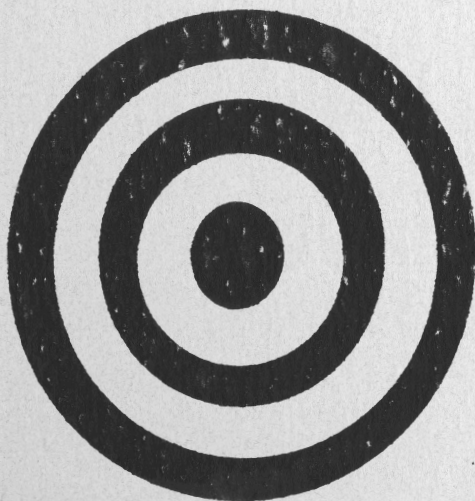


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ENDARCH
Journal of Black Political Research

A Publication of the Department of Political Science

Clark Atlanta University

ENDARCH

Journal of Black Political Research

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Statement of Purpose

In decades characterized by the complete atrophy of all struggle from the sixties and the defection of most of the former participants, the principle question must be...why? What has happened consistently to denature and distort incipiently progressive impulses that appear among Black people?

Endarch, as its names would suggest, identifies with motion; not any haphazard or desultory movement, but movement that is conscious of its origins and destinations. As an embodiment of aggregate but mutually consistent perspectives, this journal seeks to reflect, analyze, and generate activity which will ultimately lead toward the expansion, clarification, and solidification of Black political thought.

The conscious nature of movement is derived from a clear social and analytic methodology. An approach which views the world as a totality, but also diaphanously understands that the components comprising this world are not of equal importance. With this in mind, and given Black peoples historical grounding in oppression and exploitation, **Endarch** sees of paramount importance those phenomena and groups of phenomena which operate in a system of oppression and exploitation. Recognition of such phenomena must lead to a discernment of those vital elements, the crucial essences of which define and condition the world. Our purpose is to expose those essences and through this explication illuminate the totality from the vantage point of a specific oppressed people. Such is the task of a conscious and critical Black political thought imbued with the task of defining the Black experience in politics. It is toward this goal that we aim.

NIGERIAN CONTENTS POLITICS

Articles *Abiodun Adegboye Awomolo* *Clark Atlanta University*

This paper focuses on a review of Nigerian women's political activity, particularly their aspiration for government office, grassroots mobilization, and interaction with the state. The influence of variables such as colonialism, modernization, development, and patriarchy on women's political involvement are also investigated. This analysis begins with a historical overview emphasizing the pre-colonial, colonial, and post-colonial periods. Finally, the different manifestations of women's political activity are analyzed and I offer some insight into the effectiveness of these activities.

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State support for an ideology of the family and women's primary allegiance to it provides numerous opportunities for state involvement in the division of labor, wages, and terms and conditions of employment, so intensively that it reinforces women's subordination to men.¹ On the other hand, the expansion of the state could offer attractive, or even the only viable alternative to oppressive family or kin relationships that prevent women from

¹ See Ellen Chariton, Jane Everett, and Kathleen Standt, eds. in "Women, the State, and Development" *Women, the State and Development* (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1989), pp.3-4.

² *Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

³ Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist-Feminist Encounter* (New York & London: Verso, 1981), p.351.

NIGERIAN WOMEN AND POLITICS

Abiodun Adegboye Awomolo
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INTRODUCTION

On the surface, it appears that gender, like class, does not influence politics in a significant manner. The state is presumably gender-neutral and women are potentially equal competitors who must build organizations and develop political savvy in order to gain access and control over decision-making.¹ However, this remains the utopian dream of liberal-pluralists. In actuality, the state reflects gender inequality insofar as its institutions are staffed and controlled by men, its policies and laws reflect male domination of women's lives, it maintains oppressive structures and ideology against women, and it continues to perpetuate male domination over females both in the public and private spheres.²

State support for an ideology of the family and women's primary allegiance to it provides numerous opportunities for state involvement in the division of labor, wages, and terms and conditions of employment, so intensively that it reinforces women's subordination to men.³ On the other hand, the expansion of the state could offer attractive, or even the only viable alternative to oppressive family or kin relationships that prevent women from

¹Sue Ellen Charlton, Jana Everett, and Kathleen Staudt, eds. in "Women, the State, and Development" *Women, the State and Development* (Albany, NY: University of New York Press, 1989), pp.3-4.

²*Ibid.*, pp.7-8.

³Michele Barrett, *Women's Oppression Today: The Marxist-Feminist Encounter* (New York & London: Verso, 1981), p.231.

realizing either strategic or practical goals. Women in developing countries particularly, look to the state for an opportunity to move away from family control and to lay claim to resources generated by development.⁴ Though state interests always supersede state concerns for women, policies provide the clearest link to gender concerns. Policies either benefit or disadvantage, liberate or oppress, women.⁵ Therefore, one can argue that the status of African women is enhanced or circumscribed by state/institutional structures, office holders, and dominant societal interests.

Despite state manipulation, one must disclaim arguments that Nigerian women have made no progress since independence because there are more women participating and making an impact in all spheres of life, and to a lesser extent, in politics. Concerning the latter, some argue that there is a critical lack of political awareness, minimal participation, and negligible contribution to the political process among women. Although women constitute about 51 percent of Nigeria's population, the unequal distribution of institutional and economic power coupled with an acute lack of representation or under-representation in government limit women's ability to influence the legislative process and to access resources. Most women are apprehensive about, or fear, seeking public office. Uninformed about their legal rights, encumbered by timidity and traditional notions of a "woman's place," or fearful of ridicule and insults, they stay out of politics.⁶

Historical Analysis

Historically, women in several societies of pre-colonial Africa, occupied positions complementary rather than subordinate to men. Also, the traditional bisexual political system characteristic of most African societies, allowed women to choose their own leaders to run state affairs particularly in areas considered to be 'women's province,' such as the marketplace. As such,

⁴Charlton, Everett, and Staudt, p.11.

⁵Kamene Okonjo, "Women's Political Participation in Nigeria" in The Black Woman Cross-Culturally ed. Filomina Chioma Steady (Massachusetts: Schenkman Publishing, Inc., 1981), p.38.

⁶Perdita Huston, Third World Women Speak Out: Interviews in Six Countries on Change, Development, and Basic Needs, foreword by Arvonne S. Fraser (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1979), p.107.

the system of sex segregation enabled women to control their own affairs while still subject to communal government.⁷

Women were able to wield considerable power. For example, traditional Yoruba society accorded women high social and political status which necessitated their participation in politics at all levels. Generally, Yoruba women married within the same town so that they were physically close to their own families and retained rights to family land, farms, and participation in the ancestral and orisha cults of their lineage.⁸ At the village level, women met to discuss matters affecting the welfare of their communities and in most towns, women's councils and their leadership exercised tremendous pressure. In addition, wives of *Obas* had great influence in all political affairs where they represented their husband's interests at women's meetings.⁹ For example, in Oyo kingdom, there were eight titled ladies as well as eight priestesses who ensured the smooth functioning of the political machinery.¹⁰

As in Yorubaland, the *Iyoba* (Queen Mother) in traditional Edo society, wielded great political power and governed cities on behalf of her son and in traditional Ibo society, the *Omu* was the counterpart of the king.¹¹ At a higher level, women played kingship roles as evident in the oral tradition and records of female *Obas* in Oyo, Sabe, Ondo, and Ilesha. For example, traditional records reveal that a female regent, Orompoto, drove the Nupe out of Oyo.¹² Hence, the early colonial period witnessed the political visibility of southern Nigerian women via pressure groups and titles within their communities.

⁷Emma Nina Mba, Nigerian Women Mobilized: Women's Political Activity in Southern Nigeria 1900 - 1965 (Berkeley, CA: University of California, 1982), p.37; Okonjo 1981, p.102.

⁸Mba, 1982, p.13.

⁹Patrick Kenechukwu Uchendu, The Role of Nigerian Women in Politics: Past and Present (Enugu, Nigeria: Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd., 1993), p.72.

¹⁰Okonjo, 1981, pp.91-2.

¹¹Ibid., pp.93 and 98.

¹²Women regents were not in such significant numbers for their presence to be considered usual rather than aberration. Victor Nelson et al., Area Handbook for Nigeria, 1972 cited by Uchendu, p.19; R.S. Smith, Kingdoms of the Yoruba and "The Alaafin in Exile: A Study of the Igboho Period in Oyo History," Journal of African History cited by Mba, 1982, p.2.

However, with colonialism came so many changes in women's autonomy and traditional positions. In cases where the British found women autonomous, they instituted a Victorian framework which circumscribed women's power and in others where women had lost autonomy, they reinforced existing patriarchal traditions. For example, colonialism in northern Nigeria encouraged the expansion of Islamic ideals thereby reinforcing the exclusion of women from politics and other public affairs.

As public matters became dominated by men, women became more dependent and oppressed. Consequently, following independence, northern Nigerian women were not allowed to vote or participate in politics, and their access to education and other resources was severely restricted. On the other hand, in southern Nigeria, the British simply swept aside previous female political structures, replacing them with completely male structures and positions and perpetuating male dominance in erstwhile complementary systems.¹³

The colonial period occasioned the disappearance of several female titles. And as the titles disappeared, the privileges and functions of their holders became obsolete through colonial legislation. For example, the colonial government refused to recognize the *Iyalode* as the direct link between womenfolk and thus undermined her position. The *Iyalode* was removed from membership in the local council of elders and her long-standing function as supervisor of the market was terminated and entrusted to the local government council.¹⁴ As the titles dropped, women became less visible and less able to attract the attention of British administrators.¹⁵

Post-Colonial Politics and Administration

For both northern and southern Nigerian women, the loss of traditional political status which began through islamization and continued during the colonial period, manifested in the exclusion and marginalization of women by both the civilian and military regimes in post-independent Nigeria.¹⁶

¹³Molara Ogundipe-Leslie, Recreating Ourselves: African Women and Critical Transformation (New Jersey: Africa World Press, Inc., 1994), p.30.

¹⁴Uchendu, p.45.

¹⁵Mba, 1982, p.38.

¹⁶See Kamene Okonjo, "Reversing the Marginalization of the Invisible and Silent Majority: Women in Politics in Nigeria" in Women and

Although women aggressively resisted colonial marginalization through press campaigns, petitions, mass demonstrations, and riots, they achieved very little toward regaining pre-colonial autonomy. And as the British formed executive and legislative councils in preparation for decolonization, only Nigerian men were integrated.

Thus, from the beginning, territorial politics was an arena into which only men were admitted, and national politics became male-only terrain.¹⁷ Hence, while several Nigerian women attended the constitutional conferences preceding independence in London, only a handful have actively participated in post-independent politics.¹⁸ For socio-cultural reasons such as the disapproval of husbands, Margaret Ekpo reports, very few women could actually attend political party meetings and other similar rallies which were considered unsavory and solely men's province.¹⁹

The decade from 1950 - 1960 witnessed seven years of post-independent civilian politics but, not one woman was elected into any regional or national legislative bodies! Both southern parties: the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) and Action Group (AG), attempted to correct this situation by appointing some women to various legislatures. These female appointees were relatively well-educated and organized and recruited both rural and urban women for their parties. The women took part in political rallies, fund-raisers, and demonstrations against British brutality.²⁰

Though the NCNC and AG were committed to the women's suffrage, they could not shift the position of the Northern People's Congress (NPC) thus, in the 1959 federal elections, only southern women could vote and participate.²¹ Yet, very few women contested elections and only one woman was appointed to the senate and a second woman in 1964. Women were marginally represented in the federal and regional civil service, and there were

Politics Worldwide eds. Barbara J. Nelson and Najma Chowdhury (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), p.514; Bolanle Awe and Nkoli N. Ezumah, "Women in West Africa: A Nigerian Case Study" in *The Women and International Development Annual* Vol.2 eds. Rita S. Gallin and Anne Ferguson (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, Inc., 1991), p.193.

¹⁷ Okonjo, 1994, p.514.

¹⁸ Uchendu, p.xii.

¹⁹ Margaret Ekpo cited by Amina Mamman, "Where are the Women?" *This week* cited by Ibid., pp.xiv-xv.

²⁰ Oriaku Nwosu, *The African Woman: Nigerian Perspective* (Lagos, Nigeria: Bima Publications, 1993), pp.80-1.

²¹ Mba, 1989, p.71.

very few women senior servants. Though women could vote in and contest elections in the south, the unisexual nature of national politics did not allow their full participation in government.²²

In leadership, the only woman in Nigerian history who successfully organized a political party was Beatrice Adunni Oluwole of the Nigerian Commoner's Liberal Party (NCLP) formed in 1954.²³ The party had two aims: to oppose Nigerian independence in 1956 because Adunni believed the masses were not politically well-informed and to defend the views of the common person.²⁴ Adunni was a colorful and charismatic politician who played a significant role in the independence movement from 1945 when she became a public figure.²⁵ A champion of workers' interests, Adunni emphasized that the commoner should be allowed to choose which form of government she preferred. She promised that her party would recognize the rights of the neglected and opposed self-serving politicians.²⁶

As a party leader, Adunni was firm and successful. Her party was well-organized though it lacked adequate financial resources. Nevertheless, it won a seat in the Western Region through a male candidate.²⁷ However, an analysis of Adunni's politics reveals a more ideological than pragmatic politician, though her opposition of Nigerian independence in 1956 could be deemed right on target in hindsight.

The question then is, had she been more pragmatic in her outlook, would she have had better success? Or did gender predetermine her actual potential of success in a male-dominated arena? To a large extent, we can

²²Because fewer women than men obtained tertiary education, or education specifically relevant to political or economic activity, their avenues to power were limited to political parties and governmental nominations. See *Ibid.*

²³The party was in existence from 1954 to 1957. See O. E. Odinamadu, "The Role of Women in Our Community," Lecture delivered in Awareness Forum Seminar, cited by Uchendu, p.47.

²⁴In 1953, Anthony Enahoro of the Action Group moved the motion for Nigerian independence in 1956, a motion which led to a crisis because northerners were not ready for self government. See G. O. Olusanya, "Olaniwun Adunni Oluwole" in *Nigerian Women in Historical Perspective* ed. Bolanle Awe (Lagos: Sankore Publishers Ltd. and Ibadan: Bookcraft Ltd., 1992), p.128.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p.127.

²⁶Adunni had eloquence, flamboyance, irrepressible energy, and a sense of the dramatic which made her very popular. Already an aberration, she adopted the habit of dressing in sackcloth and riding a white charger through town. See *Ibid.*, p.128.

²⁷*Ibid.*, pp.129-30.

argue that gender did predetermine Adunni's lack of widespread success because it conditioned opponents reactions, voter response, and financing. Moreover, though Adunni's party holds the record for the most successful female-led party, it was not a feminist party. In other words, it did not espouse a feminist ideology nor did it seek to champion women's causes. In fact, the only thing particularly feminine about the party was Adunni.

Nigeria inherited the British parliamentary system of government, with a bicameral federal legislature and four regional legislatures which were contested by three major political parties and several minor ones. This system was maintained until 1989 when it was changed to a two-party system for civilian rule.²⁸ Today, the military continues to maintain a bureaucratic centralism in which women are either not represented or marginally so.²⁹

The military's patriarchal structure limits the number of top female officers in the different forces. No woman has been appointed to the Supreme Military Council (SMC), the nation's highest ruling body under the military nor has any been appointed a minister. Because the military maintains a rigid patriarchal hierarchy, the highest ranking female officer is Major General Aderonke Kale, a two star General who commands a military hospital.³⁰ Further, there are no women governors, despite the fact that there are quite a few senior women military and police officers.³¹

On the other hand, political parties operating in 1979, like earlier parties, ignored the issue of women's representation. Some had separate women's wings but nominated far fewer than men. None fielded women as gubernatorial or presidential candidates. According to the parties, the electorates and male party members were prejudiced against women in government and would not vote for women candidates.³² Other excuses advanced include: the false assumption that women could not stand the rigors of politics, the campaigns, the machine control, and the physical violence.³³

²⁸ Ibid., p.70.

²⁹ The military first came into power in 1967, and have ruled the country for over twenty-eight of its thirty-seven years. Since independence, no woman has reached the executive or decision making body yet. See Ibid., p.87.

³⁰ Soji Akinrinade, "For Girls Only," *Newswatch* (December 10, 1990): p.30.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ogundipe-Leslie, p.174.

Similarly, socioeconomic factors such as: age distribution of society, rural/urban migration, marriage, fertility and child-rearing patterns, prevailing family organization, societal attitude towards female participation in the labor force, and educational patterns, contribute in varying degrees to the marginalization of Nigerian women in politics.³⁴ In turn, problems resulting from marginalization and under-representation include: high levels of illiteracy/minimal education, un/underemployment, legal minor status, and second-class citizen treatment.

Tied into political issues are legal rights issues. Though Nigeria granted women equal rights and equal access to resources, a gender-biased mixture of colonial and customary law which deprives women of their constitutional and civil rights as citizens, are still in the books particularly in matters concerning land, marriage, divorce, and inheritance. Nigerian laws require a married woman to gain permission from her husband before applying for a passport, cannot post bond for suspects at police stations, and is exempt from tax rebates and holidays.³⁵ In addition, the implementation of laws discriminates against women; for example, in their access to credit.³⁶

Further, wide gaps exist between laws, women's knowledge and understanding of them, and enforcement of them by authorities. These gaps are particularly evident in rural areas where discriminatory beliefs and practices prevail and sometimes result in human rights violations against women.³⁷ To compound the situation, the government is constrained in its efforts to curtail most abuses because of the rigid separation between the public and private spheres, and because of its avoidance of intervention in the jurisdiction of Sharia or customary law courts.

³⁴Keziah Awosika, "Women's Education and Participation in the Labour Force: The Case of Nigeria" in *Women, Power and Political Systems*, ed. Margherita Rendel with the assistance of Georgina Ashworth (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), p.81.

³⁵See Edwin Madunagu and Bene Madunagu, "Conceptual Framework and Methodology: Marxism and the Question of the Women's Liberation" in *Women in Nigeria Today* ed. Women in Nigeria (London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1985), pp.32-3; Ayogu Eze, "Sentenced by Tradition," *Newswatch* (December 10, 1990):p.38.

³⁶Eze, pp.38-9.

³⁷Huston, p.47.

The State and Women's Political Participation

Taking its cue from the UN Decade for Women, General Ibrahim Babangida's administration supported the promotion of women's issues through the sponsorship of Better Life for Rural Dwellers Program (BLP) from 1987 to 1992. According to its brochure, BLP aimed at effectively mobilizing rural women and providing markets for their agricultural, arts, crafts, and other products through exhibitions, trade fairs, seminars, lectures, publications, loans, and machine grants.³⁸

The program, directed toward rural women, had urban organizers who were wives of state governors, and at its apex was the then first lady, Maryam Babangida. Eventually, BLP became no more than a propaganda tool of the military because of its political bias and marginalization of other organizations, societies, and institutions where women's affairs had previously been handled. Nevertheless, BLP cast a much-needed spotlight on women's issues.

From 1991 to 1993, the Babangida administration introduced a transition program to civilian rule. For women, this presented a unique opportunity to participate in politics, hence the aborted 1992 elections witnessed the most spectacular showing of women in Nigerian politics. The list of political aspirants included: Sarah Jubril as presidential aspirant under the umbrella of the Social Democratic Party (SDP), Lizzy Ajufo vying for vice-presidency under the auspices of the National Republican Convention (NRC), and Tokunbo Dosunmu as governor of Lagos State under SDP. In the proscribed elections, Pamela Sadauki and Latifat Okunnu were elected deputy governors for Kaduna and Lagos states respectively.³⁹ At the ward, council, state, and national levels, the list of women who contested and won elections multiplied to an all-time record. For example, in Oyo State alone, 130 women were elected into executive positions at the ward level, while 176 won their elections at the local and state government levels.⁴⁰

Throughout the country, women performed impressively. In Plateau and Lagos states, women floored tough male opponents to emerge as

³⁸ Catherine Obianuju Acholonu, *Motherism: The Afrocentric Alternative to Feminism* LHHW Women in Environmental Development Series, Vol. 13 (Owerri, Nigeria: Afa Publications, 1995), p.98.

³⁹ Akinrinade, p.31; Anietie Usen, "The Political Amazons," *Newswatch* (December 10, 1990): p.32.

⁴⁰ Usen, pp.32-3.

chairpersons of the NRC. Bose Oshinowo, 42, wealthy plastic manufacturer and wife of former speaker of the House of Assembly in Lagos State, defeated nine men to head the party, while Helen Gomwalk defeated six men. Victoria Aguiyi-Ironsi, performed a similar feat to become party vice-president in Imo State. At the national level, Onike Oshodi was elected ex-officio member of the NRC and was the only woman to win a party post at the national level.⁴¹

During the same period, many women emerged as local government councilors in different parts of the country including the Muslim North where two women became councilors in Kano State. In addition, women led the NRC in Lagos, Plateau, and Benue.⁴² Several explanations have been proffered for the unprecedented influx of women into politics in 1992 including: MAMSER, the government's mass mobilization outfit, mobilization efforts of women's organizations such as the National Council of Women's Societies (NCWS), the BLP, and the establishment of the NCW.⁴³

In spite of their progress, several challenges still remain. Many women are turned off by the violence, political insults, thuggery, and other 'murky practices' which characterize Nigerian politics.⁴⁴ In addition, family status (presence of young children), money, religion, and financial insufficiency, bar women's widespread participation.⁴⁵ Opponents of women's political participation tirelessly emphasize how women are neglecting their roles as wives and mothers to chase after public glamour thereby contributing to the degradation of Nigerian society.

Women's Political Initiatives

When not actively involved in politics, women are members of civic organizations which may also act as springboards for political careers. Hundreds of formal and informal women's associations flourish in post-independent Nigeria, each drawing attention to the problems and needs of women. Some are autonomous bodies such as NCWS, while others are female wings of larger organizations such as Society of Women Accountants of

⁴¹ Ibid., p.33.

⁴² Godwin Agbroko, "More than a Heart-beat Away," Newswatch cited by Uchendu, p.92.

⁴³ Olarembi Elizabeth Adiukwu in interview with Usen, p.33.

⁴⁴ Usen, p.35.

⁴⁵ Uchendu, p.93.

Nigeria (SWAN). Others include: Women in Nigeria (WIN), the Nigerian Association of University Women (NAUW), and various service organizations such as the Lionesses, Inner Wheel, and the Soroptimists.

Urban women's groups reflect western influences. Typically, these groups are dominated by the middle-class and their views and interests often diverge widely from those of the poor. They support social welfare activities such as literacy campaigns, seminars, symposiums, and so on.⁴⁶ In order not to offend the male establishment, they tend to be anti-feminist and to promote their own interests in securing greater access to their husband's income, seek more advantageous marriage and divorce laws, and promote education in the domestic arts, beauty, and fashion. Consequently, they are limited in addressing the plight of poor urban or rural women.⁴⁷

Unlike instituted organizations, grassroots self-help groups, founded by poor rural women, provide vital economic assistance. They often assist in obtaining credit for farming or business ventures, and provide other forms of mutual assistance to members such as child care and maternity services.⁴⁸ Reciprocal service is a common basis for solidarity. Groups such as the Nigerian Market Women's Association regulate trading practices, perform voluntary community work such as construction of roads, schools, and health clinics, and stabilize prices among themselves using systems with built-in penalties.⁴⁹

Also, several non-governmental organizations (NGOs), are founded with explicit goals addressing development issues. For example, the Lagos State Women's Association for Home Gardening and Farming concentrates on increasing food production and encouraging women to grow food for consumption. Another NGO, the All Nigerian Women's Association led by Lady Oyinkan Abayomi, acts as a pressure group which brings together subgroups of women such as the elite and the market women, to dialogue and improve the conditions of women.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ April A. Gordon, "Women and Development" in Understanding Contemporary Africa ed. April A. Gordon and Donald L. Gordon (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1992), pp.212-3.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p.214.

⁴⁸ April A. Gordon, pp.212-3.

⁴⁹ Margaret Snyder and Mary Tadesse, African Women and Development: A History preface by Gertrude Mongella (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press; London & New Jersey: Zed Books, 1995), p.43.

⁵⁰ Lillian Trager and Clara Osinulu, "New Women's Organizations in Nigeria: One Response to Structural Adjustment" in Structural

Analysis and Conclusions

Though women's voluntary associations are outstanding in wielding political clout from an economic or mass base, their organizations do not carry the weight of men's.⁵¹ Besides an obvious gender bias, these associations are limited in their effectiveness because of their isolation from mainstream development activity, lack of sufficient linkages between groups, and marginalization from government administration.⁵² For groups such as market women's associations which utilize mass mobilization tactics such as marches and protests to gain government recognition, factors determining the success or failure of their protests include: type of government (protests seem to work better under a civilian than a military regime), personality of the governor (pacifists tend to be more sympathetic to women's issues), and the gravity of the situation.

Outside of protest marches and riots, women attempt in various ways to improve their political situation. Women in non-elective offices such as *Obas'* wives or mothers and first ladies, infuse an interesting dynamism to the advancement of women's issues. Prior to Maryam Babangida's ascension to the position of first lady, the office was non-political and the occupant was restricted to cutting tapes at opening ceremonies and greeting the first baby of the year.⁵³ However, during her husband's tenure from 1985 to 1993, Mrs. Babangida established the BLP, National Commission for Women (NCW), and a host of other programs.⁵⁴

As expected, her pro-active attitude sparked controversy and provoked intense criticism. In March 1990, Gani Fawehinmi sued the first lady. In his claim, he sought an account of the public funds spent on BLP. Fawehinmi also demanded that the first couple declare their sources of funding, and proclaimed that Mrs. Babangida had no constitutional authority

Adjustment and African Women Farmers ed. Christina Gladwin (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1991), p.347.

⁵¹ECA/FAO/SIDA, "Women and Rural Institutions" cited by Snyder and Tadesse, p.43.

⁵²April A. Gordon, p.213.

⁵³Ray Ekpu with Yakubu Mohammed, "Woman with a Cause," Newswatch (August 5, 1991): p.12.

⁵⁴Her patronage secured jobs which erstwhile women could only get by being girlfriends of ministers or board chairmen. Stella Ugboma cited by Ibid.

to implement BLP.⁵⁵ Maryam Babangida's aggressive use of the first lady's office raises questions of whether the end justifies the means in terms of women using non-constitutional power to attain laudable ends. It also raises the issue of whether the dual-sex government of pre-colonial times can be transferred to a modern political-economy. At another level, the establishment of the women's commission raises the concern that it would marginalize gender issues and absolve other ministries of their responsibility to work toward gender equity. Instead, a "total package" would include a women's ministry supported by gender desks in other ministries.⁵⁶

Perhaps the unequal participation of women in Nigerian government has contributed to its illegitimacy in the eyes of the public, particularly since most traditional societies had a bisexual structure of government contrary to the unisexual system instituted following colonialism. Because women form a majority of the poor, their involvement in government will help bridge the gap between the rich and the poor, the urban and the rural populace, as well as between leadership and the polity.

The inclusion of women, enhances grassroots participation in politics and de-emphasizes the top-down approach to policy-making by taking cognizance of the masses. Representation in government implies that decision makers will take into consideration the impact of policies on women, their families and the nation as a whole. Women in government may ensure that short and medium term policies do not impact their communities negatively but rather, are consistent with long-term objectives of equality in the society.

Women demonstrate perhaps more starkly than other social groups, the broad strokes of sociopolitical conflict in contemporary Africa: formal or informal, official or off-the-record, manipulative, agitative, or repressive, hegemonic or escapist.⁵⁷ Perhaps, their vulnerability makes them better qualified to be more equitable leaders. Several women leaders even suggest that given the opportunity, women would make better leaders. As Titi

⁵⁵The case was thrown out of court, a typical practice under a dictatorial regime. Mrs. Abacha, is carrying on the tradition of proactive first lady through her Family Support program. *Ibid.*, p.15.

⁵⁶Amanda Kemp, Nozize Madlala, Asha Moodley, and Elaine Salo, "The Dawn of a New Day: Redefining South African Feminism" in *The Challenge of Local Feminisms: Women's Movements in Global Perspective* ed. Amrita Basu with the assistance of C. Elizabeth McGrory (Boulder, San Francisco & Oxford: Westview Press, 1995), pp.156-7.

⁵⁷Naomi Chazan, "Gender Perspectives on African States" in *Women and the State in Africa* eds. Jane Parpart and Kathleen Staudt (Boulder & London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1989), p.185.

Ajanaku, first elected woman municipal council chairperson (elected in Abeokuta, Ogun State in 1988), stated, "women in politics have a greater sense of purpose and are by far less corrupt."⁵⁸ However, others are more averse to female leadership. For example, the *Amirah*, the leader of the Federation of Muslim Women's Association of Nigeria (FOMWAN), stated, "a woman should not be at the apex; a man should always be the head."⁵⁹ Judith Van Allen argues that:

African women today, are not for the most part in politics. More accurately, they are between politics. Those who had opportunities for political power and autonomy suffered the impact of colonialism and what westerners call modernization. But, they have not gained power in modern political institutions, nor autonomy in modern urban social and economic life.⁶⁰

In actuality, it appears that Nigerian women's "political activity" or their efforts to influence the allocation of resources and values in their communities rely more heavily on appeals to leadership than their own participation in that leadership in order to secure favorable government policies.⁶¹ From the foregoing, Nigerian women's political power appear to be mainly associational power derived from associating with powerful men. For example, the titles "*Obas'* wife or mother," first lady, or "cash madam" suggest women's association with powerful men who may be kings, presidents, or government officials but, does not confer any real authority on women. Because of the male territoriality of Nigerian politics, women have to beg permission to enter this domain and they remain within defined areas.

Invariably, those women who do get into government are no better than their male counterparts and they maintain the status quo. Variables which limit women's effectiveness in government include: a high level of tokenism

⁵⁸Usen, p.35.

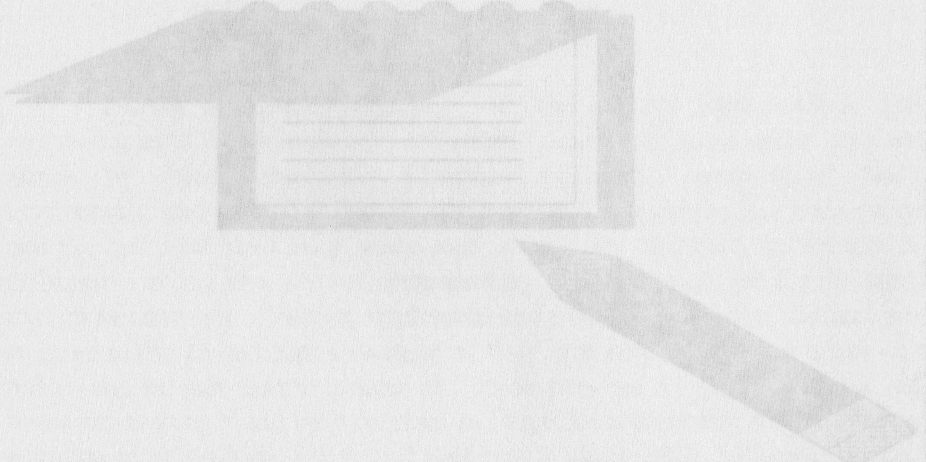
⁵⁹Bola Kassal, "Women in Politics," Daily Times cited by Uchendu, p. 87.

⁶⁰Judith Van Allen, "Memsahib, Militante, Femme Libre: Political and Apolitical Styles of Modern African Women" in Women in Politics, ed. Jane S. Jaquette, "A Wiley-Interscience Publication" (New York, Sidney & Toronto: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1974), p.304.

⁶¹Mba, 1982, p.vii.

which produces a diffusion of power, male-dominated patronage, relational avenues of success, and scapegoatism. Where women have sought power themselves, they encounter extensive backlash and very little success. Even intra-gender, women's political activity reveals class, religious, and socio-cultural stratification which may result from a weakness in female collective or feminist consciousness.

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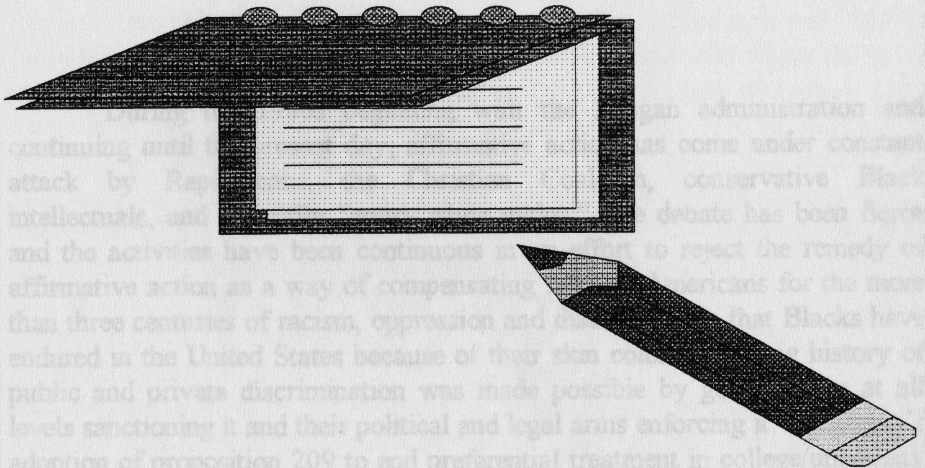
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AFFIRMATIVE ACTION UNDER SIEGE

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This article examines the conditions and need for affirmative action in America. The author conceptualizes the struggle over affirmative action as first and foremost a struggle over power. This article is also a revised version of a speech presented to the Annual Conference of the Illinois Committee on Black Concerns in Higher Education held at the University of Illinois at Springfield, October 16-18, 1996.

INTRODUCTION

During the 1980s beginning with the Reagan administration and continuing until the present day, affirmative action has come under constant attack by Republicans, the Christian Coalition, conservative Black intellectuals, and generally "angry white males." The debate has been fierce and the activities have been continuous in an effort to reject the remedy of affirmative action as a way of compensating African Americans for the more than three centuries of racism, oppression and discrimination that Blacks have endured in the United States because of their skin color. This long history of public and private discrimination was made possible by governments at all levels sanctioning it and their political and legal arms enforcing it. California's adoption of proposition 209 to end preferential treatment in college/university admission and the federal court upholding the challenge to the resolution has already been reflected in swift efforts in other states to follow the precedent.

One black student was admitted to the Medical College of Georgia in 1997, and one each was accepted for the first year of law schools at the University of California and University of Texas. Similar efforts are underway in Georgia led by Republican minority whip, Representative Earl Ehrhart, to eliminate existing local county and municipal programs and to prohibit the state from instituting such a program. The ball is rolling and picking up speed as a central element in white America's effort to deny Blacks even a small portion of the American Pie. The urgent and critical question for Blacks at this moment in our history, to quote the title of Nicolai V. Lenin's famous pamphlet, "What is to be done?" In order to answer this question, it is imperative that we first understand the historical, political, economic, social

and legal context for affirmative action and why it has been under siege for two decades. Only by having such an understanding can African Americans then formulate a strategy that frames our position in the most favorable light and enables us to mobilize and maximize our resources to ensure the survival and enhancement of this public policy remedy. A caveat to remember is that affirmative action is not the "silver bullet" or solution to the Black condition in the US, but it can play a vital role as a bridge to assist us in gaining access into heretofore denied opportunities in jobs, businesses and educational institutions.

We are very much aware of the growing number of Black "Trojan Horses" in our midst who are identified by their white admirers and mentors as conservative scholars. Many of them, whether they admit it or not, are the beneficiaries of affirmative action, yet they have joined with whites to try to undermine this valuable tool that has benefited hundreds of thousands of minorities and females. To summarize a classic essay, "The Purpose of Political Science," written by Hans Morgenthau in 1948, the truth about political science is the truth about power, its origins, its manifestations and its uses. The elite in every society seek to conceal these facts about power from the masses, but the role and responsibility of scholars is to uncover these facts and tell society about many things it does not want to hear. However, they have a choice of pulling away the veneer of the myths that are being perpetrated and incur the wrath of the power elite or support the status quo and reap the rewards provided by the dominant group. The Black conservative scholars have decided to opt for the latter and have received lucrative speaking fees, prestigious faculty and judicial appointments, and kudos for being great Americans. At every opportunity, these Trojan Horses need to be exposed for what they are: opportunistic prostitutes who say what their masters want to hear and receive their "pieces of silver" and other rewards for assisting in perpetuating the oppression of their brethren. They are similar to the good "house slaves" who were willing to court the favor of their masters by selling out the "field slaves."

We have heard about Black brothers who have taken this route, such as Clarence Thomas, Glen Loury, Walter Williams, Thomas Sowell, Robert Woodson and Shelby Steele, but recently some sisters have jumped on the "grave train." For example, Carol Swain wrote a book titled, *Black Faces, Black Interests and Representation in Congress* in which she asserts that African Americans don't really require/need Blacks to represent them in

Congress because whites can represent them just as well as or better than Blacks. There were numerous methodological flaws in her samples of Congresspersons and roll call votes on legislation, and her omission of white polarized voting patterns, racial gerrymandering, centuries of legal and denial of Black political rights by a white controlled Congress. Despite these many shortcomings, the text has been hailed as a tour de force and set off a bidding war to hire this new expert on Black representation which was finally won by Princeton University.

George Curry, editor of *Emerge* magazine, has written that the downsizing of personnel and declining wages in corporations, which has occurred simultaneously with rising business profits, created the opportunity for the frontal assault on affirmative action and a scapegoat was readily available. A three pronged strategy was adopted. First, opponents say the program was designed for incompetent/unqualified people, just as admission to achieve diversity in colleges was attacked using the same logic. It's clear that when given the opportunity to perform, minorities have succeeded almost to the same degree as the privileged white males. Second, they said it was a quota system, not based on merit. Third, they argue that such programs are no longer needed because racism is no longer either a private or public policy in America. Of course, they ignore the facts and numerous studies which document not only racism's dogged persistence, but white male privilege and status based on money and family ties, and inter-generational wealth transfer are continuing without any criticism from either white or Black conservatives.

Stephen Carter writes in *Confessions of An Affirmative Action Baby* that affirmative action causes one to have lower self-esteem and self-doubt about whether one got their positions because of their color or their capabilities. It's the silliest thing I've ever heard. I've never heard of a white child of an alumnus at any of the top 25 universities have pangs of conscience of self-doubt because the basis of their admission was being born to a graduate of one of these institutions. They have their quotas which no one criticizes. They simply accept it as their right or privilege and make the most of the opportunity presented them by accident of birth.

Black conservative academicians are unique creatures who either have forgotten or deliberately discounted the 350 years of slavery/oppression and discrimination perpetuated by white America against people of African American ancestry. In contrast, the Jewish community has no problems asking the US, which provides economic and military assistance to Israel on a scale

that far exceeds that given to any other nation on the face of the earth, over \$8,000 per person. They take every opportunity to keep the holocaust in the public mind. On the other hand, Black and white conservatives tell us that 20 years of civil rights legislation and affirmative action are more than enough time and now such programs should be eliminated. None have proposed ending aid to Israel, farm subsidies, preference to alumni children, cattle grazing on public land for \$1 per acre or any other preferences that are 50-100 years old which benefit non-Black segments of the population.

Georgia Republican State Representative Earl Ehrhart reflect this perspective in a debate with the author, "Is Affirmative Action Obsolete?" *South Magazine*, August 1997, when he said "what's wrong with that concept to me is that we're asking for reparations against people who had nothing to do with the policies of the past. I refuse to have a guilty conscience for something I did not do." He also indicated that affirmative action was a "wrong headed policy. It's a special preference, it's a special advantage, a quota." Also, he indicated that reverse discrimination was rampant under affirmative action. In response, the author cited data which showed that 96 percent of the Fortune 500 corporations were headed by white males, that only approximately 2 percent of all complaints filed with the Equal Employment Opportunity commission involved allegations of reverse discrimination and that white males have benefited by virtue of their skin color and they want to revert back to the period when discrimination by private individuals and groups will be allowed to run rampant again.

Claud Anderson, author of *Black Labor, White Wealth*, provides one of the best historical and political analyses of how/why Blacks were enslaved, how their uncompensated labor was used by whites to accumulate wealth which has been transferred to current generations, how public policies excluded Blacks from being able to own land or engage in certain occupations, how whites have used Congress to acquire virtually free valuable land, subsidies and other benefits over the centuries while denying former slaves their 40 acres and a mule and excluding them from such programs as the veterans land program and Homestead Act of 1862. While President Andrew Johnson vetoed the 1868 legislation which would have provided Blacks some compensation for 250 years of slavery, the U.S. government has provided Japanese and Jews with compensation/reparations for World War II incarceration and for actions perpetrated by another country, Germany. Thus,

even in recent times Blacks continue to be treated differently from other minorities.

Associate Supreme Court Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg gave one of the most succinct and cogent defenses of affirmative action in her dissenting opinion in the Supreme Court case of Adarand Constructors v. Peña in June 1995. She wrote, in part, that the Court recognized the persistence of racial inequality and Congress's authority to act affirmatively to end discrimination and counteract its lingering effects:

The effects, reflective of a system of racial caste only recently ended, are evident in our work places, markets and neighborhoods. Job applicants with identical resumes, qualifications and interview styles still experience different receptions, depending on their race. White and African American consumers still encounter different deals. People of color looking for housing still face discriminatory treatment by landlords, real estate agents and mortgage lenders. Minority entrepreneurs sometimes fail to gain contracts although they are low bidders and they are sometimes refused work even after winning contracts. Bias both conscious and unconscious, reflecting traditional and unexamined habits of thought, keeps up barriers that must come down if equal opportunity and nondiscrimination are genuinely to become this country's law and practice. Given this history and its practical consequences, Congress surely can conclude that a carefully designed affirmative action program may help to realize, finally, the equal protection of the laws the Fourteenth Amendment promised since 1868.

What Is Affirmative Action All About!

The struggle over affirmative action is first and foremost a struggle over power. The minority white males who dominate U.S. society and have a disproportionate share of money/wealth, power and positions are unwilling to give up anything. They are 96 percent of the top CEOs of 500 major

corporations, 97% of School Superintendents, 93 % of law firm partners, 92% of Boards of Corporations, 91% mayors and 80% of tenured professors. Manning Marable of Columbia University has noted that white conservatives are appealing to racist sentiments among whites by perpetrating distortions and myths and asserting that affirmative action is based on rigid quotas which require hiring of incompetent, non-white persons and awarding contracts to unqualified non-white firms to the detriment of God fearing, hardworking, family values oriented, abortion hating, taxpaying Americans who happen to be white.

We must be clear that morality, philosophy, privileges/rights as cited in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution are a sham. The battle over affirmative action is about power and who gets what, when and how! An aphorism which best describes the situation is, "those with power are trying to retain it, those who've lost some of it are trying to regain it, and those without it are trying to attain it." Indeed, one would get the impression that unqualified African Americans have gained the lion's share of the admission to elite universities, the best jobs, a disproportionate share of government contracts and were kicking whites out of top management. In fact, African Americans have been losing ground because in the last 20 years the per capita income disparity between African Americans and whites has actually increased by almost 7% from 61% to 54% and the wealth gap is almost 10-1.

Dr. Linda Williams authored a report in 1995 while she was on the staff of the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation. She documented that more than two decades of affirmative action has not brought about anything approximating parity in this nation and demonstrates conclusively why affirmative action is still needed. Among her most significant conclusions were the following based on what would be necessary for parity to exist in the U.S.

- The aggregate spending of African Americans would be almost \$200 billion more than the current \$400 billion (10th largest in world)
- The average black family would have an income more than \$21,000 higher per year.
- The average black household would have a net worth more than \$41,000 higher.

- There would be
 - 1.3 million more black men working, full-time
 - 1 million more black executives, administrators and managers
 - 700,000 more black professionals
 - 73,000 more black lawyers
 - 68,000 more black mathematicians and computer scientists
 - 300,000 more black construction trade workers
 - 26,000 more black elected officials, including 11 U.S. Senators and 20 U.S. Representatives
 - The average black person would live to 6.8 years longer
- There would be:
 - 1 million fewer unemployed black adults
 - 6.7 million fewer black people in poverty

The Next Phase

We have made the egregious mistake of being reactive than proactive on the issue of affirmative action. We have allowed the enemies of affirmative action to define the issue for us. Stephen Yates of Auburn University recently completed a study for the Heartland Institute in which he describes affirmative action as "alien to the American concepts" written in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, that rights inhere in individuals, not groups, and that affirmative action is not concerned about the rights of individuals. He says affirmative action subordinates the individual's rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, seeking instead privileges granted on the basis of group characteristics and entitlement. Yates concludes

by describing affirmative action as "a perversion of the original civil rights movement" which "has fueled the country's racial tension and reinforced old stereotypes that civil rights leaders ought to eliminate." Thus, like Speaker Newt Gingrich, Yates gives a 1984 Orwellian twist to language where black becomes white and vice versa and the victim is the perpetrator. We must refute these specious, syllogistical and perverted sentiments and lies which ignore reality and facts. African Americans were excluded as a group from the tenants of the Declaration of Independence and Constitution and they were denied rights as a group, not as individuals. For over 250 years we were viewed not as individuals with inalienable rights, but as property and a race of people not entitled to the political, civil and economic rights given to whites because of the color of their skin. Thus if historically we were unique in being treated as a group under the Constitution then remedies in the form of reparations or affirmative action should logically be distributed to us as a group. As Malcolm X said, white people try to make the victim look like the perpetrator and blame us for racial tension. Remember we are simply operating like any other group in this nation who have sought to secure resources and benefits from the government for this particular group. However, we have a stronger claim because we have sacrificed to build this country with no payment for our labors. Our case for benefits is much stronger than any other group and we should not be bashful about presenting it. We must go on the offensive and attack those who would deny our rightful claims that affirmative action is one of the remedies of how we were treated.

○ **Comments:** We have allowed the enemies to usurp the colorblind discourse of proponents of the civil rights movement like Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. They promulgate progressive sounding concepts in describing their reactionary and racist initiatives which are designed to eliminate or reduce programs which may provide some small amount of assistance to African Americans. For example, the recently passed welfare reform bill is called "The Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act of 1996" and the effort to end affirmative action in California (Prop 209) was labeled the "Civil Rights Initiative." They refer to reverse discrimination and colorblind society in an effort to take control of the debate. A bill to eliminate the minority set aside programs by Congressman Jan Meyers of Kansas is called the "Entrepreneur Development Program Act of 1996." And Senator Bob Dole sponsored "The Equal Opportunity Act of 1996" to end all federal affirmative

decided officials, black and white, who are not responding positively to their

action programs. They have redefined merit to reinforce white privilege and caused Blacks to be viewed as racist.

We must take back the high moral ground by demonstrating that it is the white male minority which is the primary beneficiary of the status quo and is the only segment of the population which wins by eliminating affirmative action and turning back the clock. Women and minorities constitute almost 75 percent of the nation and such programs benefit them. In other words, there is a natural commonality of interest between women and minorities which needs to be exploited in the political and economic arena. Women helped to defeat Dole's bill and Meyers legislation and national opinion polls show that a majority of whites actually support the concept of affirmative action, but not quotas. We have to convince the white female that their interests are at risk if affirmative action is ended by Congress and/or court rulings. We must keep publishing data, which shows the continued existence of racial inequality/disparities in the nation so our allies or potential allies will recognize the continued need for race conscious remedies, not race neutral reforms.

The *Journal of Black Issues in Higher Education* reported that the ending of affirmative action in admission policies at 25 top universities would reduce the number of Blacks in the freshmen class from 6 per cent to about 1 percent.

A Strategy For Maintaining Affirmative Action And Achieving Community Empowerment

First and foremost we need to build a strong sense of community and stop spending 97 cents of every dollar with non-Black businesses. We use our \$400 million unwisely and it doesn't benefit our community. We must resist privatization because it limits the availability of government resources to assist Blacks as they have been used to help every other ethnic group in U.S. history, now they want to end it. Taxes and public policy are vehicles used by government to distribute services and resources among various interests and groups.

We need to play hard ball politics and learn from the American Jewish Congress and National Rifle Association which use their collective financial resources and votes to reward their friends and punish their enemies among elected officials, Black and white, who are not responding positively to their

agenda. We must do the same. We are too compassionate and forgiving as a people; we must recognize that our very survival is at stake and act accordingly.

We who have benefited from affirmative action have an obligation to reach down and grab hold of our less fortunate brethren's boot straps and help them up the economic ladder. We must take the lead in creating community development corporations, cooperatives and neighborhood businesses to employ them, to create jobs to keep money in the community and build wealth for reinvestment. We need to focus more on group development, not individual capitalistic ventures.

Led by the Newt Gingrich's, the new generation of white males seem more determined to make greater cuts in public assistance despite the continued deterioration of families and declining economic conditions. President Clinton stated the importance of the choice between Dole and himself in the 1996 presidential election when referring to affirmative action when he said "mend it, don't end it." Remember, the anti-affirmative action, anti-black Rehnquist Supreme Court can be changed with one new appointment which can restore a majority to support to the Voting Rights Act, minority business enterprise programs and affirmative action, which have been negated by several 5-4 decisions.

We must link public commitment to fairness with programs that target patterns of discrimination and show that contrary to William Wilson's claim regarding the declining significance of race, that race continues to be important in all aspects of American life. We must take the struggle one step further and become more active in eliminating race and gender inequality through building alternative economic and political structures. We need to get out of the mindset of thinking that individual capitalism (I) will help to lift all Blacks out of their predicament and think in terms of collective economic structures (we). There are several models ranging from the Black Family Empowerment Agenda, a concept developed by Peter Grear in North Carolina, to Claud Anderson's comprehensive group economics and wealth strategy involving vertical production and integration of industry designed to ensure we control the major markets of the products, goods and services which we consume that can serve as guides to future Black group prosperity.

The time for talking must give way to pooling our economic resources. In conclusion, I'd like to say that we would do well to remember the words of Frederick Douglas who said more than a century ago that "power

concedes nothing without struggle,” and that we may not get all that we pay for in this life, but we certainly pay for all that we get. Continue the struggle!

Bob Holmes is Director of the Southern Center for Studies in Public Policy and Professor of Political Science at Clark Atlanta University. The author, co-author or editor of 15 books and monographs, he has published more than 40 articles and chapters in journals and books throughout the world. He is editor of the *Georgia Legislative Review* and the *Status of Black Atlanta*.

- All papers should be typed
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SEPARATE BUT EQUALS DESEGREGATION FULL CIRCLE

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¹ Derrick Bell, "Learning From Our Losses: Is School Desegregation Still Possible in the 1980s?" *Phi Delta Kappan* 64 no. 572 (1982): p. 29.

² Derrick Bell, "Serving the Heritage: Integration, Ideals and Group Interests in School Desegregation Litigation" in Limits of Ideals and Group Role in Desegregation, ed. M. Alexander and J. Fluharty (1978) p. 271.

SEPARATE BUT EQUAL: SEGREGATION FULL CIRCLE

Sharon Brown Bailey
Denver, CO Public School Board

This paper examines issues motivating desegregation. An assessment of the evolution of desegregation into the condition from which it evolved, segregation is discussed. This paper also analyzes the post-desegregation period and the *Brown* legislation through Afrocentric Centered Schools and Curricula.

The Post-Desegregation Landscape

The record of desegregation in America is tarnished. The barriers of continuing white resistance, a less than supportive Supreme Court, and the growing concentration of most poor Blacks in large urban areas render continuing efforts to achieve compliance with *Brown* through racial balance remedies preposterous.¹

The great crusade to desegregate public schools has failed. There is increasing opposition to desegregation at both local and national levels (not all of which can be condemned as racist). While once vigorous support of the federal court is on the decline, new barriers have risen--inflation makes the attainment of racial balance more expensive. The growth of Black and Brown populations in urban areas renders it more difficult and an increasing number of social science studies have questioned the validity of its educational assumptions.²

Over four decades ago the Supreme Court rendered its landmark decision in *Brown v. Board of Education*. The Court ruled that the 14th Amendment rights of African American children were being violated to the extent that, to separate black children from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race, generated a feeling of inferiority as

¹Derrick Bell, "Learning From Our Losses: Is School Desegregation Still Possible in the 1980s?," *PHI Delta Kappan* 64 no.572 (1983): p.89.

²Derrick Bell, "Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interests in School Desegregation Litigation" in *Limits of Justice: The Courts Role In Desegregation*, eds. H. Kalonder and J. Fishman, (1978), p.571.

to their status in the community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely to be undone.³ With the *Brown* decision came the expectation that public schools in America would eventually cease to be separate and unequal based on race. With *Brown* came an end to the legally sanctioned American apartheid which ignited new hope for race relations and civil rights generally.

Despite the historic declaration that "separate" has no place in education, separate and unequal continues as reality for the majority of African American students.⁴ After more than forty years of desegregation efforts, the goal of equal educational opportunity remains elusive.⁵ Meaningful progress in integration has not happened. And in many of the largest inner city school districts, there are increasingly more racially isolated schools. Gary Orfield, in *The Growth of Segregation in America: Changing Patterns of Separation and Poverty Since 1968*, 1993, maintains that the amount of physical integration reached its zenith in approximately 1972. Since that time segregation has remained relatively constant. He found that even though significant progress occurred in desegregating public schools in the South, nearly one-half of all African American public school students in the Northeast attend schools that are ninety percent or more Black. Nationwide, sixty-three percent of African Americans attend schools that are at least ninety percent Black.

Legal scholars have identified several Supreme Court decisions since the 1970s which have exacerbated the present condition of urban schools. Some of the most notable cases which have undermined desegregation efforts include: Keyes v. School District No. 1 (1973), San Antonio School District v. Roderiquez (1973), Milliken v. Bradley (1974), and most recently Board of Education v. Dowell (1991), and Freeman v. Pitts (1992). Even though the basic principles of *Brown* are still standing, the courts have done much to diminish the promise of *Brown*. For example, school districts may not enact metropolitan desegregation plans, at least in the absence of a showing of prior

³*Brown v. Board of Education*, 385 U.S. (1954).

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵For discussions on the elusiveness of equal educational opportunity, see generally, Nicolaus Mills, "Segregation's Return: Does Anyone Object?," *National Law Journal* 181 (1995): a19 column 3; Jack W. London, "School Desegregation and Tracking: A Dual System Within Schools," *U.S.F.L.R.* 29 (1995): pp.705-18

discrimination.⁶ States have no obligation to fund rich and poverty stricken districts similarly.⁷ In addition, segregation which results from white flight or demographic shifts is essentially irremediable.⁸

Moreover, Kevin Brown states that,

Not only has America failed to integrate its public schools, but the Supreme Court in two of its most recent desegregation rulings, Board of Education v. Dowell and Freeman v. Pitts, has set the judicial stage for the termination of school desegregation decrees. There are currently over 500 school districts under some form of supervision. Termination of these decrees will return faculty and student assignment decisions back to the control of local and state education officials.⁹

In other words, it's a form of educational devolution. Somehow, we have forgotten that in the history of *Brown* and its progeny, that it was the resistance to fairness in education at state and local levels which led to the intervention of the Court. Because student assignments will no longer be motivated by an attempt to maintain a desegregated student body, during post-desegregation, the result of the termination of a large number of existing desegregation orders during the 1990s, will be an increase in the amount of racial separation in public schools. With this in mind, it is not farfetched to reason that public schools have already achieved the maximum, amount of desegregation that will be achieved in the near future.

The legal frameworks of *Freeman*, *Dowell* and now *Keyes* (1995), make it too easy for district courts to dissolve desegregation decrees, thus enabling the reemergence of racially identifiable stigmatizing schools that the

⁶ *Milliken v. Bradley*, 418 U.S. 717 (1974).

⁷ *San Antonio School District v. Rodriguez*, 411 U.S. 1 (1973).

⁸ See *Milliken* 433 U.S. 267. Metropolitan desegregation plans are permissible only if the segregation results from official action, not the aggregate of individual decisions by white families to move to the suburbs. For discussion regarding the impact of this case on subsequent desegregation efforts see, Raina Brubaker, "Widening the Mistakes of *Milliken v. Bradley*," *Case W. Reserve Law Review* 46 (1996): pp.579-601.

⁹ Kevin Brown, "After the Desegregation Era: The Legal Dilemma Posed by Race and Education," *St. Louis Law Review* 37 (1992): p.898.

decrees were designed to eradicate. While not advocating a mandated separation of the races, proposals to eliminate or scale back decades-old desegregation remedies will return many school districts to a system of segregated and mostly unequal neighborhood schools. Once a decree is lifted, parents and children will have a tougher time attacking a school board's actions, even if they result in "re-segregation." Plaintiffs must prove discriminatory intent and overcome a variety of other discouraging obstacles.¹⁰

In a dissenting opinion, the late Justice Marshall observed that, "the majority of the Court signals that it regards racial discrimination as largely a phenomenon of the past, and that government bodies need no longer preoccupy themselves with rectifying racial injustice."¹¹ With a variety of shifts in attitudes and tactics,¹² the legal framework of desegregation law is unraveling to the point where it has been characterized as "contradictory, surrealistic, and incoherent."¹³ Some insist that the remedy for "de jure" segregation (i.e., desegregation through racial balance), has effectively duplicated and worsened the disease it was designed to cure.¹⁴ The harshest critics insist that the Court has helped to seal off inner cities,¹⁵ reinforced the "badge of inferiority" by

¹⁰ Frank Brown, "Brown and Educational Policy Making at Forty," Journal of Negro Education 63 (1994): p.337. Six basic changes in school desegregation litigation have tended to retard or discourage plaintiff challenges to alleged discriminatory practices by school districts. These changes involve (1) standing, the right to sue; (2) restrictions on class action suits; (3) tests of evidence; (4) de jure/de facto distinction and intent to segregate; (5) remedies of desegregation; and (6) attorney's fees and rights.

¹¹ Justice Marshall (dissenting) in *City of Richmond v. J.A. Croson, Co.*, 488 U.S. 469, (1989).

¹² For an examination of the shifts in attitudes and tactics of the Court in handling race relations cases and desegregation specifically, see Chris Hansen, "Are the Courts Giving Up? Current issues in School Desegregation," Emory Law Journal 42 (1993): pp.846-75; See also, Girardeau Spann, Race Against the Court: The Supreme Court and Minorities in Contemporary America (New York: New York University Press, 1993); Stephen Wasby, Desegregation From Brown to Alexander: An Exploration of Supreme Court Strategies (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1977).

¹³ Mark Yudof, "School Desegregation: Legal Realism, Reasoned Elaboration and Social Science Research in the Supreme Court," Law and Contemporary Problems 42 (1978): pp.57, 87, 102-105.

¹⁴ Kevin Brown, "Has the Supreme Court Allowed the Cure for De Jure Segregation to Replicate the Disease?," Cornell Law Review 78 (1992): pp.1-83. This article identifies the new harm that flows from the Court's ideological framework of decisions like *Freeman* and *Dowell*.

¹⁵ G. Spann, pp.104-118. Also, *Brown v Board of Education* has served more recently to lull minorities into believing that efforts at

insisting that black schools are inferior,¹⁶ and obfuscated our understanding of race and rights.¹⁷

Taking their cues from the conservative restoration, public sentiment and the federal courts seem to have returned us full circle to a pre-*Brown* posture that says--segregation is "OK". In fact, the *Plessy v. Ferguson's* "traditions of the people"--the tradition of separateness, racial hierarchy, and racial tensions has resurfaced in the area of public education.

Faced with the disillusionment of the ability of busing to guarantee quality education for all, urban districts are sending a message that the 1990's version of neighborhood schools can truly be "separate but equal." However, the conclusion that there is a clear and certain path to providing quality education to racially isolated neighborhood schools is premature given the current state of educational inequity in urban school districts. The experiences of districts that have decided to dismantle their desegregation plans illustrate a variety of troublesome problems that suggest the need to re-examine basic assumptions regarding race, the law, and the right to equal educational opportunity. Gary Orfield and David Thronson, in their examination of the "Uncertain Gains and Unexpected Costs" of dismantling desegregation efforts, 1993, warn that school districts are moving forward in this murky landscape with unsupported expectations. The idea, for example, that political conflict will diminish and that non-judicial mechanisms can assure equity in the re-segregated minority schools are not supported empirically in several districts. Local commitments to special programs for re-segregated schools last only a limited time. Furthermore, the assumption that we know how to provide equal education in segregated schools has not proved true in spite of considerable efforts. Costs are not likely to decline. In some districts, racial tensions and high legal disagreements across racial lines have continued at a high level. The hoped for end of white flight and the return of white students have not

political self-determination are futile, fostering a seductive dependence and over reliance on the Court as the caretaker of minority rights.

¹⁶See G. Orfield.

¹⁷Several critics of the racial balance approach of *Brown* have commented that the remedy that grew out of the *Brown* decision stigmatizes African Americans as second class citizens. By labeling separate black schools as inferior, and insisting on racial mix, the Court inculcated a belief in the inferiority of African Americans. See Donald Lively, Foreshadows of the Law: Supreme Court Dissents and Constitutional Development (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1992). See also, K. Brown.

materialized at all in some districts, and have been far below predictions in others.

As urban districts become more racially isolated and unequal, the dilemma of race and education will continue to generate intense debate whether the discussion centers on long-standing desegregation orders in school busing cases, the inclusion of minority perspectives in the curriculum, the use of race-based scholarships or assumptions of the "bell curve" philosophers. The most frustrating aspect of our forty year experience with desegregation, is that "there is no political or intellectual consensus about where we are, what we have learned, and where we should be going from here."¹⁸ There is, however, general agreement on at least two points with regard to the history of public school desegregation--the racially integrated school systems we sought have not been as productive as we hoped, and the equal educational opportunities envisioned by the architects of the *Brown* strategy have not been realized. As a result of these developments, an increasing number of contemporary educators and legal theorists are beginning to advocate policies more closely aligned to *Plessy* than *Brown*.¹⁹

Many leaders of traditional civil rights groups have remained undaunted.²⁰ They press on convinced that without integration there can be no truly effective education for minority children. Racial balance proponents are convinced that unless Black children attend school with white children, the

¹⁸Gary Orfield, "Knowledge, Ideology, and School Desegregation: Views From Different Prisms," *Metropolitan Education* 1 (Spring 1986): pp.92-99.

¹⁹Several of the critics of *Brown* and the desegregation strategy have insisted that we should return to the legal posture of the separate but equal doctrine to achieve equal opportunity in today's landscape. See, e.g., G. Spann, p.115. *Brown* conveniently rescued the majority from the potentially burdensome separate-but-equal requirement of *Plessy v. Ferguson* by replacing that requirement with an integration requirement that could be satisfied without really integrating the schools. By invalidating the separate-but-equal doctrine of *Plessy*, *Brown* has deprived racial minorities of their only constitutional weapon for securing equal treatment in the light of the failure of integration. Moreover, contemporary racial minorities still seem to prepare the demonstrably hollow promise of school desegregation to the more realistic potential of minority-controlled minority schools as a strategy for improving the quality of minority education. A separate-but-equal-strategy now seems more promising than a strategy of integration.

²⁰Hillary Stout, "ACLU, NAACP, and NOW All Give Poor Marks to Plans to help Inner City Black Male Students," *Wall Street Journal*, September 10, 1991, A22.

essential benefits of *Brown* cannot be realized. For them, even the most effectively functioning Black school is simply a segregated and inferior institution. They argue that the racial balance approach has not been given the time or the resources to achieve full success, and that the effort to integrate the American educational system should be enhanced. There are those who argue that since the desegregation effort has failed to achieve either racial balance or educational equity for African American children, the effort should be re-focused on enhancing the quality of education provided in predominately Black schools.²¹ There are proposals offering privatization and voucher systems as a means of improving public schooling, and controlled choice plans as a means of both enhancing the quality of education and fostering desegregation.²² There are suggestions that multicultural education is the most appropriate focus for effective education of all Americans. Still others offer an Afrocentric curriculum as a strategy for improvement of the academic achievement of African American students. In fact, there are efforts to establish publicly supported all-Black, or even all-Black male schools as a means of enhancing the chances of success for this "endangered" population.²³

For the African American community this lack of consensus, a shifting doctrinal framework, declining public support for desegregation, and the persistence of ethnic enclaves in urban centers, have fostered a renewed inquiry into the legitimacy of the integration model of the civil rights movement as the only way to achieve equal educational opportunity. The post-desegregation landscape has become unsettling with the decline in civil rights, attacks on affirmative action and growing racial hostilities. In this setting, exploring alternative approaches to equal educational opportunity has for

²¹ James Leibman, Three Strategies for Implementing Brown Anew in Race in America: The Struggle for Equality, (1993). Presents a menu of litigative strategies to promote equality by enforcing minimum education standards adopted by state legislatures.

²² David Armor, Forced Justice: School Desegregation and the Law (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995); Armor finds that voluntary plans, which let parents decide which school program is best for their children, are just as effective in attaining the long-term goals as mandatory busing, and that these plans generate far greater community support.

²³ All-Black schools have received significant attention from legal scholars in the 1990s. See e.g., Joshua Kimberling, "Black-Male Academies: Re-Examining the strategy of Integration," Buffalo Law Review 42 (1994): pp. 829-858. Roberta Steele, "All Things Not Being Equal: The Case for Race Separate Schools," Case W. Reserve Law Review 43 (1993): p. 591.

some African Americans become a matter of survival. While integration of public schools may have been the best strategy to address the educational struggle for the African American community in 1954, it may not be the best strategy in 1996 and beyond. This separate and unequal landscape raises critical issues which will shape the future of educational opportunity for African American students.

If the desegregation era is over we must then ask: How do we provide equal educational opportunity for African American students? If racial balance is not the remedy for persistent educational inequities, then what is the formula for achieving this forgotten goal of *Brown*? What form must the content of educational offerings take to constitute equal education? Is de jure segregation really less harmful than the more "accidental" de facto segregation of our communities and schools? Can we truly provide an education for these students that is separate yet truly equal? If resistance in the courts and political realm have made desegregation impractical, why not try to ensure that separate does not mean unequal. The emergence of all-Black Afrocentric schools bring with them the hope that the promise of *Brown* can still be fulfilled in this uncertain and changing landscape.

Revisioning *Brown* Through Afrocentric Centered Schools and Curricula

The immediate and urgent need of the Black urban poor is the attainment in real life terms, and in the setting of virtually total Black-white school separation, at least some of the guarantees that *Brown* requires. The only way to ensure that thousands of Black urban poor will have a remote chance of obtaining the tools needed for them to compete in the marketplace for a decent job and its accompanying benefits, is to concentrate on having quality education delivered to the schools where these African Americans are attending, and in all likelihood will be attending for at least another generation.²⁴

Given the persistence of segregation and inequality reflected in the nation's public schools, some educators have begun to promote the development of Afrocentric schools and curricula. As we move beyond desegregation and busing, educators are revisioning equal educational

²⁴Robert Carter, "The Unending Struggle for Equal Educational Opportunity," *Teachers College Review* 96 (1995): p.619.

opportunity for racially isolated urban schools that is separate and yet equal.²⁵ These approaches are recognized by some as a realistic and practical parental choice given the ongoing crisis in the education of African American students. The primary issue is whether the adoption of Afrocentric schools and curricula in racially homogeneous schools may be viewed as an appropriate remedial device to ensure equal educational opportunity for Black students.

There are as many definitions and approaches to Afrocentric education as there are advocates. Wade Nobles offers a comprehensive definition of "Afrocentricity" and its application to educational praxis in "Definition of Afrocentricity."

Afrocentric, Africentric, or African Centered are interchangeable terms representing the concept categorizing a "quality of thought and practice" which is rooted in the cultural image and interests of people of African ancestry and which represents and reflects the life experiences, history and traditions of people of African ancestry as the center of analysis.

Afrocentricity, therein, represents the intellectual and philosophical foundations upon which people of African ancestry should create their own scientific and moral criterion for authenticating the reality of African human processes. It represents the core and fundamental quality of the "Beingness" of people of African ancestry. In essence, Afrocentricity represents the fact that as human beings, people of African ancestry have the right and the responsibility to "Center" themselves in their own subjective possibilities and potentials and through a re-centering process to reproduce and refine the best of themselves.²⁶

When applying these definitions to educational practice Nobles explains that:

African Centered educational praxis is the systemic process of developing and/or stimulating the knowledge, skill, ability, attitude, and character necessary for Black people to undertake socially

²⁵Vincent Harding, *Hope and History: Why We Must Share The Story of the Movement* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 1990), p.34. In light of the current ideological makeup of the Supreme Court, this topic provides an excellent opportunity to revision the amount of dependence that can be placed on the nation's highest court as a source of democratic expansion. It will therefore also be important to discuss creative alternatives to the Court in the democratizing process.

²⁶Wade Nobles, "Definition of Afrocentricity" Institute for the Advanced Study of Black Family Life and Culture, 1990, pp.1-2.

defined, goal-oriented and culturally meaningful activity designed to allow them to achieve mastery of all aspects of human functioning. Accordingly, "African Centered educational praxis should be conscious and rational educational experience that is intentionally designed to reproduce and refine the best of African peoplehood via the utilization of African and African American cultural precepts, traditions, and information that is essential and meaningful to our sense of excellence and higher order human functioning. African Centered educational praxis is simply the idea that the educational and developmental experience should be based in and reflect the African philosophical and cultural systems of human development, psychology, pedagogy, and learning."²⁷

When one examines Afrocentric approaches to education one can't help but agree that educational experiences for African American students may be more relevant and productive for community when placed in the context of this racial/cultural grounding.

Recent developments in education have challenged *Brown's* central premise that separate schools are inherently unequal. Since *Brown*, numerous studies have shown that while some Black children benefit from attending school with white children, others lose confidence and actually perform more poorly because of discriminatory tracking programs, teachers negative attitudes and low expectations for Black children.²⁸ Jarvis observes that, "Afrocentric education, even in segregated settings, seeks to enhance the self-esteem and academic performance of African American students in a way that is consistent with *Brown*."²⁹

Advocates for the adoption of an Afrocentric approach argue that because integration has not resulted in equal educational opportunity for African American students, educators should focus more attention on culturally sensitive ways to improve schools whose students are virtually all

²⁷ Ibid., p.2.

²⁸ Jacqueline J. Irvine, *Black Students and School Failure: Policies, Practices and Prescriptions* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1990), pp.9-12.

²⁹ Jarvis, p.1287.

Black. "And that where de facto segregation exists, the Afrocentric school is a viable vehicle by which local authorities can eliminate the stigmatizing effect of segregation."³⁰ Advocates argue that, the courts ruling in *Pitts* and *Dowell*, reasoning that the Court need not continue to address the vestiges of discrimination, make it difficult for courts to characterize culturally sensitive curricula as unreasonable under the very circumstances the Supreme Court continues to hold that courts are powerless to redress racial inequities and disparities created by demographic factors. Schools should be free to adopt programs that are culturally sensitive to the resulting student bodies, so long as such programs are not racially exclusive.³¹

With no way to effectively provide most of these children with integrated education, these predominantly Black schools must address themselves to the realities facing the children they are responsible for educating.

Opponents of Afrocentric approaches claim separatism and increase racial/ethnic tensions. Critics also complain that the establishment of all-Black schools undermine the efforts to eliminate segregation. They argue further, that the isolation of these students from mainstream society will only reinforce racial stigma.³²

The segregation argument is weak because most inner-city schools are already segregated despite the law. Even in otherwise "integrated public schools, the tracking system segregates African Americans within schools by enrolling Anglo students in college bound classes and minorities disproportionately in vocational, special education or other low level programs."³³

The stigma argument is also weak. This assumption is challenged by the successes of historically Black colleges. Since *Brown* overturned the separate but equal standard, historically black colleges have been criticized for remaining racially identifiable, yet these colleges have produced a larger number of Black graduates. Black students are attracted to Black campuses for a variety of reasons. Among these is the fact that these institutions have a

³⁰Ibid., p.1294.

³¹Ibid., p.1291.

³²Donald Lively, p.670.

³³Jeannie Oaks, *Keeping Track: How Schools Structure Inequality* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). Discusses the impact of the disproportionate placement of Black and Hispanic students in lower ability groupings and non-college bound track.

tradition of concern and caring for these students. The reason for fewer Black graduates of integrated institutions is because at the integrated institutions, students report that they feel like "visitors, like guests, like foreign or colonized citizens in relation to a traditional canon that fails to represent their cultural identities."³⁴ Proposals for all-Black Afrocentric schools are empirically supported by the historic role of these institutions in providing the African American community with leadership and professionals.

Moreover, the idea of single-race schools is not unique. Alternative and private schools for African American, Native Americans and Jewish Americans have existed for years.³⁵ Public schools, unlike private schools are subject to laws prohibiting race and sex discrimination. However, one has to wonder why it is only all-Black Schools which have been stigmatized as inferior.

In response to what many feel is a growing crisis for African American children, several public school districts have turned to some form of Afrocentric or all-Black male programs to address the academic and cultural needs of these students. Baltimore, Detroit, and Milwaukee are examples of cities that have experimented or considered experimenting with these school designs. The most controversial version of this approach has been in the efforts to establish all-male African centered schools. The proposals for these schools are based on two premises: that young Black males need a special, exclusively Black educational environment to survive, and that the curriculum of such an institution providing that educational environment should be Afrocentric. The proponents of these schools argue for their constitutionality on the grounds that "the segregation involved is voluntary self-segregation and not a segregation required by law; and that because young African American males have suffered inordinately in American society, they can, as a class be treated differently from whites, and females (both Black and white)."³⁶

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ For description of two independent African American schools see, Mary Hoover, "The Nairobi Day School: An African American Independent School, 1966-84," *Journal of Negro Education* 61 (1992): p.201. Charlotte Fardelman, "Survival Schools Rescue Indian Students, Culture," *Christian Science Monitor*, March 17, 1983, B8. Walter Gill, "Jewish Day Schools and Afrocentric Programs as Models for Educating African American Youth," *Journal of Negro Education* 60 pp.566-67. (Jewish schools have existed in this country since the revolutionary War).

³⁶ Cummings, p.725.

Black Legal disputes have arisen over this perspective and the use of public funds to establish all-Black, all-male academies. The Detroit case Garrett v. Board of Education is illustrative of the types of legal (race and sex discrimination) challenges which have emerged with these schools. In September 1991, the Detroit Board of Education announced plans to open an all-male Black academy to deal with special problems of African American boys. The academy would also incorporate an Afrocentric curriculum, and Black male role models. The ACLU and the NOW Legal Defense Fund filed suit on the basis of sex discrimination. The district subsequently agreed to admit girls and redesign its program.

This case reflects the political inertia to the establishment of these schools. The heightened controversy over Afrocentric schools and curricula arises not from a concern for white students or other non-Black students who might chose to withdraw from a school adopting such an approach. Rather the political heat is generated by the political nature of this movement--the dispute concerns who should control the educational content of what children should learn. The politics of race and education is clearly demonstrated in the resistance to these schools. The exacerbation of racial/ethnic tensions around the establishment of these schools is always a potential when issues of power and control of education are considered. Policy makers must decide whether racial tensions created by these alternative schools will be greater than the racial tensions which will emerge with the growing number neglected and disenchanted inner city youth. One observer finds that, "as long as inadequately funded inner city Black schools continue using traditional Eurocentric models for instruction, the public will remain unconcerned about the generic quality of education in those schools, namely whether these students are warehoused or taught. But, if an inner city school instead proposes an Afrocentric model, based on Black cultural experience and values, that school can expect a legal challenge to the implementation of such a program."³⁷ How these schools are conceptualized will to a great extent determine the amount of community relations needed for support as well as the constitutionality of the separatism implied in this approach to schooling for African American students.

Challenges to Afrocentric schools and curricula are also likely to come from African American parents as well. More middles class Black parents send their children to public schools than their white counterparts.

³⁷Jarvis, p.1292.

Black parents, regardless of class, are concerned that their children do not have an equal chance to be competitive and productive members of society. To the extent that an Afrocentric school or curriculum would not adequately prepare Black children to take state-mandated tests or standardized national tests, Black parents might argue that such a program in a re-segregated setting only further stigmatizes graduates of the program.³⁸

A more difficult challenge would arise if an Afrocentric curriculum were initiated in a school that was predominately, but not exclusively Black (for example 70% Black, 15% Hispanic and 15% Anglo). The non-Black students might argue that a racially centered curriculum constitutes "reverse discrimination" against them by promoting the needs of Black students to the detriment of others. In addition, these students might assert that the Afrocentric curriculum actually fosters segregation through the explicit use of certain racial perspectives making them, as non-Black, feel excluded.³⁹ In this instance, multicultural approaches may be the more appropriate approach.

Matching the need for Afrocentric or multicultural schools and curricula to a given community will depend on the political, social, and cultural dynamics, the ethnic composition and awareness of the school district or local school site. In Denver, for example, the proposal for an Afrocentric school has emerged in the context of the development of a number of magnet schools in the Park Hill community. The success of this proposal will depend on strong advocacy for it from the African American community and support of the community at large. As with experiences in other districts, the establishment of these schools becomes a community educational process which allays fears and misconceptions about such an approach. Such a school must demonstrate high academic standards as well as reflect the cultural elements presented in Nobles definition above. The establishment of the Afrocentric school in Denver would offer parents a choice without negatively impacting students who may choose one of the other magnet school options.

The success of all-Black academies is beginning to challenge the controversies that have plagued these schools. A district audit assessing Detroit schools found that in their first year these schools performed on par, marginally better, or in a few cases worse than other schools. However, in the second and third years of operation, test scores, attendance, and conduct records have nullified the criticism. Praise and inquiry regarding these schools

³⁸Ibid., p.1285.

³⁹Ibid., p.1302.

has begun to extend way beyond their doors. One principle reports that "visitors from as far away as Ethiopia, Japan, and Los Angeles, California, have come to see what all the hoopla is about."⁴⁰ Throughout the country, there is a growing interest in the positive potential these schools can add to a fairly dismal educational landscape.

Sharon Bailey is a former member of the Denver Public School Board.

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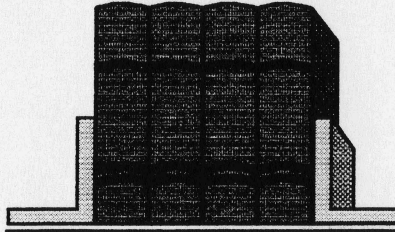
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⁴⁰ Denise Hawkins, "Detroit's African Centered Academies Disarm Skeptics, Empower Boys," 10 Black Issues in Higher Education, February 1994, p.18.

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