



Black Boy Made to Kneel and Apologize to His Teacher

By Educator Barnes – March 21, 2021

Teachers who have been teaching long enough have had students work on another teacher's assignment in their class. The response to this offense ranges from mild to major depending on the teacher. However, in a Long Island Catholic school, an 11-year-old Black boy was made to get on his knees and apologize to his teacher. The headmaster who dished out this punishment is now on leave. All this could have been avoided if the teacher responded appropriately.

The Haitian-American student had finished his reading in English class early and then decided to work on an assignment from another class. There have been no reports that the student was bothering anyone else or making noise. The student took initiative to find a task to complete instead of sitting there and doing nothing. Most seasoned teachers inform students of tasks they should work on if they finish early. If this teacher did this and complete work from other classes was not on the list, all the teacher had to do was to remind the student to put the work away. Unfortunately, the teacher made a minor situation a major situation.

The teacher ripped up the assignment and then kicked the boy out of class. Ripping up an assignment assigned by another teacher should never be the response. That action interferes with the student's ability to complete the assignment and practice skills for that class. The teacher could have held onto the assignment until the end of class instead of ripping it up. For this 6th grader, the situation became worse when he arrived at headmaster John Holian's office. Holian allegedly told the boy that kneeling and apologizing to him was the "African way." Does this man not know that this student is Haitian? If he knew that he was, did he not understand that Haiti and Africa are not the same places?

The headmaster should have told the student to not work on assignments for other classes and sent the boy back to the teacher. A good administrator should be able to use discernment to determine whether an offense needs a consequence from the administration.

Instead of the St. Martin de Porres Marianist school immediately condemning the behavior, they said that most of their students are of color. Of course, this absolves nothing and brings more alarm to how discipline is meted out. After many people raised concerns, the school later said, "I want to assure you that St. Martin's neither condones nor accepts the actions of our headmaster."

This situation shows a lack of understanding of who the students are that attend the school, a need for culturally responsive training, and revised discipline practices. The child is now in therapy. Discipline at school should never result in a child needing therapy. When this becomes the case, the school leadership needs to quickly rectify its practices so no other students are emotionally harmed.