

The Analysis of the Influence of the Consciousness of the History of Various Cultures on Student Achievement

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ABSTRACT

American history has been an essential component of every school's curriculum. Students of all ethnic backgrounds must know and understand that their culture and history are as significant as any other. The purpose of this article is to analyze the effects of the influence of ancestral history on student aspirations.

History of All Americans

My family has an educational background that dates back to at least the 1800's. I was taught the importance of knowledge, education, and family history at a very early age. This knowledge has had a profound impact on me, as well as other relatives' educational goals. Teaching the History of all Americans is important to student success. Students need to know and understand who they are before they can

decide where they are going. If more curriculums included the history of all represented ethnic populations, there would be more racial tolerance and understanding. Developing self-esteem and leadership skills is an important part of one's education. Self-esteem and determination can be enhanced by the study of one's own history. Not only do students need to know who they are, but students need to know about other people and learn to appreciate and respect differences.

Background

The purpose of this article is to discuss the effects of acquiring knowledge of African American History on African American students. I am an African American who received an education in Beaumont Catholic and Public Schools. I was involved in the desegregation of the local high school. In other words, I was bused to a school on the other side of town. The first year that Westbrook High School was desegregated, 1982 – 1983, was an eye-opening experience for all of the students. I graduated from Lamar University in Beaumont with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Elementary Education and received a Master's degree in Educational Administration from Prairie View A & M University. I have certifications in Elementary, Gifted and Talented Early Childhood, Kindergarten, and Administration.

African American History in Schools

Dr. Kirkland Jones taught African American Literature, not history, at the college level. Other than this course, I received no courses in African American History throughout my school years. However, slavery and Martin Luther King Jr. would often be mentioned briefly in history classes. While teaching fourth grade, I discovered that the students had little knowledge of African American History and proceeded to expose them to it. The knowledge that students did possess came from information handed down from their relatives. The class was comprised of students of all ethnic backgrounds. They all seemed interested in learning about the history of African Americans. The discussions that ensued were engaging by far and produced much critical thinking on the part of the students. They all seemed interested in learning about African American History each day.

One of the goals of education should be to make a man thirst for knowledge. A teacher, especially at the lower level, should be one who attempts to keep students engaged. If this is done, students will want to participate and learn. Like the students in the class who obtained their information from relatives, my family and I learned of our history in the same manner.

Historical Information

Arlinnie Bell Hooks, The Red Bank Baptist Church Historian, recorded much of the family's educational history. Much of the information in her reports was given by Bolden Hooks, my great grandfather and her father-in-law, the Bowie County Superintendent's Office, the Hooks Public School Journalism Class, and Mr. L.H. Griffin. (1984)

The First One Room School

Warren Hooks, a pioneer farmer, planter, and slave owner, came to the area, now known as the town of Hooks, from Alabama in 1818. The town was named for Warren Hooks. Warren brought with him a son, by the name of Forrest, whose mother was a Native American. Forrest was my great great great grandfather. Warren deeded two acres of land to Forrest to be used for a church, school, and a cemetery. The location of the land was north of Hooks at the edge of a high clay hill and because of its location the area was called Red Bank.

Warren taught Forrest to read, write, and count. In 1866, Forrest organized and taught the first School for African Americans in Bowie County. The schoolhouse was a small one-room building with very crude furnishings. Later another building, located in an area north of Red Bank, was used for the school. Forrest's life was threatened for educating African Americans.

Hooks Family Educators

From records found during research, many of the Hooks family members served the school in one capacity or another, including R. L Hooks who was elected teacher in 1903, A. H. Hooks who was a trustee in 1905, and B. H. Hooks a trustee in 1916. In 1915, Miss Lillian Garland taught for a salary of \$15.00 a month! In 1916, the teacher and principal both worked for \$50.00 a month.

During the year of 1924-1925, the school building was wrecked by a storm. The following year 1926-1927, school was taught in the Red Bank Church. The principal, Miss Louise McPeters was assisted by Miss Arlinnie Bell, my grandmother. The teachers did janitorial work, unless the children assisted by sweeping and bringing in wood for the teachers to make the wood stove fire for the next day.

The Rosenwald Building

The next school building was built from funds called the Rosenwald Fund. This building had two large rooms and one small room that was used for classes also. The principal was Miss Ouida Mae Smith with assistants, Miss Arlinnie B. Hooks and Miss Mable Smith. The next year a new principal came to Red Bank School. She was Mrs. Estella E. Langston. Miss Mable Smith, Miss Bell, and Miss Henrietta Wyatt assisted her.

Credit for the beautification of the school grounds and the installation of much of the furniture and equipment goes to a very active P.T.A. with the help of the trustees who were among the leading citizens of the community. Those citizens include Mr. Harrison Hill, Henry Ellis, Bolden Hooks, Lucky Lomax, Marshall Davis and others. These men had interest in the growth of the school. These trustees were known as sub-trustees.

Salary

In February 1945, the salary of the First Grade Teachers was raised to \$95.00 a month. Mrs. Arlinnie Bell Hooks often stated that, "With a salary like that I thought I would have so much money, I would soon be numbered as a member of the wealthy group." There were times when the yearly salary was \$480.00, and there were times when they had no salary because the district had no money to pay the teachers. Many of them worked consistently not knowing when or if they would be paid. They were usually paid with vouchers that they sold to anyone who they could get to buy them at a dicount of 20% on the dollar.

School Improvements

As time passed the teachers, trustees, and citizens of the community saw the need for more teaching space. Mrs. Langston, Mrs. Hooks, Mrs. Corrine Crawford (Mrs. Arlinnie Bell Hooks' sister and my aunt) and Mrs. Wyatt made a loan and purchased building material to be used for adding a room to the present building. Many patrons contributed cash, time, free labor, and whatever they could to add a room to the Rosenwald structure. Men and women gave free work after their daily fieldwork was over. Ladies came nightly and held kerosene lamps that gave light by which the men saw to do the carpentry. This gave space for P.T.A. meetings, programs, and community activities.

Under the leadership of Mrs. Gwendolyn Montgomery and the Agricultural Department of Bowie County a canning house was built. The men cut logs and did the

carpentry work. Each family made mattresses. The United States Government gave the material for the mattresses. The men tanned hides, made leather belts, harnesses, blinders, breeching for horses, and resoled shoes for their families. Ladies sewed, canned, raised gardens, and took part in a "Live At Home" Program. This was a program to encourage people to improve their living conditions. Red Bank and every family took part in a Neighborhood Beautification Program.

Hooks Independent School District

Red Bank was a Common School District until 1923 when it became Independent with Hooks and became District No. 44. When Burns School was destroyed by fire, Red Bank's School building was torn down and moved. It was consolidated with Burns School. Under the leadership of Superintendent L.H. Griffin, who became Superintendent of Hooks Schools in 1950, a new school was built and occupied in 1952. It was built by the Lavender Construction Company at a cost of \$189,000.00. This new structure became known as Hooks Colored High School and later it was known as Kennedy High School during the school year of 1968-1969. In 1981, it became known as John F. Kennedy Junior High School.

Many interesting events happened during the past years, the beginning of a one teacher-one room school. When floods prevented children and teachers from returning home from school they were kept in the home of Stanley and A.B. Hooks, my grandparents, who also brought pupils to their living room for classes when the schoolrooms were too cold for comfort. Red Bank School progressed from the one teacher school to the present modern day system.

Impact of Awareness of Family History

My maternal grandmother, a graduate of Wiley College, was a teacher for 42 years and my mother, a graduate of Prairie View A & M University, was an educator for 37 years. I have cousins, aunts, uncles, and many other family members who are or were educators. Many of them attended Prairie View A & M University. One of my uncles, Ernest Bell, taught at Prairie View A & M University in the summer. He was the first African American to teach at a local High School in Texarkana, Texas. Many of the Hooks family members work in various fields. They are engineers, teachers, nurses, physical therapists among others.

Learning of my family's history had an intense effect on me. I learned of a history that was not taught in books and would not have known about that history had it not been for my family members. Not only did they tell me about my family, they also made sure that I was knowledgeable about the history of African Americans as well.

Students often feel that they are not important or that others do not see them as significant because their people are not in textbooks and if they are mentioned it is very briefly.

Change in Curriculum

Philadelphia public schools have mandated that students take a course on African American History in order to graduate. The theory is that the African American students will finally become aware of their culture and gain self-esteem. Those who are not African American can gain an appreciation for the culture. James Baldwin, a noted novelist of the 1960's once testified before congress stating that the triumphs, trials, and tribulations of African Americans should be woven into American History instead of being taught in isolation. This would be a response to the critics who say that we should teach only American History. African American History is a part of American History.

In conclusion, it is vitally important that African American History is taught in schools. Students need to be shown that there is more to the world than just their immediate and present surroundings. They need to understand that their families are a part of history also. We must educate, motivate, lead, guide, and teach to all races of people. It is our responsibility to make sure that all students have the necessary knowledge, which includes the history of their people, to compete in the world today.

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