

AN African-American

Perspective

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Kids Worked Hard for CAPPAs Showcase 2007

If you live in Williamsport you can't miss the advertising for CAPPAs third annual talent showcase. Large billboards and posters alert everyone to this year's showcase that will be performed for the first time at the beautiful Community Arts Center on June 9th.

Loni Gamble, Executive Director of Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action, says the show gets better every year. Over 180 children will participate. Some of the kids will travel from as faraway as Chester, Pennsylvania. "We have 30 fifth graders from Muncy and 24 kids from Chester participating," he said.

This years' keynote speaker will be Sonya Toler, executive director of the Governor's Commission on African-American Affairs.

The showcase highlights the talents of Williamsport area youth. The program's purpose is to instill a commitment to excellence, to build confidence and to encourage scholastic achievement. The children started working on their acts in October last year. They auditioned then signed up to develop their skills by attending practice sessions every Saturday. Regardless of the weather, children who were once characterized as un-motivated voluntarily attended the many practice sessions at Cochran School. Tutoring workshops provided by students from nearby colleges were available to help the kids with their homework.

The showcase will be broadcast to an audience of 59,000 customers of the local Comcast Cable Network. The showcase is due to air the following Friday, Saturday and Sunday evenings.

Admission is FREE! Doors open at 5pm and the showcase will begin at 6pm. A special reception for sponsors will be held in the Center's Capital Lounge at 5pm.

Contact the CAPPAs office at 326-7700.



Here's a few of the 5,000 posters in store windows sprinkled around the city of Williamsport to advertise the "Knowledge is POWER" CAPPAs Showcase for 2007. Several billboards were also used. The billboard in the upper left photo is located at Hepburn and Park Avenues. The posters and billboards were designed by RCJamesDesign.

PHOTO CREDIT: Richard C. James

CAPPAs Basketball Season gets underway.

The CAPPAs Youth Basketball League Orientation will be held on Saturday, June 16, 2007 at The Campbell Street Community Center, 600 Campbell Street.

TIMES:	Division I	Ages 7 – 9 year olds	10:00 AM
	Division II	Ages 10 – 12 year olds	Noon
	Division III	Ages 13 – 15 year olds	Noon

BE ON TIME!

Who's to blame for our schools failing our kids?

My rudimentary survey of the American Educational landscape has revealed that our school systems need to be declared as “disaster areas”. From coast to coast schools are failing to educate a significant number of our children. And for black kids the situation is much worse, they consistently lag behind their white counterparts.

President Bush’s “No Child Left Behind” initiative was a good plan – on paper. It demanded accountability from school districts and encouraged the establishment of national standards. But, the implementation of the Federal act has had mixed results. The American Educational System (K through 12), in my opinion, gets an F.

Who’s to blame? At first glance it is easy to say that some kids are un-educable. Black kids, in particular, seem to be just plain stupid and white kids seem to be inherently superior. (That is, if you believe the statistical data.)

Further analysis points an accusing finger at school administrators and teachers. It is easy to blame the problem on indifferent, inadequate teachers that seem bent on producing another generation of “more welfare recipients”. Large metropolitan school districts have decades-long history of churning out illiterate, under-achievers that are prone to illegal drug use, teenaged pregnancies, criminal behavior and violence. The problem must be the teachers, right?

No, not exactly. If you dig further into the data compiled year after year, you will find that the problem could be the parents. Some parents just don’t give a damn about their kids. They only provide



CHILD IS A MODEL. IMAGE SUPPLIED BY A STOCK PHOTO AGENCY.

Little Johnny Black probably can't read this newsletter. That's a good thing. If he could read it he would be depressed and angry. Studies show black students (especially black boys) are failing to meet basic academic standards at an enormous rate across the nation. In an ever-growing technologically dependent world, little Johnny Black's prospects to get a decent paying job is nil. He will become a low wage "slave" in the 21st Century.

minimal support to avoid being arrested for neglect. Some parents don’t have a clue about their child’s daily activities. Some never attend parent-teacher meetings. Clearly, it is the parents who have caused this problem. Right?

Well, there is another group that we need to look at, the children. Some kids just don’t want to learn. They are disruptive in class. They act out. They defy authority figures and disobey rules. Many black kids think that being studious and well behaved is “acting white”. Some black kids become turned-off to the whole school experience and opt for the oppositional culture of the streets.

The Educational System in the United States is in critical condition and needs emergency life support. Some political observers argue that much needed monies to fund school programs is being siphoned off to fight the war in Iraq (at the tune of nearly 2 billion dollars a

week). So the feds also have a part to play in this mess.

The situation looks hopeless. The defeatist attitude is so well entrenched that everyone has ignored the looming issues of an America that is slipping in its position as a world leader of academic excellence. The future is bleak.

So here’s the deal, all public school systems are rated. Children are tested (in reading and math) and categorized into four groups; advanced, proficient, basic and below basic. If the educational system worked properly most kids would score in the advanced and proficient levels. But sadly, the opposite is true. Far too many kids are rated in the basic and below basic levels. (Black children start slightly behind white children when they enter the school system and fall further behind each year.)

But there are a few bright spots on the

Who's to blame for our schools failing our kids? continued

horizon, like the incredible Mrs. Marva Collins and her school, Westside Prep. She has received numerous awards and was featured on the TV show 60 minutes (twice!). A TV movie was made starring Cicely Tyson as Marva Collins. Here's what one website says about Mrs. Collins:

"Mrs. Collins has been called a "miracle worker" and "superteacher", but what she professes to be is an old fashioned teacher who doesn't go in for gimmicks in the classroom. Her educational philosophy is simply hard work, patience and concern for each child.

Marva Collins grew up in Atmore, Alabama at a time when segregation was the rule. Black children were not permitted to use the public library, and her schools had few books. After graduating from Clark College in Atlanta, Georgia, she taught school in Alabama for two years. She moved to Chicago and, subsequently, taught in Chicago's public school system for fourteen years.

Her experiences in that system, coupled with her dissatisfaction with the quality of education that her two youngest children were receiving in prestigious private schools, led to her decision to open her own school on the second floor of her home.

Thus, Westside Preparatory School was

founded in 1975 in Garfield Park, a Chicago inner-city area. During the first year Marva took in learning disabled, problem children and even one child labeled borderline retarded. *At the end of the first year every child scored at least five grades higher proving that the previous labels placed on these children were misguided."*

Mrs. Collins is a myth buster. She destroys the stereotype that black kids are academically inferior. She has proven that her methodology works. Her so-called "disadvantaged" kids go on to graduate from colleges and universities.

Mrs. Collins' phenomenal success has created a whole host of extracurricular organizations that think outside the box. Another group from Chicago is the Black Star project. Its founder, Philip Jackson said in a recent article,

"While the achievement gap is a difficult problem to solve, it is solvable. The key to fixing the problem is ensuring that Black parents are active, invested and involved in the educational lives of their children. Next, Black children must be re-inspired and motivated to do well in school. Many Black students have simply turned away from education. Additionally, the funding, school resources, class size, teacher quality and other factors needed to educate Black children must be equal to that of other

children. The parent-teacher connection that is directly related to improved student performance and high achievement must be strengthened. In addition, the Black community must develop and maintain high academic standards for all Black children--starting at birth."

Of course, there is Williamsport's own Community Alliance for Progressive Positive Action (CAPPA) that has arisen to meet the challenge. Loni Gamble, Bruce White, Eileen Harley and a team of volunteers, coaches and tutors have been chipping away at the problem locally. The children have responded positively to their innovative programs.

I expect to get a lot of flack on this article. I confess that there is much I don't know about our school system. I am sure that I have oversimplified the problem. But I am willing to promote meaningful dialogue on the subject. So write me, e-mail me or talk to me about the problem - and how to solve it.

The failure of black children to keep up in the global race of education, jobs and economic prosperity will result in a permanent caste system of the underprivileged based on race. A lack of education will mean a new form of slavery in the 21st Century.

The responsibility to improve the American educational system belongs to all of us.

Editor's note: Hello. My name is Richard C. James, graphic designer and artist. I decided to put my skills to work and contribute to the civic conversation in the Williamsport community. I wanted to offer a clear voice on the issues confronting Williamsport - from a black person's perspective.

This newsletter is aimed at the black community

but everyone is invited to engage in the dialogue. This newsletter is the fourth in a series.

Due to space considerations the above essay has been truncated. (I shortened it.) However, you can view the full text and the linked references to the information on my website. (Visit www.rcjamesdesign.net/African-American/index.html) So far, I've gotten posi-

tive feedback from politicians, church leaders, and community activists and of course my friends and family.

This publication is written at a 12th grade level. Most publications are written at an 8th grade level. I am a strong advocate for education. We need to reverse the "dumbing-down of America" syndrome. Keep a dictionary handy. I do.



June Doings!

Don't forget the **CAPPA showcase** on **June 9th** at the **Community Arts Center**. Admission is **FREE!** Support our kids!

Juneteenth Celebration - Music by Burning Bush; Guest Speaker, Dr. Mitch Kachun, co-edited novel by Julia C. Collins. Mrs. Collins was first black female novelist that lived in Williamsport in 1865. Many other attractions for young and the not-so-young! **June 23** in **Brandon Park**. (Rain date, **June 24**)

Visit our website for more information.

HairQuarters Grand Re-Opening

Fun, food and music marked the Grand Re-opening of the **HairQuarters Barbershop** at 1214 w. 4th St., Williamsport on May 19th. Previously the barbershop was located in the Weightman bldg. Luqman Oliver is proud of his new place. "We're a family oriented business. Parents can feel safe leaving their kids here." he said.

The shop has five barbers available. Luqman attributes his success



to his wife and partner, La-Don Oliver. The shop sits in a little alcove just left of the General Dollar store. Call **Luqman** at **323-4746** for more information.

Support Black Businesses!

A Note of Passing:

It was a sad Memorial Day weekend for much of Williamsport.

Charles V. Daniels, Jr. passed away at Geisinger Medical Center in Danville on Tuesday May 22, 2007, one day short of his 22nd birthday. CJ, as he was affectionately known, had been in a coma since his motorcycle accident in Loyalsock on January 3, 2007.

CJ's father, Charles Daniels, Sr., is the pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church. The church's congregation and the community

at-large held prayer vigils for the young man for nearly five months. Initial reports of his condition were promising. Hopes were high that CJ would make a complete recovery. Churches as far away as Philadelphia and Texas provided overwhelming support to the family.

The funeral was held at the church on Saturday, May 29th. Our condolences goes out to the Daniels family and the entire congregation of Ebenezer Baptist Church. Amen.

ATTENTION!

African-American Perspective is looking for volunteers. We need writers, artists, poets, etc., anyone who wants to make a positive difference in our community. No one will be excluded, but we are interested in engaging and showcasing the talents of African-American youth.

Write a brief description of yourself with contact information and send it to:

RCJamesDesign/African-American Perspective
P.O. Box 1181, Williamsport, Pa. 17703

Congratulations Kyla Ortiz
and all of the 2007 graduating class of
Williamsport Area High School!