

INFUSED AFROCENTRIC EDUCATION: AS NECESSARY AS READIN', 'RITIN', & 'RITHMETIC- & REVOLUTION, TOO!

Are Philadelphia's black children stupid? Why is it that they consistently lag behind all other kids in school? How is it that while 85 percent of Asian, 75 percent of Caucasian, and 55 percent of Latino students are proficient or advanced in math, as determined by this past spring's Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) tests, only 53 percent of African-American students are? And in reading, what's the reason that number is 72 percent for Asians, 70 percent for Caucasians, but just 47 percent for African-Americans? Why is it even worse for black fourth-graders and eighth-graders with 68 percent of those fourth grade students scoring below basic levels of achievement in reading on the 2009 National Assessment of Education Progress test and 46 percent below the basic levels in math? And for the eighth-graders, why are 58 percent below in reading and 60 percent below in math? Also, why are six of the state's ten worst-scoring high schools on the PSSAs predominantly black in Philly? There is one of two explanations for all of this.

The first explanation could be that black youngsters are, in fact, stupid. That means they are genetically predisposed to be at the bottom. It means that the brains of their African ancestors- and therefore the brains of these students- are not as evolved as those of other ethnic groups. Or maybe, just maybe, there's another reason.

The second explanation could be that today's low test scores are the result of yesterday's racist broken promise of a quality education that was supposed to have been delivered first with the Brown v. Board of Education "separate but equal is unconstitutional" decision in 1954, then with the Brown II "all deliberate speed" vague decision in 1955, and then again with the Brown III "we *really* mean it this time" decision in 1978 that wasn't completely implemented until 1998. 1998! Not 1776 with the Declaration of Independence or 1789 with the U.S. Constitution or 1791 with the Bill of Rights or 1861 with the Civil War or 1865 with the Thirteenth Amendment or even 1964 with the Civil Rights Act. It was 1998. That was only 13 years ago. That's the explanation, goddammit! That, along with today's inequitable school funding and especially incomplete curricula, is precisely the reason for such poor academic performance by African-American children. Better stated, that is the educational disease inflicted upon black students. But there's a cure in Philadelphia. And it was discovered by the victims themselves.

On November 17, 1967, a mass movement for much-needed Afrocentric programs came together when approximately 5,000 black students peacefully marched to the School District headquarters to peacefully demand a complete education as well as (including but not limited to) the equitable appointment of more African-American board members, administrators, and teachers, and the renaming of schools to honor blacks who fought for civil and human rights instead of whites who enslaved blacks. There were 25 demands made by student representatives who had been trained to calmly and skillfully debate and negotiate and to do so peacefully. Then the police arrived. Then, as eye and ear witnesses

reported, Commissioner Frank Rizzo arrived and yelled “Get their black asses!” And then the peacefulness ended. Without any provocation whatsoever, the cops on foot and horseback began attacking, clubbing, beating, tear-gassing, and arresting defenseless and innocent children. But those courageous students didn’t give up. They understood that real change, meaning real revolution, is not a one-day march. It’s an ongoing and incremental process, one that requires the participants to be willing to remain actively involved for the long haul. That’s why they never gave up. That’s why they sought the help of Dr. Walter D. Palmer in the spring of 1967.

Dr. Palmer was the director of cardiopulmonary care at Children’s Hospital from 1957 to 1967 and is a Howard Law School graduate. He founded Black Men at Penn and also the Walter D. Palmer Leadership Learning Partners Charter School that focuses on student leadership, character development, and social justice. The students sought his help because he was known throughout Philadelphia and nationwide as the “premiere grassroots organizers in the 1960s” (and later in the 1970s as well). He created the culturally and politically powerful Black People’s University that helped set the African American agenda in this city from 1954-1984. And beginning in 1966, he was director of Grassroots Organizing for Model Cities. Because of Dr. Palmer’s solid reputation as an uncompromising strategist, the students from Gratz, Germantown, and elsewhere, along with a young unknown activist named David Richardson, requested his wise counsel. He gave it to them by speaking with them, not by lecturing to them. He asked what they wanted and needed from the school district, and he showed them how to get it. In short, he was the political and cultural brains behind the historic and well-planned November 17, 1967 protest, and he helped the students to articulate their demands- most of which the district agreed to as a result of impressively persuasive student arguments.

A key to Dr. Palmer’s strategy was those arguments- arguments that had to be based on solid and unimpeachable scholarly research, especially since the demand for a complete education, by necessity, had to be Afrocentric. In other words, it had to inspire these black children. It had to make them believe that they could master not only reading, writing, and arithmetic but also the sciences and the advanced mathematics and the advanced grammar.

That’s when he reached out to Dr. Edward W. Robinson Jr., the renown historian, professor, U.S. Senate-appointed first black member of the Federal Reserve, Pennsylvania governor-appointed Deputy Secretary of State, Philadelphia Mayor-appointed Assistant Managing Director, attorney, and- most pertinent- the author of the first Philadelphia curriculum for teachers of African history, called “The World of Africans and Afro Americans,” and the author who was commissioned by the school superintendent to write the first ever curriculum that infused Africanized and Europeanized history. In fact, it was Dr. Robinson who, in 1967, proved to superintendent Dr. Mark Shedd by documented scientific experimentation that was evaluated by the school board’s Department of Assessment and Accountability that, when low math-scoring black children were taught the beauty, grandeur, sophistication, and intellect of their African ancestry, their mathematical achievement went from an “average of Cs to high Bs.” Similar and even greater achievement could occur in reading and all other subjects as well. In order to improve and excel, those students needed to know that the first human on the planet was from the Nile Valley region of East Africa 200,000 years ago. They needed to know that geometry,

calculus, and algebra came out of Africa, They needed to know the truth, which is precisely what the doctors- I mean the students- ordered. This was the cure. And they inspired Dr. Palmer and Dr. Robinson to organize and compile it. But much of it, particularly the essential infusion, has been sitting stagnant in the labs for 44 years instead of being distributed in the schools, despite the fact that as recently as 2004, the superintendent requested and approved it for infusion into the official school curriculum.

In honor of the 44th anniversary of those enlightened black students' fight for complete education, a demonstration will be held on November 17 at 12:30 pm at the School District Building at 440 North Broad Street. It will be headed by today's students, along with Dr. Palmer and Dr. Robinson, to demand the immediate distribution of that proven cure. The 'ritin's still on the wall, next to the readin' and the 'rithmetic- and the revolution continues.