

# AN African-American Perspective

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## To All the Children of Williamsport: Happy 2008!



Thanks to "Miss Melodie" and the staff, the volunteers and the Board Members of The Center.

# From 27 years ago: Black kids don't get a fair chance.

Some things never change... and some things do. Here's my first news article from The Mount Airy Express written in 1981.

## **Official says black kids don't get a fair chance. Pilot project would combat old myths**

At the September meeting of the Ogontz Triangle Association, Dr. Edward W. Robinson Jr. asked the question, "What is quality education?"

Robinson, a main force in establishing the Department of Afro-American Studies for the School District of Philadelphia, paused a moment before answering his own question. "Quality Education," he said, "is bringing forth from children that which they are capable of by a teacher who loves and respects those children."

Robinson, a city assistant managing director, told the small community group that he not only knows why our schools are failing but that he also has an answer to the problem. At a time when the Philadelphia school system struggles to stay afloat in a stormy sea of strikes, layoffs and cut-backs, Robinson is seeking support for a proposed pilot program to help black children learn.

Robinson, who lives in the 200 block of E. Cliveden Street, says that black children can't learn in public schools because of "low teacher expectancy." This phenomenon is due, he says, to the effects of racism and beliefs in racial myths.

"Our children are being short-changed by a very peculiar, but well proven psychological law. It states that a child cannot learn above the expectations of its teacher."

The black child, he says is thought by our society to be inadequate as a student. To back up his statement, Robinson cites 343 separate studies done during the 70's that proved dramatically that low teacher expectancy sets a ceiling that is very hard to rise above.

"Here and there," he said, "you can find individuals who, in spite of a racist school system, broke through to perform and learn." But generally, in his view, the "Law of Low teacher Expectancy" is a self-fulfilling prophecy.

Robinson, 63, has thinning hair and a stocky

build. His eyes reveal an intensity of commitment that may be slightly dulled by the constant stream of memos, phone calls, arrangements and meetings that require his attention. As he sat in his downtown office which is a stone throw's away from City Hall, he confessed that he hoped that younger blacks would continue in the race's long struggle for equality.



The Subject of raising the educational levels of all children (particularly black children) is one of the most important issues in Robinson's life. Banging the desk with his open palm, Robinson said that low teacher expectancy is exhibited every day by teachers' attitudes in the classroom. He pointed to the work done by Dr. Earline Sloane, who is now Director of the Department of Affective Education for the Philadelphia School district.

According to Robinson, Sloane's work revealed four "interventional behavioral techniques" that are symptomatic of predominantly black schools in Philadelphia. They are a general lack of discipline, a differential in time allowed for black children to answer questions as compared to white children, a lack of feedback to help the child reach the proper answer and an absence of enrichment materials and efforts to make the classrooms interesting.

Robinson's contention is that the poor performance of black schools is directly attributable to the belief that black children are inherently inferior. He claims that racial myths are so prevalent that no one escapes their influence. School administrators, teachers, parents and the students themselves have internalized these myths and suffer from the perpetuation.

In a proposal approved by the school board last fall, a pilot program has been designed to establish

corrective measures in Philadelphia's classrooms. It combines the resources of the Departments of Affective Education and Afro-American Studies and is intended to make teachers aware of these society-induced biases and their affects on children. The two part program would submit an experimental group of teachers to class-work focused on: 1) African culture and anthropology and 2) How to overcome the four negative techniques described above.

This is Ed Robinson's baby. He hopes his program can clear away racial myths and thereby raise teacher expectancy levels for black children. But he fears his approved proposal may get tucked away on a dusty shelf and his plans will never be implemented. The cost of the project, he says, is minimal when compared to such programs as desegregation.

"One hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars is a drop in the bucket when you look at the millions being spent on other programs," he said. That is why he is seeking support from community groups to help get his program off the ground.

Unless the public heats up the issue, Robinson's proposal may go the way of the Edsel. Considering the conservative national mood at this time, proposals like his are susceptible to the ax when budget cutting is the name of the game. But Robinson is a positive thinker, and his list of achievements reflects his sense of determination.

He is an educator, historian, businessman, administrator and author (Double-Day has just published his historical novel, Songhai.)

To what does he attribute his success? His cultural heritage, he said, handed down from his African grandmother. It gave him a positive self-image, thereby allowing his mind to soar academically. "I know who I am," he stated simply.

Robinson, who is a product of the Philadelphia school system and who attendee Virginia State University and the University of Pennsylvania received his Juris Doctorate from Temple University Law School. Clearly, he has broken through the wall of low teacher expectancy.

***Dr. Robinson, now over 80 years old is still continuing to fight for his dream in Philadelphia.***

# Meet me at the James V. Brown Library, it's dabomb!

The Lycoming County Library system is a treasure trove of information and its crown jewel is the James V. Brown Library in Williamsport. The majestic 100-year old building is currently under renovation but the public can still enjoy the marvelous wonders located within.

The library has more than just books. It has audio books, music CD's, DVD's, microfilm archives and computers linked to the Internet.

And the best part... it's FREE! Just prove that you are a resident of Lycoming County and you'll receive a library card allowing you access to thousands of titles.

For those interested in African-American subject matter, the library is a great place to start digging. I just recently borrowed the commercially released film, "Amazing Grace" on DVD. It's the



story of how 18th Century English politician William Wilberforce and his band of slavery abolitionists led the fight to end the slave trade.

If you have ever sung the song, "Amazing Grace" in church, you'll want to watch this movie. The song, written by John Newton, an English clergyman who had once been a slave ship captain

(played by Albert Finney) is featured throughout the film. The movie claims that the Newton played a significant role as a guidance counselor to Wilberforce. The authentic location shots, the period costumes and superb acting literally transport the viewer back to the early 1700's of England. The makers of the movie point out some similarities between the moneyed interests of the slave trade and today's geo-political influences of a petroleum based global economy. Speaking truth to power has its pitfalls.

Wilberforce was successful in securing passage of a bill in the House of Commons abolishing the slave trade. Eventually that led to the universal abolition of slavery. William Wilberforce died in 1833, thirty years before slavery was ended in the United States. Wilberforce University in Ohio, the oldest African-American college, was named after him.

## The N-word.

The library should post a danger sign in its lobby, "Warning, the knowledge contained herein may be damaging to your state of ignorant bliss. We are not responsible for any deleterious effects resulting from a higher level cognitive enlightenment."

Reading about African-American history is depressing. Perhaps that's why people shun it. Revelations of the past are painful. To truly understand the plight of black people in America is an invitation to personally relive the degradation and exploitation of millions of slaves. Digging into the murky past dredges up old injustices and shameful conduct of a nation (supposedly) founded on liberty, justice and the pursuit of happiness.

To understand the events and conditions that formed the United States of America, one must examine the American Slavery system and pre-



vailing racist attitudes against blacks.

The N-word by Jabari Asim is a book that should carry a warning label. Crack it open at your own risk; consume its exhaustive research of "Niggerology" and be transformed forever.

Asim makes a strong argument for the schism between high American ideals and American practicalities. On one hand the founding fathers sought freedom from England yet they turned a blind eye to the enslavement of blacks. Thomas Jefferson wrote, "All men are created equal." But according to Asim, Jefferson didn't believe that Africans (blacks) were human. That's right, the author of the Declaration of Independence, the third President of the United States, the noted diplomat and land owner, the founder of the University of Virginia, the respected scientist, architect and philosopher believed that the slaves that he owned were sub-human.

Asim refers to Jefferson's document, "Notes on

the State of Virginia" that included a section on Negroes. It suggested that blacks were "childlike, animalistic creatures doomed to lives of permanent subservience". Asim says, "While Jefferson claimed to be conflicted about slavery, he evidently harbored few doubts regarding the apparently insurmountable inferiority of Negroes."

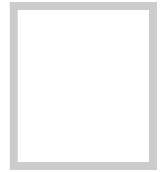
From Jefferson's well-head of learned discourse on slaves sprang a multitude of other pseudo-scientists, lawmakers, writers, artists and administrators all justifying the need for slavery. They argued that slavery was actually good for blacks! The myth of black inferiority became embedded into normal American life and still survives today.

To be truthful, I could not read the entire book. The first six chapters were quite disturbing. Asim painted a clear picture of 18th Century America. It wasn't pretty.

Check out "The N-word" if you dare. Prepare to be enraged and saddened.

***Before healing others, heal thyself.***

*- Old Gambian Proverb.*



# CONGRATULATIONS!



to Congressman Chris Carney  
and  
Community Alliance for  
Progressive Positive Action

for securing the much needed  
\$272,600 of federal funding  
for Williamsport's Youth.



An African-American Perspective wishes you much continued success in your efforts to improve our community.

## Don't forget the sacrifices he made for us...

The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King's  
birthday will be observed on Monday, January 21, 2008.

Take a moment to reflect on his sacrifices, his goals  
and his achievements

Rest in PEACE, Dr. King.

Honor Dr. King's compassion and commitment on January 21. MLK day.