

Overstreet

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two African-American administrators, those who are serving in supposedly decision-making positions are afraid to say, "black in a coal mine."

• Parents of students who are being victimized on a daily basis either could care less or do not know how to organize into an effective force for changing the status quo.

Demographic data released for the current school year indicate whites comprise 46 percent and persons of color 54 percent of the student population. The seven-person board of trustees is comprised of five (71.4 percent) whites and two (28.6 percent) minorities.

Contributing to the problem is the lack of persons of

color in key administrative decision-making positions. To illustrate my point, I refer you to last Sunday's newspaper. There was a picture of the key persons making decisions on what items to cut out of the district's bloated operating budget. Of the 23 persons in the photo, only three or four were minorities. Stated another way, only 17 percent (4 out of 23) of the persons deciding spending priorities are minorities in a district where 54 percent of the student population is comprised of persons of color.

And calling it like I see it — or as my critics say, perceive it — two African-Americans in the photo can be counted on by the system not to say, "black in a coal mine." Also, the best I could discern from the picture was

that they had their best I-am-just-like-everybody-else-in-the-room look on their faces.

This condition can only exist because the board of trustees, with one or two exceptions, does not have a clue as to how to budget with objectives to produce measurable outlines. Further, year in and year out, the board demonstrates the concept of zero-based budgeting is well beyond its cognitive capability.

The other problem that exists is the lack of parental

concern for what is happening to young people who look like us in the school district. The legal matter of the apparent violation of students' due-process rights when subjected to discipline action aside, the real crime taking place in the school district is the large percentage of students of color being "tracked" as learning disabled.

The most recent example of the consequence that can befall a student who is tracked

is the high probability that these students received a certificate of attendance rather than a high school diploma. Man, if this had happened to one of my children, I would have begged, borrowed and, if necessary, stolen the money needed to hire me a civil rights lawyer to sue the school district. My justification would be, borrowing from the title of Carter G. Woodson's 1933 book, "The Mis-Education of the Negro."

Beyond death and taxes,

another thing that is certain, if parents do not organize themselves into a force that has the strength and unity to demand quality and equal educational opportunity for their offspring, then things "ain't" going to get better. They are going to become "worse" over the next 49 years. Nowadays, however, when it comes to the mis-education of the African-American, it seems that no one cares or, for that matter, is counting the years.

Fletcher

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time, on the question of slavery. Either one opposes racism (and during Brown's time, slavery), or one supports racism. There is no middle ground. The United States was constructed from its inception as a racial capitalist state. In order to undermine the possibilities of any unity among those at the base of society, a system of racial differentials in treatment were put into place by those at the top, including and most importantly, racial slavery for Africans and the seizure of the land of the Native American. Brown recognized that in such a situation, a White person who took no stand was, indeed, taking a stand in support of the slave system.

This lesson remains critical to this day. In the on-going affirmative action debate, opponents of affirmative action repeatedly denigrate that system for giving alleged privileges to some who supposedly do not deserve it. Sometimes implied, and other times made explicit, is the notion that today's White people should not "suffer" because of the crimes of the past with which they had no involvement.

Bennett reminds the reader that U.S. society received concrete material benefits from slavery. Indeed, it continued to receive benefits from the often unpaid or underpaid labor power of African-Americans. This piracy was opposed by African-Americans and some Whites, but more often than not, it was ignored or supported by the mass of Whites. This is not a racist categorization; it is a demonstrable fact. Ignoring this piracy was tantamount to saying that it was permissible and acceptable.

The mythologizing of Lincoln, then, is not simply a matter of turning straw into gold. It is about legitimizing an approach to oppression that is comfortable for most White people in this country. It is an approach that suggests that if something does not appear to affect one directly, one can afford to ignore it, regardless of the consequences for anyone else. Lincoln did all that he could to preserve the United States, slavery and all, making it clear that the abolition of slavery was of secondary importance. He was prepared to turn a blind eye to the slave system. He somehow believed that a democracy could exist while slavery slowly — perhaps over 50 years — disappeared. He apparently saw this as being fair and even-handed. In reality, it was neither.

It all reminds me of a game I once played with my daughter. As a child she loved to see me try to walk up a descending escalator. The thing is, you cannot stand still on a descending elevator. You have to keep walking and you have to outpace the descending stairs. If you don't, you end up at the bottom.

So much for remaining neutral.

Bill Fletcher Jr. is president of TransAfrica Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based non-profit educational and organizing center formed to raise awareness in the United States about issues facing the nations and peoples of Africa, the Caribbean and Latin America.

Walters

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just can't foster cultural change that quickly.

The example of Prince George's County has national implications because Prof. John Ogbu, a University of California at Berkeley expert in education, has just written another book trying to explain why affluent Blacks don't achieve at the same rate as their affluent White counterparts. His book, a study of the predominantly Black middle-class area of Shaker Heights in Cleveland, Ohio, found that Black middle-class parents value educational advancement, but don't do much at home to foster it, such as helping their children with homework or attending school meetings to monitor their children's progress.

On the other hand, educational advancement is not the prime value of young middle-class Blacks. In fact, Ogbu revealed that the term "acting White" was being used by some Black youth to refer to those who do not value educational achievement.

Without chastising students who use the term "acting

White," as has widely been done, we should understand that they are using it to post a marker of cultural difference, recognizing it as a symbol of the supremacy of the dominant group.

This does not mean that they should not be challenged to master the cultural standard. But it does mean that if they don't as reflected in the test score gaps, they should not be considered stupid or ignorant, but that the transition to a White cultural standard has by no means been accomplished, even by their parents.

This is why the hand-wringing that goes on by Black parents should give way to challenging the testocracy, just as the parents and the wider Black community in Florida have been forced to do. Their dilemma crystallizes the issue better than I have seen it.

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Curry

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As a result of this movement, some of the fan postings on Web sites have become more vitriolic. The Danny Glover message board on www.the-movie-times.com, for example, carried the following comments:

"I put your movies in the same trash bin as my Dixie Chicks CDs," says a writer who identified himself as "Texan." He continues, "I told MCI to take a hike and why."

David writes, "I hope that Danny Glover, his family and all of you out there that support him contract a flesh-eating disease and slowly die in agony and pain! Please pass the morphine."

Harold ends his tirade with, "Oh, I wrote MCI and Foxx, CNN about you. Just trying to help."

The Associated Press reports that after receiving three dozen complaints about actress Susan Sarandon's anti-war views, the United Way of Tampa Bay, Fla., canceled a speech she had been scheduled to make to inspire volunteerism.

No one of note has called for a boycott of movies or speeches of Right-wing actors such as Arnold Schwarzenegger or Bruce Willis. According to frontpagemag.com, Willis said during the last election, "If you guys vote for Al Gore, you're out of your minds!

Gore's a knucklehead!"

When Martin Sheen, as part of his activities with "Artists United to Win Without War," urged people to contact elected leaders via telephone, fax and e-mail, the conservative Web site, newsmax.com, declared, "Now it's time to see if Sheen and his ilk can take what they dish out." It gave contact numbers "to tell the 'artists' what you think of them."

It's time for progressives to fight back. The first step is to put MCI on notice that if they cave in to this kind of pressure, it will be at their peril. You can do that by logging on to Web site www.mci.com and clicking customer service or telephon-

ing customer service at (800) 444-3333. If you're an MCI customer, tell them if Danny goes, so will your business.

You can also tune out Clear Channel, the owners of more than 1,000 radio stations in the nation, and the pro-Bush rallies it sponsors. And you can tune into some of the chat rooms on the Internet and provide a counterpoint to these unknowledgeable meanderings.

If Danny Glover can exhibit courage by standing up, the least we can do is to support him by making our opinions count. That's how we can become a lethal weapon.

George E. Curry is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service.

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black kids from economically disadvantaged West Las Vegas who were receiving free haircuts, this "perky" announcer hissed — as viewers watched black kids sitting compliantly for professional barbers in their professional shop — that "the fur was flying" and that certain people were "cleaning up their act."

It was nauseating.

Now, here's what, in TV, they call "the kicker." The white Promotions Department flunky who wrote the copy the white anchorperson knowingly read, was, when last heard from, hosting a talk show on a local AM radio station!

Taken together, these anecdotes speak of the racism

alluded to a couple of weeks ago, extant in local TV and indistinguishable from Griffith's when he produced *The Birth of A Nation* nearly a century ago.

It compels one to ask whether anything's changed — at any of the stations here — and if so, how much worse now must it be.

Long our medium of choice and primary information source, television shapes opinions in America. It's most dangerous at the local level and helps explain why opinions of us are so low. We deserve what we've gotten and continue to get if all we do is watch, passively, "The Rebirth of A Nation."

Now, a word from their sponsors.