

AOIP A Progress Report

The August 1982 issue of the *National BLACK MONITOR* made the following announcement:

Black America is attacked! Current headline news about war has focused on the Falklands and the Middle East, but the most important—and most intensive—warfare being set for staging in this country today is the national Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP) all across the nation.

The event which initially provoked the staging of this “most important and most intensive” warfare was the alarming statistics reported by a federal agency in 1980. These statistics noted that 44 percent of all Black youth leaving our public schools at age 18 could not read beyond the fourth grade level and thus fit into the technical classification of “functional illiterates”! The *MONITOR* article urged its readers to open their imaginations to the awesomely painful and realistic possibilities for all Black Americans if we allowed that trend to continue.

These perilous facts, the article concluded, could mean that by 1991 nearly one-half of all Black young adults would be permanently unemployable in terms of long-range jobs. As “functional illiterates” they often would be unable to read an employer’s warning signs or to understand instructions on a simple label.

Left out of the secure employment market, the article predicted that these largely urban Black youth and young adults will become an almost alien and hostile mass with tendencies toward welfare-dependency, drug addiction and lives of crime. They will be hopeless, frustrated, angry and ready at almost any time for all destruction

and societal turbulence via riots and rampage. They will help to make of much of Black America a picture of urban human rot and waste.

Black Americans as a whole, the article continued, may tend—in the minds of some—to be seen as threatening to the nation’s peace. With all the detention camps across America still in existence together with massive amounts of sophisticated group control weaponry, the coup-de-grace easily could come if only a few in power then lumped all Black Americans together as being more or less expendable.

This article deliberately drew a frightening picture of what might happen unless something immediate and effective were not done about what increasing numbers were calling “the most serious emerging social dilemma that Black Americans have faced since the Reconstruction Period.”

Root Causes of This Awesome Predicament

WHERE does one go to look for the root causes of this awesome predicament? One must go back in history to the enslavement system that existed in this country for well over 200 years. A system of deliberate ego-diminition which brutally, harshly and continuously dehumanized and debased an entire race of people. The imposition of racial and racist values still impacts negatively and widely upon Black Americans at almost every turn.

As a result of these deliberate and

unremediated actions of the past, and by policies and practices of the present, a majority of Black Americans have a negative self-image. Far too many Black children and adults are poorly motivated to even want to learn.

The current welfare policies and practices of federal, state and local agencies reinforce the demeaning belief imposed on many Black people that they are not worthy of the “dignity of work” and that, as an alternative, welfare is a legitimate hustle.

The enormously high and continuously escalating rate of functional illiteracy is evidence of the almost universal failure of the school systems of every city in the country to educate inner city students. A complementary support mechanism far beyond the jurisdiction of the schools was needed.

The lack of positive personal values has become so widespread that in some urban areas over 50 percent of Black males have a criminal record and over 70 percent of Black children are reared in homes without a father.

Why AOIP Is Needed

THE Assault On Illiteracy Program (AOIP) is a unique and urgently needed Black-led coordinating framework to both enhance and broaden the efforts that were already being made to address the root causes of the illiteracy predicament. AOIP is not another organization but a framework for all Black community-building organizations to work together on this awesome predicament. In other words, AOIP is a collective and growing response on the part of what promises to be the

largest coordinated network of Black community groups in our history.

AOIP is the only national system of interorganizational cooperation designed to combat this uniquely rooted dilemma of “functional illiteracy” among Black Americans. AOIP is an all-volunteer community-building coalition of well over 90 national Black-led organizations who are focused in a coordinated way on complementing and supplementing the role of teachers and tutors in overcoming illiteracy.

AOIP has enabled Black organizations to use their facilities which were already in place more effectively and more efficiently. These efforts have been coordinated without any changes in the structures of individual organizations. AOIP provided the strategic and compelling focus which is the removal of the unique root causes of Black illiteracy such as lack of pride, security, hope, etc.

What AOIP Does

AOIP’s strategy takes into account the centuries of unredressed and deliberate ego devastation that Black Americans have experienced and starts a rebuilding system that encourages Black people to want to learn. Black students need help and a carefully planned system like that of AOIP to complement the almost awesome task of even the most dedicated teachers is the only answer.

AOIP’s mission is two-fold. One is to work in ways whereby the ego strength and motivation of students is sufficiently high so that any classroom

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“Pulling Ourselves Up By Our Own Bootstraps”...A Series