

A Report To The Community The Rochester City School District's African / African American Studies Department

By: Howard J. Eagle
February 2008

As many are aware, the Rochester City School District (RCSD) has established an African & African American Studies Department.

A group of RCSD teachers, administrators, parents and community members, including this writer and Mr. Wallace Smith, which is known as the Advisory Committee to the African & African American Studies Department has also been established. The Advisory Committee held its third meeting on January 31, 2008. The next meeting is scheduled to take place at RCSD Central Offices on March 17, 2008 at 3:30 p.m.

Other than offering advice to the Director of the Department, which presumably may or may not be accepted -- the role of the Advisory Committee is not clear to us (Mr. Smith and myself) at this time. If our understanding is correct, one aspect of advisement includes helping to foster engagement of RCSD parents and the general Rochester community relative to the Department's work.

As it relates to the intended work of the Department (again, if our understanding is correct) --- based on conversations with those who are leading the initiative, and the Job Description of the Department's sole employee, i.e. the Director --- it appears that the work will focus narrowly and exclusively on infusing new content into current curricula, and implementation of staff development and training associated with carrying out this single goal. We believe that this is a much limited direction, which is not likely (in and of itself) to result in significant qualitative or quantitative academic change or improvement, especially when considering the reality that instruction is to a large degree driven by state and federal standardized testing regiments, which are disguised as a so-called "movement" to raise academic standards.

While we (Mr. Smith and I) agree that efforts to broaden current, thoroughly Eurocentric curricula are important and necessary --- we also believe that the potential of a "Department of African & African American Affairs" as opposed to Studies --- is much greater relative to (not only curricula change and academic improvement), but overall cultural change within and throughout the RCSD.

For example, many are aware of a recent incident at Wilson High School, Commencement Campus, in which a 20-year, white teacher apparently felt that it was acceptable for her to refer to African American students as "monkeys, animals [and] chocolate." This incident is likely related to the reality that the overall culture at Wilson and within the

RCSD in general, is such that the offending teacher never gave it a second thought that there would be negative repercussions relative to utilizing foul, abusive, derogatory, disrespectful language to describe African American students --- even in the presence of a colleague who is also a person of color.

One reason for raising this example is because the incident was discussed at the January 31st African & African American Studies Advisory Committee meeting. Rochester Board of Education Commissioner Van White was present at the meeting, and mentioned that the fact that (at that point) --- there had been "no dialogue" at Wilson regarding the above referenced incident was "unacceptable." He also stated that he believed that the newly appointed Director of the African & African American Studies Department, Ms. Nyree Strong, should help facilitate dialogue at Wilson.

Ms. Strong's initial response regarding the Wilson incident was that she was "not surprised," and that she deals "with such issues all the time." She also mentioned that the Department of African & African American Studies is new, and "cannot be expected to resolve the issue of institutional racism." She noted that even though she is "capable and willing to help lead dialogue" --- she does "not necessarily see that as part of [her] role as Director of African & African American Studies."

Commissioner White noted that there is a class at Wilson called Theory of Knowledge. He said that the incident outlined above had not even been discussed in that particular class. He also mentioned that his daughter is a student at Wilson, and that when he asked her if the above referenced incident is "unusual" --- her answer was "no." Lastly, he mentioned that his daughter is the only black person in her Latin class, and that students were "telling jokes about black people" in that particular class.

We do not believe that the incidents referenced above are isolated. On the contrary, we are thoroughly convinced that such occurrences are widespread, and that this reality supports our position that individual and institutional racism, which are inseparable from each other, are pervasive within the RCSD, which we believe represents a serious obstacle to effective teaching and learning, as well as potentially, a very volatile situation.

This is why, from the very beginning, i.e. from the time that we first proposed the idea of developing a "Department of African & African American Affairs" to Commissioner White (during the summer of 2007) --- we had always envisioned a Department with a mission that would be much broader than dealing exclusively with curricula issues. In fact, we envisioned the Department as a

SISTA SEANTELE'S SPORTS

The Economics of Sports

by O. Seantelle White

Sports are a business. It is entertainment. While I have discussed the drama factor of sports- I guess it is not so funny when it hits close to home. Last week, things began to heat up for the Patriots. During week one of the season, accusations were made that Patriots coach Bill Belichick instructed Matt Walsh to video tape opponents, in order to capture and evaluate hand signals used on the sidelines.

Cheating is cheating- but it's not considered cheating if it falls in a loophole. NFL rules are implicit. You have to cheat the old fashioned way. You can situate someone on the sideline or in the stands with a radio or cell phone who may in turn, call up to 'the box' and let them try and decipher the subsequent play. An offensive coordinator may sit in 'the box' with binoculars and try to distinguish the sign for a blitz, a play action pass, a half back option- and then communicate with the defensive coordinator or head coach. Under no circumstances, may you video tape.

That's all well and good. My concern is the damage control that Roger Goodell has done all season. Patriots videographer, Matt Walsh, came forward and eventually supplied the NFL commissioner with videotapes and notes that he created during his dirty deeds. Goodell decided he would review the evidence, make a determination and then destroy the tapes. To summarize his mindset, "We (the NFL) detected a violation and ... (gave) unprecedented discipline." He is referring to a \$250,000 fine levied against the team and \$500,000 assessed to the coach. NFL coaches and owners have closed ranks. Even the Steelers front office has made statements that the tapes did not affect the two AFC championships the Patriots stole from us. Say what now? While I respect the owners of my team, I don't think they could know that.

Many people argue that the Patriots' perfect regular season- despite ceasing to tape in week two- indicates that the tapes really didn't help. I beg to differ. Consider that the Patriots have taped for years- at least as far back as their defeat of the Eagles in 2001. That is seven years of the last decade- a decade that they have more or less dominated. Do you think all of the teams had time to draft

up all new plays and signals? Plays that they have used for years with minor adjustments? I doubt it.

But as I said, this is big business. This mirrors the pattern of what capitalism has become in America. Protect the interest of corporations while hurling the book at the workers on the front line. Protect the interest of big business while they cheat the consumer. Goodell did what any textbook capitalist would have. He made sure that the money kept coming. Indeed owners around the league realize the impact this could have. The Patriots owner Bob Kraft is good old money- if you follow me. And then, who is to say that the Patriots are the only ones with a little video action?

Goodell tried to sweep the incident to the side because it was the sound economic thing to do. It was a desperate thing to do- in order to avoid Senate hearings that may be inevitable. PA Senator Arlen Specter has questioned Goodell directly about his destruction of evidence but the commissioner stands by his decision. Time will tell if that is wise or not.

On February 20th, Goodell reported that he has made progress in speaking with Matt Walsh's attorney concerning testimony from Walsh. Walsh has been willing to come forward all season. Originally the NFL offered indemnification for any cooperation from Walsh. His attorney, Michael Levy, feels what has been offered still leaves his client vulnerable and made the following statement: "I sent them my proposal last Thursday (Feb. 14). I spoke to Gregg Levy, outside counsel for the NFL, [Tuesday] and I have not heard back from the league or any of its lawyers about my proposal."

So what gives? Is Goodell still buying time? Does he really want to know? I don't think he does. And who the hell told him that he could destroy those tapes? Football is for the fans. We buy the jerseys, tickets, concessions- spend the money! Once something like this is disclosed it is Public Information. Goodell was questioned during Superbowl week about destroying the tapes and said he felt he did the right thing- there was no evidence. Well, then he should have let an independent entity make that determination. By taking the law in his hands it may lead to the law coming after him in the future. If so, it is only right.

"clearinghouse" within the larger institution, which would not only focus on curricula issues, but rather on numerous aspects of issues and affairs that are, in some cases, vital to the academic well being and best interests of the African and African American communities.

In addition to helping with broadening and correcting distorted, inaccurate, thoroughly Eurocentric curricula, we believe that via development of mechanisms designed to facilitate ongoing, consistent, widespread dialogue and training for all RCSD employees --- the Department could play a critical and pivotal role in helping to change the overall culture of the Rochester City School District, including addressing the potentially volatile issue of pervasive, individual and institutionalized racism.

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Ask your local paper to feature school and community programs that celebrate National Women's History Month. Direct them to the Women's History Month section of the Women's History Month for ideas and information this year's Honorees.

Ask your local schools what they are doing for National Women's History Month. Suggest they visit our website for information and resources. www.nwhp.org

Suggest to your local schools and school boards that they encourage students to write an essay or draw a picture about the theme, "Women's Art: Women's Vision." Encourage students at every grade level to develop an art project.

Contribute a Women's History Month Program Kit to a local school or local library. 2008 Official Program Kit No Video

Take a 2008 commemorative poster,

Official 2008 Theme Poster banner, 2008 NWHM Banner or bookmarks 2008 Themed Bookmarks to your local library or bookstore and ask what special features or programs they have scheduled for National Women's History Month.

Ask that your place of worship recognize women's contribution to your spiritual community either in a special celebration or through announcements at gatherings.

Write a proclamation for National Women's History Month and ask your local city council or board of supervisors to issue a special proclamation in honor of March being National Women's History Month. See a Sample Proclamation in the Women's History Month section of our website www.nwhp.org

Plan a reception or luncheon to honor the women artists in your community.

Write a letter to the editor of your local paper explaining the need to celebrate and recognize women's contributions and include information about National Women's History Month and suggestions of women from the community to celebrate.

Invite a woman from history to be at your celebration program. See the NWHM listings of Women's History Performers and Authors and Presenters on our website www.nwhp.org There may be a performer in your community that you can plan a special program with or one of the listed National Performers can travel across the country to be at your event.

Email the nwhp@aol.com images of your events with permission from those involved.

Visit our webstore for an array of educational and celebratory materials to make women's history contributions visible. Women's History Celebration Materials

Otis Young - First African-American actor to co-star on TV

...continued from page 1

In the 1980's Young's acting career slowed and he began to become more spiritually focused. In 1983, Young earned his bachelor's degree from L.I.F.E. Bible College in Los Angeles, California. After becoming an ordained pastor, he served as senior pastor from 1986-1988 at Elim Foursquare Gospel Church, located at 469 West Ave. in Rochester, NY. Young also taught acting classes at Rochester's School Without Walls from 1987-1991.

The School Without Walls Principal, Dan Drmacich, remembers when Young approached him and asked what opportunities there were at the school for him to work with the students. Principal Drmacich remembered Otis from "The Last Detail" and knew it would be a golden opportunity to have someone with Young's experience to be exposed to the aspiring acting students. After being referred by creditable sources, Young was hired by

Dan Drmacich as a part-time acting specialist. "He was an inspirational person for the students. Otis was very motivational and simply outstanding," remembers Mr. Drmacich, who felt that it was beneficial for students to have a professional actor at their disposal. Drmacich felt that to have someone like Young, who could first-handedly speak to the students about the racism that he faced while breaking through the ranks into the acting industry, was invaluable.

Also, at Rochester's Monroe Community College, Young worked as a Professor of Communications and head of the Drama Department from 1989 until his retirement in 1999. In 2001, Young suffered a stroke and died in Los Angeles, California. Otis Young remains as an example that dreams can be accomplished and barriers can be broken as long as you believe in yourself.

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About the Authors:

Virginia DeBerry was formerly the president of BB/LW, an agency for plus size and petite models as well as a spokeswoman for Hanes hosiery. She currently lives in New Jersey. Donna Grant, a Brooklyn native, currently lives in the borough with her husband. Before becoming a novelist, she spent more than a decade as a plus-sized model. DeBerry and Grant have co-authored three bestselling novels - Tryin' to Sleep in the Bed You Made (merit Award/Fiction, Black Caucus of the American Library Association), Far From the Tree (New York Times Bestseller) and Better Than I Know Myself (Open Book Award, Essence Bestseller, Best African American Fiction 2004 Borders and Waldenbooks) - turning a 25-year friendship into the most successful and enduring writing collaboration in fiction.

Purchase your copy of Gotta Keep on Tryin' at MMB before February 28th and save 15% off the cover price of \$24.95. The first 10 customers to purchase the book will receive the 2008 Calendar/Journal "Celebrate You". Wise words aimed to inspire and empower by the authors and best friends, Virginia DeBerry & Donna Grant



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Many interviewers when they come to talk to me, think they're being progressive by not mentioning in their stories any longer that I'm black. I tell them, 'Don't stop now. If I shot somebody you'd mention it.'

~Colin Powell

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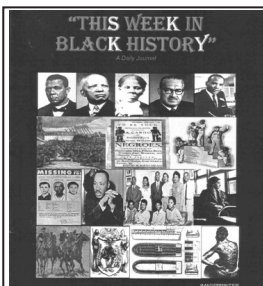
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150 State Street,

Transportation will be provided, contact us for details
This event empowers Latinas ages 7-17, encouraging them to feel good about themselves and be proud to be Latina. It is an opportunity for young girls to celebrate who they are with other girls just like them, and learn about iSoy Unica! information and resources.
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Tuesday March 11, 2008

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Just for Laughs

God is sitting in Heaven when a scientist says to Him,

"Lord, we don't need you anymore. Science has finally figured out a way to create life out of nothing. In other words, we can now do what you did in the beginning."

"Oh, is that so? Tell me," says God.

"Well," says the scientist, "We can take dirt and form it into the likeness of You and breathe life into it, thus creating man."

God replies, "Well, that's interesting. Show Me."

So the scientist bends down to the earth and starts to mold the soil.

"Oh no, no, no," interrupts God. "Get your own dirt."

January 20-March 16

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Saturday, March 1

iSoy Unica! iSoy Latina! University of Rochester at 8:30 a.m. sharp!

Answer to last week's Sudoku

8	9	7	4	5	2	6	1	3
5	6	3	8	9	1	4	2	7
4	1	2	6	7	3	8	9	5
6	5	8	2	4	9	7	3	1
1	7	4	3	6	5	2	8	9
3	2	9	1	8	7	5	4	6
9	4	1	5	2	6	3	7	8
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