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Afrocentrism as an Intellectual Tool of Whites: A Critique of Molefi Asante

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“The Afrocentric idea is the most revolutionary challenge to a White supremacist-based educational system,” says Asante.

Afrocentricity, as defined by Asante, is a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person. The African approach seeks in every situation to appropriate centrality of the African person. Asante emphasizes that Afrocentricity is not a Black version of Eurocentricity (which is based on White supremacist notions whose purposes are to protect White privileges and advantages in education, economics, politics, and so forth.)

Unfortunately, like many Afrocentrists, Asante continues to want to debate, challenge, or argue points with White people. Because his idea is so profound and needed, there is no need to address White people because they will attack it, a point he makes throughout his article. In his article, Asante says that the Afrocentric idea is the most revolutionary challenge to a White supremacist based educational system because, to date, it (1) questions the imposition of the White supremacist view as universal and/or classical, (2) demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories that assault multiculturalism and pluralism, and (3) protects a humanistic and pluralistic viewpoint by articulating Afrocentricity as a valid, non-hegemonic perspective.

Articulates Afrocentricity to whom? Seeks to establish its validity to whom?

Demonstrates the indefensibility of racist theories to whom? Questions the imposition of the White supremacist view to whom?

In terms of making moral appeals or engaging in challenges, debates, arguments, and rhetoric, ideas such as those posed by Asante are continually bogged down when these "scholars" waste valuable time chasing "the wild goose of racism." It is not enough to have a strategy that is pro-Black and can help our young people in the short- and long-term; these individuals want to argue, debate, and challenge the White man day in and day out. And in his own article, Asante alludes to these people who are the most severe critics of Afrocentrism. Few of them are Black.

If it's not that, we're trying to humanize people who have shown they don't have the attention span, the will, or the time to become concerned with studying people of different cultures. For instance, Patricia Jones, an Afrocentrist, writes in an article titled "Educating Black Males—Several Solutions, No Solutions," that the call is for giving Black students of all ages a clearer sense of their heritage in "an all-too Eurocentric world." The call also is to educate both sides, giving Whites a way to overcome that certain sense of superiority by being educated in the presence of Blacks and being

educated on the contributions and culture of those from Africa.

Why educate both sides as a goal? If you educate Black people, Whites will find out and join on their own. If they don't, then you don't lose anything. When you have a goal of educating both sides, both sides receive equal priority and attention and when this happens, the emphasis on what Black people need always gets lost. And even more profoundly, what makes Jones think that being educated in the presence of Blacks is going to overcome any sense of superiority? Secondly, if the world is all too Eurocentric, we again come back to a reactionary reason for us to do for self. We should study because it is necessary for our survival and because it is mandatory for us to have cultural continuity—not because the world is "all too Eurocentric."

This paper seeks to re-direct the attention and "debate the enemy" priorities of Afrocentrists and direct paradigms.

PRESENTER

Matthew C. Stelly is a graduate student in the Department of Public Administration at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He holds bachelor's degrees in urban studies and Black studies and a master's degree in urban studies, and has completed all course work toward a second master's degree in urban education. Stelly is the former editor of the Milwaukee Courier newspaper, one of the largest African American newspapers in the U.S. He is Director of the Triple One Neighborhood Association in Omaha and has a cable television program, "North Omaha Focus."