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*Promoting Academic Excellence in key urban zip codes*

August 18, 2011

Subject: A Fellowship with College Board Staff

A Twelve Two-Letter Phrase/Observation: "If it is to be, it is up to me...or us!"

**"Can high school students receive college credit for spending a year exploring black life in America?"**

Trevor Packer, senior vice-president for the College Board's Advanced Placement Program and College Readiness, arranged a fellowship for me to discuss this question with him and six members of the College Board's AP team on August 16. We met for an hour, the equivalent of eight people-hours, discussing a possible college-level class for high school students. Below is a recap of some key points covered during the discussion.

We all concurred that the time we were spending together was of some value. Trevor indicated that this was the first time that an advocate for minority students had visited the College Board seeking to explore establishing an AP African American Studies/History class option for high school students. At my request, Odette Duggan captured the moment on her Blackberry and sent me the picture.



After introductions, Trevor painted the picture of the College Board being a non-profit association of over 5,000 members (high schools, school districts, colleges, and universities). The association members throughout the country form into six regions. Delegates from member

institutions attend Regional Conferences in February. The College Board holds an annual national conference in October. Agenda items from regional conferences may appear on the national conference agenda. The national governing body, the College Board Board of Trustees, issues “charges” to the College Board staff based on resolutions adopted at the national conference.

Trevor shared that only one of the 5,000-plus members had ever inquired about the possibility of an African American History class being included in the AP Program. Apparently this inquiry from the school district serving Pittsburgh never made it to the regional conference agenda. From the College Board’s perspective, regional conference outcomes have yet to indicate a demand for making AP African American Studies/History an option available to high school students. Consequently, there is no national demand from the association’s members for having high school students receive possible college credit for spending a year exploring black life in America.”

Understandably, the College Board staff is not the appropriate agent to advocate for any specific future AP class. The staff exists to do the work for a member-driven association. Odette indicated that educators she touches in her College Board Equity role have other responsibilities to fulfill. They are unlikely to have time to be strong member advocates for an AP African American Studies/History class. Getting “a critical mass” of association members to show an interest in being able to offer this AP class is just one challenge.

Another key for the College Board is protecting its AP Program trademark. There is absolutely no “wobble-room” in its stance that AP classes offer college credit by exam exemption. Therefore, the curriculum and exam for a potential AP African American Studies/History class must have college/university buy-in. Lacking a charge from the governing board to do so, the staff has not queried member postsecondary institutions about their willingness to grant college credit for a passing score on an AP African American Studies/History exam.

The value of the discussion for me is that I can offer an explanation to the children and youth I encounter for why they cannot receive (through the AP Program) college credit for spending a year exploring black life through a nationally recognized, college-level, rigorous academic class and passing an exam at the end of the class.

After the fellowship, I “googled” “College Board AND Pittsburgh AND African American History.” Documents generated in 2007 describe the environment that still exists in 2011. College Board association members want to maintain a strong AP Program. It can—and does—happen without the inclusion of an AP African American Studies/History class.

In His Service,

*Jason*

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August 18, 2011

Subject: Peeking at the Road Ahead

A Twelve Two-Letter Phrase/Observation: “If it is to be, it is up to me...or us!”

**“Can high school students receive college credit for spending a year exploring black life in America?”**

Exactly four months prior to the day of the fellowship with the College Board, the leadership of the Notre Dame Alumni Association presented me with an award at half-time of the 82<sup>nd</sup> Annual Blue-Gold Football Game on the 50-yard line of Notre Dame Stadium. The [William D. Reynolds award](#) inscription reads “for fostering academic excellence among youth in his community.” The Alumni Association leadership indicated that it expected me to continue doing what I am doing as the award recipient.



Among the things I do is look into the eyes of black youth. I relish having “eyeball-to-eyeball” contact with some of them. Sometimes the eyes are simply asking, “Jason, what are you doing to shape the environment in which we learn?” Because they are respectful when I encourage them to demonstrate academic excellence in the most rigorous academic classes, my glaze back at them must reflect sincere efforts to shape the environment in which they learn.

Young men like these have no opportunity to gain college credit for exploring black life in America in a year-long, nationally recognized, college-level, rigorous academic class while they are in high school. Merchants of Knowledge far removed from these eyes set the agenda for what classes will be available to them. The brightness in ninth-grade eyes tends to dimmer over four years in many cases. “We do not know what we do not know.” Even now, after thirty years

of a Space Shuttle program, we have no data describing the effects of black males earning college credit for the study of black life just after they enter high school.

After leaving the fellowship at the College Board, I reviewed possible options. The first is the “do nothing—it’s too hard” option. My son, Jason II, was the first to suggest this option to me. He mentioned that times are tough all around and there probably is little to gain from devoting personal funds to such a huge project at this time. We changed the conversation but I wondered aloud about the fruit of efforts undertaken previously “in the best of times.”

I explored the option of establishing a non-profit to raise the funds to undertake a longer expedition focused on creating the national demand that the governing body of the College Board would have to see before issuing a charge to College Board staff for an AP African American Studies/History class. Pieces of this option are already in place, ready for further development—should it seem like the best route to take to produce fruit sometime this decade.

A third option that comes to mind is seeking to collaborate with the University of Notre Dame in what I would bill as a “Transformational Change.” I will bring the two fish and five loaves that I receive monthly and place them in Our Lady’s service. The University’s leadership might be willing to explore a role in helping high school students earn college credits (or providing other incentives) for exploring black life in America. Father Sorin, C,S,C, (founder of Notre Dame) had a vision: “This college will be one of the most powerful means for doing good in this country.”

At a later time, I will provide an update on which of the above options seems to be working.

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Showing results for [College Board AND Pittsburgh AND "AP African American History"](#).

## Search Results

### 1. [College Board cool to AP course in African-American history](#)

[www.post-gazette.com/pg/07218/807286-298.stm](http://www.post-gazette.com/pg/07218/807286-298.stm) - [CachedSimilar](#)

Aug 5, 2007 – The *Pittsburgh* Public Schools has a proposal for addressing the chronic ... wants to create an *AP African-American history* course, believing it will ... "I know the *College Board* is not on board yet, but we'll keep the ...

### 2. [College Board cool to AP course in African-American history - In ...](#)

[www.militarysos.com](http://www.militarysos.com) › ... › [General Discussion](#) › [In the News](#) - [Cached](#)

Aug 6, 2007 – Monday, August 06, 2007 By Joe Smydo, *Pittsburgh* Post-Gazette The *Pittsburgh* Public ... wants to create an *AP African-American history* course, ... According to research cited by the *College Board*, students who did well ...

### 3. [News: Should AP Add African-American History? - Inside Higher Ed](#)

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Aug 7, 2007 – For a variety of reasons, the *College Board* says, college officials prefer to ... deputy superintendent for instruction of the *Pittsburgh* Public Schools. .... Lane is on the right track, *AP African American History* is a ...

### 4. [News: Should AP Add African-American History? - Inside Higher Ed](#)

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Aug 7, 2007 – *College Board* officials say their doubts have nothing to do ...

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### 5. [College Board Not in Support of AP Credit for African-American ...](#)

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Aug 6, 2007 – *College Board* Not in Support of AP Credit for African-American history Black Society ... The *Pittsburgh* Public Schools has a proposal for addressing the chronic ... wants to create an *AP African-American history* course, ...

### 6. [Pittsburgh Public Schools Seek to Create AP African American History](#)

[www.bloggernews.net/19207](http://www.bloggernews.net/19207) - [Cached](#)

Aug 7, 2007 – According to research conducted by the *College Board*, students who ...  
Public Schools Seek to Create *AP African American History Course* " ...

7. [Susan Ohanian's Testing Atrocities \(Susan Ohanian Speaks Out\)](#)

[www.susanohanian.org/atrocity\\_fetch.php?id=7396](http://www.susanohanian.org/atrocity_fetch.php?id=7396) - [Cached](#)

Aug 6, 2007 – *College Board* cool to AP course in African-American history ... wants to create an *AP African-American history* course, believing it will ... "The *College Board* knows as well as we do in *Pittsburgh* that they have some ...

8. [The college has to have an African American history course to get ...](#)

[www.prometheus6.org](http://www.prometheus6.org) › [Blogs](#) › [Prometheus 6's blog](#) - [Cached](#)

Aug 7, 2007 – The *College Board* says it has helped districts take that approach by offering pre-AP ... The *Pittsburgh Public Schools* has a proposal for addressing the chronic ... wants to create an *AP African-American history* course, ...

9. [African American History Courses](#)

[www.rubiorlikowski.tk/african-american-history-courses](http://www.rubiorlikowski.tk/african-american-history-courses) - [Cached](#)

Franklin said that while the *College Board* may be correct that students today ... The *Pittsburgh Public Schools* has a proposal for addressing the chronic under ... of an *AP African American history* course is data from the *College Board* ...