

AFRICAN-AMERICAN PRINCIPALS Bureaucrat/Administrators and Ethno-Humanists

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In this article, the author looks at a subset of the data from a study that focused on teachers' responses to a curriculum innovation and conduct an analysis of it that illustrates the differences that distinguish the bureaucrat/administrator role from the ethno-humanist role as two African-American principals describe how they go about their work. These differences represent a focus on the goals of schooling and on the goals of education. The author found that the principals often moved back and forth between these two identities. They were rarely focusing only on the bureaucrat/administrator role or only on the ethno-humanist role. This overlap of roles, and the tensions between them are reflected throughout the interview transcripts.

I have been concerned for some time with the academic disenfranchisement of African-American students on all schooling levels (Lomotey, 1990). Regardless of the measures employed (e.g., standardized achievement tests, high school completion rates, suspension rates, special education placement, etc.), on average, African-American students fare poorly when compared to their European-American peers.

AUTHOR'S NOTE: I would like to thank Lucille Teichert, a graduate student in the Graduate School of Education (GSE) at the State University of New York at Buffalo (SUNYAB), for her assistance with the reanalysis of the data employed in this article. I would also like to thank Dianne L. H. Mark, another graduate student in the GSE at SUNYAB, for her comments on an earlier draft of this article.

URBAN EDUCATION, Vol. 27 No. 4, January 1993 395-412
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Moreover, I am interested in improving the life chances of African-American people, in general (Lomotey & Staley, 1990). Although it is not true that schooling is the "great equalizer" or the answer to all oppression in American society, it is true that improved schooling will increase the likelihood for individuals and groups to improve their status and make greater contributions to their communities and to the society at large.

There is evidence to suggest that principal leadership is significant in bringing about greater success in school for African-American students. In an earlier study (Lomotey, 1989a), I identified four qualities exhibited by principals in effective schools. These include (a) developing goals; (b) harnessing energy; (c) facilitating communication; and (d) managing instruction, which incorporates teacher supervision, curriculum development, and achievement evaluation.

In this article, I will refer to these qualities to describe what I call the principal's "bureaucrat/administrator" role identity. They are linked to academic success for students and these qualities also help to facilitate the socialization function of schooling in the United States. In addition to influencing the probability of academic success among students, these qualities are also effective in enabling principals to help these students move through the educational hierarchy. Clearly, principals play a major role in enabling schools to serve their sorting, stratification, and credentialing function within the American social system (Bowles & Gintis, 1976; Fine, 1991; Hill, 1989).

I have also identified three qualities shared by some African-American principals in predominantly African-American schools. These are commitment to the education of all students; confidence in the ability of all students to do well; and compassion for, and understanding of, all students and the communities in which they live (Lomotey, 1989a). Herein, I refer to these attributes to describe what I have termed the principal's "ethno-humanist role identity." These principals are not only concerned with the students progressing from grade to grade; they are also concerned with the individual life chances of their students and with the overall improvement of the status of African-American people. This commitment evolves

from the cultural affinity that these individuals feel toward African-American students.

I have borrowed the concept of role identity from the symbolic interactionist literature. Roles are determined by the nature of the shared structured relationships that exist between human beings. Individuals may have as many different role identities as there are different kinds of structured social interactions in which they are involved (see Stryker, 1980, pp. 51-65). In this particular discussion, my intent is to describe two distinct role identities that can be detected in the perceptions of African-American principals as they describe their relationships with African-American students. It is my contention that African-American principals often perform their bureaucrat/administrative roles. However, in addition, when they view their African-American culture as a significant bond with their students, they assume ethno-humanist roles. The affinity associated with this second role identity is facilitated, in part, by what political scientists refer to as "homophily"—the notion that people with homogeneous beliefs, values, and cultural attributes tend to interact and communicate more effectively with each other (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971).

The bureaucrat/administrator role identity facilitates what Shujaa (in press) refers to as "schooling." Its objective is meeting societal goals. The principals are merely committed to facilitating the movement of their students from grade to grade. In so doing, they perpetuate the stratification and credentialing functions of schools.

The ethno-humanist role identity is more appropriately associated with Shujaa's notion of "education." Its objective is meeting a set of cultural goals. In this role, principals identify with African-American students as a member of their culture. They argue that academic success is not enough. What is needed, these principals contend, is an education about one's culture, about life and about where these African-American students fit in the society and in the world. In essence, these leaders encourage African-American students to look at the world through an African-centered set of lenses that provides them with vision that is more focused, has a wider periphery and more depth.

This notion of education, I would argue, has been missing, for the most part, from the experiences afforded the large majority of African-American students in public schools. The result has been generations of African-American students with little sense of identity, purpose, or direction and with little knowledge of the relationship between their schooling and what will occur in their later life (Fine, 1991; Karenga, 1984; Lomotey, 1989b, 1992). In this article, I look at a subset of the data from a study (Shujaa, 1991) that focused on teachers' responses to a curriculum innovation and conduct as analysis of it that illustrates the differences that distinguish the bureaucrat/administrator role from the ethno-humanist role as two African-American principals describe how they go about their work. These differences represent a focus on the goals of schooling on the one hand, and on the goals of education, on the other hand.

THE ORIGINAL STUDY

Shujaa's (1991) study was conducted in the Buffalo (New York) Public Schools, where an African and African-American curriculum content infusion project was being implemented referred to as the Curriculum Integration Project (CIP). His data were collected at two schools selected by district administrators as pilot sites. The study was guided by three questions:

1. To what extent did teachers' perceptions of their role in the implementation of African and African-American curriculum content innovations match district policy goals?
2. What differences existed among teachers in the way they interpreted the task of infusing African and African-American curriculum content?
3. What differences existed among teachers' perceptions of the value to students of infusing African and African-American curriculum content?

The study was qualitative and the methods employed included in-depth interviews, document analysis, and observation. Twenty-three interviews were conducted with teachers, principals, and

other staff in both schools. Both sites were elementary schools in predominantly African-American communities with overwhelmingly African-American student populations. Whereas Shujaa was primarily interested in teachers' responses to CIP, my concern is with principal leadership as it relates to CIP. I, therefore, focus solely on the two principal interviews for this analysis. I refer to the two principals—both of whom were African-American females—as Ms. Grey and Ms. Scarlet.

DATA ANALYSIS

The analysis is presented in two major parts. I share examples of comments from the principals that characterize both the bureaucrat/administrator role and ethno-humanist role identities. I found that the principals often moved back and forth between these two identities. They were rarely focusing only on the bureaucrat/administrator role or only on the ethno-humanist role. This overlap of roles, and the tensions between them are reflected throughout the interview transcripts.

THE BUREAUCRAT/ADMINISTRATOR ROLE IDENTITY: PURSUING THE GOALS OF SCHOOLING

GOAL DEVELOPMENT

Leaders in successful organizations facilitate the development of easily understood and readily applied organizational goals. Moreover, these leaders accept and personify these goals. In schools, such an emphasis by principals helps to facilitate the principal-teacher interaction necessary for greater student success (Casterter, 1976). Clear goals minimize the likelihood of conflicts and misunderstandings among the staff. If principals facilitate and embody clear goals, the likelihood is greater that other members of the organization will internalize these goals (Lomotey, 1989a), thereby increasing the probability of greater organizational harmony.

The principals in this study understood, articulated, and internalized a set of goals related to the infusion project. In doing so, they demonstrated qualities that characterize effective school leaders. Ms. Grey, in explaining her understanding of the project said:

I understand the goals of the project as to present a more real life history for young people as it portrays the role of their culture in the making of our country and the world. It gives them a sense of identity.

She went on to say that she envisioned the goals being achieved "by sensitizing the staff to include in their daily activities, where appropriate, positive aspects of Black culture and how it relates to the rest of the world."

Ms. Scarlet articulated what she perceived the goals of the infusion project to be when she said:

I understand the goals to be [to] make the understanding or the knowledge and the awareness of the contributions of African and African-Americans [known] to everybody—all children. . . . The other goal is to sort of fill in the gaps [in the] textbooks and the curriculum that we have been taught.

These comments indicate that the principals held distinct views about the goals of the infusion project. And, as illustrated by Ms. Grey's remarks, there is some evidence that they also understood the significance of articulating these goals clearly to their staff—a process of particular importance to energy harnessing, which is discussed in the next section.

The principals also demonstrated an internalization of the project goals. For instance, Ms. Grey commented, "I bought into the project. . . . [I feel] very strong [about principals giving leadership to this project]. The principal is the leader of the building; [the principal] sets the tone."

ENERGY HARNESSING

Cooperation is the key to the effective operation of any organization. Such cooperation among staff members in schools can only come about when principals are able to capture the energies of their

teachers and encourage them to work toward collectively agreed-on goals (Casterter, 1976; McGregor, 1966; Louis & Miles, 1990). Increased staff harmony translates into higher levels of student success.

The principals in this study understood the importance of harnessing the energies of their teachers. Ms. Scarlet expressed the following perception:

I'm more concerned about my teachers at this point than I am for my kids, because I think if I can win the teachers over, they can set the examples the kids will follow. . . . If the teachers buy into the program, [if] they become enthusiastic about teaching about these different things that they should be teaching, then the kids will learn too.

Ms. Grey added, "When I see my teachers get interested in something and [I observe] the spirit in which they do it and the reaction of the kids, we've met a goal." In each instance, the principals described their perceptions of focusing the energies of their teachers.

Perhaps, most importantly, these principals reflected an understanding that they were working with teachers who possessed varied perspectives and levels of consciousness regarding the infusion project. Although some teachers may have been thoroughly committed to the project, others failed to acknowledge its significance. And, of course, there were others who fit somewhere in between. In describing her perceptions of these differences that teachers brought to the situation, Ms. Grey said:

It is one thing to do the lesson activities for young people. How teachers present and what prejudices they bring to that presentation can [make it] backfire. Something that can be very positive can be very negative. What we do is bring to it our own feelings and most people are not really objective enough . . . in our teaching because we personalize things as we see them.

Ms. Scarlet also discussed her perceptions of the varying levels of consciousness that teachers possess:

There are some teachers [whose] children treat each other with the utmost respect. You take these same children somewhere else, and if the environment is not the same, these same children who know

how to treat one another so nicely in this environment will follow the path of another. Then you say, well, my goals haven't been met. That is not the children so much as it is the person that is doing the instructing.

At another point, Ms. Scarlet provided additional insight into the staff development implications of teacher differences:

Teachers are not born—they are made. Many teachers, as much as we hate to admit it sometimes, are not very creative. They are [a] regular, average, run-of-the-mill group. Many of them need direction, guidance, aid, and some suggestions. Once they get that, and once they feel that this is going to be a goal, then they begin to buy into it.

Here, Ms. Scarlet is not only revealing her perceptions of the differences among teachers; she is also talking about how she attempts to “bring teachers around” in an effort to have everyone working toward the same set of goals.

Beyond understanding the importance of harnessing the energies of their teachers, Ms. Grey and Ms. Scarlet were both actively engaged in focusing the energies of their faculties toward pursuing the goals of the infusion project. They were also aware of what it takes to harness the energies of teachers. Ms. Scarlet described further how she works with teachers who display a low level of commitment to the project:

I have negative people on our staff. I won't say I don't. We know who these people are and what the rest of us do is try and say something—to be as positive as we can to counteract that. I think that has a lot to do with the success of the program. You don't let certain things stop you. You don't waste your time trying to fight it. You simply work around [it] and you shore up those edges and give those kids a little more exposure and a little more experience in a round about way rather than trying to make an enemy out of someone and then spend all your time fighting.

At another point she expressed the following optimism:

Because I am positive, I am finding that my teachers now are becoming a little bit more positive. I do a lot of stroking and a lot of telling people that they are doing a good job and encouraging them. I am very careful of when I say things to people, not only what I say.

Ms. Grey discussed another perception of an advantage of the project in harnessing the energy of some teachers:

I think what [the project] says to that person who doesn't see a need to teach African history or anything about Black people [is that] if they start to look at their own culture, [which] a lot of them don't know about, and see the importance, they will also begin to see the importance of someone else's culture.

COMMUNICATION FACILITATION

Developing goals and harnessing the energy of staff, although critically important, will only be minimally effective if the principals cannot develop and implement effective two-way communication with their staff. Two-way communication is critical. Many principals communicate with their staffs, but equally important is the degree to which teachers feel comfortable communicating with the principals on matters related to the school's goals. Research has demonstrated a link between effective two-way communication within schools and higher levels of student success (Wellisch, MacQueen, Carriere, & Duck, 1978).

The principals in this study have developed effective two-way communication vehicles. Ms. Scarlet spoke about the importance of two-way communication in the school:

With the African infusion project, I think once we get back into the in-services, once the teachers start working on a day-to-day basis, once the coordinators have materials that they can share with the teachers, they can sit down and discuss. Okay, this is great. I can try this; we are doing a unit next week; let's see if we can give some direction. . . . I think they'll fall into line. [Whereas] if you give it to them and say: I got this at the in-service the other day and maybe you can use it, yeah, they may not look at it again for the next two weeks.

At another point, Ms. Scarlet voiced the following perception of changes she had made that were brought about by the implementation of the project:

I've learned about people. I believed before, but I know now that some of these people have to be handled a little bit differently. For example, my coordinator becomes fierce about a lot of things and

what she's beginning to see is that . . . you are emotional about a lot of things and there is nothing wrong with that. But you have to get beyond that because these people over here need to see and understand that this is something they need. They may not want it, but they need it. Rather than get ornery about it, you have to understand that they are frightened; their whole life is shaken up; and that's good; and they retaliate and you have to be secure enough yourself to know this.

In the above statement, Ms. Scarlet is emphasizing the importance of effective two-way communication, but here again, implications for one's ability to harness the energy of teachers are evident. Principals must not only be aware of the varying levels of consciousness that teachers possess; they must also respond appropriately.

Ms. Scarlet expressed her perceptions of the effects of communication on staff morale: "Once we start this in-service and not just lecture but actually . . . talk about different kinds of things and break up into groups and have discussions and share ideas . . . then you'll get more enthusiasm."

In describing her perceptions of what teachers are doing differently and how their attitudes have begun to change as a result of the project, Ms. Grey said, "They communicate that to me." She went on at another point to discuss her perceptions of an increased level of communication among the teachers, brought about by the implementation of the project:

[Since the implementation of the infusion project] there's been a lot of debate. . . . What you see is teachers who debate whether we should be doing this. At least they're talking. It's not under the ground or under the cover that nobody talks about it. . . . I think there are some other people who use this to say to people, "What are you doing about it?"

Ms. Scarlet described how she communicated with teachers about the decision to introduce CIP at their school: "We were told in June of last year that we were going to be a pilot and I had a faculty meeting and we talked about it. I told them how I felt." Here she reflected an understanding of the importance of free and open communication with her staff.

INSTRUCTIONAL MANAGEMENT

Principals in successful schools demonstrate instructional management that includes curriculum planning, teacher supervision, and achievement evaluation. These leaders often participate actively in staff meetings and other aspects of the curriculum planning process (California State Development of Education, 1977). They are also involved on a regular basis in the supervision of teachers, often through regular observations (Wellisch et al., 1978). Finally, principals who are instructional leaders play a meaningful role in the evaluation of student achievement. This is done through the monitoring of schoolwide test results and through regular evaluative and prescriptive dialogue with teachers (Brookover & Lezotte, 1979).

I will briefly discuss the two principals' perception about curriculum planning and teacher supervision. Because CIP was a relatively new program at the time data were collected, there was no assessment mechanism in place to evaluate student achievement. Accordingly, little, if anything, was said in the interviews by the principals about their roles in the evaluation of student achievement in the CIP program.

Curriculum Planning

With regard to her involvement in curriculum planning, Ms. Grey provided the following comment: "I am searching out new materials and I'm being careful how monies are spent. . . . I have become more aware of what's out there and what's good and what's positive and ways to use it." At another point, she described another aspect of her input into the curriculum planning process: "I did something different last year. I said to them: Let's do an international thing. Let's have lots of countries, lots of people . . . choose your country. They liked that. . . . And the kids had to go and do the research."

Ms. Scarlet also stressed the importance of her involvement in curriculum matters: "[My teachers] . . . went to a couple of inservices in June and I went too. I think it is important as far as my role goes to participate along with the staff. . . . I intend to continue

to do that.” Each of these principals understood the importance of their hands-on involvement in curriculum planning.

Teacher Supervision

Ms. Scarlet’s perception of the importance of teacher supervision is emphasized in the following comments:

People lose their enthusiasm because they don’t have that enthusiasm in a big way. What gets measured gets done. When you stop measuring it, they slide back. Not because maybe they don’t buy into the program, but because there are other things that become priority and they don’t know how to make this infusion project a part of those priorities.

Ms. Scarlet also spoke about another aspect of her teacher supervision responsibilities—monitoring and feedback. She stated, “I do check lesson plans and notice when teachers have put some things in writing. I write a little note and tell them, ‘I see you are using African culture.’ ”

To summarize, the above analyses illustrate how these principals perceive their bureaucrat/administrator role identities. The assumption of role identities by African-American leaders serves a critical function in maintaining the status quo in our schools and in our society. Schools impart information, instill values, and control people (Lomotey & Brookins, 1988) and school leaders help to facilitate these functions by serving in the roles of bureaucrats/administrators.

THE ETHNO-HUMANIST ROLE IDENTITY: PURSUING THE GOALS OF EDUCATION

Achieving a significant improvement in the level of African-American student success in public schools and in the life chances of African-American people will require a greater focus on these students by school leaders. This increased focus must be geared toward enabling these students to feel good about themselves and about their people. Moreover, these students must be encouraged to expand their worldviews and to learn to see the world through

the eyes of Africans.

The perpetuation of African-American culture requires this re-direction in the education of African-American students. African-American school leaders play a key role in bringing about these changes. Commitment to the education of all students, compassion and understanding of students and their communities, and confidence in their skill, are necessary components of this critical change effort. I will discuss how each of these attributes were evidenced in the attitudes of these two African-American principals.

COMMITMENT

Both of these principals expressed their commitment to the education of African-American children. As they discussed the need for the infusion project, they recalled the lack of African-American content in their own schooling and that of their students' parents. They noted the difference between education in the northern and southern United States, and they stressed the significance of African-American churches and colleges in disseminating African and African-American history and culture.

Ms. Grey believed that the infusion project would not work for African-American students, or for any students, unless all educators—and not just African-American educators—were involved in the project: “I think . . . that there needs to be some kind of pressure or monitoring of principals and their attitude and it should not be up to Black teachers or Black principals to carry out such a project.” Her concerns about the success of the project emanated from her perception of systemic problems in the American educational system and its treatment of African and African-American history and culture: “I think we have to go back to the teacher training institutions. It’s got to be included. . . . They’ve got to be sensitized. It doesn’t matter where you teach, you need to do it in a sensitive kind of way.” Regarding the significance of the project, she added:

[This project] is a beginning. There should never be an end. While there are people and racism, it should always be a part. It should not be related to money. We don’t teach reading because of money. We don’t teach math because of money. We teach it because we feel it is important that we know how to read and how to do math. It is

also important that we know about people and it should be considered like that.

These statements reveal Ms. Grey's deep-felt commitment to her people—a feeling that goes much deeper than that required by her bureaucrat/administrator role identity.

COMPASSION

Ms. Scarlet's compassionate understanding of African-American children is articulated in the following statements:

I am interested in children learning and knowing information, but I think we need to have our children understand where we come from. Our people are able to deal with conflict, have an inner dignity and know how to cope with situations. Many of our kids have lost that. I grew up learning that; my grandmother taught me. I think a lot of us grew up that way. What I am seeing now, somewhere in these past 20 years or so, we have lost that with our kids; we don't know how to deal with adversity; we don't know how to deal with problems; we don't know how to be adults and get along in the world; and I think that if teachers are able to learn from reading in the African cultures that will give them another vehicle. Maybe having an additional wealth of information that you can tell children to help them understand how to deal with problems, how to relate to themselves and growing up [will help].

This statement, perhaps better than any from the data, captures the essence of the notion of the ethno-humanist role identity. Ms. Scarlet's compassion comes through as she personalizes the education of African-American students. Her recounting of what learning from her grandmother about African-American people was like and the need for such experiences to begin with today's African-American youth reflect this compassion. Implicit in this understanding is the acknowledgment of the importance of the transmission of a culture—in this case, African-American culture—from one generation to another. More evidence of Ms. Scarlet's compassion and of her immersion in African-American culture comes through in her constant inclusionary use of the term "we." She says, "*We* have lost that with our kids . . ."; "*we* don't know how to deal with adversity . . ."; and "*we* don't know how to be adults."

In stressing the importance of the infusion project, Ms. Grey displayed her compassion and understanding: “[I believe this project is needed] because I came up through a system in Buffalo where we were not a part of the history of the majority of things that were taught in the school settings.” Further evidence of Ms. Grey’s compassion and understanding was apparent when she talked about African-American teenagers growing up unaware of their history or the current reality of racism. She noted that they are not prepared for the problems they will face once they grow up. She said, “They don’t understand racism; that’s why they have the problems they are having. That’s why a lot of them don’t hang in there. . . . No-where were they told about it; so they run into problems they can’t handle.”

Involvement with implementing the infusion project itself was credited with fostering the development of at least one of the principals’ sense of compassion and understanding. In this regard, Ms. Grey commented, “[Since the project] I think I am more aware [of kids], and I make sure I’m positive to a child.”

CONFIDENCE

Ms. Scarlet’s confidence was reflected in her understanding of the potential impact of the project on her students:

My goal for this building is to have these children learn and grow and develop and be everything that they can possibly be. I think that if the African infusion program is done right, it is a vehicle by which the children will learn about themselves and want to be able to achieve.

This statement, although reflecting Ms. Scarlet’s confidence and her deep ethno-humanism, also shows, at times, how much these school leaders’ bureaucrat/administrator and ethno-humanist role identities overlap. While discussing the impact of the project on African-American youth, Ms. Scarlet is at the same time articulating school goals.

In summary, both of the principals in this study played their bureaucrat/administrator roles well. However, they were also concerned about equally important “education” issues related to the

holistic development of their students. They wanted to ensure that their students had every opportunity to learn about African and African-American history and culture and they wanted their students to develop positive self-concepts and generally to feel good about themselves and their people. Moreover, they wanted the students to develop a love for and a commitment to African-American people. They were committed to the education of their students; they were confident that these children could do well; and they displayed compassion for, and understanding of the children and the communities in which they lived. In sum, these African-American school leaders were committed to doing their part to insure the perpetuation of African-American culture.

CONCLUSION

Principals are indeed administrators and their behavior reflects this truism. But a principal is also a member of a cultural group (e.g., African-American culture, Hispanic-American culture, European-American culture). Moreover, if principals view their cultures as significant, they consciously or unconsciously make a distinction between their bureaucrat/administrator role and ethno-humanist function. This was the case with the two African-American principals observed in the present study. Although they demonstrated goal development, energy harnessing, communication facilitation, and instruction management, they also demonstrated commitment to their students, compassion for their students, and confidence in their students. Consequently, but not at all unexpectedly, the personal (ethno-humanist) and professional (bureaucrat/administrator) role identities were often intertwined.

Ms. Scarlet, in discussing the infusion project, said, "[It is intended to] make all children . . . [and] all teachers . . . more aware of our contribution to the American culture. That's one of the goals." While Ms. Scarlet is describing one of the goals of the program (schooling) in this statement, she is, at the same time, personalizing the goal when she says "our contribution." She is making a connection between what African-American children do in school and how it affects their lives outside of school.

At another point, Ms. Scarlet further articulated her perceptions of the goals of the project:

One of the goals is to help African-American children develop a sense of self-esteem so that they realize that they have a place in this world culture in addition to the United States culture. I think those are the broad goals of the program—not only for us but also for the majority population. So things have been rather one-sided and I think one of the goals is to show that all of us have worked together and contributed to make this world what it is.

Here again, her comments offer a clear discussion of the goals, but she also adds a more personal and cultural “editorial.” She is assessing the shortcomings of the status quo and arguing that a new agenda is necessary in schools in order to insure the success of African-American students.

The ability to strike a balance between schooling and education is essential in order for public school educators to educate African-American students effectively. Although it is critically important that we improve the academic achievement of African-American students, it is equally important that we enable these students to fit into and serve a meaningful role in the African-American community and in the United States. Moreover, African-American students need to be made to feel good about themselves as individuals and as African-Americans. Presently, many of these students see little connection between their educational experiences and their later lives. Moreover, they are not developing a commitment to the development of their own communities. Only with a greater emphasis from school leaders (teachers and administrators) on education for African-American students will we begin to see a qualitative change in the life chances of African-American people. African-American school leaders must take the lead in this by accentuating their ethno-humanist role identities.

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