

Reality High School for Black Students

[*Scene*: the shabby auditorium of a former public high school in the African-American ghetto of a large American city. The students, all African-American, sit sprawled in the chairs, talking loudly. Several teachers stand in the back of the room. The principal, an African-American, walks to center stage. Throughout the following speech, he shifts back and forth between flawless educated white English and ghetto African-American English in a continuing demonstration that it is possible for an African-American to speak both dialects.

He pronounces “shit”, “sheeit” to amplify the contempt which he is usually trying to express with the word.

Note: sub-headings are supplied for ease of reference to various subjects, and are obviously not a part of the actual speech.]

The Principal’s Opening Remarks

OK, could I have your attention please? [No perceivable response.]...Could we have it quiet? [The teachers begin to demand silence. It takes at least a minute for the students to quiet down.] ...Thank you. My name is Mr. Johnson and I am the principal of this high school, which, as you know, we call Reality High School. I’d like to welcome you all to the first day of another school year.

This morning I’m going to tell you a little about what you’re going to learn here, and why we teach it. The second, third and fourth-year students have heard this before, you first-year students haven’t.

First of all, the reason we call it Reality High School is that here we only teach you things that pertain to reality — things that are *useful* — useful for helping you get your share of the American dream — to have a good job and live in decent housing and to educate your kids — in other words, useful for giving you some other choices besides the ones you think are the only ones you’ve got now, namely, to become a sports star or entertainment star or a drug lord. We gonna teach you how to get up from the bottom of the social ladder, which is where you and most other African-Americans are now.

But now let’s ask a question: *Why are* African-Americans still on the bottom of the ladder?

Why African-Americans Are On the Bottom Racism Is Not News

Everyone else, every other minority seems to do better than us. How come? I’ve wracked my brain over this through many a dark and lonely night, askin myself over and over, “How come we’re at the bottom of the ladder? How come we never *get anywhere*?” [Shouts of “racism!”]

[Bored tone] Yeah, racism. [Normal tone] Oh, yeah, that was the first thought that came into my mind. Every African-American knows that the cause of his troubles is racism: “We were slaves. We never get any opportunities. Until the white man stops bein a racist, what can we do?”

Meantime, all those other minorities are passing us by. They bustin they ass, workin hard, and here we are, waiting for racism to go away, and for us all to get our rights, so we can start workin. Shit.

Let me tell you somethin: the best weapon the white man has to keep us down, is to keep drumming into us that we are victims of racism: “Those poor African-Americans. Look what they have to struggle against. We’ll just have to pass more laws to try to put a stop to this terrible racial prejudice that prevents them from having a piece of the American pie.”

Well, I don't see any prejudice against Michael Jackson or Michael Jordan. Or against Thurgood Marshall or Colin Powell. How many here know who Colin Powell is? [Incoherent mumbling] Who was Thurgood Marshall? [Same response] Shame on you! These two African-Americans reached two of the highest offices in the land and you don't even recognize their names. Well, Colin Powell was the Secretary of Defense under President Bush — he was the boss of the Army, the Navy, the Marine Corps and the Air Force — an African-American! Thurgood Marshall was a member of the highest court in the land, the United States Supreme Court. Well, before you leave this school, you are going to know who some of the winners have been among African-Americans, outside of sports stars and rock and roll stars.

How the White Man Will Build a Wall Around Us

Let me tell you somethin: the white man doesn't need cops and police dogs to keep us in line. He's got a way that's much better, because it's invisible. In fact it looks just like the opposite of what it is. He makes great speeches about the tragedy of racism; he passes more laws than you can count; he appoints commissions to study African-American problems and he puts African-Americans in charge of them. Oh, yes. And he hires African-American professors so they can spend their lives studying *all about* the phe-nom-en-on of racism, and how it has oppressed African-Americans, and what its causes are, and what can be done to cure it. And all these folks are jettin back and forth holding meetings and conferences and writin books and articles — everyone bustin they ass trying to study and analyze and understand this terrible problem called “racism” which is keeping African-Americans at the bottom of the ladder.

And then we got all those PBS programs givin us the history of the African-American's misery and suffering in this country. And all that talk and *anal-y-sis*. Let's see, now, maybe, if we get enough *exposure*, why, maybe we can figure out what's wrong with us.

And the movies: African-Americans makin no end of movies about how bad things are in the ghetto. And gettin rich doin it. And all them songs, all that rap, yassuh, why, maybe, if we tell the world how bad it is *long enough*, and *hard enough* — maybe, if the only thing on TV is stuff about how much the African-American has suffered at the hands of the white man — why, why maybe all our troubles will go away! Maybe the white man will one day come to us and say, Yep, you've suffered enough, here, take our money and our nice houses and our cars and our jobs: here, it's yours: we been bad and now we're going to make up for it.

But let me tell you somethin: all the white man is doing with all this is building a wall around us. Do you know why? Because all this is just tellin us that we can't do anything to help ourselves until we thoroughly study and analyze and understand and get rid of racism. Until then, well, hell, you can't expect those poor black folk to do anything.

Listen: anyone who tells you that the only reason you're not succeedin is because it's someone else's fault, is the worst kind of racist, because he's tellin you that there's nothing you can do to help yourself. He's a far worse, a far more dangerous racist than the worst lynchin redneck down South. Because there at least it's clear who the enemy is.

Meantime, of course, because he has to protect himself from us, he's cramming more and more of us — dope dealers and thieves and murderers — into his prisons which are already jam-packed and overflowin. And white folk — and I mean the ones who don't go around everyday hating niggers; I mean the ones who just want to get on with their lives with as little interference as possible — these white folks are thinking to themselves, “Just look at those African-Americans; no matter how much we try to help them, they still never get anywhere. Why do we waste our money?” You'll never hear any white politician say that in any speech, and they won't have

to, because they'll all be thinking the same thing.

And so, year after year, they'll slowly wall us off in these ghettos where we've always lived. They're not going to build fences or even walls of concrete. But maybe they put a big highway to separate their part of town from ours; or maybe the police get real active as soon as you cross into their part of town, or maybe white folks buy up the houses of any African-Americans living in white areas, and fix em up nicely, and let the high prices do the rest of the work — I mean, hell, you can't expect them to sell their nice remodelled houses for less than they paid, and if that keeps the African-Americans out, well, that's not the white folks fault, is it?

There are lots of ways to keep us in our ghettos, lots of ways to wall us up, the white man all the time knowing that we're so ignorant that we'll just express our rage by killing each other and robbing from each other and selling dope to each other. See how it works? All those fancy words and speeches telling us that we are victims of racism and so we can't really be expected to save ourselves.

What We Have To Do

We Have to Pull Ourselves Up By Our Bootstraps

If we African-Americans are ever goin to save ourselves and get out of this situation we're in, there's only one way to do it. We've got to pull ourselves up by our bootstraps. Starting now. That's the only way. We're going to have to start puttin our energy into the dull, boring, work that every minority in this country has had to do to raise itself up from the bottom. We're goin to have to stop spending so much time writin songs and poems about how bad off we are, and get down to work. Malcolm X said that the black man will always be a second class citizen as long as he keeps waiting for the white man to solve his problems. As long as we continue goin to the white man, sayin, "We can't do anything for ourselves because of what you did to us, because of what you are still doin to us — you owe us a livin because of what you done to us," we will stay on the bottom.

No, instead we're goin to have to learn to *think smart*. And that's what we teach you in this school, we teach you how to *think smart* about things. Every minority seems to be smarter than African-Americans. Asians seem to be smarter, Jews seem to be smarter. Even some Hispanics seem to be smarter. Do you know why you're living in the ghetto? Because no one ever taught your parents how to *think smart*. Well, I think it's time *you* learned how to think smart. Thinking smart means asking ourselves, "What do we want?" and then — *and then* — asking ourselves, "What do we have to do to get what we want?"

Well, the first question is easy to answer: we want the good life, we want not to have to live in poverty, we want our share of the American dream. The second question is much harder to answer. God knows, the answer that many African-Americans have believed in for so many years, doesn't seem to be workin. I mean the answer that says, "To get what we want, we have to force the white man to give it to us." Well, let me tell you somethin: I don't know of *any other minority*, either in America or anywhere else in the world, that has improved its situation by going to its oppressor and saying, "We demand that you give us what we want." [Very loud, with clenched fish] *No minority in the world has ever gotten what it wants by legislation and pity!* It don't work, folks. Of course, you may say that it *ought* to work, that the white man *owes* it to us. I say you wastin your time, brothers and sisters. "Ought" don't count for shit. I say instead you got to start lookin around at what other folks did who got themselves up from the bottom of the ladder. In other words, I'm saying that, to think smart about how to succeed, one thing you got to

do is find out what has worked for others. Shit, some of you, when you're in the classroom, you don't hesitate to try to copy what the smarter kids write down on their papers during a test or on their homework? Am I right? You know I'm right. So why not copy what some of the successful kids — the successful minorities — have done to raise themselves up? [Cries of anger, no, no, sense of betrayal]

But now wait a minute. You say no, no, you're angry at the whole idea, but there's only one reason why you should be sayin no, no, and that is, because you have a better way. If you're sayin no, no, we don't want to do what they did, the only possible smart reason for sayin that has to be that you know a much better way. Right? What other possible reason can you have for sayin no, no? All right, tell me this much better way. Tell me what proof you have that it works. Go ahead, show me. Show me some African-Americans who are livin the good life, raisin their kids in safe neighborhoods, sendin them to good schools, havin good jobs, who haven't done what any other successful minority has done. [Shouts that other minorities had unfair advantages]

Well, I don't hear anyone tellin me about any better ways. All I hear is lots of folks tellin me why African-Americans can't succeed like other minorities have, and I don't want to hear that. I heard that all the years I was growin up and I don't want to hear it any more.

[In frustration because he senses he hasn't gotten his point across] *What else can I possibly say to you?* What else can anyone say to you who cares about the plight of the African-American? Should I say to you, "Oh, yeah, shit, go on selling dope, taking dope, dropping out of school — go on, because there's no use trying to do anything till you get your *rights* and until that glorious day when all racism is ended"? Is that what you want to hear? Well, I'm telling you: if it is, then one hundred years from now African-Americans are going to be exactly where you are, and probably worse off, still shuckin and jivin and waitin for their rights. Shit.

Folks, there's only one way out for us, and that's to get down to business. We *know* there's racism, and if we know anything about the world, we know that racism ain't goin to end tomorrow or next year or twenty or fifty years from now. Racism is there. And the only way we're goin to overcome it, is by goin around it, just like our great athletes and entertainment stars have gone around it, namely, by makin ourselves so valuable that people will hire us despite their racism. That's what other oppressed minorities have done, and that's what we have to do.

We got to get down to business. We got to start thinkin smart. We've got to stop wastin our time on these make-believe, jerk-off answers [grotesque imitation of male masturbation; embarrassed response from males in the audience] like *changin our name*. First we thought our problems would go away if the white man stopped callin us "nigger". Well, he stopped calling us nigger — or, at least he didn't call us nigger as much as he used to. Now we were called "Negro". But our problems still didn't go away. Why? Why, must be because we still hadn't found the right name. So we started demandin that the white man call us "blacks". "Negro" was a European term that symbolized our slavery, black was what we *really* were. Fine. So the white man started referring to as blacks, and guess what? Our problems were just as bad as they were before. Still hadn't got that name right. Ah! But wait! We're not black, we're ... African-American! *That's* the right name. Now we got it right. And all our problems have gone away now, right?

It's not our name that counts, it's what we can *do* that's important. In this school you're gonna learn a lot about the difference between names and what the names stand for. You're gonna learn that *the name ain't the same thing as what it stands for*.

We got to get down to business. We go to stop lookin for magic answers. We got to stop bullshittin ourselves about our history. Nowadays some African-American professors are gettin a lot of attention by tellin the world that the ancient Egyptians were really black Africans, that the

Greeks learned everything they knew from black Africans. I tell you honestly, I think that's bullshit. It's another example of the African-American doin anything he can to avoid gettin down to the hard, boring work that will get him up from the bottom. That's right, I said "hard, boring work", and I don't mean pick and shovel work. I mean hard, boring work like going to school and doing your homework and learning to read and write and getting a job and keeping a job and votin for the people who will help you get what you want.

But, oh yeah, it's a hell of a lot more fun to sit around talking about how, for 3000 years, the white devil historians managed to conceal from the world that the Egyptians were really blacks — don't ask me how come all those all those pictures on the walls of the pyramids don't look like blacks at all — maybe those white devils changed them all! And no one, not one black, white, or Asian in 3000 years ever gave away the secret until now. Folks, if you can believe shit like this, you and your kids and your kids' kids are goin to spend their lives the same way you spendin yours.

We got to stop lookin for magic answers: it's a good thing for us and the white man to honor our great African-American leaders, but that ain't gonna get us up from the bottom of the ladder. But, I know, it's a hell of a lot more fun to demonstrate and break windows and march through the streets over whether this day or that day should or should not celebrate the birth of an African-American leader, than it is to get down to business.

We got to stop *bullshittin* ourselves. We go to stop imagining that we are all going to be rock n roll stars and entertainment stars and sports stars. In this school, you're goin to learn just how few African-Americans get rich in sports and entertainment. You're going to learn to think smart about gamblin your whole life on those careers.

We got to stop *killin ourselves* with dope and guns. You know what most young African-American males *die from*? Gunshot wounds, and most of them are caused by other African-American males. Can you *think smart* about this? Can you imagine doin anything that could make the white man happier than for us to be killin each other? He don't even have to send cops or white punks in to do the job! We doin the job for him! Think about it! We doin the white man's dirty work for him!

And we got to stop *stealin*. Every time you steal, you are doing the white man's dirty work for him. Let me repeat that: *every time you steal, you are doin the white man's dirty work for him*. Because every time you steal, you give him another reason to deny you good schools and jobs and decent housing. He just says to himself, "Those goddamn blacks are a lazy, shiftless, bunch of *thieves*. Why should I help them out?" And that's right. Why should he? Would you help anyone out who every time you turned your back was breaking into your house or robbin your car or muggin you on the sidewalk? [Angry shouts, including "Only way we can get money!"]

No, that's not the only way you can get money. Don't you see that you're only diggin yourselves into a deeper hole than you're already in when you say that? You use that excuse now and there's no end to it. Because you'll never have enough money. No one, white or black, has "enough" money. So what does that mean? That the white man ought to let you keep stealing forever? I repeat: when you steal, you are doin the white man's dirty work for him. You are giving him another excuse to maintain his stereotype of blacks.

No, sooner or later, we are going to have to realize that we are never going to get anywhere — we're never going to get ourselves out of the ghetto — until we start thinking smart and start gettin down to business.

It Begins With Cleaning Up Our Streets

Let me ask you something that will seem kind of dumb, but I'll ask it anyway, because sometimes dumb questions turn out to be smart questions: Why doesn't anyone want to live in the ghetto? Why don't *you* want to live in the ghetto? [Among the replies, "There's shit all over the streets" is heard.] That's right, there's shit all over the streets — there's junk and garbage everywhere. Now let me ask you, and I want you to *think* about your answer before you reply: Is that entirely the fault of the white man? When I walk through African-American neighborhoods and I see paper and trash in the streets, old chairs and junk on the sidewalk, I say to myself, "Is the African-American *so poor* that he can't even pick up the paper and trash off the streets he lives on? How much does that cost? How much money does he have to have in his pocket to do that?"

You want to get out of the ghetto? Then start cleaning up the streets! Start cleaning up the street in front of your house or apartment. Pick up those papers and all that trash and put it in the garbage can. Be able to say to yourself, "I may be poor, but that doesn't mean I have to live in shit!" [Sounds of skepticism, boredom from audience]

Well, you may not want to clean up your own streets — *yet* — but you sure gonna clean up the streets around this school. At *this* school, every student takes his turn on the Clean-Up Committee — and that includes all the basketball players and the football players and all the budding entertainment stars. You gonna pick up papers and cans and cigarette butts and trash — in the building and around the building and on the streets around the building — because this is *your school*, this is an *African-American* school, and by God you're gonna let the world know you're proud of the fact that it's as clean as you want it to be.

Jobs

What else do you learn at this school? In this school, you learn how to think smart about gettin jobs and *keepin* jobs. [Chorus of boos] Yes, yes, I know, you think all jobs are boring jobs, you want *important* jobs, you want to make a lot of money, and if the white man won't give you a job where you can make a lot of money, then you'll sell drugs. Fine. Sell drugs. But before you go into *that* line of business, you should at least do your homework and find out what some of the disadvantages of it are. That's what smart people do before they go into a line of work. They say, "OK, how much can I make, what do I have to do, and what are some of the bad things about the job?"

We're going to show you that, based on the *facts* — not on what you want to believe, but on the actual facts — you might as well go home and put a gun to your head right now and save yourselves a lot of trouble, because just about no one gets to enjoy all the money they make in the drug business. Oh, they do for a few months, maybe a year or two, but why should you have to settle for that? *Why should the best thing an African-American can hope for be a couple of years of livin high on the hog and then dyin in a hail of gunfire?* And folks, please, let's not have anyone *bullshit* themselves about this matter: real bullets ain't like movie bullets or TV bullets! Real bullets, if they don't kill you right away, real bullets do bad things like make it so you can never walk again, never go out and do it to the girls again — *never!* Real bullets can make you sit in a corner all the rest of your miserable life, thinkin about all that sweet young black pussy you never ever goin to be able to *get into*. That's what real bullets do.

And, of course, you doin the white man's dirty work for him when you sell drugs. He wants to see African-Americans as a bunch of thieving, no-good, drug dealers, and by God, you say Yasuh, that's us, suh. Shit.

Reality High School for Black Students

In this school we teach you how to fill out an application form, what to wear when you go for an interview, and *how to speak the kind of English you need to speak if you want to get anywhere in the business world*. [Sounds of contempt, anger.] You don't like to hear that, do you? You want to hear me say that black English is "just as good" as white English. Well, it is, in fact, it's better — in the ghetto — but it's worse if you want to go anywhere in business. Sorry, but I told you that in this school we teach you to think smart, and one way of thinking smart is to learn *how things really are*. Maybe people in business *should* all speak black English, I don't know, but they don't, and you're not goin anywhere very far from the bottom if you don't know how to speak educated white English. That's the way it is.

So in this school, speaking and writing educated white English is not a *course*, it's part of *every* course. In *every* course, you're graded on how well you speak and and read and write white English in that course.

Of course, some of you are thinkin, "It's *racism* that we have to learn to speak and read and write white English." And maybe you're thinking of devoting your lives to fighting that, maybe get some laws passed which will make it illegal for anyone to be deprived of a job or a promotion because he speaks ghetto English. And the sad truth is, one or two of you may be able to make careers for yourselves by wasting your lives on that kind of dogshit. I repeat what I told you earlier: the white man just *loves* to pass laws, particularly laws about racism — he didn't always, but he does now, because he knows it's a way to fool African-Americans; it's a way for him to keep them down, because it says to them, "You can't do anything until we outlaw all racism."

So, if you want to waste your life tryin to get the white man to respect ghetto English, go ahead, but don't come to me for any help.

So we teach you how to get a job — and, by the way, each of you will have to hold a part-time job for at least three months in order to graduate. [Groans]

Now once you've got a job, of course, your next task is to *keep* the job, and we tell you ways of doing that. We teach you how to get a better job, even if it's just a *little* better — how to *check out* the job scene to see if there are any better jobs there, and if not, how to find a better one elsewhere without getting fired while you're looking. (Only a dummy quits a job and *then* goes looking for another one.) We teach you how to get along with people, in particular, with bosses, how to *psych 'em out*, how to understand where they're coming from, what they like and don't like, so you don't have to get in trouble with them.

Of course, a lot of jobs are boring. So we teach you some ways of fighting boredom. You might say, "Shit, I'm not gonna stay in any job that's boring." We say, if you can't learn how to deal with boredom, you ain't goin anywhere in this life. You got to *earn the right* to get a job which isn't boring, either by getting promoted in the job you're in, or by learning to do something that you enjoy doing and that people will pay you to do, or even by starting your own business. We teach you how to start your own business in this school.

And, please, don't tell me that all this is harder for us than it is for other folks in this country, because you ain't tellin me anything new when you tell me that. We all *know* it's harder, and the only possible answer anyone can give you who cares about the fate of African-Americans in this country is to say, Yeah, and now what? So we're goin to have to work harder, and get stronger and better from workin harder. That's just the way it is.

Yet, the sad truth is that some of you are going to wind up on welfare at least for a while. Sad, but that's how things are right now for some African-Americans. But it's even possible to think smart about being on welfare, and we're going to show you how.

Importance of Controlling Our Population

You know another reason why African-Americans are on the bottom of the heap? it's because they have too many babies. [Giggles, sounds of embarrassment] Don't like to hear that either, do you? A teenage African-American girl, why, she wants to *be somebody*, and how does she *be somebody*? Why, by havin a baby. Now she's a real lady. 'Course she don't have any money to raise that baby, and she got no skills to get a job — hell, she can hardly read — so she gonna have to go on welfare. Of course, if there weren't all this *racism* and *oppression*, why, someone would give her a job and the job would pay so well she could afford to pay for child-care. Well, sisters — and brothers, 'cause we all know, I assume, that it takes two to make a baby — that's one of the reasons you-all are livin in the ghetto with no other *career options* 'cept dealing dope and servin hamburgers. Do you *fully understand this*? Babies take away your freedom.

You know, we've had some great leaders in the African-American community, but even the best of them sometimes says dumb things, and one of the dumbest things that one of our leaders said — it was many years ago — is that the more African-American children there are, the better, because that will mean more African-American people to vote for African-American causes.

Now, I have to tell you, that's crazy. First of all, most African-Americans don't vote. (They do the white man's dirty work for him by stayin home on election day.) Second of all, and you better get this straight right from today, the white man doesn't want to pay to raise your kids! It's gonna be a long time before there are so many African-American people who vote that they can *force* him to pay to raise our kids. Meantime, what? We put these kids into the world, we can't feed them or raise them properly, we sure as hell don't have time to help them with their home-work because we working so hard tryin to earn some money or dealin with our drug problem, we sure as hell can't afford to send them to college — folks, that just ain't thinkin smart. That's thinkin *dumb*.

What are the upper class white girls and Asian girls and Jewish girls doin at your age? They sure as hell aint havin babies in order to be somebody. They in *school*, they bustin their ass trying to get into college, so at the very least they can git themselves a husband who's gonna be earning a good living when *they* start havin babies. Why should the white man be concerned about us when all we do is keep havin babies he's got to support? Think about it! You aint dumb. Anyone who can deal dope and buy fancy cars is smart enough to know that if someone came to him and said, "You gotta give me money to support me and my kids", you'd say, "Hey, fuck off. If you don't got enough money for your kids, then don't have kids." Am I right? The African-American has got to learn that a damn sure way to stay in the ghetto is by keepin on havin kids he can't afford to raise.

So in this school, we teach you about birth control, we teach you all about sex — all about how the plumbing works, and some of the things you can do to avoid having babies you don't want. We tell you where you can get safe abortions that don't cost you much. (There's not many of those places but there are some.)

Getting Political Power

Now, I know some of you are thinking, "What's the use of all this effort. We still don't got no *power*." What does that mean, *power*? Well, one thing it means is political power. We have an African-American mayor and a majority of the people on the city council are African-American. How many of you knew that? [About 20% of audience hesitatingly raise their hands.] See what I

mean? Most of you don't even know *what power you have*. How many of you know how many African-Americans there are in this city? [No hands] Well, in this school, we gonna make sure that each of you knows how much power we African-Americans have in this city, and then we gonna teach you how to keep it, and how to get more of it.

That means, we gonna teach you how to *register to vote*, and then we gonna teach you how to read the ballot — anyone know what a ballot is? [Hesitant smattering of hands] It's a list of people who want to be in the government. And then we teach you how to go and vote. [Groans, angry denial that it will do any good]

You'll notice I said *read* the ballot. Well, ballots ain't the only thing you gonna learn to *read* in this school. Let me repeat what I said before: we don't have any reading *courses* in this school because *every* course is a reading course. In order to do your work, brothers and sisters, you gonna have to know how to read, and if you don't how, we'll help you.

Getting Financial Power

OK, we're talking about African-American power. Anyone know what another kind of power is, besides political power? [Fidgeting silence, some half-hearted raising of hands; a couple of voices shout "Money!"] You're right. Money is power. And I'm sure that most of you are thinking, "We don't got no money — if we don't we sell drugs." Well, let me tell you something. There are about 35 million black people in this country — men, women, kids. Suppose that each of them contributed *one dollar each year* to a special bank account (in the case of kids, their parents, say, would contribute a dollar for each kid). Do you know how much money there'd be in that account at the end of the year? [Various absurd figures are half-heartedly uttered, e.g., "a million dollars!", "a thousand!", etc.] Imagine that 35 million black people were all standing in a line and each person was holding \$1. How many dollars would all the black people be holding? [A few correct answers are heard.] Right. Thirty-five million dollars. Now with 35 million dollars you can buy yourself some political power: you can get a few black persons elected to Congress, you can pay a few lobbyists to fight for laws to help black people. Anyone know what a lobbyist is? [Grumbles, vague answers, including, "a person that works in a hotel"] A lobbyist is someone who puts pressure on Congressmen to vote for the laws that people who hired the lobbyist want.

But we don't need to go to Washington to get power. How many here know how much money all the African-Americans who live in this city have in the bank? [General silence] How many here know how to find out the answer to such a question? [General silence] Well, that's something else you're gonna learn in this school: how to find the answers to questions like these. Now imagine that each of those black people put \$1 in the account of a bank, here in this city, during this year. Now suppose an African-American family wants a loan to buy a house — good family, father's working, mother's staying home taking care of the kids — and so they go to this bank and the bank says, well, you see, we don't think you gonna be able to make the monthly payments on your loan, so we're sorry, but we can't give you that loan. Now suppose that family told those other African-Americans that this bank wouldn't loan them any money, and suppose all of them went in and took their money out of that bank. Don't you think the bank would think twice about its decision not to make that loan? Because if all those African-Americans take their money out, then the bank wouldn't be able to use that money to loan to other people, white people, say, and so it wouldn't be able to make as much profit. In this school, you're gonna learn about how banks work, and about some of the things you can do to make them work for you.

We Teach You How to Handle Money

Another thing we teach you at this school is how to get the most for the money you earn, no matter how little that might be. We teach you how to think straight about all them *ad-vert-ise-ments* that you believe when you see them on TV. We teach you how to get the most for your money when you go to buy something.

We Teach You How to Do Well In School

Another thing we teach you is how get good grades in this school and in any other school. And let me tell you right now: any student who threatens a teacher in this school, or talks disrespectfully to a teacher — as far as we're concerned, that student is saying to us, "Hey, I don't need this place!" and we *oblige* that student on the spot by escorting him or her to the door. And there ain't no second chances. In this school, there is no threatening of teachers, I absolutely guarantee you that. In this school, you do *not* say to a teacher who tells you to hand in your homework, that the teacher is a *racist*. That kind of bullshit stops at the front door of this school.

You *will* be allowed to disagree with your teachers, but you will learn to do it *in-tell-i-gent-ly*, which means, by giving reasons for *why* you disagree. In this school, you learn to *argue* intelligently, you learn to ask questions, you learn that there are other, much better, ways to disagree with someone than by calling them a name, which is a dumb way, and doesn't accomplish what you want anyway.

And, just in case you had any doubts: if you're caught with drugs or weapons on the school grounds, you're out. Period. Call it racism, call it anything you like, but you're out. No ifs, ands, or buts. Clear?

We Teach You the Everyday Crafts of Life

In this school we teach you ordinary, everyday things that help you make your life better — that help you be independent, be your own person, rather than having to depend on someone else. We teach you how to cook, sew, eat right — and that's right, we teach these things to *everyone*: sisters *and* brothers. Why should you brothers be prevented from taking care of yourselves, livin better?

We Teach You How to Behave So That People Will Respect You

Finally, we teach you how to make other people, especially white people, *respect* you. When I look around at how the black man behaves — I mean the black man who lives in the ghetto — I have to tell you, I'm not surprised that the white man has so little respect for you. I see young men your age trooping down the street, doin the heel-bouncin, ghetto shuffle, wearing baggy pants down around their ass, torn cuffs draggin on the pavement, talkin the ghetto talk — Hey, muhfuckuh, what you sayin, nigguh, sheeit — and I can't help thinkin to myself, No wonder the white man thinks the black man is such a loser. Hell, when I see that kind of behavior, I think so too!

And you know what? The reason you dress that way and walk that way *is because you think you're a loser too!* It's the same with the hoodies that some of you wear. I ask myself, when it's not cold out, why is this black kid hiding himself inside a pointy-top hood? What's he tryin to do,

look like the Ku-Klux-Klan? But I'll tell you what I think: I think he's wearing that hoodie because he wants to hide. He's ashamed of himself, he doesn't want anyone lookin at him.

And when I see you walkin through white neighborhoods talking loudly, with boom boxes blasting, just daring some white to say something — (And if they do, maybe you beat them up.) — I think to myself, Don't they see that they are just reinforcing the white man's views of the black man when they do that? The white man says to himself, See, those niggers are just as we have always thought: nothing but loud, dumb, and violent. You only hurt your own people when you behave like that. (The black man says Fuck you! to the white man. Then he says, why doesn't the white man respect us?)

So in this school, we don't allow you to walk the loser walk, wear loser clothes, behave like a loser. We teach you to walk with your back straight and your head up, like your ancestors did in Africa. We teach you to walk in a way that will make other people say, Hey, that young man looks like he's going somewhere, like he's proud of himself.

But you shouldn't think for a minute that posture and decent-looking clothes are all you need! We're not much interested in black pride. Do you think that the white man walks around thinking, Shit, man, I'm so cool, I'm proud because I'm white! No, he walks around thinking, Shit, I'm so cool, I'm proud because I'm an office worker, an engineer, a programmer, a lawyer, a doctor, and I make good money for what I do.

That's the ultimate source of respect: what you can do, what you are good at.

We Teach You to Help Others After You're Successful

Many of you who graduate from this high school are going to go on and make a success of your lives, even though you don't think so now. And even though you will owe your most of your success to no one but yourselves, you didn't do it *all*. This high school was here to help you get started. Members of the African-American community — and even some members of the white community — contribute money to this school. And so we're gonna expect that, when you become successful, you're gonna want to express your appreciation by donating some money *back* into the African-American community to help others just like yourselves who are coming up just as you did.

Bill Cosby gave millions of dollars to African-American colleges, did you know that? The whole African-American community should admire him for that. I wish some of our other millionaire African-American entertainment and sports stars would follow his example. But you don't have to be a millionaire to help your brothers and sisters. Even if you only contribute a few dollars a year — \$10, \$20 — *that helps*, that shows that you appreciate what this school did for you when you had no other choice. That shows you want African-Americans to get themselves up from the bottom of the ladder.

Conclusion

So you've got a lot to learn. We're here to help you learn it. We're not like some schools that do everything they can to find ways to separate the winners from the losers. In this school, we do everything we can to make all of you be winners. If you can't understand something, if you just don't seem to *get* something, you can come to us for help and we'll do our damndest to help you. We'll get you a tutor if necessary, because we're here to make you winners, not losers. Everyone of your teachers, everyone in the office, is here because they've decided that they want to do

something to help African-Americans get up the ladder, they want African-Americans to climb up from the bottom, they want them to start being somebody, gettin their share of the good things that so many people in this country get. This is your chance. The world is reachin its hand out to you. It's sayin, "Things are very bad for African-Americans, there's racism everywhere, there's unemployment, but *nevertheless* — *nevertheless* — we are not going to accept it. We are goin to do something. We are goin to help young African-Americans to learn to think smart. We are goin to help them climb the ladder just like every other minority in this country. We are goin to help them *get down to business*."

That's all I have to say.

Additional Thoughts

This essay was written in the firm belief that the only way a white person can think constructively about the problems of the African-American is by imagining himself to be a leader in the African-American community, and by asking himself the question, *What would I be telling my people?*

So far, there have been two criticisms of the essay. The radical left, always hostile to any idea that threatens its supply of victims and oppressed, made the usual accusations of racism. More serious was the criticism from a member of the radical right that the essay represents the last gasp of liberal thought. He construed the essay as saying, "If African-Americans can't find any other motivation to solve their problems than hatred of us, then we must accept that hatred", which, at the very least, he said, is demeaning of African-Americans, and reveals a repugnant lack of self-respect on the part of liberals. However, for myself, I think the plight of African-Americans is desperate enough that I would be glad to sacrifice that much of my self-respect to see them begin to take hold of their future.

It is sad but true that bookish blacks continue to be tempted by the prospect of building an academic career in Black Studies, this despite the evidence all around them that no minority in this country, or any other country, has ever come up from the bottom by being expert in all the reasons why the minority has failed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is, at least to me, the most insufferable of these failure queens. To become a scholar of black *success*, now that would be something we could admire. Even more can we admire blacks who become experts in any of the professions, or the sciences, or the traditional humanities subjects. But becoming an expert in the failures of one's people is a loser's game.

(The reader will perhaps remind me that Black Studies are not only about failure: they are about success, and the reader will point to the black authors who are read and praised in these courses. But what do these authors write about?)

Probably the best argument against affirmative action would be simply this: whatever percentage of minority students are to be given special consideration — are to be allowed to be promoted to the next grade even though they were not able to do the required work — are to be allowed into college even though their previous academic performance is inadequate — are to be given jobs

even though they do not qualify — just that percentage of college and professional basketball teams is to consist of players who were not able to make the team under the normal criteria for selection. A couple of Woody Allens on every professional basketball team would do wonders for explaining why affirmative action is not a good thing.

A slogan that truly progressive black leaders should bring to their people is, “From now on — basketball rules!”.

We must ask if it would do any good to try to convince male black students that school is just like basketball: what would a coach say to a player who wasn't doing very well? Definitely not, “We're going to get the whites to lower the basket!” But rather, “You need to practice more, and I will give you some guidance in how to practice.” Exactly what good teachers say. But I am afraid that even this simple analogy would be beyond the comprehension of the typical black student.

The idealistic young Jews in New York City who have thrown over high-paying careers in the professions in order to devote their lives to trying to educate black ghetto kids, are victims of the same kind of liberal vanity that I described in the chapter, “Politics and Economics”: “Can anyone as extraordinarily bright as I am, who has been educated at the best schools as I have, fail to solve the problem of black education? Impossible!” Unfortunately, not impossible at all, as the failures, year after year, of endless educational innovations, serve to demonstrate. The simple truth, known by all and ignored by all when it comes to blacks, is that without the family and the community placing the highest value on education, nothing will change.

“I cannot be optimistic about the future of any minority that considers ignorance and stupidity to be virtues.” — S. f.

Reality High School for Black Students