

EDUCATION BARRIER

by Linda Richardson

In his book, *The Conspiracy to Destroy Black Boys*, Author Jawanza Kinjufu explores the legacy of using race to discriminate against Black children in the education system. He uses experiences and statistics to show how Black boys are marginalized and criminalized at an early age. My own experience with my son and his cousin whom I raised began when they were young, and I was advocating for special education for one and high academic placement for the other in the suburbs we had moved to.

A high percentage of Black children are placed in special education because of perceived behavior issues. In our case, my nephew whom I raised from age 13 to 18 was not sent to school because of negligence by his mother. We practiced informal adoption and had him evaluated after calling the Pennsylvania Department of Education to have him tested. He had been socially promoted each year and by the time he came to live with us, he was in 5th grade, but had not attended school for most of his school years. He tested normal intelligence and from 6th to 10th grades, our goal was to get him out of special education.

Many obstacles were put in place to keep him in special ed, but due to my tenacity, I was able to get him into the mainstream. This took a stigma away from him. He thought he was retarded, to use a politically incorrect term. On the other hand, my son was intellectually gifted and in gifted programs all through elementary and middle school. By the time we moved to the suburbs, he was placed in a low functioning class because the school district officials felt that he could not be gifted, he was just put into those programs because of the way the Philadelphia school system worked. I asked to have him tested intellectually but was initially rejected. For months he was in a classroom that did not challenge him.

Finally, after calling and writing the school district, he was tested. Afterward, the psychologist called me and said, "Ms. Richardson, at 12, he tested at 2nd year college level! He will be put in the gifted program immediately." The work in getting these young men placed appropriately was exhausting and only because I was armed with the research from the above book, had parents who supported me and a husband who was culturally a Black Militant, I succeeded. Both my Black guys are doing well. They are fathers, leaders in their families and contribute to the broader society. They are BMW's, Black Men Working, and are managers in their workplaces. The idea that you have to fight for your Black children as a professional is not something average parents have time, resources and access to.