OUR VIEW
Convenient Blackness

There is a problem with blackness in Black America. Sounds strange, but it's true.

The problem isn't an outgrowth of the malleable terms we've used (or that have been foisted upon us) to describe ourselves—Black, Negro, Afro-American, African-American, Africans living in America. No, the issue is more pernicious and it dovetails with our current stagnancy as socioeconomic and sociopolitical force in this country.

It's the issue of convenient blackness.

There are a multitude of organizations with variations of Black or Negro or African-American in their names—almost too many to name. Think of any profession and there's probably a black version of its trade group—journalism, engineering, accounting, psychology, education, law enforcement and the list goes on ad infinitum. But what about these organizations is truly Black or reflects blackness? Rhetorically speaking, what good is it to have a black version of a mainstream organization if said version merely puts a Black face on mainstream issues?

Part of what made the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People such a seminal force in obtaining human and civil rights for minorities was its commitment to the ultimate cause of Black uplift. If that meant appending itself to a fight against segregation in public accommodations or for fairness in public housing, then the NAACP did it. The NAACP wasn't for Black people just some of the time or for only those issues important to the Blacks who comprised its membership and leadership; Black inclusion in the American dream meant confronting inequity everywhere it reared its ugly head.

The Black Panther Party, at least in its initial incarnation, understood this.

The Panthers were smart to educate African-Americans on the constitutional protections afforded citizens, such as the right to bear arms, as well as state statutes on carrying weapons, and bold enough to exercise their rights in the face of oppression. Even smarter, they ran many civic programs—feeding the needy, caring for the elderly, teaching money management skills. They recognized the importance of nation building.

How many so-called Black organizations recognize the need for nation building in these modern times? How many have become so bogged down in their own fiefdoms that the idea of, say, collaborating to tackle a pertinent issue seems foreign? Nowadays, Black groups can turn their blackness on and off with the ease of someone flipping a light switch. They're pro-Black on the issues important to them; indifferent on things they're lukewarm about; and blatantly oppositional to items they disdain. Whether something is antithetical to the interests of Black people becomes a mute point for many of them; the new point: What's in it for me/us?

Where are the Black reformers, the dynamite leaders who can bring all the disparate parts together into one whole? More than ever, Black America needs someone (or many someones; a group or many groups) to corral folks (and interests) from the left, right, middle, top and bottom and facilitate dialogue on how to address the most pressing needs. Hopefully, such an effort would encourage these myriad Black groups to return to their communities and focus on improving the lives of Black people in their own way. In this small way, we can begin restoring meaning to the names in these organizations and start to redefine the Black experience in America.

SEX OFFENDERS SHOULD BE SENT TO PRISON IN A PROM DRESS

SHALL WE DANCE?

Where's the village on education of children?

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice
Part 2 in the series

For Blacks growing up in the 1940s, '50s, '60s and '70s, academic excellence was the norm — not the exception. It was the norm, even though some of the classes—held 40 students or more. It was the norm, even though teachers were underpaid. It was the norm, even though schools were segregated for a portion of that time period. And it was the norm, even though they had antiquated facilities, used books and other shortages of resources. So what is the difference between Black children's education today and their education during the middle of the 20th century?

The difference was people in the village who realized that children are utterly dependent on an adult society to meet their most basic needs in order for those children to survive, thrive and grow into self sufficient adults, caring parents and competent workers. Children were and still are dependent upon adults who will help them grow into responsible citizens in a democracy.

People in the village must understand that youngsters need our help to get the education required to prepare them to compete in the world of work, to make sound decisions about when to become parents, to feel valued and valuable, and to believe they have a fair chance to succeed.

There are many influential adults in a child's life, but the most important ones for Black children are their parents. Parents during the earlier decades, whether they were educated or not, placed a much greater emphasis on schooling than many Black parents do today. Children knew their ABCs and knew how to count before they started kindergarten. Parents knew kids had to go to school; they knew homework had to be done before playtime.

A great number of Black parents today are not fulfilling their responsibilities to their children. They are more interested in being their kids' friends than they are in meeting their children's most basic needs regarding education. Many parents today would rather make sure children have the $150 tennis shoes, the diamond earrings or the designer clothes than to ensure that children can read, write and get a quality education.

Historically, Black parents believed that the only way for their children to succeed in life was for them to get an education. They believed this so strongly that they attended the parent and teachers conferences. They supported the teachers, made sure that the children got to school on time and made sure the students behaved once they got there.

For me personally, I knew that I couldn't bring a C into Blanche's house, because after she got through skinning me alive, she would go to school and have me held back a grade, like she did with one of my brothers.

While parents share the primary responsibility for ensuring the success of their children, they don't shoulder this burden alone. Other very important willing members of the village who unselfishly and untiringly share the burden are Black teachers and Black educators who are concerned about Black children

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getting a meaningful education, rather than just passing them through the system.

This brings me to the vital point that children today are subjected to "social passing," which is not beneficial to their academic growth and development. In the past, parents didn't allow their children to be passed if they couldn't do the work. At that time, it was just as common for a parent to have a student held back a grade, just as my mother did for my brother, as it was for the school to hold a student back.

Daisy Miller, a retired teacher, counselor, dean and assistant principal from the Clark County School District said, "Social passing is a large part of the problem with Black children today."

She went on to say that if school districts across the country put an end to social passing then they wouldn't have to worry about children failing at such an alarming rate. Why? If children knew