

Dissin' Blacks in the Name of Science

By Norm R. Allen Jr.

Part 5

Those arguing that Blacks are less intelligent than other races downplay or completely ignore the role that poverty plays in determining I.Q. Indeed, a study conducted in 2008 found that nine and ten-year old children from poor families fared so poorly compared to rich children that the difference was like the damage done to a person suffering from a stroke. The December 8, 2008 issue of *USA TODAY* reported that:

“It is a similar pattern to what’s seen in patients with strokes that have led to lesions in their prefrontal cortex,” which controls higher-order thinking and problem solving, says lead researcher Mark Kishiyama, a cognitive psychologist at the University of California-Berkeley. (“Poverty dramatically affects children’s brains,” by Greg Toppo, p. 4D.)

The article continued:

The study adds to a growing body of evidence that shows how poverty afflicts [sic] children’s brains. Researchers have long pointed to the ravages of malnutrition, stress, literacy and toxic environments in low-income children’s lives. Research has shown that the neural systems of poor children develop differently from those of middle-class children, affecting language development and “executive function,” or the ability to plan, remember details and pay attention in school.

Such deficiencies are reversible through intensive intervention such as focused lessons and games that encourage children to think out loud or use executive function....For the new study, researchers used an electroencephalograph (EEG) to measure brain function of 26 children while they watched images flashing on a computer. The children pressed a button when a tilted triangle appeared.

The researchers found a huge difference in the low-income children’s ability to detect the tilted triangles and block out distractions - a key function of the prefrontal cortex. (ibid.)

For decades we have known that high levels of lead decrease children’s I.Q., and that poor children are those most likely to be exposed to lead. However, in recent years we have learned lead levels that were widely believed to be safe can also cause serious damage to children’s cognitive ability. According to the April 17, 2003 issue of *The Buffalo News* (p. A7):

Blood levels of lead below current federal and international guidelines of 10 micrograms per deciliter produce a surprisingly large 7.4-point drop in IQ, a U.S. team reports in today’s *New England Journal of Medicine*....

“People have been asking, ‘How low (a lead concentration) is low enough?’” said Dr. Richard Canfield of Cornell University, one of the leaders of the study. “The fact is, in our study, we found

no evidence for a safe level. There is no safe level of exposure.” (“Study finds even low levels of lead reduce children’s IQ,” by Thomas H. Maugh II, *Los Angeles Times*.)

The article went on the note that about “38 million houses built before 1950 still have lead-based paints on their walls.” Obviously, poor African Americans are those most likely to live in such homes. Yet race scholars in their ivory towers never get the opportunity to experience this problem up close, nor do they care to do so. What is more, their research is inextricably linked to their conservative politics which dictate that they do away with government programs that could drastically reduce poverty and the ills it causes.

Such government programs include preschool programs. Head Start produced many empirically verifiable benefits to poor children throughout the U.S. It is amazing what can be accomplished when adults make up their minds to save *all* children rather than stigmatize many and cast them aside as hopelessly stupid.

For example, Leonard Masse and W. Steven Barnett of the New Jersey-based National Institute for Early Education Research looked into the social and financial outcomes of a program for pre-school children in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. David S. Broder, writing in the November 27, 2002 issue of *The Washington Post*, stated:

The Abecedarian Project has been operating since the 1970s, so the impact on the lives of 57 infants in the program can be compared over a long period of time with 54 similar youngster who did not participate in this program.

The results, much like those in a study of a similar program in Chicago, about which I wrote 15 months ago, are dramatic. Those who were in the Abecedarian Project had “significantly higher” mental test scores, from the time they were toddlers right up through the cutoff point at age 21. Far fewer were later enrolled in special education or remedial education classes. And they were 2 ½ times as likely to go to college as the kids in the control group. (“Strong Families, Strong Young Minds,” p. A 17.)

In Part VI, I will give more excellent examples of what can be accomplished in the area of teaching Black students when caring, committed teachers understand that failure is simply not an option.