

Black Psychology

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Introduction

Psychology is essentially the science that systematically studies behavior in its relationship to the complexity of mental, emotional, physical and environmental factors which shape it. Although there is a tendency to include the study of animal behavior as part of the definition of psychology (Kagan and Haveman, 1976), I have purposely omitted it in order to maintain focus on the human personality as the core and motive force of psychological study. In fact, even the study of animal behavior in psychology is only relevant in its use to deepen and expand understanding of human behavior. Otherwise, such study of animals is better defined as zoology rather than psychology.

Furthermore, all science is ultimately systematic study and knowledge to enhance human grasp of and effective encounter with themselves and their environment. Psychology, then, as a person-focused discipline, stands out as a key science in this historical project of overall human understanding of self, society and the world. For at its most relevant level, it not only focuses on the structure and functioning of the human personality, but equally important, points to the possibilities of its unlimited expansion and thus the realization of a higher level of human life on the personal and social level (Karenga, 1978).

The concerns of Black psychology revolve around the development of a discipline which not only studies the behavior of Black persons, but seeks to transform them into self-conscious agents of their own mental and political liberation. This is achieved through: 1) a severe critique and rejection of white psychology, in terms of its methodology, conclusions and the ideological premises on which it rests; 2) provision of Afrocentric models of study and therapy; and 3) self-conscious intervention in the social struggle for a more Black and human environment (Jones, 1980; Jackson, 1982).

Black psychology has its origins in the 1920's when Francis Sumner became the first Black Ph.D. in psychology in 1920, and subsequently Blacks began to publish research to disprove racists charges of Black inferiority, to push for stronger departments of psychology in Black schools, and to attempt to provide better psychological services to the Black community (Guthrie, 1976). It gained greater strength as an educational thrust when in 1938 Herman Canady of West Virginia State College began to organize Black professionals interested in psychology. Although he was unable then to organize an independent Black psychologist

association, he did establish a Black psychologists' caucus within the American Teachers Association, the main professional structure for Black educators. Among the goals they set for themselves were: 1) to promote the teaching and application of psychology, especially in Black schools; 2) to stimulate study, research and exchange; and 3) to set up qualifications for teachers of psychology and assist Black institutions in training and selecting psychologists (Guthrie, 1976:115ff).

However, it was not until the 60's as Jackson (1979:27) notes, "that Afro-American psychologists made a concerted and sustained effort to expand their concerns into a distinct system of thought and not until the 70's that publications appeared in the form of a Black Psychology." In the 60's, the resurgence of Black nationalism, and its Black Power expression, encouraged and demanded Black caucuses within traditionally white-controlled and white-oriented professional organizations as well as independent Black organizations. In 1968 the Association of Black Psychologists (ABP) was founded in the midst of criticism of the American Psychological Association (APA) for its limited vision and conscious and unconscious support of the racist character of American society.

Pledging themselves "to the realization that they are Black people first and psychologists second," the ABP vowed not to "ignore the exploitation of the Black community" and expressed urgent concern "about its role and that of the APA in Black people's struggle for dignity and equality in this country" (Williams, 1974:11-12). The suggestion that the APA had a role in the Black struggle and the subsequent 10-point program for correctives of the APA's thought and practice shows that Black psychologists were still in transition toward an Afro-centric psychology. However, in 1974 when Williams wrote a brief history of the ABP, it was his assessment that traditional psychology was out and Black psychology coming into being. "Black psychologists," he (1974:24) asserted, "have finally broken the symbiotic relationship with white psychology." Black psychology must now, he continued, "be about the business of setting forth new definitions, conceptual models, test theories, normative behavior, all of which must come from the heart of the Black experience."

The history of the Association of Black Psychologists reflects the consolidation and development of distinct but overlapping schools of Black psychology. These are the traditional, reformist and radical schools. Although these approximate Jackson's (1979) reactive, inventive and innovative categories of Black psychology components, I find the categories "inventive" and "innovative" close enough in redefinition to warrant alternative categories. Thus, I have offered "reformist" and "radical" as alternative categories. It is important to state here that I suggest no pejorative meaning to reform or the reformist school. I recognize it as a transitional and middle posture between the traditional and the radical schools and as having exhibited necessary and significant development from the traditional school. Moreover, the reformist school not only often borrows from the radical school, but also often leads to the assumption of a radical posture.

The traditional school is defined by: 1) its defensive and/or reactive posture; 2) its lack of concern for the development of a Black psychology and its continued support of the Eurocentric model with minor changes; 3) its concern with changing white attitudes, and 4) its being essentially critical without offering substantive correctives (Guthrie, 1970).

The reformist represents a period of historical evolution as well as a current posture. It maintains some of the concern for white attitudes and behavior, but focuses more on change in public policy than on simply attitudinal change. Furthermore, this school begins to advocate an Afrocentric psychology but still combines it with traditional focus on appeal for change that would ostensibly benefit Blacks and whites and thus U.S. society (Thomas, 1971; Cross, 1971).

The radical school makes no appeal to whites and directs their attention instead to Black people in terms of analysis, treatment and transformation. Moreover, they insist on and are developing a psychology that has its roots in the African worldview which is opposite of and opposed to the European worldview (Jackson, 1982; King, et al, 1976; Baldwin, 1992). Moreover, the members of this school are socially conscious theorists and practitioners who advocate self-conscious participation of Black psychologists and Black people in the transformation of social reality through cultural and political struggle. This, of course, is in the Fanonian tradition which influenced many of them (Fanon, 1968, 1967).

Perspectives

The Traditional School

Kenneth Clark

Clark, who is the first and only Black to be president of the APA, early established himself with the citation of his work on the damaging effects of segregation by the U.S. Supreme Court in its historical *Brown vs. Board of Education* (1954) decision. The author of several books and articles, his work, *The Dark Ghetto: Dilemma of Social Power* (1965) stands out as a seminal work on the sociology and psychology of the ghetto. In chapter IV of his book, entitled the Psychology of the Ghetto," he essentially gives a "traditional" analysis of segregation. He (1965:63) argues that "racial segregation, like all other forms of cruelty and tyranny, debases all human beings—those who are its victims, those who victimize, and in quite subtle ways those who are merely accessories."

The victims, Blacks, are essentially portrayed with little or no strengths, i.e., as fantasy-oriented, sexually excessive, matriarchal, irresponsible, etc. However, Clark does not attribute these negatives to Black inferiority, but to an insensitive and brutally segregated society which imposes these patterns of thought and behavior on Blacks. Clark argues that social (white) insensitivity is "a protective device" and criticizes some of its "primitive examples," i.e. labeling of Blacks as inferior and "subhuman persons who cause and perpetuate their own difficulties" (1965:75-76).

In addition, he criticizes those social scientists whose "preoccupation with trivia...leads to the irrelevance of much of social science research," and "detached professionalism," which, in reality is a false objectivity and masked insensitivity. And finally, he (1965:77, 80) criticizes the "professional perspective which constricts social vision to the impulses, strengths and weakness of the individual 'client' as if these can be isolated from the injustices and pathologies of his life." Such a detached and alleged objectivity, he concludes, serves "not to enlarge truth but to constrict it."

William Grier and Price Cobbs

Grier and Cobbs are best known for their work *Black Rage*. Although it was written in a popular style, it nevertheless reflects some of the basic contentions of the traditionalist school. Like Clark, Grier and Cobbs are concerned with whites knowing what they're doing to Blacks in order to change their attitudes and behavior. Concerned with the implication of the mutual racial hostility, they (1968:2) assert that "if racist hostility is to subside and if we are to avoid conflict on a nationwide scale, information is the most desperate commodity of our time." And, they continue, "of all the things worth knowing, none is more important than that all Blacks are angry"—in a word enraged.

Having established the fact of Black rage, Grier and Cobbs then set out to explain its origins and expressions. They establish the effects of what they call the shadows of the past, i.e., slavery, arguing that through this oppression and its sequel, "The psyche of Black men has been distorted." But, they assert "their genius is that they have survived" through adaptations of both positive and negative dimensions (1968:31). Unwilling and/or unable to see significant distinctness in Black life, they (1968:29) contend that "the psychological principles first understood in the study of white men are true, no matter what the man's color." And they (1968:86) maintain that "all that is uniquely (Black) found its origins on these shores, and provides a living document of Black history in America."

In what seems to be a contradiction to the denial of Black uniqueness, Grier and Cobbs then set down some principles of a "Black norm" which they claim distinguish black psychological postures from others but which are essentially a list of unsubstantiated and self-indicting negatives (1968:149ff). Among these are: 1) Blacks' understandable and necessary cultural paranoia; 2) their cultural depression and cultural masochism rising out of "sadness and intimacy with misery;" and 3) cultural anti-socialism, i.e., disrespect for white laws which are designed to protect whites not Blacks. They (1968:124) conclude their "dismal tone is deliberate" in an attempt to stir the feelings of the reader to the "depression and hopelessness" Blacks feel daily.

Alvin Poussaint

Poussaint's major work is his *Why Blacks Kill Blacks*. In his work, he covers a series of topics including Black Power, Black suicide, Black sexuality and suggestions to white parents on how to raise their children free of prejudice. Criticizing the racial and socioeconomic bias of traditional white psychiatry, Poussaint (1972:49ff) shows sensitivity to Black "suspicion of its concepts and practice" and their tendency to label it the "white man's psychology." He (1972:51) states that not only have white psychiatrists preferred to treat members of their own race and class, but their "short-sighted training...has made it impossible for them to distinguish deviant behavior from what is in fact *different* behavior." In this regard, he (1972:54) argues for "understanding special cultural adaptations or interests" of Blacks, if white psychiatrists are to be effective clinicians. For he (1972:55) believes that "despite obvious handicaps, some white psychiatrists are sensitive to the Black experience and have helped all types of Black patients."

In his chapter on “Why Blacks Kill Blacks,” Poussaint (1972:69-70) begins by criticizing deficient modeling of Blacks as “culturally deprived” and “socially disadvantaged” and “culturally paranoid.” These labels would fit the racist more than the Black, he argues. Likewise, the “creation of self-serving theories by some white academicians” about how Blacks hate themselves is not only exaggerated, but “another subtle attempt to maintain the oppressor’s false sense of superiority.” In fact, “it is likely,” he maintains, “that whites have more self-hate and insecurity than we do, since they need racism to maintain a sense of self.”

Recognizing, however, that there are negatives among Blacks and that crime and violence by Blacks against each other is a serious problem, he posits several reasons for it. Among these are: 1) the American cultural experience that teaches “crime and violence as a way to success and manhood;” 2) the fact that “Americans respect violence and often will not respond to just demands except through violence” as with the revolts; 3) the sense of power that violence gives the oppressed; and 4) dehumanizing transformation in incarceration which perpetuates the cycle of violence. Poussaint, however, rushes to say that regardless of the blame white society must shoulder for the Black condition, Blacks, in the final analysis, must move to intervene in and transform their own lives and life-conditions. This essentially means development of community programs which check the negatives and support development of “deep self-love that ends the self-defeating behavior among ourselves.”

The Reformist School

Charles Thomas

Thomas is one of the founders and first co-chairpersons of the ABP and was instrumental in shaping the early moves of Black psychology from the negatives of the traditional school. He and others of the school stand as bridges between the traditional and radical school, attempting a synthesis of the social and discipline criticism of the traditional school and the demands for and development of new models and professional engagement from the radical schools. Thomas’ book *Boys No More* and subsequent articles represent this attempt toward synthesis.

Thomas (1979, 1971) begins by assigning Black psychologists the fundamental task of “instructive intervention” which leads to change in Black attitudes, self-mastery, social competence and personal fulfillment. He asserts that social scientists have an ethical responsibility for changing the Black condition “by defining, defending and developing information systems that will give Blacks increased socio-political power” (1979:7). Thus, he rejects the simple treatment-centered therapy and urges community engagement for the psychology.

Secondly, Thomas (1974) argues the significance of the Ethnocentrism factor. By ethnocentrism or ethnicity, he means, focus and pride in one’s bio-social identity—in this case, one’s Blackness. For Thomas, ethnicity not only provides the “frame of reference...for the development of countervailing social forces and institutions, it encourages self-activated behavior and breaks down patterns of self-hate and self-denial.” Thomas contends that within the context of Black oppression four major social roles were generated to meet it: “hybrid or

bad niggers, conformists or good negroes, marginalists or white middle class negroes and rebels or Black 'militants.'" Each group not only represents a search for identity but, except for the last one, they also represent "modes of escape which are ineffective." This is so, for the flight from oneself essentially means a flight from one's humanity. Ethnicity as a proactive alternative, then, poses and cultivates "the renewed thrust toward self-esteem, environmental mastery, definition of self in terms of potential and a variety of other concerns around intervention or prevention of pathological cognition..."

Also, Thomas (1978:11ff) is concerned about the damage done by white or other social scientists who "have confused knowledge about a people with knowledge of a people." The first is superficial learning from without and imposing a conceptual framework; the latter is learning from within the group and sharing its conceptual framework. The bio-socialists who deny cultural differences, the cultural pathologists who are "preoccupied with the victim of oppression rather than with oppressive institutions," and the integrationists which limit social options on the assumption that Blacks "ought to be white or placed in situations where they can be treated as if white," all fit in this category of deficient and damaging social science.

Finally, Thomas (1978, 1971) poses deficient-deficit modeling as a major problem of Black psychology as well as for Blacks in terms of its implications for public policy and self actualization. Examples, of this are terms such as *minority*, and all its variations, i.e., *minority status and culture*, etc., *disadvantaged*, *culturally deprived*, *negro*, etc. He (1978:21-22) states that "if 'Blackness' came into existence as a healthy support state, it cannot be logically used as a symptomatology of maladaptive behavior." The need, then, is for imaginative cross cultural conceptual models which press for para-cultural (equal rather than sub-cultural) frames of reference.

Joseph White

Although White has written other articles and a book (White and Parham, 1990) his "Toward A Black Psychology," written in 1970, is seen as an important piece of literature in the early criticism of and move from the traditional school of psychology. In fact, he (1980:5) begins his article arguing that "it is very difficult, if not impossible to understand the life styles of Blacks people using the traditional theories developed by white psychologists to explain white people." Furthermore, "when these traditional theories are applied to the lives of Blacks folks, many incorrect, weakness-dominated, and inferiority-oriented conclusions come about."

White maintains that traditional psychology's use of "an Anglo middle-class frame of reference" gives it a distorted view of the adaptive vitality of Black children and the Black family. Instead of a correct and positive view, hypotheses of cultural deprivation and matriarchal families are advanced. His contention is that a Black frame of reference is necessary which will enable Black psychologists and others "to come up with more accurate and comprehensive explanations" of Black life, as well as enable them "to build the kinds of programs within the Black world which capitalize on the strengths of Black people" (White, 1980:8).

He also argues "That not all traditional white psychology theory is useless." The existentialists' stress on pain and struggle as unavoidable and the self-theorists' stress on

understanding one's experiential background to understand a person are examples of useful theories. The need, then, in building a Black psychology is to incorporate what is useful and reject the rest. White (1980:11) suggests the value of Black/white dialogue and exchange in encounter groups, suggesting they give whites a better chance to experience Blackness "outside the protective group setting."

William Cross

Concerned with the prevalence and negatives of Western thought and science and the need for "psychological liberation under conditions of oppression," Cross (1971:13) offered a model suggesting the stages persons go through in the process of the "Negro-to-Black conversion." In a subsequent article, comparing this model to one Thomas developed, he (1980) terms these models of "nigrescence," i.e., the process of becoming Black. The first stage of nigrescence is the *pre-encounter* (or prediscovery) stage in which the person is out of touch with himself/herself racially and the "the person's worldview is dominated by Euro-American determinants" causing him/her to act in manners which degrade and deny Blackness (Cross 1971:15ff).

The second or *encounter* (discovery) stage involves a shocking personal or social event which pushes the person past his/her old conceptions of Black and Black conditions to an intense search for Black identity. The third stage is one of *immersion-emersion*. In the first phase, there is an intense involvement in being and demonstrating Blackness and rejection and condemnation of white people and culture. In the second phase, there is a levelling off and emergence from either/or and racist positions and the oversimplified aspects of Blackness, as well as acceptance of white humanity. Stage four is one of *internalization*, a sense of security, receptivity to discussion, and action and resolution of the conflict between the old and the new. The final state is *internalization—commitment* in which one "becomes the new identity and pro-Black attitudes become more expansive, open and less defensive."

In focusing in on and criticizing Blacks for high levels of racial identity and severe rejection of whites and white values in the immersion phase, Cross seems to demonstrate again the reformist school's concern for relations with whites. This is not to say or imply that this represents servility, but to make the point that this is clearly an issue the radical school would neither raise, be concerned with, nor agree with. On the contrary, the radical school would see questioning of white humanity and total rejection of their values as positive.

In a more recent work, however, Cross (1991) has revised his original theory of nigrescence in order to bring it in line with new discoveries in his research. He begins his revision by noting that understanding Black mental health is more complex than his original theory of nigrescence suggested. Such complexity begins with recognition of the fact that any identity change is mixed, not pure, and thus involves carryovers from previous identity, transformation of old into new and incorporation of things new. Also Cross argues that given the distinction between personal identity and group identity or reference group orientation, one can be mentally healthy without the need to relate strongly to a distinct cultural group. Finally, he contends that the aspects of the personality remain stable and healthy even while ideologies are changing, thus revealing a greater diversity of attitudes, behaviors and possibilities than he first suggested.

Thus, he (1991:xiv) maintains that at the heart of the identity conversion in the 60's "was not so much the dynamics of self-hatred as the metamorphosis of a Eurocentric worldview into an Afrocentric one."

The Radical School

Na'im Akbar

Akbar's (1991, 1981, 1976, 1974) critique of the traditional psychology model begins with the historical fact that African Americans have been victims of intellectual as well physical oppression. "Intellectual oppression," he asserts (1981: 18), "involves the abusive use of ideas, labels and concepts geared toward the mental degradation of a people." And, he states, "there is no area in which mental or intellectual oppression is more clearly illustrated than...the area of mental health judgement." In such a context not only are white oppressors' sanity not questioned, but Black mental health is not linked with the social conditions which shaped it.

The white oppressor, Akbar (1981: 18,49) states, uncertain as to "what constituted a normal human being," established a kind of "democratic sanity" model of mental health. This was a kind of "majority rule application to mental health judgement, i.e. insane behavior was determined "on the basis of the degree to which it deviated from the majority's behavior in a given context." This approach had the tragic consequence of judging sane and competent "entire communities of raving inhuman lunatics...because the majority of people in that particular context either participated in the questionable behavior or refused to question (it)." It is, Akbar maintains, clearly necessary to raise questions about the mental health standards and mental competence of a people who enslaved, terrorized and murdered numerous non-hostile peoples throughout the world.

Secondly, Akbar (1981:20) criticizes white scientists for "acquiring great scholarly renown for documenting deficits of Afro-Americans," a pathology perspective based on the norm and context of the people who uphold the "democratic sanity" standard. Thirdly, he (1981:20) criticizes Black traditionalists like Clark and Grier and Cobbs for "following the lead of Caucasian scholars in both conceptualizing and analyzing problems." He especially criticizes Grier and Cobbs for their "guide to the neurotic Negro," *Black Rage*, and their overgeneralization and use of the pathology model in it. Moreover, he concludes that the traditional school: 1) equates mental health with imitation of white middle class behavior, 2) assumes similarity of sources of Black and white behavior; and 3) assumes "democratic sanity" standards are "reflective of human standards documented by thousands of years of human history."

Fourthly, he argues that these and other traditional psychologists fail to take into consideration "two essential variables in determining the adequacy of human behavior:" 1) the historical antecedents or determinants of the behavior; and 2) the effects of inhuman conditions on the human being. As a result of these failures, there are attempts to eliminate or diminish many behaviors in African Americans "which are essential to their survival and development."

Having critiqued the traditional school, Akbar defines mental health in proactive terms as a state "reflected in those behaviors which foster mental growth and awareness (i.e., mental life)."

Mental illness, then, is posed as reflected in “ideas and forces within the mind that threaten awareness and mental growth.” It also can mean, from an extended self-concept, disorders reflected in “behaviors or ideas which threaten the survival of the collective self,” i.e., one’s people. Given these definitions, one can understand the reasoning of an insane parasitic people which justified domination as a model of survival and the reasoning of the dominated people which poses liberation as a mode of survival and development.

Finally, within the framework of his definitions, Akbar (1981) poses four kinds of disorders which threaten Black life and development, i.e., “anti-life forces.” These are the alien-self disorder, a socialization to be other than oneself on a race, class and sex level; the anti-self disorder, which expresses “overt and covert hostility towards the group of one’s origin and thus one’s self”; the self-destructive disorder, a destructive retreat from reality, i.e., drugs, etc.; and organic disorders, physiological, neurological or biochemical malfunctions. He (1981:25) concludes by noting that these four disorders, it must be remembered, all emanate from “a psychopathic society typified by oppression and racism,” a situation which must be changed for Blacks to “realize the full power of their human potential.”

In a recent work, Akbar (1991) offers an analysis of the problematic of maleness and the challenge of manhood. He explains this as a process concerning, “the transformation of African consciousness” (Akbar, 1991:3). For him, the essence of the transformation is moving from the biologically bound in both the physical and mental sense. This requires first external discipline then internal discipline. “The thing that moves us from the male to the boy is discipline and that frees the boy from being slave to his male” (Akbar, 1991:18). Likewise that which transforms a boy into a man is knowledge. “Consciousness is a natural possibility or potential, but it must be tended and guided in order for it to develop properly.”

Manhood for Akbar (1991:32), which is at first defined by discipline and then knowledge, is also expressed by self-definition. “Men must define themselves. It is their definitions that give them power.” Finally, Akbar (1991:61) argues that manhood must ultimately be grounded in a proactive spirituality. “In order to establish authority over our lives, you must call upon that ruling force of ‘will power’ within your make-up. That will be the representative of the ‘Divine Kingship’ within our being...You can do it once you begin to utilize the power that is naturally yours. You are the ones who first came into human mastery,” therefore, he concludes, “you can do it again.”

Joseph Baldwin (Kobi Kazembe Kalongi Kambon)

Within the context of his contribution to Black psychology, Baldwin (1992, 1980, 1976) focuses on the function of definitional systems in liberation and oppression. Definitional systems are key, he (1980:96) posits, for they “determine how we experience (perceive and respond to) the various phenomena that characterize the ongoing process of everyday existence.” Moreover, the definitional system or worldview represents the ideological or philosophical base of a social system or a people and thus determines the meanings or values a people attach to their experience including their experience of themselves and how they will react.

The problem, however, arises, Baldwin argues, when an alien worldview is imposed on and/or accepted by people, leaving the people at the mercy of definitions negative to their image and interests. Such is the case of Blacks under white domination. According to Baldwin, race, i.e., biogenetic commonality, “constitutes the principal binding condition underlying the evolution of definitional systems which “in their most basic fundamental nature have a ‘racial character’.”

Given this, what passes and is pushed as a universal worldview turns out to be nothing more than a European definitional system. This system is not only diametrically opposed to Black interests, but reinforces a distorted reality in the image and interest for the Europeans. Thus, African Americans “operate in a space dominated primarily by a definitional framework which does not and cannot give legitimacy to our African social reality” (1980:108). Complicating resistance to this state of things, Baldwin (1980:101) contends, is that the “Europeans control the formal process of social reinforcements,” i.e., economics and political power. This gives them power to impose their “definitions and the experiential confirmations on the experiences of Black people in society.”

Although there has been some Black resistance to this imposition, it has “not necessarily been of a highly conscious form,” that is to say, “it has not generally taken the form of a carefully planned or necessarily intentional collective resistance” (1980:106). Thus, if Blacks are to liberate themselves and validate and expand their own African definitional system and social reality, “*conscious, collective resistance* is ultimately required.” This of necessity requires a “clear frame of reference from which to ultimately examine the psychological nature of (Black) oppression” (1980:107). This in turn demands a Black psychology, Baldwin concludes, which not only explains the “ongoing process of psychological genocide,” but contributes to a critical understanding of Euro-American society by which African people can “ultimately achieve the fullness of psychological and physical liberation from it.”

Continuing his concern with the distinctness of a worldview for the African person, Baldwin (1992) develops an Africentric theory of the Black personality. Essentially he argues that a healthy functioning African personality has a bio-genetic tendency to affirm rather than deny Black life, makes group a priority, including survival of culture and institutions, and engages in activities that promote this survival as well as the dignity and mental health of Black people.

He (1992:41) also makes four critical “assumptions about the nature of the African personality which derive from an Africentric approach.” They are: 1) a bio-genetically or innately determined character of the personality; 2) the intra-psychoic integrity of the personality which cannot be separated or analyzed from the context of the whole; 3) the social or collective character of the personality and the need to understand it in a “social collective context”; and 4) the racial distinctiveness of the personality which is affirmed in its own context and negatively affected outside of it. Finally, Baldwin identifies two major psychological components of the core African personality: 1) The African Self-Extension Orientation (ASEO); and 2) African Self-Consciousness (ASC) which derives from the ASEO and engages it in a mutually interactive process.

Linda James Myers

The key concepts in Myers' (1992, 1988, 1987, 1985) contribution to an Afrocentric psychology are optimality and suboptimality. Her thrust is to define and implement, as a critical framework for understanding and achieving maximum mental health, a theory of psychology rooted in and reflective of African culture. This begins with a definition of the optimal Afrocentric belief system. For Myers such an Afrocentric worldview is characterized by at least three basic concepts: 1) holistic-spiritual/unity; 2) communalism; and 3) proper consciousness. For Myers (1988:12) this optimal worldview first of all "assumes that reality is spiritual and material." Thus, the first aspect of it is a spiritual/material unity (Myers, 1988:41ff). This arises from the concept of the unity of being through assumption that "all is spirit individually and uniquely expressed" (Myers, 1988:19). When one adheres to this principle, she states, one "loses the sense of the individualized ego/mind and experiences the harmony of collective identity of being one with the source of all good" (Myers, 1988:12).

Secondly, the African worldview is communalistic. It originates from the concept of the extended self. "Self in this instance is extended to include all the ancestors, the yet unborn, all nature and the entire community" (Myers:1988:12). Thirdly, Myers argues that proper consciousness or self-knowledge is another aspect of the Afrocentric worldview. She states that "the role of consciousness is primary in this conceptual system; in fact consciousness is identifiably that permeating essence or pervasive energy and spirit." This centrality is reflected in African concepts of Maat (truth); Mdw Ntr (divine speech) and Nommo (word power).

Myers contrasts this African worldview to the Eurocentric worldview with the former representing an optimal psychology and the latter a suboptimal psychology. The latter is racist, sexist, materialist and ultimately unworkable. Its fatal flaw is the socialization of its adherents to seek the key values in life, i.e. self-worth, peace, happiness, etc. through externals. But the reality is "identity and self-worth are intrinsic" and peace and happiness are generated from within. This in turn requires self-realization of the spirit within.

Secondly, she (1988:14) asserts that "the suboptimal conceptual system oppresses all its adherents. It makes the racist/sexist the oppressor acting out and projecting the negativity and insecurity he/she feels within." The oppressed however, are "doubly oppressed" when they absorb, "adapt and assimilate the conceptual system of the oppressor." In the end they suffer from all kinds of mental health and social problems.

Myers (1992:6) also defines the suboptimal or Eurocentric worldview in terms of its tendency to fragment and segment not only reality but peoples (racism) and genders (sexism). Although racism is clearly a problem for the African American community, "sexism is a serious problem that we have not as a people really addressed or solved" (Myers, 1992:8) It is her contention that "in a suboptimal/fragmented culture like this one, womanhood and motherhood (the central role of woman) are disdained rather than revered. But she (Myers 1992:9) notes "In a patriarchal society, anything feminine is inferior." Moreover, "In a sexist environment, women tend to hate themselves," Myers states and they tend to "think that men are superior just like many Blacks (in a racist society) tend to think whites are superior."

The need then is to come into African consciousness "to begin forging a relationship with ourselves so that we can come into right relationship with our counterpart." She (1988:15)

concludes, arguing that Black intervention in their liberation from oppression is key and compelling in the struggle for an optimal psychology and a positive social context. The “charge then is to learn more about our choices through increased awareness of the nature of that which is us” and then act accordingly (Myers, 1988:15).

Wade Nobles

Clearly Nobles (1986, 1985, 1980, 1976) is the pioneer and most quoted in the area of using African philosophy as a foundation for Black psychology. In his seminal essay on the subject, Nobles (1980:23) begins by arguing that Black psychology is more than the psychology of the underprivileged, the ghettoized or the enslaved and more than the ‘darker’ dimension of general psychology. In a word, “Its unique status,” “is derived not from the negative aspect of being Black in white America,” he argues, “but rather from the positive features of basic African philosophy which dictates the values, customs, attitudes and behavior of Africans in Africa and the New World.”

Nobles argues that what we have here is a commonality of consciousness based on guiding beliefs, an ethos which is at the core of African philosophy. This ethos determines two operational orders—the notion of oneness with nature and the survival of one’s people. Given its distinctiveness from the white ethos and its place at the center of African philosophy, African philosophy easily and effectively serves as the foundation for Black psychology. A study of African philosophy shows several fundamental themes which not only explain African philosophy, but also African (Black) psychology.

First, one sees the rootedness of philosophy in religion. Religion, in turn, was life-practice, not sect or church or Sunday or proselytizing. “Traditional Africans made no distinction between the act and the belief” (1980:25). Secondly, the notion of unity of humans with God and the whole universe is key to African philosophy. A third key concept is the concept of time which is/was essentially “a composition of events” in two dimensions, the past and present, which are experienced rather than calculated. A fourth fundamental concept is that of death and immortality through recognition and remembrance. A final concept is one of kinship or collective unity which created a sense of collective identity, i.e., an extended self.

What this explanation of African philosophical themes does is demonstrate a distinctiveness of philosophy and psychology. The point now, Nobles (1980:31) contends is to “‘prove’ that Africans living in the Western world and in contemporary times still have or maintain an African philosophical definition.” Thus, there is a need for demonstration of links and ways that Blacks express an African perception of reality. Nobles argues that several Africanisms did survive slavery and contemporary times. The first is the stress on the survival of the people which expressed itself in a mentality and structures like benevolent societies and the church. Also the idea of a man being inseparable, one with nature and the community, is a surviving Africanism. Oral tradition in the form of folktales, the dozens, rappin, etc., have also survived. Finally, the concept of time as phenomenal, potential and flexible rather than mathematical as expressed in CP time is also a surviving Africanism. These, Nobles (1980:35) states, are some examples which demonstrate a distinctiveness of Black consciousness rooted in and reflective

of African philosophy. "The task of Black psychology, (then), is to offer an understanding of the behavioral definitions of African philosophy and to document what, if any, modifications it has undergone during particular experiential periods" in the U.S.

Frances Cress Welsing

Cress Welsing (1991,1980,1970), a noted psychiatrist, advances one of the most controversial and discussed theories in the area of Black psychology, "The Cress Theory of Color-Confrontation and Racism (White Supremacy)." Cress Welsing builds on the contentions of Neeley Fuller in his *Textbook of Victims of White Supremacy* (1969). Fuller essentially argued that: 1) white supremacy was the only functional racism; 2) all Third World people are victims of it; 3) racism is not merely an individual or institutional phenomena, but a universal system of domination; and 4) that European theories and systems of political and economic organization are designed to establish, insure and expand white domination.

Having accepted these essential contentions, Cress Welsing developed them further and advanced other ones. First, she (1970:5) argued that the white supremacy drive is in fact like other neurotic drives for superiority or domination "founded upon a deep and pervading sense of inadequacy and inferiority." Secondly, she contends that the basis for this neurotic disorder is found in the "quality of whiteness (which) is indeed a genetic inadequacy or a relative genetic deficiency, state or disease based upon the genetic inability to produce the skin pigments of melanin which are responsible for all skin coloration."

Whiteness as the absence of color or "the very absence of any ability to produce color" is the minority in the world given that "the massive majority of the world's people are not so afflicted." Thus, the color normality in the majority throws light on the abnormality of the colorless minority. Moreover, given that "color always annihilates phenotypically and genetically speaking, the non-color, white," and given their numerical minority status, whites are faced with the constant fear of genetic extinction (1970:6). Therefore, Cress Welsing continues, "an uncontrollable sense of hostility and aggression developed defensively which has continued to manifest itself throughout the entire historical epoch of mass confrontations of the whites with people of color."

Cress Welsing contends that this "sense of numerical inadequacy and genetic color inferiority" led whites not only to dominate, destroy and deform Third World peoples, but also to alienation and self-hatred as well as defense mechanisms to handle these feelings. Among these are: 1) repression of the inadequacy inferiority feeling by denying it; 2) discrediting and despising Black and other colors of skin; 3) suntanning and making up to acquire color; 4) elaborating myths of white genetic superiority as with Jensen's and other racist theories; 5) projection of their hate and sexual desires on Third World peoples, pretending it is they who hate and lust after white; 6) obsessive focus on the body yet alienated from sex because of inability to produce color; 7) dividing Third World people into factions to make them minorities; and 8) imposing birth control on Third World people to limit or reverse their majority number. Cress Welsing (1970:10) concludes that if Third World people are armed with the above insights, this will indeed reduce their vulnerability to manipulation and messages of white supremacy

and contribute to their psychological liberation from the white racist ideology which so dominates their lives.

In her latest work, Cress Welsing (1991) reaffirms her theories in earlier literature adding emphasis in two basic areas: decoding symbols of white supremacy and the crisis in male/female relations. She (1991:xi) states that there are many symbols "in the system of white supremacy that reveal its roots in the struggle for white survival." These include the cross, the gun, smoking objects, boxing, paper money and various sizes and colors of balls. Cress Welsing (1991:54) contends that "the process of decoding a power system and its culture is a necessary first step to achieve behavioral mastery over that system/culture." As she concludes, "the attainment of such mastery is an essential step in the process of total liberation for the victims who wish to end that oppression and regain their self-respect and mental health." Without this, there is a failure to understand the system which is being confronted, low levels of self and group consciousness and respect and the pervasive presence of mental illness.

Cress Welsing (1991:277) also turns attention to the crisis in Black male/female relationships. She argues that most discussions on the subject focus on the wrong issue. The key to understanding Black male/female relationships is analysis of "the white supremacy dynamic" which puts "disproportionate pressure on Black males (and) ...produces a grave imbalance between the Black male and female, even though both are victimized by white supremacy." The thrust is to incapacitate Black males in a white struggle for survival so that the "Black female must confront a white male-dominated power system alone" (Cress Welsing, 1991:278). But, Black males and females can defeat this, if they together "take up the struggle for justice against white supremacy" as "their number one priority." For in this move they are strengthened and "are united in a common effort against injustice and simultaneously, they express the strongest possible statement about respect and love for themselves as individuals" (Cress Welsing, 1991:280).

Amos Wilson

Focusing on the psychological development of the Black child, Wilson (1991a, 1991b, 1981, 1978), contributes to the projects of defining the tasks and parameters of Black psychology. Wilson (1981:8) argues, as do Nobles and others, that an understanding of the psychology of Blacks, adults and children, demands that the study of Blacks begin in Africa, not in slavery. Moreover, he (1981:10) maintains that Black psychology must be extremely careful about the application of European based psychology and the use of its models. In fact, he suggests white psychology does not even adequately explain white people who "seem bent on destroying themselves as well as the rest of the world."

Drawing on the growing interest in melanin and its properties, Wilson (1981:10) contends that the study of melanin is important in the study of Black people. Arguing that the history of Blacks are in their genes, he suggests Black superiority in the areas of mental development, neurological functioning and psychomotor development of the Black child which are all related to the possession of a high level of melanin. Melanin, he contends, is not simply a coloring agent, but "an integral part of the body system itself operating in the brain." In fact, the ability

of the Black child to survive and the comparative long life of Blacks are related to their Blackness.

Wilson (1981:12) is also concerned that Blacks have been reduced to use only one side of their brain. This right side, he states "processes information...deals with the world in a holistic fashion and (also) processes music and art." The left side is the analytical side which develops technology, mathematics and so forth. But "the side of the brain an individual uses is determined by experience," therefore, if we look at the history and experience of Blacks in America, we see essentially that the European has rewarded Blacks for using the right brain," i.e., singing, dancing, music and sports. On the other hand, because whites "are afraid of intellectually assertive Black people," Blacks are discriminated against and discouraged from using the left side of the brain, i.e., the linguistic and analytical. The need is thus for a balance, for "the ultimate human being is the one who can balance between the use of both sides of the brain."

Finally, Wilson (1981:12) maintains that one of the major problems of Black child development "is determining how we can maintain the intellectual and psychological advance that nature has give our children." It is here, he states, that we see the inadequacy of white child psychology for "the issues and questions that the Black psychologist must address are distinctively different." This essentially demands the development of an educational psychology and methodology directed toward "the reconstruction of the personality and the orientation of our children" (Wilson, 1981:13; 1991a).

Such a thrust would be directed toward educational and cultural change which not only stimulates the brain, but teaches children how to think, not simply prepares them for jobs but also facilitates and encourages high levels of self-development and service to their people. For "Blacks who are not conscious of their Blackness, who have no sense of destiny, and then go through (white systems of education) ultimately end up serving their own oppressors and become a means of oppressing their own people." Therefore, Black liberation depends on an educational system for Black children based on a psychological model which builds on and develops Black strength in order "to create an intelligent, independent thinking, interpretive and critical person committed to working tirelessly in the interest of Black people."

In one of his latest works, Wilson (1991b) discusses the social psychology of violence among young Black men. It is his (1991b:2) contention that Black male adolescent criminality is the principle outcome of three things: 1) white-on-Black violence since enslavement; 2) the deliberate creation of white American-dominated racist society; and 3) "unrelenting and collective ego defensive and political economic needs for white America to criminalize, denigrate and degrade Black America." Moreover, he states that he is not arguing that Blacks have no responsibility in this problem. Rather he is arguing that white America sets the context and sustains it. But he (1991:31) argues that "such a regime can only hold sway over African Americans and Africans in general as long as their consciousness and identity are not African centered." The need then, is to bring that consciousness to them in order to end their destructive alienation from self and community and enable them to escape the criminality and antisocial conduct which plagues them.

Bobby Wright

Although Wright (1981;1975) has written other pieces in Black psychology, his fundamental and most-known work is *The Psychopathic Racial Personality*. In this essay, he poses whites as the mortal danger to Black people and seeks to analyze their behavior to demonstrate this. The urgency of such an analysis, he suggests, is due to the fact that this period in history is critical to Blacks' future. Using the analogy of a bull fight in which the bull finally stops charging the cape blindly, sees the "matador" and faces "the moment of truth," he (1975:3) argues that "this is indeed Blacks' moment of truth and it is time for them to look at the matador."

According to Wright, European "matadors" have for hundreds of years held up various banners to distract and delude Black people, i.e., "such concepts as democracy, capitalism, Marxism, religion and education." But now these banners, Wright contends, have been reduced to one—genocide, as evidenced in the development of genetic, chemical, electrical surgical and other behavioral control strategies. This emerges from the fact that due to technological development and the worldwide struggle for resources, "Blacks are now a threat and a liability to the white race." It is in such a context that the understanding of the white "matador" becomes imperative.

Wright (1975:3) states at the outset that the basic premise of his work "is that in their relationship with the Black race Europeans (whites) are psychopaths." Moreover, he states that this "behavior reflects an underlying biologically transmitted proclivity with roots deep in their evolutionary history." He defines a psychopath as "one who is constantly in conflict with others,...unable to experience guilt, completely selfish and callous and has total disregard for the rights of others."

Expanding his analysis, Wright focuses on evidence of behavior traits which he reasons proves his contentions and demands Black consideration. He (1975:5) asserts that key to understanding the psychopathic personality is its "almost complete absence of ethical or moral development and an almost total disregard for appropriate patterns of behavior." This is expressed in the fact that whites have "historically oppressed, exploited and killed Black people—all in the name of their God Jesus...and with the sanction of the churches" (Wright, 1975:6). The activities of the KKK, a white Christian organization, and the Pope blessing Italian planes and pilots on their way to bomb Ethiopia without provocation are cited as examples.

Secondly, Wright maintains, the psychopath is also defined by the lack of "concern or commitment except to their own interest" and becoming indignant and angry when they are exposed or questioned. The unkept promises of the 60's by whites and their attitude toward Black liberation and progress are examples of this. Also, Wright argues that "the psychopath is usually sexually inadequate with a very limited capacity to form interpersonal relationships." This is exhibited in whites in their constant projection of excessive sexuality on Blacks, although it is they "who streak, mate swap, participate in orgies, etc."

Fourthly, the psychopath has a marked "inability to accept blame (or) to learn from previous experience." Whites "never accept blame for Blacks' environmental conditions which is clearly the result of white oppression" (1975:7). Instead, Blacks are held responsible. Also, attempts to sensitize and change them fail because of their inability to feel guilt. Finally, the psychopath

rejects authority and discipline. Even when their own laws are the authority, they reject them if it is not in their interest as Blacks “who seek legal solutions to their problems” discover (1975:8).

Given this kind of adversary, “the inevitable question is what should Blacks do?” (1975:9). First, Wright suggests that Blacks must cast aside illusions that a psychopathic oppressor can provide strategies of liberation for those they oppress. Secondly, Blacks must recognize the oppressors as waging war against them and respond in equal measure. And finally, he (1975:11) states that they should seek the “answer to Blacks’ problems in the works and lives of Black heroes” and heroines “whose minds have moved past the psychopath’s imposed boundaries and have begun to blaze new paths towards Blacks’ rendezvous with destiny.”

Ethos

The stress on the radical restructuring of the consciousness of Black people and persons by Black psychologists finds its logical parallel and support in the Kawaïda contentions concerning the need for a proactive and positive ethos among African Americans (Karenga, 1980:Chapter VIII). Kawaïda defines ethos “as the sum of characteristics and achievements of a people which define and distinguish it from others and gives it its collective self-consciousness and collective personality” (Karenga, 1980:90). Put another way, “the ethos of a people is often called its national or ethnic character which is not only defined by itself, but also assumed by others.”

Now, ethos, or a people’s self-consciousness and self-definition, is defined by their thought and practice in the other six fundamental areas of culture, i.e., history, religion, social organization, economic organization, political organization and creative production. This means essentially that we know ourselves and are known by what we have done and do. And from our knowledge of self and others’ knowledge or perception of us, we acquire our self-concept. Thus, the contribution of the Africans of Egypt to the establishment of the major disciplines of human knowledge defines them in their own eyes as well as the world’s. Moreover, the Moorish African contribution to the civilization of Europe, the African contribution to the Olmec civilization and African Americans’ contribution to the social and cultural wealth of the U.S. and its political liberation and development, all indicate sources of positive self-consciousness and self-definition.

The achievement of a positive ethos lies then in historical and current struggle and achievement. The struggle can be seen as an ongoing struggle of humans, in this case Blacks, to realize themselves. In Kawaïda theory, self-realization has a double meaning, i.e., to know and to produce oneself. To know oneself is to grasp the essences of one’s past, one’s present and especially one’s future possibilities and thereby know who you are by what you have done and thus what you are capable of doing and becoming based on past achievement and current conditions. To produce oneself is to create oneself through struggle against natural and social oppositions and through knowledge of what and who you can and ought to be. Thus, self-knowledge and self-production are at the heart of ethos and are clearly linked. For as a people struggles to overcome basic oppositions, then, it creates and defines itself and informs the world of its difference and distinctiveness, i.e., its ethos. Thus, a people comes into being and knows

itself by its achievements; and through its efforts to become and know itself, it achieves.

Given this, it is a fundamental Kawaïda contention that a people whose achievements are minor, or whose knowledge of its history and the possibilities it suggests is deficient, develops a self-consciousness of similar characteristics. Moreover, in a social context which defines and deforms a people's capacity to realize itself, the problem of self-consciousness is not simply a problem of thought, but also a problem of practice (Karenga, 1982). For the demand to end a deficient consciousness must be joined to a demand to eliminate the conditions which caused it. This is why Black psychologists advocate the social intervention model of psychology advanced by Fanon (1967:11) who argued that mental health demanded a solution on both the subjective (mental) and objective (social) level.

In conclusion, then, the problem of self-consciousness is solved in the process of solving the social problems which cause it. This essentially means that through *study, work and struggle, building and becoming*, Blacks' real self, hidden under layers of false roles and identities imposed by the dominant society, will emerge. Through these self-conscious efforts and the resultant achievements in the various areas of human thought and practice as well as the model of work and liberational struggle Africans in America establish, they will, as I (Karenga, 1980:114) stated, transform themselves into a distinct self-realized and "self-conscious historical personality, proud of its past, challenged by the present and inspired by the possibilities of the future."

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