

The Beautiful Resistance

Black Humanity and Black Boy Joy

by Mike Browne and Amir Asim Gilmore

What makes Black boys joyful? That is a question that white educators typically do not center. All Black boys need childhoods. In many ways, U.S. society and education have continually failed Black boys in this endeavor—through investments in and commitments to anti-Black male social imagery. Within contemporary and historical contexts, Black boys' pathologization has been predicated on the public's assumptions that they are a danger to society (e.g., Emmett Till, Trayvon Martin,

Tamir Rice). This pathologization heavily affects their abilities to define their futures and joy, as Black boys are surveilled by disciplinary practices that mitigate their childhood.

What does a Black boy explicitly and implicitly learn about their role within society when they are perceived as criminals? As two Black male educators deeply invested in Black boys' brilliance, resilience, and educational well-being, we understand how precarious their joy is and how crucial it is to their livelihood. Our conversation is not simply a call for a critical reimagining of Black boyhoods, but also an invitation to center Black Boy Joy.

Black Boy Joy is a spiritual life force and a liberatory emotional expression that satisfies Black boys' humanity and desires by refusing anti-Black pathologies.

This refusal is the continuance of the long tradition of Black resistance and refusal—from marronage communities during chattel slavery to the New Negro Movement, the Civil Rights Movement, and the Black Lives Matter movement. Black Boy Joy is the beautiful resistance of the standards imposed upon Black boys, allowing them to create spaces of affirmation in which they can be felt, heard, seen, and comprehensively matter. Thus, Black Boy Joy becomes a radical act of self-love—an active reorientation of oneself, ensuring that their identities, emotions, hobbies, and quirks are not abnormal. Black Boy Joy allows Black boys to be and to belong.

Early childhood and K-12 educators can center Black Boy Joy by moving beyond



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the narrow, deficit, and static images of Black masculinity. This work begins with (white) educators understanding how the pervasiveness of anti-blackness makes Black boyhoods socially unimaginable. Celebrating Black Boy Joy is about loving Blackness, and loving their Blackness, in a society struggling to do so. It is about ensuring that Black boys can be happy, whole, and vulnerable in a learning space, without adult-like culpability. Educators must meet this opportunity to combat anti-Black male imagery and love Black boys for all their beauty and brilliance. We cannot wait.



Learn More

Watch video of Mike and Amir's conversation deeper into the topic of "Co-conspiring for Black Boy Joy."

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