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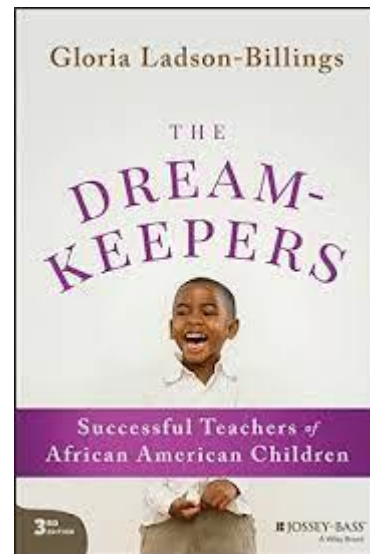
**Ladson-Billings, G. (2022).** *The Dreamkeepers: Successful teachers of African-American children.* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) Jossey-Bass.

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Gloria Ladson-Billings stands as a luminary in the field of education, weaving narratives that resonate deeply with readers. She holds the prestigious position of Kellner Family Professor of Urban Education in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction and Faculty Affiliate in the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. In addition, she has served as president of the American Educational Research Association and the National Academy of Education and is a Fellow of the British Academy, and the American Academy of Arts & Sciences Her storytelling prowess brings to light the rich tapestry of history, particularly focusing on the pedagogical success of teaching African-American students in the public school system. In her seminal work, *The DreamKeepers: Successful Teachers of African-American Children*, now in its third edition, Ladson-Billings navigates through the complexities of education amid unprecedented global challenges.



The third edition of *The Dreamkeepers* emerges from the crucible of the COVID-19 pandemic, a time described by Ladson-Billings not merely as a singular crisis but as a convergence of multiple afflictions, including the pervasive shadows of anti-Black racism, economic turmoil, and ecological pressures. This confluence of global tumult underscores the holistic and far-reaching impacts on students, particularly those from marginalized communities. Drawing inspiration from Indian novelist Arundhati Roy's poignant observation that "The Pandemic is a Portal," Ladson-Billings calls for a radical departure from the pre-pandemic status quo, advocating for a "hard reset" in education paradigms.

This edition is an assertion that a return to "normalcy" is not the solution for the systemic inequities ingrained in education institutions. Ladson-Billings boldly confronts the entrenched disparities faced by Black and Latinx students, from overidentification in special needs programs to disproportionate disciplinary

measures and academic underachievement. Through the lens of culturally relevant pedagogy, Ladson-Billings heralds a paradigm shift, submitting that the integration of youth culture serves as a pillar for genuine transformation.

While previous editions of *The Dreamkeepers* celebrated the triumphs of exemplary educators, selected by their school administrator, the third edition casts a spotlight on the transformative power of youth culture. Ladson-Billings showcases luminaries such as Amanda Gorman, whose ascent from battling speech impediments and cognitive processing challenges to delivering a stirring poem at the Presidential Inauguration of 2021 epitomizes the resilience and creativity inherent in youth culture. By intertwining these narratives with scholarly insights and practical strategies, Ladson-Billings charts a course towards a more inclusive and equitable school landscape inviting educators and policymakers alike to heed the imperative for transformative change in education.

Ladson-Billings highlights the need for culturally relevant teaching through poignant vignettes and insightful interviews with successful teachers. The text reveals how successful teachers cultivate environments conducive to academic achievement by structuring classroom social interactions informed by cultural understanding and empathy. The reader quickly learns that it is not certain strategies that have enabled them to be successful, but rather their genuine innate attributes and their commitment to understanding students' lived experiences. These featured educators epitomize this ethos, recognizing the systemic barriers impeding the academic success of African-American students. Armed with empathy and perseverance, they set high expectations and employ innovative approaches to ensure their students thrive academically and socially.

Beyond pedagogical strategies, Ladson-Billings advocates for the incorporation of youth culture into school frameworks, particularly at the secondary level. Acknowledging the profound influence of technology and cultural trends on students' experiences, she warns against disregarding these vital components of students' identity. By embracing youth culture, educators can affirm the significance of students' lives and perspectives, fostering a more inclusive and engaging learning environment.

The text underscores the indispensable role of teacher preparation programs in shaping effective pedagogy. Ladson-Billings contends that such programs must prioritize cultural competence and community engagement, equipping educators with the tools to navigate the complexities of diverse classrooms. This paradigm shift demands a reevaluation of curricular priorities, placing a heightened emphasis on culturally responsive practices and critical race theory applications.

After three decades, *The Dreamkeepers* remains a beacon of insight and inspiration, resonating with educators committed to fostering equitable and empowering educational experiences. Ladson-Billings's multifaceted perspective as a scholar, African-American teacher, woman, parent, and community member infuses the text with a richness and authenticity that transcends academic discourse. Through her impassioned advocacy for culturally relevant pedagogy, she champions a vision of education that celebrates diversity, embraces equity, and empowers students to realize their full potential.

During her 2024 AERA Distinguished Lecture, Ladson-Billings emphasized that the fight for equity in education continues as African Americans face systemic challenges that question their intellect and historical significance. She highlighted the persistence of racist narratives, such as the idea that slavery “benefits” Black people, and how education remains a battleground for these distorted beliefs. Her call for examining “big things” that disrupt systemic inequities—such as school desegregation and equitable funding—mirrors the urgency she conveys in *The Dreamkeepers* for a “hard reset” in education. This lecture underscores the ongoing relevance of Ladson-Billings's work and its profound impact on today's education landscape.

*The Dreamkeepers* stands as seminal work that not only celebrates the triumphs of exemplary educators but also challenges the status quo and offers a blueprint for transformative change. It is a testament to the enduring relevance of culturally responsive teaching and the unwavering commitment to equity in education.

## References

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## About the Reviewer

With nearly 20 years in education, **Dajuana Chaney Fontenot** has held a variety of roles, from teacher to administrator, shaping an impactful career dedicated to advancing educational equity. Beginning with a bachelor's degree and teacher certification from Lamar University, she continued to Texas Southern University for a master's degree and administrator certification. Currently, she is pursuing a doctorate in curriculum and instruction with a focus on urban education at Texas A&M University, where she has served as a graduate assistant for a Hagler Fellow, as well as a graduate research assistant contributing to progressive educational discourse. Her research centers on enhancing the retention of Black teachers in urban schools, driven by a commitment to developing policies that create supportive, sustainable environments for educators. She believes that affirming teacher retention is essential to providing equitable, quality education for all students. Outside academia, Dajuana enjoys traveling and spending quality time with family through interactive games and activities. Deeply rooted in her faith, she views each step of her journey as purposefully guided, inspired by the conviction that her work aligns with a greater calling.



  
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