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Demand Excellence in Education

The best quality education is one of the most important issues that will determine ones future life, prosperity and destiny. But for Black American parents and students, this is the single most important issue that will affect not only our overall quality of life, but also will determine how we will achieve to the fullest extent actual freedom, justice, equality and empowerment. Excellence in education should not be just a matter for national political debate and dialogue; it should be the cause for urgent grassroots social action, protest and demand.

The truth is we are not making enough noise and clamor about what is happening to the majority of Black youth in the public schools systems across America. Why are 45 million Black Americans so silent about the failures of the primary and secondary school systems when it comes to the education of our children? The high school dropout rate for Black students continues to be double that of White students. This statistic has become so common that in many school districts it no longer serves as the subject or predicate for policy change at the school board level. Yet we know well the direct correlation between low academic achievement and persistent high school dropouts as well as the direct correlation between disproportionate high unemployment and incarceration. Income inequality is directly related to educational inequality!

EDUCATION SERVICES

Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.



Poverty persists disproportionately in the Black American community because of the absence of economic empowerment that would be fulfilled if we would educate ourselves more fervently and

A recent study completed by Stanford University's Sean Reardon established that income inequality also predetermines how well a student will do in school. In other words, students from "rich" families potentially do better in school than students from "poor" and working class families. For the first time the study revealed, "The achievement gap between children from high and low income families is far higher than the achievement gap between black and white students."

Options (BAEO). The mission of BAEO is to increase access to high-quality educational options for Black children by actively supporting parental choices policies and programs that empower low-income and working-class Black families.

From Mississippi to Kentucky to Virginia, New Jersey, Missouri, and New York as well as in Alabama and other states, there is a growing national movement of Black parents and advocates for school reform.

We salute the involvement and leadership of some the outstanding performing artists and young emerging leaders in the African American community who have taken a public stand on the crucial education issue. Especially we note the renowned leadership of John Legend. He is a member of the Board of Directors of Stand for Children Leadership Center and the Education Equality Project, two groups that work on education reform.

Legend emphasized, "Half of my fellow students dropped out before graduation, I was one of the lucky ones — I finished high school and went on to college ... With a different situation different teachers, maybe I would've been one of those 53 percent of young black men who do not graduate from high school. One of the 53 percent doing the low wage jobs, unemployment and prison."

The truth is we are not making enough noise and clamor about what is happening to the majority of Black youth in the public schools systems across America

urgently with excellence in every subject matter and discipline of

But it should not be shocking that the academic achievement gaps are determine both by race

The future is in our own hands to the extent to which we demand and achieve the best education in the world without apology or excuse

study. The future is in our own hands to the extent to which we demand and achieve the best education in the world without apology or excuse.

and economic class status. The question is what can we do about these systemic inequalities? This is why I have joined the ranks of the Black Alliance of Educational

New York Life: Parades and 'Nut Drivers'

“Jimmy, Jimmy...give this man what he wants but DON'T HELP HIM.”

It all started innocently enough with the purchase of a “nut driver” at my (former) favorite neighborhood hardware store. Normally, I would have searched out the tool myself but the nut drivers were hanging high above me so I asked “Jimmy” for assistance. I handed him the nut I needed to drive and he selected the tool. Unfortunately, when I got the tool home, it was the wrong size. I took it back. The manager was nearly apoplectic that I wanted to return the tool despite the fact that his employee had picked it out for me. So... Jimmy was loudly instructed to not help me anymore. Finally, a New York shop keeper worthy of my disdain!

Now, it took me five months to come across such a jerk but, yet, many of our out-of-town friends would fully expect to encounter this type of treatment the minute they set foot in New York City. An Australian colleague, here on a business trip, recently asked me if it was safe to ride the subway to reach our apartment at 7 p.m. He, of course, didn't realize that 7 p.m. is still rush hour, but, even if he had said 11 p.m., I would have told him it was safe. Old stereotypes about this town die hard.

One thing that hasn't changed about New York is the need for resolve. I ride the train (subway) to work. One many days, I'm faced with a dilemma. A seat-hog

NORTHWESTER IN NYC

Jeff Tryens

will, for either physio- or psychological reasons, occupy way more than one seat. Sometimes two seat hogs will sit next to one another hogging a middle third seat. Sure, I could just stand there waiting for a seat to open up at Times Square, OR I could plop myself down, cut-

A seat-hog will, for either physio- or psychological reasons, occupy way more than one seat

ting right through the hogger's little “I dare you” shield. Well, believe me, that requires resolve to do on a regular basis.

I enjoyed my first perk of the job this weekend. I was a winner in the Mayor's office lottery for bleacher tickets to the Macy's Thanksgiving Day parade. What a scene. The same number of people that live in the entire state of Oregon line the streets of New York to watch this extravaganza. It was really fun but a little disappointing. After you've seen 20 giant balloons, number 21 looks a lot the same. Same goes for weirdly dressed marching band majorettes. And so on. There's a kind of corporatized sameness to the procession that's just a little boring.

My favorite part of the parade was the float representing the Oneida Indian Nation. It was a fantastic combination of Oneida beliefs, note creation story giant turtle (Oops, sorry about that missing head.), and total kitsch, note, well, the whole float. I understand that the Oneida's gambling operations give them the luxury to be in the parade, but I admire their attempts to marry traditional beliefs with the dominant culture. Assuming, of course, it's not a

cynical attempt to fit in allowing them to maintain their monopoly on the lucrative gambling trade. Nah.

Every once in a while I am struck with disbelief that we're actually living in Manhattan. The other evening Pat and I stood on a high rock in lower Central Park overlooking a busy ice skating rink framed with trees in the foreground, tall buildings in the background all set off by a gorgeous pink sky. Stunning. And to think we were just taking a little detour (that also included Rockefeller Plaza) on our way to a see a movie! It felt like we were in a movie!

Work has been a little more challenging for me since city govern-

ment started pushing back against the Occupy Wall Street movement. I haven't had to do anything that I found distasteful but being on the other side of the metaphorical fence when the pushing and shoving starts is no fun. I find it very unfortunate that a group who's purpose is to expose the increasing wealth disparities in this country by focusing on corporate greed has, in the process, made life miserable for some of the country's most progressive mayors.

My latest challenge - I'm hiring a statistician to develop a new project in Operations based on a concept called predictive analytics. By integrating data from lots of different sources, we're going to try to predict the likelihood of problems arising in the future. For instance, we're already looking at how to better predict which accidents will result in successful claims against city government. A colleague has created a program that spits out a weekly list of the 25 residential building at highest risk of a catastrophic fire based on six different variables his team examines. The idea is use these techniques to better marshal scarce prevention resources.

Anyway, I'm hoping that the help in my new favorite hardware store (which looks amazingly like my old hardware store) will be nicer. Who, after all, wants to live in a neighborhood without a decent hardware store?