

# Point of View

## Blacks Washed Out Of American History

By Joan Davis Ratteray

The latest buzzword coming out of the nation's capital is "culture" -- meaning American culture. It's a great word, until people start to define what they think it means.

Some people have started talking about "cultural conservatism." They want to conserve traditional American culture, teach children about our "common culture." So far, so good.

The nation's chief education researcher, Chester Finn, appointed by Secretary Bennett, wrote: "Citizens reinforce their attachment to our shared culture through free association in common pursuits and through celebration of our heroes, holidays, legends, hymns, and symbols. The citizens of a free society cherish both its principles and its traditions. They study its history."

If we look at the context in which this "common culture" is defined, that's where this noble rhetoric falls apart.

They say, "Its roots are in the Western civilization that began in Greece and Rome, and its ethical and moral foundations derive from the Greek and Judeo-Christian traditions."

What they really mean is to

define America's roots so narrowly that there is only room for Europe. They see Europe as the only fountain of truth and wisdom in American social, political, economic, and religious life. Africa, the children of Africa, and African influences in America and washed off the face and out of the soul of civilization.

The common culture of the Founding Fathers had roots in more than Greece and Rome. Indeed, the Greeks enhanced their understanding of the world by pursuing graduate-level studies in Africa.

It was from Africa that the Greeks borrowed freely many well-known mathematical, medical and other scientific principles and renamed, which they renamed after their own Greek heroes. They also borrowed African gods, barely changed their names, carved statues of them in the likeness of Europeans, and exalted them to the world as preeminent symbols of beauty.

Europeans, inspired by the Judeo-Christian ethos, did help to start America. Of course, they should not be forgotten. But as historian Dr. John Henrik Clarke says, Europeans should not be allowed to claim that "the whole world waited in darkness for them to bring

## To Be Equal

by John E. Jacob

The death penalty isn't simply a criminal justice issue, or even a moral issue. It is also a racial issue.

In the days when the barbarous practice of state-ordered executions was common, the death penalty was the preferred sentence for blacks convicted of certain crimes. Now that the death penalty has been

the light."

The "common culture" of America today is increasingly multicultural. Purely European influences are very hard to find.

For example, the temple in which the statue of Abraham Lincoln sits in Washington, D.C., is only superficially Greek. Its architectural roots are in Africa, in the Temple of Karnak, build over 1,000 years before the Parthenon was designed.

Even America's motto, E Pluribus Unum, has a new meaning. Two hundred years ago, it referred to the creation of a very limited union of colonies. It later was used in the context of the Nation as a "melting pot" for European immigrants.

Today and for the future, this motto refers to a new union -- an America whose roots are being transformed so that they are no longer exclusively European. This motto has no meaning whatsoever unless it refers to America as a mosaic of distinguishable parts.

It is not enough to cite Martin Luther King, Jr., Benjamin Banneker, and Harriet Tubman, using them to illustrate "courage in the face of adversity." We must look at the African value system way of understanding, and logic system that shaped the views of these leaders and fundamentally altered the European perspectives that dominated our society. They all helped create a new America, not just create new citizens of color in a European system.

Let's all take a closer look at history, so we can properly defend this democracy -- together.

## Race A Death Penalty Factor

bounded by various legal restrictions, race is still a factor.

That racial factor was a major cause of the Supreme Court decisions restricting its use. But ten years ago the Court gave the green light to the death penalty so long as states established fair procedures to decide who should be executed.

That presumes formal legal procedures are sufficient to take race out of the picture, but the evidence suggests that the death penalty is still a lottery administered in an unfair way and race is still a factor.



John E. Jacob

The Supreme Court recently heard arguments in a Georgia case in which a convicted black man is trying to overturn his sentence of death on the grounds that race systematically influences death sentencing in the state.

The cornerstone of his

case is an exhaustive study of homicide indictments in Georgia and other states that shows people accused of murdering whites are nearly eleven times more likely to receive the death penalty as those convicted of killing blacks.

And where the victim of the killing was white, black defendants receive the sentence of death nearly three times more often than white defendants.

In its arguments before the Supreme Court, the state said the disparity in sentencing is caused by white victims being more likely to be murdered in the course of armed robberies and other vicious crimes that

penalty once and for all or refuse to sustain laws that have disproportionate racial impacts.

It would be best for the Supreme Court to summon the courage to go ahead with a total ban on the death penalty as an unconstitutionally cruel punishment.

We seemed headed in that direction in the 1970s, when public opinion was strongly anti-death penalty. But now a majority is in favor of it, and the courts are following the public opinion polls, with dire results.

The Appeals Court, in allowing the Georgia verdict to stand, said that despite the study showing racial bias in sentencing patterns such

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warrant more extreme penalties.

But the study took that into account -- it isolated all well over 200 variables and adjusted for them. The conclusion still was that killers of whites are 4.3 times more likely to get the death penalty.

So race is still a factor in deciding who lives and who dies. The courts have to recognize that and either strike down the death

statistics couldn't be used to show that any particular death sentence was improper without proof of bias in the cause in question.

Thirty-seven states have death penalty provisions, but only four states -- Texas, Georgia, Florida and Louisiana account for 75 percent of all executions in the past decade. Most states recognize that the death penalty does not deter crime, it simply is an act of vengeance that should have no place in a civilized society.

In our society, the death penalty will always be affected by racial factors. That is enough to place it outside the bounds of constitutionality. The courts should lead the way in banning it, and a shift in public opinion against the death penalty will help them do the right thing.

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### Words of Marcus Garvey

By Kofi Tyus

"A race that is solely dependent upon another for its economic existence sooner or later dies."

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