

I was invited to speak at a conference about the African American experience in the West and I have never been so shocked and disappointed in blacks as I was then. The entire conference was focused on the African perspective in education. I ask now, why was I even invited to speak, because all that was being promoted was the Africentric perspective. I have problems with identifying with the mother land when I haven't come to grips with my most recent historical past here in America! Most children in urban area have never even left their neighborhoods and have difficulty relating to what's going on across town, or in another state, let alone relating to another continent. Many children think that Africa is a country in and unto itself. They don't even realize that when they relate to Egyptian history that Egypt is a country unto itself. I say let start giving our children a firm and positive history lesson from the pages of American history before we negate the experiences of our forefathers right here. To negate slavery is to say that our ancestors here in America did not exist and their existence was worthless and is worthless to us today. I can look upon the faces in the photos of my great, great, great grand parents and know that their lives were not in vain and that I am here because of the pain and struggles they had to endure. I want to pay homage to them for experiences.

When I think about them, I think about how they were denied education and now we can pay our kids to go or stay in school. Many died learning to read and write, now our children are killing each other in schools over clothing items or even in response to the way someone has looked at them. Something is terribly wrong with this picture. We have a generation of complacent kids and this is our future - we have to be responsible enough to know that if we don't give them something to be proud of and to live for that is worthy than we don't really have a future.

I grew up in southern California and my interest in Nicodemus was stimulated at an early age because we spent summer vacations there. There was no doubt in anyone's mind that home was where Nicodemus was. I had a perspective of the world and my place as it relates to Nicodemus. Nicodemus was a special place for my family for my relatives. We had our own town - and it was all black. I knew who I was when during the 60's we were going through an identity crisis as a race. We still are going through an identity crisis. We are now referring to ourselves as African Americans.

In Nicodemus we had the family, the extended family and the town. We had Nicodemus in common with all who were from there. We had a real sense of who we were. I am a descendent from the black settlers of the West and I'm very proud of my history as it relates to the western frontier.

If we take the time to educate our children with the rich American history that is our and is real and not just the negative aspects of slavery, we can give our children a good foundation to stand on psychologically as well as academically. There is finally a movement in the academic environment where our history is finally coming to surface. We must realize that what is important to us is in our own back yard.

As I started to do the research on my own family I wanted to know about the faces of the people that I saw in many photos and I tried to put the faces with the stories. As I started to do this, each bit of information I found pulled me further and further