

Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose and the Emancipatory Embrace of the HIV Community

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Abstract

This article discusses the background, training, family and community roots, life mission focus, scholar-activism, and lifelong contributions of Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose. This includes a review of some of her publications and papers/speeches, as well as her founding of the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC) and the IBWC Annual Conference. Focus is placed on IBWC's place in HIV service delivery and care in Virginia, which is analyzed as exhibiting *emancipatory embrace*. *Emancipatory embrace* is a moral perspective wherein one receives humans eagerly and gladly by engaging humankind in liberative ways that free both self and community from bondage, oppression, and restraint. The *emancipatory embrace* of Dr. Rodgers-Rose has its roots in her family and in the community in which she spent her formative years. An examination of her formative years reveals how exposure to the Black community's survival and thriving under the umbrella of legal segregation set the tone for her mission and life work which exhibits *emancipatory embrace*. In addition, the work of her father, Reverend Carroll Rodgers, Sr., reflected *emancipatory embrace* as did the ministry of his father, Reverend James E. Rodgers (grandfather to La Francis)—as significant paternal family roots. With IBWC having a regional office in Norfolk, Virginia since 1991, and with the national office relocating to the Norfolk location in 1997, the Norfolk office intensified activism in its community. This included seeking funding through grant applications, allowing IBWC to launch several programs to impact the community, including culturally competent service delivery to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA); this is evidence of Dr. Rodgers-Rose's work as *emancipatory embrace*, while more broadly seeking to remedy health disparities. The article reviews key concepts emphasized in the writings of Dr. Rodgers-Rose such as *self-definition*, *self-identity*, *African spirituality*, and *beliefs of Ancestors*. Special attention is paid to Dr. Rodgers-Rose's pioneering presentation of the dominant Black cultural values: (1) *communal existentialism*, (2) *uniqueness of the individual*, (3) *affective-humanistic behavior*, and (4) *the diunital relationship between good and evil*. These values were first presented in her 1972 article, *The Dominant Values of Black Culture* (that is re-published in this September 2023 issue of the *Journal of Equity in Health* as Rodgers-Rose, 2023a). These values serve as a reminder of how important spirituality, family and community are in the lives of African descended people. Finally, it is asserted that an *emancipatory embrace* of the HIV/AIDS community by Black Christians must derive from consideration of these values, as a tenet elaborated upon in greater detail elsewhere (Lewis, 2018).

Keywords: La Francia Rodgers-Rose, HIV/AIDS, Black culture, values, emancipatory embrace, Christians

Introduction

La Francis Rodgers-Rose is a clinical sociologist who received a B.A. in Sociology and History from Morgan State College in 1958; a M.A. in Sociology and Anthropology from Fisk University in 1960; and a Ph.D. in Sociology and Social Psychology from the University of Iowa in 1964 (Rose, H., n.d., pp. 1-3). Dr. Rodgers-Rose has had a varied career. In addition to being a clinical Sociologist, she is an Academic, lecturer, community activist, and founder of the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC), an international non-profit networking organization growing out of the felt need to unite women of African descent (Rose, H., n.d., p. 6). Its mission is to bring forth exemplary models of African womanhood by self-definition, self-embrace and self-improvement through socio-political empowerment (Rose, H., n.d., p. 7). In 1997 through its Norfolk office, IBWC began offering community outreach programs in the area of health. The

first program was to serve people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). In subsequent years, based on the model of the HIV/AIDS programs, other programs were developed to address health care disparities impacting the African American community.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose is noteworthy because of her career as a sociologist, educator, and lecturer, and what her experience contributes to the fight against injustices in health care systems. Because of her academic and professional background, Dr. Rodgers-Rose brings a unique perspective to HIV services relative to stigma and cultural competence.

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Additionally, focusing on the study of the Black family and its women in particular, her leadership in inspiring and leading efforts for community uplift has served as an inspiration for many people of color.

Emancipatory embrace is a moral perspective wherein one receives humans eagerly and gladly by engaging humankind in liberative ways that free both self and community from bondage, oppression, and restraint. The life and work of Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose embody respectful relationships between individuals that are not condescending but rewarding for all involved. I first stumbled upon this concept of *emancipatory embrace* in my doctoral studies as I sought the inclusion of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in the broader Christian community, a place where many have been neglected.

I had received copies of many of her papers/speeches (Rodgers-Rose, 1972; 2006, 2009, 2014a, 2014b) and books (Rodgers-Rose, 1980; Rodger & Rodgers-Rose, 1985; Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993) and interviewed Dr. Rodgers-Rose to gain understanding about the context of her writings. During the conversation, she mentioned to me her work, “*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*” (Rodgers-Rose, 1972) and her desire to find a published copy of it. I searched and found what seemed to be the only public copy housed in a college library in New Jersey. The search led me to a document that presented the foundation of her work, as well as a manual of cultural competency years before the term was widely used in the HIV arena. Reading it opened my eyes to thoughts and actions that had been devalued by the dominant culture and ultimately absorbed by many in the Black community. *The Dominant Values of Black Culture* (Rodgers-Rose, 1972) offers a way of thinking about those of the African Diaspora who reside in the United States that steps beyond stereotypes and reaches commonalities within the diverse experiences of African Americans. At a time in the United States when an assault on authentic Black History is gaining acceptance and the possibility of Black children being force fed an inaccurate narrative, there is a need to re-read *The Dominant Values of Black Culture* (Rodgers-Rose, 1972). Concern for crime within Black communities causes frustrations that cloud views of potential existing there. Negative perspectives in the community about the community are emerging that are creating tense environments that hinder efforts to improve life for those living in African American communities. Reading “*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*” (Rodgers-Rose, 1972) will enhance the historical and sociological understanding of African descendants on American shores. With so few copies in circulation, this important work should be re-published for contemporary minds to engage (See re-publication as Rodgers-Rose, 2023a in this issue, pp. 8-18).

The Early Years as Context for Key Influences

The emancipatory embrace of Dr. Rodgers-Rose has its roots in her family and in the community in which she spent her formative years. The world was on the verge of its second global war and the United States was feeling the rumblings of an emerging sustained fight for equal rights for African Americans when **La Francis Audrey Rodgers** was born in Norfolk, Virginia on July 19, 1936. She was the fifth of seven children born to Carroll Mathews Rodgers, Sr. and Beulah Smith Rodgers.

Eventually the family moved across the Elizabeth River to Portsmouth, where La Francis graduated in 1954 from I.C. Norcom High School, the city’s lone high school for African Americans.

Growing up in the Jim Crow South had La Francis Rodgers facing racially segregated schools, separate water fountains, separate seating in public transportation and separate restrooms in public facilities—all supported by law. Unequal pay between Blacks and Whites was the norm and neighborhoods throughout the city were divided by ethnicity. Societal expectations were low for children of African-American descent, however, the home and community in which she was reared valued education and saw it as the way to progress. Her accomplishments stand in contrast to societal expectations of Black children in the first half of the twentieth century given financial and political restrictions in the Jim Crow South (Proctor, 1999, p. 28). Although she grew up in a racially segregated society, or maybe because of it, the Black community became the incubator from which a scholar-activist could emerge.

Family, church, and school comprised the community which facilitated her trajectory beyond the boundaries set by legal discrimination. Each contributed significantly to the ability of La Francis Rodgers, and those like her, to recognize and combat the negative notions that racism forwarded. Within the family, the church and the school were responses to racist thought that cultivated and reinforced self-esteem, spiritual values, and intellectual development. These responses afforded children of color the opportunity to overcome repressive Jim Crow practices and to exhibit care for one another, an important component of *emancipatory embrace*. The moral compass and ethical expression of those in a subjugated community are developed in an environment crafted and sustained by the existence of strong institutions which prepare its inhabitants to survive the onslaught from without.

Robert Franklin in *Crisis in The Village: Restoring Hope In African American Communities* identifies family, church and school as anchor institutions within the Black community: i.e. “*institutions that African Americans control and for which they set the agenda, determine the*

priorities, and pursue solutions with the necessary or available energy and resources" (Franklin, 2007, p. 16). These "anchor" institutions, which can also be seen as communities within themselves, have provided for African Americans historically a sense of self, a realization of community and the tools to carve out a meaningful life in a "strange land." In the face of laws and societal practices intent on destroying African American life, these institutions forwarded a constructive response (Paris, 1998; Lewis, 1991).

The communities which nurtured La Francis Rodgers stood within the broader community of Tidewater, also called Hampton Roads, and specifically South Hampton Roads, Virginia. As was the case throughout the segregated South, life for African Americans was a two-tiered experience. The first layer was interaction with a predominately White population which dominated places of political and economic power. The second was predominately Black and forced by social restrictions to respond to its oppression in creative and constructive ways. The Black community's survival and thriving under the umbrella of legal segregation set the tone for the work of La Francis Rodgers which would exhibit *emancipatory embrace*.

African American social activism was well developed by the 19th century in Hampton Roads, Virginia when in 1865 leaders in the Black community of Norfolk produced a document that advocated for voting rights. The document was titled *Equal Suffrage Address from the Colored Citizens of Norfolk, Va., to the People of the United States* and subtitled *Also an Account of the Agitation among the Colored People of Virginia for Equal Rights* (Lewis, 1991, pp. 11-14). Appealing to the Christianity and enlightenment of area Whites, this document forwarded a moral and patriotic argument on behalf of voting rights for Blacks in the South generally and in South Hampton Roads specifically. Fighting to further progress made by the impact of the Emancipation Proclamation, Black leadership desired to solidify its citizenship in the face of backlash from Whites. Knowing of the hostilities against its neighbors to the west and throughout the agrarian South, Blacks in Norfolk sought to ward off these atrocities approaching South Hampton Roads. In addition to advocating for voting rights, the authors of this document also laid out a strategy that would emanate from and give protection to the Black community. They proposed the formation of political, labor and land organizations. These three types of organizations would protect the interests of Blacks in decision making, employment status, and property ownership. The struggle for equal rights continued through the 19th and 20th centuries with varying degrees of success.

Home life for the Rodgers family was both difficult and rewarding. Part of this experience was enduring the

challenges of life with their father, Carroll Rodgers, Sr., who struggled with alcoholism. Another part of this experience was living with their mother, Beulah Smith Rodgers (The Virginian Pilot, 2009), who sought creative ways to survive the trials of maintaining a home in the face of her husband's erratic behavior. Despite the obstacles, the Rodgers children survived and thrived. The challenges the children faced elicited "gifts" that caused them to hurdle the inconsistencies of their life as a unit of siblings and to draw upon available resources to guide them on the road to achievement.

A Mission Focus

The source of this *sense of collective mission* of the Rodgers' children is not easy to identify. The families of both their mother and father contained people of faith and accomplishment. Much needs to be recorded about the contributions of the mother of the family, Beulah Smith Rodgers. Her strength and determination created for the children a sense of stability in an unstable world. Her influence is often heard in the speeches of her daughter La Francis Rodgers, as well as reflected in the wisdom she shares.

However, for the sake of this study that investigates *emancipatory embrace*, attention is given to the ministry of the father of the clan, Rev. Carroll Rodgers, Sr. After obtaining his own sobriety, Rev. Carroll Rodgers established an alcoholic recovery ministry which operated out of an office building and a couple of houses. The first such effort in South Hampton Roads and possibly one of the earliest in the southeast region of the United States, this ministry was the life's work of a man who was devoted to helping others access a process which culminated in freedom from the clutches of alcohol addiction. Additionally, Rev. Carroll Rodgers, Sr. offered other forms of assistance to those in need (New Journal and Guide, 1926; 1931a; 1931b; 1936; 1984).

Rev. Carroll Rodgers, Sr.'s *emancipatory embrace* can be seen as an extension of the ministry of his father, Reverend James E. Rodgers, one of the leading ministers of his time. It is here, with her paternal grandfather, Rev. J. E. Rodgers, that we will begin to examine the intersection of family and faith in the life of La Francis Rodgers-Rose.

Rev. James E. Rodgers was born in Princess Anne County, Virginia, (present day Virginia Beach, Virginia) to Rev. Simon and Mrs. Mariah Rodgers (New Journal and Guide, 1931a). Rev. James E. Rodgers had served as pastor of at least three churches by 1905 (New Journal and Guide, 1931a). By the time of his death in 1936, Rev. James E. Rodgers had emerged as a prominent minister in the Hampton Roads area (New Journal and Guide, 1936). Rev. James E. Rodgers was known as a skilled pastor and pulpiteer. He was held in high regard by clergy in the area,

serving in leadership positions and being sought for his counsel. The church statement released to the *New Journal and Guide*, the local “Negro” newspaper, at the time of Rev. Rodgers’ second call to First Baptist Church Campostella (Norfolk, Virginia) states:

“Rev. Rodgers is unassuming and quiet, but he is a deep thinker, profound reasoner, and a wonderful preacher and orator. He is held in high esteem among the brethren of the denomination and of the state. He is the oldest member of the Baptist Ministers Union by virtue of membership and is regarded by them as a man of splendid integrity” (*New Journal and Guide*, 1933).

Growing up under the influence of his father Rev. James Rodgers, Rev. Carroll Rodgers, Sr. developed a sense of the church providing service outside the walls of the sanctuary. He saw the value of social service agencies, yet he thought the Church could provide better treatment for those in need because the Church would offer a “personal touch” not found when dealing with institutions (*New Journal and Guide*, 1965). According to Rev. Carroll Rodgers, Sr., “Christians should be the friends of alcoholics and their families and not content themselves with just being critics. The same goes for the church and religious organizations” (*New Journal and Guide*, 1965). These ideas were at the forefront of Rev. Carroll Rodgers, Sr.’s establishment of the *Alcoholic Rescue Mission and Rehabilitation Center*. Not only did he challenge the church to improve its engagement with the unfortunate, but he lived his convictions outside the sanctuary and through this organization.

In the decades to come, Rev. Carroll Rodgers, Sr.’s daughter, La Francis, will live her convictions through her organization, the International Black Women’s Congress (IBWC)—with a *mission focus*.

For La Francis Audrey Rodgers, academia became the place not only of intellectual stimulation but of social consciousness expansion. Ultimately, it was the place that equipped her to embody her faith wherever she found herself. It was there that the progressiveness of her community intersected with *the mission focus* of her father and grandfather. Added to this was her sense of identity, independence and integrity, which laid the ground for a scholar-activist.

Evolution into a Scholar-Activist: Key Influences

La Francis graduated from I. C. Norcom High School in 1954. In September, she entered Morgan State College to study Sociology and Anthropology in preparation for a career in Law. However, she found in Sociology the academic discipline through which she could attend to the

well-being of peoples of the African Diaspora. When she arrived in Baltimore, the city was in the midst of protests for equal rights, as part of the American Civil Rights movement.

Baltimore had become one of the centers for student activism for desegregation. Discontent was felt throughout the Black community toward racial inequities. Morgan State students participated in community protests as early as the 1940s. In 1947 several hundred Morgan State students protested at the Maryland State capital in Annapolis for equality in educational funding. The following year Morgan students began a four-year picketing campaign to desegregate Ford’s Theater. However, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision by the United States Supreme Court stimulated a more intense response to racial segregation.

In 1953, the Baltimore chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) was formed. Early protests focused on lunch counters at low-cost variety stores. During that year, CORE linked with Morgan students who wanted to desegregate Northwood Shopping Center. Originally, student protests were sponsored by the social action committee of Morgan State’s student government. In 1955, the college’s administration no longer supported school sponsored protests. Thus, the Civic Interest Group (CIG) was formed as an independent organization of college students predominately but not exclusively from Morgan whose focus was the end of racial segregation (Nathan, 2011, p. 50). Desegregating Read’s Drug Stores was the primary focus of the emerging protest organization.

Read’s Drug Store was a chain of 37 establishments that allowed Blacks to shop but prevented them from eating at their lunch counters. A group of students from Morgan State College were denied service in 1954, which became the catalyst for city-wide sit-ins which lasted into the early 1960s. The local chapter of the Congress of Racial Equality (CORE) led the sit-ins, which occurred five years earlier than the better-known sit-ins in Greensboro, North Carolina (Baltimore Sun, 2011).

So socially conscious was the Morgan campus that Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivered the commencement address in 1958, the year of La Francis Audrey Rodgers’ graduation. His speech, titled “A Great Time To Be Alive”, challenged graduates to take what they had learned and experienced at Morgan to equip themselves to excel in a world of revolution, the breaking down of barriers around the globe.

La Francis Audrey Rodgers’ time at Morgan was an awakening of sorts. It was there she discovered her academic passion in sociology as well the roots of her activism on behalf of social justice. If her emergence at Morgan in the midst of social protests seemed accidental, destiny was in control when she chose the location of her

post-bachelor's studies.

In the fall of 1958, La Francis Rodgers went to Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee to study in the master's program in sociology and anthropology (Rose, H., n.d., p. 2). Once again, she found herself on historic grounds. Fisk was a meeting place for social protestors in Nashville.

One of the unsung heroes of the Civil Rights movement was the President of Fisk, Dr. Charles S. Johnson. His trajectory brought him to a progressive perspective for his time which in turn opened the campus of Fisk University to host an emerging community of college educated social justice workers. These particular students from various campuses in the Nashville area later provided significant leadership in the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), which became one of the major social justice organizations in the 1960s.

One of the byproducts of the work of Nashville area activists was to develop a climate of nurture for those focused on the fight for equality. This was key to Fisk becoming the meeting place for Rev. James Lawson and his work on behalf of social justice. Lawson's work and that of C. T. Vivian made Nashville, in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the hub for training students in non-violent protest. Among those students were giants in the struggle for equal justice in the 1960s and 1970s, including Diane Nash, James Bevel, Marion Berry, Bernard Lafayette and John Lewis. These student activists completed the Freedom Rides, started by Congress of Racial Equality (CORE), after the 1961 attack on the original riders in Alabama and played prominent roles in and provided the early leadership for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). La Francis Rodgers, during her time at Fisk, was living in the campus house of a faculty member on leave and found herself in the residence where several meetings for student protestors were held.

As these future Civil Rights icons headed further South as members of SNCC, La Francis Rodgers went to the nation's capital and married her college sweetheart before entering the doctoral program at the University of Iowa. As Mrs. La Francis Rodgers-Rose, she arrived at the University of Iowa as the only Black in the last cohort of Manford Kuhn's students in symbolic interaction (Rose, H., n.d., p. 2). Kuhn was the founder of a branch of sociology known as "the Iowa School" and he approached sociology emphasizing empirical techniques that could be used to investigate and generalize about human interaction and cognition (Rose, H., n.d., p. 2). Rodgers-Rose's work with the U.S. Census Bureau was an extension of her research interest and proved to be a foundation of her critique of the issue of race in American society (Rodgers & Rodgers-Rose, 1985, pp. 1-4).

Leaving Iowa with a Ph.D., Dr. Rodgers-Rose embarks upon a career in Academia. However, she does not leave behind her activist leanings, rather, she incorporates

activism into her expanding scholarship and preparation of a new generation of scholars.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose's Life of Service and Love for Humanity

To fulfill what she sees as her mission, to contribute to and make a difference in the lives of others, Dr. Rodgers-Rose has committed her entire being to a life of service. This service is not merely giving but purposeful, giving that effects nurture, empowerment, consciousness and love for all of humanity. Her love for humanity causes her to not be satisfied until the playing field is levelled, through sharing information and implementing strategies to help people overcome educational, political, social, psychological and medical disparities. This is the key to her community activities, her scholarship and her faith journey. Her work and even her existence are meaningful to the extent that quality of life is raised and the plight of people is improved. Dr. Rodgers-Rose shared, "For over twenty-five years, I have tried to provide unselfish, untiring and constant service to others." Dr. Rodgers-Rose represents those in the Church community whose passion to impact the community creates a need to move beyond ministry emanating from a single congregation to ministry given by like-minded people of various faith traditions. The undergirding of such efforts is similar to single church or congregational social ministry; however, such service is broader than a single ministry could launch or sustain. Justice work for a diverse community needs to come from a diverse base of advocates.

The work of Dr. Rodgers-Rose combines social justice and Afrocentric spirituality traditions. She advocates and lives her beliefs in the public square, working for equality within the Black community and among the broader society. Whether educating the community to the existence and sources of inequities, empowering oppressed communities to gather and challenge the status-quo or enabling marginalized communities to achieve a measure of accomplishment in the face of fierce opposition, her work is founded on her belief in the value of humanity and the need for sisterhood and brotherhood to achieve a more just society. Wherever her justice journey takes her the focus on Afrocentric history and culture raises self-esteem and self-identity among Black women and men, girls and boys as well as lays the groundwork for multi-ethnic collaboration in civic affairs.

The International Black Women's Congress (IBWC)

Though education in various settings is a calling that Dr. Rodgers-Rose fulfills, it is the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC) that stands as the vehicle through which her life of service can best be seen. It is the pinnacle of her efforts to bridge the gap between brothers and sisters and to elevate humanity around the globe. And yet, it was

scholarship that laid the groundwork for the organization and sharing information that was the chief recruitment tool. Additionally, her experiences in the state of New Jersey were the seedbed for the emergence of an organization that would connect women of color on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1973, Dr. Rodgers-Rose took a half-time teaching position in the African American Studies Program at Princeton University. The following year she offered her first course on the Black Woman. Not finding adequate resources in one volume, Dr. Rodgers-Rose began the work of developing a textbook based in the social sciences that would give voice to the intellect, achievements and concerns of Black women. Dr. Rodgers-Rose sought out Black female scholars to contribute to this planned edited volume. Several years after the initiation of the project, having been rejected by every other major publishing company, *The Black Woman* (Rodgers-Rose, 1980) was published by Sage Publications in 1980.

The Edited Volume, *The Black Woman*

At the time of its publication, *The Black Woman* (Rodgers-Rose, 1980) represented the most comprehensive work on the Black woman. Sixteen Black women scholars, some established and some emerging, contributed original works that reflected backgrounds in various academic disciplines—sociology, psychology, law, nursing, education, literature, theology, social work, and political science. The text identifies the Black woman and her role in the community, acknowledging the existence of her African heritage despite efforts in American society to demean or eliminate it. Its intent is to refute social science research conducted by those who were not familiar with nor interested in core values in the Black community and were incapable of understanding the meaning of data analyzed. Presenting the African American woman as the conveyor and shaper of African American culture, it acknowledges her influence in the community. The articles within propose her value in re-shaping the thinking of African Americans on issues of importance: politics, economics, health, sexuality, family, relationships, etc. She serves as the mid-wife, protector, and mentor of the process of creativity within a community that is often repressed by the broader society. Rodgers-Rose (1980) writes in the Preface to *The Black Woman* “We will understand the Black woman to the extent that we are able to concretize her general experiences...not only her contemporary experiences, but also the historical collective experiences of all Black women” (Rodgers-Rose, 1980, p. 9).

This volume exposes the broader population to the richness of the Black woman’s experience and her strength to struggle. The Black woman carves out space for her family/community to experience self-enlightenment that leads to self-empowerment. She hides and guards resources

so that her family has enough substance to survive in this strange land. She nurtures and effects healing to those who have been wounded on various levels. Dr. Rodgers-Rose writes of the Black woman’s strength to struggle: “...not only did she bring with her the ability to raise strong sons and daughters, but she also brought with her a sense of independence, a knowledge of warfare, and a commitment to the survival of her race” (Rodgers-Rose, 1980, p. 10).

Traces Institute Publications

While in New Jersey, Dr. Rodgers-Rose became involved in many community activities. In 1979 she founded Training Research and Community Educational Services Institute (TRACES), under whose umbrella was a publishing company, Traces Institute Publications.

Among the books published by TRACES Publications were *Strategies for Resolving Conflict in Black Male and Female Relationships* (1985), co-authored by Dr. Rose and her brother Dr. James T. Rodgers (Rodgers & Rodgers-Rose, 1985); and *River of Tears: The Politics of Black Women’s Health* (1993), co-edited by Dr. Rodgers-Rose and Dr. Delores P. Aldridge (Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993).

Strategies for Resolving Conflict in Black Male and Female Relationships

Strategies for Resolving Conflict in Black Male and Female Relationships (Rodgers & Rodgers-Rose, 1985) was a collaborative effort between Dr. Dr. Rodgers-Rose and her brother, the late James T. Rodgers, counselor and parapsychologist.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose’s work with the United States Census Bureau informed her that African Americans were undercounted; her point of reference was the 1980 census. It was estimated that ten percent of African Americans were missed, with more males than females being absent from the final counts. Three times as many men were missed than women. This undercounting of African American males created a false perception of the absence of Black men from their families, which has now become a self-fulfilling prophecy. Dr. Rodgers-Rose’s writes, “The census count for the age group 20-44 years would suggest a sex ratio of 857 men to 1000 women. However, the corrected count would suggest a sex ratio of 958 per 1000.” She further writes, “Finally, we have no way of knowing the number of Black men who are gay, but it is suggested that the number of Black women who are lesbian may offset that number whatever it is” (Rodgers-Rose, 1980, p. 10).

Strategies for Resolving Conflict in Black Male and Female Relationships (Rodgers & Rodgers-Rose, 1985) continued Dr. Rodgers-Rose’s emphasis on healing the community from within and bringing about a holism by uniting the parts as opposed to eliminating what is

undesirable. This work is the written form of a workshop the two did together for five years. The male-female dialogue which places the responsibility for healthy relations on both genders destroys the barrier between men and women that is very often erected from a place of hurt and pain. Mutual responsibility not only promotes equality, but also provides a place where gender differences can be confronted, discussed and ultimately overcome. Mutual responsibility also promotes mutual value, as individuals navigate through interpersonal relationships. Being part of the process that refutes the myths that inform unhealthy relationships makes one aware of the danger of basing actions and ideas on falsehoods and can fuel the search for truth in other areas. Additionally, *Strategies for Resolving Conflict in Black Male and Female Relationships* (Rodgers & Rodgers-Rose, 1985) gives the reader permission and support to take the risks involved in seeking and finding common ground. It is common ground relative to perceptions and practices within society that provides an effective basis from which individuals can negotiate space, how to live peacefully with one another.

Dr. James Rodgers in his chapter, *Psychological and Spiritual Dynamics in Black Male/Female Relationships: Individual Encounters*, discusses what he calls the attack syndrome. It refers to the attitude that some people who are alone have become bitter and hostile over hurt that was experienced in relationships. This hurt causes them to try to get even by “striking out” at those who try to get close. Dr. Rodgers suggests that if single people are to be prepared for new relationships, they must resolve the hurt. While Dr. Rodgers is speaking about romantic relationships there is a correlation between this and any pain induced barrier between human beings. Unresolved hurt not only prevents healthy romantic encounters, but it also prevents healthy interactions in various other relationships: with siblings, with peers, with co-laborers, with those in authority, etc. And where hurt is attached to sexual activity, whether it was consensual or intrusive, if that hurt is not resolved, resentment towards one individual/group or another could be prevalent (Rodgers & Rodgers-Rose, 1985).

River of Tears: The Politics of Black Women’s Health

River of Tears: The Politics of Black Women’s Health (Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993) was co-edited by Dr. Rodgers-Rose and Dr. Delores P. Aldridge, the Grace Towns Hamilton Professor of Sociology and African American Studies Emeritus, Emory College of Arts and sciences, Emory University, Atlanta, Georgia.

This work grew out of presentations given at the 5th National Conference of the International Black Women’s Congress (IBWC) held September 22-24, 1989. The Introduction states the emphasis of the annual gathering as follows: “The conference focused on the politics of Black women’s health, analyzing the impact of a structurally

unjust system on our lives. Looking at areas such as increasing poverty and associated homelessness, disparities in accessing adequate health care, the experience of abuse among Black women and various health challenges, the conference voiced the concerns of Black women nationally” (Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993).

The edited volume is a compilation of transcribed tapes and formal papers from presenters, a collection of data and resources to prevent Black women from suffering in silence. *River of Tears: The Politics of Black Women’s Health* (Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993) is a raising of consciousness through the collective experiences of Black women. The book is divided into six parts that address various topics relative to health: An Overview of the Health of Black Women; Barriers to Health; Health of Older Women; Violence against Women; and Homelessness and Spiritual Wholeness.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose’s chapter is titled, “Every Tub Must Sit on its Own Bottom.” Dr. Rodgers-Rose discusses health disparities suffered by Black women and the link between physical and mental health. A study is referenced that suggests that half of Black women experience severe levels of psychological distress, which in turn negatively impacts their physical well-being. Dr. Rodgers-Rose often challenges the results of studies conducted with African American subjects which do not consider their history and culture. In this case, she raises two issues. First, the outlook of Blacks differs from their White counterparts. She notes that Blacks with positive outlooks during slavery were characterized as “happy darkies” without considering their outlook as a way of surviving atrocities without losing humanity. Second, Dr. Rodgers-Rose noted that prior to the 1960 census the majority of United States citizens over the age of 100 were African Americans, as less than 20% of the population accounted for more than 50% of centenarians (Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993). Dr. Rodgers-Rose suggests that what is seen as psychological distress might simply be an indication that Black women are facing challenges, which create difficulties; but what is not being considered is the ways in which they cope and the results of their coping strategies. Dr. Rodgers-Rose further suggests that the spirituality of Black women accounts for their ability to cope and that traditional African spirituality in its Diasporic forms should be considered when analyzing the quality of life of Black women. Likewise, health outcomes of Black women can improve, Dr. Rodgers-Rose asserts, if links to the centrality of African civilization and African spirituality are established and maintained (Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993).

The perspectives and scholarship presented in the publications of Rodgers-Rose beg further action to maximize education and empowerment within her community. Raising collective voices from the experiences of Black women in edited scholarly volumes speaks to a limited audience. Raising collective action effecting the

change advocated by those voices impact more broadly the communities of which the publications speak. Dr. Rodgers-Rose lays the groundwork for community interventions best based in an organizational structure. An organization, the International Black Women's Congress, will emerge to satisfy the need to serve communities plagued with injustice.

Work of The International Black Women's Congress

Of note, this section evolved from ongoing formal dialogue over a six-year period with Dr. Rodgers-Rose who shared insights on the methods and motivation that led to the establishment of the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC); and dialogue covered the embrace of service to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) by the Norfolk branch. Conversations based on Dr. Rodgers-Rose's recollections, personal narrative, papers/speeches, and publications as well as IBWC internal documents were all considered. Represented, herein, are both the reflections of Dr. Rodgers-Rose and my analysis. Additional program information was provided by Dr. Rodgers-Rose's sister, Cynthia Rodgers, Director of Programs at IBWC's Norfolk Office.

In an effort to connect with like-minded women of African descent, to create a collective voice of often hidden and suppressed concerns and dismissed scholarship, Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose founded the International Black Woman's Congress (IBWC) in Newark, New Jersey in 1983. The International Black Women's Congress (IBWC) is a networking organization that by its very existence refutes negative stereotypes of Black women and provides for future generations a resource for excellence in academic and social achievement. The mission statement of IBWC is: "The International Black Women's Congress is a global community of women of African descent bound by our ancestral spirituality. Our vision is to bring forth exemplary models of African Womanhood by defining ourselves, embracing ourselves and improving ourselves through social, political and economic empowerment." IBWC, especially its annual conferences, provides forums focusing on poverty, racism, patriarchy, sexism and the many "isms" that divide societies and encumber and sometimes destroy the lives of individuals. IBWC provides "space" for women of African descent to define themselves and to prioritize their issues. "The founding of the International Black Women's Congress in 1983 is probably my most cherished and significant experience, challenge and accomplishment. This has been a labor of love".

Dr. Rodgers-Rose's belief that social change is necessary to improve the plight of Black women and society generally is realized through the programs and projects launched by IBWC and its membership.

Coordinated by a future IBWC president, Dr. Sharon Brown Bailey, a 1984 meeting held in Denver, Colorado, framed the processes by which IBWC would hold future annual gatherings. Women gathered in Denver to prepare to attend the 1985 International Women's Conference in Nairobi, Kenya. Dr. Rodgers-Rose led a delegation of thirty-five women to the Kenya meeting. The networking that occurred in Denver laid the foundation for what would be known as IBWC's Annual Conference, which proved to be a place of refreshment, inspiration, empowerment and consciousness building, along with the affirmation of sisterhood.

Since the mid-1980s, IBWC has held annual issue-focused conferences, many of which received grant funding. In 1994, the organization was awarded an Agency for Health Policy and Research, Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) grant to hold a conference on "Establishing a Research and Policy Agenda for Black Women's Health." Four years later, the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) granted funds for IBWC to hold a conference in four regions around the country on "Improving the Health Status of Black Women." IBWC also received co-sponsorship for these conferences from: the DHHS Office on Women's Health; Region II and III Office of Minority Health; Region II Office on Health in Maryland, New Jersey; and the Ohio and the Virginia State Offices on Minority Health. In that same year, IBWC received a grant from the Komen and Cleveland Foundations which co-sponsored the 2001 conference on Black Women and Breast Cancer. In 2003, the organization received a grant from DHHS Office on Women and Health to hold a conference on Black women and heart disease. The following year, the organization received a grant from GovWorks to hold educational seminars in the African American community on the need for organ and tissue donation.

In addition to its annual conferences, the organization has contributed to initiatives on the African continent. IBWC has given support to the SOS Children's Village in Gambia and to a maternal and child health program in Guinea, West Africa. A *Neighbor-to-Neighbor* component, with special emphasis on HIV prevention, was added to this program in 2004.

The 1990s moved the International Black Women's Congress (IBWC) into the area of community service, both nationally and on the African continent. *The Genesis Rites of Passage Program*, focused on girls ages eleven through seventeen, supported consciousness raising and personal and community responsibility through connection to African culture and heritage.

Since 1991, IBWC has had a regional office in Norfolk, Virginia, and in 1997 the national office relocated to the Norfolk location. Moving into the 21st century, IBWC announced its focus on addressing increasing poverty and

declining health which impacted the well-being of Black families. Its mission is “to bring forth exemplary models of African womanhood by defining ourselves and improving ourselves through social, economic and political empowerment.” Consequently, the Norfolk office intensified activism in its community. Seeking funding through grant applications, IBWC launched several programs to impact the community, many of which served people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA). IBWC became one of the agencies in the Hampton Roads area working to reduce HIV infection. Each organization has its own unique position in the HIV/AIDS arena in Hampton Roads. IBWC has identified its place in HIV/AIDS services which will be discussed in a later section. The agency relies primarily on grant funding to join the group of agencies serving communities in specific programs relative to HIV transmission.

IBWC’s Place in Culturally Competent HIV Service Delivery and Care

The International Black Women’s Congress (IBWC) Norfolk office, located in the downtown area, is in the heart of the historical African American community. It is surrounded by six low-income family housing sites, which are predominately African American.

The organization’s service philosophy is to implement an integrative, holistic approach to care that is culturally sensitive, compassionate and non-judgmental. Its aim is to empower consumers, to promote self-determination and a sense of personal control in managing challenges. This is especially needed by African Americans living in high-risk communities impacted by health disparities and by psychosocial issues which can hinder health care choices. Its philosophy is realized by joining a group of community-based organization’s whose focus is to serve persons living with HIV and AIDS. IBWC delivers HIV services to diverse populations—ethnically, geographically, and demographically. Though its clients are primarily African Americans, individuals of several ethnic groups have been served and individuals from any ethnic group are welcomed by the agency. IBWC provides services in the Greater Hampton Roads area with a focus on South Hampton Roads: the cities of Norfolk, Portsmouth, Virginia Beach, and Chesapeake. IBWC also serves the city of Suffolk. At various times, IBWC has maintained offices in Norfolk, Portsmouth and Suffolk. Its name might suggest the International Black Women’s Congress is an organization that only serves women, however that perception is not true. Both the staff and client roster have female, male and transgendered individuals. Additionally, unemployed, underemployed and employed clients are served by IBWC, as well as persons with all levels of educational attainments.

IBWC staff receives training in cultural competency which enables it to be knowledgeable of, sensitive to and

effective with its diverse population. Given the myriad of psychosocial issues that hinder African Americans from accessing adequate health care services generally, those individuals in the community diagnosed with HIV/AIDS receive yet another complication to their lives. The staff at IBWC, representative of the various segments of the community it serves, offers a welcoming space to those in need. Additionally, because the organization is relatively small it connects well with those who desire a more intimate family-like setting or a less complex structure than would be found in larger organizations.

The work of IBWC in the field of HIV prevention and services has provided a platform for other health related efforts. Following from her heart transplant in 2000, Dr. Rose has launched heart awareness and has sponsored an annual fundraiser.

IBWC is an extension of Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose’s commitment to impact positively the lives of those in the African American community and healing the community from within.

Through HIV prevention and direct services efforts, the agency addresses on a daily basis the issues of discrimination and poverty, especially when it comes to health care disparities. In fact, disparities in several areas have been a focus of IBWC, such as: adequate affordable housing, which contributes to homelessness; the availability of grocery stores, which impacts nutrition and is key in the development of children, while impacting educational outcomes; and the proximity of health care facilities to minorities, which impacts both access to services and information. All of these disparities have driven IBWC to maintain its position as one of the agencies in its area providing services to people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA), while also addressing other issues. For example, work in the HIV arena has exposed yet another layer of the impact of physical and verbal abuse on the lives of African American women and their families.

Through IBWC, Dr. Rodgers-Rose has: carved out a space for her family and community to experience self-empowerment; guarded the use of resources to enhance survival in this unjust society; and nurtured and effected healing, not only with regard to HIV but each contributing factor to HIV transmission. She has embraced, institutionally, the historical role of the Black woman: i.e., that of raising strong families and thereby strong communities. Dr. Rodgers-Rose has brought with her a sense of independence, a knowledge of warfare, and a commitment to the survival of her people.

Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose lives her faith individually and organizationally through IBWC. The organization provides her space, research sources, connection with the community, and a dependable source of scholars focused on social justice. Her belief in justice has propelled her into being the guiding force behind the International Black Women’s Congress (IBWC).

Papers and Speeches: A Focus on Self-Definition as Key to Culturally Competent Care, Self-Identity, African Spirituality, Health Disparities, and Health

The National Center for Cultural Competence, Georgetown University defines culture as “An integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communications, languages, practices, beliefs, values, customs, courtesies, rituals, manners of interacting, roles, relationships, and expected behaviors of a racial, ethnic, religious or social group; the ability to transmit the above to succeeding generations; is dynamic in nature (Georgetown University, n.d.). Culture encompasses a people’s way of life, that which binds individuals into groups that develop and co-exist over time. It is the living record of a communal journey, as extraordinary as complex systems of communication and rituals and as ordinary, though not invaluable, as the use of colloquialisms and preparing and bringing food to the homes of the ill or bereaved.

An emphasis in the HIV/AIDS arena is culturally competent care, which considers and values sensitivities specific to a group within the continuum of care. The Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services administers funds for the treatment and care of persons living with HIV disease, which includes AIDS. HRSA defines cultural competency as “congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together to enable systems, agencies and professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations” (Cross, et al., 1989, p. 13). If care, which includes the dissemination of information, is not culturally sensitive and relevant to those served, then the impact of prevention efforts is minimized. Enhancing anti-HIV transmission strategies encompasses the following: informing the community of the wide scope of transmission possibilities; dispelling the myth that HIV disease is restricted to any group of people; and covering advances in medicine effectiveness that permit creating a vast number of people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) who have undetectable viral loads, while virtually removing the possibility of transmitting HIV.

Cultural competency, however, is not a reality without an understanding of the culture of constituents served. One of the failings of cultural competency is working from the definition of a culture constructed outside of a given community. This bestowing of meaning misses cultural nuances and communal “spirit” and thus creates strategies that do not intersect effectively nor constructively with communities served. Cultural models established by those outside African American communities very often perpetuate stereotypes that paint false pictures of intercommunal perceptions and motivations and neglect to recognize patterns of interactions that not only inform but protect Black communities from that which does it harm. It casts a net of oppression that reinforces racist ideals and that

prevents Blacks from receiving, in this case, adequate health care. Health disparities are not only evident in the physical proximity of care facilities to Black communities nor in the high cost of health care, but also in the lack of information that reaches the masses which would empower members of Black communities to move past barriers. These problems could be eradicated by cultural competence, based on cultural meanings derived from within the impacted community. *Self-definition is key to culturally competent care.*

Self-definition occurs often in the work of Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose. It was the chief factor in the development of *The Black Woman* (Rodgers-Rose, 1980), the cause for the initiation of the edited volume book project, and the reason for inviting the women who contributed their scholarship to the edited work. Likewise, in *Strategies for Resolving Conflict in Black Male and Female Relationships* (Rodgers & Rodgers-Rose, 1985), Dr. Rodgers-Rose and her brother Dr. James Rodgers described and explained essential components of male-female relationships and offered remedies to challenges as communal insiders. This work moves against the practice of Eurocentric prescriptions on how to live as Blacks in America as being normative. Additionally, in *River of Tears: The Politics of Black Women’s Health* (Aldridge & Rodgers-Rose, 1993), there is the raising of issues relative to health disparities among African American women; these were best articulated by scholars who had themselves confronted barriers to care based on race and ethnicity as well as gender.

In each instance of her publications, Dr. Rodgers-Rose valued and focused on *ethnic self-definition, the ability of people to describe and explain their lives*. Because in Dr. Rodgers-Rose’s case, this self-definition occurred in the context of the social sciences, this work became part of the body of work accessible to scholars and available to train professionals who would engage Blacks throughout society. Having a group of “aware” people among those providing services to the African American community would serve as a bridge over disparities in health care service throughout the United States.

In her papers/speeches, Dr. Rodgers-Rose not only constructs *self-definitions* but also launches assaults against those bent on destroying African culture.

In the paper/speech “*What We Don’t Know About Africa: Black Cultural Unity*” (Rodgers-Rose, 2014a), Dr. Rodgers-Rose addresses the issue of efforts to dismantle the existence and value of African society in the broader society. She challenges people of the Diaspora to take back the values and culture that connect African Americans to the “Motherland” and to each other. Dr. Rodgers-Rose sees Black culture and history as the process of placing all humanity into a real and proper perspective, for understanding African roots is also understanding the roots of all humanity, since the earliest humans lived have been discovered on the African continent (e.g., Gibbons, 2010).

At the basis of African culture is a spirituality which recognizes no separation between the material and spiritual world, which fosters care for one another—even to the extent of sacrifice. African values pass through a matrilineal descent society, in which women’s life-giving abilities are respected, even revered. In the earliest African societies, women held positions of power that did not threaten their male counterparts. Thus, African societies were true reflections of a just society, one based on the principles of Ma’at: truth, justice and righteousness (e.g., van Blerk, 2018). Dr. Rodgers-Rose (2014a) goes on to list several beliefs of the Ancestors:

- Anyone can be transformed through learning directed toward moral wisdom in the service of others.
- Human nature is divine and essentially good as a result of the assumption of a shared nature with God.
- The human soul comes from the Creator and is symbolized as the vital breath of life.
- Resurrection of the soul, which leads to reverence of the Ancestors.
- Humans are not limited to one’s circumstance. Human lives are continually created anew.
- Africans believe in the natural sequence of cause and effect.
- The most important thing in life is to have self-knowledge, which leads to perfectibility.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose believes that *African spirituality effects appropriate self-definition and identity for African descended peoples* and defeats the chaos caused by those who would minimize those who have their roots in the Motherland.

The theme of African spirituality continues in the paper/speech, “*Do Lord Remember Me: Reconstructing Spirituality in The Black Community*” (Rodgers-Rose, 2009), as Dr. Rodgers-Rose furthers her discussion on the societal deconstruction of African culture, values and spirituality, and the strength of Black communities. These were easily recognized, historically, in communities where care for one another, fair treatment is evident. These values over time have been usurped in Black communities by the values of the dominant culture which focuses on individualism, materialism and violence, as forces used to conquer and control both lands and peoples. These “selfish” values have been absorbed by many in the Black community to its detriment, fragmenting a people that in many instances is turning on itself. Dr. Rodgers-Rose is calling for an embrace of traditional African values so that Black communities can return to themselves. Otherwise, she sees further confusion and fragmentation and deteriorating health for a people who have moved far from their center.

As if the struggle for equality was for the right to live like the oppressor, Dr. Rodgers-Rose (2009) identifies the end of the 1960s Black Revolution Movement as the point

at which a massive turning away from African communal spirituality reached its highest point. She assesses a shift in the movement from its beginnings to its latter days “from human rights to civil rights; from justice to integration; from a viable Black community to one of abandonment.” Dr. Rodgers-Rose notes that African Americans abandoned behaviors and values that contributed to a history of four centuries of survival amidst often violent oppression during slavery, Reconstruction, Jim Crow and legal segregation which lasted through the 1960s. She identifies four areas in which African Americans began to doubt what had been working in and for their community, historically. First, the strength and viability of the Black family, matrifocal and extended, was questioned. Second, the healthiness of male female relationships was suspect, and trust was said to have eroded. Third, the relevance of spirit-filled, social justice focused religious services were considered irrelevant. Fourth, community institutions—banks, hospitals, schools, etc.—were deemed inefficient. These vast uncertainties soon became self-fulfilling prophecies, as confidence in these institutions diminished to the extent that Black communities became largely devoid of strong families, healthy relationships, places of worship and viable businesses. These negative stereotypes expanded from shared personal conversations to taught academic topics to impacted public policy. Soon normative, these negative perceptions became the expectations of many post-civil rights movement babies. Once that occurred all kinds of chaos proliferated in Black communities, least of which is fratricide.

The appropriation of traditional African spirituality by Dr. Rodgers-Rose offers a sense of hope to the hopeless. Because these concepts are African, and Africans are humans that exist on the earth, these concepts will benefit all of humanity worldwide. Those living with HIV and AIDS and those who love and care for them can gain a sense of encouragement and empowerment from embracing the tenets proposed by Dr. Rodgers-Rose. Within these core beliefs is the substance needed to weather the storms of oppression, neglect and objectification.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose sees the correlation between spirituality and physical health and self-identity as resistance against health care disparities. In the paper/speech, “Matters of the Heart: Reconstructing Black Women’s Health” (Rodgers-Rose, 2006), Dr. Rodgers-Rose connects health care with human freedom, asserting that access to care is an issue of freedom. A lack of concern for the health of African Americans is a vestige of slavery, a continuation of a view of African descended peoples as chattel-property.

The denial of health care, sanitary living and work environments and the rape of black females evident during the era of slavery can be seen in Black communities in the 21st century. This physical health neglect produces severe

and pervasive mental and emotional problems for many in the Black community, posits Rodgers-Rose (2006). Black women, she says “experience chronic depression symptoms and feelings of powerlessness; suffer more allergies and pelvic inflammatory diseases; two thirds of them over sixty-five years of age have hypertension; and suffer from various forms of racism every day” (Rodgers-Rose, 2006). Black women are twenty-five times more likely to be diagnosed with HIV than their White counterparts and twenty-two times more likely to die from complications from AIDS, writes Rodgers-Rose (2006). Heart disease, diabetes and stroke impact Black women disproportionately, argues Rodgers-Rose (2006), and can be managed by the implementation of prevention strategies. Dr. Rodgers-Rose points to cultural values as an avenue to improved health care outcomes for Black women. Culturally sensitive health care providers enhance the likelihood of receiving effectively communicated information on relevant issues, including methods of treatment, available medications, nutritional concerns and health conditions prevalent in the African American community and in Black women, specifically.

Concerning health, Dr. Rodgers-Rose sees the value of spirituality to improved quality of life. She suggests the establishment of a peaceful environment, whether an entire living area or a meditation room, to reduce stress in the mind and body. “A mind at peace with itself protects the body’s health no matter what we have experienced. There is a part of us that is untouched, unaffected and whole”(Rodgers-Rose, 2006).

Dr. Rodgers-Rose continues her dialogue on spirituality and self-identity in the paper/speech “*Black Women, Obesity, Depression and Mental and Physical Abuse*” (Rodgers-Rose, 2014b) in which she equates health disparities to fundamental structural inequities in health care systems. Dr. Rodgers-Rose proposes that an accurate sense of self is one step that can empower Black women to avoid the traps of obesity, depression, mental and physical abuse. She proposes knowledge of the Ancestors and the Ancestors’ beliefs and practices will provide a spiritual foundation that will “center” women which will lead to the realization of a healthy self-image and thus impact positively the health and welfare of Black women as a community.

Rodgers-Rose’s 1972 Pioneering Contribution of “The Dominant Values of Black Culture”

Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose was impacting the lives of African Americans with Afrocentric themes, thereby planting seeds that would impart to Black communities a love for and experience with the narrative that would rebuild their communities. This is a work she has been doing since her early days in academia.

However, it was an article she published in 1972, “*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*” (Rodgers-Rose, 1972) that contributes to self-definition, self-identity and ethnic acceptance. In some ways this article embodies the concerns of Asa Hilliard III, that Black men and women construct Afrocentric education as a way of improving a communal sense of self.

Sometime in the early 1970s, Dr. Rodgers-Rose revisited an article written by the anthropologist Cora DuBois (1903-1991). The article, “The Dominant Profile of American Culture” (DuBois, 1955), was published in December 1955 by Cora DuBois which identifies key components of the value system of middle-class Americans. This value system, Cora DuBois (1955) argues, is rooted in the Protestant work ethic and eighteenth-century rationalism. DuBois’ writing is not the result of scientific investigation but anthropological observation. DuBois (1955) suggests sources of findings of scientific investigation for those seeking it. However, she sees the value of this work as the organizing and synthesizing of one hundred twenty years of insights and dialogues on American values.

Cora DuBois’ (1955) article, “The Dominant Profile of American Culture,” is based on two assumptions. First, no viable value system can by nature of being a system tolerate logical contraries. Second, there is a strain for consistency among the factitious contradictions that may be inherent in any value system. DuBois (1955) proposes four major premises that undergird middle class values: a universe that is mechanistically conceived; a universe that is mastered by man; the equality of men; and man’s perfectibility. From these four premises DuBois (1955) suggests three focal values, values about which numerous specific values cluster: effort-optimism, material well-being, and conformity. Each of these values to varying extents rests upon each of the premises and in turn comprise a series of values and directives that are interrelated.

- *Effort-Optimism* is valuing the acquisition of skills as being worthwhile and derives from the premise of man’s perfectibility. Cora DuBois’ (1955) discussion centers on work, the vehicle through which humans achieve goals. Work in this context includes but is more than labor for wages, but any deed or task that brings a desired result. In this case recreation, normally thought of as the opposite of work, can be considered work.
- *Material Well-Being* is a result or by product of work, the optimistic end of effort (DuBois, 1955). Material well-being is demonstrated in the dependence on and expectation of the American standard of living. Not to be confused with materialism, Cora DuBois (1955), in this value system, sees material well-being not as the concentration on extravagance but the proof of the success or achievement of work. What outsiders see as materialism in a derogatory sense, Americans within this system see as the result of a successful system.

- *Conformity* derives from the premise of man's equality and hinges on the impossibility of an individual mastering a socio-political environment alone (DuBois, 1955). For many ventures, cooperation with other human beings is necessary for success. A society benefits from persons who are focused on good citizenship. Self-cultivation in the American value system, says Cora DuBois, is less about the achievement of uniqueness than it is about the achievement of similarity.

The Cora DuBois (1955) article goes on to discuss various other issues relative to the American value system and the causes for changes in it. However, it is the identification of four values that takes Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose on a journey that culminates in the creation of a significant cultural document. Realizing that Cora DuBois' (1955) work was a discussion of White middle-class values and not representative of the lives of several ethnicities, chiefly African Americans, Dr. Rodgers-Rose set out to investigate the experiences of African Americans. The result is "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*" published in 1972 (re-published in this issue of the *Journal of Equity in Health* as Rodgers-Rose, 2023a, pp. 8-18).

In the Introduction to "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*," Dr. Rodgers-Rose acknowledges that what is known about Black culture has come from study in literature, music, poetry and history. This type of study is devoid of empirical evidence. There is no way to test the scientific validity of the information. She calls for scholars to develop characteristics of Black culture using the methodology of the social sciences. Discussions of the culture of Black people from the knowledge of the researchers through field observations is needed. Dominant values and themes must be identified, and cultural patterns must be characterized.

In "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*," Dr. Rodgers-Rose establishes that culture is the totality of what is learned by individuals as members of a society. The concept of Black culture can be proved by analysis of three basic institutions: family, religion and educational institutions, given that they have been separate and different from their counterparts in the general society.

She begins with examining how the socialization process leads to specific values in Black culture. Culture is learned through the influence of significant individuals: parents, extended family and respected friends. What is noteworthy in Black culture is that parents teach values often contradictory to and at least different than values in general society.

Dr. Rodgers-Rose devotes the paper, "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*," to the socialization process. Socialization encompasses the daily behavior of Black people. This behavior leads to values in Black culture. Her secondary interest is examining the role of parents in perpetuating culture within Black communities. Among the

dominant values identified are: (1) *Communal Existentialism*; (2) *Uniqueness of the Individual*; (3) *Affective-Humanistic Behavior*; and (4) the *Diurnal Relationship Between Good and Evil*.

Rodgers-Rose's (1) Communal Existentialism

Existentialism means 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 (Rodgers-Rose, 1972). Dr. Rodgers-Rose works from the premise that Black parents speak and interact with their children in vastly different ways than do White parents. She identifies this communication process as a dominant value.

Children are born into an environment of social processes carried out by extended family. Members of the family at any given time may interact with the child, thus the child from a very early age learns how to share the physical self with and to respond to others. Dr. Rodgers-Rose maintains that the seeds of communal sharing develop during the initial socialization process. Also, the existential person develops from the child extending selfhood into those with whom he or she interacts regularly. Once the child's interactions with those in his or her environment lead to their importance to the child, the pool of persons from which the child can receive expands. What results is the child being able to share physical well-being with different people in the extended family. This, Dr. Rodgers-Rose maintains, is crucial in assessing Black culture. It leads to the child's openness to other aspects of the culture being taught.

According to Dr. Rodgers-Rose, by the child's eighteenth month, he or she learns that sharing tangible possessions with members of the family is necessary. This sharing is motivated by more than desire. It is the result of conditions of life and the values of the culture in which the child is growing up. One place to see communal existentialism practiced historically, Dr. Rodgers-Rose posits, is in the practice of receiving and helping relatives and friends in need of a place to live. Many African American homes have at any given time had relatives and friends staying under their roofs for short or extended periods of time.

Rodgers-Rose's (2) Uniqueness of the Individual

The second value seems to be a contradiction of the previous value, but it is not, says Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose. The uniqueness of the individual is not license to be selfish, rather it is permission to become one's authentic self. This value affords persons the opportunity to develop at his or her own pace and the freedom not to feel the need to become a copy of another individual. "One can," says Dr. Rodgers-Rose, "be different and still be a member of the family and broader community" (Rodgers-Rose, 1972).

Recognizing the uniqueness of the child occurs early in the socialization process. Naming children uniquely reinforces a sense of self. According to Dr. Rodgers-Rose,

the process of naming is continuous. After initial naming, many children grow into nick names which are monikers often better known in the community than birth names. The uniqueness of the individual, when affirmed, removes the need for competition within the family. There is still competition, but it does not derive from a place of superiority, rather it serves as an exercise to strengthen the individual for challenges faced outside the family unit.

When considering the first two values together, Dr. Rodgers-Rose concludes that the two themes make for individuals who embrace their uniqueness and have concern for others. This runs counter to values of the dominant culture which reinforce the superiority of the individual and embrace a kind of selfishness that leads individuals to care for self to the neglect of others.

Rodgers-Rose's (3) Affective-Humanistic Behavior

The expressive nature of Black people has been assessed both positively and negatively. The reality is that no matter the opinion, Black people have in no way abandoned their humanism; they are still an expressive people. Black people do not deny themselves their feelings and make room to communicate and sometimes demonstrate them. Dr. Rodgers-Rose sees the affective existence of Black people as connected with the values of shared existence and the unique individual.

Children in the process of socialization receive the "right" to express themselves, 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" (Rodgers-Rose, 1972). Children are not taught to suppress feelings, rather they are encouraged to share. A major part of this expressiveness is the use of language. The rhythms and rhymes of speech among Blacks mirror a dynamic home life, as do music and clothing.

Rodgers-Rose's (4) Diunital Relationship Between Good and Evil

One of the earliest lessons taught in the process of socialization is that good will triumph over evil. Consequently, one must deal fairly (good) with neighbors, treating them the way one would want to be treated. This interaction with good and evil does not occur through occasional moral or theological discourse, but is an experience lived daily. Accepting and modeling the premise that good triumphs over evil does not negate behaviors deemed evil for methods of self-defense that would seem to some evil. "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" (Rodgers-Rose, 1972). Goodness is not seen as an absolute. "There is, then, no clear-cut demarcation between good and evil."

When character is analyzed, it is done so in an overall sense. Persons can be, think, speak, and act in both good and evil ways in the same encounter. Religious ideas are at the forefront of understanding and processing this daily encounter with the good and the evil. Blacks who understand that they live in an oppressive society, appropriate this concept in their belief that Whites will receive punishment for their participation in and perpetuation of racist practices. Thus, "some Blacks are willing to wait for God to punish the unjust" (Rodgers-Rose, 1972).

Conclusion

In sum, these are the dominant values of Black culture identified by Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose in the paper, "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*" (Rodgers-Rose, 1972; 2023a): (1) *communal existentialism*, (2) *uniqueness of the individual*, (3) *affective-humanistic behavior*, and (4) *the diunital relationship between good and evil*. They serve as a reminder of how important spirituality, family and community are in the lives of African descended people. An *emancipatory embrace* of the HIV/AIDS community by Black Christians must derive from consideration of these values. When constructing strategies intended to effect healing, the physical and psychological, spirituality, and familial and communal relationships must all be part of the development and implementation of a holistic approach. This holistic approach to care is a hallmark of the extension of Dr. Rodgers-Rose's faith into community service. It is a model for compassionate care that empowers people to change the environments in which they live, thus contributing to their own quality of life. Through resisting negative stereotypes and affirming the humanity of Africans and those of the Diaspora, Dr. Rodgers-Rose contributes to an environment in which self-esteem is raised and people are enabled to push past barriers to care. Whether it is understanding how to navigate systems that are not sensitive to the needs of African Americans or creating informed spaces within those systems that serve well its constituents, persons of color find strength from the wisdom of Dr. Rodgers-Rose.

Dr. La Francis Rodgers-Rose is a worthy example of one who incorporates *emancipatory embrace* in her scholarship and activism. "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*" (Rodgers-Rose, 1972) is the foundation of her work and is vital in understanding life in the Black community. Those who are searching for ways to improve quality of life in urban settings would benefit from reading the paper, "*The Dominant Values of Black Culture*"—published in 1972 and re-published in this issue of the *Journal of Equity in Health* (i.e., Rodgers-Rose, 2023a, pp. 8-18). Reading this paper would discourage blaming the victim and encourage the constructing of strategies that will refute negative stereotypes, ideologies, practices, and policies, and inform constructive ways to achieve.



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