# The Dominant Values of Black Culture

La Francis Rodgers-Rose, Ph.D.

Founder & CEO, International Black Women's Congress

## Abstract

This special theme issue celebrates the 50th anniversary of the publication of the innovative analysis put forth by Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose in an article published by Aframailibrary of Harlem, New York in 1972—though also codified in an earlier 1970 unpublished paper: i.e., "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture.*" The original constructs and analysis published 50 years ago resonate as timeless and brilliant, standing the test of time, while justifying the importance of their re-publication to permit access for a contemporary audience. Dr. Rodgers-Rose presents the results of a decade of study and deep thought in an original, complex, pioneering sociological analysis of Black cultural patterns and values. The Black value system consists of a pattern of behavior centered around *communal existentialism* and a belief in the *uniqueness of the individual*. Additional dominant values include *humanistic values or the affective existential basis of Black culture* (i.e., *affective-humanistic behavior*), and the *diunital relationship between good and evil*. Rodgers-Rose (1972) defined them, as follows: (1) *communal existentialism,* meaning that one's total being and one's total process of becoming is wrapped up in others; (2) *uniqueness of the individual*, which says that one can be different and still a part of the family or group; (3) *humanistic values or the affective existential basis of Black culture—*or more succinctly, the *affective-humanistic or expressive humanistic values—*seen in how children are taught to show their feelings, and learn that people have both positive and negative qualities, including in themselves; and, (4) *the diunital relationship between good and evil,* which centers around the daily struggle for justice at the individual and community levels—as the central theme in Black religion. These values and beliefs fit together to make a unified whole. This re-publication centers the original work of Dr. Rodgers-Rose on "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*" as the source of ideas to be treasured, while she is to be treasured for her genius in pioneering the Theory of Black Culture in 1972. This Theory of Black Culture spurred advancements in African American Studies, as well as in the fields of education and academic achievement, counseling, assessment, and research—by virtue of her elucidating the critical role of culture as essential for consideration. To apply a quote from this paper, it may be said that *her parents* "birthed a unique being who may change the course of human events." In fact, that is what Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose has accomplished, given her impact on multiple fields, and on Black cultural scholarship and research across the past five decades—and for decades to come.

Keywords: Black culture, values, communal existentialism, communalism, parenting, socialization

## Introduction

Any attempt by social scientists to delineate the characteristics of a phenomenon must be grounded in a sound theoretical base that is supported by empirical observations. When addressing oneself to the study of Black culture, the characteristics of that culture must also be grounded in sound theory and observation. What we should be about, then, is outlining the characteristics of such a culture in a manner that can be empirically tested.

There are various ways by which one can approach the study of Black culture. For example, one can analyze Black culture from the perspective of history, literature, poetry and music. These ways of approaching the study of culture are not what we normally consider the scientific empirical method. I am not suggesting, however, that these ways of knowing are less valid for the purposes they serve but, rather, they are not an empirical science. For in an empirical science, propositions must be stated in such a manner that they can be observed, tested and verified.

Basically, what we presently know about Black culture has come largely from the areas of literature, music, poetry and history. We do not know, for example, to what extent the literature on Black culture is valid scientifically. We do not know to what extent Black people embody the ethos of Black poetry; nor do we know how or to what extent our past history relates to the ways in which Blacks presently define their culture. We must begin to do in the social sciences what is now being done in history and the Humanities as it relates to Black culture. That is, we must develop, very specifically, the characteristics of a Black culture using the methodology of social science. We must discuss the total culture of Black people from our knowledge of that culture through field observations. We must be able to identify the dominant values and themes of Black culture. We must characterize what anthropologists call cultural patterns.

We know from anthropology that culture consists of more than painting, music, poetry, literature and history. We know that culture is defined as the totality of what is learned by individuals as members of society—that culture is a way of life, a mode of feeling, thinking and acting. Writing in 1871, Tylor said, "culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law,

Address correspondence to:
La Francis Rodgers-Rose, PhD
International Black Women's Congress
Norfolk, Virginia
Email: ibwc1609@cs.com

custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of "society." From this definition, one of the difficulties in analyzing Black culture in America is the notion by sociologists and anthropologists that Blacks do not have, nor have they ever had, a society of their own.

If one accepts the previous statement, it becomes impossible, then, to speak of a culture without a society or a society without a culture. Therefore, it becomes necessary to make a case that Blacks indeed have operated a society within a larger society. That we, at least, have had our own sub-culture within the American society. At least, the Kerner's (1968) report suggested that America is moving toward two separate cultures—one Black and one white. And historically, John Hope Franklin (1966) maintains that there have always been two separate worlds of race in American Society.

One can make a strong case for the concept of a Black culture if one views and analyzes the two basic institutions of the family and religion. Likewise, the educational institutions in Black society have, for the most part, been separate and different from the total society. At a sub-cultural level, we see the differences in the political and economic institutions of Black life. This is particularly true if one analyzes the **content** of these institutions rather than simply the form of these institutions. The theoretical and empirical support to substantiate the premise of Blacks having different basic institutions can be found in the works of Du Bois (1899, 1903), Cox (1948), Frazier (1939, 1957), Billingsley (1968), Ladner (1971), Staples (1971), Cleage (1968), Johnson (1934), and Herskovits (1941).

What these works suggest in one way or another is that one acquires the major themes of a Black culture through the socialization process. That is, one is not born knowing his culture. He must learn it through his parents and various significant others, who filter the way of life of the culture to the child. We must be concerned with the question to what extent do Black parents, and other significant others teach the Black child a culture that is different from the dominant American culture? For example, a number of studies have looked at the differences in child rearing practices between Black and white parents. But these studies do not address themselves to the question of the **content** of the child rearing practices. They have tended to suggest that Black parents are more lenient in their child rearing practices than whites; and, lately, the findings suggest that the reverse is true. But that both sets of parents may be teaching different values, norms, beliefs is rarely, if ever, discussed. Concern has centered around the way the child is nursed, toilet trained, weaned—not with what parents tell their children. However, we know that the socialization process is more than methods of feeding, toilet training, and weaning. Also, we know that the socialization process is always, initially, a primary process. It starts from the time the child is born and continues until he dies. As Cooley (1902) suggested, the development of self takes place in primary groups—in

family settings. What parents tell their children is very important in how that child will define himself, how he will view the world and the attitudes he will take toward others. Anthropologists tell us that this socialization process varies by culture. And one can study the relationship between culture and personality by studying the variations in socialization processes. [See, for example, Benedict (1934), Mead (1928, 1939), Kardiner (1945), Bateson (1958), Du Bois (1944), and Read (1960)]. Specifically, then, I would like to discuss how the socialization process—that is, the daily behavior of Black people—leads to very specific values in the Black culture. The remainder of this paper is addressed to this endeavor.

**Communal Existentialism**

I maintain that what Black parents tell their children and do with their children is significantly different from what white parents tell their children and do with their children. And, further, that this communication process forms a dominant value, belief system that in turn makes up the Black culture. One of the basic values in the Black culture is that of **communal existentialism**. Existentialism here meaning that one's total being and one's total process of becoming is wrapped up in others. We are who we are because we are an extension of those around us. One learns early in life that he must share his physical self with others. The child is born into an environment of on-going social processes. These processes are carried out in an extended family. For example, the child interacts with not only the mother, father, siblings, but also grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. All of these people, at one time or another, may feed the child, change his diaper, or play with him. We do not have, then, the traditional role of the relationship between the "mothering one," as Sullivan (1953) described it, and the baby. One finds that different people, at an early age, are involved with giving love, affection, and discipline to the child. Thus, the child learns at an early age to respond to many different people; not just to the mother figure. It seems, then, that Sullivan's (1953) notion of the personification of the mother as a "good" mother or "bad" mother may not be so readily formulated by a child raised in a large extended family. Also, the over attachment to the mother is not as likely to occur, since the child has many more people with whom he can relate. Out of this initial socialization process, the seeds of communal sharing develop. When one is forced from birth to relate to many different people, his selfhood extends into them. He becomes an existential person. Others become important to him. Likewise, the child has a larger number of people from whom he can gain support and satisfaction. This beginning process of sharing one's physical well-being with different people in the extended family is crucial in the assessment of Black culture. This leads the child toward an openness to other aspects of the culture that will be taught

to him. Also, it leads to a different, collectively, modal personality.

By the time the child is eighteen months old, he learns that he must share his tangible possessions with others in the family. This does not suggest that one shares or extends himself because one wants to, but rather, because the conditions of life and the values of the culture make it necessary. Quite often this phenomenon is closely related to the survival mechanisms of the family. That is, communal existentialism is a necessary value in the Black culture. It is nearly impossible to find a Black child raised in the Black culture who did not have to share his toys, food, clothes, with other brothers and sisters within his family. Likewise, he may have shared these same things with his cousins and other relatives.

Sociologists have looked upon this pattern of communal existentialism as a negative aspect in Black life. They have questioned whether a child can ever develop a sense of his own personhood if he never possesses that which is his own? Now, this kind of analysis seems to come from the basic value system of white American culture. It is seeped in the syndrome of, "What is mine is nine, and what is yours is yours." It would seem that feelings from the latter statement would lead to individuals who are selfish, who always think of themselves first and their family or group second. For sure, it would not lead to the kind of communal sharing that exists in the Black culture.

Closely related to the early socialization of communal existentialism, which is not based on the premise that one extends himself to be nice, but rather, one extends himself because he **must**, is the continuation of this process into early childhood and adolescence. Friends—peers—spend a great deal of time communally sharing their money, clothes, and other possessions. It is nothing unusual to borrow personal articles of clothes from a friend. In fact, the extent of a friendship may be determined by whether a friend will let you borrow something that he dearly loves, or for that matter, whether he will let you wear it before he does. The relationship is always reciprocal. That is, the child's friend would expect the same from him. As one gets older and can buy some of his own clothing, the pattern of communal existentialism is seen in friends who dress alike. Five or six friends will all buy the same outfit to wear to school on the same day. In doing this, these friends, are suggesting to others their unity in selfhood. Further, it is understood that if one member in the peer group does not have money, for example, that others will share their money with him. Also, if money is needed for some occasion and all cannot go, the group as a whole will not go.

As we move into adulthood, we see in the Black culture a further outgrowth of the communal existentialistic pattern in families that refuse to turn away relatives and friends when they are in need of some place to live. At any given point in time, a Black household may consist of mother, father, offspring, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and friends—

friends who are defined as cousins although there are no biological ties. Just as one shared, early in life, his sense of personhood, his clothes, toys, books and other personal possessions, in later life he shares his home out of the spirit of communal existentialism. This does not mean that Black people do not realize the strain that "outside" members of the family may have on their economic conditions; but instead, Blacks cannot view the situation any other way. How can one put a member of the family out into the streets when he knows that there is no place to turn? Of course, the person in need **must** become a part of the functioning unit.

The way that money is used in Black culture is an extension of the communal sharing pattern. If another person needs money and you have some, then it is expected that one must share this money with others. Again, friendship is based on the extent to which one can borrow money from another person without feeling that his self esteem is lowered by such an act. The understanding is that if the other person were in the same position, he would do the same thing for you. Likewise, pressure is not put on the person about some specific time of repayment, because the likelihood is that the lender will not be repaid, especially if the sum of money is not too large. Now the pattern that I am describing is true for members of the immediate family, relatives and close friends. Therefore, when one looks at the Black extended family, it resembles a clan—the carryover of the African clan system in Black life. What goes on in clans other than one's own is their business. Consequently, I am not suggesting that there is universal communal existentialism among all Black people, but that sharing extends beyond the boundaries of the nuclear family. When contrasting the Black culture with the American culture, one can see the possibility of total communal living in the Black culture in as much as one of the basic themes is that of **collective existentialism.** We need only to extend the boundaries out further to take in larger sub-groups until all Black people are encircled in the pattern.

Further, I am not suggesting that all Black people have the basic value of sharing their material and nonmaterial possessions with others. But I do feel that Blacks who were raised in working class families, although they may no longer belong to this class, possess the values of communal existentialism. Thus, it becomes nearly impossible for newly arrived Black middle-class people to detach themselves from their extended families. Some of the newly arrived middle class Blacks have no desire to cut themselves loose from their families, but see their obligations to help their families who have, more than likely, helped them to get where they are. Thus, middle class Black families are more extended than middle class white families. We can still see the pattern of grandparents and other relatives as part of the family unit. On the other hand, one may find middle class Black families who would like to sever the ties with their past—with their extended families and past friends, but find it difficult to do. Such middle class families

may find themselves in reciprocal obligations that they cannot eliminate.

Likewise, there are Blacks, perhaps no more than twenty percent of the total population, who were never raised in the pattern of communal existentialism, and consequently, cannot appreciate this pattern in Black culture, nor understand it. These Blacks may be the "old upper class" that Frazier (1957) discusses—the Blacks who were "upper class" before the end of slavery. These Black families, as regard the pattern of communal existentialism fit the traditional middle class white pattern. I say middle class white pattern because we know from sociological studies and observations of the news media that upper class white families resemble lower class Black families as regard the extended family pattern. Also, we know that lower class white families have some of the same characteristics of Black families as regard the extended family. That communal sharing is a characteristic of other groups within and among societies does not negate the fact that it can be a significant pattern in another group inasmuch as the way Blacks put together their communal existentialism is not the same as the way white upper class or working class put together their communal existentialism. For I maintain, that the existential basis of the latter two classes is not the same as the existential basis of Black people. What I am suggesting then, is that the extended nature of the family, with its African heritage, has led to communal existentialism which includes both family and friends.

## Uniqueness of the Individual

Another major theme in Black culture is that of a belief in the unique individual and his rights. This may at first seem to contradict the above analysis, but the two themes really fit together. That is, one is free to develop at his own speed, in his own way as long as this development does not hinder another person. Thus, a certain amount of unselfishness is a necessity. However, one need not strive to be like his brothers and sisters. One can be different and yet a part of the family or group.

Early in the socialization process parents try to recognize what is unique in their child. They may arrive at this position by showing the similarities between their child and some relative, but the feeling is not that the child's character or personality will be the same as the person he resembles. The process of trying to arrive at the uniqueness of the child through collective appraisal is closely related to the unique names that Black parents give their children. In this way, they are suggesting that "we have a unique child that is like no other child." Strauss (1968) has suggested that to name is to identify. It is to place a meaning on an object. Names say something about identity. It may suggest the character of the person. Therefore, Black parents make much "to do" over the names they select for their children. They say, in effect, we have just birthed a

unique being who may change the course of human events.

The process of naming is a continuous one. As Black children grow older, we find that they, in terms of their own identity, may take on new names. It seems that nearly everyone in the Black community has a nickname, and one may grow up in a neighborhood and never know the "real" name of a friend because he was always referred to by his nickname. The nickname says something very specific about the person's character. For example, the nickname may characterize him as:

- Devil—a person in my youth who would be described by sociologists as an underworld character, but to Blacks in my community, he was a person who knew how to manipulate, deal and get along with nearly all people. He was also a smooth talker and quite handsome.

- Mungo—a person not particularly handsome, but a strong person who was an outstanding football player.

- Rabbi—a person who was not necessarily religious but who talked like a minister. Again, a person who knew how to deal with others.

- Pig—the name was initially given because the person ate so much. Although now an adult, he is still referred to by that name, and I find it difficult to call him "James."

- Flee—a young man who I presently know and insists on being called "Flee" rather than his given name. He probably got the nickname because he is very small.

- "Little Sis" or "Big Sis"—in this case my youngest aunt and my mother. These two people are still referred to by the above nicknames. Incidentally, the names indicate the birth order in the family—the youngest and oldest daughters, and also certain kinds of rights and responsibilities.

One also finds in the naming process that Black families quite often refer to siblings as "brother" and "sister." These two names are used in place of their given names, I have also found several variations on the names for mother and father. Particularly, I knew one family where the children always called their mother, "mother dear."

From the short list given above, one may note that nicknames are basically a male pattern rather than being distributed equally among males and females. In fact, I can think of very few nicknames for girls other than sister, peaches, pudding, baby, and shorter variations of the given

name. For me, all of these names suggest a concern in the Black culture with uniqueness and, thus, with a real meaning of equality.

Another aspect of equality, as seen through the uniqueness of the individual, is the lack of competition within the family. There is little need in the Black family to compete with one's brothers and sisters if each individual is unique. When competition does exist, it is not with the thought that "I am better than you," but rather, it serves as a method of keeping one prepared for other forces in the environment. To compete for the same girl, for example, simply sharpen one's method of dealing with the next girl. That is, competition serves as a method of developing lines of strategy. Thus, closely related to strategy building is a kind of "ribbing" that goes on in the Black community. When one person "runs another person down," the individual rarely gets angry because it is understood that the whole matter is not serious, but that it is really a tactic or mode of operation. It teaches the individual how to deal with hostile forces. As Joseph White (1970) suggested, Blacks on a regular basis deal with existential psychology without really knowing it. One learns early how to analyze the basic beliefs of others. He learns how to attack these beliefs; and the person being attacked learns how to defend this position. The "ribbing" process may center around the existential analysis of what the person is wearing, how he walks, talks or relates to others. Playing the "dozen" is the epitome of existential analysis in Black culture. To run down the existential basis of another's mother is to be on the brink of physical confrontation or a good hardy joke depending on the friendship and the situation involved. A person never plays the "dozen" with a person he does not know—to do so initiates a fight. In my youth, the symbol of the "dozen" was to place a small stick on one's shoulder and dare someone to knock it off. This act also signaled that the person walking around with the stick on his shoulder wanted to fight. Whites analyzing Black culture miss the significance of "ribbing" and "playing the dozen." Also, they fail to understand it or appreciate it.

It would seem to me that in the whole process of "ribbing" the individual is being prepared for the outside white world. He is learning how to defend himself by any means necessary. Therefore, in this process of strategy building, one is never defeated. He is simply down for the moment and will come up again fighting—sometimes physically and quite often verbally. Thus, it becomes difficult for me to understand the assertions by educators that Black children lack verbal skills. What I would suggest is that they abound in verbal skills, but they are not the same kinds of skills that the typical teacher is looking for. In fact, if a Black child starts his existential analysis on his teacher, he will more than likely be sent home. He will be defined in a whole host of negative ways. His personhood nay be questioned. That is, he may be defined as a hostile, negative, aggressive child.

I would say that roughly eighty percent of the Black people in this country have the experience of the use of names as a specific way to identify the uniqueness of the individual, knows how, and probably has played the "dozen." What happened to the other twenty percent of the Black population is that either they do not understand the naming or ribbing process, or else they know and understand but now, because of their middle class values, define the whole process as negative, and something they would like to get away from.

I mentioned previously that the value of the uniqueness of the individual can be seen in the lack of competition within the family. However, we can find working class Black families that make a great effort to have their children compete with one another —families that hold the accomplishment of one person in the family against another. If studied empirically, I am sure that sociologists would find that these people are striving for white middle class values, are trying to change their orientation to life. That is, one's behavior, although lower class in measures of money, status and power, may be quite middle class in values. Children growing up in these families may totally miss the non-competitive nature of Black life if they only associate with peers who are raised in similar environments. They may never appreciate the sharing of information that goes on in school. The feeling that exists among Blacks is that to have a piece of information about the system is to share that information with other folk. What may be defined as "cheating" in middle class values, may be defined as sharing information in the Black experience. The Black culture, then, does not share the value then that Cora DuBois describes as "effort-optimism," in the American culture. DuBois maintains that the belief among Americans is that if I try hard, I will succeed. Taking this attitude, defeat is defined as a deficiency on the individual's part. Blacks, on the other hand, take the attitude that whether they succeed depends on the social system and how it operates, and also on the circumstances of the situation. It becomes necessary, then, to learn the operation of that system and deal with one's successes and failures in light of the social system. This, it seems to me, is another example of reality analysis—or the sociology of knowledge—that sociologists have in their inevitable way defined as a negative, defeatist pattern in Black life. But when sociologists analyze Black people beyond their reality analysis, they are continuously amazed at the ability of Black people to struggle and exist in a racist society. Coles (1967) makes the above point throughout his writings.

What I have suggested thus far is that the Black value system consists of a pattern of behavior centered around communal existentialism and a belief in the uniqueness of the individual. These two themes together make for individuals who are aware of their uniqueness but at the

same time concerned about what is happening to other Black people, particularly their families and friends.

## Humanistic Values or the Affective Existential Basis of Black Culture

Much has been written about the expressive nature of Black people. Research has ranged from a negative interpretation of this value, Rainwater (1966), to a very sensitive analysis of it as found in the works of Jones (1963, 1967) and Keil (1966). What we find is that Black people have not given up on their humanism—they are a feeling people, who express this feeling in various ways throughout the culture. One must see that the affective existence of Black people is very closely related to their values of shared existence and their emphasis on the unique individual.

In socializing their children, Black parents emphasize the right of the child to express himself, to show feelings of love and hate. The two are not separated. That is, one recognizes at an early age that he can both love and hate at the same time. He is taught diunital existence as Dixon and Foster (1971) define the phenomenon. Thus, there is little need to repress feelings of love and hate. Family life is not sedentary—not quiet, but rather, the child is born into an exciting, active environment. Several things may be going on at the same time, and as the child matures, he learns how to tune-in or tune-out on things that do not involve him at any given time.

A specific aspect of the expressive nature of Black culture is seen in the use of language. The way Black people talk—the rhythm of the language, the slangs, the deleting of verbs, are all examples of the expressive use of language. The significance of this is seen in the number of times white sociologists have missed the meaning of words and expressions by Black people, the number of times they have not understood the subtle meaning of words. For example, Rainwater (1966), in describing one Black mother's reaction to her child, missed the meaning of the whole conversation. The mother said that her child was bad. Rainwater took this to mean that the mother hated or disliked her child, rather than the fact that the mother was characterizing one aspect of the child—which says nothing about her love or hate for that child. (See Ladner's, 1971 interpretation of the same data.) Another misunderstanding of Black communication is the "ribbing" process discussed previously. Unless one is a part of Black culture, he will totally miss the positive aspects of "running" another person down or the educational importance of that process.

The expressive aspects of Black culture may also be seen in music, dance, literature, religion, and rituals of "root" medicine. Jones' *Blues People* (1963) and Keil's *Urban Blues* (1966) are excellent analyses of the blues as part and parcel of Black culture. The use of dance is seen by many as being basic to the way Black people express themselves.

The definition of the word "soul" is quite often defined in relationship to the ability of a person to dance—the rhythm of Black people's dance can be traced directly to its African heritage (Herskovits, 1941). Closely related to the dance is the expressive way that Blacks use their body. They walk in a unique way—and part of this uniqueness is that each person has his own special walk. He uses his body to give off certain identity stances.

Likewise, Black people show greater freedom in touching one another. This touching is not linked with sexual overtones, as sociologists would have us believe, but rather, there is no clear-cut distinction between my body and your body. Thus, in conversation, Blacks stand closer to one another than whites do; they use more gestures, and physical contact is greater. When the rave for sensitivity training started in the early 1960's, the emphasis was on people touching one another and not feeling ashamed about that feeling. I have always maintained that sensitivity training was not for Black folk, since we have always been and continue to be a feeling people who have no hang-ups about touching one another, about dealing with one another in a frank and open manner. All of this relates to the trusting values in the Black culture that grow directly out of the relationship that the young child has with his extended family and friends. As stated previously, the child learns at an early age to extend his personhood to others. He learns that there is no sharp demarcation between himself and others.

The feeling of Black people is further seen in the way time is viewed. There is the idea of CPT (Colored People Time) in the Black community. I am told that the concept of CPT is not unique with African Americans, but that there is the notion of PT (Puerto Rican Time); APT (African People Time) and many other cultural groups. Perhaps, it is only Occidentals who have a hang-up about time. Nevertheless, if one does not realize the use of time as viewed by Black people, he will continually arrive too early for meetings, parties, dates, etc. He will be upset about people not keeping appointments, getting to work "on time," or coming to class "on time." For a person not a part of the Black culture, the behavior of Black people, as it relates to time, may be defined as a lack of responsibility, concern or respect. If one operates within the values of a white culture, he cannot appreciate a person who sees no need to be "on tine"—to rush his existence, which is already limited by time. That is, Blacks see that man's existence on earth is limited by death. And since time waits for no one, why should one rush it? Therefore, a certain lack of concern about time exists. Things rarely start on time, and likewise, they rarely end on time. To operate adequately in a Black culture one must be free and loose with his time. People may stop by to visit without a formal invitation—they may or may not stay for dinner, but some type of food or drink will be served. Parties are rarely planned well in advance. Quite often when more

than five people are together for no specific purpose, a party will evolve. Families and friends get together often for social occasions. These may be weekend functions on Friday or Saturday, or they may be after church on Sunday. Whatever the day, a communal spirit of sharing and relaxing exists.

As one moves away from the community of shared Black existence, the situation changes. The more a Black person has internalized the values of white America, his beliefs in the values of the Black culture decreases. Therefore, **we** find middle class Black people who are overly concerned with punctuality, who cannot "understand" why Black people are always late, who cannot appreciate the affective nature of Black people. They may feel that Blacks are too overly familiar with them, do not respect their positions. However, these same Black people who profess a lack of knowledge of Black culture can be seen as still enjoying some of the behavior patterns of that culture. They still have their "soul" parties that may start off quite formal but break down to the natural rhythm of the Black culture as the evening wears on; they still eat "soul" food and listen to the music and dance the dance of Black people. What we fail to do in analyzing the attitudes of the Black middle class is to study their actual behavior patterns. I would maintain that the behavior of the Black middle class around other Black middle class people is quite similar to the behavior of Black people in general—and, thus, part and parcel of the same Black culture.

A final aspect of the expressive value theme in Black culture is seen in the use of clothes. The unique outfits of Black people are part of the expression of freedom both as a group and as an individual. The bright clothes in Black culture indicate the attitudes of the people toward life in general. That is, an overall optimism exists in Black culture, although the objective conditions of Blacks have been less than optimistic. What better way for a people to say "we love life," than in the clothes they wear and the way they wear their clothes. Although Blacks are oppressed by a capitalistic system that keeps them in low paid jobs, keeps them perpetually unemployed, keeps them in sub-standard housing, and keeps them trapped in an obsolete school system, their outlook is one of hope. And with this hope they continue to struggle for a better existence.

### The Diunital Relationship Between Good and Evil

The final dominant value or belief to be discussed in Black culture centers around the diunital relationship between good and evil. One is taught early that good will triumph over evil—that one must be fair in dealing with others. The proverb is: do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and likewise, do unto others as you have been done by others. To believe in the triumph of good over evil does not necessarily mean that one must be good all the

time. In fact, it becomes necessary to teach the child to protect himself, but never, for example, start a fight. To defend one's self against evil is very appropriate. To not do so, would question one's selfhood. Parents teach children not to let anyone take advantage of them. Also, being good does not mean that "goodness" is defined as an absolute concept, for Blacks believe, each individual has varying degrees of "goodness" and "evilness." What is analyzed, then, is the overall sense of the total character. A child can be both good and bad at the same time—that is, he is diunital. Consequently, when a parent tells a child that he is bad or evil, it does not mean that this is the final assessment of his character. The statement may only hold true for the moment, the day, or for several years. There is always the possibility that a person may change their character—be converted. Likewise, as stated earlier, to say that a child is bad does not mean that his parents do not love him. They may be simply making, what they define, as an objective statement. White social scientists have been puzzled by this factor in Black life. They have, therefore, come up with all kinds of hate syndromes in Black people that bares little resembles to the reality of the situation.

How one defines the relationship between good and evil in the world, is related to religious ideas. Since Blacks know that they are oppressed in this racist society by evil people, they see whites getting their just regards in the final analysis. For some Blacks this attitude takes on strictly a spiritual character. That is, some Blacks are willing to wait for God to punish the unjust. They bury themselves in thoughts of the after-life. On the other hand, the religious precepts may direct Black people toward positive action in ridding themselves of the oppressor. They may find passages in the Bible which suggest that one must take up the gun to kill his oppressor. Such was the case of Nat Turner, who saw his mission dictated by the Bible. Such is also the case as Blacks study and interpret the Book of Revelation in the Bible and the Armageddon—the place where the last decisive battle between the forces of good and evil will be fought. (See Cleage, l968, for a further discussion of these points.)

If Black people have defined their common oppressor as whites, then it stands to reason that they need not deal fairly with the white system. To do so would go against the basic beliefs in the goodness of Black people and the evilness of whites. Why should one respect those laws and beliefs that operate to the detriment of Black people? Blacks believe that one must become aware of the just laws of the universe and respect them, but unjust laws should be ignored or broken. Blacks who tend to ignore or break the unjust laws may find themselves in prison. People caught in this situation become political prisoners. They have lashed out against the oppressive racist powers that control Black people. Or, as Jackson (1970, 1972) and Davis (1971) maintain, they have taken from the system and its people

what they need to survive. There is, then, no clear-cut demarcation between good and evil. Each individual has varying degrees of both, and the struggle centers around overcoming the evil tendencies in individuals, groups, and societies. To struggle is to become aware of Mannheim's (1936) ideology and utopia. For nearly four hundred years Black people have been a part of the Utopian struggle. They have sought to change the unjust system of capitalistic exploitation. Now, they are becoming aware that the Armageddon is upon this system. They can see the end results of their struggle for equality and justice.

Now it stands to reason that there are some Black people who do not share these basic beliefs. There are Blacks who are willing to exploit other Blacks, who have internalized the white value system of conspicuous consumption, who get a psychic boost out of oppressing others. These people are found in both the Black middle class and lower class. The hustlers, who pry on poor Black people, the pimps, underworld characters and similar type people, operating in the Black community have the same values and behavior patterns as their white middle class counterpart. We tend, however, to forget that these people do not have the dominant values of the Black culture. But, rather, they are living off the efforts and struggles of the masses of Black people. They have the values of the middle class and operate their businesses as middle class white people do— everything for a profit. W. F. Whyte (1943) addresses himself to this problem in discussing street corner society. A great deal of the hustlers, pimps and racketeers live middle class life styles and relate well to their middle class neighbors.

I am not suggesting here, that Black people are content with the conditions that exist in this country—by no means. But, rather, they have not found a way to unite their forces, especially when Black aliens are in their environment, to fight the racist society. Furthermore, when efforts are made in the direction of political unification, the powers of the establishment are geared up to crush that effort. Historically, this can be seen in the cases of Nat Turner, Denmark Vessey, Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, Malcolm X, Medgar Evers, Martin Luther King Jr., Jon Huggins, Freddie Hampton, Sam Napiers, George Jackson, Rap Brown, to mention just a few. The situation is not a lack of political commitment, but the use of force by the white racist society has continued to crush such efforts. I am also not suggesting that a unified Black ideology now exists; in fact it does not, but rather, racists have killed or crushed, or imprisoned any person who moved in that direction. Further, Blacks in this country seem to be dedicated to a **"communal" democracy**. They have not been able to see, as a total group, the incongruities of democracy and capitalism. Until such awareness is present, Blacks will remain divided on a viable political ideology. They will

continue to try to survive in this country by way of the educational institution; that is, trying to improve their educational attainment so that they can move up in the system. Blacks fail to realize the significant fact that they only earn about sixty percent as much as whites in this country. Even when education is held constant, Blacks with a college degree only earn sixty percent as much as whites with a college degree. When Blacks can see the way the white racist system of control perpetuates itself, they will be able to see the incompatibility of democracy and capitalism. (See Allen, 1971). For, in the final analysis, most Blacks have never believed in the ideas of capitalism as much as they have believed in the destruction of evil, as proclaimed in the Bible.

## Summary and Conclusions

The dominant values of Black culture have been characterized as emphasizing communal existentialism, uniqueness of the individual, affective-humanistic behavior, the triumph of good over evil, and a belief in communal democracy. All of these beliefs and values fit together to make a unified whole. The Black culture stresses the uniqueness of the individual but at the same time one must be concerned about the welfare and happiness of his family and friends. Stress is placed on communal living and sharing. Although life is hard, one strives to balance the bitter and the sweet. Life cannot be taken too seriously because one may lose his purpose for existence in the first place. He may be destroyed by outside forces. At the same time, people work hard realizing, in the final analysis, their good work will pay off. Therefore, the behavior of Black people is a "hang loose" behavior. It does not pay to get uptight. Coupled, with all of this, is the expressive, sensitive, feelings of the people. The desire and ability to relate to people on a feeling basis, a senate feeling runs throughout family life; it is seen in music, art, literature, dance. It sets a tone in religion. God becomes a feeling God; religions become, indeed, the struggle between good and evil with each person possessing varying degrees of both. And, whatever the situation, whatever the demands, the Black culture is summed up in the phrase TCB—Take Care of Business.

## Note

Two footnotes in the original 1972 publication of this article, "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*" (Aframailibrary, Harlem, New York), were incorporated into the body of the paper in the present version re-published here.

Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose is the Founder and CEO of the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC).

## Bibliography

Allen, Robert. *Black Awakening in Capitalist America*. New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1969.

Anderson, John O. "The New Orleans Voodoo Ritual Dance and its Twentieth Century Survivals." *Southern Folklore Quarterly* 24, June 1960, pp. 135-143

Bateson, Gregory. *Naven*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1958.

Benedict, Ruth. *Patterns of Culture*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1934.

Berdie, R.F.B. "Playing the Dozens." *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 42, January 1947, pp. 120-121.

Billingsley, Andrew. *Black Families in White America*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc..

Blauner, Robert. "Black Culture: Myth or Reality?" in Peter I. Rose (editor), *Old Memories, New Hoods*. New York: Atherton Press, Inc., 1970.

Brewer, John Mason. *American Negro Folklore*. Chicago: Quadrangle, 1968.

Brown, Sterling A. "Negro Folk Expression," *Phylon*, 14, Spring 1953, pp. 50-60.

Childs, Gladwyn. *Umbundu Kinship and Character*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1949.

Cleage, Albert B. Jr. *The Black Messiah*. New York: Sheed and Ward, 1968.

Coles, Robert. *Children of Crisis: A Study of Courage and Fear*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1967.

Cooley, Charles Horton. *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1902.

Cone, James H. *Black Theology and Black Power*. New York: Seabury, 1969.

Cox, Oliver C. *Caste, Class, and Race*, New York: Modern Reader Paperbacks, 1948.

Cronin, E.D. *Black Moses*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1957.

Davis, Angela Y. *If They Come in the Morning*. New York: The New American Library, 1971.

Dixon, Vernon J, and Badi Foster, *Beyond Black or White*. Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1971

Dollard, John. *Caste and Class in a Southern Town*. New York: Doubleday Anchor Books, 1937.

Drake, St. Clair and Horace Cayton. *Black Metropolis*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1945.

DuBois, Cora. *The People of Alor*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1944

**Note:** This reference, below, was accidentally not included in the 1972 original version of this paper published by Aframailibrary, Harlem, New York:

DuBois, C, The Dominant Value Profile of American Culture. *American Anthropologist.* 57:6 December 1955: 1232-39.

Du Bois, W. E. B., *The Philadelphia Negro.* Philadelphia; Publishers for the University, 1899.

Du Bois, W. E. B., *The Souls of Black Folk.* Chicago: A, C. McClury and Company,1903.

Du Bois, W. E. B., *Dusk and Dawn.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1945

Fosold, Ralph. "Tense and the Form be in Black English." Language 45, December 1969, pp. 763-776

Franklin, John Hope. "The Two Worlds of Race: A Historical View," in Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark (editors) *The Negro American.* Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

Frazier, E. Franklin, *The Negro Family in the United States.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939.

Frazier, E. Franklin, *The Negro Family in the United States.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939.

Frazier, E. Franklin, *Black Bourgeoisie.* New York: Collier, 1957.

Herskovits, Melville. *The Myth of the Negro Past.* New York: Harper, 1941.

Hughes, Langston and Arna Bontemps, *The Book of Negro Folklore.* New York: Dodd, Mead, 1958.

Hughes, Langston, *The Book of Negro Humor.* New York: Dodd, Mead, 1966.

Jackson, George, *Soledad Brother.* New York: Bantom Books, 1970.

Jackson, George, *Blood in My Eye.* New York: Random House, 1972.

Johnson, Charles S., *Shadow of the Plantation.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1334.

Jones, Le Roi, *Blues People.* New York: William Morrow, 1963.

Jones, Le Roi, *Black Music.* New York: William Morrow, 1967.

Kardiner, Abram. *Psychological Frontiers of Society.* New York: Columbia University Press, 1945.

Keil, Charles. *Urban Blues.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966.

Ladner, Joyce A. *Tomorrow's Tomorrow.* New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971.

Locke, Alain. *The Negro and His Music.* Washington: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1936.

Mannheim, Karl. *Ideology and Utopia.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1936.

Mead, Margaret. *Coming of Age in Samoa.* New York: Mentor Books, New American Library, 1928

Mead, Margaret. *From the South Seas: Studies of Adolescence and Sex in Primitive Societies.* New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1939.

Mead, Margaret, *Children of Their Fathers: Growing up Among the Ngoni of Nyasaland,* New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press, 1960

Mead, Margaret, *Report of the National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders*, 1968.

Rainwater, Lee. "Crucible of Identity," in Talcott Parsons and Kenneth B. Clark (editors) *The Negro American,* Boston: Beacon Press, 1966.

Riesman, David. *The Lonely Crowd.* New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950.

Staples, Robert (editor). *The Black Family: Essays and Studies.* Belmont, Calif., Wadsworth Publishing Company, Inc. 1971.

Strauss, Anselm. "Names as Identity," in Bernard Meltzer *Symbolic Interaction: A Book of Readings.* New York: 1967.

Sullivan, Harry Stack. *The Interpersonal Theory of Psychiatry,* New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1953

Stewart, Williams, "Sociolinguistic Factors in the History of American Negro Dialectics." *Florida Foreign Language Reporter*, 5, No. 2 (1967).

White, Joseph. "Toward a Black Psychology." *Ebony Magazine* (October 1970), pp. 45-52.

Whiting, John and Irwin L. Child. *Child Training and Personality: A Cross Cultural Study*, New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1953.

Whyte, William Foote. *Street Corner Society.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943.