

The Abell Report

What we think about, and what we'd like you to think about

Published as a community service by The Abell Foundation

Abell Salutes: EURUS:Turning Russian Brain Drain Into American Brain Gain.

If you are a Russian emigre, reading any one of several Russian newspapers that are written and published in the United States for its growing Russian population, you are likely to see this classified ad:

Scientists and Engineers . We would like to help you with your invention. At no charge we can evaluate the commercial potential of your invention. We can help you to license it and find a market for it, and help you set up your own company. We speak Russian and confidentiality is assured. To receive more information, contact EURUS 210 N. Charles St. Baltimore, MD 21201 att: Eva Burdman, Director.

The ad is designed to be step one in mining the rich vein of scientific knowledge that runs through the Russian immigrant community in the United States. In so doing, EURUS helps scientists move ideas from concept through to commercialization, and helps consumers enjoy the benefits of new products and services that might not otherwise, were it not for these Russian scientists, come into use.

Equally important, because EURUS is Maryland-based, the process as it moves along makes its contribution to the economic well being of the state. The process begins when a Russian scientist contacts EURUS, Inc., with an idea. At that point, a team working in the University of Maryland Office of

(continued on page 6)

The "Melting Pot" Under Challenge: Afrocentrism and Multiculturalism in Baltimore City's Public Schools:

*In a well-intentioned attempt to "correct," are we "rewriting"?
The community needs to debate: "What is accurate?
What shall we teach our children?"*

At the August 8, 1991 meeting of the Baltimore City School Board, Dr. Rebecca Carroll, co-chairman of the board-appointed African/African American Task Force, presented the committee's recommendations "for the infusion of materials about the history, contributions, and perspectives of people of African descent into the (multicultural) curriculum documents currently under development." The board's decision to develop and implement a multicultural curriculum and an African and African-American content within it marked a watershed in the history of the system.

What kind of America do Americans want?

At stake is not only the question of the kind of education 110,000 students in one city will receive, but also larger questions: What kind of America do Americans want? Is it one where society emphasizes separate ethnic identities, or one where these same separate ethnic identities, though preserved, are submerged in favor of the melting pot ideal? How should society go

about identifying and then "correcting" the biases in our existing curricula? What are the risks implicit in the task force's objectives? What are the hoped for gains?

The program began as a pilot in the fifth grade on the first day of the school year, September, 1991.

Because the issue remains a complex one, with widespread implications, the continuing debate about it serves the community interest. This article seeks to provide background material to deepen and extend that debate.

What shall we teach our children?

In a climate witnessing the growth of (and debate about) ethnic pride, educators, elected officials, social scientists and parents in Baltimore and throughout America are being confronted with the issue: what shall we teach our children?

Under challenge is the teaching of versions of history and views of American society sacrosanct since the founding of our country. The existing history curriculum focuses largely but not exclusively on the European origins of and influences

of those origins on American culture, and, critics say, pays scant attention to the contributions of separate ethnic minorities.

It is critical in any discussion of this issue to separate the several issues, which are often mixed together. The immediate discussion below will be limited to the teaching of history.

The first issue is whether instruction should be accurate. Most people would probably answer, "Yes" and make the point that accuracy is not the exclusive possession of any one group be it Afrocentrist, Eurocentrist or multiculturalist. There are those, however, who advocate the presentation of certain recognized myths they believe critical to the maintenance of a necessary level of patriotism and national pride. It appears that this latter point of view is advocated by fewer and fewer people.

A second issue is whether American children should be exposed to cultures other than those of Western Europe. The answer is, "Yes" from those who point out the shrinking world of the late 20th century communications and transportation, the growing importance of world trade, and the growth of populations in this country that trace their ancestry to countries not in Western Europe. Others would argue "No" because they believe it is critical to every country that wishes to remain united that there be a common culture shared by all its citizens.

Published bi-monthly by
The Abell foundation
1116 Fidelity Building
210 North Charles Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21201
(410) 547-1300

Is "emphasis" correcting or rewriting?

For example, in teaching about the life of Thomas Jefferson and his place in American history, it is allegedly Eurocentric to emphasize Jefferson as patriot, a founding father who helped write the Declaration of Independence; it is Afrocentric to emphasize that Jefferson was a slave owner; it is multicultural to emphasize that Jefferson allegedly borrowed ideas of many cultures which he put together into his writing of the Declaration; it is more accurate to teach that Jefferson, one of the founding fathers who helped write the Declaration of Independence, was, also a slave owner, not untypical in the lifestyle of Virginia's landed gentry, who in writing the Declaration, borrowed heavily and wisely from the writings of many cultures.

These differing views of how history should be taught, as they are finding their ways into the classrooms of public schools in America, attempt, by virtue of their own special emphasis, to write (or in some cases "correct") history.

"Unum" under challenge . . .

A simple lesson on Thomas Jefferson, then, taught from an "Afro-centric" or "multicultural" curriculum, can turn out to be what some might call a shift in emphasis and others a rewriting in the teaching of the history of America. Such a lesson is not about Jefferson; it is, depending on the emphasis, about a different view of America's past, present and future from the one traditionally taught. It is perhaps about changing the definition of

America, from an experiment wherein diverse cultures come together to become a new culture ("American"), to one emphasizing distinctly separate ethnic and racial groups. The alternative curricula ask for new answers to old questions: Against a background of revisionism based on ethnicity, how did America come into being? Who are its heroes? What is its history? What is its heritage? What are its societal values? What indeed is the destiny of a country founded on pluribus unum when its precious unum ("one") is under challenge from forces that focus on, and look to sharply divide the country into, the pluribus (many)?

Those who support the teaching of a multicultural curriculum argue that the Eurocentric view of the past distorts the present, insults minority cultures (African, Hispanic, Asian) by ignoring them, and damages the psyche of minority students (products of these same cultures) by failing to give them a sense of pride in the role their particular heritage has played in the forming of America. Those who support the teaching of the traditional Eurocentric perspective take the view that the promotion of cultural separatism runs counter to the American dream of cultural pluralism—the melting pot idea which purports to create one culture ("American") out of many.

All things considered, and in particular, in Baltimore City, what shall we teach our children?

The African/African-American Task Force, formed in October 1990 by the Baltimore City Public Schools, believes it knows. It takes the position, that:

"The overall goal of Baltimore city's general curriculum is to provide a multicultural education for all its students, that is, an education that instills in students the quality of respecting and accepting a variety of cultural perspectives without

hierarchy. However, we must acknowledge that because over 80 percent of Baltimore City Public Schools is composed of African-Americans...it is of the utmost importance that these students find themselves and their heritage represented accurately and fairly within any adopted curriculum. Therefore the role of the Curriculum Task Force is to provide input to the curriculum developers of the Baltimore City Public Schools so that they will infuse the legacy of Africans and African-Americans into every instructional area of the city school curriculum from K through 12."

What the task force recommends be taught in the city schools within a multicultural curriculum is a series of "Understandings" and "Suggested Topics to Develop and Enhance the Understandings" in each of certain selected disciplines that make up the curriculum: mathematics, science, music, social studies.

In the case of mathematics, for example, it recommends the basic "understanding" that "African contributions to the development of mathematics are fundamental and extensive."

It then suggests the following be taught so as to develop and enhance the "understanding":

- The measurement of time, length, and mass dates back to prehistoric times in Egypt. (In the curriculum Egypt is described as "African.")
- Both the concepts of numbers and the process of counting are first recorded in Africa. (e.g. Ishango, bone, Egyptian numerals)
- Euclid of Alexandria, one of the most important mathematicians of his era, spent his entire life in Africa.
- African Muslims introduced their numerals into Europe.

The report goes on to recommend similar "Understandings" and

"Topics" to "develop and enhance" other subjects. In each case, the emphasis is on the "infusion" into the curriculum of the role of Africa (taking in Egypt) and Africans to the particular subject.

"Infusion is more than inclusion"

Further, the report holds, "Infusion is more than inclusion. In the past school systems have often included information about African-Americans in segments, during the month of February, and in one or two learning modules. The African / African-American Curriculum Task Force maintains that this information must be infused into every aspect of the curriculum, including the language and illustrations used in the writing of the materials. The Task Force will recommend infusion of information often overlooked in the presentation of history. For example," the report argues, "documented evidence exists that the oldest mathematical texts are of African origin, that Africans came to America prior to 1492, and that the University of Sankore at Timbuktu was a major source of education and culture during the 15th through 17th centuries."

Advocates of infusing "Afrocentricism" into the curriculum make three assumptions: first, that learning about the richness of one's ancestry builds self esteem; second, that this richness, in quality and quantity is there to teach in the first place; third, that the existing curriculum described as Eurocentric teaches many misperceptions, by omission or commission, and that the schools have a duty to correct them.

There is no clear agreement among advocates of Afrocentric curriculum that teaching their curriculum increases the self esteem of the students to whom it is being

taught. In an article in *The American Scholar*, (Spring, 1991) Molefi Kete Asante, professor in and chairman of the department of African-American studies at Temple University and a leading authority on the subject, vehemently denies that the project seeks to raise "self esteem and self respect" among African, Latinos and Native Americans. "I know of no Afrocentric curriculum planner — Asa Hilliard, Wade Nobles, Leonard Jeffries, Don McNeely being the principal ones — who insist the primary aim is to raise self esteem.

The "Self Esteem" Issue In the Afrocentric Experience:

The argument is a false lead to nowhere because the curriculum planners I am familiar with insist that the fundamental objective is to provide accurate information. A secondary effect of accuracy and truth might be the adjustment of attitudes by both black and white students. In several surveys of college students, research has demonstrated that new information changes attitudes in both African-American and white students. Whites are not so apt to take a superior attitude when they are aware of the achievements of other cultures. They do not lose their self-esteem, they adjust their views. On the other hand, African-Americans who are often as ignorant as whites about African achievements adjust their attitudes about themselves once they are exposed to new information." But Asante, in making the argument that accuracy, not self esteem is the purpose of the infusion, leaves open the question of why the proposed Baltimore curriculum is described as "Afrocentric" rather than "accurate"?

Dr. Diane Ravitch, Assistant U. S. Secretary of Education, responding to Asante in a follow-up article, disagrees. She argues that Asante is wrong, that ethnocentric curricula does claim to raise the self esteem of students of the same racial or ethnic group. She writes, "Professor Wade Nobles, whom (Asante) cites, runs a state funded program in California called the HAWK Federation Youth Development and Training program which aims to immerse black males in African and African-American culture; its purpose, according to the program's brochure, is to address simultaneously the problems of substance abuse prevention (sic), gang violence, academic failure, low aspirations and poor self esteem. And the New York state task force report, 'A Curriculum of Inclusion,' whose chief consultant was professor Leonard Jeffries, Jr., repeatedly asserts the relationship between the curriculum and the self-esteem of students. The report claims that a rewriting of the curriculum will promote 'higher self esteem and self-respect' among children from racial minorities, while 'children from European cultures will have a less arrogant perspective of being a part of the group that has done it all.'"

"Logically . . . teaching Afrocentrism to African students does in fact improve self esteem."

Erich Martel, teacher of world history and U.S. history in Woodrow Wilson High School in Washington, D.C., in a letter to then D.C. School Superintendent Andrew Jenkins, comes down hard on the idea of Afrocentric curriculum: "The assertion that learning about one's glorious ancestors will build self-

esteem in African-American students is nothing more than that, an assertion. In his address to the D.C. school principals in November, 1989, Dr. Asa Hilliard, III, perhaps the leading national proponent of Afrocentric education, failed to cite any scientific classroom studies. Moreover, in a recent interview with Washington Post writer David Nicholson, he made an astounding admission: 'I don't know that any one has done the research to say, other than *by impression and opinion* (italics Martel's) what's going to happen.' The nation's leading advocate doesn't know! Should we be committing the resources of our entire school system to a questionable philosophy, whose leading advocate at best can admit only to 'impression and opinion' in support of it?"

On the issue of self-esteem, Dr. Lisa Delpit, co-chairperson of the Institute For Urban Research, Morgan State University, and a member of the Baltimore City Public Schools African / African-American Task Force, says, "I don't know if teaching Afrocentrism to African-American students does, in fact, improve self-esteem. Logically it would seem to me that it would, and I have seen enough anecdotal evidence that it does. Still, until hard research has been done we cannot say. But I do know that it is necessary to teach viewpoints of history other than the Eurocentric if we as human beings are to survive on this planet."

Some opponents of any version of an Afrocentric/multicultural curriculum argue that African American students who attend parochial or exclusive private schools that traditionally have paid little heed to Afrocentrism do better than African-American students in the public schools, where Afrocentrism is emphasized.

The Heritage Issue; The African contribution to American culture:

Fundamental to the Afrocentric program are certain historic assertions: that early civilizations began in Africa; that Africa is the cradle of civilization; that people from African countries once held positions as world teachers, and that African/African-Americans have throughout history made significant contributions in the arts, sciences, humanities, politics and other aspects of the human experience.

On the subject of the African-American contribution to American culture there is little argument; it has been and is generous and ongoing. But on the subject of the history of Africa as it relates to world civilization and of Africa's and African-American contribution to world civilization, there is little agreement, much controversy. (Much of the perspectives of Afrocentrism are grounded in the concept that Egypt was a part of the "African" culture, and there is considerable debate among scholars about this.)

Martel, in an article written by Michael Marriott in the New York Times (08/11/91), questions some of what Afrocentrists press educators to present as truth. "Some of these things rubbed me the wrong way," he said, after reviewing Afrocentric materials for the current curriculum committee at his school. "There were all kinds of claims, such as black people coming to America before Columbus, which has been dismissed by almost all archaeologists and specialists in pre-Columbian America."

Marriott comments, "The theory that Africans sailed to America before Columbus is indeed dismissed by most scholars of that period. But other basic tenets of Afrocentricity are less disputed,

depending on the extreme to which they are taken. For example, few scholars question that earliest man appeared on the African continent. Whether that should be interpreted to mean civilization also started there is debatable.”

*The issue of
“misperceptions” in
Eurocentric curriculum:*

Dr. Carroll, chairperson of the task force that produced the Baltimore study, in making her presentation to the school board, cited the following as a lingering example of a “misperception” that remains in the curriculum: “Nat Turner is referred to as a slave. That misperception needs to be corrected. Nat Turner was not a slave, he was a human being who was enslaved.”

It is not surprising that a culture that sprang from Western Europe and premised on the desirability of a common “American” culture has omitted the contributions of any particular ethnic group. Prominent historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his article, “Towards a Divisive Diversity,” (Wall Street Journal, 06/25/91) makes such a case: “The curse of racism (is) the great failure of the American experiment, the glaring contradiction of American ideals and the still crippling disease of American society.” But that same society has been responsive: Genuine efforts to correct the imbalance have been and are being made. There is general agreement among educators that Eurocentric curriculum, with the recent infusions into it of many ethnic cultures including and perhaps especially black culture, is a lot less Eurocentric than it has been.

But as Afrocentrists argue that Eurocentrism is replete with misperceptions unfavorable to blacks, Eurocentrists are left to point out that there does not appear to be

any effort in the framing of Afrocentric curriculum to teach the negatives as well as the positives of African contributions. For example, it is an historical fact that the selling of African slaves by Africans predated the European slave trade of Africans to North America. Does the curriculum insure that this aspect of history is taught, notwithstanding the practice of white Americans to keep Africans enslaved?

*The issue for the
Baltimore City community;
what shall we teach
our children?*

There are, now, some guidelines. The results of a public opinion poll commissioned by the New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) indicate that scrapping the common heritage in favor of separate histories of separate groups isn’t what ordinary citizens want at all. These findings were reported by Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers in his New York Times column of 12/29/91.

Referring to the survey, Shanker said, “Three quarters of the New York staters who responded to the NYSUT poll considered teaching ‘the common heritage and values that we share as Americans’ to be ‘very important.’ And when you break down responses by ethnic groups, it turns out that many more African Americans and Hispanics believe it’s ‘very important’ to teach the common heritage than whites: The numbers are 70 percent of whites and a whopping 89 percent of African-Americans and 88 percent Hispanics.

“But respondents to the NYSUT poll were not talking about going back to the old way of teaching history, when we ignored the contributions of minority, ethnic and racial groups to American history and society. Eighty nine percent

believed that public schools should teach both the traditional events of American history and the contributions and experiences of America’s ethnic and racial populations.’ And there was strong agreement across groups on this point: 88 percent of the whites, 91 percent of the African Americans and 92 percent of the Hispanics polled believed that both should be taught.”

The Questions . . .

The report of the Curriculum Task Force; the school board’s decision to infuse it into the curriculum of the Baltimore City Public Schools; the recent poll in New York State—all leave black and white educators, elected officials, parents and students with a number of questions. All of them are important in the context of support for public education.

- 1) America has achieved its success as a society on the strength of the “melting pot” ideal. What are the risks to that ideal in focusing on any one individual “ism”? The problem is complex because the melting pot has not always worked as well for some as it has for others;
- 2) Variations of multicultural curriculum, and in some cases, curriculum emphasizing Afrocentricism, have only recently been introduced into schools in Portland, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, Detroit and Prince George’s County, MD. No results of the experience are yet available; would the students of Baltimore City Public Schools be better served if the decision about whether to introduce the program in Baltimore could be made after the results of these programs became known? And in the absence of quantifiable goals, what “results” will be called “acceptable”?

- 3) As the school system is trying to decentralize and relocate decision making authority from the central office to individual schools, will each school be given authority to decide on the degree to which it will change its curriculum?
- 4) Parents, students and educators all say they seek a balanced curriculum. But how to find that balance: in teaching an Afrocentric component within a multicultural curriculum to a class that is 80 percent African American, is there not a distinct danger that multiculturalism will lose out to Afrocentrism?
- 5) Even among those who reject the need for infusion of Afrocentrism into Eurocentric there is recognition that inaccuracies need to be corrected. If one rejects Afrocentrism as a technique to redress the balance, what program would Eurocentrists suggest in its place, to accomplish what all agree must be accomplished--teaching what is accurate.
- 6) On the other hand, numerous critics are urging that Americans have a need, as it faces challenges from other advanced economies, to come together as a society. In a recent book, James Fallows urges us "to revive the idea that America is one coherent society, with bonds that are stronger than its internal differences. We understood this instructively during World War II, but not often enough since then." A similar plea for unity was made recently by Time magazine in its cover story ruing the "Fraying of America." Does emphasis on our diverse origins lead to a stronger sense of unity by reducing past grievances, or weaken our unity by emphasizing our diversity?

It is no small decision the Baltimore City School Board has taken. At stake, in a well-intentioned effort to correct inaccuracies, is accuracy itself, challenging the historic merits of the melting pot ideal and in the process,

putting it at risk. And, complicating the debate, each of the complex and delicate issues must be resolved by mortals—each of whom brings to the debate inevitable cultural biases. What shall we teach our children? Clearly, we must teach them what is accurate, what is balanced, and what is consistent with the responsibilities of public education in a democratic society—as citizens of good will, working in common cause in free and open debate, choose to define those terms.

Eurocentrists Afrocentrists and multi-culturalists all take pride that their respective points of view welcome free and open debate.

All have a duty to get on with it.

Abell Salutes: EURUS:

(continued from page 1)

Technology Liaison evaluates the invention. EURUS will, within a 90-day period, decide whether to terminate the arrangement or move forward with it, entering, then, into a contractual relationship with the inventor for ownership and share-of-the profits rights.

Wayne Swann, director of the office, is optimistic on the future role of EURUS in achieving its objectives: "What EURUS does is to make the most of the Soviet brain drain. There are almost 12,000 Soviet scientists living and working in Maryland alone, many of whom are extraordinarily energetic and inventive. Our normal rate of success with technology transfer, taking a product from the laboratory to the marketplace, is about twenty five percent. All things considered, the talent to be marketed and at the same time the hurdles to get over, I would expect that our rate of success with the Soviet scientists' initiatives to be close to that.

But that total will meaningfully enrich the economy of Maryland. I think before too long we'll be able to say that EURUS is helping to make the Soviet's brain drain America's brain gain."

Some Recent Grants by The Abell Foundation

Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, Inc. \$100,000
Toward relocation expenses of headquarters from Chicago to Baltimore.

Baltimore Jobs In Energy Project \$30,000
For seed funding toward staffing costs to promote and develop recycling manufacturing industry in the local area.

Baltimore Opera Company \$5,000
Toward cost of a six-week program, "Create and Produce", for students at Harbor City Learning Center to create their own opera and to identify social issues on which to base the libretto.

Boy Scouts of America \$25,000
For staffing for eight inner city Boy Scout troops.

Communities Organized to Improve Life/The Learning Bank \$25,000
In support of the Family Literacy Project, an adult literacy program for parents of students at Steuart Hill Elementary School to increase math, reading and writing skills as well as to enhance parenting skills.

Maryland Food Committee \$100,000
Toward capital equipment for emergency food centers and soup kitchens in order to increase the distribution capacity of usable but unsalable surplus food.

Morgan State University \$15,000
Start-up costs of the Granville Academy in Baltimore, an after-school program providing inner city students with fundamental business and financial skills.

Offender Aid and Restoration of Baltimore \$5,000
Toward the revolving loan bail fund for minor offenders to reduce overcrowded conditions in the Baltimore City Jail.

Sexual Assault Recovery Center \$165,600
Seed funding for staffing of a comprehensive Children's and Adolescent Division of SARC which will include group and individual treatment sessions for sexually assaulted child victims.

University of Maryland Foundation \$25,000
For start-up operating funds of the Western Maryland Conservancy; in part to encourage public-private partnerships in the protection and preservation of environmentally sensitive land.