

**July 01, 2008**

**The African-American Disorder: Failed Leadership**

How does a white man of a certain age review a book by a black author commenting about the black experience? One wonders if my own racial identity and life experiences will cause me to overlook the ingrained sense of suffering or misfortune of others merely because I lack a common cultural framework? Or as a friend told me, you may sympathize with the author's position, but surely you cannot empathize with the conditions he describes. Which made me question the reason that I wanted to mention the book in the first place.

The book is titled "While African Americans Slept" and carries a subtitle "Leadership By Parasites."

Which piqued my curiosity as I have often harbored ill-will for certain black leaders like Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton who seem to mount never-ending and often self-serving media campaigns; loudly proclaiming the perils of being black in a white society and the need of society to redress historic racial wrongs. And then doing absolutely nothing of lasting value to elevate the very people they are seeking to help. All the while pocketing money from unknown sources for honorariums, consulting and expenses and then jetting off to the next media-covered protest. In many cases their advice can be summarized simply by repeating: "do as I say, don't do as I do." Or in some cases, by an implicit mantra of "pay me or there will be big trouble."

As a technologist who deals with a great variety of people who work in a binary world, knowledge, whether obtained by formal schooling or self-teaching, and accomplishment are a given. As with society in general, people are valued for what they produce and what they contribute to the team. There is a minimum of racial animosity as everybody is treated exactly the same: like crap, especially as they fight unrealistic deadlines based on idealistic, impractical expectations and woefully inadequate budgets. People who do not perform under pressure are weeded from the group and from our consciousness as we strive to complete our mission. You are either productive or you are gone!

So with some inherent bias against those who are not motivated to achieve and better their own condition, I will attempt to describe this painfully honest book and why I believe that the book is important to the discussion of race in America.

*In the here and now ...*

I do not understand how anyone can point to historical transgressions against a class or race of people and use that as a basis for personal behavior and action, or should I say inaction, in today's modern world. In short, I do not understand the concept of victimhood and a person's sense of entitlement based on indignities encountered by one's ancestors. Encountering such attitudes makes me want to scream "get on with your own life – you are responsible for you, not society and not the state!" Perhaps that's just the

result of an entrepreneurial streak within my character or the product of two loving parents who encouraged me to find my own way.

In one way, Dr. Aikins points out a critical difference between my experience and that of someone growing up in a black environment. That is, I had a built-in support mechanism in place – whether it was my parents, my relatives, our neighbors or our community. I had the innate knowledge that people were rooting for me to succeed where many blacks encounter no support, familial or otherwise, and others are, at best, indifferent to their efforts. My accomplishments did not come at the expense of others and I did not require any critical commodity which was hotly contested by others seeking the same thing. Again, possibly because I was entrepreneurial at a young age.

### *Segregation and balkanization by design ...*

But I do understand that America has been balkanized by its political and social leaders for the sole purpose of creating dependent individual constituencies that can be more easily manipulated into ceding power to so-called community leaders as well as contributing time, effort and money to their cause. By creating entitlements which sap one's self-esteem and productivity and create a need to keep those political parties and politicians who hand out the goodies in power, lest the money cease to flow. The very same politicians who have seemingly corrupted many black leaders with "walking around money" and appointments to minor positions of community power.

### *The painful truth ...*

The book's author, Dr. Lenton Aikins is a well-credentialed professional with a wealth of subject matter experience. However, in writing this particular book, I fear that his message may be greatly overshadowed by the propensity of those in positions of leadership and power to denigrate the author or disregard the message; especially since it seems to run counter to what I perceive is the accepted wisdom within the greater community. A message that is simultaneously truthful and painful. Especially to the black community which has suffered the indignity of having leaders who are more interested in their personal prestige, power and profits than they are leading others to a more fruitful existence.

### *A challenge to fellow blacks ...*

Dr. Aikins dedicates this book to his fellow black men and calls upon them to stand up and act like men when it comes to traditional family and social values. At the same time, he decries a lack of personal responsibility on the part of parents who have essentially allowed their children to run wild; without the significant nurturing or guidance that will prevent them from perpetuating the past and resulting in a life that may not be considered to be well-lived. A life of personal anguish, strife and mounting discontent with an enemy that can only be seen in a mirror.

### *Multiculturalism and diversity ...*

Like most people who have never considered the matter, I have often confused the concepts of diversity with that of multiculturalism. However, Dr. Aikins makes an important distinction.

“Diversity does not require everybody to see things the same way; just that everybody looks in the same direction and the same goals.”

“Multiculturalism holds that all cultures, all people and all languages are equal and deserve to be given equal treatment in our society.”

An important distinction which I had never considered before reading Aikins’ work. Therefore, reflecting upon these concepts, I can see where the United States is treading a dangerous path. By adopting a position of diversity one can be inclusive of all peoples; whereas the adoption of multiculturalism may lead to the destruction of our current society as we know it. Mostly by treating everyone and everything as beige, by accepting wrong or harmful practices merely because some particular sect may support them. By ignoring that illegal aliens and others still bear allegiance to their homeland or culture while proclaiming false allegiance to ours.

Aikins’ loudest criticism seems reserved for those who dare consider the plight of illegal aliens as being equal to the historical plight of Africans who were forcibly removed from their world and brought here as slaves. And for those elected leaders who are allocating attention and resources to others while ignoring our legal citizens who should have a prior well-established claim.

### *The bane of illegal immigration ...*

Dr. Aikins rails against illegal immigration. But where I note that the overwhelming numbers of illegal aliens are destroying our healthcare, educational, judicial, social, cultural and retirement infrastructure, Aikins points the further devastating effects that the tide of illegal aliens has wreaked on the black community. Especially in the areas of illegally confiscating lower wage positions and the severely crippling the ability of government agencies to offer additional support required for subsistence to its legal citizens.

Aikins believes it is both unfair and unwarranted of the government to take this mass of recently-arrived illegal aliens and raise their wants and needs above those of legal, law-abiding citizens, especially the indigenous blacks who are disproportionately affected. With this I strongly agree. I look at a depressed area such as South Central Los Angeles and wonder why we are pouring billions into foreign aid while our own people fight for jobs and the basic necessities of life. I imagine that the situation is much the same in Detroit and other areas where mainstream industry and commerce has left a decaying morass of shuttered buildings and discarded trash.

There are any number of solid social observations and prescriptions in this book which I wholeheartedly recommend to those who want a rational perspective on racial issues in

America. Amazingly, at least to me, Aikins' make a case for the draft, where young men are exposed to a variety of racial and ethnic situations, an environment in which discipline reigns supreme and rank and privileges are bestowed mostly on merit. (And above all, begins to understand the concept of loyalty to ones' country. – my words)

I believe Dr. Aikins has made an extremely strong case for his position there has been a massive failure on the part of black leaders to come to the aid of a people in desperate need of appropriate leadership. A position, if sincerely considered, may point they way out of the self-imposed ghetto mentality that impedes black progress today.

### *The N-word ...*

However, not all is sweetness and light as I strongly disagree with Dr. Aikins about the use of the dreaded and despised N-word. He believes that the word should never be spoken; by blacks, whites or any other person as its hateful connotation sends the wrong message both to the user and those that hear the word spoken. Here I disagree. Not that I advocate using the N-word, but that I do not see the point of investing any word or symbol with such power that human nature almost demands that it be used to provoke a reaction in another person. By empowering either words or symbols with devastatingly hateful meaning, I believe that you have granted another person a measure of control over your emotions. Possibly to the extent of causing one to lose focus, all sense of reason and embark on an ultimately self-destructive path as one seeks to further escalate the confrontation.

### *Assimilation or acculturation?*

After reading Aikins' book, I also find myself reconsidering the path by which one is accepted as an equal member of society. Dr. Aikins apparently believes that assimilation applies more to people who arrived in the United States by voluntary choice.

“The assimilation model has not worked for African Americans. But who can argue that it was ever intended to work for African Americans? It has only worked for groups that came here *voluntarily*, because they have been and are able to hold on to their language, religion and trust among themselves at the same time they are developing social, educational, economic, and political ties with the majority community.”

Then Dr. Aikins goes on to point out a major difference between these ethnic groups and blacks.

“The immigrant groups see their immigrant communities as positive and identify with them. They do not refer to themselves with negative stereotypes and hateful words coined to refer to them as African Americans do.”

He goes further to note that these immigrants take pride in their group whereas African Americans seem to take pride in escaping from their group.

And with the fervor of an academic sociologist or political scientist, Aikins goes on to describe the process of acculturation which continues to work for immigrant communities but seems to be ineffective in moving blacks toward social acceptance.

### *The parasites: the failure of black leadership ...*

While Dr. Aikins' notes the corrupt nature of many black leaders, it appears that his greatest angst is related to the failure of today's so-called black leadership to demonstrate true leadership, to set the high moral standards required to elevate black self-esteem, to support broader economic initiatives for devastated black communities and, most of all, to stand up for the black community which is being pervasively overrun and disadvantaged by the onslaught of illegal immigrants.

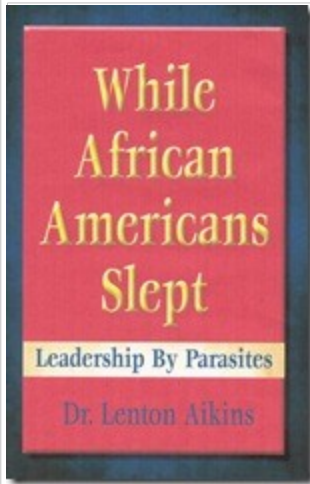
### *Why you should buy the book ...*

I cannot begin to understand the plight of a single black working mother whose life is a series of tradeoffs – none of which are pleasant to contemplate. Or that of a young black man who suffers emotionally at the thought of being stopped by a police officer. Therefore, I do not and can not appreciate all that Dr. Aikins explains. I get the broad strokes, but not the nuance that comes from a common experience. So I can hardly do justice to this book with a short review.

I have read this book three times. And each time I see something new, something that makes me challenge my assumptions ... and causes me to rewrite this review. I see any number of places where I disagree with Dr. Aikins' conclusions, but that is what makes for a healthy discussion within the community and between people seeking solutions to social problems.

But I need to say, in the final analysis, there is much in this book that makes it necessary and worthwhile reading for black leaders, black citizens – and anyone else concerned with returning America to a productive society. A society where contributions are valued for their inherent worth rather than judged by the skin color of the contributor. A society which features an equality of opportunities rather than legislatively mandating an equality of outcomes.

-- steve



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Americans Slept:  
Leadership By Parasites**


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