

It's on us to get by in a white man's world

By Kimberly Wilson
SPECIAL TO THE POST

For many people, "The Black Man's Guide to Working in a White Man's World" is going to be hard to read. This is not because it is a dry, scholarly tome, but because it will make quite a few readers squirm with discomfort.

The guide's author, E. LeMay Lathan, fits hard and speaks plainly. To those who come to this book looking for a mish-mash of theory and finger-pointing at whites, Lathan offers hard truth instead. It comes as a splash of cold water: to those readers who approach it with open minds, this book will be as refreshing as rain after a drought. Lathan is not an academic sitting in an Ivy League comfort zone. He is a black man who rose from a poor neighborhood in Mississippi to become a successful manager at a large Pacific Northwest company.

Instead of offering dry surveys, statistics and charts, Lathan begins his book by simply telling how — as a black man — he made his dreams come true. After a stint in the Navy, he found that no one

was beating down his door to hire him. Lacking a college degree, he also realized the world was not going to be his oyster. But, his own work ethic would not allow him to sit on a street corner and weep into a beer with the guys. He got a job as a cemetery security guard. He soon got second and third part-time jobs, and was earning a decent amount of money.

There was not enough. Lathan realized that he had to go back to school. In the guide, he repeatedly admonishes young black men to get themselves into an institution of higher learning. "Education," he writes, is "the secret of achieving the American dream." Lathan went to his local city college, and later to a technical school, to study mechanical drafting. This led to a career that has taken him and his family across the country and into a middle-class lifestyle.

To those who claim the white man keeps them from succeeding, Lathan says, "it is not the white man's fault, it is not the government's fault, it is our own fault... we must stop giving the impression that the blame lies with someone else. We must at some point break this

chain of thought." To those who claim they can't do better on their jobs because the white man won't let them, Lathan is equally stern. He discusses the concept of "getting over." At his early jobs, he was often "mentored" by blacks who taught him the best places to goof off, how to get by doing the least amount of work, and how — if things got tough — to use the race card to get himself out of trouble. Lathan ignored this advice and tells his readers to do the same.

There was a price for Lathan's success. As he moved up the ranks, passing blacks who had been on the job for years in the same position, he had to face resentment and backbiting. He was called a sellout and the old stand by, Uncle Tom. Former friends back in his neighborhood criticized him for going to work every day instead of "keeping it real" on the street corners with them. Lathan advises his readers that, when faced with this kind of peer pressure, they should think how good they feel as they pass "the brothers on the corner to go to the bank and all they are capable of doing is standing and watching and

making comments."

Lathan is also angry. He wastes no words in describing his disgust and sorrow for the terrible situation the black community finds itself in today. The fact that black kids are failing in school, joining gangs, killing one another and getting pregnant at alarming levels has him angry. When he speaks of the black criminals who are terrorizing their own neighborhoods and the black apologists who seem to condone their behavior with high-sounding psychobabble, the indignation he feels seems to rise from the page. But Lathan does not end his book on a note of despair. Black America's problems, he says, cannot and should not be solved by whites, even sympathetic whites of good will.

Finally, Lathan leaves the reader with a challenge. Go home, brother, get out of the gangster-lane and educate yourself. Get a job with a future and take care of your own.

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Bernice P. Jackson



People of color and disabilities

When Ralph Ellison's book, "The Invisible Man," was published some 50 or so years ago, it created an uproar because it pointed to the fact that millions of African Americans were all but invisible to the larger society. A half a century later there is an invisible group of people in our society, including in communities of color, but there is no hard-hitting novel to tell their story. The invisible people are those with disabilities.

Eight years ago the Americans with Disabilities Act was signed and went into effect, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of disability. And while it has made a significant difference in the lives of many people, the 54 million Americans with disabilities still face all kinds of discrimination.

A few weeks ago I was speaking in California and I told the story of a federal judge whose mother had taught him an important lesson as a child growing up in the South. When his mother saw busses passing by an elderly black woman at the bus stop in front of their house, his mother went and stood with the black woman so that the bus would stop. A few days ago, I received a note from a woman in a wheelchair who was attending that meeting and who shared her own similar experiences today. Often she has to get a friend or colleague to stand with her at the bus stop to ensure that the bus will stop for her. It's illegal, but it still happens.

Not surprisingly, that discrimination against people of color is evident in the job market. About half of working age Americans with disabilities are employed and only one fourth with severe disabilities hold a job. People of color with disabilities face double or triple jeopardy when it comes to employment. Almost three-fourths of African Americans and more than half of Hispanics with disabilities are unemployed. The tragedy is that most disabled people are capable of working.

In addition, people of color with disabilities are less likely to receive rehabilitation services and educational opportunities are less available and affordable to them. Inadequate transportation and housing for people with disabilities in disadvantaged communities is limited at best. There are fewer mentors and role models for people of color with disabilities and mainstream job coaching, on-the-job training and internships are less frequently available to them. Finally, some of the organizations designing programs for the employment of persons with disabilities do not clearly understand the cultural differences in communities of color and thus, have not done the best job in serving people of color.

We can make people with disabilities visible in our workplaces, in our educational institutions, in our churches and in our communities. We can advocate for them, we can hire them, we can make sure they are represented at our national meetings, our job fairs, our training programs.

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Negroes: Major obstacles to black progress

By Gyasi Foluke
SPECIAL TO THE POST

We have heard so much about white racism, "racial progress" and/or the lack thereof that we often fail to take a closer look at another major obstacle to black progress, both locally and nationwide. And this major obstacle is perhaps best defined with one word — negroes — a distinctly pejorative term in contrast to black or African American.

Over 30 years ago, as I distinctly recall, we were reminded by author Lerone Bennett Jr. that every serious social movement for change or "revolution is a two-fold revolution — a revolution against the enemy without and a revolution against the enemy within." And while we must continue to combat our white racist enemies "without," we would make a serious mistake if we continue to ignore, fail to acknowledge or to confront our ubiquitous enemies within — negroes.

As specific, recent case in point, let us recall that the superintendent of Charlotte-Mecklenburg schools, Eric Smith, consulted with several negroes before he removed Kenneth Simmons, an outstanding black principal, from West Charlotte High School last year. And these negroes — as well as some others who remained silent — "sold out" their black community on this important incident. Moreover, let us be reminded that as we seek to better unify our African American community, we must concede that it is highly improbable, if not impossible, to unite blacks and negroes behind our Community Agenda — copies of which are available — and/or into a more viable community organizational structure.

Important question: How do we define negroes, in

contrast to blacks or other African Americans? As narrated over 30 years ago by author-activist H. Rap Brown, in "Die Nigger Die," negroes, being generally institutionalized or working for whites are forever promoting themselves individually, to the exclusion of the welfare of the African American community. Therefore, they "give their allegiance to white cultural, political, social, and economic to undesirable acculturation." Moreover and generally, they live in fear of whites, for they are afraid that if they antagonize whites, "they would lose their position as negroes — the white-appointed overseers of blacks. Thus, negroes have always tried to aid and impress whites by eliminating blackness, for they know that whites prefer institutionalized negroes."

Additionally, Brown observed, negroes "see poor and uninstitutionalized blacks as niggers. They find it necessary to prove to whites that they are not niggers, failing to realize that whites generally see black people as niggers, no matter how rich or how poor... it is negroes who strain to send their children to white schools so that the nigger in them may be killed and they may thereby become better institutionalized... The negro, being unable to recognize who is the true enemy, becomes an enemy of blacks. Negroes prefer 'living' to being free." For negroes are often rewarded and/or given awards by the system that they serve so faithfully.

Ironically and most tragically, negroes generally are devoid of positive ethnic identity or self-worth. For apparently, they perceive that they have no value — unless and until they have been validated by whites. Indeed, if whites sponsor any communal endeavor, negroes will attend — in great numbers — symbolically "falling over each other" for seats at the "master's table." However, with similar events sponsored by blacks, negroes will be conspicuous by their absence — perhaps re-affirming their fear of whites,

their devaluation of self or Blacks generally, their subconscious self-hate and/or their desire to "be white, in contrast to "acting white."

Conversely, blacks, who are more communal in their orientation, give their primary allegiance to the African American community. They have a positive sense of spiritual or ethnic identity, with a profound sense of pride in their African and African American heritage of greatness and struggle. Moreover, they have no desire to culturally assimilate in White America. Therefore, non-institutionalized blacks are more "difficult to control" by white "masters" or plutocratic rulers of the system. And blacks, accordingly, are often ignored, personally maligned, socio-politically ostracized, subjected to racial discrimination, victimized by character assassination and/or otherwise treated as pariahs since they may "rock the boat" of white racism-privilege-hegemony in America.

Clearly, the time has come — indeed, it is far past due — for Afrocentric blacks to send an important message to negroes in our community; that is, those of us who are spiritually committed to promoting human rights and dignity in this community, should no longer remain silent, irrespective of consequences, about the traitorous behavior of our enemies within — negroes. With serious contemplation and without malice, we should expose them publicly when their actions are perceived to be detrimental to the progress and wholistic health of our black community. Of course, we should always extend our communal love to them, hoping that they will repent or "cease and desist" in selling us and themselves — their souls — to the "devil" of individualism or materialism. Subsequently, they may join with us in the black liberation struggle, building the Kingdom of God, "on earth, as it is in heaven."

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Needle exchange: idea whose time shouldn't come

By Abdul Alim Muhammad MD
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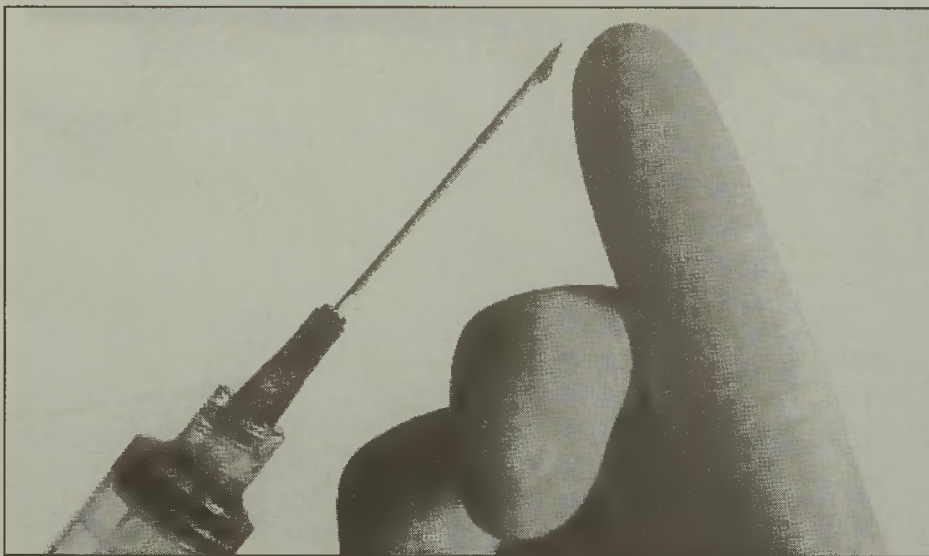
I've always said that needle exchange, as a means of preventing the spread of AIDS among intravenous drug users was, a bad idea whose time has apparently come.

That is because the pressure to introduce such programs all over the United States seemed to be irresistible. Otherwise rational people seemed to be fascinated with such an apparently easy way to stop the spread of AIDS.

Often when asked to speak about AIDS and the progress or the lack thereof in winning the war against the disease, I would often put clean needle exchange down with condoms and safe sex pamphlets. I was attempting to show how pathetic the efforts are to date of the U.S. government and its health agencies, in addressing the AIDS epidemic. Of course, AIDS is at its maximum in black communities across America.

And now the needle exchange program has been killed by President Clinton. Apparently President Clinton was originally persuaded that needle exchange programs work to decrease the spread of AIDS among intravenous drug users but was cautioned by his Drug Czar, Gen. Barry McCaffrey that allowing it would send the wrong signal to our children about the use of drugs.

Even Surgeon General David Satcher understood quite well that America is facing two separate epidemics, one HIV/AIDS and the other drug use. Obviously, measures that might work in one area but exacerbate a



problem in another are not acceptable options.

After Clinton's announcement, no less a figure than the non-voting Congressional Delegate from the District of Columbia, Eleanor Holmes Norton immediately declared McCaffrey her enemy. In a fierce statement voicing her disapproval of the president's decision under the influence of McCaffrey, she is quoted as saying that Clinton made a new enemy, and started a new war with blacks who intended to fight back. She and other members of the Congressional Black Caucus seem to be convinced that needle exchange programs work and would benefit the black community if only the President could stand-up to people like his Drug Czar.

Critics of the president's decision not to fund the programs often cite the scientific evidence

that proves that such programs actually work. They make it seem that all of the evidence is in favor of such programs. Strangely though, the actual contents of these studies never seem to make it to the pages of newspapers or end up being quoted on TV and radio reports.

Being a scientific skeptic by nature I began to do a little research. It turns out that the biggest and the oldest needle exchange program in the world is in Vancouver,

Canada. This program began in 1988 and was at the vanguard of needle exchange programs. In Vancouver each year officials pass out an estimated 2 million clean needles to drug-users. In fact, over the years, 78 percent of IV-Drug users cite the Vancouver needle exchange program as the primary source of needles for their chronic drug-abuse. In a

study entitled, "Needle Exchange Is Not Enough: Lessons from the Vancouver Injecting Drug Use Study," 1,006 Intravenous Drug Users (IDUs) were enrolled through street outreach in the community. Individuals who were enrolled in this study had to be IV drug users who had injected drugs within the last month. There was an HIV infection rate of 23 percent and an 88 percent infection rate for Hepatitis C virus. A full 40 percent of the enrollees in the needle exchange program study indicated that they shared needles. Sharing occurred both ways (i.e., the recipients of clean needles allowed others to use their needles whether they were HIV positive or not and they also used needles that they obtained from other IV drug users). This 23 percent HIV infection rate compares to a two percent infection rate in

the same geographic area 10 years ago. So much for the myth that clean needle exchange programs prevent the increase in AIDS infection.

The study also uncovered several factors that were considered to be predictors of a high probability of HIV infection. Among these were, low education, unstable housing, participation in commercial sex, borrowing needles, being an established IV drug user, injecting drugs in the company of others and (get this) participation in the needle exchange program itself!

The study's conclusion reached by the authors was that, despite having the largest needle exchange program in North America, Vancouver has been experiencing an ongoing HIV epidemic.

So, President Clinton should get some credit for doing the right thing for the wrong reasons. And Gen. McCaffrey's position is also somewhat refreshing. He does not allow the AIDS hype to interfere with his trained military judgment. He is quite right when he says drug policy is more than a function of the narrowest possible analytical view of an event and that drug policy has ramifications that are not only tactical, but operational and strategic. By this he means that to introduce clean needles as a part of an AIDS prevention initiative, has diverse ramifications for drug policy. It is one more step in the direction of drug legalization.

Needle exchange is a bad idea whose time should never come and it needs to be consigned to the dust-bins of history.

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