

Playing Hard to Get  
by  
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When I was a single young man, I enjoyed listening to the older men and Elders in the barbershop. There was so much wisdom there!! One frequent topic was women. I remember one man saying, "I chased my wife until she caught me". Everyone laughed, knowingly, but it struck a nerve with me and I've never forgotten it. As I grow older, I had an opportunity to observe and experience this paradoxical practice of "playing hard to get."

This phenomenon has actually been studied by psychologists...

When our Afrikan Ancestors were kidnapped and store-housed in the dungeons of the numerous forts on the coast of West Afrika, they had only a few options: one option was to fight right away knowing that they would be killed, another option was to bide their time and wait for a good time to fight, to commit suicide or to comply. We know of the Afrikans who chose to die fighting rather than to face an uncertain but horrible future. We know about the Afrikans who bided their time to revolt. Their stories are told when discussing revolts on ships, the best known being the Amistad but there were many more. By the way, the movie was a fictionalized version of real history that did what all movies in America do, it glorified the white characters and made the Black characters secondary. We know about the Afrikans who jumped into the ocean rather than to continue on that unholy journey called the Middle Passage.

I want to concentrate on another group, the Afrikans who chose to live and who complied with the devilish treatment accorded them. These were our Ancestors, the Ancestors of the Afrikans from the United States of America (AUSA) and other "New World Afrikans".

When they arrived in seaports like Charleston, SC, which received more than 40% of the kidnapped and enslaved Afrikans brought to North America, they were knowledgeable about who they were. Even though

virtually all of them identified with an ethnic group (I hate the word “tribe”), the experiences of being kidnapped, the horrors of the Middle Passage and the brutal, dehumanizing treatment that they received made them realize that they did have something in common, their appearance. All the features that define “blackness” were in them while the kidnappers, enslavers and savages who brutalized and chattelized them were not black. Of course, some would say that Afrikans sold Afrikans but that is another article (think Clarence Thomas in the mean-time). These enslaved Afrikans began to forge a “racial” solidarity despite speaking different languages. That fact is highlighted by the more than 250 rebellions of the enslaved Afrikans (I also don’t like the word ‘slave’ especially applied to AUSA).

For at least two to four generations, these kidnapped and enslaved Afrikans relished their Afrikanness, as shown in their organization names like the African Methodist Episcopal Church and the African Lodge (now the Prince Hall Masons).

The question that the brilliant AUSA scholar, Dr. Anderson Thompson, raised is when did these enslaved Afrikans stop wanting to be Afrikan and start wanting to be American? I would add, what was the impetus that caused the switch in aspirations? Regardless, since the early part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there have been a significant number of AUSA who have been begging, pleading and entreating our kidnappers, enslavers, oppressors and colonizers to suddenly respect us and accept us as their equals in what they call American democracy. It is easy to concede that there have been many people from the enslaver/oppressor class that have verbally agreed that AUSA are truly Americans and should benefit equally as all other “citizens” benefit.

The “acid test”, though, is to look, not only at the laws of the United States but also at the way that these laws are enforced. Why is it that only recently, after more than a century, an antilynching law has been passed? Why are the prisons filled with AUSA women and men who got harsher sentences for the same (or lesser) crimes than white people? Why do AUSA earn less than whites (especially Black women who are the most educated group in America)? Why is there such a thing as racial health disparity? It

seems as though something other than individual racism is happening. There is a “dead rat” called systemic racism stinking up the system.

For the first eighty-nine years of the existence of the United States, our Ancestors were legally enslaved. It took a bloody Civil War to change that. For the next twelve years, during a very important period called Reconstruction, great strides were made for and by AUSA. This ended because of the desire for white America to reunite (at the expense of AUSA). White historians even conspired to teach lies that Reconstruction was a failed project (look up the Dunning school). The next seventy-seven years was marked by abject, unchecked, unpunished, vicious terrorism directed at AUSA with multiple lynchings, many race massacres and state sanctioned lawful American apartheid (segregation). Even though laws were passed to end this apartheid, they were not actually enforced.

Throughout all this time, however, AUSA petitioned, demonstrated, and protested to force the lawmakers and citizens to accept us as citizens with all the rights and privileges of that title. It would seem that America is and has not just been playing hard to get, but that they have no interest in recognizing us.

Sure, we can all say that our Ancestors built this country and we are entitled to whatever benefits America has to offer. We can say that we are owed Reparations for unpaid for unpaid labor during enslavement as well as denied opportunities after enslavement was legally ended (as we certainly are). But, in light of what is happening in America today, what the heck?

A record number of Americans voted for a man who is an obvious racist who supported racist organizations (and also gave support to the traditional enemies of the United States). That said, a slightly larger number of Americans voted against him.

I would submit that in the coming years, America will no longer play hard to get. They will either slam the door or open it widely with conditions. Slamming the door is self-explanatory. The conditions for opening it widely will be that all AUSA assimilate into the polluted mainstream of western culture. No longer will America tolerate the

rantings of wide-eyed Pan-Afrikan nationalistic militancy. No AUSA would be able to claim discrimination or racism. The conditions would call for the creation of the fabled "melting pot."

What then?

However, as many people who know me have heard me say, "We can chew gum and walk down the street at the same time".

There is value in pursuing equality and equity in America, politically, educationally, economically and especially culturally. What I have a problem with is the why. Why are we pursuing equality and equity in America? During the final phase of his career, when he had turned from an idealistic dreamer to a pragmatic realist, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. lamented that "...we are integrating into a burning house." The late great teacher Dr John Henrik Clarke often said that we must indulge in "the essential selfishness of survival". We have to break the addiction (That we all have been educated and socialized to have) of the desire to attain equal participation in the flawed culture called Western Civilization. Our pursuit must be for the reason of becoming a self-sufficient and sovereign people.

We must relearn the history and culture of our Ancestors. We must re-ignite those Nationalistic dreams and rediscover what our Ancestors, our grandparent's grandparents, knew when they built institutions that were independent of the mainstream. When we were given a conditional and token integration, we abandoned our institutions for the supposedly greener grass of the polluted mainstream. Today, unfortunately, many if not most of our children have no odea of what we have lost as a people. As an example, AUSA today own approximately half the land that AUSA owned in the year 1900.

Are we moving backwards? Are we chasing something until it catches us? Food for thought.