

# African American Psychology

## I. Introductory Comments

### A. Black vs. African American

Hall & Barongan = African American is the preferred term

D. Phillip McGee - Black & African American are equivalent terms and the choice of which to use is a academic, social, personal & political choice.

Black: evokes a history of slavery, racism, segregation, and discrimination.

African-American: evokes a sense of shared cultural heritage rooted in African culture.

B. What is African American (Black) Psychology = any research addressing psychology from the African American perspective (p. 17 foot note). How studied not who.

Origins =

1920's Francis Sumner earns Ph.D.

1938 Herman Canady organizes black psychologists

1960's APA begins to recognize black issues

1968 ABPsi (Assoc of Black Psychologists) forms in protest against APA

B. "Current" Demographics

12.9% of U.S. Population

36.4 Million African Americans (March 2002)

-281.4 Million U.S. Citizens Estimated Total

Comparison with other ethnic groups

- Hispanic/Lantino = 12.5%

- Asian-American = 4.2%<sup>3</sup>

- <http://www.census.gov/population/www/cen2000/briefs.html>

## C. A Little African History

- A majority of the American slaves were taken from the sub-Saharan region of north west African (See [Map](#)).
- Africa has been portrayed by European/American historians as a cultureless, tribal, uncivilized continent.
  - The “Dark Continent”
  - The “Jungle Continent” (though only a small portion of African is jungle. It is mostly savanna).
  - In the jungle, the mighty jungle, the lion sleeps tonight?

African has a rich culture and has a history of highly organized, city-state civilizations.

- Gahnah (also called Kumbi Saleh) : rises approximately 600 ad, though some evidence suggest it existed as early as 100 ad.
- Declines in approximately 1200 ad
- (600 ad England still has not be conquered by the Romans: Europe is still a tribal, stateless society),

[map](#)

- Mali (Melle) : 1235 - to late 1300's - replaces Gahnah as the dominant political influence in the area. Strongly influenced my Islam.
  - Mansa Musa : 1324 - visits Mecca: The show of opulence rivals the visit of any great leader ever to visit Mecca.
  
- Songhay: 1400's - 1600's, Gives rise to the modern Sudanese culture. Develop a unique sub-Saharan written language.
  - (Note: 1500's slave trade begins).

[map](#)

## D. A Little African American History

### 1. The slave trade

- Slaves were often the prisoners taken by rival political and tribal systems and sold to the white traders.
- Africans sold Africans into slavery (though probably not realizing what slavery meant to the whites).

### 2. Establishing Slavery

- 1669 Virginia Legislature formally define slaves as Property
- 1691 Virginia denies slaves the right to vote, hold office, or testify in court

## 2. Abolishing Slavery

### **Article XIII of the U.S. Constitution**

Section 1. Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.

Section 2. Congress shall have power to enforce this article by appropriate legislation.

Ratification was completed on December 6, 1865.

Kentucky is last state to ratify (1976) and Mississippi has never ratified this amendment.

## 3. The right to Vote

### XV Amendment

Section 1. The right of citizens of the United States to vote shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or by any State on account of race, color, or previous condition of servitude.

Ratification was completed on February 3, 1870

-The amendment was never ratified by Tennessee.

## 4. Separate but Equal

- Plessey vs. Ferguson 1898 (John Howard Plessey fined \$20 for sitting in a whites only rail car. Establishes the Doctrine

- Brown vs. Board of Education of Topeka, KS, 1954.

- Linda Brown files suit against the school board for not allowing her daughter to attend a Whites only school.

- Abolishes Separate but Equal & Jim Crow Segregation.

## E. Black Psychology: An Historical View (Maulana Karenga “Black Psychology”)

1. Three Schools of Black Psychology
  - Traditionalist
  - Reformist
  - Radical

They differ in their view of white and black psychology and the route they take toward change.

These schools can be viewed as both historical perspective and current postures.

### Traditionalists -

- 1) Defensive &/or reactive posture
- 2) Not focused on Black Psychology, but on redefining psychology in general.
  - eliminating the overtly racist aspects
- 3) Focus on changing white attitudes
  - do this through desegregation
- 4) Critical of psychology, but offers no substantive corrections

Kenneth Clark - First Black Pres of APA

- Clark, K. B. and Clark, M. P.- 1939- The black baby doll studies cited by Supreme Court in Brown Vs. Board of Ed of Topeka (1954). Taken as evidence of the damaging effects of segregation.
- Traditional Analysis of Segregation
  - Like all forms of cruelty and tyranny, debases all those associated with it (victims, victimizers, and accessories)
  - Victims are blamed for their lack strength (portrayed as fantasy oriented, sexually excessive, matriarchal, and irresponsible children), e.g. that they cause their own plight. Not the result of inferiority, but a result of brutally enforced segregation.
- Criticizes psychology for its focus on trivial minutia and the individual without considering the larger perspective of prejudice and oppression, that constricts efforts aimed at identifying truth

- Reformists -

- 1) Both historical revolution (starts in the late 50s and early 60s) and a current posture
- 2) Less emphasis on white attitude change and more on changes on public policy .
- 3) want to develop Black Psychology within the context of traditional focus on benefiting blacks, whites, and general culture

Charles Thomas : helped found and co-chair the ABP (1968). First major figure in the reformist movement.

- Social scientists have a responsibility to change the black condition. The Scientist/Activist Perspective
- Argues for the Ethnic perspective. Ethnicity frames the issue as a cultural one, not a biological one, and breaks down patterns of self-hate and self-denial.
- Critical of socio-biology that ignores cultural influences
- Critical of cultural pathologists' preoccupation with the deficits of the victims not the institution of victimization.
- Critical of the integrationists that believe blacks can act like whites if we give them more opportunities to be treated as white.
- Assumes that blacks do not have a viable culture of their own

Radicals - (rises in the late 60s)

- 1) totally unconcerned with the state of traditional psychology
- 2) focus on the analysis, treatment, and transformation of black people
- 3) focus on developing a view of psyc from the African perspective which is opposed to and opposite of the European world view.
- 4) Black Psychology should aim to change social reality through cultural and political struggle.

a. Na'im Akbar

- Traditional Psychology's "Intellectual Oppression" geared toward the mental degradation of a people.
- "Democratic Sanity" Model of Mental Health : insane behavior was determined by the degree to which it deviated from normal behavior in a given context
- Criticizes Traditional Psychology's focus on "documenting deficits of Afro-Americans" based on Democratic Sanity models.

b. Joseph Bladwin (Kobi Kazembe Kalongi Kambon)

- Two Core components of the African Personality
  - 1) African Self-Extension Orientation. (self and other are one).
  - 2) African Self-Consciousness is imbedded in ASEO. (individual thought is symbolically collective).

c. Linda James Myers

- The Optimal Africentric World View :

1) **Holistic-Spiritual/Unity** = Spiritual and Material are united (Animism) ; helps one to lose individual ego/mind and experience collective identity.

2) **Communalism** : the extended self = self equals all others including ancestors past and future.

3) **Proper Consciousness** : Truth is internal (not external as exemplified in European world view).

- The Suboptimal Eurocentric World View-

- racist, sexist, and materialistic (Hegemony)

- socializes member to seek key life values (self-worth, peace, happiness) through externals (materialism)

- racists and sexists are the oppressors who act out and project their own feelings of insecurity onto the oppressed.

- this world view fragments people into categories.

d. Wade Nobles

- Black Psychology - is more than the psych of underprivileged and ghettoized. It is derived from the African values, customs, attitudes, and behavior of Africans in Africa and the New World.

- African Philosophy is grounded in the notion of oneness with nature and survival of its peoples

1) Roots of philosophy in religion (religion = life practice)

2) Humans united with god and universe (not separate)

3) Time is experienced not calculated

4) Immortality for the dead through recognition and remembrance. (ancestor worship)

5) extended self, collective identity

- Surviving Africanisms

- Stress on survival

- man and nature are one

- oral tradition (folk tales and rappin')

- time is phenomenal, flexible, and potential not mathematical (CP time).

- Rock n' Roll is an Africanism (syncopated beat).

e. Frances Cress Welsing

- The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy)
- Neeley Fuller's Argument "Textbook of White Supremacy"
  - 1) White supremacy was the only functional Racism
  - 2) All 3rd world people are victims of it
  - 3) racism is not merely an individual or institutional phenomena, but a universal system of domination.
  - 4) European theories, politics, and economics are designed to establish, insure, and expand white domination

Cress's expansion.

- 1) supremacy drive is a neurotic drive for superiority and domination based on feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
- 2) source of inferiority is genetic inability to produce melanin
- 3) European whiteness makes them the world minority, and they are paranoid, because of real likelihood that they could be genetically wiped out by dark skinned phenotype.
- 4) hostility and aggression toward dark skinned people develops as a defense mechanism.

e. Frances Cress Welsing cont.

- White minority and genetic inferiority also leads to self-hatred and alienation. Whites develop defense mechanisms for this as well.
  - 1) repression and denial of feelings of inadequacy and inferiority
  - 2) discrediting & despising dark skinned people.
  - 3) suntanning to gain color
  - 4) develop white supremacy myth
  - 5) projection of hate and sexual desire on dark skinned people
  - 6) obsession with body but alienated from sex
  - 7) dividing people of color into diff. groups to make them minorities. (e.g. African American).
  - 8) efforts of population control in 3rd world.

Symbols of White Power

- 1) The Cross
- 2) The Gun
- 3) Paper Money
- 4) Smoking Objects (Conspicuous Leisure)
- 5) Boxing (masculine competition, desensitizes one to brutality)
- 6) Various Sizes and Colors of Balls (sporting; old and new testament, old balls and new balls; giving testimony)

## F. Current Issues in African American Psychology

### 1. Core Values

- a. Interrelatedness of nature and Univers  
  - Nobles "I am because we are; we are, therefore I am"
  - Contrast with Descartes' Dualism: "I think, therefore I am."
- b. Communalism-
  - Family      -Extended Family
  - Fictive Kin (play cousins)
- c. Spirituality-
  - Physical and Spiritual world are one
  - Christianity & Islam

### 2. Family Issues

- a. attachment theory
- b. Nuclear Families vs. Mother Dominant  
Nuclear Families and Single Parent  
Families
- c. Physical Discipline
- d. Racial Socialization

### 3. Academic Achievement

### 4. Psychopathology

### 5. Mental Health

### 6. Violence