Love, B. L. (2023). *Punished for dreaming: How school reform harms Black children and how we heal.* **St. Martin's Press.**

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Bettina L. Love is the William F. Russell Professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the acclaimed author of *We Want to Do More Than Survive*, winner of the 2020 Society of Professors of Education Outstanding Book Award. *Punished for Dreaming*, a *New York Times* Bestseller, led to her being awarded the prestigious Stowe Prize for Literary Activism and being named a finalist for the *LA Times* Book Prize. In 2022, the Kennedy Center named her one of the world's Next 50 Leaders.
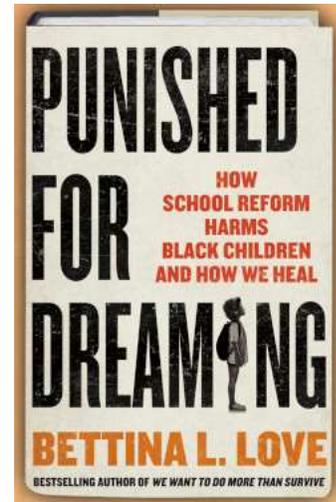
In *Punished for Dreaming*, Love attempts to explain how White rage was embedded in the education reforms of K-12 schooling during the past 40 years. She argues that the education system has failed Black and Brown children by punishing, assaulting, and throwing these children away after using them. According to Love, the report *A Nation at Risk* was used in Reagan's war on drugs to merge schools and prisons, creating the school-to-prison pipeline. She also argues that reformers punished Black people for their big dreams, effective organizing, and struggle for social justice by "implementing and creating punitive laws, regulations, and school policies that disproportionality label Black children as unruly, violent, and academically inferior" (p. 11).

During the 1980s and 1990s, Black children were called disposable because of their zip codes, test scores, and skin color. Anti-Blackness and White rage are embedded and rooted deeply in education reform efforts of the past 40 years. Love believes that the way erase the harmful consequences of the previous school reforms is through educational reparations, which, to her, are the essence of democracy.

The author has combined evidence from documents, public speeches, Black people's stories and experiments, and literary data to produce a comprehensive, interconnected, and persuasive narrative about the embedded White rage against Black people. The persuasiveness of the evidence in most chapters was very strong. For example, in Chapter 1, she employs stories, accounts of education reforms of the past 40 years, and both Democrat and Republican presidents' speeches and initiatives

in education to frame her argument about "super predators." "Super predators" is how Love refers to rich White men and women who joined forces to control the civil rights movement in public education. Their goal was to make Black people vulnerable in every way possible to maintain the status quo to protect White privilege. Both political parties employed anti-Black approaches for different reasons, but the underlying motive was most evident in education reforms. Also in the first chapter, Love argues that instead of moving toward more just and equitable approaches in how K-12 schools treated Black students after the *Brown v Board of Education* decision, this Supreme Court decision sparked what is called White rage in how education reform was pursued. Mrs. Ali's narrative in Chapter 1 coveys a deep understanding of the phrase, "White supremacists viewed Brown as a 'declaration of war'" (p. 19). Love describes how the *Brown* decision led to devastating results such as punishing Black students instead of disciplining them. In addition, pushing out Black and colored teachers is another anti-Black approach that was escalated after *Brown*.

Chapter 3 provides further compelling evidence, particularly regarding the influence of education policies during and following George H. W. Bush's administration. During this period, influential actors, described by the author as "super predators," accessed public funds to establish charter schools, virtual schools, and voucher programs, which ultimately threatened the educational opportunities for Black children. The policies introduced under both the Bush and Clinton administrations facilitated the use of public resources for private gain, enabling these actors to capitalize on public education systems. Notably, Clinton's administration advanced privatization efforts through reforms that encouraged the involvement of corporate sponsors, philanthropic investments, and entrepreneurial models in public schools. These initiatives marked a shift toward privatization that, as Love argues, prioritized profit over equitable education for marginalized communities.

While Barack Obama was president, neoliberal super predators, such as Joanne Weiss, the Gates Foundation, the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation, and the Eli and Edythe Broad Foundation, crafted school reforms. Donald Trump's administration also crafted an anti-Black education reform system. The Biden administration attempted to launch programs committed to racial justice, though most efforts were compromised by the global pandemic.

Biden's administration sought the help of scholars in education to release a COVID-19 handbook for reopening schools safely. Love and members from the Abolitionist Teaching Network (ATN) were part of this work, and a link was added to the handbook for a guide made by her and the other members of ATN. This guide caused an uproar, especially among the far-right White supremacists, leading to threatening emails and pressure on institutions to fire whoever was involved in creating the guide. To better understand this attack on ATN members and the controversy of critical race theory, Love indicated that the past 40 years of education reforms have been used by White supremacists to point at Black history, anti-racism, and LGBTQIA rights as the new threat to the American education system.

In *Punished for Dreaming*, Love meticulously supports her assertions with a wide range of research sources, employing an ecological perspective to present her arguments. She integrates personal narratives, documents, public speeches, and multiple examples of education reform at federal, state, and local levels. This multi-

layered approach creates a comprehensive and compelling narrative that exposes how historical and current policies perpetuate inequities in schooling. The book's roadmap, strategically placed at the conclusion, offers a clear framework for envisioning reforms that prevent the continuation of harm and inequity against Black communities in education.

Love's storytelling ability stands out, particularly in her skillful linking of interviewees' personal experiences with broader education narratives and policies. She explains how the alignment between Reagan's presidency and Milton Friedman's economic philosophy set the stage for undervaluing public education, establishing "what Naomi Klein calls 'disaster capitalism'" (p. 51). She also contends that the publication of *A Nation at Risk* constituted "the ultimate attack against Black life." Although race was not directly mentioned, the report's language "created the perception that Black children were putting this country at risk of war simply by being Black and fighting for equally funded education" (p. 55). According to Love, *A Nation at Risk* concealed two primary motives: "advancing Anti-Blackness and diminishing the trust in public education." This critique underscores how political and economic ideologies have historically shaped policies that disadvantage Black students and communities, framing her call for a systemic shift towards equity in education.

Love linked theoretical concepts such as James Q. Wilson and George L. Kelling's "broken windows" and Ted Gaebler and David Osborne's "entrepreneurial government" with education reforms by explaining and elucidating examples and practices that indicated the correctness of such claims. For instance, in Chapter 4, she narrated her interview with Shani, who was a former member of TFA, and explained how these alternative programs jeopardize the work force in K-12 schools.

A Black kid must be extraordinary to get what an ordinary White kid gets. The label "ghetto superstars" resembles Hehir's (2002) "supercrip," indicating that a person has to overcome societal and institutional obstacles to prove that they deserve to receive adequate learning opportunities.

In Chapter 12, Love, Champbell, and Wollensack present a framework encompassing three areas: the physical condition of schools, access to rich and engaging learning, and the "school-to-prison" pipelines embedded in schools to calculate educational reparations. They used conservative estimates to determine the dollar amounts they believed were owed to Black people. They argued that after the calculation of the three affected areas, the cohort of Black students who attended schools between 1985 and 2005 deserved reparations estimated at $56 billion. As for post-secondary educational reparations, Black folx would have an additional 1.6 million Black higher education graduates during the past 20 years, generating around $1.2 trillion to $1.7 trillion in income over their lifetime. They argued that the federal government should be held responsible for paying a large amount of their estimates. Love and her colleagues also believe that philanthropic foundations and corporations must pay back because of "the harm they inflicted and profited from through education reform" (p. 282).

Only two places in the book needed more evidence to be persuasive. In Chapter 4, Love argues that Teach for America increased the jeopardy of public education by recruiting non-education college graduates to work as teachers in inner-city schools under two-year commitments. Likewise in the same chapter, she discusses how No Child Left Behind mandated evaluations based on test scores and linked the scores with adequate yearly progress; if schools did not reach a mandated level, they could be closed for underperformance.

However, Love points out how a policy revision led to a lowering of mandated levels when dealing with students with disabilities. "It was in the school's, school district's, or state's best interest to ensure that subgroups remained under the minimum group size and that lower-achieving students were placed into a special education category to prevent their scores from impacting the school's, district's, or state's accountability outcomes" (p. 107).

On a personal note, *Punished for Dreaming* had a big impact on my understanding of racism in U.S. public schools. Several vignettes are literally heart breaking. Love's book also opened my eyes to the racist practices that I have witnessed in my native Kuwait, where we did not talk about racism but witnessed it and experienced it. I am grateful to Bettina Love for writing this book.

Reference

Hehir, T. (2002). Eliminating ableism in education. *Harvard Educational Review*, *72*(1), 1-33. https://doi.org/10.17763/haer.72.1.03866528702g2105

About the Reviewer

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