

COMMENTARY

# Outfitting students for academic success

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

It's the middle of the summer. The air is thick with heat. And most of us are thinking more about beaches than schools.

But I've just read a new book which has brought the educational future of our children — particularly those in predominately black and Hispanic public schools — back to the center of my consciousness.

This book, *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools That Work*, is sounding an alarm America must heed.

Author Linda Darling-Hammond, a professor at Columbia University's Teachers College, says that we must act now to fix the future of millions of poor and minority school children.

As Darling-Hammond puts it, "perhaps even the survival of nations and people [is] so tightly tied to their ability to learn. Consequently, our future depends now, as never before, on our ability to teach."

The importance of the blueprint Darling-Hammond presents seems to be reinforced with every news story relating the quality of schooling our children receive to their employability.

For example, a recent study found that today's high school graduates are not as prepared to enter the workforce as they think.

The study, sponsored by Amway and Junior Achievement, whose programs seek to acquaint young people with the business world, determined that 90 percent of graduating high school seniors feel they are prepared to enter the workforce directly. However, only 51 percent of employers feel that way. Nearly six

out of 10 employers say that the high school graduates they see lack such fundamental skills as the ability to write adequately.

Economics affect education. Great economic disparities disproportionately harm poor and minority pupils concentrated in the rural and urban school districts. These school districts — with some striking exceptions — contain the most outdated equipment, least challenging curricula and the largest numbers of unprepared teachers, Darling-Hammond says.

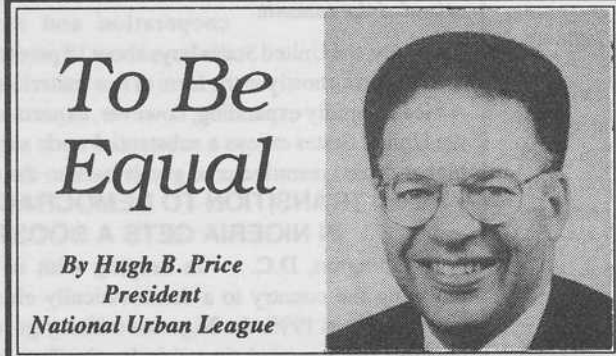
Fortunately, she does not leave the matter there. Instead, she shows points to an already-traveled path to improving poor-quality schooling.

If the schools these children attend have well prepared teachers with effective teaching methods, things can change.

If the schools are properly outfitted for teaching — supplied with up-to-date textbooks and computers and other teaching materials — and have workable student-teacher ratios, things can change.

A major revamp of the nation's school system is needed. But those of us at the local-school level cannot merely wait for that to occur.

We know what works. We must exercise the will and the determination to bring it about. We — educators, parents, elected officials, community leaders and taxpayers — must commit ourselves to improving the schools neighborhood by neighborhood if necessary. Because it is true that all children have a right to learn, and deserve the opportunity to achieve it.



To Be Equal

By Hugh B. Price  
President  
National Urban League



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# Getting beyond racism means traversing race

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

I recently had the pleasure of having Dr. Kwame Anthony Appiah on my weekly cable TV show.

Appiah is professor of African-American Studies and Philosophy at Harvard University. His recent works include: *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture*, *The Dictionary of Global Culture* with Henry Lewis Gates, and *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race*, co-authored with Amy Gutman.

Like many other scholars, Appiah argues that there is no such thing as race. Going

beyond showing that there is no biological evidence for racial differences, he claims that race is not cultural either. The move to

identify racial differences as cultural, he says, falsely suggests that people in one cultural grouping are the same as each other and different from people in other cultural groupings.

Racism is then understood as stemming from cultural misunderstandings. But, Appiah points out — and I agree with him — that black and white Americans understand each other just fine. Racism isn't a matter of cultural differences and misunderstandings; it's a matter of political power.

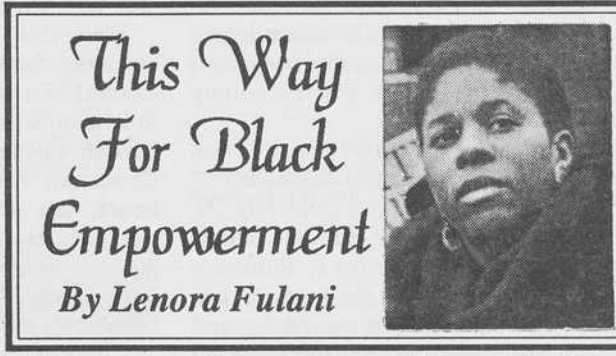
Appiah speaks of the need to get beyond what the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre identified as anti-racist racism — as exemplified, for example, in black pride and Pan-Africanism.

The establishment of this kind of racial identity, Appiah says, is a stage in a people's demand to be recognized. But there are problems with identity: it becomes categorical;

it becomes defining and rigid, signaling association with particular political or social agendas and particular beliefs.

Appiah writes persuasively of the destructive effects of identity politics, as identity-defined interest groups compete with each other for legislative initiatives and social policy.

He recommends we engage in "identity play" — that we step back from our identities, see that they are not always important nor all of who we are and move on to post racial identities. He describes this "moving on" as "the ... imaginative work of constructing



This Way For Black Empowerment  
By Lenora Fulani



collective identities for a democratic nation in a world of democratic nations, work that must go hand in hand with cultivating democracy

here and encouraging it everywhere."

While I agree with much of what Appiah says, I take issue with his view that the establishment of racial identity (and thereby, identity politics) is a necessary stage in the process of challenging identity, and his claim that first we have to establish our identity and then we can challenge it.

I see nothing natural or inevitable about this. In fact, that this is what has happened historically is more an issue of a mistaken political tactic — identity politics — than the proof for an abstract stagist theory of human history.

In my work as both a development psychologist and a political activist I have come to believe that the African-American community must challenge both the theoretical and tactical frameworks that are based on racial identity in order to truly deal with the issue of racism and political power.

## SPEAK OUT!

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## VOICE FROM THE HILL

# African-Americans: Replace talk with action

By George Wilson  
*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

President Clinton has indicated that the time has come for a national dialogue on race in America.

He said that at first the discussions won't be easy, but they will get better as time goes on. Clinton has put on hold issuing an apology for slavery.

To that end, a commission has been organized that will explore America's most vexing problem. A minute portion of my being cheers the president for at least addressing the issue, which others have chosen to ignore or pretend doesn't exist.

However, a larger portion of me says, "What's the point?"

Since the president and his family took up residence in the White House, he has had numerous opportunities to address the question of race.

Instead, he has consistently avoided it, for fear that he would alienate those who might not have voted for him if he was considered too sympathetic towards minorities.

Yes, Aretha Franklin has entertained at the White House, Clinton has attended a few African-American churches and a few African-Americans have gotten jobs. However, for the most part, he has been silent on issues involving the treatment afforded people of color.

At this suggestion of a dialogue on race, my first question is, how is the dialogue to take place?

At last count there are hundreds of paramilitary groups across this nation who

quite openly espouse hatred toward African-Americans. Will such groups be represented in the discussions?

According to Webster's Dictionary, a dialogue is "an exchange of ideas with a view to reaching an amicable agreement." Using this definition as a guide, what type of agreement is supposed to be reached between diametrically opposed groups of people?

*"I think there is a good part of the white population that doesn't want to hear anything that Clinton has to say on race relations or anything else"*

— David Borsitis of Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies

David Borsitis of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies offered his perspective on the President's initiative on race.

"I think that it will be possible for a lot of white Americans and a lot of black Americans. I think there is a good part of the white population that doesn't want to hear anything that Clinton has to say on race relations or anything else," he said.

"I don't think they're going to follow his lead in that regard and unless some people that these people respect and listen to join in the dialogue, the success of his commission will be modest at best."

Borsitis recently concluded a survey on race relations in America.

"Despite the fact that there is all of this acknowledged discrimination, white Americans by and large don't want to do anything about it," he said.

The president wants to tie a neat little bow around race relations. However, it's going to be hard to tie that knot as long as the heat is still rising on the plantation.

George Wilson is a 16-year Capitol Hill correspondent for the American Urban Radio Network.