

EDITORIALS

An ugly chapter in Hempstead

The attempt to remove Maribel Touré from the Hempstead school board because she supposedly is not a U.S. citizen has been exposed as a sham — and a shameful display of the bigotry that makes progress in the struggling district so difficult to achieve.

Touré's critics had no proof of their charges, only suspicion stemming from the simmering racial tensions between blacks and Latinos in Hempstead. Touré, an émigré from Mexico, was forced to produce her U.S. passport and voter registration to verify her citizenship.

Her other "sin" was defeating longtime board member and power broker Betty Cross in an October revote ordered by the state education commissioner after allegations of absentee ballot fraud and voter coercion by Cross' campaign workers in last May's election. Cross' supporters have been unrelenting in their criticism of Touré, even complaining about her accent at board meetings. It's no coincidence that formal challenges to her citizenship were filed now, one month before Touré runs again for another term.

Touré said yesterday that bigotry and ignorance are poisonous and "infect the educational system that is supposed to deliver enlightenment to our children." That's the right message. And Touré has been a voice for openness and reform, another reason she is despised by some who benefited from the old system.

Cross' campaign manager, Cornell Bozier, filed one of the challenges against Touré, saying, "Now, let's see who stole the election." The answer is that Touré won fair and square by getting more votes. That's the American way. And to Bozier and the rest of that camp: The question is not who stole the election, but who still is stealing Hempstead's soul. **N**