

Afrocentrism and the shocking silence over Rwanda

The horror of Rwanda is blaring from every television set and newspaper headline. Half a million people gleefully slaughtered in a tiny country in the middle of Africa that most people had never even heard of. Two million refugees suddenly hit by a murderous plague of cholera, with perhaps a quarter of the country dead or dying in agony.

But how is this inhuman monstrosity being handled by the American educational system—whose benevolently intended but simple-minded goal now seems to be the creation of “self-esteem”? What are American educators telling black students about Rwanda to make them “feel good about themselves”? Let’s give them Cleopatra. All right, Cleopatra was black. All right, the Greeks stole their philosophy from black scholars in ancient Africa. Now how about Rwanda?

The behavior of America’s black leadership class is curious. Randall Robinson, head of “TransAfrica,” recently staged a

heavily publicized hunger strike. Why was he starving himself? Perhaps something in Africa? A continent on which suffering and injustice are never in short supply? Well, no, actually. He was starving himself for Haiti, whose vicious murder rate per capita is currently under 10 percent that of Washington, D.C. What does Mr. Robinson have to say about Rwanda? Nothing.



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How about Congress’ Black Caucus? Leader Kweisi Mfume, for example, or Rep. Charles Rangel. Strangely, they, too, have nothing to say about Rwanda. And they’ve had nothing to say about anything else in Africa since the hated white man relinquished control of South Africa. It’s as if the real Africa didn’t exist. A military coup d’etat took place in Gambia just last week, but the Black Caucus doesn’t want to hear anything about it. Instead, ashamed that “black brothers” in Haiti occupy the poorest and most backward country

in the Western Hemisphere, with no democratic institutions whatever, they want to invade it and somehow turn it into Argentina.

Since President Clinton is putty in the hands of these people, he, too, is acting like Gen. Norman Schwarzkopf about invading Haiti. Mr. Clinton’s woman at the U.N., Madeleine Albright, tells us that “with surprising unanimity” the world is aghast at the horrors taking place—no, not in Rwanda—but in Haiti. If “the world” is distressed at Rwanda, you couldn’t prove it by Madeleine Albright.

In the world of American education, we’re in a particularly acute state of hypocrisy. “Aryan” racism is out of fashion, to say the least. In intellectual circles it’s totally discredited, fit only for bikers or skinheads on the Geraldo show. For a civilized person, “blood,” ancestry and genealogy are not supposed to count. On the other hand, thanks to affirmative action and multiculturalism in the schools, blood is making a stunning comeback. You may call it “multiculturalism” as long as you like, and it’s a stupid idea anyway, but whenever “Afrocentrism” get into the act, it’s just racism under a new name.

The Manhattan Institute recently

published a collection of essays by brilliant black scholars called “Alternatives to Afrocentrism,” which is worth its weight in gold. In her preface, Linda Chavez points out that within the last decade “Afrocentric” curricula, largely racial flattery systems, have become a staple of many urban schools, particularly with large black student populations. The benign idea behind this new fad is that “black schoolchildren can learn effectively only in an environment that recognizes and amplifies their African heritage.” If students learn of great accomplishments by those sharing their skin color, the theory goes, they’ll develop “an enhanced sense of self-esteem, which in turn will promote learning.” This has become the conventional wisdom of American education.

Unfortunately, there’s absolutely no evidence to support it. Even the “California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility,” after rigorous scholarly examination of the evidence of a major study, concluded sadly that there was no connection between, on the one hand, self-esteem, and on the other: academic achievement, drug use, teenage pregnancy, crime, child abuse or welfare dependency. None. The

fabled “self-esteem” did no good at all. And it didn’t cause or explain anything.

Among the collection’s essays are particularly sparkling ones by Stanley Crouch and Michael Meyers. Mr. Meyers describes the Afrocentric education in a typical U.S. pub-

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lic school, which requires black students to be “uncritically abject, obsequious, and worshipful” toward an Afrocentric liturgy and worldview that is both fraudulent and primitive. Scholars, he says,

should not abandon the pursuit of truth, but must “examine and confront all racial idiocies.” Otherwise, he says, they’re merely producing a “black imitation of white racism.”

To my question, “What about Rwanda?” Afrocentrists, pushed to the wall, say, “Well, what about Hitler?” And, less often, “What about Stalin?” Now this is a perfectly fair objection. Those who maintain that we derive essentially from Europe our civilization and institutions (from which both black and white benefit) must take account of these monsters.

But my point is that they are being taken account of. Thousands and thousands of books have been written about Hitler, hundreds of movies have been made, there is even a heavily attended Holocaust Museum in Washington, all expressing the revulsion Hitler’s ideas now inspire throughout the Western world. Nobody says, “Hitler? Who’s Hitler?”

Whereas, the Black Caucus and Afrocentrists throughout the American educational system all say, “Rwanda? What’s that?” Sliding past Africa (which a pretty big place to slide past), they want to invade Haiti and make their “black brothers” there a shining light unto the world. To improve black self-esteem, you see. Which is the silliest reason for a military invasion I’ve ever heard, and won’t work anyway.

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