

Advocacy From the Ground Up: An Examination of Black Education Advocacy for Equitable School Partnerships

Andrea N. Smith

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3539-8448>
University of West Georgia, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The history of education in the United States abounds with double themes and purposes for education: schooling for democratic citizenship and schooling for second-class citizenship. Although African Americans encountered significant legal barriers and threats of death while trying to obtain an education, their yearning for knowledge and opportunities served as a catalyst for education advocacy in their communities. In spite of various obstacles, researchers posit that African Americans erupted from slavery with a philosophy of education and perseverance that served as a precursor to the establishment of advocacy in education that would serve their needs and provide hope for a better education system. As a result, African Americans erupted from slavery with a philosophy of education and perseverance that served as a precursor to the establishment of universal schooling that would serve their needs and provide hope for a better life.

INTRODUCTION

Educational attainment is revered as a tool for racial liberation and self-determination. African Americans have long advocated for equal educational opportunity at grassroots, institutional, and societal levels (Franklin, 1990; Richards & Lemelle, 2005). Examples of educational activism and advocacy are exemplified in the actions of African Americans through campaigning for the needs of their children, educators, and community (Cooper, 2009; Gordon, 2005; Henry, 2005; Wilson & Johnson, 2015). While advocacy and activism are similar notions, advocacy refers to one's effort within personal or political spaces to secure benefits for themselves or their loved ones (Wilson, 2015). Activism involves similar acts, yet is explicitly political and includes resisting the status quo and working for a group's benefit intentionally (Wilson, 2015). Moreover, the political resistance of African Americans encompassed both advocacy and activism, and reflect radical traditions of resistance that have emerged from culturally relevant, social and political resistance (Collins, 2000; Gordon, 2005; King, 2006).

This chapter examines the history of advocacy among African Americans in the education system and presents a historical review of Black education since the 1800s in the United States. Parent involvement in education is explored by examining the advocacy experiences of African American parents of children who are enrolled in Mays Academy to provide counter narratives to existing research on Black parental involvement in education. It concludes by illuminating the immense level of advocacy among African Americans and offers educators and stakeholders with implications for establishing equitable relationships between schools and communities.

BACKGROUND

Political Resistance for Education Advocacy

Before the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965¹, African American men enjoyed a brief stint of participation in the electoral process. In 1870, Congress approved and passed the 15th Amendment, which granted African American men the right to vote (Haskins & Haskins, 1998). While short-lived, African American participation was at its highest ever in history. As late as 1876, black male turnout rates in Louisiana and South Carolina (the two states which have voting data by race) were 75% and 78% of the eligible population (King, 2001). The onset of political participation among African Americans brought representation in government positions. Foner (1988) notes, "In virtually every county with a sizable black population, blacks served in at least some local office during Reconstruction ... assumed such powerful offices

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