

What's in a name? Plenty for African descendants

It may have been just a subconscious slip or perhaps a deliberate effort to be politically correct. Either way, while covering the riots in France, CNN reporter Carol Lin mis-spoke when she referred to two black teenagers there as "African Americans."



ANGELA
LINDSAY

A more correct reference would have been to call them black Frenchmen or maybe even French-Tunisians, since they were French citizens of Tunisian origin. Lin may not have managed to get her euphemisms right, but she did spark discussions about the apparently still debatable issue over how people of black African ancestry in America are nominally defined. Negroid. Negro. Colored. Black Afro-American. All of these terms have been used to describe blacks in America.

An acquaintance, who is black, suggested that I consistently use either the term "African American" or "black" throughout my editorials. He stated that people still attach very specific definitions to each term and may be offended by their interchange. Interestingly, a Caucasian man expressed similar sentiments to me, pointing out that white people do not consistently refer to themselves as, for example, Irish-American. The difference with black people, however, may lie in the significance labels have played in our collective history.

Many black people associate very distinct experiences with certain terms such as 'Negro' and 'Colored'. Whereas these monikers were once used by both blacks and whites, hearing them these days would cause most black people to cringe. These terms have fallen out of favor for various reasons, not the least of which being their association to the Jim Crow era and the close relation of the term 'Negro', in particular, to the derogatory term "nigger." Some social commentators say that the creation of a new moniker functions like a defense mechanism, serves as a source of racial pride, and even acts as an objection of white American society.

Currently, the term African American is the most widely used moniker to describe black Americans. Proponents of the term say it causes them to feel closer to Africa and what it symbolizes for black heritage and history. It also designates a place to which we can relate as a people. Some believed that it increased the status of black Americans because of its parallels with terms for other ethnic groups like "Asian Americans." And for some, such importance is placed on it that they are even offended by the hyphenation of the phrase.

Still, the term is not without its dissenters. Opponents of the term "African American" often view it as pretentious and overly politically correct. They deem it inappropriate as many blacks have never been to Africa, have no relatives there, and are too far removed from the country itself. Some believe that the widespread acceptance of the term by many whites is due to a desire to see blacks like other ethnic groups who came to the United States by choice and to ignore the implications of slavery and the Middle Passage.

And there are even those native Africans who have moved to the U.S. in 20th or 21st century and wish to use them term exclusively to separate themselves from those black Americans who are descendants of slaves. Then, of course, there is the common argument regarding inequity of terminology because "African American" technically includes non-blacks who were actually born in Africa. A popular example includes U.S. Sen. John Kerry's wife Teresa, a white who was born in South Africa. However, she would likely be greeted with raised eyebrows if she were to refer to herself as such.

Along those same lines, critics of the term "black" are quick to point out that it is too general since people of other ethnicities, like champion golfer Vijay Singh, could be considered "black" whereas African American is more specific. They point out that it also ignores the key concept of being an American citizen. Those in favor of "black" point out that the term is more universal, represents an entire Diaspora of who we are, and links us to something identifiable beyond just one continent.

The touchy-feely topic of race relations causes a lot of tip-toeing around certain subjects to the point that it leads to incidences such as Lin's mistake. It is the inevitable result of our society's constant struggle to find less ways to offend people. I can remember a time when the "race" section of a standardized test or application basically included white, black or other. Now the section reads like an ethnic dictionary of our ever diverse society.

Blackness clearly encompasses more than just the stringing together of a bunch of letters. As a friend suggested, we may be better served concentrating on more important titles such as fathers, mothers, and educators. And even if more inventive terms do evolve to identify black people, an individual's truest sense of identity should develop from the inside out.

ANGELA LINDSAY is a Charlotte attorney. E-mail her at lindsay-law00@yahoo.com.

A fix for what ails public schools

"Those who do not treat you right cannot be expected to teach you right"—a profound insight by the late Honorable Elijah Muhammad that is distinctly relevant to the recent rejection of the school bond package by Mecklenburg County voters. For bonds, even if approved based upon demonstrated needs, would provide no panacea for major problems of African Americans, both within and beyond Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools.



GYASI
FOLUKE

Tragically, the essence of our problems far transcends and embraces proposals for new school construction or renovations, while involving more critical issues: (1) A Euro-centric curriculum-what is being taught or not being taught and by whom, especially about our ancient black heritage-culture; (2) Grossly disproportionate white teachers, often with bias perspectives of Blacks and with little or no knowledge of our rich Black history or underlying causes of present black socioeconomic conditions; (3) Faulty student "tracking" or mal-assignment to dead-end academic courses; (4) Large gaps in test scores with an overly narrow focus on "training"—reading, writing, arithmetic—in contrast to education as wholistic development that provides students with more positive self-concepts or identities, both spiritual and ethnic; (5) The failure to create new educational strategies, including African-centered Supplemental Centers or magnet schools to address major damages historically inflicted upon black parents and students; (6) Grossly disproportionate punishment, suspension, retention and drop-out rates; and (7) The potential misuse of Ritalin (drugs) on students, etc., ad nauseam.

In essence and generally, our problems include the historic-continuing phenomenon of racial oppression-suppression, locally and nationally, involving stolen black wealth-resources, disproportionate poverty, and/or the relative paucity of more authentic "community." And while there is *much good*, many altruistic people and perhaps some "progress" in ethnic relations in Charlotte-Mecklenburg, a plantation mentality permeates far too much of this area, across ethnic lines. Therefore, we exist in an area characterized by "dysfunctional civility," where racial problems are ignored or covered up in lieu of confronting them honestly, based upon historic-present facts. And this reality is exacerbated by a multi-million dollar CMS "public relations" budget, too often a pseudonym for official propaganda. Moreover, Dr. Frances Haithcock, interim superintendent, openly has boasted that "we have a great school system." However and conversely, board member Larry Gauvreau has perceived CMS, based upon recent national test score ratings, as "queen of the pigs," with truth somewhere in between such extreme descriptions, both allegedly depicting CMS performance and/or official behavior.

Significantly, according to Dr. Phil McGraw (of television fame), "The best predictor of present or future behavior is past behavior." Therefore, if school bonds were approved, we could expect no significant change in the status of blacks. For clearly, we have "observed" already nearly 400 years of "past behavior" by the collective majority that controls America and, obviously, "our" public school system, including: Nearly 250 years of chattel slavery where it was a crime to teach blacks to read and write; about 100 years of racially segregated, allegedly "separate but equal," but grossly unequal "education" for blacks, as reflected in palpably standard school buildings, "hand-me-down" textbooks, unequal pay for black and white teachers, etc., "lynching and other forms of 'mentacide'—genocide not included." And finally, we have witnessed about 50 years of legally mandated school desegregation that extended the racial inequality of the segregation era, having evolved today into a "new" system of racial "re-segregation."

Tragically, with this long ugly record, there are some blacks who believe-falsely, that majority controlled public schools will provide a genuine education for our students. Rhetorical questions: Would Jews permit their children to be "educated" today by Nazi Germans whose ancestors allegedly killed 6 million of them. And since Europeans and Euro-Americans have killed a "guesstimated" 300 millions blacks, as documented in "The Real-Holocaust" (Foluke, 1995), then why are we-blacks permitting our historic-present oppressors-suppressors to mis-educate ("brainwash") or to destroy our young black minds, including "academic genocide," as noted recently by Superior Court Judge Howard Manning. For "he who controls the mind, controls the behind," a basic metaphysical truism that underlies much of our despicable black condition today—one that has been described pejoratively as a "moral sewer," apparently from a psychopathic racist-idiotic perspective. (Dr. Bobby Wright, "The Psychopathic Racial Personality," 1985)

Clearly, we should confront, honestly, our *major* challenge of gross mis-education. For all students need an authentic education, while black students have a critical need for an African-centered and a more authentic "multicultural" education to promote truth, while addressing "Lies My Teacher Told Me" (Loewen, 1995) and related scholarly documented low self-esteem among blacks since desegregation began legally in 1954. Therefore, we—blacks—must become *much* more serious about creating independent schools, study groups, after-school ("freedom schools") and weekend programs within our churches and community organizations or agencies, following the example of our "free" black ancestors during the antebellum era—a system later imitated successfully by Jewish Americans.

GYASI A. FOLUKE, MA, DD, is an author, lecturer, consultant and part-time CEO of The Kushite Institute for Wholistic Development.

The right blend of success for black business

"The coffee with a classic taste" is the slogan that always follows the Farley's name, and I can personally attest to the truth of that statement.

Do you know about this privately-owned black company in Seattle? Have you tasted its fine coffees? Are you aware of Farley's commitment to and involvement in economic empowerment and community development? Did you know that Farley's demonstrates its corporate citizenship by giving back to schools, youth programs, and other worthwhile causes? Well, if you don't know about Farley's Coffee Inc., just sit back and read this, and enjoy a refreshing insight on one of this country's most progressive businesses.

Creative, innovative, altruistic, conscientious, and conscious. All of those words describe the owners and operators of Farley's Coffee. Since first speaking to company President, Ricky Fyles, I have been impressed with his warmth, his sincerity, and his follow through. Not only is he an astute businessman, he is genuinely concerned about Farley's social impact on others. In demonstration of that, Farley's has implemented a brand new "give back" strategy with its new "Hip Hop Blend," which was exclusively designed and is marketed to help Historically Black Colleges and Universities and underprivileged students. Fyles states, "We will direct a portion of the proceeds from each sale of our Hip Hop Coffee Blend to [HBCUs]."

Chairman and CEO Raymond Wilford said, "With increasing demands to help sustain education, it is important to take the time to support our communities within one's capacity to give." He went on to emphasize, "We are missing economic opportunities by not investing our dollars within our own communities... we have a heart and a responsibility to our communities."

Those two statements alone reeled me in like a fish on a hook, along with the great taste of "the coffee with the classic taste." I immediately ordered a couple of pounds and have been drinking Farley's fine gourmet coffee for several weeks now. There are many blends and varieties from which to choose, and you can read all about Farley's, and order your special selection, by going to farleyscoffeeinc.com, or call 1-206-824-7004.

Farley's has a special partner too. Familiar to all who follow pro basketball, (unless you're my age and knew him during his days at Providence) NBA legend, Lenny Wilkens, has joined Farley's Coffee Inc. "Something has to be done to improve the future of society and create positive opportunities for our youth. It begins one person at a time. We need to support each other," stated an exuberant Wilkens.

What a team! Farley's, with an annual minimum blending, roasting, and delivery capacity of 10 million pounds, with the infrastructure capacity to deliver 25 million pounds, finds itself on the cusp of greatness. We can all benefit from its continued growth. Thus, it's up to us to support this and other companies owned by conscious brothers and sisters if we are serious about doing more for ourselves and building—and leaving—an economic foundation for our children.

Ricky Fyles laments on why a black owned coffee company does not get the level of support from black people commensurate to our overall consumption of coffee. Of course, he is not asking that only black folks support the company, Farley's Coffee Inc. is not a charity case; it sells its coffees to all consumers. However, as I have seen over the years and many of my readers know, our tendency is to opt for the products and services of others, despite how great our goods and services may be. Thus, while Farley's wants your business, it's not simply because it's black owned; Farley's desires your business because it delivers an excellent product—and because it wants to do as much as it can to help our youth.

Here's the bottom line. We must redirect our coffee dollars to Farley's. There are many ways to boost sales for this black company and allow it to do more for our youth and for other worthy causes and institutions. Farley's is a glowing example of doing good and doing well at the same time. Support Farley's Coffee Inc., "The coffee with a classic taste," one delicious sip at a time.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, an adjunct professor at the University of Cincinnati's African American Studies department, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald newspaper and founder of the Greater Cincinnati African American Chamber of Commerce.



ADA FISHER
M.D.

