

The ABCs of Reality with America's
Urban Public Schools

By: Kenneth Colvin, Jr.

Well, it's another school year for our children across America, as they now eagerly prepare themselves for the hectic upcoming academic year. They are finally settling down from the memorable exciting summer and focusing themselves on their studies.

Recently, just before the United States Supreme Court recessed for the summer break, the politically divided justices had rendered two critical decisions that has basically turned the clock back on public school diversification, *Pre-Brown v. Board of Education*. The highest court in the Nation, who was sharply divided 5-4, with the liberal justices dissenting, decided in both, *Meredith v. Jefferson County Board of Education* and *Parents Involved in Community Schools v. Seattle School, District No. 1*, that public school's administrators could not take race into account when creating diversity policies of its schools. U.S. Supreme Court Chief Justice, John Roberts who written the majority opinion stated, "The way to stop discrimination on the basis of race is to stop discriminating on the basis of race." I had found his view on race-based discrimination exceptionally interesting, considering America's historical track record on the issue of race and discrimination, particularly from the traditional conservatives. I wonder if he and his conservative friends are truly in support of his view, or is this another political tactic in the conservatives and neo-conservatives corrupt bag of political tricks.

These two troubling, but not surprising decisions are just another nail in the coffin for the advancement of Civil Rights in America.

Fifty three² has passed since the historical landmark decision of *Brown v. Board of Education*, and as we have witnessed, nothing has significantly changed for America's public schools. The schools across the nation are still segregated than ever before. The school systems in which our children attend are still inferior to most of their caucasian counterpart's public schools. And African American children still have found themselves attending these extremely depressing school houses that are dilapidated and totally unsafe. I often wonder, "Why is that?" Why is it, that after fifty years, the quality of public education for African American children in predominately segregated schools is essentially in the same state of emergency as it was before the *Brown* decision. How is it, that after fifty years, the dropout rate among African American children is just above fifty percent, with some of America's urban school districts being identified as "Dropout Factories". Why is it, that each and every year when we read the local newspapers, watch the local news and listen to the local news radio stations when it comes to reporting the plight of its urban schools, it is the same exact story: "The school district is in search of a new school superintendent, the school buildings are extremely poor condition, lack of proper funding, overcrowding, poor quality teachers, school closures, low national standardized test scores/results, rightfully concerned and disgruntled parents and students³ about the substandard education⁴ their school districts are providing, and the list goes on and on. Whether it is in Detroit, Flint, Grand Rapids, Lansing, or New York City, Chicago, Philadelphia, New Orleans and Oakland, California, it all has the same ring. While on the other hand with our caucasian counterparts, we never hear of these never-ending issues of concerns coming from America's poor rural and working-class suburban caucasian communities. You have to asked yourself, "Why is that?"

I guess what I am trying to get at folks, "When are we, as African Americans going to wake up and realize that we are allowing ourselves to be 'played' once again by virtually the same system that has been 'existence the day our forefathers officially walked off the southern plantations and started 'so-called' receiving assistance from the very short lived U.S Bureau of Refugees, Freedman, and Abandoned Land Agency." An agency which was established by Congress in 1865 and discontinued in 1872 after heavily staunch protest from the Christian conservative confederate southerners who vehemently opposed the "Freedman Bureau" program, who established among other things, over a thousand African American "inferior" schools and most of the historical African American colleges and universities during the Reconstruction period.

If you will look back during the Freedman period, and then review the Bush Administration "pushed", and congress bi-partisan supported No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, it will become pretty clear to you that the Act in reality is nothing more than another experiment that has been unfairly used on our African American children, just as the Freedman School Program and the National Busing Program had done in the past. When examining both programs and its significant success overwhelmingly towards African Americans and its children, you will realize that there hasn't been any. From the Freedman program, it basically established the inferior system of public education for African American children, which in turn brought about the Brown decision, as well as other critical decisions. And from Brown, through "experimentation-desegregation", via public school busing, it essentially tried but failed to integrate caucasian public schools with inner-city children, thus, totally ignoring the original program that started it all: The inferior system that most of our today's children has fallen victim to. From the results of these many failed policies, we as an African American Nation has, and continue to suffer as we now see with many of our sons and daughters, who has become adults and now are high-school dropouts, living in poverty, unemployed, uneducated, in poor health and occupying many of America's prisons -which the U.S. Justice Department reported that high-school dropouts are eight times likely to be incarcerated, and that sixty-eight percent of today's American prison population is basically functionally illiterate.

Today, with the "so-called" No Child Left Behind Act, the experimentation continues. This Act is not teaching our children to become intellectual critical-minded thinkers, but in fact, exploiting the children, as they are force to prepared for a government required standardized test. This policy does nothing to develop, stimulate, and encourage our children to learn. In fact, it does the opposite, as it prepares them to memorize, but not intellectually think. To follow a universal uniform order, pattern, or formula, instead of thinking and establishing new orders, patterns or formulas. The current system of teaching is basically obsolete to the sophisticated, more advance world of information globalization.

Bill Gates, the co-founder of Microsoft, had spoke on this issue as well. He said, "America's high schools are obsolete. By obsolete, I don't just mean that our high schools are broken, flawed or under funded -though a case could be made for every one of those points. By obsolete, I mean that our high schools -even when they're working as designed- cannot teach our kids what they need to know today." He further said that today's high schools were designed for the world of 50 years ago where only one third of high school graduates are actually ready for college and work life, and the other two thirds he added, "most of that low-income and minority students, are tracked into courses that won't ever get them ready for college or prepare them for a family-wage job, no matter how well the students learn or the teachers teach." Gates concluded his discussion by saying, "This isn't

an accident or a flaw in the system, it 'is' the system."

As it currently stands based on Gates' honest -and in my opinion, trustworthy findings, our children are doomed for failure that first day they enter the classroom. Then we all wonder why so many of our children become so disconnected with learning about time they enter high school. It's because they are not being challenged, intellectually. We must remember, most children do not know that they have what Dr. Carter G. Woodson (founder of Black History Week, now Black History Month) pointed out in his famous book, *The Miseducation of the Negro*, "The spark of genius". It is our obligation to discover this "spark" in each and every one of our children.

I believe another contributing factor to the rapid erosion of public education in America, and that has to do with the age of industrial mass production. Before the 1980s, an average person could in fact secure an exceptionally well paying living-wage job to support a family on, without a college degree or a high school diploma, just by simply filling out an application at one of the big three automotive manufacturing companies. Once a person became a union member, he or she was basically set with a secured career in the auto industry. The jobs only required physical labor without any independent intellectual creative thinking in order to carry out many of the tasks. You just simply followed a company uniformed system, in a formal structural pattern, to produce a product. Simple. But with today's global economy, the system of industrial mass production, which has been the economic backbone of America's middle-class every since the early 1900s, is no longer economically practical to many of America's corporations whom now found it more profitable in relocating their manufacturing operations in economically developing nations, like China, Indonesia and Malaysia. Therefore, with the massive de-industrialization of major predominantly African American urban cities, African Americans, as well as some caucasians has suffered tremendously as both have found themselves fighting for jobs that were once considered by most Americans standards distasteful and repugnant -prisons/corrections. As a result of the industrial mass production system and its exodus, and now with the establishment in the globalization industrial mass production -which has been responsible, in part, for creating tens of millions of middle-class families in China alone, America, particularly urban African Americans and rural caucasians has found themselves in a dire situation of high unemployment and crime, especially in the eastern and midwest regions where the industrial mass production industries were very prevalent. Because of the lack of knowledge in my opinion, in world socioeconomics, political science and sociology, the many Americans whom heavily relied on these once plentiful jobs ~~and~~ unfortunately believed that the jobs would forever exist. Now that these manual labor jobs no longer exist, individuals are forced to receive a secondary education in order to survive in the now digital information global age.

Recently I read a book called, *The World Philosophers: The Lives, Times and Ideas of the Great Economic Thinkers* (6th Edition) by Robert L. Heilbroner, and in Chapter 3, "The Wonderful World of Adam Smith", the author revealed an extremely enlightening opinion from legendary British Economist, Adam Smith, who written the famous book -which is considered an economic literary classic, "The Wealth of Nations". Heilbroner said, "He [Smith] warns, for example, of the stultifying effect of mass production. 'The understandings of the greater part of men are necessarily formed in their employments. The man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations...generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become'..."unless the government takes some pains to prevent it.'" According to Heilbroner, Smith was in favor of public education, as Heilbroner said, "...to raise the citizenry above the mere uncomprehending cogs in a vast machine."

Since one of America's founding fathers and former president of the United States, Thomas Jefferson created America's first public schools over 200 years ago, America's education institutions has become one of the world's finest, as it has produced some of the greatest contemporary intellectual minds known to modern man. But for some strange reason, America, with its world finest educational system, can not seem to solve the problems that ails America's Urban public schools. Why is that? As I written in my forthcoming untitled book, the solution to the problem is simple: Just take the system which is producing America's world leaders, top business professionals, engineers, scientists, doctors, and best minded intellectual thinkers -the one-third system that Gates addressed, and simply institute it into the two-third system of public education, and stop creating policies and laws, like the No Child Left Behind Act, which has done nothing to successfully solve the problem with urban public education, and has done nothing more than used our children as human experiments or guinea pigs. Just like the Freedman's Bureau Program and the Busing Programs, the No Child Left Behind Act is in reality a political cash cow in which both parties of government, including their friends -lobbyists are enriching themselves with the tens of billions of taxpayers' dollars that are available each year. Even President George Bush's Texans friends are profiting from the Act, including his buddy, Randy Best, whom started his company off the lucrative federally funded reading program called, "Reading First", before he had sold it, according to ABC Morning News for a reportedly \$360 million. Now just think, we forever hear this racist political babble coming from the conservative right or white nationalist in regards to how Affirmative Actions Programs, quotas, set asides and the like are nothing more than entitlement programs that in turns discriminates towards others, particularly caucasian Americans, yet America's original entitlement program, "The Good-old White Boys Network" is still forever live and well.

It is just like the brother Chris Gardner (who was once homeless before he became a successful multimillionaire stock investor and written his autobiography, "The Pursuit of Happyness") has always said, "The cavalry is not coming to save us!" We must save ourselves! We must stop relying on government to solve our many problems, including education. We have the best minds to solve our own problems. The problem is, we do not use them. By today's standards, we should be producing innovators and entrepreneurs who will grow up and create powerful corporations that will employ many of our unemployed. Scientists, doctors, and engineers who will create and discover new ideas (medicine, technology, and biotechnology/biomedicine) and solve the many serious problems that has ailed the world. World leaders and politicians who will have the courage and the boldness in changing the course for the betterment of the People of Color, and mankind.

But in order for the "audacity of hope" to come alive, we all collectively must step up to the plate and demand these changes, or forever accept the present state of urban public education, which teaches our children to think inside the box, as oppose to outside of it. This is the ABCs of reality with America's urban public schools.

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