



THE LOUISIANA STATE COMMITTEE AGAINST APARTHEID

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September 12, 1993

THE ORIGIN OF THE AFRICAN/AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE CURRICULUM IN THE NEW ORLEANS PUBLIC SCHOOL SYSTEM

In 1987, I was invited by the African National Congress, U. S. Congressional Black Caucus, and Transafrica to the 65th Anniversary of the African National Congress held in Washington, D.C. Anti-Apartheid organizations and many activists from around the world were also invited. Mr. Oliver Tambo, President of the A.N.C., was the keynote speaker. The late Mr. Tambo served as President of the A.N.C. during the period when Mr. Nelson Mandela was imprisoned.

Mr. Tambo posed a very important question during his address to the delegation. That question was: "Will our African American brothers and sisters be ready to do trade with us and visit with us when apartheid is abolished in South Africa?" Groups of dedicated anti-apartheid activists, and persons interested in Pan African Studies, took up the call. In our strategy workshop, we voted to demand that all educational institutions teach African/African American History and Culture throughout the nation.

Dr. Gwendolyn Patton, former Professor of History at Tuskegee University and currently the Coordinator of the Southern Regional African Peace Coordinating Network, agreed to serve as Regional Facilitator for the Southwest Region. During a two-year period, numerous meetings were held in Washington, D.C.; Atlanta, Georgia, and Chattanooga, Tennessee.

January 23, 1989

In New Orleans, the banner was taken up by the Louisiana State Committee Against Apartheid and strongly supported by the Afro-American Liberation League headed by Malcolm Suber. These individuals and others first approached the Orleans Parish School Board on January 23, 1989. Demands were made to the board to implement an African/African American History and Culture Curriculum throughout the school system and change the racial designation of Black to African American.

The demands were not well received. In fact, some members were very hostile to our request. Dr. Dwight McKenna believed that

"Most Black Americans were comfortable with western values and do not feel the need to change." He also wrote an editorial in the February 1989 issue of his magazine, New Orleans Tribune stating that: "The majority of Black, Negro, or People of Color have no ancestors from the African Continent with which to identify, nor do they speak any of the varied African dialects. For that matter, many have no interest in establishing hereditary linkages."

Dr. Everett Williams, former Superintendent of Schools, gave the following statement to the Xavier Herald in March 1989: "Black Americans have been through enough name changes (Negro, Colored, Black). The desire to change their identity from Black to African American is just a temporary phase that a small group of people are going through."

First of all, black is a color; not a race of people. It appears that we have a public school system that strongly teaches our children: Angel Food Cake is definitely white and Devil's Food Cake must be black. You must wear white to weddings and you must wear black to funerals. If I know something on you, I will blackmail you. If I want to put you out of the church, I will blackball you.

Our youth cannot visit the pool hall after school without racism staring them in the face: a shiny white ball on the table knocking the hell out of the brown, red, yellow, and worst of all, the black ball!

March 27th Meeting

Delegation night was on the agenda and we were placed last. I protested that as old business this matter should have been taken up first. We already knew that Dr. McKenna was usually unreasonable in this regard; but the three African American board members--Dr. Carl Robinson, Dr. Betty Jefferson, and Mrs. Gail Glapion--showed no leadership.

At 9:50 p.m., Dr. McKenna allowed six organizations and 12 individuals about ten minutes to make a presentation on African Studies and the race identification change. When the delegation protested and became disruptive, Dr. McKenna called the police and the school board meeting was adjourned.

August 14th Meeting

Due to the Board's lack of interest in African Studies, we picketed the school board building approximately 30 minutes prior to the opening of the August 14th meeting. The Board voted to suspend the rules and allow us to speak. We were ready to go to jail. Some comments dealt with the need for students to know their roots and culture, the building of self-esteem, and the understanding of black accomplishments through the study of African/African American History. Incidentally, Dr. McKenna and Mr. Paul Sens voted against suspension of the rules. After our presentations, the majority of the African American school board members took no action.

October 23rd Meeting

We met with Dr. Carl Robinson prior to the October meeting. He agreed to take the leadership role on the African Studies issue. Mr. Koppel agreed

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to second the motion and talk to Mr. Sens. When the issue came up on the agenda, Dr. Dwight McKenna walked out without properly relinquishing his seat as president of the Orleans Parish School Board. Mrs. Avra O'Dwyer also walked out of the meeting. The following board members voted for the African/African American History and Culture Curriculum. They are: Dr. Carl Robinson, Dr. Betty Jefferson, Mr. Woody Koppel, Mrs. Gail Glapion, and Mr. Paul Sens.

The policy adopted called for the curriculum to be placed in effect by September 1990. Dr. Everett Williams was directed to move with haste to fully implement this program but, unfortunately, this was not done.

Under Dr. Linda Stelly, Associate Superintendent of Curriculum and Instruction, the first attempt to sabotage the African Studies Program was made. The name was changed to Multicultural without the approval of the school board and the input from the African American community. Although New Orleans is 65% African American, it appears that a small number within the school system is involved in a 'romance with slavery'. Also, it appears that there are some negroes who are firm believers in White Supremacy.

The second sabotage attempt appeared to have been made by Mr. John A. Jones, Instructional Specialist, Social Studies Department. He appointed an advisory committee made up mostly of 'miseducated' negroes trained to "think white, act white, live white, and love white". To make matters worst, Mr. Jones appointed 13 whites to the committee who had about as much interest in Africa as David Duke has. After the second meeting, most of the appointed stop attending.

Acting Superintendent, Dr. Barbara Ferguson, re-activated the committee with mostly new people in August 1992. Over the past three years, most of the individuals appointed to top level management under Dr. Everett Williams have not shown much interest in African Studies. Social scientists call this phenomenon, "identification with the oppressor". Sometimes when people are oppressed or enslaved, they try to become like their captors in an attempt to escape their own harsh reality.

Today, the African/African American History and Culture Curriculum is greatly underfunded. After a period of three years, African Studies is only mandated in 22 of the 125 public schools in the system.

Respectfully,

Carl Galmon

Carl Galmon, President
Louisiana State Committee Against Apartheid