

The Archeology of the African Spirit: Toward a Deeper Discourse in Black Studies

by

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It is important, politically, economically, socially, historically and most of all psychologically, to understand what it means “*to be African.*”

In the critically acclaimed and equally critically flawed BBC documentary, “Africans in America,” this nation was informed that the first African child born in America was named William Tucker. He was born in 1624. While attempting to describe the events and evolution of chattel slavery in America, the documentary tries to give the viewer a first hand account of this American experience by taking excerpts from the autobiography of Olaudah Equiano. The film shares Olaudah’s personal account of his enslavement and freedom by introducing him as “a kidnapped African who becomes British and marries a British wife.” In the actual writing of his autobiography, Olaudah completes his saga by signing his book as “Olaudah, an enslaved African.” This brief commentary on the BBC documentary helps us to see several important points. The first point, which is substantiated by the necessity to pass the 14th amendment to the U.S. Constitution, is that each and every African American today, like Olaudah, is technically only an American by the location of our birth and secondly by an act of law which makes us citizens. Who or what is being located and whose citizenship had to be ratified into law is the African. The second important observation in the documentary is that, while the mythmakers want us to believe that the Africans, along with our culture and spirit, somehow were mysteriously transformed into something other than African, the authentic voice of Olaudah recognizes that he remains an African, albeit “an enslaved African.” Neither time, circumstance, conditions of cruelty and oppression, nor adopted legal status, eliminated being African. It has, in fact, been the African in us that has been the constant, although disrespected, unrecognized and most often misunderstood, aspect of our strength and humanity. In effect, Black Americans are all William Tuckers. We are all Olaudah Equianos. We are Africans whose birth place locates us in America. We are, in many respects, especially mentally, still enslaved Africans.

In the book, Souls of Black Folks, Dr. W.E.B. Dubois made the classic and prophetic observation that the problem for the twentieth century was the problem of the color line. Dr. Dubois went on to identify the dual consciousness of the Negro (sic) which consisted of two warring dark idols, one American and one Negro (errata African) whose dogged strength alone keeps us from being torn asunder. Dr. Dubois’ observation is fundamental in two distinct ways. Firstly, it directs our

attention to the duality of our lived experience. An experience which is simultaneously African and not African (i.e., American) at the same time. Secondly, it most importantly directs our attention to the African essence, whose dogged strength keeps us from being torn asunder.

As we enter the new millennium, it is paramount that we return to, revisit and recast Dr. Dubois' prophetic observations. Today, it should be recognized that the so-called racial problem in America was not simply a problem of the color line. The problem in America from the colonial times to the present (Johnson & Smith, 1988) was and has been what to do with both the meaning and being of the African. In America there has been and remains a deep psychological fear of Black people (African people). A fear of pathological proportions, resulted in an almost complete obsession with the question, what shall be done with the African.

The historical and on-going answer to this seemingly perplexing question was to "de-Africanize" the African. The objective was simply to make African American people ashamed of being Black and African and ultimately to convince African American people that our very humanity was connected to the declaration that we, individually and collectively, were not African at all. It was, however, Black people's response to the experience of de-Africanization or dehumanization, that DuBois noted, acknowledged and in a sense, celebrated as the "dogged strength." This dogged strength which refused to be torn asunder was, I would argue, our racial instinct to refuse to be "de-Africanized."

In revisiting Dr. DuBois' observation, Black Studies must help Black people to claim the responsibility for seeing ourselves in the world as African people. The discipline must help Black people to voice our own special truths and recognize and claim our own special meaning as human beings. In recasting DuBois' edict, I believe the task of the next Millennium for African American people is to be authentically African and, in so doing, create time, place and space on the stage of humanity's future. The challenge of the millennium is to be African by fully understanding the African spirit which keeps us from being torn asunder.

TfTf (Idle Chatter) vs. Mdw Nfr (Good Speech)

It is critical that we note a fundamental truth about the Academy and its disciplines. The

development and practice of the Western (white) university and the disciplines which categorize its educational process was predetermined by the specific way in which its developers (Western man) understood and were conscious of their own particular awareness of human reality. Consequently, the body of orientations, practices, and information (white studies), is no more than the creation and reflection of European-Western man and his particular resolute position in the universe. As a reflection of the complexities found in humanity, White Studies as found in the West, has inherently defined “particularities” which relegate its utility and applicability to limited and/or abbreviated aspects of the whole human community and its varied and multiple social realities.

The importance of this for Black Studies is that Eurocentric hegemony places the practice of Black Studies in a dilemma. A dilemma wherein we seek an awareness of our own reality, yet, our training and skills are geared toward understanding reality as perceived by non-Black people. Explicitly, we are trained, educated and indoctrinated into believing and accepting White-Western conceptions of the role of the university, its functions and the definitions of what is real and relevant to the educational process as well as the categorization of its disciplines.

Dr. Jacob Carruthers (1995) has argued rather convincingly that the very foundation of ancient or classical African (Kemet) wisdom was “Divine Speech.” In fact, he notes, that for the ancients, speech itself was perceived as a gift of the Creator; and that, through words spoken, the Creator gives all Life, Power, and Health.(pp 40) In the ancient African context, the disciplines (science, mathematics, etc.) were considered a branch of wisdom which was cultivated through *Mdw Nfr* (Good Speech). Good speech, in turn, was required in order to attain *Mdw Ntr* (Divine Speech). *Mdw Nfr*, was believed to belong in the domain of humanity, and humans were able to choose between good speech (*Mdw Nfr*) and evil speech (*Mdw Dw*) or idle chatter (*TfTf*). Because humans think in speech, speech is the instrument by which we come to be aware that we are even aware (conscious). In effect, speech determines an awareness of consciousness. Speech creates consciousness in the sense that speech, in the form of words, gives meaning to and directs all events that are ponderable and perceivable by humans. Good speech (*Mdw Nfr*), it would seem is designed to clarify and illuminate the humans’ understanding, meanings and management of the events and experience of living, while *TfTf* (idle chatter) is speech whose sole purpose or value is in making sounds. *TfTf* gives the illusion of conversation and understanding; but in actuality, it is

only noise. It does not clarify or explicate meaning and understanding.

Since the advent of Black Studies programs in the early sixties, Black Scholars (Hare, 1969; Gordan, 1981; Karenga, 1982; Turner, 1984; Stewart, 1992; William, 1993, Marable, 1995; Aldridge, 1996; Alkalimat, 1998) have engaged in a discourse which has consistently moved the many fledgeling highly political programs toward the status of full-fledged academic disciplines (Asante, 1992; Fossett & Tucker, 1997; Hall, 1999; Karenga, 2000; Marable, 2000). However, in some ways, as a direct result of blindly following alien paradigms and models of discourse, some of the discussion in and about Black Studies has been more akin to *TfTf* than *Mdw Nfr*. One could in fact suggest that all the discussions about the legitimacy of Black Studies (Butler, 2000. Boyd, 2000, Ransby, 2000) and/or the centrality of Afrocentricity (cf., Schlesinger, 1992, Lefkowitz, 1996a, 1996b; Berlinerblau, 1999; Poe, 1997, & Howe, 1998) are in many respects *TfTf*. Rather than fulfilling the requisites of *Mdw Nfr* and forcefully engaging in a discourse that addresses and clarifies the field's epistemological foundations, strategies for inquiry, paradigmatic directives and methodological procedures, the on-going discussion wallows in the trivia of whether or not Black Studies, as developed at Temple University, for instance, is really mysticism, theology or ideology or that the Afrocentric paradigm is too closely aligned with Karenga's Kawaida Theory or the seven principles of Kwanzaa or if the emerging woman's voice in the field is mostly woman or mostly Black. In not engaging the field on its own grounds, too much energy is given to trying to justify or negate the authenticity or legitimacy of Black Studies in terms of its perceived or demonstrated relationship to old world, or contemporary or now post-modern Western thought. While interesting, this discussion amounts to intellectual noise and mere idle chatter. The disciplinary requirement of Black Studies can not be "Bamboozled." Black Studies, as a discipline, has to be more than European *TfTf* in Blackface.

The Birth of Black Studies

Black Studies was born out of the Black community and students' struggle for a relevant and meaningful education. Established in 1969, under the leadership of Dr. Nathan Hare, the Black Studies Department at San Francisco State University was the first Black Studies Department at a four year college campus in the United States. Guided by Dr. Hare, the department embraced a special philosophy and pedagogy that viewed the Black community as the classroom and the

classroom as the community. The founding premise of Black studies was and remains that self knowledge is the key to all knowledge and thereby offers San Francisco State students a balanced and well-rounded curriculum that seeks to develop self-knowledge, critical thinking skills and a holistic understanding of African and African American reality that prepare our students to serve as agents of awareness and change in the world in which they live.

Each generation is responsible for shaping its concrete experiences in terms of its own interest and image and thereby accept responsibility for self-consciously determining and continuing the traditions of their people. Thus, if Black Studies (scholarship) is to become a tool of human liberation, it must first re-claim and clarify its cultural base, or core or center, or anchor. Fanon noted and believed that “culture reflects, represents and helps to create a whole body of effort by a people in the sphere of thought to describe, justify and promise the actions through which a people have created themselves and keep themselves in existence.” The critical key is culture. Culture is the human process which conceptually represents the vast structure of behaviors, ideas, attitudes, values, habits, beliefs, customs, language, rituals, ceremonies and practices "peculiar" to a particular group of people and which provides them with (1) a general design for living and (2) patterns for interpreting reality. The way we dress, what we eat, how we talk and what and why we think are all culturally determined. The academic definition and practice of disciplines (as a human activity) are also cultural. Accordingly, there can or should be no study of African people (ergo, Black Studies) which is a-cultural and a-historical. Given that culture gives meaning to reality, and encompasses and defines every aspect of reality, culture or, more precisely, African cultures should be the bases of *Mdw Nfr* in Black Studies.

In general, the role and purpose of education is to allow each generation in society to rationally guide and systematically guarantee that it reproduces and refines the best of itself and by so doing pass on to the next generation its accumulated wisdom, knowledge and skills necessary to develop, maintain and participate in the future. By determining the “general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality” culture naturally determines what is considered wisdom and knowledge and what should be “reproduced and refined.”

Hence, Black Studies, at San Francisco State recognizes that culture, historical and philosophy

must be at the foundation of what is constructed as an academic discipline. We further recognize that within each culture there are set of axioms, maxims and precepts which implicitly shape and determine the cultural assumptions relative to knowing and understanding reality. A core set of cultural precepts thusly serve as the foundation for all academic disciplines. Hence, the task of defining a Black studies discipline requires the understanding of and utilization of African centered philosophy and precepts.

Let me make a parenthetic point regarding the interactive effects of culture and the material condition on a people's mind-set. The purpose of culture is to give people the capacity to act and to re-act in relation to their material/spiritual condition and their own self-vested interests. However, there is a direct connection between a people's cultural traditions and their psychological self-worth and self-esteem and how they "see" themselves and give meaning to their position in the universe. When a people's cultural symbols lose their legitimacy (power to compel thought and action) psychological disruption occurs in the people. Accordingly, Fanon, Sarason as well as others have made the point that, "The destruction of a people's indigenous culture is the necessary requisite to the effective colonization and political domination of the people." Hence, to dominate or oppress a people requires that one usurp and/or destroy a people's cultural and historical integrity; and the best way to destroy a people's culture is to have their tools of knowing and systems of education (i.e., Black scholars, Historical Black Colleges and Black Studies Programs) to be intellectually cultureless.

In effect, Black Studies must be and become a tool for human liberation and illumination. Historically, however, there has been some difficulty in explicating specific strategies for each of these tasks. The difficulty, it seems, stems from the way we think about (methodology) and think in (epistemology) the discipline. Our thinking is equally a product of the long history of human inhumanity and European domination and the disrespected and un-recognized yearnings of an African episteme. In order to clarify, analyze and excite authentic Black thought and action, Black Studies must embrace an understanding and utilization of our culture and concrete historical experiences as instruments of (1) conceptualization, (2) operationalization, (3) methodology, and (4) praxis in relationship to the entire African experience.

San Francisco State Black Studies: A Vitalistic Synergetic Multidimensional Science”

Alfred Memmi (1969) noted that “for the oppressed to be really free, he must go beyond revolt, by another path he must begin other ways to conceive of himself and reconstruct himself independently of the master”. The liberation of Black people is dependent on Black Studies' ability to assist in the reconceptualization and reconstruction of Black reality independently of White conceptualizations. We must recognize that fundamental core of dissimilarity between Africans and Europeans. The Black intellectual should a priori accept the notion that Black people are African people by virtue of our genetic (biological), cultural (philosophical) and ancestral heritages (historical) and that these combine to affect our perceptions, responses and reactions to whatever social reality in which we find ourselves.

We are African people who have been separated from our original environment and have been incarcerated in European-American conceptions of reality. The epistemological trap has been to assume that the behavior of a prisoner and the prisoner are one and the same. The more insidious aspects of the epistemological trap is the process wherein the Black intellectual accepts a set of White-defined assumptions about Black people and proceeds to study our people and ends up forced to rationalize the negativity of their so-called results. This amounts to a state of “conceptual incarceration”. This state inhibits us from asking the right questions and “doing the right thing.” Hence, we are limited in what we can know about Black reality by what we think we know about the dynamics of reality (which more accurately should be called White reality). Hence, the meta-epistemological dilemma for Black Studies is that we find ourselves seeking an awareness or understanding of our reality, yet the parameters of the definition of what constitutes knowledge is defined according to the Western (white) conceptions of reality. To work without recognizing and resolving this epistemic dilemma is to continue to be conceptually incarcerated.

To recognize the problem is the first and most critical step in determining the justification and parameters of our discipline. Accordingly, our task is to become conscious of our own consciousness (which is very different from being aware of "accepted" (via formal education)

perceptions of reality. It is our task to develop our intrinsic African perceptions and then develop and practice a discipline which is pre-determined by the particular way in which we understand and are conscious of our own awareness of reality. It is my belief that this process can only begin when we accurately assess our intrinsic cultural, historical and philosophical orientations to the world.

If we are to develop an authentic Black Studies discipline, then we must recognize that when Black scholars shape and offer a discipline that has uncritically replicated and internalized the assumptions, pre-suppositions and apperceptive mass found in Western social science and its varied theories of human functioning as well as its methodological strategies for studying said processes, then Black scholarship becomes culturally transformed (i.e., becomes “Frankensteined”) and abdicates its own research agenda and position of authenticity. When this occurs then Black Studies participates in (knowingly &/or unknowingly) and assists in the elimination of the Black community's ability to resist oppression and domination and abdicates its responsibility to actively create its own future in its own image and interests.

Hence, only in the act of clarifying and explicating the philosophical and epistemological foundation for Black Studies can the justification and sole legitimacy for the existence of Black Studies as an academic discipline be found.

It has been argued that the fundamental philosophical and theoretical basis for Black Studies (or Africana Studies or African American Studies) is derived from the African-centered perspective which determines for the discipline its observations relative to reality and justifies what questions should be asked (what is real and how to know that truth) and what method is appropriate to the question. By definition, therefore, Black studies or Africana Studies or African American Studies should reflect an African-centered study, analyses and praxis relative to all phenomena (events, actions, processes, experiences, etc.) concerning African peoples.

At the core of what is defined as a scientific discipline is a particular world-view, set of normative assumptions and a referential framework. The world-view (i.e., a people's most comprehensive ideas about order); Normative assumptions (i.e., their apriori truths); and, frame of reference

combine to form and inform the centrality of the discipline's "paradigm." The paradigm then becomes the "formalized framework which guides the assessment and evaluation of reality. The paradigm is, in effect, the perceptual, cognitive and affective achievement representing the organizational plan for thinking, understanding and doing. The paradigm in Black Studies should, therefore, be the set of assumptions within the discipline that determine its recognition and range of phenomena, concepts, theories and methodology. A Black Studies Paradigm is, in effect, the perceptual, cognitive and affective achievement representing the organizational plan for knowledge acquisition, intellectual understanding and self-interested practice. It is the formalized framework for guiding the assessment and evaluation of reality. As such the Black Studies paradigm reflects an implicit epistemological position which determines (1) how truth is defined, (2) the nature of reality, (3) the relationship between the knower and the known, (4) what can even be known (what should even be investigated), and what should/could be done in response to the known.

Combined with the Kemetic notion of "Sacred Science", the program of Black Studies at San Francisco State has operationally defined the discipline as a "vitalistic synergetic multidimensional science." Specifically it is the set of systematized and multidimensional knowledge derived from observation, study and experiences of African people in the tradition of Mdw Nfr and Ma'at. The discipline is "vitalistic" (self-determining and self-evolving) in that the discipline functions as a living organism which is obedient to the laws of the universe and as such, has an ever expanding capacity for growth. Accordingly, the discipline is naturally concerned with the maintenance of life in all its forms. The discipline is "synergistic" (features working together, cooperating) in that the discipline has the capacity for its discreet subjects to act cooperatively and interdependently such that the total effect of the knowledge base is greater than the sum of the individual subjects taken separately. The discipline is "multidimensional" (having, consisting of, or affecting many dimensions of reality) in that the range and degree over which each subject extends is not limited to a single focus or area. The discipline is "scientific" in that the discipline represents a body of systematized knowledge and information consisting of theories, laws, and methods concerning a particular phenomenon (i.e., African reality).

Accordingly, as a "scientific discipline" rooted in racial redemption and driven by the notion of liberatory scholarship and community revitalization, the discipline of Black Studies is a body of

systematized knowledge, theories, methods, and laws (ergo science) which are congruent with the African centered paradigm and philosophy it reflects and represents. Consistent with an African cultural paradigm and epistemology, its evolution results in the discipline itself functioning as a living body of information, ideas, methods and techniques (ergo, vitalistic) which has the ability, in its range and degree, to extend beyond the limited scope of a single focus or area (ergo, multidimensional) and thereby, has the requisite capacity to result in an intellectual experience that is greater than the sum total of its component features or interest (ergo synergistic).

In the tradition of *Mdw Nfr* (Good Speech), a Black Studies discipline should hold the notion of people or human being as central, essential and sacred. Accordingly, the discipline of Black Studies is formally defined and operationalized as "*a prescribed set of instruction and learning grounded in a particular philosophical and world-view while being guided by a coherent and comprehensive set of behaviors, beliefs, attitudes and information, stemming from a set of values, rules, standards, methods, procedures and traditions that serve the simultaneous goals of intellectual critique and creativity and human perfectibility and mastery*" (*Black Studies Faculty Position paper, 1997*).

Accepting an African-centered foundation for scientific discipline of Black Studies, is, it should be noted, no substitute for the revolutionary praxis or historical legacy of the field. Liberation and the freeing of human possibility and potential is and always should be the precondition and prerequisite of the discipline. The goals and task of intellectual critique, criticism and creativity as well as human perfectibility and mastery are all further accessed from an African world-view. Centering Black Studies in African philosophy and culture, in fact, broadens the horizons of scholarship and deepens the depths of intellectual discourse.

Toward a Deeper Discourse

“Ka Mo Ibi Ti Afi Mbo, Ka To Mo Ibi Ti Aan Re” (Yoruba)

(We should know where we are coming from to know where we are going)

The issue of *Mdw Nfr* (Good Speech) and consciousness alluded to above suggest that there needs to be an even deeper discourse in Black Studies. A Black Studies discourse that is rooted in an appreciation and respect for the simultaneous particularity and universality of African reality as

defined by African people. In this regard, it is noted that the children of those Africans who were stolen from Africa and enslaved in America (the African Americans) are no less African than the Africans left behind in Africa and made victims of European colonialism and foreign i.e., Christian and Islamic, religious conversion. To be stolen from one's mother does not make you any less her child or any less a member of the family. Obviously socialization and indoctrination can make one believe that they are different from their own mother. Africans on the continent and Africans throughout the Diaspora must understand the power of recognizing that we have one mother or more clearly one culture which is Africa.

As an African people, Africans in America are an amalgam of several traditional peoples. It is well known that the origin of most of the Africans in America is West Africa, (cf. Holloway, 1991). In fact, during the active European slave trade, approximately 60% of the kidnapped Africans came from West Africa. The remaining 39% came from central Africa, primarily Angola with some 2% coming from as far as East Africa (Mozambique-Madagascar). It is important to note that when African people were stolen and kidnapped, they did not give up, sell, denounce or throw away their socio-cultural membership in the African family (cf. Hilliard, 1995).

Given this historical circumstance, the cultural and philosophical heritages of the Africans who were stolen and enslaved in America are grounded in the West and Central African cultures brought here from Senegambia (Serer, Wolof, Mandingo, Malinke, Diola, Bambara, Fulani, Papel, Limba, Bola, Balante, etc.); The Sierra Leone Coast (Temne, Mende, etc.); The Liberian Coast (Vai, De, Gola, Kisa, Bassa, Crabo, etc.); The Gold Coast (Yoruba, Nupe, Benin, Fon, Ewe, Ga, Pop, Edo-Bini, Asante-Fante, etc.); The Niger-Delta (Efik-Ibibio, Ijan, Ibani, Igbos, etc.) and Central Africa (Bakongo, Mbundu, Malimbo, Bambo, Ndungo, Balimbe, Badongo, Luba, Loango, Woyo, Ovimbundu, etc.).

Africans in America, therefore, have both ancestral rights and spiritual connections and cultural and philosophical moorings and retentions belonging to the African traditions of Senegal, Gambia, Ivory Coast, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Ghana, Dahomey, Guinea, Togo, Gabon, the Congo, Angola and Burkina Faso (cf. Nobles, 1997). Given the root position of Ancient Kmt (Egypt) to African Cultures, in general, it also is not surprising that the African Cultures of East Africa (The Amara,

Tigrean, Eritrians, etc.) and South Africa (Zulu, Ndebele, Xhosa, etc.) are fundamentally similar to those of West and Central Africa. We are all African people. Hence, Black Studies must understand and understand both the common core of African beingness and the divergent and varied expressions of African experiences.

In the quest for this level of understanding, Karenga, (2000) in part, notes that the discipline of Black Studies is challenged by the following five fundamental projects: (1) an on-going dialog with African Culture; (2) an expansion of its internal dialog; (3) a continuous development of a new language and logic; (4) new models of social and human possibilities; and (5) social engagement which proves and makes possible everything. In obedience to these challenges, I want to suggest that one area of deeper discourse in Black Studies can be found in its conceptualization of African human beingness as revealed in Africa's appreciation and understanding of the "Spirit." In fact, in order to understand Africa's uncontaminated meaning of being human, Black Studies should engage in the use of both African terminology (language) and epistemology (logic).

Rather than mimicing European thought and debate (classical or post-modern), Black Studies should be in the forefront of asking what had and has Africa to say about the fundamental questions of human condition and concerns. If "voice" is the ability to express one's own reality or the power to express one's own beingness or essence, then what is Africa's voice? How does Africa express and understand human reality given African people's cultural grounding, historical relations and meanings? In regards to what it means to be human, what does Africa have to say?

When, Africa and African thought are given the same intellectual value as other systems of knowing, then one is able to see that Africa has much to say. For instance, African systems of metaphysics (Obenga, 1992) argue that existence (including human existence) is comprised of visible and invisible realms and that the universe is comprised of a hierarchy of forces and beings (Mbiti, 1979). Shouldn't Black Studies help and guide all of humanity to systematically respect, study and understand African conceptualizations about what it means to be human? In most African philosophy, the meaning of human beingness is defined as both an essence (spirit) and an expression (body). Accordingly, it is appropriate for Black Studies to critically dialog with the

archeology of the African essence (spirit).

While this paper can not contain such a dialog in its entirety, the following is offered as a preliminary, albeit brief introduction.

The Archeology of the African Spirit as reflected in **Akan** language and logic suggests that the Akan consider a human being to be fundamentally spirit or force or energy comprised of three elements. The first element is the **Okra** which constitutes the innermost self, the essence of the person (Gyekye, 1987 9). The **Okra** is considered the living soul of the person and is sometimes referred to as the “*Okrateasafo*.” As the living soul, the *Okra* is identical with life. It is also the embodiment and transmitter of the individual’s **Nkrabea** (destiny). The “**Nkrabea**” is a directing energy – destiny which can influence consciousness and orient one to one’s purpose in life. As the life force, the *Okra* is linked to “*Honhom*” (breath) (1987 95). The second element of the person is the “*Sunsum*.” The term “*Sunsum*” is used to refer to all unperceivable, mystical beings and forces. It is the activating principle in the person (1987 88). The “**Sunsum**”, is an indwelling spirit that constitutes the character and personality of the individual or people. It is what molds the child’s or people’s personality and disposition. The *Okra*, in turn, manifests itself in the world of experience through the “*Sunsum*.” The final component is simply the “*Honam*” (the body). The “*Honam*,” (body) is the tangible and recognizable manifestation of the presence of the *Okra*, which is made up of *Ntoro* and *Mogya*. (1987) While the *Okra* and the *Sunsum* come from *Onyame* (God), the *Ntoro* and the *Mogya* are derived from other humans; i.e., one’s parents. In their conception of the nature of the person, the Akan believe that the *Ntoro* is derived from the father’s sperm. The *Ntoro* is one’s father’s spiritual contribution to one’s being and the *Mogya* is derived from the mother’s blood. It is a physical connection to one’s ancestry via the mother’s blood line. The *Okra* and the *Sunsum* constitute a spiritual unity. Hence, the person is made up of two principal components, the immaterial/spiritual (*Okra & Sunsum*) and the material/physical (*Honam*). In terms of African logic, the Akan believe there exists an inextricable relation between the soul (essence) and the body (expression). Akan logic suggests that not only does the (physical) body influence the (spiritual) soul, the (spiritual) soul also influences the (physical) body. The Akan believe that the relation between the spirit (invisible) and the physical (visible) is so close that they comprise an indissoluble and indivisible unity. Hence, the person is a homogeneous spirit/

physical entity or value.

The Archeology of the African Spirit as reflected in **Yoruba** language and logic suggests that the Yoruba believe that the person is made up of a spirit and a body (Opoku, 1978 92). The body or “*Ara*” is formed by the divinity, *Orisha-nla*. It is through the “*Ara*” that man responds to his environment. It is the part of the person which can be touched and felt. It can be damaged and disintegrates after death. The ‘essential’ component of the person is the “*Emi*” (spirit). The “*Emi*” gives life to the person. The “*Emi*” is the divine element of the person and links the person directly to God. Upon the death of the person, the “*Emi*” returns to “*Elemi*” (the owner of the spirit, God) and continues to live. As a person, one also possesses an inner head or “*Ori Inu*”. The “*Ori Inu*” is given directly by Oludumare. It is the person’s personal “spirit.” The “*Ori Inu*” is the guardian of the self and the carrier of one’s destiny. It also influences the personality of the person. In addition to the (Divine essence) “*Emi*” and the (personal essence) “*Ori Inu*”, the person has an “*Okan* (1978 93)”. The word “*Okan*” means heart, but as a constituent component of the person, it represents the immaterial (essence) element that is the seat of intelligence, thought and action. Hence, it is sometimes referred to as the “heart-soul” of the person. The “*Okan*” is believed to exist even before the person’s birth. It is the “*Okan*” of the ancestors which is reincarnated in the newborn child. To be a person, the Yoruba also believe that one must have “*Ori*” and “*Eje*.” The “*Ori*” rules, controls and guides the person’s life and actually activates the person. The “*Ori*” is the bearer of one’s destiny and helps the person to fulfill what they came to Earth to do. The “*Ori*” is simultaneously the “essence of the person” and the person’s “guardian and protector” (1978 93). The “*Ori*” is closely associated with the “*Emi*.” The “*Eje*” is the blood. It is the physical expression of an electro-chemical/magnetic energy that is the force (essence) which binds and animates life. The Yoruba, also believe that the “*Iye*” is a component of the person. The “*Iye*” is the immaterial element that is sometimes referred to as the mind (1978 93).

The Archeology of the African Spirit as reflected in **Mende** language and logic suggests that the person is made up of the “*Ngafa*” (the essence or spirit) and the “*Nduwai*” (the flesh) (1979 94). The “*Ngafa*” is immaterial and is provided by the mother. It leaves the body at death and goes into the land of the spirits. The “*Ngafa*” is the psychic constituent of the person. The “*Nduwai*” is the physical part of the person and is provided by the father. The “*Nduwai*” is, in part, contained in the

seminal fluid. The “shadow” (*Nenei*) is also part of the person (Harris, 1968 88) and is believed to report the death of the body to God. The Mende believe that a healthy spirit (*Ngatha*) produces a state of “*Guhun*” (total well-being). The person’s name is closely associated with his “*Ngafa*”. The significance of the name is that the Mende believe that a person’s “*Ngafa*” can travel from the person during sleep or other state of unconsciousness. However, a person can be revived or awakened when one’s name is called repeatedly. The Mende, therefore, believe that the person’s name may be the component that wakes up the “*Ngafa*” or the human spirit.

The Archeology of the African Spirit as reflected in **Lebou** language and logic suggests that the Lebou of Senegal (see, Grills and Rowe, 1996) believe that the person is, first and foremost, comprised of “spirit” or “*Fit*” (vital energy or life force) which is what makes them human. “*Fit*” is referred to as the spiritual heart of the person. The part of the person that gives one physical life is called “*Roo*”. This is the breath of life which leaves the body at death. The Lebou believe that each of us has a spiritual shadow that is always present and protects the person. This shadow is called the “*Takondeer*”. Additionally, to be a person, one must possess and cultivate the qualities of “*Yel*” (intelligence) and “*Sago*” (reason). Finally to be a person is to have a “*Raab*”. “*Raabs*” are constellations of “spiritual” forces, like the Yoruba Orishas, that possess, guide and protect the person. They are, in fact, ancestral “spirits” that influence and shape the personality and behavior of the person.

The Archeology of the African Spirit as reflected in **Bantu-Kongo** language and logic suggests that the Bantu-Kongo believe that the person is an energy, spirit or power. And as a spirit, the person is a phenomenon of “perpetual veneration.” The person is both the container and instrument of Divine essence or energy and relationships. To be a human, for the Bantu-Kongo, is to be a "person" who is a living (Black) sun, possessing a "knowing and knowable" spirit (essence) through which one has an enduring relationship with the total perceptible and ponderable universe. For the Bantu-Kongo, the birth of a child is perceived as the rising of a “living sun” into the upper world (Fu-Kiau, 1991, 8). The person is both the container and instrument of Divine energy and relationships. It is the spiritual essence of the person that makes one human. Accordingly, a person, as Ngolo (energy, spirit or power) is, therefore, a phenomenon of “perpetual veneration”.

Included in the African notion of essentialism or spiritness is the belief that the complexity (immaterial & material) of being “a person” gives one an intrinsic human value and that the “person” is, in fact, a “process” characterized by the divinely governed laws of essence, appearing, perfecting and compassion (Ba Amadou, 1981). The concept of “spirit” or “essence” as defined by African thought (Kamahu, 1990) further suggests that the examination of African American life should be guided by strategies of knowing that allow for the examination of the continuation and refinement, across time, space and place, of the African conceptualization of human beingness. Constructs designed to understand the meaning and functioning of energy could prove helpful in understanding African and African American metaphysics. Notions like “retentions” (i.e., the act or power of “remembering” or retaining an aspect, feature or part of something or idea); “residuals” (i.e., the act or power that constitute the residue or remaining value after repeated usage of an original form or process); “resonance” (i.e., the state of a system in which a vibration or energy field is produced in response to an external stimulus); “resonance” (i.e., occurrences in one object, when the characteristics or qualities of an external or neighboring system or subject is the same or nearly the same as the qualities or features of the target system); and, “reverberations” (i.e., the persistence of a phenomenon or act (like sound) after its source has stopped, caused by multiple reflections of the thing in a closed space)

In struggling with the parameters of thought, theory and therapy in Black Psychology, it has been suggested (Nobles, 1986a; 1986b) that a complete and full understanding of African people should be governed by a deep, profound and penetrating search, study and mastery of the process of “illuminating” the human spirit or essence. In Black Psychology this process has been termed “Sakhu Sheti” (Nobles, 1997). It suggests that, for African people, human understanding requires an examination and explication of the meaning and functioning of the nature (essence) of being human. Unlike the notion of “essentialism” found in Western thought, the African idea about “essence” or human nature is yet to be explored or understood on African terms. One can not assume a priori that the African notion of “essence” or spirit is the same as the limiting, restrictive and historically destructive European notion of essentialism. African and things African must be examined and understood on African grounds (i.e., with African meanings and applications). To do otherwise is to limit African insights and inspirations to European instruments and

interpretations.

With this brief dialog, it is clear that Black Studies, as “vitalistic synergetic multidimensional science” should ground its investigation of the world in an African philosophical world-view and epistemology. As such, Black Studies should be compelled to explore the complete contours (contexts, contents and conditions) of the African notion of human “essence” or spirit. The field can not in this regard accept as an indicator of intellectual deficiency, the charge of essentialism. Positing that for African people, there does, in fact, exist an essential element in one’s human beingness is fundamental. Consequently, Black Studies scholars should be able to construct investigations that examine and test the utility of African peoples’ creative responses to their concrete conditions and resolute position in the world from the vantage point of the African spirit. This, it seems, is good science and, in my mind, a major frontier for Black Studies scholarship.

Finally, it should be noted that if one of the responsibilities of a scientific discipline is to engage in the quest for understanding (Horton, 1967) the (1) unity underlying apparent diversity; (2) simplicity underlying apparent complexity; (3) order underlying apparent disorder and (4) regularity underlying apparent anomaly, then the archeology of the spirit would suggest that the deeper discourse in Black Studies requires language and logic that respect and reflect the “essence” and totality of “expressions” of African people.

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