

Wright 101

Obama funded extremist Afrocentrists who shared Rev. Wright's anti-Americanism

By Stanley Kurtz
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It looks like Jeremiah Wright was just the tip of the iceberg. Not only did Barack Obama savor Wright's sermons, Obama gave legitimacy and a whole lot of money to education programs built around the same extremist anti-American ideology preached by Reverend Wright. And guess what? Bill Ayers is still palling around with the same bitterly anti-American Afrocentric ideologues that he and Obama were promoting a decade ago. All this is revealed by a bit of digging, combined with a careful study of documents from the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, the education foundation Obama and Ayers jointly led in the late 1990s.

John McCain, take note. Obama's tie to Wright is no longer a purely personal question (if it ever was one) about one man's choice of his pastor. The fact that Obama funded extremist Afrocentrists who shared Wright's anti-Americanism means that this is now a matter of public policy, and therefore an entirely legitimate issue in this campaign.

African Village

In the winter of 1996, the Coalition for Improved Education in [Chicago's] South Shore (CIESS) announced that it had received a \$200,000 grant from the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. That made CIESS an external partner, i.e. a community organization linked to a network of schools within the Chicago public system. This network, named the South Shore African Village Collaborative, was thoroughly Afrocentric in orientation. CIESS's job was to use a combination of teacher-training, curriculum advice, and community involvement to improve academic performance in the schools it worked with. CIESS would continue to receive large Annenberg grants throughout the 1990s.

The South Shore African Village Collaborative (SSAVC) was very much a part of the Afrocentric rites of passage movement, a fringe education crusade of the 1990s. SSAVC schools featured African-Centered curricula built around rites of passage ceremonies inspired by the puberty rites found in many African societies. In and of themselves, these ceremonies were harmless. Yet the philosophy that accompanied them was not. On the contrary, it was a carbon-copy of Jeremiah Wright's worldview.

Rites of Passage

To learn what the rites of passage movement was all about, we can turn to a sympathetic 1992 study published in the *Journal of Negro Education* by Nsenga Warfield-Coppock. In that article, Warfield-Coppock bemoans the fact that public education in the United States is shaped by capitalism, competitiveness, racism, sexism and oppression. According to Warfield-Coppock, these American values have confused African American people and oriented them toward American definitions of achievement and success and away from traditional African values. American socialization has proven to be dysfunctional and genocidal to the African American community, Warfield-Coppock tells us. The answer is the adolescent rites of passage movement, designed to provide African American youth with the cultural information and

values they would need to counter the potentially detrimental effects of a Eurocentrically oriented society.

The adolescent rites of passage movement that flowered in the 1990s grew out of the cultural nationalist or Pan-African thinking popular in radical black circles of the 1960s and 1970s. The attempt to create a virtually separate and intensely anti-American black social world began to take hold in the mid-1980s in small private schools, which carefully guarded the contents of their controversial curricula. Gradually, through external partners like CIESS, the movement spread to a few public schools. Supporters view these programs as a social and cultural inoculation process that facilitates healthy, African-centered development among African American youth and protects them against the ravages of a racist, sexist, capitalist, and oppressive society.

We know that SSAVC was part of this movement, not only because their Annenberg proposals were filled with Afrocentric themes and references to rites of passage, but also because SSAVC's faculty set up its African-centered curriculum in consultation with some of the most prominent leaders of the rites of passage movement. For example, a CIESS teacher conference sponsored a presentation on African-centered curricula by Jacob Carruthers, a particularly controversial Afrocentrist.

Jacob Carruthers

Like other leaders of the rites of passage movement, Carruthers teaches that the true birthplace of world civilization was ancient Kemet (Egypt), from which Kemetic philosophy supposedly spread to Africa as a whole. Carruthers and his colleagues believe that the values of Kemetic civilization are far superior to the isolating and oppressive, ancient Greek-based values of European and American civilization. Although academic Egyptologists and anthropologists strongly reject these historical claims, Carruthers dismisses critics as part of a white supremacist conspiracy to hide the truth of African superiority.

Carruthers's key writings are collected in [his book](#), *Intellectual Warfare*. Reading it is a wild, anti-American ride. In his book, we learn that Carruthers and his like-minded colleagues have formed an organization called the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC), which takes as its mission the need to dismantle the European intellectual campaign to commit historicide against African peoples. Carruthers includes African-Americans within a group he would define as simply African. When forced to describe a black person as American, Carruthers uses quotation marks, thus indicating that no black person can be American in any authentic sense. According to Carruthers, The submission to Western civilization and its most outstanding offspring, American civilization, is, in reality, surrender to white supremacy.

Carruthers's goal is to use African-centered education to recreate a separatist universe within America, a kind of state-within-a-state. The rites of passage movement is central to the plan. Carruthers sees enemies on every part of the political spectrum, from conservatives, to liberals, to academic leftists, all of whom reject advocates of Kemetic civilization, like himself, as dangerous and academically irresponsible extremists. Carruthers sees all these groups as deluded captives of white supremacist Eurocentric culture. Therefore the only safe place for Africans

living in the United States (i.e. American blacks) is outside the mental boundaries of our ineradicably racist Eurocentric civilization. As Carruthers puts it: ...some of us have chosen to reject the culture of our oppressors and recover our disrupted ancestral culture. The rites of passage movement is a way to teach young Africans in the United States how to reject America and recover their authentic African heritage.

America as Rape

Carruthers admits that Africans living in America have already been shaped by Western culture, yet compares this Americanization process to rape: We may not be able to get our virginity back after the rape, but we do not have to marry the rapist.... In other words, American blacks (i.e. Africans) may have been forcibly exposed to American culture, but that doesn't mean they need to accept it. The better option, says Carruthers, is to separate out and relearn the wisdom of Africa's original Kemetic culture, embodied in the teachings of the ancient wise man, Ptahhotep (an historical figure traditionally identified as the author of a Fifth Dynasty wisdom book). Anything less than re-Africanization threatens the mental, and even physical, genocide of Africans living in an ineradicably white supremacist United States.

Carruthers is a defender of Leonard Jeffries, professor in the department of black studies at City College in Harlem, infamous for his black supremacist and anti-Semitic views. Jeffries sees whites as oppressive and violent ice people, in contrast to peaceful and mutually supportive black sun people. The divergence says Jeffries, is attributable to differing levels of melanin in the skin. Jeffries also blames Jews for financing the slave trade. Carruthers defends Jeffries and excoriates the prestigious black academics Carruthers views as traitorous for denouncing their African brother, Jeffries. Carruthers's vision of the superior and peaceful Kemetic philosophy of Ptahhotep triumphing over Greco-Euro-American-white culture obviously parallels Jeffries' opposition between ice people and sun people.

More of Carruthers's education philosophy can be found in his newsletter, *The Kemetic Voice*. In 1997, for example, at the same time Carruthers was advising SSAVC on how to set up an African-centered curriculum, he praised the decision of New Orleans School Board to remove the name of George Washington from an elementary school. Apparently, some officials in New Orleans had decided that nobody who held slaves should have a school named after him. Carruthers touted the name-change as proof that his African-centered perspective was finally having an effect on public policy. At the demise of George Washington School, Carruthers crowed: These events remind us of how vast the gulf is that separates the Defenders of Western Civilization from the Champions of African Civilization.

According to Chicago Annenberg Challenge records, Carruthers's training session on African-centered curricula for SSAVC teachers was a huge hit: As a consciousness raising session, it received rave reviews, and has prepared the way for the curriculum readiness survey.... These teacher-training workshops were directly funded by the Chicago Annenberg Challenge. Another sure sign of the ideological cast of SSAVC's curriculum can be found in Annenberg documents noting that SSAVC students are taught the wisdom of Ptahhotep. Carruthers's concerns about menticide and genocide at the hand of America's white supremacist system seem to be echoed in an SSAVC document that says: Our children need to understand the historical context

of our struggles for liberation from those forces that seek to destroy us.

When Jeremiah Wright turned toward African-centered thinking in the late 1980s and early 1990s (the period when, attracted by Wright's African themes, Barack Obama first became a church member), many prominent thinkers from Carruthers's Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations were invited to speak at Trinity United Church of Christ, Carruthers himself included. We hear echoes of Carruthers's work in Wright's distinction between "right brained" Africans and "left brained" Europeans, in Wright's fears of U.S. government-sponsored genocide against American blacks, and in Wright's embittered attacks on America's indelibly white-supremacist history. In Wright's *Trumpet Newsmagazine*, as in Carruthers's own writings, blacks are often referred to as "Africans living in the diaspora" rather than as Americans.

Asa Hilliard

Chicago Annenberg Challenge records also indicate that SSAVC educators invited Asa Hilliard, a pioneer of African-centered curricula and a close colleague of Carruthers, to offer a keynote address at yet another Annenberg-funded teacher training session. Hilliard's ties to Wright run still deeper than Carruthers's. A close Wright mentor and friend, Hilliard died in 2007 while on a trip to Kemet (Egypt) with Wright and members of Wright's congregation. Hilliard was scheduled to deliver several lectures to the congregants, and to speak at a meeting of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilization, which he co-founded with Carruthers and other African-centered scholars. On that last trip, Hilliard accepted an appointment to the board of Wright's new elementary school, Kwame Nkrumah Academy. Speaking of the need for such a school, Wright had earlier said, "We need to educate our children to the reality of white supremacy." (For more on Wright's Afrocentric school, see [Jeremiah Wright's Trumpet](#).)

Wright delivered the eulogy at Hilliard's memorial service, with prominent members of ASCAC in the audience. To commemorate Hilliard, a special, two-cover double issue of Wright's *Trumpet Newsmagazine* was published, with a picture of Hilliard on one side, and a picture of Louis Farrakhan on the other (in celebration of a 2007 award Farrakhan received from Wright). In short, the ties between Wright and Hilliard could hardly have been closer. Clearly, then, Wright's own educational philosophy was mirrored at the Annenberg-funded SSAVC, which sought out Hilliard's and Carruthers's counsel to construct its curriculum.

Perhaps inadvertently, Wright's eulogy for Hilliard actually established the fringe nature of his favorite African-centered scholars. In his tribute, Wright stressed how intensely "white" Egyptologists recoiled at the very notion of everything Asa taught. As Wright himself made plain, it seems virtually impossible to find respectable scholars of any political stripe who approve of the extremist anti-American version of Afrocentrism promoted by Hilliard and Carruthers.

Ayers's Pals

An important exception to the rule is Bill Ayers himself, who not only worked with Obama to fund groups like this at the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, but who is still "palling around" with the same folks. Discretely waiting until after the election, Bill Ayers and his wife, and fellow former terrorist, Bernardine Dohrn plan to release a book in 2009 entitled *Race Course Against*

White Supremacy. The book will be published by Third World Press, a press set up by Carruthers and other members of the ASCAC. Representatives of that press were prominently present for Wright's eulogy at Asa Hilliard's memorial service. Less than a decade ago, therefore, when it came to education issues, Barack Obama, Bill Ayers, and Jeremiah Wright were pretty much on the same page.

Obama's Knowledge

Given the precedent of his earlier responses on Ayers and Wright, Obama might be inclined to deny personal knowledge of the educational philosophy he was so generously funding. Such a denial would not be convincing. For one thing, we have evidence that in 1995, the same year Obama assumed control of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, he publicly rejected the unrealistic politics of integrationist assimilation, a stance that clearly resonates with both Wright and Carruthers. (See [No Liberation](#).)

And as noted, Wright had invited Carruthers, Hilliard, and like-minded thinkers to address his Trinity congregants. Wright likes to tick off his connections to these prominent Afrocentrists in sermons, and Obama would surely have heard of them. Reading over SSAVC's Annenberg proposals, Obama could hardly be ignorant of what they were about. And if by some chance Obama overlooked Hilliard's or Carruthers's names, SSAVC's proposals are filled with references to rites of passage and Ptahhotep, dead giveaways for the anti-American and separatist ideological concoction favored by SSAVC.

We know that Obama did read the proposals. Annenberg documents show him commenting on proposal quality. And especially after 1995, when concerns over self-dealing and conflicts of interest forced the Ayers-headed Collaborative to distance itself from monetary issues, all funding decisions fell to Obama and the board. Significantly, there was dissent within the board. One business leader and experienced grant-smith characterized the quality of most Annenberg proposals as awful. (See [The Chicago Annenberg Challenge: The First Three Years](#), p. 19.) Yet Obama and his very small and divided board kept the money flowing to ideologically extremist groups like the South Shore African Village Collaborative, instead of organizations focused on traditional educational achievement.

As if the content of SSAVC documents wasn't warning enough, their proposals consistently misspelled rites of passage as rights of passage, hardly an encouraging sign from a group meant to improve children's reading skills. The Chicago Annenberg Challenge's own evaluators acknowledged that Annenberg-aided schools showed no improvement in achievement scores. Evaluators attributed that failure, in part, to the fact that many of Annenberg's external partners had little educational expertise. A group that puts its efforts into Kwanzaa celebrations and half-baked history certainly fits that bill, and goes a long way toward explaining how Ayers and Obama managed to waste upwards of \$150 million without improving student achievement.

However he may seek to deny it, all evidence points to the fact that, from his position as board chair of the Chicago Annenberg Challenge, Barack Obama knowingly and persistently funded an educational project that shared the extremist and anti-American philosophy of Jeremiah Wright. The Wright affair was no fluke. It's time for McCain to say so.