

THE “PATCH-QUILT” ANALOGY EXPLAINED

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04 12th, 2007

The “BRING BACK BLACK” Movement

Most of us are familiar with the term “melting-pot” as it is used in reference to the population make-up of the United States. It ties closely with yet another term: “Out of many, one.” Both terms suggest that the many races, ethnicities, cultures and nationalities which are reflected in the U.S. population all combine to produce a single, new homogeneous whole. The implication is that each of these groups voluntarily gives up its unique individuality and blends in to become a new man-made creation called “Americans.”

Back in the 1960s when insurrections were taking place in major American cities, the entertainer Eartha Kitt proposed what she felt was a simple solution to the conflict between Blacks and White America. She called on the government to outlaw mating between males and females of the same race, and require that White men be allowed to procreate only with Black women, and Black men only with White women. In this way she suggested, both the Black and White races would gradually be replaced by a “beautiful café au-lait-colored population.” Disagree with her proposed solution if you will, but sister Eartha was sincere! Of course, White America was not about to allow such a thing to happen, intentionally or otherwise. Blacks on the other hand, were split on the issue, some agreeing with her wholeheartedly, and others condemning her just as strongly. Back in those days the race issue in America was strictly between Blacks and Whites.

In the decades since the 1960s we have witnessed a tremendous increase in both the variety of different racial, ethnic and nationality groups coming to and settling in America, and in their percentage of the population. No longer is the issue of race limited to Black and White, we now have browns, yellows and reds vying for attention. The addition of these groups to the mix has led to the use of terms such as “minorities,” “people of color,” “multi-cultural,” and “diverse” in reference to people who are not White. Even the once widely accepted premise that “one ounce of Black blood made one Black” has come under attack, and mixed-race people are urged to claim a new category for themselves: “bi-racial.” ‘Black’ is now considered passé’ and a throw-back to a period of time we would all be better off forgetting. Indeed, if one is famous and rich enough, one can create one’s own personal designation, as Tiger Woods has done by declaring himself neither Black nor Asian, but “Cablan!”

While White Americans are unalterably opposed to Eartha Kitt’s proposal, and reject miscegenation, they do feel that there should be such a thing as a “uniquely American culture.” How this is to be achieved with such a diversity of racial and ethnic groups as we have today is the consuming question. The simple solution says well-intentioned Whites, is that immigrant groups relinquish their “alien” cultures and become totally ‘American.’ For many of us this means all non-whites should become ‘imitation Whites.’ For the most part only a segment of the Black race gives this ludicrous proposition any consideration; other so-called minorities reject it out-of-hand and are insulted by it. The vast majority of White folks are taken-aback by such opposition; they feel they are being more than reasonable by allowing minorities to retain their

respective race and color (which they cannot escape anyway), but giving up their culture and language in favor of being accepted as American.

Whereas the United States of America once had a population mix comprised of only three color stripes, Black, White, and Red (for the 'Native' Americans), we now have a 'hodge-podge' mixture referred to by some as a "rainbow." The dilemma for Whites folks is that they prefer that America be seen as a "melting-pot" of races, ethnics and nationalities, but they do not want to lose their "whiteness" and all the privileges that brings by having to be 'melted' into the 'pot' with all the 'lesser' beings. So we hear those using references such as our population resembling "links in a chain." However, they are quick to point out that "a chain is only as strong as its weakest link" as a word of caution to 'minorities.' All non-white groups are thus reminded that they must at all cost avoids being that weakest link. Ironically, the best if not only way for a group to avoid becoming the weakest link is to strengthen itself from within and by its own initiative! In other words, it is up to each 'link' to BE strong enough as to not weaken the chain. Every group other than Blacks have taken this caution to heart, and work hard and well to assure they are not the weak link. "Enlightened self-interest" is the order of every day for non-Blacks in America, and for the most part, in the world.

This writer prefers to use the "patch-quilt" to illustrate the American populace rather than a melting pot, rainbow, or chain. In part this is due to the lack of variety of colors in a chain, and its use in constraining our ancestors; the association of the melting-pot with one form of punishment used against Black men who refused to submit to enslavement; and the rainbow being a natural phenomenon, unlike the man-made mixture of races in this country.

The "Patch-Quilt" Defined

Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary defines a "quilt" as "A bed coverlet of two layers of cloth filled with wool, cotton, or down, held in place by stitched designs;" and "patch" as "to make of patches or fragments." Therefore, a patch-quilt is a bed coverlet with the top layer made from patches and fragments of stitched design cloth. Each patch is unique in its design and color combinations, and seldom are two identical patches used in the same quilt. Quilts are usually made by groups of women working cooperatively. The gatherings at which patch-quilts were made were called "quilting bees," and were popular social events often lasting all day. As with links in a chain, a finished quilt was only as strong as its weakest patch. Given the current state of affairs, there is no doubt that Americans of African descent are the weakest patch in the American quilt. We are therefore blamed for everything that is wrong or not right about the American condition. This is a dangerous position to be in!

The TRI-PART Quilt

Our colleague and Brother Roger Madison, the Izania Man, reminded me that the quilt actually comprised three (3) layers: 1) the multi-patch COVER; 2) the FILL, be it down, cotton, or feathers; and 3) the BASE or FOUNDATION cloth. (All of us old guys know about this stuff). The FILL is what caused the quilt to keep us WARM, and keep us warm it did, no matter how cold it was out-from-under! Remember, we had no central heating back in those days, and the wood-burning stove would go out in the middle of the night after everyone, including Dad, had

succumbed to the comfort and security of the quilt. It would be five o'clock in the morning before the oldest boy child in the home would drag himself out from under the quilt and perform his 'chore' of re-starting the fire so that the house would be warm by the time everyone else began to stir, usually by or before 6:00 AM.

Unlike the cover made of multiple and varied patches, the BASE cloth was a single, large, continuous piece of material, strong and resilient enough to be selected for its foundational purpose: to provide SUPPORT for, and to hold everything placed and sewn on it together! The foundation cloth also had to be soothing to the touch because it was closest to our bodies. It felt g-o-o-o-o-d-d-d up under the 'ah y'all!

The Patch-Quilt Analogy APPLIED

In this analogy the multi-patch cover on the quilt represents the many racial, nationality, religious, and cultural groups that are part of the American population. Within the context of the Black patch are represented the various shades of skin, religious and denominational beliefs and practices, genders, and generations present among members of our race within the population as a whole. The fill represents the values, principles, beliefs, mores, and folkways that govern and guide the way we relate to and interact with and toward one another. Respect for our elders is one important example. The love and affection we have for one another is equally important as an example. The base/foundation represents our PEOPLE in their Spiritual, communal, collective, and nurturing nature. These are the traits and characteristics which make us most like our Creator and our Ancestors. By our very nature, we are our Brothers' and Sisters' keepers! In this context we are the Black patch that has to be strengthened, and to do so we must return to those attributes which made us a great people in ancient times, and gave us the strength and perseverance to endure extended periods of tremendous trial and tribulation more recently.

ACTION Steps

It is the responsibility and goal of the Bring Back Black Movement to strengthen the Black patch, and to do so, "We's gonna have us a quilting bee! The process leading to our goal began in Cincinnati on December 9, 2006. The next major event will be our follow-up gathering scheduled for April 20 & 21, 2007 in Atlanta, Georgia when our teams of patch-bearers (task forces) will present their respective "fragments" for review and approval by those who will participate in our "bee." The quilting-bee itself will take place on or about October 16, 2007 at a location yet to be determined. That date is chosen because it is the anniversary of the original Million Man March, and we are determined that our movement will bring back the Spirit of that momentous occasion! The 'fragments' referred to above are the mission statements and proposed structures our ten (10) task forces are developing as this is written. These will be 'sewn' or 'stitched' together to form the 'quilt' (structure, manifesto, constitution and by-laws for our new national organization), which we will thereafter spread as a 'coverlet' over our people throughout the nation and Diaspora!!

We departed from Cincinnati with a commitment to 'BRING BACK BLACK;' when we complete our work in Atlanta, we will declare that "BLACK IS BACK!" Upon completion of our "bee" in October, 2007 we will go forth to our respective homes and places with the

declaration that: “WE ARE STRENGTHENING THE WEAKEST PATCH!!!” It must be a PROCESS, not an event.

It will be a New Day, and Black folks will begin to take care of our business in a New Way!

Bring Back Black!!!