

# Experiences With Miseducation

Albert Johnson

The most important source of knowledge that anyone can receive in life is an education. There is no way to stress how valuable an education is. Without one, it is almost impossible to be truly successful. That is why miseducation has hurt black men. I, as a black man, have experienced miseducation in the public school system.

When I went to grade school, I always kept up good grades and hardly ever got into trouble. I was a shy kid with little self-confidence or pride. I had a lot of honor courses in junior high school, but in the 9th grade, I surrendered most of those because I felt I couldn't read well enough to keep up with the work.

I was never into reading books, because I felt you could watch the same junk on television. I just couldn't identify with novels I was assigned to read. The curriculum was composed of European literature and I found it difficult for me to concentrate on what I was reading. I had a hard time writing stories in my English classes because I couldn't think of anything relevant to me in the assigned readings.

My history classes were also very Eurocentric. The only black history that I knew was slavery and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I did learn that Africa was colonized by Europe, but it seemed that Europe was the most civilized continent in the world, and they came to other continents in order to spread civilization. Although I learned some things about civil rights leaders and black inventors, I still appeared lost because I had no real understanding of

how blacks were relevant to history.

I began to notice that some of my favorite artists like Boogie Down Productions and Public Enemy mention a lot of black history in their music. I was amazed yet ignorant of what they were rapping. For example, the Boogie Down Productions' song "You Must Learn" mentions how blacks were responsible for great inventions such as the walkie talkie and traffic lights. This left me thinking, "Really? They did?" Part of Public Enemy's song "Welcome to the Terrordome" mentions the shooting of Huey Newton, I began wandering, "Who was Huey Newton?" I wanted to relate to the things these rap artists were mentioning.

So, I figured that the only way to gain the knowledge was to start reading books. The first books that I started reading were on black history. Reading was never a hobby of mine, but that began to change when I discovered some history that I never knew could be possible. I became glued to reading books. I started reading everyday, in my spare time at school and I even read when I walked home from school. I discovered that I liked going to the library and reading good books.

Some of the black history that I discovered gave me a new feeling of pride and self confidence. I discovered:

- \* The shoes I wear are manufactured by a machine invented by a black man named Jan Matzeliger.

- \* The person who invented the blood bank system, Charles Drew, was black.

- \* One of the 5 people who first made it to the North Pole, Matthew Henson, was black.

I discovered that blacks could made great contributions to this country and but did not get credit for them.

I discovered that Malcolm X was a great leader. When I first started reading about him, I was blown away because I had never heard a black leader call white people "devils" and the "wolf". He was a very militant and effective revolutionary. He expressed black nationalism and self-defense which are ideas of which I had no knowledge.

As I continued to read more of and about Malcolm X, my thinking gradually began to change. My thoughts about whites, blacks, people, goals, government, politics, history, etc. went through a complete metamorphosis. I was developing a sense of pride, dignity, wisdom, identity, and understanding that I never knew could be found. My mentality became very strong and militant.

After reading about Malcolm X, I was inspired to read the literature and history of many great leaders like Nat Turner, Gabriel Prosser, Denmark Vesey, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Elijah Muhammad, Adam Clayton Powell, Angela Davis, Stokely Carmichael, H. Rap Brown, Eldridge Cleaver, Frederick Douglas, and the list goes on and on. And yes, I now know who Huey P. Newton was. He was Minister of Defense and co-founder of the Black Panther Party in 1966 along with Chairman Bobby G. Seale.

It's too bad that I couldn't learn about my culture and the conditions of blacks in the public school system. No history or English class ever taught me

A multicultural education is many things; it is not just the addition of Black, Women's and Gay Studies Departments on university campuses. Multicultural education is the ability to empathize in ways that the vanguard of multiculturalism, the politically correct, are not willing to empathize. (More about this in succeeding article) Multicultural education does not automatically become a fact simply because the classes exist that will teach the cultures of others. The ultimate aim of multiculturalism is to be able to incorporate the achievements and contributions of America's various groups into American history, art and literature courses.

Multiculturalism stresses the importance of becoming educated in a diverse, well-rounded perspective that emphasizes truth. Barbara Ehrenreich's education is surely as short-sighted and narrow as that of the "I-only-read-afrocentric-books" race man. Shelby Steele, a professor at San Jose State University and a controversial figure among the Black academia, laments,

"One of the saddest things I see is Black

## COVER STORY

any knowledge of myself. In a few ways, I feel like I've learned more wisdom in one year than I learned in 12 years at public institutions. Teachers are supposed to be our guides in learning, but I had to teach myself black history.

Textbooks never taught me enough about history either. For example, there was only one sentence in my U.S. history book about the Black Panthers. That makes me wonder. Are these books hiding and distorting history because it's too dangerous, or is it done to keep wisdom enslaved in the European power structure? I've always known that blacks can do anything they put their minds to, but if I didn't know that blacks in past history have established great power bases and have continued to express black nationalism, then my only goal today would be to assimilate into the white man's society.

It's been said, "If you don't know your past, then you don't know your future. Miseducation among blacks must stop if the conditions of black people are going to get better. Blacks must be taught a proper education, one that teaches them about themselves. The current school system isn't doing that, and it's leaving the black mind enslaved. If there is ever going to be pride and unity among blacks, then we need education not miseducation.

- Albert Johnson

students who say to me, "I only read Black writers." And what they really mean is they are reading people like Don L. Lee and Louis Farrakhan. I say; Have you ever read any Jean-Paul Sartre? Have you ever read any Ralph Ellison or Albert Murray or James Baldwin?....There's this sort of intellectual segregation that I think is absolutely a death knell for our future."

When students are finally fortunate enough to be taught the Middle Passage, one can only hope that it will not be the patronizing "Africans were wonderful people until the white man came along" variety. The history of European expansion and colonization of Africa must also include the fact that Africans were actively involved in the slave trade as well. Without these truths, the African experience will become as pathetic as the 'noble savage' theory that liberal whites have applied to the Native American experience.

Education continued on p. 17

### Education From Page 8

The aim of multicultural education is for history, literature, art and music to begin to reflect the various cultures and ethnic groups that populate this country and the rest of the world and for these topics to reflect the contributions the males and females of these groups have made to the enrichment of the United States and world as a whole.

Maybe the opposition has simply failed to take a look at the demographics of America and the rest of the globe. The world is not the domain of white heterosexual males. It never was their domain, but they surely treated it as such.

White, feminist scholar Barbara Ehrenreich has written about the extensive damage that this monocultural education has rendered:

*"American history, as it was taught to us, began with Columbus' "discovery" of an apparently unpeopled America, and moved on to the Pilgrims serving pumpkin pie to a handful of grateful red-skinned folks. College expanded our horizons with courses called Humanities...Graduate students wrote dissertations on what long-dead men though of Chaucer's verse or Shakespeare's drama; foreign languages meant French or German. If there had been high technology in China, kingdoms in black Africa or women anywhere, at any time, doing anything worth noticing, we did not know it, nor did anyone think to tell us."*

The fact is, many people in educational settings are led to believe that every idea, concept, political movement and other important functions of the world were carried out by white people alone. Women simply bred the men and blacks, once released from slavery, provided the entertainment. Beyond this, no one else existed and the existence of Blacks and women was simply an irrelevant footnote.