

# Five Harmful Stereotypes of Black Boys and Young Men

This factsheet was developed from Students ‘at risk’: Stereotypes and the schooling of Black boys (2012) by Carl E. James in *Urban Education*.

Black youth experience disproportionately negative outcomes in the education system, including higher rates of disciplinary action and higher dropout rates than their peers. One of the ways that anti-Black racism limits young people’s success is through the enactment and reproduction of harmful stereotypes. This factsheet summarizes five common stereotypes that shape the educational journeys of Black boys and young men.



## 01. IMMIGRANT

Racialized youth are routinely stereotyped as foreigners – as not belonging to Canadian culture – regardless of their immigration status; this informs educators’ assumptions that poor educational outcomes and “disciplinary problems” are a result of young people’s “foreign cultures” and their presumed inability, or unwillingness, to assimilate (p. 472). These stereotypes, combined with a lack of representation in the curriculum, create a sense that these youth are visitors and that they do not belong.



## 02. FATHERLESS

Due to the ways that systemic discrimination shapes the lives of Black families, Black children are significantly more likely to grow up in single-parent households – commonly perceived as “problem families” (p. 474) in which boys fail to develop the skills and discipline they need to succeed in school. Evidence suggests, however, that Black parents view education as a path to success, and that Black mothers are most often involved in their children’s socialization and school activities.



### 03. ATHLETE

In many schools, Black boys are recruited into sports based on the myth that Black men are “natural athletes” (p. 478). Although this is often understood to be a *positive stereotype*, this perception can shift young people’s attention from educational and career pursuits and limit their sense of what is possible. While a few may succeed in becoming athletes, most fail to achieve this goal and find themselves with few alternatives.



### 04. TROUBLEMAKER

When Black boys are seen as immigrants, fatherless, and athletes, they are also perceived as lacking critical resources for educational success, such as social support and cultural capital. For students who live in stigmatized urban communities, these stereotypes are heightened in a “racialized moral panic” (p. 482) that contributes to hostile and heavily surveilled school environments; these, in turn, facilitate the school-to-prison pipeline.



### 05. UNDERACHIEVER

The dominant use of test scores to measure students’ skills and knowledge stigmatizes schools in underserved communities and reinforces stereotypes. Rather than focusing on the ways that schools are failing to meet the needs of Black youth, educators often attribute poor outcomes to the failures of students or their parents, who are seen as not being committed to their children’s education.

To make educational experiences meaningful, safe, and empowering for Black youth, we must recognize and address the ways that educational policies, programs, and practices perpetuate these harmful stereotypes.