

Don't Get Tricked in the Educational Game

by Dr. Asa G. Hilliard III

African people have been tricked so many times in so many ways mainly because we have learned to trust strangers or our enemies and not each other. Many of us have developed the habit of copying everything that white people do, instead of implementing their actions that work

Recently many school districts around the country have been making contracts for "charter schools" with for-profit corporations This means that some schools will be run like a private business. One Such Charter corporation is The Edison Project. Although the Project has been tried in more than two dozen schools, it has no track record of raising achievement to levels of excellence in schools that serve poor African children. Moreover, its operators present no expertise whatsoever in teaching African students about their history and culture. Yet several urban school boards continue to allow these private businesses to experiment on our children, and get this, are paying them to do it.

Colorado Springs, Colorado; Dade County, Florida; Wichita, Kansas and Boston are but a few of the areas that have already tried The Edison Project. Atlanta, Georgia may have an Edison contract soon. By promising computers for every family and offering stock in the company to teachers. the program's proponents have successfully softened LIP its critical reviewers and gotten their foot in the door. These strategies were hatched in right-wing think tanks whose long-range agenda is to destroy public education to "privatize" the system that Was Put together largely through the efforts of organized labor in the North and Africans in the South. Shall public education fall to the network of right-wing foundations that is home to Charles Murray of The Bell Curve fame and others who believe poor and minority children are less able to learn and don't deserve equal funding and resources?

This is another obvious example of ,I time when knowing our history would help us. During slavery, Africans ran their own schools. Immediately after slavery, hundreds of

schools all over the South sprang up. These were independent schools, paid for by Africans themselves. It was their independence that troubled whites at the time, and everything possible was done to close them down. After visiting and evaluating the African independent schools, Thomas Jesse Jones, a Welsh immigrant and a professor at Hampton Institute and an employee of the Phelps Stokes foundation reported that all independent high schools should be shut down unless they had a white board of trustees. In other words, Africans had private schools, yet the domination of whites was such that they could close these schools down or take them over.

After a brief period of opportunity, many African educators led some of the largest urban school districts, with influence over major budgets, during the 1970's and 1980's. Many have been replaced by chief executive officers from the private sector. School districts have been taken over by courts and state departments of education, retired military officers and even Private businesses'. Now some school districts are beginning to abandon their responsibilities and are contracting with mediocre educational maintenance organizations (EMO's) that brag about the low achieving schools that they run for our children.

In truth, we have thousands of years of great history of excellence in education, in Africa, before the slave trade, We have hundreds of Years of experience in education since the beginning of slavery. where educators from Our own communities have shown its excellence. But now we are being tricked by those who have nothing of value to sell. Some of our own community members will try to sell us down the river for "thirty pieces of silver."

Coming somewhere near you are strangers to your community who will be asking for your birthright. At least you can go to board meetings and challenge the tricksters. Expose the tricks. Insist that our elected officials take responsibility-and that we accept accountability-for shaping our children's minds Do not let them have our children for experiments and profit. An old African proverb says, "By the time the foot learns the

rules of the game. the players have At gone home." Learn the rules before the players start to play, and tell them that our children's education is not a game.

Serious Africans will read:

Black Reconstruction by W.E.B. DuBois

MDW NTR: Divine Speech, A Historiographical Reflection of African

Deep Thought From The Time of tile Pharaohs to tile Present

by Jacob Carruthers

Pan Africanism and Education by Kenneth King

SBA: The Reawakening of the African Mind by Asa G. Hilliard III

The Education of Blacks in the South: 1860-1935 by James Anderson

The Education of the Negro: Ten Critiques by W.E.B. DuBois

by Herbert Aptheker, Editor

The Orions of Black Scholars by Horace Mann Bond

The Social History of Timbuktu by Ellis Saad

Knowledge: <http://edreform.com/charters.htm>- Center for Education Reform site that gives directories, statistics and workbooks on charter schools.

<http://www.policy.com/issuewk/98/0907/index.html>-

News and information service with an article focusing on charter schools.