



Mazama, Ama and Garvey Musumunu. *African Americans and Homeschooling: Motivations, Opportunities, and Challenges*. New York, Routledge, 2014, 144 pp., 978-1-138-80732-7 reviewed by Joyce E. King (jking@gsu.edu), Georgia State University (Benjamin E. Mays Endowed Chair for Urban Teaching, Learning and Leadership).

There have been many studies of homeschooling in the United States in particular in recent years. As all indicators began pointing that, far from a fad, homeschooling was gaining strength and momentum across racial and social lines, becoming the fastest-growing form of education, scholars began to research this new phenomenon, especially motivations for homeschooling. However, most have concerned themselves with the experiences of Euro-American homeschooling families while few have dealt with the African American homeschooling experiences. This book, organized in eight chapters, was written to address this gap in the literature, and is thus both timely and pertinent. It is an new area for innovative Afrocentric scholarship. There are no other books that deal so completely with this subject and the fact that two scholars with particular strength in theory and methodology undertook the task of surveying African Americans across the nation to determine their motivations for homeschooling is a first. From an Africological perspective, that is, one where the idea is to allow African people to speak for themselves, this book is an advance in method and interpretation.

In their introductory chapter, Mazama and Musumunu provide a comprehensive, wide-ranging and detailed account of the use of formal education to disenfranchise African Americans throughout U.S. history, as well as the struggles waged by African Americans to obtain access to formal education. They convincingly argue that education has been a contentious arena for Black people in the United States since the beginning, and that it continues to be so. This is the context in which, they argue, the rise of Black homeschooling must be examined, i.e., as the latest strategy developed by African Americans to secure quality education – in the face of the recurrent and seemingly overwhelming obstacles that they face in many urban schools.

In the first chapter, the authors review the literature on motivations for homeschooling and object to the widespread Eurocentric notion that African Americans homeschool for the same reasons as Euro-Americans. They convincingly argue that, given the prevalence of racial discrimination in American society, it is only to be expected that African Americans would have specific reasons for educating their children at home, which may not apply to white families.

Moreover, they object to the denial of African agency that is implicit in such a stance, hence this study aimed at capturing the voice of African American homeschooling families in the United States, in an attempt to provide empirical evidence about their experiences while allowing them to speak for themselves.

The authors provide a thorough explanation of their study's conceptual framework and methodological approach, and share the main reasons given by the 74 African American homeschooling families, distributed over a wide geographical area (Southeast, Northeast, Midwest), whom they interviewed and observed for their study, that is, concerns over the quality of the education dispensed in schools, the manifestations and impact of racism in the classroom, the lack of cultural relevance of most school curricula, the disintegration of family bonds as a result of schooling, the teaching of facts or values incompatible with the family's religious beliefs and practices, and finally, a preoccupation with Black children's safety while in school. Chapters 2-7 are devoted to an in-depth examination of each one of these concerns. The last chapter (chapter 8) engages in a review of the challenges specifically faced by African American homeschoolers as they educate their children at home. Each of these chapters provides a brief literature review that problematizes and exposes the difficulties faced today by many African American children attending either public or private schools. This approach has the clear advantage of providing a rich context that highlights the pertinence and full meaning of parents' statements.

One of the strongest points of the book is to highlight what the authors call the "agency" of Black parents, that is, the constructive and systematic efforts made by Black parents to overcome the many difficulties still experienced by many people of color as a result of racism. Thus, the authors do not engage in merely listing such difficulties, but identify the strategies (what they call the "correctives") developed by Black homeschooling families to provide their children with what they consider the best educational experience. In the process, and through the careful selection of appropriate quotes, they allow the voice of African American homeschooling parents to be heard, which is quite refreshing. Certainly, this book explodes the idea that Black parents do not care about their children's academic standing, or their future. Instead, what emerges is an often moving picture of parents deeply concerned about, and deeply committed to their children's well-being, including (but not limited to) academics. One of the most interesting findings of this study is the concerted efforts made by Black homeschooling parents to "break the wall of whiteness" and engage in a "rhetoric of victory" and provide their children with racially inspiring models, from whom they are expected to derive not only self-knowledge, but also a sense of racial confidence and pride. This search for African American agency as the driving force behind Black homeschooling has produced a book sustained coherence, with a tight argument across the chapters. Therefore, this book should be of considerable interest to professionals, students and researchers working in the field of homeschooling, African American education, the sociology of education, and school reform, and all who wish to interrogate at a deeper level the common assumptions about the responses of Black families to their children's academic achievement or failure.