
coverer." When we forget that Imhotep of Ancient Egypt, the real father of medicine, and the architect of time as we know it, lived around 2300 B.C. (2,000 years before Hippocrates) and was worshipped by Romans as the Prince of Peace, we forget the scientific contributions of Africans. But this is not a trivia lesson; history is much more analytical, much more politicized, so I'll move on.

But the important point is this: without an acknowledgment of the influences of Africans, we tend to forget that Africans did not start in slavery. More importantly, we "forget when we could not" verbalize our discontent with the historical teachings of African existence. We forget the powerful psychological impact of seeing just three pages of history in American textbooks. Three pages which usually began..."Africa was a barren land, where savages roamed scantily clad, killing each other without remorse or authority structure." Three pages which include a huge description of the psychological and cultural benefits of slavery to the African or African American, then move on to discuss the aftermath of Reconstruction, the 1920s, the Civil Rights Movement and paint a picture of everything being fine by the 1970s. They forget the 1619 legal statutes in Virginia that legalized white servitude, the arrival of Africans to this world not as slaves but as indentured servants. We allow them to exclude the linguistic and psychological creation of the word "white" during the 17th century to slot for words like "Englishmen and/or Christians" as a response to the explicit humanity of words like

Blackamoors, Moors, Ethiopian, Negro. We forget when we could not be anything more than Nigger, Negro, Colored, Afro-American...we forget to remind them that these terms were manufactured by racist ideologies. And yes, we forget when we could not do the most important thing to the psychological development of a people...name ourselves or our children...to speak and spell the word "Revolution."

When we forget the injustices of slavery, we forget the slave codes preventing Africans from learning how to read or learning how to speak beyond grunts and sounds. When we forget when we could not read, we forget to read. We deny the power of "The Bluest Eye" (Toni Morrison), the insight of "The Souls of Black Folk" (W.E.B. DuBois), the powerful message in the pages of "The Mis-Education of the Negro" (Carter G. Woodson), the explosive analysis of living by the Constitution in "Three-Fifths of a Man" (Floyd McKissick, Sr.), the revolutionary dialogue in "A Time to Act" (Julian Bond) or "Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl" (Harriet Jacobs); the struggle against gender, race and color oppression in "The Color Purple" (Alice Walker) or "Message to the Black Man" (Elijah Muhammad). In fact, when we forget we could not read, we forget the names of the authors - we consume only John Grisham, John Steinbeck, Ernest Hemmingway, Thomas Jefferson, Gertrude Stein, Arthur Miller and Shakespeare. At worst, we consume only comic strips that tickle our stupid bone and bring us the bliss of ignorance to the plight of

your people.

But now my Brothers and Sisters you can read and we can speak and spell the word Revolution. It happens every time you decide to stand up for your right to existence. It happens every time you force UNC-CH to recognize the University as more than a mere vineyard in which minds are cultivated, but a place where voices are given their rightful place in spaces that historically have denied them entrance, presence and identity. My final question is simple: Are those who have forgotten to speak and spell ready to help construct a narrative of existence for Africans in the Diaspora?

*An earlier and much modified version of a speech entitled "Forgetting When We Could Not Do: Black Responsibility in the Next Century" was presented to the Craig Residence Hall Association, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, on February 27, 1997.

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