

There Is No Black American Identity and Community

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This work provides a descriptive analysis of the so-called Black American community whose practical consciousness is a result of adopting, and reacting to, both white values and discriminatory terms to constitute their practical activities and so-called cultural identity. Outside of the practices associated with these values and discriminatory terms, there is no *sui generis* Black American identity and community with its own form of system and social integration that is different from, or diametrically opposes, the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of their white counterparts, which would emerge out of that relationship.

Keywords: Black Church, African-Americanization, racial identity, religiosity, Black Diaspora, spiritualism, phenomenological structuralism

Introduction

This work argues that there is no Black American identity and community in America outside of their segregation associated with their relations to, and differentiation within, the American modes and means of production. Ever since their arrival onto the shores of America, so-called black identity and practical consciousness, in other words, have been determined by their actions and reactions, i.e., practical consciousnesses, to their interpellation and embourgeoisement by whites to the social class language games of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. There is no *sui generis* Black American identity and community with its own form of system and social integration that is different from, or diametrically opposes, the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of their white counterparts, which would emerge out of that historical relationship.

Background of the Problem

Since the 1960s, there have been two dominant schools of thought on understanding the origins and nature of Black American practical consciousnesses, the ideas, ideals, and values, i.e., practical consciousnesses, Black Americans recursively reorganize and reproduce in their material practices in the United States (US): the pathological-pathogenic and adaptive-vitality schools. The pathological-pathogenic position suggests that in its divergences from White American norms and values Black American community life and practical consciousness are nothing more than a pathological form of, and reaction to, American consciousness rather than a dual (both African and American) hegemonic opposing “identity-in-differential” (the term is Gayatri Spivak’s) to the American one (Elkins, 1959; Frazier, 1939; 1957; Genovese, 1974; Murray, 1984; Moynihan, 1965; Myrdal, 1944; Wilson, 1978; 1987; Sowell, 1975; 1981). Afrocentric proponents of the adaptive-vitality school suggest

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that the divergences are not pathologies but African “institutional transformations”, Africanisms, preserved on the American landscape (Allen, 2001; Asante, 1988; 1990; Billingsley, 1968; 1970; 1993; Blassingame, 1972; Gilroy, 1993; Gutman, 1976; Herskovits, 1958 [1941]; Holloway, 1990a; Karenga, 1993; Levine, 1977; Lincoln & Mamiya, 1990; Nobles, 1987; Staples, 1978; Stack, 1974; West, 1993; Sudarkasa, 1980; 1981).

Contemporarily, both positions have been criticized for either their structural determinism as in the case of the pathological-pathogenic approach, or racial/cultural (essentialist) determinism as in the case of the adaptive-vitality (Karenga, 1993; Mocombe, 2008). In directly or indirectly refuting these two positions for their structural and racial/cultural determinism, contemporary post-sixties and post-segregation era black scholars (Critical Race Theorists and Afropessimists) in the United States (US) attempt to understand black consciousnesses and communities by using post-structural and post-modern theories to either reinterpret W. E. B. Du Bois’s (1903) double consciousness construct as an epistemological (negative dialectical) mode of critical inquiry that characterizes the nature or essence of black consciousness, a la Cornel West (1993) and Paul Gilroy (1993), or, building on the social constructivist work of Frantz Fanon, offer an intersectional approach to the constitution of black consciousnesses and communities, which, methodologically, using case studies and ethnographic research under the umbrella of exploring the lived-experiences of blacks, emphasize the diverse and different levels of alienation, marginalization, and domination, class, race, gender, global location, age, and sexual identity, by which black consciousnesses and communities get constituted, a la Bell Hooks and Patricia Hill Collins (Reed, 1997; Mocombe, 2008). The former, under the umbrella of critical race theory, attempts to portray Du Boisian double consciousness as negative dialectic in order to convict the West for not identifying with their ideas, ideals, and values when they continuously discriminate (individually and institutionally) against black folks who recursively organize and reproduce these ideas, ideals, and values as their practical consciousness, i.e., the modernity of the black Atlantic. In the latter position, Afropessimists take it to the extreme to suggest that blackness is an ontological paradigm of death with no political subjectivity, created by white structural violence, wherein the so-called black body is instrumentalized for intersectional (postcolonial, gay, etc.) agendas (Wilderson III, 2017). In this work, using Mocombeian phenomenological structuralism, which seeks to fix the problems of structure and agency that plagues the aforementioned approaches, I argue that all four positions are problematic in that there is no Black American identity and community to speak of in America, which renders all four positions problematic, outside of their analysis vis-à-vis their relations to the modes and means of production constituting America’s social structure (Mocombe, 2008). In other words, the majority of Black American identity/practical consciousness, like their White American counterparts, has been determined by their relations to, and differentiation within, the modes and means of production of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism under white oligarchical domination. Segregation and the embrace of the “other” terms and practices of blackness, emerging from structural differentiation, highlighted by whites for black identity-in-differential to whiteness, are the sole basis for this talk about a so-called black American identity and community, which is a fictitious community as it does not offer an alternative form of system and social integration that is distinct from the systemicity of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism.

Theory and Method

Mocombeian phenomenological structuralism posits that societal and agential constitution are a result of power relations, interpellation, and socialization or embourgeoisement via five systems, i.e., mode of production,

language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse, which are reified as one of two types of social structure (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism or the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism), or what Mocombe (2019; 2021a; 2021b) calls a “social class language game”, by persons, power elites, who control the means and modes of production in a material resource framework. Once interpellated and embourgeoisied by these five systems, which are reified as a social structure and society (social class language game), social actors, for their ontological security, recursively organize, reproduce, and are differentiated by the rules of conduct of the social structure, which are sanctioned by the power elites who control the means and modes of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse in a material resource framework. Hence, societal and agential constitution are both a duality and dualism: a dualism given the reification of the social structure (social class language games) via the five systems; and a duality given the internalization of the rules of the five systems, which become the agential initiatives or praxes of social actors differentiated by the rules of conduct that are sanctioned based on the economic mode of production. Difference, or alternative social praxis, in Mocombe’s structuration theory, phenomenological structuralism, is not structural differentiation as articulated by traditional structurationists such as Bourdieu, Sahlins, Habermas, and Giddens; instead, it is a result of actions arising from the deferment of meaning and ego-centered communication given the interaction of two other structuring structures (physiological drives of the body and brain; and phenomenal properties of subatomic particles that constitute the human subject) vis-à-vis the mental stance of the ego during the interpellation and socialization or embourgeoisement of social actors throughout their life span or cycle in the dominant social class language game or social structure, which produces alternative praxis that is exercised at the expense of the threat these practices may pose to the ontological security of social actors in the social structure or society, which, as previously mentioned, is of two types (the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism or the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism). This difference, however, becomes structural difference or differentiation in the structurationist sense once it is (dialectically, negative dialectically, and antidialectically) interpellated in the language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse of those who own the means and modes of production in order to control and direct the alternative praxis towards structural functionalism and equilibrium. Hence, true difference, *différance*, is practice associated with one of the two forms of system and social integration operating in, and against, its opposite counterpart for social change. For in the latter sense, the social praxis of the social actor is permanently differentiated and marginalized and is incommensurable within the alternative social class language game it is operating within. From this perspective, there is no Black American identity and community, for their practical consciousnesses are not constituted as an alternative, and permanently incommensurable, social class language game to that of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism; instead, they are a structurally differentiated group, created by whites and their relations to the means and modes of production, whose practical consciousness emerges from their segregation based on, and embrace of, the structurally differentiated othering terms and behaviors incorporated in the social class language game of their former white slavemasters.

Discussion and Conclusion

In other words, within Mocombe’s phenomenological structuralism, the understanding is that the ideologies and rhetoric of pathological-pathogenic, adaptive-vitality, Afropessimism, and critical race theory capture the nature of black practical consciousnesses as determined not by their own agential initiatives, but by their relations

and differentiations to different modes of production in the capitalist world-system. The adaptive-vitality and pathological-pathogenic positions emerged (1619-1970) between the aporias of agricultural and industrial modes of production, respectively; and the postmodern and post-structural positions of critical race theory and afropessimism emerged (1980-2023) between the aporias of industrial and postindustrial productions.

Put differently, all four theories, regarding the constitution of black practical consciousness, are ideologies of different modes of production within which Black American practical consciousnesses were interpellated, constituted, embourgeoisied, and differentiated. The pathological-pathogenic and adaptive-vitality positions emerged between the aporia of a declining agricultural mode of production and an emerging industrial production. In the case of the former, adaptive-vitality position, black communalism, single female-headed households, improvisation, language, musical inclinations, and food choices witnessed in slavery were viewed as Africanisms, i.e., adaptive African behaviors to the processes and vagaries of agricultural slavery (Holloway, 1990a; 1990b). The former, pathological-pathogenic position, viewed, given the assumption that the total institution of slavery deculturalized the African, these latter adaptations as pathological-pathogenic practices adopted from poor white culture—which emerged out of agricultural slavery and were perpetuated in the urban ghettos as blacks adapted to the industrial mode of production—which stood in contradistinction to the nuclear family traditions of the white and black bourgeoisies (Frazier, 1939; 1957; 1968). Contemporarily, in post-industrial America, Black American practical consciousness is associated, as highlighted by the postmodern and poststructural positions of critical race theory and afropessimism, with the glorification and commodification of black underclass practices of the ghettos, narcissism, and improvisation highlighted by their musical styles, and identity politics as it stands against the nuclear and bourgeois rhetoric of the pathological-pathogenic position emerging out of the industrialism of the 1960s (Wilson, 1978; 1987; Reed, 1997; Mocombe, 2008).

The majority of black wealth in America, contemporarily, is contingent upon rent with no true productivity value, just consumptive value. White rentier oligarchs ascertain wealth via finance, insurance, and real estate, which they in turn invest in sports and other entertainment industries where black millionaires, “the my niggas”, become millionaires and billionaires who drive the consumptive taste of the black poor through the commodification and celebration of their underclass hip-hop, gender, sexual, athletic, and youthful identities, which emerged from their integration in the social structure of postindustrial capitalism, which both transmogrified and constituted their communities, families, and identities as the by-product of intersectional (age, sex, sexual orientation, class, and race) standpoints within capitalist relations of production as opposed to nuclear family ideologies of the pathological-pathogenic position. Critical race theorists, such as Cornel West and Paul Gilroy, see the former as the “Souls” of black folks, and the basis upon which they should integrate the West in general and America in particular by convicting the latter for not living up to the values when they discriminate against black folks, who, although different, “other” (because of their improvisational styles, etc.), nonetheless, partake in the humanism of the West and America. Afropessimists interpret these processes as the instrumentalization of the so-called black body to promote political agendas.

For me, these positions, from the adaptive-vitality to Afropessimism, speak to how so-called black folks in America have been interpellated and socialized in the socioeconomic processes of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism of the West and America. In the agricultural, and the beginning of the industrial, age, between 1880-1960, married households, traditional nuclear families raising children, dominated the so-called black American family structure against the adaptive-vitality of the agricultural mode of production (1619-1880s). Post

the 1960s, and the advent of deindustrialization, criminalization, mass incarceration, and post-industrialization of American inner-cities, the out-of-wedlock birth rate began emerging as the dominant black family structural form, which was 25% among black people (Moynihan, 1965). Post the Moynihan report, which examined the link between black poverty and family structure, that number rose to 70% as of 2018. The result in postindustrial American capitalism where identity politics and the glorification of the self and its standpoints are commodified by finance capital for capital accumulation by the white power elites, rentier oligarchs, the celebration of single-female headed households and same-sex couple family structures would emerge, via the ideology of identity politics, as the dominant family forms in Black America post the 1960s. Given the criminalization, mass incarceration of black males, and their absence in the homes as a result of legislation associated with the processes of deindustrialization, postindustrial inner-cities would be dominated by black single-female headed households, and gay male and female family structures (the latter one can surmise emerging from homosexual behaviors, which occurred in prison and post-incarceration amongst black males; and the rise of lesbianism due to the lack of men in the communities). Amidst the 70% single-female headed households, as of 2010, 32.9% of children in the US were raised by same-sex black male couples compared to 6.2% raised by white male same-sex couples; 46.7% were raised by black female same-sex couples compared to 23.1% for white female same-sex couples; and as of 2015, 24% of all black men married outside of their race compared with 12% of black female newlyweds, which is on the rise (Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council and Center for American Progress, 2012). Hence, blackness, due to its social relations and differentiations within industrialization and post-industrialization, lacked any subjectivity as posited by afropessimists; instead, it (their practical consciousnesses that emerged from their social relations and differentiations vis-à-vis the industrial and post-industrial modes of production) was instrumentalized for neoliberal identity politics and intersectional jargon, becoming a model community of, and for, the latter (intersectional) by negative dialectically convicting Western society for its (individual and institutional) discriminatory affects against the serial, reified, and commodified identities utilized by finance capital for capital accumulation. This latter position represents the theorization of critical race theory, which highlights the continual effects of institutional racism, sexism, transgenderism, etc., on preventing black folks from achieving equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with their white counterparts.

Hence, in the end, the so-called black community in America has always been a construct of whites with their agential initiatives determined by their relations to, and differentiation within, the modes and means of production of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. Instead of constituting an alternative rational form of system and social integration (the Vodou Ethic and the spirit of communism) with its own mode of production, language (i.e., Black English Vernacular), communicative discourse, ideology, and ideological apparatuses from that of their white counterparts, which would have made them permanently unable to integrate the social class language game of the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism; under the leadership of the black bourgeoisie, i.e., the best of the house servants, mulattoes, and free blacks in the north, they recursively organized and reproduced the latter as social actors with black skin and all of the othering terms of the social class language game for the purpose of system and social integration, which they have achieved through the identity politics of post-industrial capitalism. Contemporarily, they embrace the othering terms and practices of the structurally differentiated black underclass as the cultural and communal practices of the so-called black community for diversified communism in post-industrial finance capital.

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