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I Want to Be a Teacher but the Profession Won't Let Me: How a Criminal Record Alters a Black Man's Teaching Aspirations

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Abstract

There is a shortage of Black men pursuing and or entering the pre-K-12 teaching profession. Some of the causes for the lack of Black men in the teaching profession stems from burnout, the school-to-prison pipeline, bad experiences as students, and a myriad of other reasons. We believe that Black men having a criminal record has not been fully explored or brought to the forefront as a major issue amongst the teaching profession and teacher preparation programs. To highlight this issue, we highlight and center the experience of one Black male who wanted to become an elementary reading teacher but was unable to due to his criminal record via a case study approach and a layered textual analysis. Specifically, we investigate what inspired a Black man's interest in pursuing a teaching career and what factors altered or contributed to his deviation from pursuing the teaching profession. We then offer suggestions for research, practice, and policy with hopes that these suggestions provide teacher preparation programs and the teaching profession at-large with tangible tangles goals and task to address the Black male shortage in the pre-K-12 profession.

Keywords

aspiration, Black male teachers, case study, criminal record, narrative

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I Want to Be a Teacher but the Profession Won't Let Me: How a Criminal Record Alters a Black Man's Teaching Aspirations

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There is a shortage of Black men pursuing and or entering the pre-K-12 teaching profession. Some of the causes for the lack of Black men in the teaching profession stems from burnout, the school-to-prison pipeline, bad experiences as students, and a myriad of other reasons. We believe that Black men having a criminal record has not been fully explored or brought to the forefront as a major issue amongst the teaching profession and teacher preparation programs. To highlight this issue, we highlight and center the experience of one Black male who wanted to become an elementary reading teacher but was unable to due to his criminal record via a case study approach and a layered textual analysis. Specifically, we investigate what inspired a Black man's interest in pursuing a teaching career and what factors altered or contributed to his deviation from pursuing the teaching profession. We then offer suggestions for research, practice, and policy with hopes that these suggestions provide teacher preparation programs and the teaching profession at-large with tangible tangles goals and task to address the Black male shortage in the pre-K-12 profession.

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Introduction

Black men have long been sought after to enter and work in the pre-K-12 teaching profession as the profession is composed mostly of White middle-aged women (Aud et al., 2013; Pabon et al., 2011; Sleeter & Milner, 2011). Unfortunately, many pre-K-12 schools and teacher prep programs have either failed to address or struggled to hire, recruit, or retain Black men as teachers for reasons such as poor institutional culture and environments, academic barriers, stereotypes, burnout, and their personal experience as students in the pre-K-12 setting that have deterred them (Bryan & Browder, 2013; Bryan & Ford, 2014; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Sandles, 2020; Scott, 2016; Warren, 2016). Walker et al. (2019) suggests that Black boys experience and encounter several stressors (e.g., racism, disproportionate placement in special education, higher suspension, and expulsion rates) in their impressionable years as students which taints their interest in pursuing the teaching profession altogether. Walker et al. (2019) also notes that "Black males face pressure to teach, mentor, serve on various committees in addition to other responsibilities that can become taxing. This can lead to teacher burnout" (p. 127).

Various scholars point out and acknowledge that White middle-aged women make up roughly 80% of teachers in the teaching profession, while approximately 20% of the teaching profession are people of color and two percent of that are Black men (Brockenbrough, 2015; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Sandles, 2020). As one scholar put it, "Black male educators are a

classroom anomaly" (Young & Young, 2020, p. 327). The lack of Black male educators is a major issue for many stakeholders who are trying to diversify the profession because students of color are expected to make up 56% of the student population in pre-K-12 by year 2024 and white teachers are still expected to dominate the profession (King et al., 2016).

Thinking through the aforementioned information, the issue is that the teaching profession claims to want and need more Black men, however there are several barriers (i.e., those that are self-induced and those that are unintended) that prohibit and deter Black men from entering the profession. We believe the reasons as to why Black men are not entering the teaching profession has not been fully explored. Based on our exploration of literature and our collective experience as educators, very few studies talk about the implications a criminal record, or a specific type of crime has on an individual's ability to enter the pre-K-12 teaching profession. To our knowledge, very few, studies have utilized the voices of Black men who were interested in the pre-K-12 profession but ultimately were prohibited or deterred from pursuing this career for reasons such as having a criminal record.

Due to this revelation, the purpose of our case study is twofold. First, we wanted to investigate what inspired a Black man's interest in pursuing a teaching career. Second, we sought to understand what factor(s) alter or contribute to a deviation from the teaching profession. We employed the following research questions: (1) How does a Black man describe his inspiration for entering the Pre-K-12 teaching profession? and (2) How does a Black man describe their forced abandonment from one career to a new career because of having a criminal record? This study provides another perspective, and it brings about another avenue for teacher preparation programs to consider when examining the why (i.e., why Black men are not entering the teaching profession).

Trouble with Recruiting Black Male Teachers

Scholars have noted that Black men cannot be what they do not see (Brown & Thomas, 2020; Goings & Bianco, 2016; Sandles, 2020). We know that the United States teaching profession does not reflect the changing demographics of students in school districts. Teachers of Color only make up about 17 % of the teacher workforce (NCES, 2013). Specifically, when looking at teacher demographics by race and gender, Black male teachers comprise only 2% of the national teaching profession while Black students are 17 % of students in our nation's public schools (Kena et al., 2015). For children in public schools today there is a significant chance that they may never have an educator who identifies as a Black man (Goings & Bianco, 2016).

Scholars have addressed some of the main explanations for the current shortage of Black men teachers, Lewis and Toldson (2013), stressed that because Black men are less likely to graduate from college, then a vast majority of them are eliminated from consideration as teachers in traditional schools. Lewis and Toldson (2013) also highlighted that of the Black men who do graduate with a bachelor's degree, very few of them choose teaching as a profession. Brockenbrough (2012) raised the point that a small portion of Black men may choose to become teachers, but they continue to face obstacles from a system that has never seen them as educators. For Black men who do decide to pursue the teaching profession, they continue to navigate barriers at the preservice teacher education level. In many instances, exams (e.g., Praxis I) serve as a gatekeeper for Black men entering the teaching profession (Petchauer, 2012). Black men have been found to have lower scores on the Praxis I and II than their white counterparts (Latiker et al., 2013; Nettles et al., 2011). These tests have been documented as exams that are rooted in bias and not culturally relevant (Pabon et al., 2011).

Goings and Bianco (2016) interviewed 22 Black high school men regarding what deters them from becoming teachers. Their study highlighted when Black high school men have

encouraging interactions with educators and have opportunities to gain direct teaching experience in the community, they are more likely to see themselves as potential teachers. Due to the shortage of Black men in the classroom, recruiting these men into the profession has garnered both local and national attention. For instance, in the last decade the U.S. The Department of Education's TEACH Campaign has focused on recruiting Black men educators to the teaching profession (Davis et al., 2013). Other programs such as Call Mister at Clemson University (Norton, 2005) and the Brothers RISE program at Ohio University (Patton College of Education, 2021) have also focused on the recruitment of undergraduate Black men into the teaching profession. Unfortunately, very few studies, if any, address or consider how criminal records deter or prohibit Black men from entering the teaching profession. Especially since we know that Black boys are 12 times more likely to have a criminal record prior to their 20th birthday than White boys (Bowleg et al., 2020). Our study addresses the gap by focusing on Black men with criminal records interested in pursuing the teaching profession.

Black Males, The School-to-Prison Pipeline, and Incarceration

The school-to-prison pipeline has been a highly scrutinized practice and issue dating back to the early 1970's (Losen & Skiba, 2010; McCarter, 2017). Since the implementation of zero tolerance in pre-K-12 schools, which is a school discipline practice that allows for the removal of students for any school violation (Losen & Skiba, 2010), many scholars have highlighted how this system has disproportionately affected students of color, most notably Black boys starting as early as pre-K (Basile, 2020; Dancy, 2014; Gilliam, 2005; Grace & Nelson, 2019; Muñiz, 2021; Skiba et al., 2014). According to a plethora of scholars (see e.g., Brown, 2013; Heitzeg, 2014; Novak, 2019; Witt, 2007), African Americans are suspended and expelled from school at higher rates, despite having equivalent violations as other students with varying racial identities (Smith, 2015). For example, the United States Department of Education Office of Civil Rights (2016) examined the 2013-2014 school year and found that preschool enrollment was around 20% for Black boys, however, this same population of students (i.e., Black preschool boys) made up almost half of all males out of school suspensions at approximately 45%. What this means is that young Black boys are introduced and exposed to expulsion and incarceration from the time they start school until the time they are forced out.

While a significant portion of the literature has focused on the deep-rooted issues of the school-to-prison pipeline, several scholars believe they have found ways to combat the school-to-prison pipeline (Basford et al., 2020; Dutil, 2020; Gupta-Kagan, 2019; Nance, 2016). Basford et al. (2020) examined the High School for the Recording Arts (i.e., a charter school designed to serve and meet the needs of high school dropouts and at-risk kids while simultaneously dismantling the school-to-prison pipeline using unique approaches such as rap, hip-hop, and specialized staff), found that incorporating institutional plasticity within the school's practices contributed to the success of the school and its students. Institutional plasticity refers to the ability to adapt and incorporate new and innovative changes on a consistent basis. Basford et al. (2020) also found that by incorporating: (1) hooking and healing, (2) carefully selecting and training staff, (3) building a school family, (4) providing wrap around services and heavy advising for all students, and (5) flexible planning for intermittent attendance, they were able to serve a wide variety of students and successfully graduate them. Even with all the success, Basford et al. (2020) highlighted the fact that the school consists mostly of a white administration due to an issue recruiting teachers of color. Their student population is mostly students of color.

Moreover, having a criminal record disproportionately affects young African American males in areas of education, employment, and economic stability (Harris & Harding, 2019). According to Brame et al. (2012), one-third of young people are expected to be arrested and

charged with a crime by the age of 23. When looking at race, 49% of young Black men in comparison to 38% of young White men will experience arrest by the age of 23 (Brame et al., 2014; Harris et al., 2009). As it relates to mass incarceration and mass supervision, Black men makeup six percent of the US population but are sentenced to prison at six times the rate of white people with the same gender identities (Bowleg et al., 2020; Bronson & Carson, 2019). They are 12 times more likely to be imprisoned at the ages of 18 and 19 in comparison to white individuals (Bowleg et al., 2020). Roughly 80% of individuals released from prison are on some form of mass supervision, which affects their ability to integrate into society successfully.

Conceptual/Theoretical Framework CRT

For this study, we draw on Critical Race Theory (CRT), which we use as our foundation for understanding a Black man's plight to teach with a criminal record. CRT is a critical approach to exploring and challenging racial inequality in various aspects of society such as in K-12 and higher education settings (Kumasi, 2015; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Ledesma & Calderón, 2015). Essentially, CRT was developed as a "critique of color blindness" within critical legal scholarship (Cabrera, 2018, p. 210). Though CRT is concerned with the various structures and interactions that uphold racial inequality, the approach does not exclude or disregard other forms of injustices that may be prevalent (Rollock & Gillborn, 2011).

CRT was first introduced by Derrick Bell and Alan Freeman in the mid-1970s due to critical legal studies failing to address the effects of race and racism in US jurisprudence (DeCuir & Dixson, 2004). Thus, these scholars created a framework for analyzing "the role of race and racism in perpetuating social disparities between dominant and marginalized racial groups" (Hiraldo, 2010, p. 54). Scholars such as Ladson-Billings and Tate (1995) have been credited with introducing CRT to the world of education to understand the role of race and racism in the educational setting. Since CRTs introduction to the education world, a variety of scholars (see e.g., Davila & de Bradley, 2010; Harper et al., 2009; Jayakumar et al., 2009) have used CRT to argue that many educational inequities are deeply rooted in racism (Andrews, 2009).

Moreover, five main tenets outline CRT (Abrams & Moio, 2009; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Johnson, 2013). The first is endemic racism, which suggest that racism is a normal everyday occurrence for people of color. Next is race as a social construction. In this tenet, CRT posits that race is an artificial system comprised of arranging people according to observable or perceived physical attributes that have no connection to an individual's genetics or actual biological makeup. Whiteness as property is the third tenet and it suggest that whiteness as property restricts access to the multitude of resources and upward mobility by way of policies and practices for people of color whereby the rights to these resources and opportunities for upward mobility have been enjoyed and possessed solely by white people. The fourth tenet is voices of people of color. In this tenet, CRT believes in including the lived realities and experiences of people of color by centering their voices and perspectives. CRT also believes in the art of counter storytelling. Specifically, giving people of color the opportunity to tell their own story based on their lived truths and realities. The last tenet is intersectionality, which suggests there are other oppressed identities (e.g., gender, disability, criminality) that intersect with one another and shapes one's experiences.

These five main tenets of CRT provide a framework that can be applied to the lived experiences of Black men with criminal records. Within our study, CRT provides a lens for exploring the ways race, gender, and criminal records intersect with one another while simultaneously impacting the degree and career seeking process for Black men. CRT also provides a lens for understanding inequity (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Specifically, when we think of access to certain industries (i.e., teaching profession), which is mostly comprised

of White women, and the lack of Black men teaching, we know that race is a factor in inequity. In addition to using CRT as a framework, we use the tenet (i.e., voices of people of color) of CRT to amplify the voice of a Black man who was interested in teaching but was prohibited from doing so because of his criminal record. Very few studies, if any, capture the voices and perspectives of Black men with criminal records trying to teach. We also use CRT as a foundation for understanding the power of white supremacy and its role in cultivating, reinforcing racial subordination, and normalizing white privilege in the teaching profession. Specifically, we use CRT to understand how gatekeepers dictate who can enter the teaching profession and when. Last, we use another tenet of CRT (i.e., intersectionality) to focus on the intersections of race, gender, and an individual's crime type.

Methodology

For this study, we use Stake's (1995) case study approach coupled with Covert and Ljungberg's (2015) layered textual analysis. Stake (1995) defines a case study as a single thing of focus, which in this case is a Black man, with a set of tight margins (i.e., the bounded system) and intricate working parts. Covert and Ljungberg's (2015) layered textural analysis (see analysis section) provides a rigorous and robust process for bringing together "images and text in ways that changed existing and decontextualized understandings" (p. 307). We opted to use a qualitative case study approach because very few studies focus on Black men with criminal records with an interest in teaching in a pre-K-12 setting. Furthermore, we wanted to explore additional reasons why Black men were not entering the teaching profession. To explore this phenomenon, we followed Stakes (1995) approach by binding this study. Specifically, we focused on one single race/ethnicity (i.e., Black or of African descent), we limited our population to a single-gendered identity (i.e., cis-gendered man) and to individuals who showed interest in teaching in the pre-K-12 profession, and we limited our study to individuals who had a criminal record. Individuals who fell outside of the bound system were not in the scope of our case study.

As for our qualitative study, we center our unique case around one single Black man who was interested in teaching elementary reading as his preferred career choice. However, when he attempted to pursue a teaching education degree, he was prohibited from proceeding with the degree due to having a criminal record. What makes this case unique is the fact that teacher education programs are desperately trying to recruit Black men into the teaching profession. However, when a prospective Black man showed interest in the teaching profession, they denied him the opportunity because of having a criminal record.

Reflexivity

Patel (2016) calls on researchers to adopt a different way of explicating their positionality in the research process through asking themselves three questions: why me/us, why this study, and why now? We share our positionality as researchers using this format.

Why Me/Us?

All three authors identify as African American educators. Two are African American cis-gendered men (Terrence and Cameron) and one is an African American cis-gendered woman (Theda). Terrence is currently an Interim Dean of Students and formerly an assistant professor in higher education and director of a prison education program. Cameron currently is an assistant professor in a higher education graduate program and Theda is an associate professor in a teacher education program. Terrence has three years teaching experience as an

elementary school substitute teacher and is a formerly incarcerated juvenile. His career aspirations were not altered because of having a juvenile criminal record. Cameron does not have K-12 teaching experience. However, he has taught at the postsecondary level for eight years. Theda has experience in K-12 curriculum, instruction, teacher education and has over seven years of teaching experience.

Why this Study?

Terrence is a product of the school-to-prison pipeline. He was arrested two different times at school prior to the age of 10 for his excessive behavior problems, which eventually contributed to him dropping out of high school years later. Despite his career aspirations not being altered because of having a juvenile record, Terrence has witnessed how others career aspirations have been altered because of having a criminal record. He has also seen how the school-to-prison pipeline affects young Black boys in the pre-K-12 setting. For these reasons, Terrence along with Cameron and Theda believe it is important to consider all barriers to the teaching profession for Black boys.

Why Now?

There continues to be a large conversation about why Black men are not entering the teaching profession and how to recruit them. Unfortunately, the conversations never consider the impact that a criminal record has on Black men's ability to enter the profession. Due to this gap in literature and the lack of focus on the intersections of race, criminal records, and the teaching profession, we believe there is no other time but now to address these gaps.

Participant Profile

Very few, if any, educational studies capture the voices of Black men with criminal records who are/were interested in teaching in the pre-K-12 academic setting. As a result, we thought it best to highlight and focus on the experience of a Black man who wanted to become an elementary reading teacher but could not because of having a criminal record. For this case study, we draw our attention to Jacob (participant pseudonym). Jacob self-identifies as a Black man with a criminal record. He was charged and convicted of two felony counts of forgery and one felony count of criminal simulation $1,000-$10,000. Due to his crime type and after being denied the opportunity to pursue a bachelor's degree in elementary or middle grades reading education due to having a criminal record, Jacob ultimately had to forgo pursuing this aspiration. As a result of being denied, Jacob graduated with his bachelor's in human development learning, and he ended up pursuing a master's in educational leadership. He now works in academic advising at a higher education institution (see Table 1).

Table 1

Participant Demographics, Degree Completion, and Crimes Convicted of

Demographics	
Pseudonym	Jacob
Age	32
Race/Ethnicity	Black-African American
Gender	Cis-man
Degree completed	
Associate's	General Studies
Bachelor's	Human Development & Learning
Master's	Educational Leadership: Higher Education
Crimes Convicted Of	
Felony	2 Counts of Forgery
Felony	Criminal Simulation $1,000-$10,000

Note. Forgery is the manipulation of documents with the intent to defraud or harm an individual. Criminal simulation is when an individual attempts to defraud or when an individual alters an object so that it appears to have more value than it does.

Recruitment and Collection of Participant Narratives

For this case study, we address how we recruited participants for this study. Recruitment for this study consisted of criterion sampling. Criterion sampling is a set of predetermined criteria that a prospective participant must meet to participate in the study officially (Patton, 2002). To participate in this study, prospective participants had to be 18 years of age or older, had to have a criminal record, had to have been a current student (i.e., undergraduate, graduate, or professional degree) or a recent graduate, and prospective participants career aspirations had to have changed because of obtaining a criminal record. Criteria were placed on an Ohio University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approved flier and was posted on Facebook, Twitter, and on the Higher Education in Prison listserv. Prospective participants who met the study's criteria and agreed to participate received one $25 Amazon e-gift card. Only one participant out of 13 who inquired about the study met all the requirements.

The description that we provide below is the collection process, which examined how having a criminal record altered or negatively affected the types of careers people with criminal records could pursue. First, the entire collection of the sole participants' perspective(s) took place over 30 days in the fall of 2020. To collect the participant's perspective(s), the prospective participant reviewed and approved Ohio University IRB Informed Consent Form, which provided details (e.g., purpose, criteria, remuneration) for our study. Following the review of the consent form, the participant completed a closed-ended demographic pre-questionnaire form. The participant also engaged in a photo-elicitation exercise where he submitted three photos of his career aspirations before obtaining a criminal record and three photos of his career aspirations after acquiring a criminal record. Photo elicitation is the "process of incorporating creative images or photographs into the research process" (McTier et al., 2023, p. 955). In total, the participants submitted six photos.

The last step in the collection of the participants' perspective(s) consisted of one semi-structured interview. During this interview, the participant reflected and provided a deep

discussion of their photos, and then they reflected on how their criminal record altered their previous career aspirations, resources that were offered and used in college, and their feelings about losing the opportunity to pursue their original career goal. In addition, the participants reflected on the role that higher education played in achieving their original and new career goals. Example questions that were asked in the semi-structured interview were: (1) using your photos, can you describe in detail your career goals before having a criminal record, (2) can you describe how your criminal record changed or altered your career goals, and (3) can you describe how higher education has helped or hindered you from achieving your career goals?

Analysis of Participant Perspectives: Layered Textual Analysis Approach

In Covert and Ljungberg's (2015) paper on Layers of Narratives, Images, and Analysis, they use a layered and sequenced approach to analyze the "content and relationship of photos and narratives in simultaneous and integrated ways" (p. 309). The three-step approach consists of structural analysis, visual analysis, and thematic analysis. In their first step, they engage in a structural analysis approach, which consists of reading the participant's transcript, writing detailed memos, and searching for narrative turns and talk. In the second step, they engage in a visual analysis approach, which consists of observing the photos at face value, reviewing participants meaning of the photos, taking inventory of the photos collected, and categorizing the photos. In the final step, Covert and Ljungberg (2015) engage in a th'matic analysis approach, which brought together the narratives selected from the text during the structural narrative analysis and the visual analysis process. Specifically, they found that neither the participant's perspectives nor the photos could stand alone. As such, the thematic analysis allowed for these two approaches to be reviewed, categorized, and thematized in a way that would answer the research questions while also representing the participant's perspectives visually and in written form. Together, this layered and sequenced approach allowed us to answer our research question while simultaneously honoring the voice of our participant Jacob. Below we provide a deeper explanation of our analysis process.

Before engaging in the analysis of Jacobs's transcript, we conducted a thorough check of the transcript for accuracy because we used a free transcription service called Otter.ai. This check consisted of us reading through the raw transcript and listening to the recorded audio. While listening to the transcripts, we made the appropriate changes and edited the raw transcript when needed. These edits were done to ensure that we captured precisely what Jacob said. We also checked the photos that were sent to the research team. Specifically, we checked for quality (i.e., was the picture grainy or hard to make out). Once the preliminary check of participants' materials we conducted, we then moved into the layered textual analysis approach, which consisted of (1) structural analysis (Labov, 1997), (2) visual analysis (Collier, 2001), and (3) thematic analysis (Riessman, 1993). Covert and Ljungberg's (2015) process would allow us to engage and analyze Jacob's transcript and photos simultaneously.

To engage in the structural analysis process of the participant's transcript, which recognizes the way a story is told and emphasizes the many shifts in the story that takes place (Riessman, 1993), we read through the Jacob's transcribed transcript several times while keeping a close eye on text that tied directly to the purpose of this case study, the research questions, and any text that took on the appearance of a narrative (Riessman, 1993). For context, Covert and Ljungberg (2015) consider a narrative to be a topic of focus with an "episodic turn at talk" relating to a participants lived experience (p. 309). Text on the other hand, "bring stories of personal experience into being by means of the first-person oral narration of past, present, future or imaginary experience" (Patterson, 2013, p. 128). These definitions of narrative and text, which are used interchangeably, help us understand how a

Black male (i.e., the participant in this study) describes their original career aspirations and their forced abandonment of that initial career aspiration due to having a criminal record.

The research team read through Jacobs' transcript to familiarize themselves and to become acquainted with his story. On the subsequent read through of his transcript, we began to write a detailed description about his career aspirations, the various turns in talk, and a description highlighting some sort of opinion, reaction, or evaluation about his initial career aspirations and how their career aspirations changed because of having a criminal record on his transcript. We then analyzed his transcript using Labov's (1993) six elements of narrative structure as Covert and Ljungberg (2015) recommended. Those six elements include: (1) abstract (a brief overview of the main points in the narrative), (2) orientation (details about the location, time, and characters), (3) complicating action (the plot or events that take place in the narrative), (4) evaluation (the narrator's interpretation or opinions), (5) resolution (the outcome or final result of the story), and (6) coda (a conclusion of the narrative and a return to the present time). To form a narrative, two elements are required: (1) a complicating action describing the events that led to their initial career aspirations and the deviation or abandonment from that initial career aspiration as a result of obtaining a criminal record and (2) an evaluation, which explores the crucial point(s) of the story, which justifies the telling of the story in the first place (Covert & Ljungberg, 2015; Patterson, 2013). To identify the required elements in each narrative or selected text, we read through Jacob's transcript again. During this read-through, we highlighted where the required elements began and ended. We also identified the "function, content, and relationship" across Jacob's narratives, and we engaged in extensive note taking about the structural patterns that were taking place throughout all his story and experiences (Covert & Ljungberg, 2015, p. 309).

For the visual analysis of photos, Covert and Ljungberg (2015) implemented Colliers (2001) direct analysis technique to analyze a participant(s) photo. Using their suggestion, we engaged in a process of open viewing. Here, we reviewed each photo and wrote down our initial thoughts about each individual photo. Then we began to categorize our photos based on Jacobs meaning of the photo. Here we had to refer to the transcribed transcript to obtain Jacob's meanings. Immediately following this step, we produced in-depth descriptions of each photo by asking the following questions: (1) What is the focus of the photo at face value? and (2) What is the photo telling us? Last, we reviewed the photos as a whole or a complete package to discover patterns and to make a deliberate connection to the participants narrative.

The final process in the layered textual analysis approach consists of a thematic analysis of photo and narrative events. After reviewing Jacob's (i.e., the study participant) photos and selected narratives or text from his transcript, we realized that there was a clear connection between the two. Like what other scholars have found in their use of the layered textual analysis approach (see e.g., Covert & Ljungberg, 2015; McTier et al., 2023), we realized that the photos and the narratives worked together. They would not and could not operate independently from one another. As a result of this revelation and after an individualized examination of the narratives and photos, we opted to examine both the photos and the selected narratives together. To do so, we used the suggestion provided by Covert and Ljungberg (2015) and conducted a thematic analysis approach using Riessman's (1993) thematic analysis of narratives. Here we asked several analytical questions such as what inspired the participant's initial career aspirations, how are participants coping with the forced change in their career aspirations, and what role did the participants' crime play in the changes in career aspirations? We then identified various patterns across the photos and the narratives simultaneously. While identifying patterns, we also searched for areas that constituted a theme. For the findings, we opted to highlight both the narratives and the photos, which were identified in the structural analysis process, followed by a single photo to represent the theme.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is considered a way for researchers to convince various individuals that their work is legitimate and worth a solid review (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Nowell et al., 2017). Stake (1995) discussed trustworthiness and triangulation and offered four strategies for triangulating data: (1) data source triangulation, (2) investigator triangulation, (3) theory triangulation, and (4) methodological triangulation. Stake also offered reflective questions like, "'Do we have it right?' Not only 'Are we generating a comprehensive and accurate description of the case?' but 'Are we developing the interpretations we want?'" (Stake, 1995, p. 107). To convince our readers and various constituents that our work is rooted in a rigorous analysis, we employed several trustworthiness techniques. Like Stake (1995), we created detailed and uncontestable thick descriptions of our case. We engaged in reflexivity before the start of the study, during the collection of the participant's perspectives, and in the analysis of the participants' perspectives. Through investigator or research triangulation, we kept a written and detailed account of the research process and a journal of our internal and external conversations with one another (Nowell et al., 2017; Stake, 1995; Tobin & Begley, 2004). We also engaged in the process of transferability. Due to our small sample size (i.e., one participant), we cannot confirm generalizability to other Black men with criminal records interested in becoming a teacher. However, we have created a thick description of our collection and analysis process for other researchers to follow if they want to conduct a similar study or if their or context or findings that can be transferable.

Through methodological triangulation, we developed a robust audit trail of our study. Notably, we kept a written account of every decision we made, starting from the beginning of the study to the very end of the study. Ohio University's IRB has approved the detailed report of our research and the various analytical decisions. Last, we engaged in the process of peer debriefing. In this process, we sent our preliminary findings to the participant to check the findings for accuracy. To theory and methodological triangulation, the research team also engaged in peer debriefing to discuss the interpretations and representations of the findings and to ensure the findings were adequately represented and void of bias and misrepresentation (Nowell et al., 2017; Stake, 1995).

Findings

Based on the analysis of the participant's perspective(s), two findings were produced. The first finding, *The Magical Teacher & The Stressful Home Environment*, provides a narrative and photo representation of Jacob's career aspiration of becoming an elementary reading teacher. This finding addresses our research question on how Black men describe their inspiration for entering the pre-K-12 teaching profession. Our second finding, *The Pivot, The Big "If," and the 3 Ladies "No,"* provides a narrative and photo representation of the factors that led to the forced abandonment of Jacob's career aspirations due to having a criminal record. This finding addresses our second research question on how Black men describe their forced abandonment from one career to a new career because of having a criminal record? To display the participant's narrative, we use tables to show all six elements of narrative structure. Particularly, the required narratives structures (i.e., the evaluation and complicating action) that Covert and Ljungberg (2015) suggest in their layered analysis approach. Elements of narrative structure do not have any specific order and may be reflected differently in each table.

The Magical Teacher & The Stressful Home Environment

Jacob begins his narrative by describing his home life and the stress it brought to him. To understand his career aspirations, you first must understand who he was at the time and the type of environment he was living in. Jacob was a young eight-year-old Black boy who was raised by his single mother alongside his brother. His father, whom he had much admiration for, separated from his mother and started an entirely new family. This separation of his parents posed as a complicated action of the narrative structure in his story. Due to Jacob's father not being in the picture, Jacob's mom began entertaining other men. This entertainment of other men would go on for some time until she found someone to settle down with, which you can see in the narrative structure: orientation portion of the narrative. With this new man in place, Jacob begins to see and experience his mother changing from a laid-back mom to a strict disciplinarian, which is also depicted in the narrative structure: evaluation portion of his narrative. Jacob starts his narrative (see Table 2) by focusing on that change and the effects it had on him at such a young age.

Table 2
Jacob's Narrative Describing His Home Life and Stressors

Elements of Narrative Structure	Participant Narrative
Orientation	My mother married her husband, I don't know, in 1997, and me and him never clicked. They were married for like, I don't know, 20 years. So, me and him never we never clicked.
Evaluation	And up until that time, my mom I guess you could say, I hate to say free range parenting, but she just made sure that me and my brother were okay. So really, we didn't have chores we didn't have to do some of the stuff that you typically see in an African American household. That wasn't me and him [brother]. We, you know, when we just wanted money, she gave us money. She was not strict at all. After meeting him [new husband]. She became like this really strict disciplinarian and anything [emphasis] we did we could get a paddling for [inaudible].
Complicating Action	We didn't call him dad we didn't say yes sir no sir. And then me and him just never clicked. And then I [I exaggerated] still love my real dad and my, his family. [inaudible]. I ran away a couple of times. And this being at home was so stressful. I would do homework as soon as I got home then I had all these choirs that I had to do.
Resolution	Then I might have a couple of minutes to read a book
Evaluation	but just home life was more stressful than it needed to be
Coda	and reading was just my way to set that aside for a minute.

The stress of seeing his biological father, whom he loved so much, with another family and experiencing his mother change because of the man she was with had a profound impact on young Jacob. As a result, Jacob would run away at times to cope. When he did not run away and when he had an extra moment, Jacob did something fascinating to escape the daily stresses; he read books, which served as a resolution (i.e., narrative structure) for dealing with the stressors in his young life.

In the first portion of Jacob's narrative, he begins his story by describing his stressors and the effects it had on him. In the upcoming portion of his story, Jacob begins to make the connection as to how the stressors from his home life and the inspiration of his teacher influenced his decision to pursue a career as an elementary reading teacher (see Table 3).

Table 3

Jacob's Narrative Describing His Inspiration to Pursue a Career as an Elementary Reading Teacher

Elements of Narrative Structure	Participant Narrative
Orientation	In the third grade I just had a teacher that was magical.
Evaluation	In the third grade I became fascinated with not learning how to read but learning to read for understanding learning to read for education. And once I figured out that I could get lost in the books
Complicating Action	and some of the troubles that I had in my world, just reading could take me out of that.
Resolution	Then I was like I gota teach other people to read because you can go many places without even leaving your couch, your book, newspaper, [inaudible], so.
Abstract	I wanted to be an elementary or middle school English teacher, English, or reading teacher cuz I like reading but they don't really separate them anymore. And that was my only career idea.
Complicating Action	Ever since I was in the third grade I said, "I was not going to be anything but a teacher," and even through post-conviction and my incarceration, still held on to that for a long time. I didn't want to be anything; people would ask me what do you want to do I don't know it's teaching. And that was pretty simple everyone who knows me from when I was younger until I was in high school,
Coda	I did everything that was geared to me becoming a teacher so that was my one and only career aspiration.

These stressors coupled with the inspiration Jacob garnered from his "magical" reading teacher, are the reasons why he wanted to pursue a career as an elementary reading teacher (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

Photos Depicting Aspirations of Becoming a Teacher before Obtaining a Criminal Record

Note. The people in the photos do NOT have a criminal record nor are they participants in this study. The photos are stock photos, which are publicly available on the world wide web. The photos are used ONLY as a depiction of career aspirations.

As you can see from the complicating action of the narrative structure in Table 3, which describes Jacob's inspiration to pursue a career as an elementary reading teacher, school became a haven and a space for him to cultivate his career aspirations while reading became a healthy way for him to escape the stressors in his home environment. As Jacob describes in the evaluation section of the narrative structure, reading also became a major coping mechanism

and a way for Jacob to get lost in the books, so much so that he wanted to teach this technique to other children when he grew up (as depicted in the resolution of the narrative structure in Table 3). Unfortunately, without these pivotal experiences and inspirations taking place or happening in Jacob's life, becoming an elementary reading teacher as a Black man could possibly not be his career choice or aspiration.

The collage of photos, selected by Jacob in Figure 1, photos depicting his career aspirations before obtaining a criminal record, reflects his view on what an elementary reading teacher looks like. He's always envisioned himself as a teacher standing at the front of the classroom while delivering a robust lecture on how "to read for understanding" and how "to read for education." As he mentioned in his early narrative, he was inspired by his elementary teacher and thought he would be able to inspire others once he entered the profession.

The Pivot, The Big "If" and the 3 Ladies "No"

As we begin to focus on Jacobs' next story, it is imperative that we lay the foundation for his narrative, that is, understanding the reason for a change in his career aspirations of becoming an elementary reading teacher. To understand his unwanted newfound career aspirations, you first must realize Jacob's dilemma (i.e., his criminal record) and the various factors that would get in his way of becoming an elementary reading teacher. Jacob, a Black man, is now an adult convicted of two felony counts of forgery and one felony count of criminal simulation $1,000-$10000 (see Table 1 notes for definitions of each crime). As Jacob returns to society from prison, he still had the sole desire to become an elementary reading teacher. Since Jacob partook in college classes while in prison, he thought it best to continue his education and pursue this degree post-incarceration. However, unbeknownst to him, he would run into a life-altering situation while in college that would ultimately "block and corner him in" because of having a criminal record. As shown in Table 4, Jacob's description of how his criminal record altered his initial career aspirations, we start his narrative by focusing on his altered career aspirations of becoming an elementary reading teacher.

Table 4
Jacob's Narrative Discussing How His Criminal Record Altered His Initial Career Aspirations

Elements of Narrative Structure	Participants Narrative
Abstract	So, I decided that I wanted to become an academic advisor. And the reason I decided that is, somewhere at the end of my sentence, I got involved with the agency that provides a mechanism for offenders to get an associate's degree. So, I did not get my associates degree on the inside because I got out the semester before, but I was able to get my associates degree, bachelors, and masters. And, I had an issue with my institution, because like I stated, I wanted to be a teacher, so I enrolled in teacher education.
Orientation	So, she kicked me from the college of ed. on a Friday afternoon, and I left not knowing what I was going to do. Pretty much it was all crazy. We had a meeting on a Friday, and they left it as well, we're going to see what we can do.
Complicating Action	There were three ladies in the room who did not like me. One was like hell no it's not happening, one was like well maybe we can figure out how you can at least get the courses, and then one she was on the fence, so they just left me. I came back to school on that Monday, and nobody knew what to do and it was like past the withdrawal time, so they would have to have given me W's I would have lost all that money.
Evaluation	And it was really the academic advising team who said, you know, this is not what education should be about and they really, they really worked to get me taken care of. I've never seen them [the 3 ladies]. They [new academic advisors] went into Banner and just took the courses off, so that way I wouldn't have W's, I wouldn't have to pay for them or have to drop them. Like they really went far and beyond to make sure that I wasn't penalized for [name of teacher education program redacted] decision and now I just want to do that for other people.
Resolution	So, you know, sometimes you have to go that extra mile for folks. So, on paper you know I could. It appears to be that I could probably protest and get a teaching job somewhere in the United States. But that's a big if. Having that record it just limited me with my job prospects. And then, I'm trying to complete a teacher education program. So, my institution says no, I can't, I can't get in until it's expunged.
Coda	And so, it's just kind of blocked me and cornered me into this specific program that I can get into.

While incarcerated, Jacob decided to pursue his associate degree in general studies. However, before he could complete his degree, he was released from prison. Wanting to finish what he started, Jacob finishes his associate degree. Thereafter, he decides to enroll in a four-year college to obtain his bachelor's in teaching education to fulfill his lifelong dream of becoming an elementary teacher. Unfortunately, as you can see in the elements of narrative structure complicating action portion of his story, Jacob is blocked from pursuing the educational degree by three women faculty in the teacher education program who have mixed feelings and apprehensions about him pursuing the profession with a criminal record. As a result, they use their mixed feelings and apprehensions as a justification to boot him from the teacher education program.

In Table 4 of Jacob's altered career aspirations, we see Jacob wrestling with the fact that he may never pursue his career aspirations of becoming an elementary reading teacher because of his criminal record. Through his story, we also see how Jacob was never given a chance to pursue his career aspirations because of the faculty's gatekeeping to the teaching profession and the various beliefs about whether he would get placed as a student-teacher. Coming to grips with the fact that he may never become a teacher, as seen in the elements of the narrative structure evaluation portion of his story, Jacob's assessment causes him to quickly pivot and find another career to pursue with his criminal record. We continue Jacob's narrative by focusing on this career transition from an elementary reading teacher to an academic advisor. Specifically, we focus on how his new academic advisor in interdisciplinary studies unknowingly inspired him to become an academic advisor. Part two of Jacob's narrative is summarized in Table 5, Jacob's narrative focuses on his career transition from a teacher to an academic advisor.

Table 5
Jacob's Narrative Focusing on His Career Transition from a Teacher to an Academic Advisor

Elements of Narrative Structure	Participant Narrative
Evaluation	I mean for me I feel like, you need a, in this day and time, you need a degree, and you need an education to excel at anything, or at most, even if it's not a Bachelor's, you need some type of credentials. And unfortunately, I think those with criminal records, those options are limited, based on, you know, your location and other things.
Orientation	And so, I got in touch, They got me in touch with an advisor in Interdisciplinary Studies.
Abstract	And the first thing she said to me was that I've had second chances in my life so you deserve a second chance and I'm going to do whatever I can to help you.
Complicating Action	And it was just at that moment that relationship had developed with her. Um, I realized that we, that we don't do enough to really get to know our students, most of the time our students just go through the university, and they see advisors when they need to.
Resolution	But after talking with her and seeing how important it is to have that one main connection so that you feel like you belong, I decided that I wanted to do that because I attend a PWI [predominately white institution] so I decided that I wanted to be that person at another PWI for someone who might feel like they are left out because they don't belong, or they feel like they don't belong there.
Coda	So, I decided to pursue a career in academic advising.

In the first portion of Jacob's narrative (i.e., part one), particularly in the elements of narrative structure complicating action portion of the story, Jacob is blocked from pursuing his original career aspirations. In part two of Jacob's narrative, particularly in the elements of narrative structure evaluation portion of his story, we see Jacob realizing that if he is going to make it in society, he will need a degree and a career change to make it in the world with a

criminal record. Through his evaluation portion of his narrative, Jacob begins to realize through his own experience with his new academic advisor, who vowed to help him through his difficult time of being blocked from pursuing his teacher education degree, that certain groups of students are alienated from the campus community and the resources provided (seen in the complicating action portion of Jacob's narrative). Using his experience with his new academic advisor and his dilemma with the teacher education program, Jacob decides to pivot and help other students who face the same or similar experiences in higher education. So as a resolution, he decides to become an academic advisor (see Figure 2).

Figure 2
Photos Depicting Aspirations of Becoming an Academic Advisor after Obtaining a Criminal Record

Note. The people in the photos do NOT have a criminal record nor are they participants in this study. The photos are stock photos, which are publicly available on the world wide web. The photos are used ONLY as a depiction of career aspirations.

The collage of photos, selected by Jacob in Figure 2, photos depicting aspirations of becoming an academic advisor after obtaining a criminal record, reflects his decision to pursue a new career as an academic advisor. Though his heart was set on becoming an elementary reading teacher, he realized that this career was most likely not going to happen. As such, he pivoted and found a new career choice after his interaction with an academic advisor who showed him "how important it is to have that one main connection so that you feel like you belong." Like his original plans of inspiring kids to read, he believed he would be able to inspire college students who felt "left out because they don't belong, or they feel like they don't belong" at the institution.

Discussion

Prior to us moving into the discussion section of this paper, we first want to acknowledge that we do not claim any generalizability for our study. The lack of generalizability is a direct response to having only one participant and focusing on one unique participant which derived from a larger study on how criminal records alter career aspirations. Despite having only one participant, we believe this study sheds light on a complex issue that has been glossed over or not talked about within the teaching profession (i.e., pre-K-12 and higher education settings). Due to the lack of generalizability, we caution against using the study's findings as the final say. We do, however, encourage readers to consider the findings as a foundation for exploring a deeper issue around Black men with criminal records and teacher recruitment and preparation.

Moreover, as an implication of national COVID-19 restrictions, our study was confined to only a virtual interviewing space. As a result, we were unable to capture the voices of those who are not able to use or engage in virtual settings due to court orders, probation, or parole expectations. This means that we could have missed out on perspectives such as those with sexually related offenses who have been banned from using any type of technology. Given the

nature of their crime type, their perspective could be useful in understanding the difficulties of entering the teaching profession with their specific crime type. Another limitation for this study consists of not having the perspectives of teachers and teacher preparation programs as it relates to Black men entering the teaching profession with a criminal record. Having their perspectives could provide us with an understanding of why Black men with criminal records are not considered for a career in teaching. Last, we consider crime type a limitation to this study. Specifically, the participant had a non-violent crime type (i.e., forgery and criminal simulation $1,000-$10,000). Our study did not capture the perspectives of Black men with a violent crime type who were interested in a career in teaching. Having their perspectives could have provided a much broader understanding of the issue's Black men with criminal records face when trying to pursue a career in pre-K-12 teaching.

Focusing on our first finding *The Magical Teacher and the Stressful Home Environment,* which speaks to our first research question (i.e., How does a Black man describe their inspiration for entering the pre-K-12 teaching profession), we found that our participant was inspired to pursue a teaching career by his own third grade teacher. This suggests that teachers do have a profound impact on their student's career decisions even at an early age. As many researchers have concluded, teachers play a major role in cultivating a student's development while simultaneously inspiring them to pursue the things that matter to them (Davis, 2001). We also found the rationale for pursuing a teaching career was in relation to the participants' lived reality. Meaning that the participant figured out early on that reading became a way to escape the daily trauma (e.g., the absence of his biological father, the change in family dynamic, the introduction of other men) he was experiencing at home. As a result of the participant's revelation, he wanted to pursue a teaching career and use his coping technique of reading to inspire other children who may need an outlet or a healthy way of escaping their daily traumas.

Reflecting on this finding, we begin to see the power of education and the power of a teacher's ability to positively influence a young Black man's life. Knowing that we lose a large portion of young Black boys to the school-to-prison pipeline, to life outside of the academy, and quite frankly to the streets, then why are we (i.e., the teaching profession) not learning from Black men who have been through those trials and tribulations? Why are we blocking Black men's ability to enter a profession because of their past criminal histories? Leaning on our theoretical framework, specifically the tenets whiteness as property and the voices of people of color, we see that the teaching profession, which is comprised mostly of White women both in leadership and the classroom, maintains that whiteness as property by restricting access to the profession even when knowing that Black men and Black boys are likely to have a criminal record. They also limit Black men's ability to connect and positively influence children who may be going down similar paths as teachers because of having a criminal record. It's about power, maintaining control, and perpetuating a cycle even when knowing that we are losing the education battle as it pertains to Black boys.

As it relates to our second finding *The Pivot, The Big "If" and the 3 Ladies "No,"* which speaks to the second research question (i.e., How does a Black man describe their forced abandonment from one career to a new career as a result of having a criminal record?), our participant had this dream of becoming an elementary reading teacher for quite some time. However, because he obtained a criminal record later in life, three faculty believed he did not deserve to enter the profession and they believed that he wouldn't be able to find a student teaching opportunity. As a result of their lack of confidence, our participant was forced to pursue another type of degree because of the stigmas and the perceptions that were held by the teacher education program faculty who acted as gatekeepers into the profession. This finding confirms previous studies on faculty and administrator attitudes towards college students with criminal records. Specifically, faculty and administrators serving as gatekeepers into the

academy and preventing people with criminal records from even accessing the various resources on campus because of their negative attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about them as an individual and the type of crime they have (McTier et al., 2020; Ott & McTier, 2020, 2021).There has to be an opportunity for Black men who may have a criminal record to make a change for themselves and the communities that they are a part of. Simply banning Black men from a profession because of a criminal record does nothing but maintain whiteness as property and this notion of endemic racism.

Recommendations for Policy, Practice, and Research

Based on the discussion and this paper's findings section, we have developed a list of recommendations that we believe will help teacher education programs within higher education. For policy, we recommend that higher education institutions create a statewide institutional policy that prohibits faculty and staff, mainly advising staff, from banning or prohibiting college students with criminal records from pursuing a teacher education degree and program. While we recognize that outside forces such as state licensure agencies have their own rules, we believe that individuals should be able to pursue the degree of their choosing so long as they are aware of the roadblocks that may lie ahead. Higher education should not intervene with one's educational interest, especially if the individual is paying for their degree. Like the statewide policy, we suggest that teacher education programs create a policy that allows individuals with criminal records to pursue the academic component (i.e., classwork) of the degree. In this policy, teacher programs should also work with college students with criminal records and pre-K-12 schools for student teaching opportunities. If none are afforded to the student, the program should think of other innovative ways to meet their needs (e.g., online teaching options).

State boards of education, governing boards, and teacher certification boards should create a state policy that allows a person with a criminal record to pursue a teaching license if specific requirements are met. Examples of requirements can include the following: (1) a person must be clear of all legal requirements and obligations, (2) must not be on parole or probation, (3) must be five-years removed from parole and probation, (4) must be seven-years with no new criminal charges since last incarceration, (5) must be evaluated by a specialized team of teachers, scholars, psychologist, behaviorist, and advocates for people with criminal records, and (6) crime types must not involve the harm of children in any capacity. These specialized individuals will be trained to assess risk and behavior as well as their own biases.

Teacher education programs should begin to work with Black men who were impacted by the (in)justice system so that they may help with mentoring our youth who are affected by school discipline, poverty, and the school-to-prison pipeline. Utilizing individuals who have been in the system and who understand the culture of being Black can help decrease the school-to-prison pipeline while also increasing the number of Black men in the teaching profession. Teacher education programs should address their own personal bias and stigmas related to Black men with criminal records specifically and people with criminal records more broadly. Based on research from Ott and McTier (2020) and McTier et al. (2020), faculty and administrators serve as gatekeepers and can have a profound impact on a student's outcomes. Instead of saying no, a person with a criminal record can't pursue a teaching degree; we believe teacher education programs should stop, assess, and evaluate the benefits of utilizing Black men with criminal records in the teaching profession.

For research, we suggest that researchers conduct a large-scale study investigating teacher education programs, teachers, superintendents, students, and parents' perceptions and beliefs of people with criminal records working in the teaching profession post-graduation. Research investigating Black men's rationale for not pursuing the teaching profession should

be explored extensively. We believe that teacher education programs should conduct prison studies to determine whether Black men are interested in pursuing teacher education programs post-incarceration and post-graduation from a teacher education program. Based on research, we know that Black men are the highest incarcerated population within the United States, and Black men are likely to have a criminal record compared to any other racial and ethnic population (Brame et al., 2014). Last, we suggest a thorough policy analysis of federal and state policy and law around teaching certification and licensure be explored extensively as it relates to people with criminal records entering the profession.

Conclusion

This study opens another conversation around Black men, criminal records, and the teaching profession. Particularly, this study challenges us to think critically about why Black men are not entering the teaching profession. Though this is only one perspective, we believe that this study about a Black man who was interested in teaching but was not able to because of his criminal record, sheds light on an issue that has been swept under a rug or ignored. To move the field forward, we reiterate the need to create federal, state, and institutional policies around criminal records, academic, and career pursuits. We also reiterate the need to create policies that allow an individual with a criminal record to pursue a teaching license after a certain time and if specific requirements are met. By implementing our suggestions, we believe the teaching profession and teacher preparation programs can build better pathways into the teaching profession for Black men while also addressing the intersections of race and crime.

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