

The Pied Pipers of Tribalism

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The "Million Woman March" Should Have Promoted Individualism Not Tribalism

In nineteenth century Africa, blacks were sold into slavery by their community leaders. The leaders of the Million Woman March are trying to repeat history.

The 500,000 attendees at the October 25 march in Philadelphia listened to speakers extolling the theme "Sisters Healing Sisters." The mission statement says: "Great-grandmother taught grandmother. Grandmother taught mother. Mother taught me. I will teach you." What ideas did the organizers teach? They pushed unity among "racial sisters," and a return to the primitive tribalism of "African values."

Because the individual's identity is determined by the ethnic group, they said, one should devote oneself to supporting the needs of the tribe. Organizer Barbara Smith explained what this means: "In Africa, we shared everything. If I [had] milk, you had milk. If I had a house built, you had a house built. And when we started to learn that we were actually kings, queens, physicians, musicians, builders of pyramids, the stimulation of that [was] incredibly powerful. We can't find that in American history. We have to find that in African history."

Barbara Smith got the facts right--but not the evaluation. The sacrifice of the individual to the ethnic collective is indeed to be found in African, not American, history. America's unique heritage is individualism. America has historically treasured self-reliance and independent thinking. But those values have created the freest and wealthiest country ever.

What, by contrast, has Africa's philosophical heritage of collectivism produced? Its worship of ethnic groups has caused centuries of misery and tribal slaughter. For example, an estimated 80-115 million young girls have been forced to submit to the ancient horror of genital mutilation. Life expectancy on the continent is some 25 years lower than in the U.S. The infant mortality rate is about fifteen times higher. There is unspeakable disease and mass starvation caused by a variety of collectivist dictatorships.

This is the tribalism that the march's organizers accepted--and flaunted.

Do the march's leaders want increased economic opportunities? Then let them endorse, not more government programs, but individual rights and capitalism. Do they want racial harmony? Let them grant moral supremacy, not to the collective tribe, but to the independent individual. Do they want better education? Let them fight, not for black-only schools, but for schools that teach the value of the individual, rational mind.

Lurking behind the rally's love of all things African was the insidious message to every listener: Ditch your brain; subordinate your will; accept the notion that your life has no reality except as an appendage of the tribal organism.

These ideas are not originated by the leaders of the march. They come from the humanities departments at our colleges and universities. The organizers merely spread in the culture what college professors now teach in class. For instance, one avant-garde concept in academia is "critical race theory"--which argues that there is no reality independent of a person's ethnicity, no objective facts and no universal rules of logic. Every person thus interprets events according to the emotions of his racial group. Said Professor Anthony Cook, a law professor at Georgetown University and a defender of the theory: "Critical race theory wants to bring race to the very center of the analysis of most situations. Its assumption is that race has affected our perception of reality and our understanding of the world--in almost every way."

Assaults on human reason create a herd mentality--a mentality that mindlessly follows those who declare themselves the leaders. Travelers on the Million Woman March will find that this tribalist road leads only to poverty, dictatorship and slavery. Ideologically there is no difference between "Aryan only" and "black only" schools. And there is no difference between a Nazi intellectual who said: "The voice of the blood speaks a louder language than that of the intellect," and a Million Woman March attendee who said: "I wanted to meet other strong black women who had the same agenda and be united."

Leaders of the minority communities will not find economic progress or racial harmony by turning to Africa. They will find positive values only by discovering the ideas that created the freest, wealthiest country in history--the one that fought a war to eradicate slavery: America. Minorities, as do all Americans, need a crusade against tribalism and for the supremacy of reason and individualism.