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AFROCENTRISM
A Problem for Public Education

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PREFACE

African-Americans have had much to complain about regarding American public education. While in recent years many schools have included curricula on black contributions to America, historically such material has been minimized, and the history of Africa nearly ignored. Imagine how difficult it must be for many African-American school children to listen to 19th and 20th century American history with only a passing or one-dimensional reference to slavery. Is Thomas Jefferson one of the great democratic founders of America, with his powerful articulation of equality? Isn't he also someone who held slaves and had some of the most vile views of black people? Jefferson "was the first to use . . . their failure to write poetry . . . to advance the 'suspicion' that blacks [whom he referred to as 'dull, tasteless and anomalous'] were genetically inferior to whites in the important areas of intellectual activity." He believed that what made blacks inferior was their skin color.¹ Yet, his ideas on equality gave philosophical ammunition to those who battled to end slavery. How *should* he be taught?

The need to give a fuller picture of history, one that includes various and competing perspectives and the good with the bad, is obvious. But questions of curriculum content are difficult enough when people approach

them with differing perspectives and expectations. Many people with good intentions have tried to broaden what our schools teach, especially about African-Americans, and have looked to people with Ph.D.s and reputations in the black community for ways to improve the curriculum. Unfortunately, many of these "experts" are poor scholars, racists, sexists, homophobes, anti-Semites, and are part of a political movement aimed at creating a new ideology of black supremacy, supported by political groups such as the Nation of Islam. This movement is every bit as perverse and dangerous as any other based on an ideology of biological determinism. Some school districts, innocently seeking to upgrade their curricula, are feeding students the stuff of which Nazism is made, and we are paying for this new self-defeating hate with tax dollars.

No one today is teaching elementary school children that Jefferson was correct in his "suspicion" that people with black skin are less intelligent than whites. Go to Baltimore and you will find some school children being taught that the more melanin you have in your skin, the smarter you are.

This paper makes no pretense of being a thorough examination of curricula in all school districts in the country, nor does it suggest that what it finds troubling is commonplace. Rather it is a call to be on guard. The people who are trying to promote racism through Afrocentrism have an intellectual base on campus and a political base outside. They are adept at packaging their hateful agenda as a reasonable-sounding remedy to real injustices. When even one school district, through error or design, promotes hate as truth and bigotry as scholarship, all Americans should be concerned. After all, we are talking about our children.

INTRODUCTION

Although the push for African-centered, or "Afrocentric," education has been around for decades, most people were not aware of it until July 20, 1991, when Dr. Leonard Jeffries, a tenured professor and chair of the African-American Studies Department at City College of New York, gave a speech at the Empire State Black Arts and Cultural Festival in Albany, New York. Using the language of a classical anti-Semite, Jeffries blamed Jews for most maladies that have historically befallen blacks, including slavery and racist depictions of blacks in American culture. He claimed, for instance, that there is an antiblack "conspiracy, planned and plotted and programmed out of Hollywood [by] people called Greenberg and Weisberg and Trigliani." He referred to a CCNY colleague, Dr. Bernard Sohmer, as a "head Jew," and Diane Ravitch as a "sophisticated Texas Jew." And he claimed that Jews, "even when they converted to Christianity . . . had a network around the world . . . with their Jewish community brothers."

Jeffries was not a lone crackpot, nor was his hatred confined to Jews. Like many in the leadership of the Afrocentrist movement, he believes that blacks ("sun people") are biologically superior to whites ("ice people"), that all important human progress is to be credited to Africa alone, and that gays and Jews and Catholics, as well as some Italians and the blacks who do not agree with him, are to be reviled.

Nearly a year before his 1991 speech, Jeffries had organized the "Second National Conference on the Infusion of African and African-American Content in the High School Curriculum" in Atlanta. Over 1,000 educators, mostly black, came from around the country. According to *The New Republic* of November 26, 1990, the conference reflected "the conviction that all Western knowledge is a corruption of Egyptian, i.e., black African thought [and therefore] schoolchildren, black and white, should be taught everything from a black African perspective." One leader of the Afrocentrist movement, Wade Nobles from Oakland, California, said, "When we adopt other people's theories, we are like Frankenstein doing other people's wills. It's like someone drinking some good stuff, vomiting it, and then we have to catch the vomit and drink it ourselves. . . . The Greeks gave back the vomit of the African way. . . . Don't become vomit-drinkers." Anti-Semitism was present at that conference too. Copies of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* were on sale.

Although Leonard Jeffries has not published, many of his colleagues who promote Afrocentric education are prolific writers. A magazine widely circulated among Afrocentrists, the *Alkebulanian*, advances their agenda. The *Alkebulanian* describes itself as dedicated to “the power of African pride and dignity revealing a divinity of spirituality as lived during the great era of Egyptian Kings and Queens. [We] will speak the truth and expose the falsehoods that have weakened a precious people through the course of history.” The *Alkebulanian* also claims that Jews and Arabs are “dogs,” that the Talmud was written by “racist dogs calling themselves Jewish Talmudist Scholars,” and regularly reports on such college lecturers as Ashra Kwesi, who calls the Pope “faggot Pope” and America “faggot America.” It does not appreciate people like Henry Louis Gates, chair of the African Studies program at Harvard. The *Alkebulanian* displays a picture of Gates with the caption: “This is the jackass with his Ph.D.: Henry Louis (Skip) Gates, Jr. He wants to be an authority on Black Studies, yet he couldn’t find a Black woman to make his wife. He married a Cracker woman. He is the asshole that Dr. Ben² had the dishonor of working with at Cornell University.”³

Revered in the *Alkebulanian*, as well as in the Afrocentrist movement itself, is Dr. John Henrik Clarke, professor emeritus at Hunter College in New York. Clarke’s speech at Wayne Community College was reported in the magazine:

African people have been manipulated into agreeing with everything white, from a white Jesus to white bread. A mere handful of people utilized the word “Holocaust” and made the entire world weep for them making Black people forget that it was this same handful who participated in the African holocaust. [African slavery]

Dr. Clarke pointed out that the fact that the “evil” genius of Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx and Albert Einstein has colonized the minds of the world and he asked why this minute group of people were so effective.⁴

Clarke has also written:

The Africans, the Asians and people in warmer climates celebrated the force of nature [while] the Europeans tried to fight the force of nature. . . . So the Europeans developed an attitude toward nature that is deviant. . . . The Europeans did not celebrate life

because nature was so stingy, not giving him enough to eat, not giving him enough women to procreate with and not giving him enough land to raise food.⁵

The ships brought no gays. They brought all men with their manhood, and women with their womanhood, and men who knew what to do with their manhood, with no confusion. . . . The European living in that varying climate and the Arab living in the same made different uses of the female and developed a different attitude toward the female.⁶

Once you get to know Europeans, many of them have a certain levelness in their temperament, and these are people with an infusion of Black blood in them.⁷

All organized Western religions are male chauvinist murder cults.⁸

I am a curriculum specialist and advisor to the school systems, not those in New York City; it is impossible because this is a capitalist school system controlled by an ethnic group.⁹

* * * *

Carolyn Leonard is a distinguished educator in Portland, Oregon, who has worked for over twenty years trying to promote multicultural education. She is the administrator responsible for what is known as the Portland Baseline Essays, an attempt to infuse material about diverse groups into the public school curriculum. The first essays written were the Afrocentric ones. She approached people respected within the Afrocentrist movement for material. She found an emeritus professor, widely published, to write the social studies curriculum. His name was John Henrik Clarke. And that was only the beginning of her problems.

Imagine that you are an elementary student in the Portland public schools and receive your foundational understanding of science from the baseline essay on science and technology.¹⁰ According to one critic, Erich Martel (a high school teacher from Washington, D.C.), you would learn about

the “extraterrestrial origins of the Nile’ and war-related microcomets as the source of the oceans, . . . that ‘ancient Egyptians developed full size gliders four thousand years ago and used their early planes for travel and recreation.’ . . . (because the author misinterprets a small bird effigy in the Cairo Museum as a model of a glider); . . . [the] mystical powers [of] the pyramids and . . . [because the author ‘misinterprets artifacts’] that the ancient Egyptians experimented with antenna and electricity.”¹¹

What began as an attempt to include knowledge of Africa and African-Americans into the curriculum has now become a laughingstock in many quarters, despite the fact that even critics such as Martel acknowledge that much of the information in the other baseline essays is credible. The problem, however, is not one of factual or analytical errors easily remedied. The obstacle is the significant numbers of pseudo-scholars and hateful people with a political agenda who defend extreme and racist Afrocentrism. Meanwhile, more school districts are embracing this type of curriculum, including public schools in Atlanta, Detroit, Philadelphia, parts of Maryland, and Washington, D.C. Afrocentrism is no longer a problem of the campus alone. Its teachings and materials are finding the targets it has always aspired to reach: public school children.

AFROCENTRISM

“Afrocentrism” is difficult to define because different people use the word for different purposes. If it is to “reposition Africa in people’s minds,” as Dr. Molefi Kete Asante of Temple University says, and that means to bring knowledge about Africa into the respected center of academic pursuit, that is something with which no thinking person could disagree.

But to people like Leonard Jeffries, Wade Nobles, John Henrik Clarke, Asa Hilliard¹² and others, Afrocentrism means filtering all knowledge and history to prove the superiority of all things African and African-American to anything non-African.

To people like Selwyn Cudjoe, chair of the African Studies program at Wellesley College, Afrocentrism is merely a method of inquiry, with no preordained result. Abstractly, he may be right, and he argues powerfully that

many Eurocentric analyses have neglected any comprehensive treatment of the history of Africa, or the complex experience of African-American people. Consider, again, how Thomas Jefferson was viewed. But if a focus through a European prism is inherently skewed, isn't the same true of one preprogrammed always to look first to Africa and African-Americans? Consider the following exchange from the TV documentary *Reverse Angle: The Education Wars*:

"What are Dr. King's beliefs, values and hopes?" a high school teacher asks her class.

"He believed that everyone should be equal," a student answers.

Moderator: "You had this lesson today about Martin Luther King, and what struck me is that everybody said that [he] said that all men were created equal . . . You've taken some history. Does anyone remember back in American history ever having heard the idea that all men were created equal before?"

Stone silence.¹³

That chilling silence reflects the danger of an Afrocentric prism: it is at least as distorted as a Eurocentric point of view. How will students see American society if they believe that America had no conception of equality before the 1960s and Dr. King? And how warped will their knowledge of what Dr. King achieved be if they, therefore, do not know that he relied on the political traditions of people such as Locke and DeToqueville and Emerson and Thoreau and, yes, Jefferson, to challenge America to practice what it had long preached?

On the other hand, without the *a priori* assumption that we must look to the history of Africa and African-Americans, the Eurocentric model does not take the time to ask much about black contributions to, say, the revolutionary war, the Civil War, World War I and II, the American economy, culture, etc., let alone the full picture of slavery,¹⁴ the Middle Passage, etc. Proponents of Afrocentrism argue, with an historical record to cite, that if they do not ask the questions about blacks first, the questions will likely go unasked.

Faced with this dilemma, what should public schools do?

The easier question, which will be answered first, is what they should not do — rely on racists, and on those to whom Dr. Henry Louis Gates of Harvard University refers as “pseudo-scholars and demagogues.”

THE DANGERS OF EXTREME AFROCENTRISM: PSEUDO-HISTORY

If the curriculum on Africa is ninety-percent about Egypt, and Egypt is defined as a “black” society, you know you have problems. The departure point for most extreme Afrocentrists, who call themselves the Nile Valley school, is the identification of African history with Egypt.

The reconfiguration of the history of a huge continent into one small corner thereof probably began with Marcus Garvey (1887-1940). Dr. Tony Martin has noted that “History, like everything else for Garvey, was a subject to be used for the furtherance of racial emancipation. He used history first to establish a grievance — to show that the black man had been wronged.”¹⁵

Garvey wrote:

The white world has always tried to rob and discredit us of our history. . . . Every student of history, of impartial mind, knows that the Negro once ruled the world, when white men were savages and barbarians living in caves; that thousands of Negro professors at that time taught in the universities in Alexandria, then the seat of learning; that ancient Egypt gave the world civilization and that Greece and Rome have robbed Egypt of her arts and letters, and taken all the credit to themselves.¹⁶

“Garvey’s claims,” writes Mary Lefkowitz, Andrew W. Mellon Professor in the Humanities at Wellesley College, “are not supported by the citation of any archaeological or linguistic data.”¹⁷

In 1954 George G. M. James wrote *Stolen Legacy*, which purported to take Garvey’s claims one step further. This book is relied upon as a central text by many Afrocentrists. The introduction to the *Stolen Legacy* illustrates the fallacy of its historical “method”:

The term Greek philosophy, to begin with is a misnomer, for there is no such philosophy in existence. . . . After nearly five thousand years of prohibition against the Greeks, they were permitted to enter Egypt for the purpose of their education. First through the Persian invasion and secondly through the invasion of Alexander the Great. From the sixth century B.C. therefore to the death of Aristotle (322 B.C.) the Greeks made the best of their chance to learn all they could about Egyptian culture; most students received instructions directly from the Egyptian Priests, but after the invasion by Alexander the Great, the Royal temples and libraries were plundered and pillaged, and Aristotle's school converted the library at Alexandria into a research center. There is no wonder, then, that the production of the unusually large number of books ascribed to Aristotle has proved a physical impossibility, for any single man within a life time.¹⁸

James not only attempts to discredit Aristotle because of his vast literary output, but also argues, *redundandum ad absurdum*, that since the "history of Aristotle's life . . . carefully avoids any statement relating to his visit to Egypt. . . [t]his silence of history at once throws doubt upon the life and achievements of Aristotle."¹⁹ It never occurs to James that Aristotle might not have mentioned a plundering sojourn to Egypt because such a trip did not happen. Rather, in James's conspiratorial framework, Aristotle's failure to mention such a trip is proof that it occurred because (1) James believes Aristotle went there, and (2) Aristotle's silence is indicative of a guilty conscience over his massive plagiarism, and his fear that he would be found out!

Taking James one step farther, Dr. Yosef Ben-Yochannan, in *Africa, Mother of Western Civilization*, writes that Aristotle's "fame begins with his entrance into Egypt (Kimit or Sais) with Alexander 'the Great' [sic] (the son of Phillip of Macedonia) during the Greek's invasion and conquest of the Africans in 332 B.C.E. The next time he is spoken of is when he led Greek soldiers in sacking the Lodges and Libraries of Egypt of everything movable. He is seen looting and destroying the most valuable works of the Africans' Mysteries Systems,²⁰ these works predated his birth by thousands of years. The Africans' works which he did not claim or give to friends he destroyed in various ways. . . . He stole and plagiarized these works, many of them he placed his name as author [sic]; still others were accredited to him by so-called 'authorities' of much later periods in history."²¹

James and Ben-Yochannan repeatedly claim that what Aristotle is said to have authored was actually stolen from the Egyptians when the library at Alexandria was sacked at the behest of Alexander the Great in 332 B.C.E. But as Mary Lefkowitz points out:

There is no reason to believe that Aristotle had much contact with Alexander after he ceased to be his tutor, before 338 B.C.E. It is simply untrue, to the best of my knowledge, to claim that Greek philosophy was stolen from Egyptian sources. There is no evidence whatever for James's claim that Alexander took books from the library at Alexandria — *which was founded after his death* [emphasis added] — to give to Aristotle, or for Ben-Yochannan's assertion that Aristotle came to Egypt with him and sacked the temples of ideas and books.²²

For James, and especially Ben-Yochannan, scholarship and facts do not seem to matter. Ben-Yochannan, revered by many as one of the "fathers" of Afrocentrism, does not, consequently, write or speak in the language of scholarship. He frequently uses ethnic slurs and advocates racial violence.²³

The extreme Afrocentrists not only try to rewrite Greek and Egyptian history, they also attempt to remake Egypt into a nation of black-skinned people, when all evidence suggests that, in the words of Dr. Barry Mehler, "the ancient Egyptians, like their modern descendants, were of varying complexions and color from the light mediterranean type like Queen Nefertiti to the light brown of middle Egypt to the darker brown of upper Egypt to the darkish shade around Aswan and the First Cataract region where even today the population shifts to Nubian."²⁴

How does Egypt, then, a society of many skin hues, become a black land? Partly because, according to Dr. Mehler, "the phrase 'land of the blacks' is a mistranslation by some Afrocentrist writers of the ancient Egyptian word 'KMT' (Kemet). It means 'the black land' by contrast to the word 'Deshret,' the red land, the desert. Kemet refers to the black soil deposited by the yearly inundation of the Nile. It was never a reference to the skin color of the ancient Egyptians."²⁵

The self-fulfilling prophecy of such intentionally shoddy and ideologically driven "scholarship" feeds on itself. If one starts from the undeniable departure point that, due to racism, much of African history has

been distorted, and add to that truth a faith in the assertion that all Egyptians were black-skinned, then what is the logical outcome? That all the Egyptians who we think of as white were, of course, black.

Cleopatra was probably not at all like the Elizabeth Taylor depiction in the movies, but Afrocentrists make the claim, based on their “logical” progression, that she was black. What “proof” is offered? The Portland baseline essays cite Shakespeare, who referred to her as “tawny.”^{26 27}

Leonard Jeffries, in some of his speeches, holds up depictions of people in ancient Egypt and shows them, correctly, to have been rendered in a black-colored medium. Mary Lefkowitz asks, “If that’s ‘proof’ that the ancient Egyptians were all black, what about the Egyptian depictions of people in a green medium?”²⁸

The saddest irony of the historical distortion that ties African history into Egypt alone, and remakes Egypt into a black society, is not only that the major contributions of other parts of the continent are largely ignored; but also that the emphasis on Egypt is itself a reflection of Eurocentric assumptions. Eurocentrists tend to think of buildings and art and literature as the only defining aspects of ancient civilizations. Strangely, so do the extreme Afrocentrists.

THE DANGERS OF EXTREME AFROCENTRISM: PSEUDO-BIOLOGY — MELANIN AND ICE

Egypt is, obviously, part of Africa. So if one is interested in African history, and wants to teach it in public schools, why should it matter what skin color the Egyptians were? Why distort history to paint Egypt as entirely black-skinned? Simple. The basic racist assumptions of the extreme Afrocentrists demand it.

Many people laughed when they heard about Professor Jeffries and his “ice people/sun people” statements. But this is no joke — for many in the Afrocentric movement, questions of biological determinism are fundamental.

Leonard Jeffries, John Henrik Clarke, James Small and others have written in support of a book called *The Iceman Inheritance* by Michael

Bradley.²⁹ *The Iceman Inheritance's* premise is easy to understand. Its first sentence admits, "This book is racist." Its seventh announces, "The problem with the world is white men." Interspersed with Bradley's discussions of the importance of brain size, penis size, breast size, hip size, love songs, fashion, Chinese junks, the medicinal qualities of gemstones, the "strange and unaccountable properties" of pyramids, the effect of "acid rock" on plants, the shape of milk containers, the abominable snowman, and the role of aliens in the human past and future (" . . . the 'Venusians' may not prove to be 'benevolent'") are claims that all Western novels are about love, and therefore evil because they reflect a "pair-bonding adaptation demanded by a high level of aggression"; and that Egypt's downfall was the result of the inmixing of whites into "Negroid . . . and Capoid racial traits." All this somehow leads to Bradley's conclusion that white people suffer "a low frustration tolerance because glacial adaptation robbed [them] of sufficiently effective sexual displacement activities [sic]," since they must have had to dress warmly during the ice age. In other words, Bradley believes that the cold changed the white man physiologically, making him more aggressive than other races due to something he calls "sexual dimorphism." "[S]ince the end of World War II," Bradley concludes, "Caucasoids have become biologically inferior to other kinds of men."³⁰

That whites are biologically inferior³¹ is music to many racist Afrocentrist's ears, and is concordant with their other eugenics-based premise, that blacks are biologically superior because they "have more melanin."

Dr. Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano has debunked the false biology on which the melanin theorists rely. He writes:

[A] movement growing in the African-American community proposes that Black people are biologically superior to whites because the pigment melanin has extraordinary qualities. It claims that melanin provides a "scientific" explanation for the origin of civilization in Egypt and its subsequent diffusion to the rest of the world. These ideas are now being introduced into the grade school curriculum. . . . A review of the genetics and biochemistry of human pigmentation shows that all humans have similar amounts of neuromelanin (brain melanin), and that its concentration is absolutely independent of skin color; that adult humans do not synthesize B-MSH; and that human melatonin [has] no clearly demonstrable physiological function and no

relationship to skin color. "Melanin scholars" also distort human evolution by claims that European whites are descendants of Negroid albinos.³²

One of the leading Afrocentrists on this subject is Dr. Frances Welsing, who regularly appears on college campuses speaking about biology. "White racism and aggression," she says, according to the *Amsterdam News*, "are the result of the lack of melanin. This genetic deficiency, the lack of color, compels white people to be hostile to people of color." Her arguments are not philosophically abstract, but designed to tie genetics into the problems in the African-American community. She says, for example:

The reason that the Black male . . . is and always has been central to the issue of white supremacy is clarified by the definition of racism as white genetic survival. In the collective white psyche, Black males represent the greatest threat to white genetic survival because only males (of any color) can impose sexual intercourse, and Black males have the greatest genetic potential (of all non-white males) to cause white genetic annihilation. Thus, Black males must be attacked and destroyed in a power system designed to assure white genetic survival.³³

The respect that her views on race receives by some is instructive. Consider this portion of her talk at Michigan State University:

What are the two series of ball games in the white supremacy system in college? . . . Now this is an exam question. You will not graduate without this. But you will know forever when I tell you. I said two series. That means two categories of ball games. You are actually looking at all the time, but people did not give you the reality data so your eyes don't even understand what you're looking at.

So we're talking about ball games in the white supremacy system and culture. It's two series. Big brown balls and small white.

Big black: football, basketball, bowling. Soccer. Small white: ping pong.

(Laughter)

Golf, tennis, baseball. Am I right?

This is a culture that says what? Keep your eye on the ball. What balls are they talking about? [T]hey are testicles . . . In this culture of people who are colored and people who white, and the people who are colored have the most powerful testicles. So symbolically black people didn't create these games. The same brain computer that created the concern about white genetic annihilation decided that the big brown balls would be thus, and the small balls would be white. And the men who are considered to be the most virile play with games with a big brown ball.

(Laughter)

One wonders what Dr. Welsing thinks about squash, racketball and volleyball?

Dr. de Montellano notes:

The basic premise in this formulation is that skin color is transmitted genetically as a single locus Mendelian gene pair in which the presence of melanin is dominant and its absence (which melanin scholars equate with white) occurs only in homozygous recessive cases. This is not correct. . . . Skin color in humans is due to a combination of at least four genes, which is the reason for the wide continuum of human skin color. . . . If the melanin scholars were correct there would be only two skin colors, deep black and albino.³⁴

Dr. de Montellano also finds that the melanin scholars tend to believe in a "conspiracy to destroy black men [which] has several corollaries. It is claimed that AIDS was deliberately developed by white males to infect and kill black people."³⁵

That irrational theories of racial superiority and biological conspiracy are bandied about on various campuses, and subscribed to by many of the leaders of the Afrocentric movement, is enough to make one cautious of any curriculum movement they have their hands in. But the practice, in some elementary classrooms, is nothing other than obscene.

The documentary *Education Wars* took a look at various inner city

schools, one of which was Robert Coleman Elementary in Baltimore, in which male and female students were separated in grades K through 3.³⁶ In the boys' classes there are volunteer aides who serve as role models for the students. John Richardson, a volunteer aide, explains the view of history he transmits to his young students:

There was no recorded culture before African culture. . . . Africans were in this country thousands of years before Columbus. Basically, all people in the planet are Africans. Since the earth has gone through certain ice ages, some of us were stuck in those regions. We lost our color in order to survive. When the ice melts, and people come back down into Africa that has not basically changed, you have people that were referred to as barbarians because that was the only way they were able to survive. . . .

There is behavior that is inherent of your ancestors, your ancestral background. Now when I say who we are, I'm not putting us on a superiority tip [sic], I'm setting the record straight. There was no such thing as Greek philosophy. The Greeks learned in Africa. The children that are being raised now have to be told, the young lions, to tell the truth.

Thomas Delaine is the Assistant Superintendent of Baltimore City Public Schools. He sees much value in this Afrocentric elementary curriculum. "If you look at the African world view," he explains, "you will see an aura of interdependency, cooperative thinking, working with each other, one with nature, dealing with the environment, and a holistic point of view, with people contributing for themselves and the community, versus what the European thing has done, with the capitalist aspect and one for oneself and dealing with survival of the fittest and this type of situation."³⁷

Dr. Delaine was asked if it bothered him that "the last time questions of melanin were taught in schools as factors involved with intelligence and superiority was in Nazi Germany?"

He answered: "No, that does not disturb me. I am, and I believe everyone is, open to deep research to see what is the truth. In fact, all of our curriculum is dealing with doing away with myths and seeking the truth. . . . There are a lot of studies dealing with melanin as being a provider for

different intellectual traits, etc., but that is not part of the elementary curriculum.”

But in the classroom, volunteer aide John Richardson asks, “What is melanin?” and a young student answers, “Melanin is a chemical in your body that makes you black.” Richardson explains that “there is a gland in the middle of everybody’s brain surrounded by a melanated layer of cells called pigmented layer of cells that has the actual memory of our ancestral past.”

Richardson is a creative teacher. He gathers his young charges in a circle and leads them in a chant: “African people. African-American people. You were once great. You shall be great again.”

But how can this do anything other than make the students feel separate from the larger American society? And since kids are kids, and not stupid, won’t they look at each other and conclude that the more light-skinned African-Americans have less melanin, and therefore are inferior, to their darker-skinned classmates? And how is this different from a publicly funded school in which a white supremacist might lead children in a chant of “European people. European American people. You were once great. You shall be great again”?

Apparently the leadership of Baltimore’s public schools is not concerned by this question. Assistant Superintendent Delaine says, “I believe that we are on the cutting edge of something that’s great, and I hope people will mirror what we have done because we are actually dealing with erasing the myths and telling the truths about peoples.”

Some in the Afrocentric movement may believe that distorting history and science to instill a positive self-image is a good thing. But what happens when a youngster in Portland discovers that his or her ancestors were not flying glider planes 4,000 years ago? Does that youngster lose his or her self-esteem, or does he or she rationalize that the white world is conspiring to deprive African-Americans of their history? Either way, that child’s world is diminished.

How can people of good will be silent when kids are not only taught nonsense, but nonsense with a destructive political agenda: to distance themselves from their neighbors, and to believe that biological differences are

a driving force of human events?

CHALLENGES

The push to include such Afrocentric education in public schools is partly fueled by the perception that it brings to the surface societally suppressed "truths." As Dr. Ben-Yochannan acknowledged, "[T]o get the program I'm teaching, the students took up guns and burned down many of the buildings on campus."³⁸ People like Leonard Jeffries — who was given tenure and a department to run when he was hired over twenty years ago — have built a self-perpetuating paradigm. They revel in any criticism, and use it as "proof" that they are speaking "the truth" that racist America does not want black people to know.

These pseudo-scholars are tapping into anger over the underlying truth that America is a society with a history of racism and was constructed on the belief that black people were no better than chattel. America also sought to deny African Americans their history and culture. A Jeffries or Ben-Yochannan or Clarke can play upon that reality, and suggest that any criticism, especially any white one, is intended disingenuously, and for the purpose of promoting white supremacy.

Jeffries *et al.* have an ally in political forces that tap into the same set of dogmas. It is no coincidence that Louis Farrakhan and the Nation of Islam are ardent promoters of Afrocentrism in the public schools. This is not only because one of the tenets of Farrakhan's group dovetails nicely with the eugenics of black supremacy (the belief in Yacob, a scientist who 6,600 years ago was supposedly working in his lab, and invented a mutated species, white people). Farrakhan's vision for America has the races divided from each other. Separatism is a logical conclusion of this type of Afrocentrism.

In fact, the ideal of separation and racism goes so far that, for many, Afrocentrism is a unique discipline. In no other academic field is there a preordained judgment that only scholars of certain biological attributes are appropriate. Not so with many Afrocentrists. Rather than attempt to reduce the biases in the entire field of history as it relates to Africa, Dr. Tony Martin of Wellesley College advocates a new academic Jim Crow. He defines Afrocentrism this way: "It asserts that African people must interpret their

own reality and see the world from their own perspective.”³⁹

The extreme Afrocentrists and the Nation of Islam are moving closer to each other. For example, the November 16, 1994 issue of the *Final Call*, Farrakhan’s paper, includes the following, by James Muhammad:

White people once lived in the caves of Europe; they once thought the earth was flat, remember? At the same time, Blacks in Africa were circumnavigating the planet and charting the stars. . . . While it is not widely taught in schools, Western (white) civilization is based on African scholarship. The architects of European philosophy studied under great African scholars and returned to Europe to build their civilization. . . . Then Europe invaded Africa, driving our forefathers into the interior, and raped and robbed our treasures and scholarship without giving credit to its creators.

Conversely, Dr. Tony Martin used a Nation of Islam book that attempted to repaint slavery as a Jewish enterprise⁴⁰ in his classroom. And when then-Nation of Islam spokesman Khallid Abdul Muhammad gave his now-famous hate speech at Kean College on November 29, 1993,⁴¹ he credited Tony Martin for having “done much of this research for us.” In newspapers such as the *Amsterdam News*, and on many talk radio programs (WLIB in New York, for example), there is increasing clamor to bring this racist Afrocentric point of view into public schools.

Aside from the problems of the curriculum itself, there is the intrinsic bigotry of its proponents. Abstractly, one can isolate the racism, anti-Semitism, homophobia, sexism, and anti-Catholicism from some of this material, but in practice one cannot and, perhaps more importantly, should not try.⁴²

The extreme Afrocentrists will challenge any criticism of their handiwork, especially if it comes from the Jewish community,⁴³ using the criticism to carve out a siege mentality around the question of Afrocentric education. But that ought not to dissuade people from denouncing this type of education. After all, if any other group of hateful “scholars” tried to get racist and pseudo-history incorporated into the public school curriculum, people of good will would object. Bigotry and hate cannot be ignored — regardless of their source.

WHAT SHOULD WE DO?

Schools must meet the needs of inner-city African-American children, who make up a disproportionate share of the student body, through academically sound material that reflects the fact that all people, including African-Americans, have contributed to this society, that there are different sub-cultures and religions, and that this is something that makes our society not only unique, but better. Education should allow students to see history from many vantage points, because only in that way can they really understand how events took place. All the while there needs to be a constant tension bringing everyone back to a common core, a reaffirmation that, for all our differences, each and every American equally belongs in our society and can claim that heritage and history in equal measure.

That view of society is antithetical to extreme Afrocentrism, which preaches the superiority of one perspective, one race, one region. Too often Afrocentrists are called multiculturalists. They are not. Leonard Jeffries, a black supremacist, labels multiculturalism "ethnic genocide."

All American public school children must learn more about African-American and other groups in our society. But if the curriculum is tainted, it will set back rather than enhance that effort.⁴⁴

While curricula should be changed and updated, school districts should not abandon oversight over the content — that is what happened in colleges 20 years ago when the just demand for black studies departments allowed shortcuts that doomed many of the programs.⁴⁵

CONCLUSION

The field of education has often been plagued by agendas that put politics before the welfare of children. Earlier in this century there was pressure from the anti-Catholic Ku Klux Klan to force Catholic children into the public schools so that they could not receive any Catholic education. But there were a number of groups, including the American Jewish Committee, that went to court to protect the rights of these children, and to oppose the bigots.

Today, as well, there are right-wing religious groups that covet the

public schools as a vehicle for transmission of their sectarian view of America — that all children, including Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Bahai, American Indian and other students, should be taught from a “Christian” perspective. The American Jewish Committee, along with other groups, opposes this effort.

Afrocentrism is no different. The “Afrocentric” curriculum targeted to our public schools has been described by Michael Meyers, director of the New York Civil Rights Coalition: “[It is] another form of segregation in schooling. Its exponents run the gamut from those who support special curricula, programs and even separate schools for black children to those who insist on defining culture in terms of race and who want education for black children to be esteem builders. Hence American education is losing course due to the winds of ethnic particularism and racial separation that has been pulling us apart as Americans.”⁴⁶

The role of public schools is to teach our youngsters to think critically, all the while emphasizing that Americans are united in a common culture and common purpose. Public schools must also help students understand that Americans differ, and that this is a *good* thing that makes us stronger as a society. New information on Africa and African-Americans has to be part of this effort, but this information *must* not distort history and science for racist or political purposes. Too many who would do so are part of the Afrocentrist movement.

ENDNOTES

¹ John Chester Miller, *The Wolf by the Ears* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1991), pp. 49, 65.

² See discussion of Dr. Yosef Ben-Yochannan, *infra*, p. 10.

³ Brother Piankhi, "The Masses Are Asses," *Alkebulanian*, 3rd Quarter 1992, p. 11.

⁴ *Alkebulanian*, 1:6 (July 1989)

⁵ *New Dimensions in African History*, pp. 109-111.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124. Clarke has also written:

What you call the Holocaust was a family dispute between European and European. European racism had split itself outside of Europe. Now the racism that had wrecked the rest of the world turned on itself and wrecked its own people. That is what the essence of the so-called Holocaust is about. (*Ibid.*, p.101.)

Some people in Germany allegedly killed six million in a gas chamber. These people are willing to fight everybody except the Germans. They fight the Arabs, fight the Africans, anybody that's "we." (Quoted in Barbara Eleanor Adam, *John Henrik Clarke: The Early Years* [Hampton: United Brothers and Sisters Communication, 1992] p. 136.)

¹⁰ The science and technology essay was written by Hunter Havlin Adams III. "He is described," says Erich Martel, "on the essay cover as a 'research scientist' at Argonne National Laboratories. The director of public information at Argonne Laboratories . . . [states] 'Mr. Adams does no research at Argonne on any topic. He is an industrial hygiene technician who collects air and other environmental samples from laboratories. According to our records, his highest academic degree is a high school diploma.' In addition to that, Adams is widely known in Afrocentric circles as a melanin theorist." (Transcript of AJC Task Force on Academic Bigotry and Freedom, September 13, 1994, pp. 20-21.)

¹¹ Transcript of AJC Task Force, September 13, 1994, pp. 27-18.

¹² Asa Hilliard has been a major figure in the move to get "Afrocentric" curricula into the public schools. Erich Martel tells of Hilliard's speech to the assembled principals of the District of Columbia. Hilliard said:

The first Chaing Dynasty of China was African. People called oily black people. The first Shogun was an African. There used to be a saying in Japan, in order for a Samurai to be brave, he need only have a little black blood in him. I checked this out with a Japanese martial arts instructor and he said, "Hey, truth is truth." (Transcript of AJC Task Force, p. 31.)

¹³ *Reverse Angle: The Education Wars*, Lionel Chetwynd Productions, 1993.

¹⁴ Just as Marxists are trained to see the world through class first, Afrocentrists see Africa and Africans first. An Afrocentric view of America before the Civil War might credit the building of society to slaves, whose labor was expropriated. But while slaves were an important part, frequently overlooked, of the American economy, many forces define history.

¹⁵ Anthony Martin, *Race First*, cited in Mary Lefkowitz, "Not Out of Africa," *The New Republic*, February 10, 1992, p. 31.

¹⁶ Marcus Garvey, "Who and What is a Negro," cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ George G.M. James, *Stolen Legacy*, (Hampton: United Brothers and United Sisters Communications Systems, Inc., 1992), p. 1.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

²⁰ As Dr. Lefkowitz explains:

James's basic premise is that Greek philosophy is based directly on an "Egyptian Mystery System," which Greek philosophers allegedly copied after they studied in Egypt. In reality, however, the very notion of an Egyptian Mystery System is a relatively modern fiction based on several non-Egyptian ancient sources. How these fundamentally Greek practices came to be understood as originally Egyptian is a fascinating story.

The earliest description of "mysteries" (i.e., initiation rituals) and academies for Egyptian priests, with large libraries and art galleries, first occurs not in any ancient text, but in a 1732 novel: *Sethos*, by Abbe Jean Terrasson. The novel was widely read and heavily influenced later portrayals of Egyptian religion, as in Mozart's *The Magic Flute*. In particular, the initiation of Terrasson's hero into

Egyptian priesthood served as the inspiration for many Masonic rituals. The Masons regarded their rituals, established in the 18th century, as both ancient and Egyptian when in fact they were neither. All authentic information about early Egyptian religion was inaccessible to them, mainly because the documents describing them could not yet be read. . .

The "Egyptian" rituals described by Terrasson and his Freemason followers were actually taken from Greek and Latin literature . . . With the translation of the Rosetta Stone in 1836, new information about Egypt suddenly became available. The Masons didn't use the occasion to revise their rituals and sense of history, but neither did they lay claim to serious scholarship. James, on the other hand, purports to have written an academic book; he ought to have taken recent discoveries into consideration. . . .

In *Stolen Legacy*, James likewise insists that no records of the Egyptian Mystery System have come down to us in any language because it was secret. Because it would not suit his purpose, James neglects to mention the other and more obvious explanation for the absence of records, which is, of course, that no such system ever existed. Mary Lefkowitz, "The Origins of the 'Stolen Legacy,'" in John Miller, ed., *Alternatives to Afrocentrism* [Washington: The Manhattan Institute, 1994, ps. 27-29.)

²¹ Yosef A.A. Ben-Yochannan, *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1988), p. 399.

²² Lefkowitz, "Not Out of Africa," p. 32.

²³ Some samples of Ben-Yochannan's scholarship:

[U]nder no conditions will I marry a white woman. . . . I will look like an ass walking in here with a white wife, talking about Black is beautiful. . . . Can I lay in bed tonight with a white woman, then plan her father's murder and tell her: "I'm going to kill your father tomorrow?" (*Ibid.*, pp. 37-38.)

You're talking about "holocausts"? Nobody bothers me with nonsense about "holocausts," because let me tell you about my "holocausts." (Ben-Yochannan, "The Real Story of the Scramble for Africa," in Clarke, ed., *New Dimensions in African History: From the Nile Valley to the New World, Science, Invention and Technology* [Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1991], p. 21)

So I'm trying to see what Minister Farrakhan said. Minister Farrakhan allegedly said that, "Judaism is a gutter religion." His is too. He should know, it takes one to know one. (Ben-Yochannan, "Questions and Answers," in *New Dimensions*, p. 37.)

Ben-Yochannan also terms Europeans “crackers,” and claims that white Jews are “impostors.” (*Alkebulanian* 3:6 (June 1991): p. 8; Barry Mehler, “African American Racism in the Academic Community,” *The Review Of Education*, 15:344.) He also advocates racial separation and racial violence:

I go back to when one of the founders of the early ANC came to the United States, and I personally supported him out of my pocket. I too switched [to support of the violence-prone Pan African Congress, which has the motto ‘One settler, one bullet.’]. You see when I meet a man of the ANC and he calls me “comrade,” I said, “I prefer brother.” And he says he can’t answer “brother,” because everybody in the ANC isn’t necessarily brother in skin tone; so I say, “you’ve lost me.” . . . I remember [liberation movements in Mozambique] which said, “This is my country, I am not fighting for integration. Somebody came and took my country. I am not fighting to share it with the guy that took it.” England doesn’t share its country with you. France doesn’t share its country with you; so why should I share my country? . . . They owe me a pound of flesh and I am entitled to my pound. . . . My ancestors in the next world will not be contented if I came back and say, “I was there when it happened!” And when they say to me: “Did you take revenge?” And I said, “No, I turned the other cheek!” What a fool I would be! (Ben-Yochannan, *New Dimensions*, p. 126.)

Dr. Barry Mehler, Associate Professor of Humanities at Ferris State University, went to hear Dr. Ben-Yochannan (who is nicknamed “Dr. Ben”) speak at Grand Valley. “He was introduced by a Baptist minister,” Mehler recalls, “who sounded just like you’d expect a Baptist Minister to sound — Jesus loves everyone and brings everyone together and it’s harmony and light. The program starts with twenty minutes of Christian prayer. Then Dr. Ben speaks, and the first thing he does is attack Jesus. The second thing he does is attack the Greeks. And then he tells these college kids that they shouldn’t make a big deal out of his Ph.D. He said the Ph.D. is nothing. It’s like being taught to bark like a seal. And then he ridicules Nelson Mandela and disparages the African National Congress’s call for ‘one person one vote.’ ‘I’m not for one person one vote,’ he says, ‘I’m for one settler one bullet.’ And then he gets a round of applause for that.” (Quotes from Mr. Mehler, other than from his article or his participation at AJC’s Task Force, are from an interview the author conducted with him in the summer of 1993.)

²⁴ AJC Task Force, p. 25.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

²⁶ See Barry Mehler, “What’s Wrong with the Portland Baseline Essays?,” in Miller, *Alternatives to Afrocentrism*, p. 39.

²⁷ On Cleopatra’s ancestry, Mehler writes:

Frank Snowden, Jr. a professor emeritus of classics at Howard University,

says that Cleopatra "is well attested on coins that depict the Ptolemaic queen as white." Yurco adds that members of the Ptolemaic dynasty, which was Macedonian and came to Egypt with Alexander's conquest, were "so concerned to retain its Greek purity that they engaged regularly in brother-sister marriages . . . Though you cannot prove that Cleopatra VII had no indigenous Egyptian admixture, the probability is that she did not." ("What's Wrong with the Portland Baseline Essays," p. 39.)

Lefkowitz adds:

[O]n the basis of Cleopatra's ancestry (and her name), Cleopatra was a member of the Macedonian Greek dynasty that had imposed itself on Egypt. . . . [D]espite her fluency in the Egyptian language, the style of her dress, and the luxury of her court, she was in origin a Greek. (*New Republic*, p. 30.)

The idea that Cleopatra's skin is "tawny" is based on a misreading of Shakespeare. The source of the idea is J.A. Rogers, *World's Great Men of Color* (New York: Collier Books, 1946). According to Rogers, "in the opening lines of his *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare calls her 'tawny.'" This term, Rogers claims, was used in the seventeenth century to describe mulattoes; hence, he concludes, Shakespeare thought of Cleopatra as a mulatto. Rogers also cites a passage, where (as he puts it) Cleopatra speaks of herself as "'black,' made so by the sun."

Shakespeare in fact does use the words "tawny" and "black" to describe Cleopatra. But *in context* neither adjective means what Rogers wants them to mean. The opening lines are in fact intended as a caricature of Cleopatra, not as an actual description of her appearance. The speaker, Antony's friend Philo, is describing how Antony has degenerated because of his love for Cleopatra, whom he compares to a Gypsy woman: Antony's eyes that once "glow'd like plated Mars, now bend, now turn/ The office and devotion of their view/ Upon a tawny front," i.e., a dark face; Antony's "captain's heart" . . . "is become the bellows and the fan/ To cool a gypsy's lust." (I.i.2-9). Later in the play, when Antony realizes he has lost the war, he makes a similar attack on his lover: "O this false soul of Egypt!...like a right gypsy, hath at fast and loose/Beguil'd me to the very heart of loss" (IV.xii. 25-29). Neither Philo nor Antony says that Cleopatra actually *was* a Gypsy, which is to say an Egyptian, because that is what the word implied in Shakespeare's day. Shakespeare knew that she was a Ptolemy, as is clear from the lines he gives to Charmian in the closing lines of the play: "it is well done, and fitting for a princess/Descended of so many royal kings" (V.ii.326-7). His source for the drama was a translation of an ancient Greek source, Plutarch's *Life of Antony*. As for Cleopatra's reference to herself as "black," as a result of the action of the sun, here Rogers seems to have missed the point of a clever joke: Cleopatra implies that while Antony is away she has taken the Sun God as a lover, and the god has bruised her with his pinches: "Think on me/ that am with Phoebus' amorous pinches black/And wrinkled deep in time" because of Antony's long absence (I.v.27-29). Lefkowitz letter to author, December 19, 1994.

See also: Frank J. Yurco, "An Evaluation of the Portland Social Science Essay," *Network News and Views*, March 1991.

²⁸ Quote from interview of Dr. Lefkowitz by author in the spring of 1993.

²⁹ Michael Bradley, *The Iceman Inheritance: Prehistoric Sources of Western Man's Racism, Sexism and Aggression* (New York: Kayode Publications, 1978).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 23, 121, 110, 130, 172, 173, 96-103, 197-201, 200, 148, 160, 27, 10, 28.

³¹ Jeffries and others use the ice/sun construct to give a biological and racist analysis of homosexuality. On October 18, 1991, Jeffries was interviewed by Elliot Morgan, a black and Jewish reporter for the *Harvard Crimson*. Morgan "asked him if he felt that [as an] Afrocentrist, that it was right to exclude certain people, certain blacks, based on their sexual preference. And he said that homosexuality was . . . not natural for blacks. He [said] that it was an ice element thing." (Trial Transcript of *Jeffries vs. Harleston et al.* at 1320.)

³² Bernard R. Ortiz de Montellano, "Melanin, Afrocentricity, and Pseudoscience," *Yearbook of Anthropology*, Fall 1993.

³³ Cited in de Montellano, "Melanin, Afrocentricity and Pseudo-Science."

³⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ That the focus is on the boys, rather than the girls, is clear. Asked what he might say to feminists who might complain about girls being segregated, Spenser Holland, director of Project 2000 in Baltimore, said, "I don't care what they think. I'm not going to have a group of white women telling me how to raise my boys. I won't even discuss this with white women."

³⁷ One wonders what Dr. Delaine would think of Dr. Hilliard's views of Samurai with "black blood."

³⁸ Ben-Yochannan, "Questions and Answers," *New Dimensions*, p. 120.

³⁹ Tony Martin, *The Jewish Onslaught: Despatches from the Wellesley Battlefield*, (Dover: The Majority Press, 1993), p. 51. Martin's view has some superficial appeal — the argument is that since nonblacks have distorted black history, blacks need to "control" this field. But to push out other scholars — many of whom have contributed much to this field — because of their skin color or religion is bigotry and ultimately defeats the cause of advancing black studies.

⁴⁰ The relatively new canard that many Afrocentrists are trying to cultivate — that Jews were

major participants in, or even responsible for the slave trade — is designed to take the worst of classical anti-Semitic scapegoating and transform it into the most grievous accusation that can have currency in the African-American community. In 1830, of the 12,000 Southern slaveowners who had 50 or more slaves, only 20 were Jewish. That's two-tenths of 1 percent. And Jewish slave merchants accounted for only 10,000 of the 10 million slaves brought to the New World. That's one-tenth of 1 percent.* Yet Louis Farrakhan has asserted that "Seventy-five percent of the slaves owned in the South were owned by Jewish slaveholders." (Press conference, February 3, 1994.)

Leon Botstein, president of Bard College, says that "The damage done by Jeffries in terms of the popularization of these points of view is not to be underestimated." (Interview by author with Botstein, June 18, 1993.)

This canard has gained such currency that American Historical Association recently passed a resolution rejecting the claim that Jews had an such responsibility for slavery.

* See Harold Brackman, Farrakhan's *Reign of Historical Error: The Truth Behind "The Secret Relationship Between Blacks and Jews."* (Los Angeles: Simon Weisenthal Center, 1992). See also: David Brion Davis, "The Slave Trade and the Jews," *The New York Review of Books*, December 22, 1994, p. 14.

⁴¹ Khallid Muhammad, in addition to his advocacy of racial violence, and his gutter language (e.g., "[T]he old no-good Pope — you know that cracker, somebody need to raise that dress up and see what's really under there"), echoed many of the Afrocentric tenets of history and biology:

. . . Brothers and sisters, the so-called Jew, and I must say so-called Jew, because you're not the true Jew. You are Johnny-come-lately-Jew who just crawled out of the caves and heels [sic] of Europe just a little over 4,000 years ago. You are not the original people. You are a European strain of people who crawled around on your all fours in the caves and heels [sic] of Europe, eatin' Juniper roots and eatin' each other. You know nothing about fire. You know nothing about funeral science or nothing about embalming. You left your dead right in the caves with you and you slept with your dead for 2,000 years smelling the stench coming up from the decomposing body. You know nothing about bathroom and toilets and rest rooms and sanitation systems. You did your No. 1 and your No. 2, your pee-pee and your doo-doo, which should be a don't-don't, right in the caves and heels [sic] of Europe. You slept in your urination and your defecation, generation after generation, for 2,000 years. You know nothing about fire. You knocked your animals in the head with clubs and boulders and bricks, or whatever you had at that time, you made or chiseled, or found already that way. And drug them back to the cave . . . dragged them back to the cave. And all or you would just gum them and eat the fur, the dirt, the filth, and suck the blood from the raw meat, and you still eat your meat raw, to this very day. While you live like this, this black man and black woman that you, in a condescending way, look down your nose at, on the Kean College campus. You're

looking at the sons and daughters of your very mothers and fathers. To the whites who are in this audience, why you wouldn't even be here if it were not for the original black man and the original black woman. We are your mother and we are your father. Not only are we your mother and father biologically and genetically and historically, but we are the father and mother of all your disciplines, all of the sciences, everything that you have built your so-called civilization on. (Transcript of Kean College Speech, p. 6.)

⁴² One good test of any aspect of bigotry is to change the "victim," and see what results. Would one, for example, use a David Duke analysis of affirmative action, or welfare reform, severing it from Duke's long-standing racist agenda?

⁴³ Tony Martin, as mentioned above, wrote an entire book on this thesis. He sees Jews as exercising undue control over what he defines as non-Jewish affairs, whether it be the civil rights movement, or American life generally. Positing undue control as a Jewish characteristic, it is internally logical, in this fog of anti-Semitism, for him to believe that with that "control" challenged, "the Jews" would be angry, and strike back against African Americans.

⁴⁴ On November 29, 1994, on a WLIB radio program, Leonard Jeffries argued in favor of a curriculum that mentioned Harriet Tubman five or six times, and George Washington only twice. Of course, counting references, without noting their context, is a meaningless pursuit. But Jeffries defended this relative historical balance noting that while Washington was a slave owner, Tubman's fight for freedom had no such moral encumbrance. Harriet Tubman is an important person about whom students should learn; but she is clearly not a more important historical figure in American history than George Washington.

⁴⁵ In May 1994, at a community meeting in Montana, a high school student told the author that her school uses history textbooks from the 1960s, "and they refer to black people as niggers."

⁴⁶ "Jeffries," writes Leonard Kriegel in the magazine *Reconstruction*, "was hired to bring CCNY exactly what he brought to it — his presence as a black man with a PhD. What the college asked of him was simply that he be black and that he project himself to students as a racial rallying point. He was not asked to show those qualities the college ordinarily demanded of its faculty: intellectual diligence, dispassionate intelligence, and critical assessment. The entire college community bears responsibility for his appointment. In empowering him academically, it departed radically from the standards according to which a college should act."

It is not too difficult to imagine the thinking that went into the decision to give an untested, unknown man the academic power of a departmental chair and the institutional protection of tenure. The campus no doubt felt (partly in response to protests) that it had been lax in providing a black studies program, especially given its location in Harlem. To remedy this poor past performance, it needed to put the department on a plane where it

would have been if it had been founded years before. It needed a strong chair, protected by tenure. It was only giving Jeffries and the students what they would have had if there had been less institutional racism in the years before.

The thinking, of course, has some veneer of merit, but as with many well-intentioned acts, it would end up causing more harm than good. Its underlying assumptions were also racist, and ignorant of the function of an educational institution. Imagine if the same analysis had been used by a hospital with a medical school program. What if it had neglected inner city residents, and had discriminated throughout its history against black doctors? To remedy the past, would it take a black doctor, untested, with a fresh degree, excuse him or her from internships, residencies, fellowships, years of practice, and put him or her in charge of giving medical care to inner city (i.e., predominantly black) patients?

The same mistake that was made on many campuses should not be repeated in the public schools. Children are too important.

⁴⁷ Transcript of AJC Task Force, pp. 114-15.



American Jewish Committee Task Force on Academic Bigotry and Freedom

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