

African Americans

Since coming to the United States from Africa, Black Americans' experiences have been paradoxical: hardship and uncertainty on the one hand and accomplishment and determination on the other. The institution of slavery, followed by emancipation, with its sanctioned institutional arrangements of political, social, and economic segregation and discrimination, produced a people who provide the greatest challenge to the democratic principles of the dominant culture's emphasis and focus on equality and egalitarianism.

The African American population has undergone some significant changes over the course of its history in this country in terms of growth, distribution, and composition. It is estimated that of the 12 million Africans brought to the Americas as people held in slavery, some 700,000 of them came to the United States. At the time the first census of the United States was taken in 1790, there were about 757,000 African Americans in the country. By 1990, there were 29.9 million African Americans in the United States. By 2010, there were 42 million African Americans in the United States, projected to grow to 65.7 million by 2050 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a). Winbush (1996) reported that African Americans constitute the largest culturally diverse group in the United States and have large numbers of very old and very young. Prior to World War II, three of every four African Americans lived in the South. By 1970, 81% of African Americans lived in urban areas and only 50% lived in the South.

Women outnumber men in the population as a result of the loss of African American boys and young men to homicide, suicide, and substance abuse. This sex difference is sustained throughout the life cycle, with accidents and medical problems contributing to the loss of African American

men in later years (Task Force on Black and Minority Health, 1986). In 2000, the percentage of African American females was 52.5; in 2010 the percentage was 50.9 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2011a).

Throughout this chapter the term *African American* is used because it is consistent with terms used to describe other groups. It is also used because the descriptor *Black* is inadequate to convey the rich history of descendants of the peoples who came to the United States from the continent of Africa. The term *Black* also includes those recent immigrants from the West Indies, Brazil, and a host of other countries, including those from Africa. For most of the history of African Americans in the United States, there has been a tendency to omit the history of this group in Africa and to begin the history as of the time the first Africans arrived in the “New World” in 1619. *African American* is used because the term *Black* has been associated with darkness, evil, and ignorance while the term *White* has been associated with brightness, good, and intelligence.

African American refers to descendants of enslaved Black people who are from the United States. The reason we use an entire continent (Africa) instead of a country (e.g., Irish American) is because slave masters purposefully obliterated tribal ancestry, language, and family units in order to destroy the spirit of the people they enslaved, thereby making it impossible for their descendants to trace their history prior to being born into slavery.

Virginia codified slave laws to be exclusive to Black people in 1705. Postslavery immigrants from a country in Africa can readily identify themselves by where they came from—it is on their passports. Black immigrants from Africa can identify themselves by country and tribe. A modern-day immigrant from Africa may refer to him- or herself by a hyphenated identity—Nigerian American, for example.

The issue of who is an African American is a complex one. Eugene Robinson, a *Washington Post* associate editor and columnist, published his thoughts on African Americans in a 2010 book, *Disintegration: The Splintering of Black America*. The central thesis is that the African American population of the United States has always been seen as a single entity: a “Black America” with unified interests and needs. Over decades of desegregation, affirmative action, and immigration, the concept of Black America has shattered into four groups: mainstream, abandoned, transcendent, and emergent. Each of these groups is distinct, separated by demography, geography, and psychology. They have different profiles, different mindsets, different hopes, fears, and dreams. They even view each other with mistrust and apprehension.

The mainstream group is the middle-class majority where race should not matter, yet it does. Individuals in this group often live a double life—working in integrated settings where uncertainty of position exists and

socializing in Black settings where solidarity flows from shared history and experience. They retain a nagging sense of being looked down upon, of being judged, and of being disrespected. This group includes many single adults living alone (SALAs). The U.S. Census Bureau (2011a) reported that among eligible African American women, some 42% have never been married. Among White women, the same group represents 21%. In 2008, African Americans had an aggregate purchasing power estimated at \$913 billion. If mainstream Black America were a sovereign nation, it would have the seventeenth-largest economy in the world—bigger than Turkey, Saudi Arabia, or South Africa.

The second group is a large abandoned minority with less hope of escaping poverty and dysfunction than at any time since Reconstruction. The waters in New Orleans flushed out a long-ignored residue of Black poverty and dysfunction for all to see. The poverty rate in New Orleans was 27.9% and some 84% of those poor people were African American. Restraints that keep abandoned Black Americans from escaping into the middle class include inadequate prenatal care; the incidence of low birth weight; greater risk for chronic, debilitating conditions of asthma, obesity, and childhood diabetes; 54% of all African American children are raised in single-parent households; expectations are low and performance is even lower; and the information age economy has nothing to offer. Of the 1.5 million prisoners incarcerated in the federal and state prison systems in 2008, an estimated 528,000 were Black. It is society saying, in effect: Yes, we have turned our backs on you. Yes, we have left you adrift, knowing that many of you will drown. But look how you behave. Look how you really are. You deserve it. The crisis in abandoned Black America is unique: It is profound, multigenerational, and in some ways worsening. The problem of the 21st century is the problem of the abandoned.

The third group is a small transcendent elite with such enormous wealth, power, and influence that even White folks have to genuflect. This group includes Barack Obama, one of only three African Americans elected to the U.S. Senate and the first African American elected President of the United States, Oprah Winfrey, Frederick Douglass, W. E. B. DuBois, Joe Louis, Ralph Bunch, Duke Ellington, Miles Davis, Jackie Robinson, and John H. Johnson. Members of this group are old enough to have lived through segregation. They use that memory to give them motivation, to inspire caution, and to remind them how hard-won their success was and how radically the world can change within a human lifetime.

The final group consists of two newly emergent groups—those of mixed-race heritage and communities of recent Black immigrants. About 8% of U.S. citizens and legal residents who identify themselves as Black are foreign-born. These citizens are concentrated in New York, Massachusetts,

Minnesota, Florida, and Washington. Well over half of these new Black Americans come from the Caribbean, with the biggest contingents coming from Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad. The African immigrants come primarily from Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Ghana. Africans coming here voluntarily are the best-educated immigrants in the United States. A 2009 study by Pamela Bennett of Johns Hopkins University and Amy Lutz of Syracuse, *Sociology of Education*, reported that 75.1% of immigrant Blacks enrolled in college, compared with 72.5% of Whites and 60.2% of native Blacks. The other piece of the emergent group contains those who marry interracially. In 2008, a full 22% of Black male newlyweds married outside their race. The *Loving v. Virginia* decision in 1967 legalized interracial marriage in the states where it was still illegal.

Ellis Cose, a *Newsweek* contributing editor, in his 2011 book, *The End of Anger: A Generation's Take on Race and Rage*, reported the following:

- Sixty-nine percent of African Americans agree that the dream of Martin Luther King has been fulfilled.
- Seventy percent of African Americans thought the country was moving in the right direction, and it also found that two thirds of all Americans believed race relations to be good.
- Some 44% of African Americans now claim to believe that African Americans and whites have an equal opportunity of getting ahead—compared to 30% in 1997.
- Some 87% of those in the population studied by Cose felt that African Americans confront a glass ceiling in corporate America; only 50% saw a glass ceiling in their own workplace.

Cose went on to describe African Americans in three generations, based on their closeness to, or distance from, the defining civil rights battles of the 20th century. Generation 1 are called the fighters and are contemporaries of the silent generation. They were born prior to 1945 and are deeply scared by their racial experiences. They are unwilling to fully trust in the kindness and goodwill of White Americans. This group did not have the option of not thinking about race and view the past with a sense of lost possibilities and unfilled potential.

Cose called Generation 2 the dreamers. They were born between 1945 and 1969 and are counterparts of the Baby Boomers (1946 to 1964). They represent the first and second waves of African Americans to pour into universities, corporations, and other institutions that previously had been almost exclusively White. Members of this group are more likely to marry interracially and view interracial marriage as overcoming racism one family at a time. Guardedly optimistic, they are much more likely to have close relationships with persons other than African Americans and are less likely to see the world in stark racial tones.

Cose called Generation 3 the believers. They were born between 1970 and 1995 and fervently believe that they can personally overcome whatever obstacles prejudice might set in their way. They do not believe that the United States is color-blind, race neutral, or postracial, while advocating for complete assimilation. Many fighters and dreamers believe that the believers are living in something of a fantasy world.

Acculturation

Valentine (1971) believes that most of the African American community is bicultural. He concludes that the collective behavior and social life of the Black community is bicultural in the sense that each African American ethnic segment draws upon both a distinctive repertoire of standardized African American behaviors, and simultaneously, patterns derived from the dominant culture. Socialization into both systems begins at an early age and continues throughout life, and both systems are generally of equal importance in individuals' lives. Root (1992) estimated that in terms of family history and genealogical lines, half or more of all African Americans are multiracial.

Pinderhughes (1989) describes a meeting with a group of teachers in which one teacher had this to say about the bicultural condition:

A mother explained when I was questioning her values about allowing him to fight, "I'll take care of his behavior; you take care of his education. Where we live he has to be tough and be able to fight. I'm not going to stop that. You set your standards here and see that he understands he has to abide by them." (p. 181)

Staples (1976) suggests that the bicultural nature of African Americans is something forced upon them and is often antithetical to their own values. He goes on to say that the commitment to the Eurocentric values is not necessarily positive and that although African Americans may engage in Euroamerican cultural practices—such as individualism or materialism—this should not be taken as a strong commitment to those values.

Essien-Udom's (1962) concept of the dilemma of duality suggests that African Americans must choose to act either "the Black way," or the "non-Black way." The dilemma is resolved when African Americans distinguish between themselves and their "role." Payne (1998) stated that being culturally African American requires "both participation in antiwhite activism and the denigration of white society and what are seen to be white values" (p. 56). Such behavior eventually leads to acculturation stress.

Joiner and Walker (2002) defined acculturation stress as that stress experienced by individuals as they move from their culture of origin toward another culture. It is different from general life stress that is defined as any

event in which environmental demands, internal demands, or both, tax or exceed the adaptive resources of the individual.

Thompson, Lightfoot, Castillo, and Hurst (2010) found that family pressure not to acculturate, pressure to maintain ethnic group language, perception of acting White, and acculturation level were related to higher acculturative stress for a group of African American college students. Reid, Brown, Peterson, Snowden, and Hines (2009) reported that high levels of acculturation are linked to positive physical and mental health outcomes.

Measures of African American acculturation include the African American Acculturation Scale (AAAS) (Landrine & Klonoff, 1994). The scale measures acculturation across dimensions of religious beliefs and practices, preference for things African American, interracial attitudes, family practices, health beliefs and practices, cultural superstitions, and segregation (Klonoff & Landrine, 2000).

Snowden and Hines (1999) developed the African American Acculturation Scale (AfAAS) to assess levels of acculturation among a national sample of African Americans. The idea was to measure the social distance from the dominant culture along dimensions of culture and primary group interaction (friends, church, neighborhood). To do this, they focused on the mediums (music, radio, television) through which African American culture can be conveyed.

Parham (2002) has challenged the counseling profession to shift from racial identity to ethnic and cultural identity because racial identity makes phenotypical traits the most salient feature of African American identity. Parham argued that an understanding of African American identity must focus on an ethnic and cultural identity that is rooted in an Afrocentric worldview paradigm that critically examines and affirms Afrocentric cultural values as forming the foundation of African American identity and culture. Afrocentric values that are consistent with an Afrocentric worldview paradigm include an emphasis on spiritualism (i.e., belief in spirit as the basis of existence of everything); an emphasis on being spirit rather than just practicing spirituality; collectivism (i.e., giving priority to the goals of the family and ethnic group); shaping behavior on the basis of family and ethnic group norms and obligations; interdependences within family and ethnic group; communalism (i.e., emphasis on human relationships); recognizing every community member's value and uniqueness; emphasis on unity without uniformity; and a belief in self-knowledge as the basis of all knowledge. It should be pointed out that many of these values are not exclusive to people of African descent.

Poverty and Economic Concerns

Historically, African American unemployment rates have been at least twice those of members of the dominant culture (Dovidio & Gaertner, 1986).

Dickson (1993) reports that African American males earn only 58% of the income of their White counterparts, and 35% of African American families report incomes below the poverty line. Sassen (1990) reports that, as a function of a combination of poverty, unemployment, and discrimination, African Americans are over reported among residents in poor, inner-city neighborhoods. Blake and Darling (1994) concluded that joblessness and substandard employment of African American males contribute to family instability, mental illness, somatic symptoms, and increased rates of crime.

Wilson (1987) calls the truly disadvantaged African Americans an "underclass." These individuals are concentrated in inner cities where they are effectively isolated. This underclass emerged as a result of the growing joblessness during the 1970s and 1980s, and now these individuals lack the educational and technical skills to participate in the labor market. They are also isolated from other African Americans who have fled the inner cities for the suburbs. Malveaux (1988) reports that income distribution has changed for African Americans in three ways since 1970: (1) The proportion of African Americans in poverty has increased; (2) the proportion of African Americans with incomes between \$15,000 and \$34,999 has declined; and (3) the proportion of African Americans at the highest income levels (over \$35,000) has risen by almost a third.

Swinton (1983) characterizes the economic plight of African Americans thus:

Blacks have consistently experienced a relatively disadvantageous labor market position in good times and bad. Black workers typically have higher rates of unemployment, obtain fewer high paying jobs, more low paying jobs, and have lower wage rates than whites. The combination of obtaining less work and lower paid work results, as we have seen, in blacks obtaining significantly smaller amount of income from labor than whites. (p. 62)

In 2010, the median income of African American families was \$32,068, while median income for Whites was \$51,846 for the same time period (U.S. Bureau of Census Current Population Survey, 2011b). In 2010, the percentage of African Americans in poverty was 27.4% while for Whites the percentage was 13%.

Cone (1994) concluded that "despite the progress in middle-class black America, the black underclass are poorer today than they were in the 1960s" (p. 28). Some 4,817,000 (38.2%) African American children under 18 years of age are living in poverty, compared with 5,002,000 (12.4%) Whites (not Hispanic) (U.S. Bureau of Census, 2011b).

Traditionally, African Americans experience higher rates of joblessness, underemployment, mortality, morbidity, family instability, poor housing, homicide, and institutionalization than their White counterparts. There is no greater issue facing African Americans than the economic one.

History of Oppression

African Americans were enslaved and subjected to a system of bondage with few parallels in human history. Formal slavery ended following the Civil War, and a social system developed which continued to relegate the former slaves and their descendants to a position of inferiority. This oppressed status has been recognized as a major social problem with current ramifications in all categories of the lives of African Americans. Events such as the "Red Summer," so named because African American soldiers returning from World War I were assaulted and lynched by White mobs fearful of armed men who had been treated as equals abroad, serve to accentuate oppression.

Racism is still the dominant force in the United States insofar as attitudes and behavior toward African Americans are concerned. Changes in the status of African Americans have occurred, but the lack of significant change in the first 100 years after emancipation had the effect of compounding the problems. Racism sustains and reinforces the privileges that members of the dominant culture enjoy, thereby maintaining the dominant culture and oppressing African Americans.

hooks (2004) offers an explanation of the influence of racism and White supremacy:

Nowadays in the imperialist white-supremacist patriarch culture, most boys from poor and underprivileged classes are socialized via mass media and class-biased education to believe that all that is required of their survival is the ability to do physical labor. Black boys . . . have been socialized to believe that strength and stamina are all that really matter. Groomed to remain permanent members of an underclass, groomed to be without choice and therefore ready to kill for the state in wars whenever needed, black males without class privilege have always been targets for miseducation . . . the curiosity that may be deemed a sign of genius in a white male child is viewed as trouble making when expressed by black boys. (p. 36)

Hale-Benson (1986) found that even the literary treatment of slavery by the dominant culture has influenced the view that African Americans have of themselves. She recommends the following:

We need an extensive investigation of the acculturative process and the reaction of Black people to enslavement and slave status. The traditional interpretation of Black history has emphasized the acquiescence of Blacks to slavery. Recognizing the resistance to slavery is important because slaves who acquiesced in their status would be more prone to accept the culture of their masters than those who rebelled. Similarly, if they were reluctant to accept slave status, they would have struggled harder to retain what they could of their African culture and heritage. (pp. 12–13)

Many of the differences between the primary social institutions in the African American community and in the dominant culture are a result of the long history of oppression. While there have been changes in the 20th century, the racism of the dominant culture and the African American consciousness will promote the distinctive aspects within the social institutions. President Bill Clinton appointed a national task force on race in the United States during the summer of 1997.

In a classic study, Myrdal (1944) developed the following rank order of types of segregation and discrimination against African Americans:

1. The ban against intermarriage and sexual intercourse involving white women
2. Several etiquettes and discriminations, which specifically concern behavior in personal relations (barriers against dancing, bathing, eating, drinking together, and social intermingling generally)
3. Segregations and discriminations in use of public facilities such as schools, churches, and means of conveyance
4. Political disenfranchisement
5. Discriminations in law courts, by the police, and other public servants
6. Discriminations in securing land, credit, jobs, or other means of earning a living, and discriminations in public relief and other social welfare activities

It is important to note that African Americans in the Myrdal study ranked their concerns with the areas of segregation and discrimination in a parallel but inverse order. Likewise, it is interesting to note that the items in the discrimination rankings from more than 50 years ago remain as issues separating African Americans from the dominant culture. Such a pattern of relations results in isolation of African Americans from members of the dominant culture and vice versa, and this isolation provides the opportunity for stereotypes to persist as significant racial issues.

Language and the Arts

There are two major positions concerning the spoken language of African Americans. The language deficit position posited by Deutsch (1965) holds that the lack of appropriate early language stimulation in African American homes results in immature or deficient language development. Those who adhere to this position believe that the speech patterns of African American children are incorrect and must be corrected according to the linguistic rules of standard English.

Linguists such as Baratz (1969) and Smitherman (1977), on the other hand, take the position that all human beings develop some form of language and contend that African Americans employ a well-ordered, highly structured, highly developed language system that in many aspects is different from standard English. Although Black English is similar to standard English in many aspects, it is different from standard English in its phonological and grammatical structure. Smitherman (1977) concludes that

African slaves in America initially developed a pidgin, a language of transaction, that was used in communication between themselves and whites. Over the years, the pidgin gradually became widespread among slaves and evolved into a Creole. Developed without benefit of any formal instruction, this lingo involved the substitution of English for West African words, but within the same basic structure and idiom that characterized West African language patterns. (p. 5)

Smitherman (1977) identifies some of the West African language rules that still operate in Black English today. Included among the grammar and structural rules are the repetition of the noun subject with the pronoun (“My father, he work there”), question patterns without *to do* (“What it come to?”), and an emphasis on the character of action without the tense indicated in the verb (“I know it good when he ask me”). West African sound rules that are found in Black English include no consonant pairs (“jus” for “just”), no *r* sound (“mo” for “more”), and no *th* sound (“souf” for “south”).

Most African Americans are bilingual, speaking a version of mainstream European American English, as well as the Black English which emerged in the confluence of colonial English and African linguistic influences and their development over time. Social behavior styles include stylized expressions, social interaction patterns, facial expressions, body postures and movements, and other distinctive social behaviors.

Black English appears to be maintained by social pressures within the African American community, although the speakers are often unaware that they are maintaining it. Group identity provides a strong subconscious pressure to maintain the dialect even while the speaker’s conscious effort may be to speak standard English. For some, especially among writers, speaking Black English has become a symbol of African American unity. Baugh (1994) concludes that the “lingering linguistic differences found in minority speech communities reflect that the United states still strives to attain the status of a color blind society it has yet to become” (p. 195).

Ogbu (1999) found that within the African American community there is a linguistic expectation that Black English be used as the exclusive means of everyday communication within the African American community. Failure

to comply with the community expectation evoked anger and accusations of acting White from those who believed such behavior was evidence of the individual adopting White attitudes of superiority, hiding one's Blackness, and a loss of the Black language within the community.

A number of researchers have identified a unique cultural form that is expressed in African American arts. Agnello (2010) stated that "the history of African American artists is intertwined with that of slavery and its manifestations of inferiority and racial prejudice" (p. 57). Herskovits (1926) noted that there were very few studies of the art of the native African who wished to study early African art. Hale-Benson (1986) characterizes the African American style as circular with a "heavy emphasis on involvement through repetition of sound and movement" with an "episodic arrangement calling for small, short units leading to a succession of mini-climaxes." There is also a tendency to retreat from closure in favor of the on-going and open-ended (p. 41). Black (1996) posits that it is quite clear that the "rhythms of jazz and the blues, calypso and reggae, salsa and other Latin beats all trace their roots back to Africa" (p. 61). Black also found that the intensity of form and color in the paintings and sculpture of artists of African descent echoes the style of their mother continent.

Herskovits (1941) was the first methodical investigator of African survivals in the New World. In his work, he downplayed survivals in the arts of painting and sculpture and tended to overlook the influences of many African societies. In 1969, Robert Thompson proclaimed that "contrary to general opinion, important Afro-American and African-influenced art exists in the United States" (p. 156). By the 21st century, African American influences permeated all of the arts.

Payne (1998) credits Africans and African Americans with major cultural contributions to wood carving, weaving, forging, culinary influences, American folklore, jazz, and rock and roll, as practiced in the United States. Many outstanding characteristics of the culture of the United States derive from interactions between Whites and African Americans. Included are "slavery and freedom, the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution, the concepts of whiteness and blackness, the Civil War, the American preoccupation with race, music and art, agriculture and industrial production, education, and religion" (p. 56).

The rap and hip-hop ethos can trace its genealogy to the emergence in the 1960s of an African American ideology that equated strength and identity with a militantly adversarial stance toward the dominant culture. Included in hip-hop are clues about race, class, gender, the market, and the judicial system, among others. Watkins (2005) described the five basic elements of the core conceptual framework of hip-hop culture as the B-boy/B-girl (dance or break dance), the emcee (voice), the DJ (music), graffiti (art), and

knowledge (the consciousness). The rap industry is a multibillion dollar industry that dominates African American culture and the airwaves of the United States.

Those who oppose rap often criticize it for its violent themes, its glorification of egoism, and its misogynistic messages. Others have suggested that African American rap artists have become the main agents in disseminating debilitating images of African Americans.

Proponents defend the violence and misogyny as a revolutionary cry of frustration from disempowered youth. In either case, rap and hip-hop are critiques of U.S. American society by a significant part of that society and have secured their places as major African American art forms.

Racism and Prejudice

The issue of race and racism is one which has engaged a great deal of attention and has preoccupied many as it relates to African Americans in the United States. W. E. B. DuBois noted in 1909, with particular reference to race relations between the dominant culture and African Americans, that “the problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color line” (p. 41).

There exists a persistent disparity and inequality in the economic conditions of African Americans and members of the dominant culture, which is a result of the racism of the past. Numerous civil rights laws, affirmative action regulations, and other public policies have not been able to remove these unequal conditions; indeed, in some areas they are becoming worse. Ford (1994) reports that “three of every five African Americans live in neighborhoods with hazardous waste sites. In Houston, Texas, with 25% of the population African Americans, 100% of landfills and 75% of garbage incinerators are located in Black neighborhoods. One of the nations largest landfills housing waste from all of eastern United States, is located in Emelle, Alabama with a population that is 79% African American” (p. 188). Inequality in income, educational and occupational patterns, unemployment, and housing are influenced to a great extent by institutional racism and show minor changes, if any.

Inequality in educational opportunity, performance, achievement, and outcomes is one major area where racial differences are apparent. School funding, quality, and completion rates at all levels are significant variables to note when studying racial differences. Of those African Americans 25 years old or older in 2010, 84.2% had graduated from high school, while 87.6% of Whites in the same age group held high school diplomas (Current Population Report, Bureau of the Census, 2011a). It is not surprising

that Wilcox (1970) declared that “education must become a process that educates for liberation and survival—nothing less” (p. 11).

Despite these encouraging signs, there are still areas of concern that must be addressed. While the dropout rate is decreasing, in 2009 11.6% of African American 14- to 24-year-olds had dropped out of school. While it is important to keep students in school, it is even more important for them to graduate from school with skills or abilities to make them useful citizens. In 2010, 18.2% of African Americans 25 years old and over had graduated from college, and some 14.3% of African Americans were attending college, up from 11.3% in 2000 (U. S. Bureau of the Census, Current Population Report, 2011b). Far too many youngsters leave school who are functionally illiterate, lacking the basic skills of reading, writing, and computation. As a result, they are relegated to the lower paying and least desirable jobs. Mullins (1995) reports that when education, performance rating, and other factors are held constant, African Americans are twice as likely as Whites to be dismissed from government jobs, and the reasons are not explained. African Americans are also turned down for loans at two and a half times the rate of Whites. While affirmative action, problematic as it is, speaks to the inequality structured into the social system, the attack on affirmative action presumes that systematic institutional discrimination no longer exists. In any case, it seems that what is evident is the ability of the dominant group to define the terms of the debate and thereby control dissent.

Beeman, Glasberg, and Casey (2011) found that African Americans are less likely than Whites to receive home loans from regulated lenders, and even when loans are granted, they are at higher rates than loans to Whites. They characterized this practice as a part of the long history of federal and state policies that support the “continuing legacy of systemic racism in the USA” (p. 27). More interesting in their analysis is the revelation that these lending practices do not require either overt or conscious racism on the part of the lenders, since the practices are based on wealth advantages and privileges accumulated over generations.

The outlook for major changes in these and other areas of importance to African Americans is extremely grim. Perhaps the single most important impediment to change is the extent to which racism has become institutionalized. Cose (1993) suggests that the foundation of a solution to problems of racism involves recognizing the sense of oppression, grievance, and rage that many African American men feel, including men of professional standing. African Americans have worked to achieve equality through legal means and the dominant culture has refused to accept African Americans as equals. African Americans are likely to view the

racial situation in the United States with greater urgency than do members of the dominant culture. The likelihood of major progress in eliminating racism is remote.

Sociopolitical Factors

With rare exceptions, African Americans have played a minor role in the formal political life of the United States (holding elected or appointed positions in government). Historically, African Americans have been heavily concentrated in the South, where various techniques have been used to keep them from participating in the electoral process. African American politics has reflected an extensive range of forms and strategies, such as electoral politics, civil rights organizations, civic organizations, and policy process (through the courts).

The Fifteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, passed in 1870, was the first attempt at ensuring participation of African Americans in the electoral process. The Voting Rights Act of 1965, and its subsequent amendments, has helped to overcome the disenfranchisement of millions of potential African American voters. The Voting Rights Act was an attempt by Congress to enforce the Fifteenth Amendment. It mandated direct federal action, which allowed African Americans to register and vote without having to rely upon litigation (U.S. Civil Rights Commission, 1968)

The success of the civil rights movement changed politics in the United States. In the first election of African American mayors in 1968, the African American candidates ran against the established political machine.

C. Young (1986) summarizes the mood and focus of the dominant culture:

The general approach of the government to policy issues concerned with Afro-American affairs has been at best one of benign neglect. Disregard for the economic, social, political, and psychological well-being of black citizens is apparent in the deterioration of services, resources, and quality of life available to inner city residents (p. 71).

The highlight of African American political participation came in 2008 with the election of Barack Hussein Obama as the 44th President of the United States. For some, his election signaled the onset of a postracial era. For others, it signaled the end of the Civil War. Others suggested that until the color of one's skin goes unnoticed, we still live in a race-driven society, some even say a *racist* society. It is plausible to speak of substantial—though far from ideal—changes in the level and degree of African American participation in the socio-political life of the United States.

Child-Rearing Practices

Current research on child-rearing practices within the African American community is limited “due to an absence of longitudinal research; a severe lack of attention to intragroup variability; a disregard for the inherent diversity of the African American community; and a minimization of the staggering effects of economic deprivation racism and social stratification on processes and functioning in the African American home” (Cain & Combs-Orme, 2005, p. 20).

Moten (2004) reported that a number of values are paramount in African American families irrespective of socioeconomic status. These values include a commitment to education, self-help, service to others, and a strong religious and spiritual orientation. It has been suggested that within African American families, an extremely high value is placed on respecting, obeying, and learning from elders in the kinship network and community.

Moten (2004) identified three parenting styles: authoritarian, authoritative, and permissive. African American parenting styles include all three orientations, with socioeconomic status a primary determinant of which style is used. Authoritarian parents are low in warmth but high in control. They are demanding, lack nurturance and clarity in communication, exercise strong control over children’s behavior, and enforce demands with threats and punishment. Children of authoritarian parents often lack empathy and self-confidence; are easily upset; display moodiness, aggression, or disobedience; and demonstrate apathy, dependence, and conduct problems.

Moten (2004) described authoritative parents as high in both warmth and control. They have high expectations of their children, make demands on children while setting clear limits on behavior, and maintain a supportive and nurturing environment. Children of authoritative parents are competent, nonaggressive, self-reliant, high on self-esteem, are socially altruistic, considerate, curious, self-confident, independent, academically successful, cooperative, and obedient.

Moten (2004) described permissive parents as high in warmth but low in control. They are loving and emotionally sensitive but set few clear limits on behavior. Children of permissive parents resemble children of authoritarian parents, lack self-reliance, maturity, and self-control.

African American parents must also prepare their children to survive in spite of their otherness through a mix of culturally embedded styles and practices such as socialization practices regarding the significance and meaning of race (racial socialization). Racial socialization is defined as the process by which messages are transmitted or communicated inter- and intragenerationally regarding the significance and meaning of race and ethnicity (Coard & Sellers,

2005). An inescapable aspect of the socialization of African American children is that it prepares them for survival in an environment that is covertly, if not overtly, hostile, racist, and discriminatory against them.

Religious Practices

According to the PEW Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life (n.d.), 87% of African Americans identify with a religious group and 79% say that religion is very important in their lives. Spirituality is the means that enables individuals to be in touch with their soul. It is based on the cultural belief that humans are comprised of the mind (psychological), the body (physical), and the soul (immaterial). Smitherman (2000) argued that African Americans "believe that soul, feeling, emotion, and spirit serve as guides to understanding life and their fellows. All people are moved by spirit forces, and there is no attempt to deny or intellectualize away that fact" (p. 215).

Religion has traditionally played an important role in the life of African Americans. The African American church has served as a very important socializing institution for individuals and as a source of leadership for the community. Jemison (1982) describes the African American church as "the first welfare organization on earth" (p. 40). The African American church has served a number of service functions: senior citizen services, day care centers, credit unions, housing developments, and education in survival skills. Lefley (1986) notes that the role of the church in African American survival is well established:

It has served both as a social and spiritual resource, providing collective human support and a reference point for meaningfulness in life. Therapeutic aspects of the religious experience are so profound that it has been suggested that the black church service is a functional community mental resource for its participants. (p. 32)

African American religious practices are an outgrowth of a complex historical process. The cultural traditions of West Africa were preserved directly in the lives of the slave population in the United States. Jules-Rosette (1980, p. 275) has identified six distinctive features of African spirituality that survived and became incorporated into the practices of African Americans:

1. The direct link between the natural and supernatural
2. The importance of human intervention in the supernatural world through possession and spiritual control

3. The significance of music to invoke the supernatural
4. The strong tie between the world of the living and the world of the dead in defining the scope of community
5. The importance of participatory verbal performance, including the call-response pattern
6. The primacy of both sacred and secular verbal performance

The central focus of African American religion has been its ability to interpret the African American experience in a meaningful way. The chief function of the African American preacher has been, and remains, to make the Bible relevant to current events. As Henry (1990) states: "Black preaching is based on the Bible but not tied to pat legalistic or literalistic answers. Black worshipers are seeking the strength and assurance to survive another day rather than solutions to abstract theological problems" (p. 65).

With the emphasis on civil rights in the 20th century, the African American church has taken on a major role in advocating social change. African American ministers have become leaders in the civil rights movement, and the movement has continued to have a religious base. Henry (1990) characterizes the role of religion thus: "Black theology condemns capitalism, does not condemn violence, contends that God is actively working for black liberation, and demands reparations for past injustices" (p. 66).

African American churches have always been more than religious institutions. Jones (1983) indicates that a strong religious orientation has always been an important sustaining element in the struggle to cope with racism. During slavery, churches were centers for the development of leadership, educational institutions, and agents for the transmission of traditions and values of the African American community. After emancipation, the functions of the church increased as they became agents for strengthened family ties, employment agencies providing assistance to newcomers in locating housing and jobs, and cultural centers providing opportunities for African Americans to learn about and appreciate their own heritage. The church served as a major promoter of several themes: belief in the unity of the race; belief in self-help as the primary means of addressing problems and social conditions; and a commitment to improving the race. According to DuBois (1909), it was natural that "charitable and rescue work among Negroes should first be found in the churches and reach there its greatest development" (p. 6).

Some African Americans have joined other religions and cults but in relatively small numbers. Readers will find a discussion of Black Jews and Black Muslims in Chapters 11 and 12, respectively.

Family Structure and Dynamics

There is variation among African American families just as there is among families in any other culture. Boyd-Franklin (1989) identified five major characteristics as common to African American family functioning: (a) extended family kinship networks, (b) egalitarian and adaptable family roles, (c) strong religious orientation, (d) strong education and work ethic, and (e) flexible and strong coping skills.

Franklin (1988) posited that the family is one of the strongest and most important traditions in the African American community. Moynihan (1965) described the African American family as a “tangle of pathology . . . capable of perpetuating itself without assistance from the white world” (p. 47). Moynihan’s “blame-the-victim” deficiency-oriented explanation ignored the strengths of these families. Bass, Acosta, and Evans (1982) identify five strengths of the African American family which lead toward survival, advancement, and stability: strong kinship bonds, strong work orientation, adaptability of family roles, strong achievement orientation, and strong religious orientation. He argued that these factors, not unique to African American families, have been functional for the survival, advancement, and stability of African American families. These strengths have been found in African American communities in the form of informal day care services, informal foster care, services to unwed mothers, and services to the elderly. Hale-Benson (1986) suggests that the common use of words such as “brother,” “sister,” or “cousin” for those without actual kinships are instrumental in modeling this loyalty for the children of each generation.

Asante (1981) has identified four aspects of Afrocentric male-female relationships which are based on teachings that man and woman are equally the source of strength and genius of African Americans. The four aspects are sacrifice, inspiration, vision, and victory. These elements provide the source and inspiration for all that men and women do together. Jones (1983) defines the African value system of “we-ness” as a focus on interdependence and cooperation in the face of racism and discrimination. Furthermore, the focus on we-ness is not only an adaptation to racism in the United States but also a tradition passed on in families through early training in self-transcendence that has been culturally inherited from the family’s African tribal roots.

Staples (1981) provides insight on how external forces affect the internal stresses and strains that accompany the process of living in families. He challenges the myth of the African American matriarchy, a myth that still exists to a great extent, in spite of numerous studies that have cast doubt on it. He concludes:

It has been functional for the white ruling class, through its ideological apparatus, to create internal antagonisms in the Black community between Black

men and Black women to divide them and to ward off attacks on the external system of white racism. It is a mere manifestation of the divide-and-conquer strategy, used by most ruling classes through the annals of man, to continue the exploitation of an oppressed group. (p. 33)

No discussion of African American family structure would be complete without some attention to the extended family. Martin and Martin (1978) defined the African American extended family as “a multigenerational, independent kinship system which is welded together by a sense of obligation to relatives; is organized around a dominant figure; extends across geographic boundaries to connect family units to an extended family network; and has a built in mutual aid system for the welfare of its members and the maintenance of the family as a whole” (p. 1).

Edelman (1993) reports that the basic family unit among African Americans is the multigenerational informal extended family, where, in addition to one or both parents and their biological children, the family may include true kin, fictive kin (long-time friends or informal adoptions), and visiting relatives. The extended family might simply be described as all those who see themselves as family.

Hatchett and Jackson (1993) summarized the characteristics of the African American extended kin system as follows

- a. A high degree of geographical propinquity
- b. A strong sense of family and familial obligations
- c. Fluidity of household boundaries, with great willingness to absorb relatives as the need arises
- d. Frequent interactions with relatives
- e. Frequent get-togethers for holidays and special occasions
- f. a system of mutual aid (p. 92)

In addition to the extended family, Pinderhughes (1982) pointed out that the struggle to create a family system that can withstand the stress of the victim system has spawned a variety of family forms other than the traditional nuclear family. It is evident that the meaning of the term *parents* includes natural parents and grandparents as well as others who, at different times, assume parental roles and responsibilities. Roles within the African American family must be viewed as having developed from an interplay of at least three factors: the African heritage, interaction with the dominant culture in the United States, and the method of coping with years of oppression.

Cultural Values and Attitudes

Afrocentricity places African American history, culture, and African heritage at the center of persons of African American heritage. An Afrocentric

perspective also epitomizes the economic, social, and political freedom of African American communities. Afrocentricity asserts that peoples of African descent are active primary and central agents in the making of their histories. Culture is what gives people a general strategy for living.

Historically, cultural values, family practices, and strengths, such as special care for children and elders, kinship ties, and collectivism have been part of African American life (Barnes, 2001). Hill (1999) described five strengths of African American families: strong achievement orientation, strong work orientation, flexible family roles, strong kinship bonds, and strong religious orientation. Hill and others have pointed to strengths that are linked to history, culture, values, and cultural adaptations and suggested that building on these strengths is a good strategy for working with African American families (Freeman & Logan, 2004). Strong kinship ties, intergenerational support, faith, and coming together during times of need have been effective resources for African American families. Turner (1991) found commonalities in values and behaviors that reflect an Afrocentric perspective. These commonalities include a belief in a harmonious relationship between man, nature, and God; respect for the elderly; a consanguineal family structure; sharing of resources; antisuicide ideation; and mistrust of the medical community.

According to Karenga (1965), the seven core principles of an Afrocentric worldview include unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity, and faith. Other African-centered authors have identified additional Afrocentric values of spirituality, harmony with nature and others, balance, orientation to time as a social phenomenon, authenticity, and an emphasis on oral tradition (Mattis & Jagers, 2001; Mbiti, 1986).

Schiele (1996) stressed three main objectives of Afrocentric practice: (1) Afrocentricity seeks to promote an alternative social science paradigm that is reflective of the cultural and political reality of African Americans; (2) it seeks to dispel negative distortions about African people; and (3) it seeks to promote a world view that will facilitate human and social transformation (p. 289).

The oral tradition is a fundamental value that defines African American culture (Hecht, Jackson, & Ribeau, 2003). The oral tradition is rooted in a belief in the power of the word. African American culture has always been one that relied on the power of the spoken word to motivate, persuade, and pass down history from generation to generation.

A diunital orientation means that reality consists of complementary opposites (such as good/bad, right/wrong, concrete/abstract) that are interdependent and function to form a dual identity. A diunital orientation explains why the African American culture is more apt to perceive issues, concepts, or entities as complementary opposites than in absolutes

(Hecht et al., 2003). A diurnal orientation can best be understood from DuBois's (1909) articulation of double consciousness—that African Americans experience dual and often conflicting realities simultaneously.

A number of distinctive characteristics of African American cultural traits give strong credibility to the uniqueness of an African American culture. Many of the characteristics of African American culture are not found in the dominant culture. There is a connection between the cultural traits of African Americans and other Afrocentric communities, such as the Caribbean. Finally, many of the elements of African American culture are quite similar to the same elements which are found in West Africa, the location from which most of the slaves came.

Herskovits (1958) and Woodson (1968) identified a number of cultural elements that are carryovers from Africa and have survived in the United States. These include dialect, folklore, adult-child relationships, family structure, music, generosity or hospitality, respect for the law, religion, sense of justice, and the work ethic.

One specific cultural value is that Africans have a different concept of time than that of the Western world. This difference exists because Africans have no way of expressing a distant future. Another difference is that in traditional African societies, people emphasize whether something is done only at the present moment or done habitually. The Western view of time is linear, with an emphasis on what point on the time line an event occurs, that is, whether it is past, present, or future.

In becoming African Americans, the Africans had to develop a new framework capable of holding their beliefs, values, and behavior. What was useful from Africa was retained; what was useless was discarded, and new forms evolved upon the old. This adaptive strategy allowed African Americans to carve out a world where they could get on with the business of living, building families and kinship groups, and a way of life capable of sustaining them under the conditions they found in the United States. African American culture is testimony to the process of adaptation and cultural exchange (Turner & Perkins, 1976). While the cultures of West Africa differ in many ways, the traditional world view of these cultures is that they are remarkably similar. Among other things, each culture placed a great deal of importance on family and kinship relationships, religion, and the care of children.

Hilliard (1976, pp. 38–39) describes the core cultural characteristics of African Americans as follows:

1. They tend to respond to things in terms of the whole picture instead of its parts. Therefore, art is sometimes taught by numbers, as are dancing and music.

2. They tend to prefer inferential reasoning to deductive or inductive reasoning.
3. They tend to approximate space, numbers, and time rather than stick to accuracy.
4. They tend to prefer to focus on people and their activities rather than on things. This tendency is shown by the fact that so many African American students choose careers in the helping professions, such as teaching, psychology, and social work.
5. They tend to have a keen sense of justice and are quick to analyze and perceive injustice.
6. They tend to lean toward altruism, a concern for one's fellow man.
7. They tend to prefer novelty, freedom, and personal distinctiveness. This is shown in the development of improvisations in music and styles of clothing.
8. They tend not to be word dependent. They tend to be very proficient in non-verbal communications.

A cultural nation is formed by a people with a common past, a common present, and hopefully, a common future. The society may be that of the United States, but the values are African American. African American values come only through an African American culture. Culture is stressed because it gives identity, purpose, and direction. It tells you who you are, what you must do, and how you can do it. Without a culture, African American values are only a set of reactions to the dominant culture. African American culture is an expression of the desire of African Americans to decide their own destiny through control of their own political organizations and the formation and preservation of their cultural economic and social institutions.

Implications

African American children must be taught and must believe that deviations from the normative patterns of the dominant culture are not indications that they are abnormal. They must be helped to understand that negative social and psychological views have resulted in images of low self-esteem, identity crisis, and self-hatred. An appreciation of African American cultural values is essential for African American children if they are to develop positive self-identities. Despite the dominant culture's representations of deficiency or abnormality, a great many strengths serve as the foundation of African American culture. Educators and counselors can work more effectively with African Americans if they begin from their the students' or clients' points of strength.

Townsend, Hawkins, and Batts (2007) showed that stress is a major source of concern for African Americans and that it has a profound impact

on one's mental and physical health. Walker (2007) contends that many African Americans experience threats to their racial identity and to culture-specific values and patterns of living due to the acculturative process. Some are at risk of suicide as a result of this acculturative stress.

Utsey, Bolden, and Brown (2001) adopt the position that psychic violence, a vector of pervasive racism, oppression, discrimination, and alienation has become intertwined in the African American psyche. They describe four mental disorders for individuals of African descent that result from cultural co-option by the oppressor: alien-self disorder, the denial of reality of racism and an active attempt to emulate a European world-view/reality; anti-self disorder, covert and overt hostility toward all things African; self-destructive disorder, ineffective and destructive attempts to cope with the unnatural conditions of White supremacy and domination; and organic disorder, physiological or biological diseases having their etiology in the oppressive conditions typical for victims of White supremacy

Gibbs (1981) describes a five stage process through which African Americans interpret their meetings with White counselors. The first is the "appraisal stage" where the client "sizes up" the counselor and minimizes the intensity of the interaction. Stage two involves the client's more assertive investigation of who and what the counselor is about. It is during this stage that the subject of race is likely to emerge. Stage three involves the exchange of information, personal favors, and mutual obligations. Stage four is the client's commitment to the relationship. Stage five involves actual work on the issue which brought the client to the counselor in the first place. Gibbs (1990) recommends short-term ego-oriented treatment for African American youth who are experiencing nonpsychotic behavioral and emotional problems. Family therapy is appropriate where the adolescents' problems are symptomatic of a dysfunctional family system, a breakdown in family communication, or a family scapegoating process.

The strengths of the family (Bass et al., 1982) and the core African American cultural characteristics (Hilliard, 1976) should serve as background for any specific strategies developed for use with individuals or groups. Individuals from the dominant culture should not use themselves as sole reference points for how African American children should behave. An individual's family and community, and how one measures up to his or her peers, should provide additional reference points. In other words, African American children's interactions with the dominant culture should be filtered through an African American frame of reference.

A number of practice approaches have been proposed for culturally competent practice with African Americans and other ethnic and racial groups. Strengths-based, empowerment-oriented, ethnically sensitive, constructionist, Afrocentric, and social justice frameworks have been used to

guide practice with African American families. Such frameworks provide models by which social problems are assessed and intervention strategies may be developed.

Case Study: Jamal

Jamal is a 68-year-old African American male, who looks considerably older than his actual age. Jamal grew up in a small southern rural town with his biological parents and one older brother. His father worked in a paper mill and his mother was a housekeeper. He reported a happy childhood in a nurturing family with no traumatic events. He recalled that school was a positive experience for him. He graduated from high school and enrolled in the local college for two years, majoring in history. He dropped out because oral presentations made him anxious. He married a local woman and they are the parents of three children. He had a series of low-paying jobs, joined the military, and worked in the mailroom. He indicated that he had a successful military career. He did use marijuana while in the military. He moved to his current location to be near the VA hospital and his most recent employment was in the mailroom at the VA hospital. His friends introduced him to crack cocaine and he became addicted. Over the next 10 years, he lost his employment, his house, and his automobile and became estranged from his three children. He survived by running up credit card debt. He has charges pending for bounced checks. During this time he began having sex with drug-addicted women. His ex-wife died of cancer, and he is currently unemployed and living alone in a small one-room apartment. He volunteers in the kitchen at a veteran's shelter. He smokes cigarettes and has no automobile. He reported that he has difficulty getting up in the morning. He presented with social anxiety, a history of substance abuse, limited financial resources, and a poorly controlled medical illness. He indicated that he had completed a three-month detox program and has been clean for two years.

Questions for Review and Reflection

1. What event do you think has had the greatest influence on African Americans? Why?
2. What are the ethnic group labels which have been associated with people of color whose roots are in Africa? What is the value associated with being called "African American"?
3. Most African Americans are descendants of individuals who came to the United States as slaves, whereas most other ethnic groups are descendants of individuals who voluntarily came to the United States. What influences did this difference create in terms of cultural identification? In terms of other factors?
4. Why has the African American church had so much influence on the African American culture?

5. How does “Black English” (Ebonics) influence the education of African Americans? Should African Americans be forced to abandon “Black English?” Why or why not?
6. Which African American cultural trait has influenced the education or counseling of African Americans the most? How?
7. Discuss E. U. Essien-Udoms concept of “dilemma of duality.”
8. How would you describe the rank order of discrimination now in comparison to the rank order found by G. Myrdal in 1944? How does the rank today influence educational or counseling practices?
9. Ellis Cost described African Americans in three generations, based on their distance from the civil rights movement. How can educators or counselors use this knowledge in working with African Americans?
10. How can educators or counselors use the cultural values reported by A. Hilliard in devising strategies and techniques for their work with African Americans?

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