

Multiculturalism: Unity Within Diversity

perspectives

In The Beginning Was The Word: Spoken, Written And, Now, Electronic

Written language began with the Africans of the northeast section of that great seminal continent. Written in stone and on papyrus, it antedated similar efforts in Mesopotamia and China—but more on that later in this series. Today, we will begin with a discussion of modes that followed on the African foundation—the bewildering, yet fascinating, creations of the Greek and Latin languages with which we are forced to deal if we are going to make it in this world. It is surprising how relevant “etymologies” can be.

The Greeks are said to have had a word for everything and anything. I like that little things of theirs were, respectively, epos and logos denote the spoken and written word. And from the latter was derived the term “logotechnes” meaning a person skilled in the use of words, wordsmith/wordcook.

How about a “politician.” Now, studying the etymology or the origination/history of particular words can be a fascinating, even revealing subject. Being a person ever vigilant for hints of African roots in any aspect of culture or tradition. I have been well rewarded by my investigation of WORDS.

The following book has really turned me on in this respect, though I purchased it for a different reason. “Composition of Scientific Words,” Roland Wilbur Brown, Smithsonian Institution Press, 1956 revised edition. I purchased this 800 page text because in my scientific research I discover a number of new and original concepts (Black Inventors) which I will eventually publish, patent or copyright. In naming these, it will expedite acceptance if the nomenclature follows the tradition used by scholars in the particular field. However, for this discussion let’s just say it has been an eye opener in the fashion previously described.

The author of this book is so knowledgeable and thorough in his investigations of sources that this writings prove also to be one of the best short (and accurate) histories of the

Anglo Saxon tradition and language I’ve read. Take the following quotes for instance, an immense help in examinations for an African presence in early Europe.

“The prehistoric inhabitants of the British Isles probably left little of their language to English speech. Their relics, which excite our wonder and speculation, consist chiefly of stone, clay, and bronze implements,

kitchen middens, burial mounds (cairns, barrows, tumuli), and megalithic monuments comprising isolated stones (monoliths, menhirs), simple tombs (dolmens), and stone circles (cromlechs) such as Stonehenge, in Wiltshire, England, and the Ring of Brogar, near Stromness, in the Orkney Islands. These aborigines were either absorbed or destroyed by who came from the Continent during the first millennium B.C., and, seizing the ports, spread out over the good agricultural lands. The Celts, besides practicing agriculture, are said to have brewed beer, mined tin, and introduced the use of iron. To the English vocabulary, through contact with their Roman and later contemporaries, they contributed bard, bin, crag, and many geographic names, such a Cornball, Dover, Kent, London, Thames, York; avon, river, in Stratford-on-Avon, Avondale; bryn, hill, in Bryn Mawr; cumb, valley, in Duncombe; and dun, hill, town, in Dundee, Dumbarton, Doncaster. Our May Day and Halloween rivalries are reminiscent of less respectable Celtic ceremonies. Like wise our custom of kissing under the mistletoe is said to date from those barbaric days when that plant was held sacred and druid priests “with voices sad and prophetic” offered up human sacrifices and chanted about the transmigration of the soul. One tribe of southern Celts was called Brythons or Britons, a name perpetuated in the words Britain, British, Brittany, Briton, and Breton.”

“Near the close of the sixth century (597 A.D.) Augustine, the missionary, arrived from Rome and, aided by native Celts from Ireland, preached

Christianity throughout the land for the purpose of converting the pagan Anglo-Saxons. This movement, besides giving a strong impetus toward unification, introduced to the native vocabulary many new domestic and ecclesiastical terms derived from Latin and Greek: alms, altar, balsam, beet, belt, candle, clerk, creed, cross, deacon, devil, fig, hymn, lentil, lily, mass, millet, minster, monk, myrrh, nun, place, plant, pope, priest, psalm, relic, rose, saint, school, shrine, stole, temple, turn, Christianization, however, did not uproot some long-established pagan customs, a few of which persist in modified form to this day. For example, the winter solstice, falling on or about December twenty-first, being a turning in the astronomical year, was the inspiration for the annual festival of Yule, in which the holly, Yule-log, and wassail-bowl played conspicuous parts. Our Christmas has inherited much of the spirit and outward trappings of the Yule celebration. The word jolly, said by some authorities to be from Yule, may be regarded as a reminder of that cheerful season. In the spring of the year, at the time of the vernal equinox, the goddess Eastre was worshipped. From those rites another Christian festival has derived much of its outward form and a name, Easter. Finally, in the names of the days of the week, as Monday (mona, noon), Tuesday (Tiw, god of war), Wednesday (Woden, chief of the gods), Thursday (Thor, god of thunder), Friday (Frigg, goddess of marriage), Saturday (Saeter [L. Saturnus], Saturn), Sunday (sunne, sun), orthodox Christians, as well as unbelievers, harmlessly perpetuate religious traditions of Anglo-Saxon heathenism.

The author informs us: “The almost homogeneous Early English has now become heterogenous Modern English having derived materials from many diverse sources and adopted them with or without change as illustrated by the following examples; African—Chimpanzee, goober, gorilla, guinea, gumbo, oasis, okra, simba, voodoo, yam, zebra, zombie.”

There are many, many more of course and next week we will examine some “borrowings” in that wonderful book by African author, Cheik Anta Diop, The African Origin of Civilization.

Dr. Lerner’s lecture is presented by Park Productions, and co-sponsored by Legacy Women’s Services. A book signing will immediately follow. Legacy Health System includes Emanuel Hospital & Health Center, Good Samaritan Hospital & Medical Center, Holladay Park Medical Center, Meridian Park Hospital, Mount Hood Medical Center, Legacy Visiting Nurse Association and CareMark/Managed Healthcare Northwest PPO.

BY DR. MANNING MARBLE

In recent years, a national debate has erupted among educators, politicians and scholars over the controversial concept of “multiculturalism.” White conservatives such as William Bennett attack the term for undermining the centrality of traditional western culture and civilization within school textbooks. Conservatives claim that multiculturalism highlights the diverse ethnic contributions of various cultures, fragmenting and dividing American. Some of these concerns are now being voiced by liberals as well.

In a recent Washington Post article, Harvard University sociologist Orlando Patterson warned that there were serious problems in what he termed was “the current glorification of diversity.” By emphasizing the unique cultural heritage of African American people, for example, Patterson believes that blacks might actually “divert attention from the disproportionate contributions” they have made to America’s “common culture.” Troubled by what he terms the “separate but truly equal ideology that an increasing number of young, educated African-Americans are embracing,” Patterson insists that the genuine goal of the black freedom movement should be “social inclusion” into the mainstream.

Although Patterson is a black liberal, indirectly he provides intellectual ammunition for reactionary conservatives like Bennett. By attacking “multiculturalism” as divisive, both Patterson and Bennett for divergent reasons make it difficult to transform the deep patterns of racism, sexism and classism which still exist within our educational process. Part of the problem here is the distorted definition of “multiculturalism” and its ob-

jectives. A proper definition of multiculturalism begins with the vantage point of history, America’s history is not just a product of the activities of people of European descent. The values, cultural experiences and social patterns of people of color—American Indians, Asian-Americans, Latinos and African-Americans—are also central in the construction of the complex American identity. African-American identity is in this context our group’s historical consciousness of itself, its collective suffering and experiences, through slavery, segregation and urban ghettoization, and its attempts at self-definition.

Second, multiculturalism by definition should be “comparative” in its approach to the study of American life and culture. This means that a multicultural perspective must approach each individual cultural tradition—for example, American Indian culture, Mexican-American culture, etc.—with an awareness of its integrity and historical continuity. But it should also seek any parallels of experience, values and common traditions between various groups. It should also compare and contrast the cultures of “nonwhite” peoples with the perspectives and experiences of the white majority. We need to explore any commonalities which make all of us “Americans” and any critical points of difference and disagreement which continue to foster divisions and conflicts among groups.

Third, multiculturalism should not seek the simplistic “merger” or “inclusion” of blacks, Latinos and others into a so-called “mainstream” but instead, critique and challenge the basic assumptions and ideas of that mainstream. The vast body of traditional scholarship written about people

of color found in American libraries today is still influenced by racism and assumptions of racial inferiority of nonwhite people. We need new textbooks and cultural events which reconstruct the racist assumptions and theories which pretend to pass for “objective scholarship.”

Finally, a multicultural perspective in education should insist upon the empowerment of oppressed people and the transformation of society to abolish discrimination and inequality. Theories of cultural and social reality which stop short of addressing basic human problems experienced in the everyday world for people of color in America are useless. A theory is only important in the amount of human “reality” it explains or defines. Critical ideas about culture, history, society, and human development can truly “empower” a people who have experienced discrimination and social injustice. The task of educators here is to nurture and foster a critical consciousness and constructive self-awareness, pride and the values of excellence among young people of color, helping individual and groups to make positive contributions to their communities and society.

Multiculturalism also plays an invaluable role for white Americans at well. Because no genuine “dialogue” between ethnic groups can ever occur unless there is the presumption of equality and respect on all sides. White Americans need to learn the lessons of “nonwhite” contributions to the nation’s culture, art, politics and scientific fields, in order to overcome the legacy of racism and presumptions of nonwhite inferiority. Multiculturalism permits all Americans to discover our fundamental unity through our diversity.

Letters to the Editor

Letter To Editor

Recently I had an opportunity to preview POSSE, the new Black Western by Mario Van Peebles. I had two immediate reactions: (1) This is a movie that all African Americans should see and (2) I hope we, as publishers, can help it get a fair deal at the box office by encouraging our readers to check their tickets when they go to see it so that Van Peebles does not become a victim, like Spike Lee’s experience with Malcolm X.

You will recall that when Malcolm X was released, Home Alone II came out along with the

cartoon Aladdin. Both appeared to do better than Malcolm X during the initial days which are critical to a film’s success. We later found out as Spike complained to Warner Bros., that a number of Blacks purchasing tickets to Malcolm X got ticket stubs to Home Alone II and Aladdin. This deceptive practice boosted the ratings for these two movies and robbed Malcolm X of what would have been a more significant showing.

I have not been asked to write this letter by Van Peebles or Gramercy Pictures or the PR agency. I think the

movie is a good film experience that starts the process for giving the involvement and experiences of Black people in the West.

Yes, there is violence but it is not random nor glorified.

I hope the Gramercy people place ads with all of us and that this kind of endorsement, which I don’t believe I have made before other than Malcolm X, will not be taken as an excuse not to spend advertising dollars with us.

A Luta Continua!
John E. Warren
Publisher

Letter To The Editor

I feel compelled to respond to the letter written by James Posey in the May 5th paper. Mr. Posey mixed up a couple of his facts regarding legislation I am sponsoring. The Bill he referred to that was initiated by the Northeast Economic Alliance is HB 3499. I am sponsoring this particular piece of legislation to improve the effectiveness of state enterprise zones, not Representative Gordly. Although she has been very supportive. As for the Bill that Associated General Contractors has proposed, I became involved when I saw the Bill and had my staff send copies to several business leaders in the community so as to receive their input. It has always been my practice to go to my community regarding legislation that would affect the district, in this particular case, I believed adversely. When I sent a copy to Mr. Posey it was to elicit a response regarding how we could stop or amend the Bill. The Bill is detrimental to small and minority owned businesses. Please feel free to call my office for any further information. My very hard working staff, Charlotte or

Bill will gladly assist you. Also, for those of you who can’t come to Salem. I have been holding monthly Town Hall Meetings at the King Neighborhood Facility and my next one will be on Tuesday, May 25th at 7:00 PM. The one thing that Mr. Posey and I heartily agree on is that our community definitely needs to be involved in the legislative process.

Respectfully
Margaret Carter
State Representative Margaret Carter
District 18



Oregon Lottery Results

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Saturday May 15, 1993 • 4-6-7-17-19-29
Oregon Powerball
Wednesday May 12, 1993 • 10-24-35-36-39 PB 13
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Espy Calls Administration’s Anti-Hunger Legislation Comprehensive Reform

Secretary of Agriculture Mike Espy told the House Agriculture Committee that the administration’s hunger prevention bill, submitted to Congress represents a true commitment to addressing hunger in America and to reforming government programs.

The bill called the Mickey Leland Hunger Prevention Act, reforms the food stamp program in order to promote self sufficiency makes adequate food assistance more readily available to poor families with children and enhances program integrity and savings.

“Our comprehensive food stamp legislation is an investment in the future of our nation,” Espy said. “And it is an investment that is long overdue. Today, we have a tragic situation due to poverty and hunger in our nation.”

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