

COMMENTARY

I vouch for vouchers (and charter schools)

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Over a century of conflicted struggles for social reform created a public school system to which all children have access.

The civil rights and school desegregation movements of the 1960's established full equality of access to the public school system.

But establishing equality of education does not in and of itself establish quality education.

What are the critical policy initiatives required to address that question? Can we get beyond the culture wars over curriculum — which were much more about partisan politics than they were about curriculum anyway — to address serious educational issues?

Much of the current approach to public — and private — education is based on an acquisitional model of learning — in other words,

that children, and adults for that matter, learn by acquiring knowledge — facts and skills — like George Washington was the Father of Our Country or surfing the Internet for source material for a paper. Indeed, much of the dialogue on education has been about hiring more teachers to do roughly the same thing that current teachers are doing.

Or about getting more computers in the schools. Certainly, no one would argue that having more teachers and more computers is a bad thing.

But it certainly doesn't rise to the level of a dialogue on educational philosophy or pedagogy or subject matter.

Many psychologists and educators — I count myself among them — have raised questions about the dominant learning model.

What is the relationship between learning and development?

This Way For Black Empowerment

By Dr. Lenora Fulani



What is our learning model making our students, and thereby our workforce, less competitive on the world market?

Why haven't we succeeded in bringing minority students up to par?

What is par, anyway? What if the modernist notions of knowledge, learning and personal growth don't meet the particular challenges and nuances of the postmodern ear?

Right now, there is virtually no opportunity to create a national forum for a policy dialogue on these kinds

of issues. Why?

Because the teachers unions are concerned to preserve the jobs of their members.

The principals are concerned to make sure they get their share of available federal grants.

The Republican Party is concerned about curriculum guidelines and school prayer in order to keep the Christian Coalition voting for its candidates.

The Democratic Party insists that charter schools and vouchers will undermine the public school system, to

keep the teachers union voting for its candidates, even though 86.5% of African-Americans between the ages of 25 and 35 — young Black adults — favor vouchers.

In North Carolina, charter schools were attacked at their inception by elected Democrats who charged that they would become another version of the white flight academies that grew in the wake of court-mandated desegregation.

Today, 21 of North Carolina's 60 charter schools are 85% Black, and the Black-run schools have joined with the white Republican legislators to defend charter schools against new charges by the teachers union and some Black Democrats that the charter schools violate diversity requirements.

Where in this highly charged, top-down bureaucratically over determined politically

motivated mix do we get to talk about education as a tool for social, individual and societal development?

Where do the parents who decided to send their kids to charter schools get to talk about why they did so and have their experiences meld with the experience of educational innovations?

In the current environment, never.

And that is precisely the problem that we must do something about.

With respect to education, I believe that charter schools and vouchers are a key educational reform. Why?

Because introducing taxpayer funded public and private schools at the local level — schools which can put forth and experiment with alternative approaches and philosophies can't help but enrich the education marketplace — which has

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Reparations for African-Americans inescapable problems for America

Lee Hubbard

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Ever year since 1989, Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., asks a question no one seems to want to answer. Do descendants of African slaves deserve reparations for the more than 200 years they were in bondage in America, and the more than 100 years of de facto slavery through Jim Crow?

No one in Congress has had the guts to take a look at the legislation Conyers has tried to pass, so it hasn't been addressed. But black communities across the country are now discussing the issue Conyers raises, and it won't go away.

This conversation within the black community has been sparked by the release of the book, "The Debt," by Randall Robinson, president of TransAfrica, a lobbying firm for African interests. In his book, he writes that reparations are owed to blacks just "as Germany and other interests that profited owed reparations to Jews following the holocaust of Nazi persecution."

Most blacks have long felt that something is owed for the hundreds of years of slave labor that helped to build America. In school, most people are taught that slavery was practiced for thousands of years, and America's involvement with it wasn't unique. That may be true, but slavery under a modern democracy is something different. The United States is the only democracy where institutionalized bondage was practiced.

During the civil rights movement, activists mentioned reparations in passing. Civil rights leaders were mostly concerned with fighting years of racist and discriminatory laws. They were battling to

make American democracy recognize blacks as people, and asking for reparations at the time seemed to be putting the cart before the horse.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. mentioned reparations in his book "Why We Can't Wait." He also discussed a Marshall Plan for black Americans, but he had too much on his plate to go any further. It would be up to black nationalists like Queen Mother Moore, and groups like the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations to press the issue.

Today, the issue has been picked up by blacks—liberal and conservative—who want Conyer's question answered, and there have been some legal precedents internationally.

Germany paid reparations to the state of Israel and holocaust survivors, and Swiss Banks have decided to pay the Holocaust victims for money and other items stolen during the Nazi regime. And some precedents nationally, such as the payment to the 1923 descendants of a race riot that took place in Rosewood, FL, in which whites destroyed a small black town and killed six black residents. In 1994, the Florida Legislature provided up to \$2 million to compensate the survivors.

In 1921, Tulsa, Oklahoma violence erupted after a black man was arrested on a false charge of raping a white woman. A headline in the local paper read, "To Lynch a Negro Tonight" riled up mobs of whites who went to the courthouse to lynch the accused black man. The rioting that ensued killed 40 people (Tulsa historians say 300 died) and destroyed "the Negro Wall Street," which was home to over 15,000 black people and 191 businesses.

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Emigration in two colors

E. Louis Overstreet
Sentinel-Voice

Since the newspapers and electronic media have been filled with stories about Elian Gonzalez, have you formed an opinion or more importantly noticed a pattern in the manner our nation enforces its emigration policies?

I'm of the opinion that our nation has a dual-standard when it comes to whites and persons of color wanting to emigrate to our country. Not only by country, but by race within the same country. Have you noticed that all the persons fleeing Cuba are White-Cubans, not Afro-Cubans?

If you believe your "lying eyes," you would conclude that Cuba is populated by White-Cubans all wanting to flee this Caribbean nation. Contrast this with the fact that Cuba's Olympic team is dominated by Afro-Cubans. What gives here?

The answer is that two are what give. One, when Castro took over, he made it a point to involve Afro-Cubans in his regime. If not, he could not have remained in power for over forty years, given that the country is 37% White and 63% Black (Mestizo.) Two, White-Cubans did not want to share power with descendants of slaves, thus many of them fled to Florida.

It should be noted that the original

inhabitants of the island were Indians, who have long since been killed or died off after the Spanish occupied the island in the early 1500's.

Now contrast what White-Cubans are doing to one child in Miami, with that which is happening to children of color. A report recently released by the Human Rights Watch organization documents that thousands of children of color are caught, detained and quickly returned to their countries without any fanfare. Do Haitian boat people come to mind?

Adding insult to injury we now have presidential candidate talking about what a crime it is for this one child to have to suffer such ordeal. Mr. Gore what about the thousands of Blacks who are being unceremoniously "sent packing." This is happening at the same time our sitting vice president is lamenting over one child enjoying an upper middle-class lifestyle, while he is being used as a political pawn by White-Cubans who are mad at Castro for cutting blacks in on the action in Cuba.

Using a phrase popularized by Paul Harvey, now you know the rest of the story! Knowing the rest of the story is why you do not see any black folks worrying about what happens to some kid who has rich relatives.

Sharpton

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Sharpton himself said that: "they're doing me more like Jesse than Willie Horton. Willie Horton was a criminal. I'm a civil rights leader."

Civil rights leaders have challenged the system on behalf of the locked-out, have tried to use — as a weapon — the ability to make the comfortable, uncomfortable, and to disturb the peace.

In this sense, the power of charismatic leaders has always been and a threat because

of their ability to galvanize the masses. J. Edgar Hoover, head of the FBI, was frightened at the power of Malcolm X and of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. to mobilize the masses on behalf of justice, and so he sought to destroy their reputations by vilification and dirty tricks campaigns, and probably was involved in both of their deaths.

So, the campaign is on to discredit Rev. Al Sharpton because he has taken the side of the people.

Let us watch his back.