



Teacher Reveals Blueprint for Failure in L.A. Schools

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The Voice of our Community Speaking for Itself

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No one can seem to really answer why but with a brief yet compelling, write up of his own experience, Rabbi Nachum Shifren at least- gives insight into how the Los Angeles school system is failing it's African American and Hispanic students. In his book, "Kill Your Teacher," ex Dorsey High School teacher Shifren (more widely known as the surfing Rabbi) expresses his outrage over being fired for nothing more he said, than expecting his students to reach higher standards. And, he said, he was called "racist" and had his classroom burned to the ground for failing students whom he refused to believe could not academically perform.

But beyond anger for his own situation, Shifren who was with LAUSD for more than ten years, is angry at the sense of apathy among parents, community leaders and administrators when it comes to educating Black and Hispanic kids.

"LAUSD needs to change the leadership of their schools," said Shifren in an interview with the Sentinel.

"The Black leadership in [Los Angeles] is corrupt. It is focused on victimization ... 'we've been given a bad deck of cards.' 'It's because of the White man that we can't.' I've been told that by educators and administrators.

"I feel that unless the Al Sharptons and the Jesse Jacksons...if the Black people understand that these people are only interested in themselves. They don't care about the Black community. "They want more dysfunction, the greater role they'll have. The more people who get it together with learning, cracking the books and adhering to standards, working hard and divesting themselves of an immediate [need for] self gratification, the less they need these racist people from outside the community saying, 'you can't do it by yourself.' 'You need my help.'

"This is a tragedy across the board with all our schools. I've never found any Black educators who- would. get up and say, 'you what quit crying and complaining. Get in

here and we'll help you' ... I never saw a phenomenon where I had so many kids with no pencils, books or homework ... nothing. How could it be that a twelfth grader is in my class and doesn't know what an adjective is or where the verb is in a sentence," he said.

For his part the Surfing Rabbi who taught Spanish at Dorsey, expected nothing less than adequate performance in his classroom. That meant coming to class prepared, doing the assigned homework and passing the quizzes and tests. He left his door open during lunchtime and after school he said, for students who needed help understanding the material but no one would come.

The majority of his students failed his class because they would not comply with those standards and he would not socially promote them. For his efforts he received death threats, racial insults and no help from his higher ups who basically told him to deal with it. "F**k you, you Jewish Bastard. I'm going to kill you," he quoted one student in his book.

"After the first death threat I received from one of my students I should have been shocked." He wrote.

"I wasn't. Threats, curses and humiliating epithets had become routine in the classroom ..."

Ultimately Shiffen was fired for "cultural insensitivity." Currently he works with teens via a program that teaches them self-esteem and life skills through surfing. However, he wants his job back he said, inside the classroom where he believes he can make a real difference.

Since his departure from Dorsey, there have been administrative changes and some academic improvement according to principal George Bartleson.

"I wasn't here when Shiffen was here so I can't speak to any of the problems he had," Bartleson said.

"What I do know is that since I inherited the school in 2004 our API scores increased by 46 points and our Academic Decathlon team just got voted 'most improved.'"

Reverend Jesse Lee Peterson, founder and president of The Brotherhood Organization of A New Destiny (BOND), a group dedicated to promoting responsible fatherhood amongst African Americans said, "If we had more teachers like Shiffen we could turn America around tomorrow ..."