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Cuyjet, Michael and Associates (Eds.) (2006) *African American Men in College*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers

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Reviewed by Sheila T. Gregory and Raphael X. Moffett
Clark Atlanta University

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African American Men in College, edited by Michael Cuyjet, is a unique, practice-oriented collection of case studies which comprehensively examines the challenges, successes, activities and experiences of African American men, from admission to graduation, in American two-year, four-year and Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the United States. This book is unique in several ways. First, it is undeniably the first scholarly collection of research about undergraduate African American men, written primarily by African American men. Second, the book provides examples of nine successful college programs and activities which have been shown to enhance the academic success of this under-represented group pursuing postsecondary education. Third, Cuyjet gives his readers a comprehensive understanding of the critical

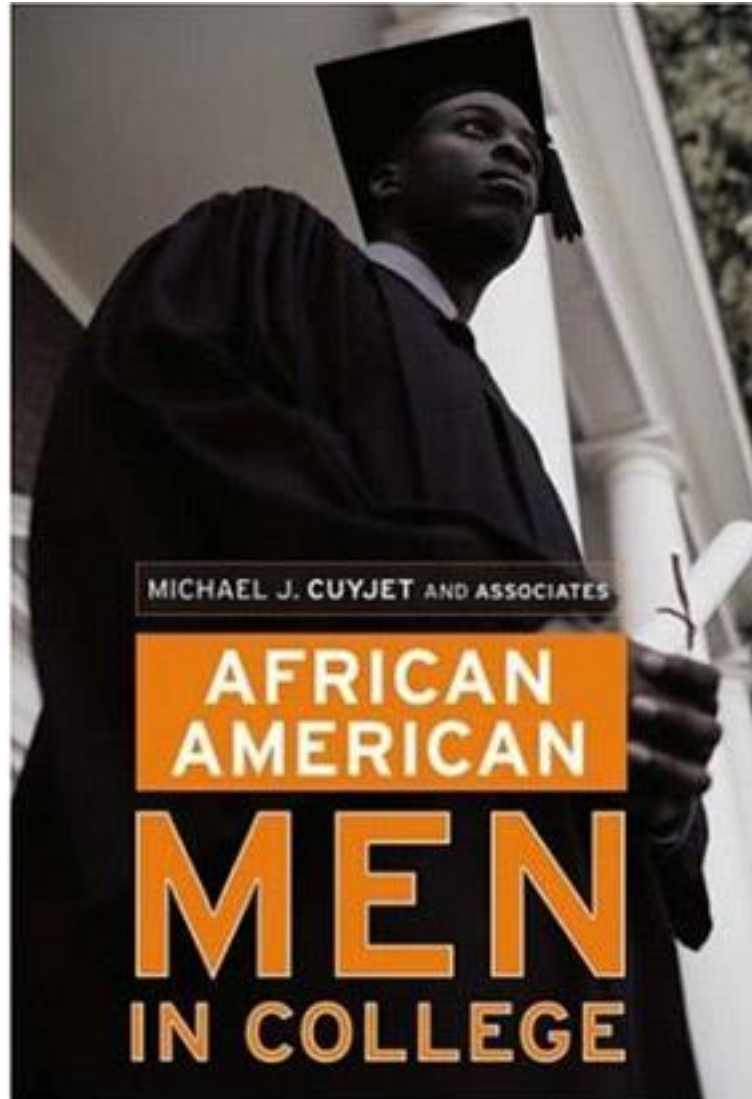
challenges and concerns young African American men face daily, in their own voices. Fourth, this book examines the advantages of many activities such as mentoring, fraternities, leadership, intercollegiate athletics, religion and spirituality, and a variety of extracurricular activities, in terms of whether they can play a pivotal role in creating and promoting a safe and enriching environment where young African American men can survive and persevere. Finally, the format of this book provides sustained attention to the complex navigational strategies and other corrective measures to help detour African American college men from becoming stifled by institutional, social, cultural, and self-imposed barriers on campus. Finally, this book provides evidence that if we fail to acknowledge and adequately address the magnitude of this crisis, we will most assuredly place our entire nation at an extreme disadvantage on all levels. This alone makes *African American Men in College* a requirement for any person committed to improving the educational status and lives of African American men.

Cuyjet begins his book with *Acknowledgements* to African American men, who have

successfully graduated from American colleges or universities. He writes, "... I salute every African American man who has persevered to obtain a college degree. For some, who had fortunate opportunities and the assistance of family and friends, it was relatively easy, but a significant accomplishment nonetheless. For others, it was a mighty struggle, many obstacles to overcome, and a major battle to be won" (vi). Also in his acknowledgements, he dedicates the book to his lifetime mentor, his beloved father, John Felix Cuyjet, who graduated with a Bachelor of Science in mechanic arts, *cum laude*, from West Virginia State College, on June 2, 1941. These reflections help set the tone for the book.

In the *Preface*, Cuyjet states that the numbers of African American women college graduates are steadily increasing, while the college graduation rate for African American men are the lowest of any other ethnic group.

Black Men in College is divided into two parts. The first twelve chapters of the book provide detailed analyses on the status of African American men in college. Part two investigates nine different programs in a variety of institutions across the country, that have been successful in promoting a climate of academic success among African American men in college.





Michael Cuyjet

In the first chapter, Cuyjet notes two observations from his experience at his daughter's junior high school awards ceremony and his university's commencement ceremony. This realization was the nearly complete absence of African American men being honored for their academic achievements or honors. He acknowledges that these observations were anecdotal as well as unscientific. However, they clearly illustrated to him the gravity of this apparent void of young African American men in high school and elsewhere. This crisis extends much more broadly and personally. Cuyjet notes that many African American women who are looking for African American men to establish a relationship with, find 'slim pickins,' which creates an imbalance in the dating process on campus. While on the surface, this might not seem to be an urgent concern, in reality and in the long term, this poses dire consequences for African American women who choose to date and marry within their race. After discussing demographic comparisons by ethnicity and gender, Cuyjet argues that disparities in academic achievement and graduation among African American college men and women are much greater than those of any other ethnic group. This chapter also identifies four characterizations of behaviors that many young men adopt in an attempt to cope and combat common feelings of fear, failure, marginalization, isolation, devaluation and other feelings of anxiety, self-worth and perceived ability.

Fred Bonner and Kevin Bailey, co-authors the second chapter, discuss how to create and foster a positive academic climate for African American men. For example, they argue in favor of establishing and maintaining direct and frequent faculty-student and student-to-student relationships, which are symbiotic in nature, through residential learning environments. They also suggest that members of the academic affairs departments work directly and in tandem, with African American men to match interests and needs, both academic and social. Bonner and Bailey discuss the impact of peer group influence and the importance of family support and guidance. This is a very important approach, which has not been traditionally implemented on other campuses simply because most institutions, primarily predominantly white institutions, assume that African American college men are a homogeneous group. As is evident from Cuyjet and his colleagues, this is a huge misnomer which they both identify, and offer creative strategies for addressing. This chapter presents opportunities for other institutions to emulate and modify their own programs, should they sincerely be interested in the academic and social success of African American college men.

The following chapter by Charles Brown, provides more depth about the types of extra-curriculum campus activities, which serve to both improve the academic climate on campus, and create unique opportunities for various initiatives that may be more receptive to African American college men. He further stated specific programs and explained how these activities create beneficial social interactions among all students. Some of these initiatives include: 1) Programs designed to intertwine young men into the tapestry of the institution, through campus organizations, memberships in clubs, and leadership activities; 2) Educating majority students, through workshops and literature about the challenges and stereotypes African American men face on a regular basis to raise their awareness and appreciation; 3) Initiating a formal mentoring program when these young men first become students, and involve the entire academic community, including faculty, staff and other students of all races; 4) Building and/or nurturing a sense of community, which will lead to a better sense of belonging in the lives of these African American men [the middle tenant in Maslow's Hierarchy of Basic Needs]; and 5) Finally, building and providing ongoing support (human and fiscal) for African American men to have nurturing and meaningful relationships with current and new students, in an effort to improve the retention and inner-campus dialogue and relationships among the entire college community. The implications of involvement, or lack thereof for African American college men is a resounding

theme. His findings indicate how African American college men often feel ostracized and harbor feelings of self-doubt that can cause them to disengage from their studies.

Chapter Four illustrates leadership opportunities and other types of campus involvement activities, which can improve the academic and social outcomes of African American college men on campus. Authored by Shaun Harper, this chapter offers a roadmap for improving scholarship and developing good academic habits. It instructs institutions to learn how best to get these young men involved on campus, through positive activities to enhance practical academic and leadership competencies in a diverse environment. He suggests that this involvement include the importance of negotiating and managing time, working collaboratively with others, crafting articulate speeches to deliver to various audiences, learning how to delegate and become politically astute. These activities, he argues, should take place on campuses and in the world of work and business. Other skills may include how to build and nurture relationships with others in an effort to network to gain knowledge and resources, and secure future leadership roles. Harper ends his chapter with ten approaches he terms, "Strategies for Increasing Out-of-Class Involvement and Leadership Participation," which he derived from his 2003 dissertation on African American college men on predominantly white campuses. Harper makes it clear that high levels of student involvement are the catalyst for success. He contends that students who are more critically engaged during college, matriculate faster and enjoy more success than students who are not as engaged on campus.

In the fifth chapter, E. Michael Sutton introduces the SAAB program and describes two types of mentoring, developmental and instructional. Sutton identifies the environmental factors which impede or contribute to the retention and graduation of African American men on college campuses. More specifically, Sutton delineates various impediments that can potentially obstruct positive mentoring interactions between white faculty and students of color. Furthermore, he argues that these interactions can be strained due to the negative perception of the academic prowess of students of color. He contends that HBCUs provide an avenue for African American students to build long-lasting relationships, that can assist them and provide support to them during their academic career. Sutton uses specific HBCUs to illustrate successful developmental mentoring practices, providing six different examples. He concludes that mentoring programs, which are grounded and developmentally focused, are usually the most successful approaches for African American college men.

Lemuel Watson in Chapter Six, examines the role that religion and spirituality play in the identity, survival and socialization of African American college men. After Watson distinguishes the difference between religion and spirituality, he introduces a research study of 97 SAAB first and second year African American college men at three different institutions in the spring of 2002. Although this study was interesting, I found it frustrating for several reasons. First, Watson did not indicate whether or not he was indeed the author. Furthermore, he did not provide any citations, in the text or references, which would allow the reader to get further information about the study. Lastly, Watson failed to identify numerous and critical portions of this study, some of which may lead readers to seriously question the reliability and validity of this study. A few of this reviewer's concerns include a) the absence of institutional type for the three colleges studied; b) convenience sampling in mentoring programs in which he currently or previously worked; c) including surveys in the study, regardless of whether or not participants had completed the entire instrument; and d) the absence of more demographic and descriptive data, which could give a richer and more balanced context and avoid skewing the findings. These data might include age, college-going generation, number of classes successfully completed, and employment status. They are critically important because his instrument focuses solely on the activities, feelings and beliefs of African American men. Furthermore, given the fact that this entire chapter is devoted to the role of religion and spirituality, I would be remised not to state that Watson does not indicate his participant's religion or spiritual habits, which is the crux of his work. Again, this chapter provided valuable information, but I found no evidence to support the reliability and validity of his contention that religious beliefs have any relationship with scholastic performance.

In the following chapter, Shaun Harper and Frank Harris team up to explore the influences of fraternity membership among African American men in college. The chapter begins with a story about a 13 year-old African American boy growing up in a small town, in a single-parent home, in the segregated South. This story serves to captivate and inspire the reader, by illustrating the critical yet little known fact, that socioeconomic status does not alone indicate the future failure or success of any student. This example demonstrates the importance of a teacher, who in this case happened to be an African American male teacher who was very active in the school, community, and the Black Greek Letter Organization (BGLO) and motivated this young child to succeed. BGLO memberships tend to be a lifelong commitment, which often enriches long-term bonding, important social networking, and other benefits which come with membership. Harper and Harris discuss the impact of BGLOs on racial identity, leadership, cognitive development, and practical competence. This astute duo also explore many of the issues surrounding the challenges some BGLOs have faced, such as incidents involving illegal hazing, academic underachievement, and sometimes tarnished reputations, and practices of exclusion, sexism, and discrimination based on characteristics, such as skin hue. The most revealing parts of this chapter illustrate many of the positive roles BGLOs have played in the lives of African American men, while simultaneously recognizing the negative factors which have threatened their very existence. Again, the authors are quick to clarify that not all BGLOs produce similar outcomes, and in many cases, both positive and negative incidences may be isolated on only a handful of campuses. Therefore, generalizations should not be made of all BGLOs. The greatest strength of many BGLO memberships are that they often provide, in both quality and quantity, powerful and dependable support and resources by other African American men who serve as role models and mentors, leading by example.

Chapter Eight, written by Kenya LeNoir Messer, provides an environmental scan of the collegiate landscape and describes the relationship between African American men and intercollegiate athletics on campus. She contends that there are many factors which can impede or encourage academic performance among African American male college athletes. The major forms of support were identified as academic, family and community, social integration (primarily at PWI), race, class and stereotypes. Some of the positive opportunities could include comprehensive academic support programs which have been shown to aid in the facilitation, matriculation, and graduation of many African American male college athletes. Conversely, she also discusses some negative outcomes which can often serve to inhibit academic performance and retention. At the end of the chapter, Messer offers a generous list of suggestions that institutions can consider which have been shown on some campuses to increase the number of African American college men athletes and help create a more welcoming campus environment for all students. She identifies best practices and approaches for increasing the rate of retention and graduation of African American college men, at both PWIs and HBCUs.

In the ninth chapter, Jamie Washington and Vernon Wall, who work for the Washington Consulting Group, discuss African American gay college men on campus, largely in terms of the impact of identity development and sexual orientation. This chapter is thoughtfully written and provides several possible strategies to help institutions minimize the challenges and maximize the supports for this commonly ignored population. Racism on American college campuses and in our society is nothing new. In the early 1950s, African American gays and lesbians were excluded from white managed gay bars and clubs. Also at that time, gay and lesbian clubs and bars were unheard of for persons of color, particularly African American men. In the new age of political correctness of the 1990s, the issues surrounding racism of an oppressed minority in mainstream gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) was introduced, but still ruled under the “don’t ask, don’t tell” philosophy. Ironically and unfortunately, not much has changed. Even our governmental guidelines for the United States military formally created and rigidly enforce this “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. Furthermore, research on the intersection of race, sexual preference, and sexual orientation is practically non-existent, available mostly in low circulated, non-academic, and “preaching-to-the-choir” populations. Recent initiatives on American college campuses, however, have been cautiously improving. Many of these initiatives are sincere efforts to help all GLBT students overcome the plethora of challenges they face daily on campuses. The

normal practice, which is disappointingly often the case, merely institutes a program for GLBT students on campus, without awareness or acknowledgement about the specific students needs and usually with strict guidelines, faculty or administrative oversight, and little to no resources. In this chapter, the co-authors explore the presence of role models and its impact on religion and on the student's psyche, as it pertains to categorizing and prioritizing identity issues and how this self-perception is viewed by others. For African American men in particular, religion is a primary component that leads to conversations about the intricacies of this issue in the religious and larger communities. Washington and Wall have written a significant piece that penetrates the very fiber of our country and is well-flavored with some revealing excerpts from the voices of GLBT students on American college campuses. Finally, the chapter offers eleven recommendations to provide support and encouragement and to address many of the specific needs of the GLBT student community. This chapter is a must read for any person committed to achieving social justice for all people.

Walter Kimbrough and Shaun Harper collaborate in this qualitative study on the experiences of African American men at HBCUs in Chapter Ten. While there is a dearth of research on the experiences of African American college men, most of what is available is written about this population in predominately white institutions. Kimbrough and Harper argue that while the environments of HBCUs and predominately white institutions (PWIs) are vastly different, some of the challenges are frighteningly similar. From an historical prospective, few can argue that HBCUs have not traditionally provided improved access and graduated huge numbers of African American college students however, there has become a steady decline in these gains over the past 30 years. The authors identify numerous challenges that many HBCUs face (with the possible exception of the most popular, well-funded institutions, such as Spelman and Morehouse Colleges and Howard University) and examine how these challenges impact African American college men. There is also a generous review of the literature that offers conflicting findings and qualitative data derived from focus groups, which magnify the need for further research in HBCUs. The five issues and concerns the focus group chose to discuss were: 1) predisposition to college; 2) academic achievement; 3) involvement and leadership development; 4) interpersonal relationships; and 5) perceptions of the climate at PWIs. Kimbrough and Harper summarize the discussion of the focus groups around these five themes and identify some disturbing findings. Some of these include evidence that on some HBCU campuses, African American men are 'neglected' and many basic needs, such as a sense of belonging, connection, and nurturing are overlooked. Perhaps most frightening, was the unanimous agreement of the entire focus group, that many African American women on HBCU campuses are taken advantage of sexually, psychologically, and physically by African American men. Lastly, the authors examine the notion of what is 'cool' for African American men, contrasting the concepts of what they term, "cool pose, which is a double-edged sword that African American males use to express their masculinity and respond to environmental oppression" (p. 203). In conclusion, the authors strongly encourage more qualitative research in the lives and experiences of African American men on HBCU campuses.

The eleventh chapter, authored by Myron Pope, examines the climates at community colleges, which like HBCUs became the entry point for many persons from all traditionally represented racial and ethnic groups. Pope begins his chapter by providing a brief history of community college systems, comparative demographic data from the National Center on Educational Statistics, a short note on the economic benefits of African American men in college from the American Society for Training and Development, issues surrounding student transfers from two-year to four-year postsecondary institutions, and comparative enrollment data. The overview also included a brief discussion of the impact of California's Proposition 209, Washington's Initiative 200, and the case of *Hopwood vs. State of Texas*. In the later portion of the chapter, Pope presents the findings of his 2001 study on the perceptions minority students have about campus diversity. This study represents 167 minority students from 15 different community colleges. Based on his study, Pope offers recommendations in the areas of retention and successful transfers. His findings serve to confirm those of several other studies. In general, the community college retention and

graduation rate for persons of color are improving, nevertheless, these rates for African American men sharply trail on the heels of all other racial groups and women. It is clear that like most areas in academe, progress for African American college men continue to be a challenging journey. More must be done to address opportunities for recruitment, matriculation, and successful graduation of African American men to four-year institutions and beyond.

Chapter Twelve, written by editor, Michael Cuyjet, offers a generous and thoughtful summary of his colleagues work in the previous chapters, along with ideas and suggestions of how institutions can provide support to African American college men and help facilitate their matriculation and graduation. Cuyjet identifies ten common themes of concern, revolving around the following issues: 1) academic climate; 2) out-of-class activities; 3) leadership participation; 4) developmental mentoring; 5) spirituality and religious activity; 6) fraternity membership; 7) college athletes; 8) GLBT men; 9) HBCU men; and 10) community college men. Cuyjet discusses several pressing issues in higher education. One critical issue that needs to be illuminated in the book is that many college students, particularly first generation African American college men, see campus as an opportunity for self-expression and greater freedom of choice. Oftentimes these students may quickly become distracted from their real purpose for being in college; to get an education and focus on those things they will need to equip themselves for a successful life. This lack of focus and direction is something that African American college men can ill-afford.

This final chapter enthusiastically provides targeted conclusions and suggestions for the future, while cautioning the reader on the limitations of research in this area. Some of these limitations include this book's: 1) primary focus on only undergraduate men; 2) other absent subpopulations, such as academically gifted or high achievers; 3) some of the nuances manifested by environmental factors yet to be addressed; 4) the situational impact of the lack of a critical mass on many campuses; 5) the presence of an honest expression of caring and concern for them; and 6) the examination of those campuses, regardless of institutional type, where African American men are flourishing academically and socially. To address some of these limitations, Cuyjet and his colleagues provide the following set of nine chapters.

Chapters thirteen through twenty-one, contribute diverse profiles (size, support, level, and type) of how nine different institutional programs successfully matriculated and graduated many African American men on college campuses. These programs included the following: 1) the Student African American Brotherhood Program, which began in 1990; 2) the Meyerhoff Scholarship Program, perhaps the most widely cited initiative, created in 1988; 3) the Bowling Green State University's Black Men on Campus Program; 4) the Black Men's Collective; 5) the Black Male Rap Session, also known as "Beamers;" 6) the African American Men of Arizona State University; 7) the Black Man Think Tank of the University of North Texas; 8) the It's Easier Than You Think Program at an HBCU; and lastly, 9) the Collegiate 100 Program.

The work of Cuyjet and his colleagues in *African American Men in College* is a comprehensive book designed to identify some of the strengths and weaknesses of programs designed to help enhance the academic environment for African American college men. The book further underscores the need for all institutions, especially those truly concerned about social justice and the welfare of all Americans, to work together in an effort to increase and nurture the lives and experiences of all college-bound students, especially those of color, and particularly African American college men students.

We owe a debt of gratitude to Cuyjet and his distinguished colleagues for identifying the challenges we have yet to address and providing inspiring examples of existing programs which have found success through their commitment to improving the matriculation, graduation and overall lives of African American men on American college and university campuses.

About the Reviewers

Sheila T. Gregory, Ph.D. is a professor of educational leadership and higher education at Clark Atlanta University. She received a B.A. degree in Communications and Journalism from Oakland University, an M.P.A. degree in Health Care Administration from Wayne State University, and a Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Pennsylvania. In 2005, Sheila Gregory's sixth co-authored book, *Daring to Educate: The Legacy of the Early Spelman College Presidents*, was nominated for an NAACP Image Award. Also in 2005, she received the prestigious national award of *Teacher and Scholar of the Year*. Dr. Gregory is the author of five scholarly books and nearly three dozen articles and book chapters. Dr. Gregory's major research interests are in the areas of faculty and student recruitment and retention, professional leadership and development, and student academic achievement with a special emphasis on race, ethnicity, class, gender, and distance learning.

Raphael X. Moffett is the Director of Student Activities at Morehouse College. He received his Bachelors in English from Washington State University. He received his Masters in Educational Leadership at Clark Atlanta University and is currently a doctoral candidate in the Educational Leadership Department at Clark Atlanta University. Raphael's research is focused on the factors that impact African American undergraduate student retention in higher education. Raphael is a member of and worked with several professional organizations including the American Educational Research Association (AERA), National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), and the American College Personnel Association (ACPA).

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