

POINTS OF VIEW

An open mind helps preserve our democracy

My father was born in Scotland, and I proudly fly his beautiful golden flag with its royal red Scottish lion in my front yard. But it waves there in the wind beneath the Stars and Stripes, because I'm a Scot second and an American first.

I am also a former teacher and coach of champion track teams in Detroit's inner city. Scores of my students became top professionals in many fields due in part to my efforts to secure college scholarships for them.

When ultimately I moved into administration, I was soon promoted a second time — mid-year — to an inner-city high school department chairmanship from my junior high school department head job in that same neighborhood. The junior high's white principal had recently been ousted by a turbulent community, so I had to be summoned back to the junior high the following week to reassure a stu-

dent multitude camped out in front of the new black principal's office that I had indeed been promoted, rather than fired because I was white.

When Detroit's affirmative action promotion policies finally spurred me to leave Detroit in 1969 to accept a suburban high school assistant principalship, Free Press sportswriter Hal Schram mourned my departure under the headline, "Inner city loses the good doctor." My former athletes asserted in print that I had "brought out the best" in them.

Several times during the following decades, I tried to return — the last time as a candidate for Detroit's superintendency. Later, as Rochester Schools' assistant superintendent, I recruited black administrators despite the raucous protests of community bigots.

One of those superb administrators — assistant principal Gene Seaborn of



JOHN TELFORD

99 percent white Hart Middle School — would come in to school at 6:30 a.m. to shoot baskets with a troubled eighth-grader he was trying to help.

When I retired from Rochester Schools in 1991, hundreds of my inner-city Detroit athletes attended the retirement dinner, including a Baltimore doctor who flew in to speak.

Now comes Kwame Kenyatta, a new

Detroit School Board member who voted against pledging allegiance to the flag at board meetings. This is the same flag that Martin Luther King revered. Which flag would Kenyatta then salute — the red, black and green of African nationalism? The Stars and Bars the Old South raised in defense of slavery?

Our Stars and Stripes symbolize that very same American democracy which guards Kenyatta's freedom and upholds his right to express his views.

Kenyatta also is urging Detroit parents to boycott an academy to be opened next fall by Jesuit priests to teach black males. He claims that whites aren't qualified to teach black students. Perhaps he doesn't think that blacks should be teaching white students, either.

Gene Seaborn and I are living, breathing evidences disproving such ahistorical thinking, which brings es-

calating evil to this troubled land, including institutional racism and recent rioting and a devastating terrorist bombing.

We must unite to counter the views of Kwame Kenyatta and others like him, such as David Duke and Louis Farrakhan and Nidal Ayyad, one of the accused World Trade Center bombers.

Whatever our cultural origins, all citizens of our multicultural country are going to have to start regarding ourselves — and each other — as Americans first.

John Telford, a Rochester Hills resident, most recently was assistant superintendent in the Rochester district. He previously was executive director for secondary education in the Plymouth-Canton Schools. To leave a message for Telford from a Touch-Tone phone, dial 953-2047, mailbox 1879.

Teachers fed up with bosses' obscure language

For a long time I thought it was just me. Being a seventh generation redneck, I don't tend to believe much in philosophers other than Hank Williams Jr., or look for more inspiration than you can receive while fly fishing or spending an evening with Jack Daniels.

But it's not just me. In a recent column, I tossed a few barbs at the intellectual mush mouthed by educational philosophers and lamented that for the money we're paying these guys to educate our kids, they can at the very least speak English instead of education-alese.

My own poor kid who attends Livonia schools cringed when he saw the column. He figured it would be another bad week with his teachers because of the column. Usually his bad weeks are brought on by nobody but himself.

I figured I'd receive a few hate letters from teachers and others, publish them and put the thing to rest. I don't like to cover the same turf more than once. Newspaper columns can be boring enough, this one included, without covering the same landscape two weeks in a row.

But I had to do it. It was the teachers who called and persuaded me. And their calls weren't nasty. They all liked the column.

Here's a sampling.

■ From George Zoff of Southfield, a former educator, "I admire your educational philosophy."

David Juhnke of Plymouth Township, a former educator who is now in industry, called to say he's glad The Observer is taking on the bureaucracy.



JEFF COUNTS

"I was about to give up on the Observer with its liberal views."

I also received the following letter from Bob Kroeger:

"Your article on our educational philosophers was wonderful. I really can't thank you enough for exposing them

and their claptrap. Everyone here at Plymouth Salem High School I have talked to agrees with you 100 percent."

"Please understand that the overwhelming majority of us teachers do not buy what is being pushed on us. It is the grandiose idea of a few who think they have infinite wisdom. It is sad, no tragic, that educational decisions are made most of all of the time by people who have never taught or have not been in the classroom in 20 or more years."

One teacher in the Plymouth Canton schools, who didn't want to be named, called to say that the problem with some school administrators is that they are really wannabe college professors. The caller said: "I've had the same feeling in meetings that you have. I don't know what these guys are talk-

ing about and neither do a lot of other teachers."

MY TURN: Hopefully parents and teachers can join forces and press the school administrators in their communities to speak English and make their ideas clear to the public.

What are the chances? Not too good. Colleges of education seem to be pumping out these mush-mouthed clones on an assembly line basis. Being an educational philosopher has got to be a good job. The task is to predict what schools should be like in 10 to 20 years. The only trouble is most of these guys will be retired by the time anybody gets to test their predictions.

Jeff Counts is the editor of the Plymouth and Canton Observer Newspaper. He can be reached at 459-2700.

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