



Human Services — and the — Afrocentric Paradigm



Jerome H. Schiele

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Jerome H. Schiele, DSW

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To the Spirit of those upon whose shoulders I stand

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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A nationally and internationally known scholar in the field of Afrocentric human services and social theory, Dr. Schiele has written numerous articles and book chapters and has conducted manifold workshops on the Afrocentric paradigm. He also serves on the editorial board of the *Journal of Black Studies* and on the Editorial Review Board for the National Association of Social Workers' *Social Work Dictionary* (Fourth Edition). In addition, he is a member of the Advisory Council for the National Academy for African-Centered Social Work for the National Association of Black Social Workers. Dr. Schiele's primary teaching areas are social welfare history and policy, social research, and human behavior theory.

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Foreword

The Afrocentric paradigm, in its currently articulated form, is a development from the last quarter of the twentieth century. It has emerged as a consequence of the reconstructive efforts of African-American and African-diasporic scholars seeking to relocate a perspective for understanding the African experience in the world. Certainly the need for such a paradigm was not new to this period in time, nor did its details emerge exclusively from this recent era. The recognition that African people had been systematically omitted or distorted by the world's scholarship is a fact firmly articulated by African scholars for as long as there have been written records available regarding the African encounter with European invaders. Certainly, during the entirety of the twentieth century as African people began to reclaim their ability and right to describe their own circumstances, more and more scholars protested the obvious distortion of the African experience in the world, particularly as revealed in European scholarship.

This outcry, heard as early as the "Appeals" of David Walker and the writings of Frederick Douglass in the nineteenth century, was the harbinger of a much more concerted intellectual reckoning to come as the literacy-deprived former slaves began to reclaim their self-defined reality in the twentieth century. The West Indian-born theologian, Edward Blyden, continued this thrust with his writings as he increasingly looked to Africa as the prototype for the cultural ethos of African people. The highly popular movement of the Honorable Marcus Moziah Garvey during the 1920s inspired a growing identification of African-Americans with the African continent. Of course, W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson became the real patriarchs for this deconstructive scholarship that gradually dawned into the reconstructive paradigms which increasingly pointed back to Africa as the norm and model for African thought and scholarship.

The early recovery from the literacy deprivation, which had characterized most Africans since their enslavement by Europeans in the sixteenth century until the very end of the nineteenth century, initially required demonstration of basic levels of competence at utilizing European academic tools. Therefore, the first several generations of literate Africans spent considerable effort demonstrating to their former masters their abili-

ty to conduct the rudiments of European scholarship. Of course, the teachers, the content, and the methods for these skills were all managed, controlled, and defined by the former captors. Even the most well-meaning teacher could only teach from the perspective that he or she understood and this was the perspective that had engendered European effectiveness and progress. The African beneficiaries of these teachers and their scholarship could only imitate their mentors until their reservoir of understanding permitted them to critique the content of what they had been given. As we progress through the twentieth century, not only do we see the critique expanding in terms of protest and demands for social, legal, political, and educational reorganization, it also begins to challenge the basic epistemology or knowledge standards of the European-American-based academy. By the third quarter of the twentieth century, African-American scholars had well demonstrated their recovery from the shackles of enforced illiteracy and had achieved prominence in every area of European-American thought and scholarship.

This phenomenal achievement, accomplished in less than a century after the Emancipation (which only removed formal and legal slavery from the American scene) did not develop without critical observation. As had been the case from the earliest demonstrated masters of European scholarship such as Du Bois and Woodson, African Americans increasingly began to raise very fundamental questions about the presentation or lack of presentation of Africans and African reality in European scholarship. The question of the omission and distortion of African presence in world reality increasingly raised fundamental questions about the validity of social, historical, legal, and even scientific conclusions that had been reached without the inclusion of African-American scrutiny, input, or even consideration. This led to an explosion of the deconstructive scholarship initially coming from the arts and scholars of history. Such deconstruction challenged the "miseducation" as defined by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, which thwarted the social, political, economic, and personal development of African Americans who only mastered European-centered education.

By the time we reach the last quarter of the twentieth century, African-American scholars have evolved from a purely deconstructive response to European-American-centered scholarship to the formulation of a reconstructive approach to African-American scholarship. The development of this approach, which is thoroughly reviewed in this volume, came to be designated as an African-centered approach. In its earliest articulation, emerging from the work of several African-American psychologists and subsequently other social scientists, the argument was for a perspective that offered a constructive view of African-American behavior. The

frustration of these scholars with the destructive, pathology-ridden, biased assumptions of black life from European-centered social science gave birth to a clamor for another perspective. The deconstructionist writings of so many African-American scholars had well documented the invalidity and limitations of the European-centered approach. The early Afrocentric scholars, as they came to be known, began to formulate a conception of African-American life that identified African people with their cultural origins as Africans rather than with their cultural origins as Europeans, which was the overriding assumption of Eurocentric scholarship.

This simple assumption had significant implications, not only for understanding but also for addressing the needs of African people. Perhaps the best example of the implications of the significance of this paradigm shift can be seen in the perception and conceptualization of the African-American family. Within the Eurocentric paradigm, the extended, matri-focal family of African Americans had been identified as a pathological and dysfunctional family structure because it failed to comply with the European assumptions of patriarchal nuclear family structures. Once the African-American family was conceptualized from the African framework as was done with the early work of the Afrocentric pioneer, Wade Nobles, the family structure became not only "normal" but also desirable and beneficial for African Americans. This had important service implications for how practitioners should approach problems of African-American family life.

In addition to the focus on African origins, the Afrocentric paradigm required the evaluation of models and methods on the basis of their effectiveness in alleviating the acquired suffering of oppressed people. Concepts were meaningful and valuable to the degree that they more effectively equipped social scientists to improve the life circumstances of African-American and other oppressed people. The model required an immediate and urgent relevance without the luxury of esoteric, abstract, and long-term probabilities.

Not unlike the budding phases of any new paradigm, much of the early work by Afrocentric scholars was conceptual. Much time and scholarship were devoted to formulating an epistemological framework that could serve as the parameter of this African paradigm. The formulators of the new paradigm continued to devote a great deal of energy to the deconstruction of the Eurocentric paradigm while identifying the basic concepts in the reconstruction of the new African-centered model of study.

This volume, under the careful construction of Dr. Jerome Schiele, is representative of the "Next Generation" of Afrocentric scholarship. It takes the paradigm formulation to its next logical level and opens the door

for the real value of a new paradigm in any scientific endeavor, which is its greater utility in formulating the issues and offering solutions to the problems confronted by African people specifically but all people generally. As Dr. Schiele effectively documents in the introductory chapter of this volume, he builds his ideas on the conceptual basis that has been established by the first generation of Afrocentric scholarship. The "New Generation" work that he has already spearheaded in so many of his publications, and further augments with this volume, establishes him firmly as a key figure for the next phase of this scholarship.

There are two basic developments that should emerge from this new-generation phase of expansion of the Afrocentric paradigm. The first development has begun with the growing number of Afrocentric scholars who are already engaged in establishing research models and measurement scales to investigate the validity of the concepts articulated in the conceptualization of the paradigm. An example of the research on measurement is the development of the African self-consciousness personality scale by Kobi Kambon, his colleagues, and students. Researchers such as Darryl Rowe and Cheryl Grills are doing intense and creative investigations of African traditional healing and its usefulness in working with African-American people.

The research done by both of these groups has grown very directly from the foundations established in the laborious conceptualizations of the builders of the Afrocentric paradigm. Most important, these research developments have been creative in their commitment to offering meaningful advancement to the members of the African-American community and humanity as a whole. These researchers have followed the mandate of the builders of the Afrocentric paradigm. That mandate demanded that the work from the Afrocentric paradigm should always provide some immediate applicability to the resolution of problems of a community with urgent needs created by conditions of sustained oppression. The emphasis was that Afrocentric research should always have heuristic value greater than just documentation for the paradigm or the expansion of knowledge. This deliberately subjective motive represented a radical departure from the so-called "objective" demands of Eurocentric research.

The second major expansion from the early reconstructive formulations of the Afrocentric paradigm has been the institutionalization of structures to more appropriately serve African-American people and others whose needs had been violated by the preservation of an alien conceptual framework. Although Chapter 10 in this volume contributes substantially to the first aspect of the new generation's thrust, it is in this second expansion that Jerome Schiele's book provides a monumental contribution. His in-

sightful and useful application of Afrocentric theory to the broad area of human services based on appropriate and relevant cultural understanding not only typifies the form of such applied scholarship, it provides critical elaboration of the paradigm itself. In his loyalty to the service and commitment of Afrocentric scholarship demonstrated in this volume, Schiele articulates specific discussions of relevant problems confronting the African-American—and the general human—community and examines the applicability of this conceptual framework to the treatment of these problems. He offers suggested approaches for the resolution of youth violence and substance abuse and the analysis of social welfare policy that could completely change the human services field.

This book is a compendium of some of the most significant thought of this century that has emerged from African-American scholarship. Its emergence from African-American thought makes it noteworthy because African-American scholars have been required to master the Eurocentric paradigm to legitimize their involvement in the dialogue regarding their survival and advancement as human beings. In mastering the Eurocentric concepts, they have evolved a critical perspective unavailable to those of European descent. So these scholars have come with the best of the European-American conceptualization of themselves, and also the unique perspective gained from being participant-observers of a system that has constrained their progress and simultaneously has benefited their oppressors. With the benefit of this painfully gained “double-consciousness,” African-American scholars have a perspective unlike any other for assessing European-American thought and for compelling them to engage in their collective liberation.

Dr. Jerome Schiele has given us a gift at the beginning of this new century. This gift is a forerunner of the significant scholarship that the world can expect from the Afrocentric paradigm, which has been so brutally maligned, not unlike African-American people, from its early days at the end of the twentieth century. It comes as a triumphant declaration of the irrepressible nature of Truth as it applies to ultimate restoration of the unjustly disparaged. Jerome Schiele’s keen insights, his thorough analysis of the work that has preceded him, and his passionate commitment to bring tools that will serve his community have forged this document as a wonderful light in the dark cave of human services doomed to failure because of their formulation in an alien framework. Professor Schiele typifies the “new generation.” He comes with the full armaments of the perspectives of multiple worldviews and the capability to select those ingredients that are most appropriate for any given situation. He is the rightful heir of generations who were not permitted to know, who came to

know despite protest, who deconstructed the flaws of the errant, and who reconstructed appropriate reality and ultimately ideas and strategies to restore health to all of the violated in the land. Welcome to the beginning of the new generation's legacy.

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Acknowledgments

Books, as with any written treatise, reflect the experiences and interpretations of the author. There are many who have helped to shape both my experiences and interpretations. Considerable credit should be given to my immediate and extended families. Using the African proverb “I am because we are and because we are therefore I am” as a backdrop, my immediate and extended families provided the foundation for the collective “we” in my life. Although my extended family complemented and reinforced the socialization I experienced in my immediate family, my parents deserve primary credit for influencing who and what I have become. In this regard, preeminent gratitude is extended to my father, Dr. William Bernard Schiele, and my mother, Mae Schiele. My parents were my first teachers, and they not only gave me life, but also the socioemotional and financial support necessary to advance in America.

Though my parents gave me life and established a home milieu supportive of positive growth and potential, it was my only sibling and elder brother, Dr. Adib Shakir, who was the main person who accelerated my exposure to, and insights about, the Afrocentric paradigm. His receipt of a student fellowship in college to travel to Africa in 1974, and his personal relationship with his then-Morehouse College psychology professor, Dr. Luther B. Weems (now known as Dr. Na'im Akbar, the eminent Afrocentric psychologist), afforded me an intimate window into the history, culture, and contributions of Africa that most teenagers in the 1970s probably did not have. In fact, after he returned from Africa, and via a community slide show presentation, Adib was the one who gave me my first formal Afrocentric lecture. Adib, thank you immensely for rescuing me from my miseducation!

I also would like to offer my appreciation to the academic institutions that trained me. My experiences and training at Hampton and Howard Universities, both historically black universities, helped me to master Eurocentric paradigms in sociology and social work and offered me opportunities to explore conceptual models established by prominent African-American scholars. Although Hampton furnished me with rudimentary social science and social work skills, my matriculation in Howard University's MSW and DSW programs provided the icing on the cake.

Partly because of my greater maturity, and because of the outstanding and supportive administration, faculty, and staff, my academic skills and enthusiasm blossomed at Howard. Howard afforded an open intellectual environment for me to explore all kinds of ideas while concomitantly helping me to focus my personal interest in Afrocentricity. As a demonstration of Howard's intellectual elasticity and motivating force in my academic life, my very first publication—which was on the Afrocentric paradigm—was developed from a paper I had written for a Communities and Organizations seminar in the doctoral program.

Although my academic training and experiences at Howard did much to nurture my ideas on Afrocentricity and its applicability to social work, my participation in, and exposure to, grassroots community-based organizations and advocates in the African-American communities of Washington, DC (and later on in New York) also helped to crystallize my thinking on the Afrocentric paradigm. Organizations such as the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations, black-owned bookstores such as Pyramid Books in DC and Pan African International in Hempstead, New York, events such as the weekly Afrocentric lectures at the Slave Theatre in Brooklyn, New York, and daily talk radio programs sponsored by WUDC and WPFW in Washington and WLIB in New York gave me a wealth of information and analysis on the Afrocentric paradigm. The experiences with these African-American community entities oftentimes provided me with a much more incisive, substantial, and emotional understanding of the Afrocentric paradigm than the confines of traditional Eurocentric academic training, even at historically black colleges and universities, could offer.

I also would like to thank all of my personal friends who have provided encouragement, constructive criticism, and much-needed fun along the way. Although all of my personal friends have been very special to me, a few have been enormously helpful in the process of either conceptualizing or writing this book. Special thanks to Ms. Valerie A. Crawford, Dr. A. Kareem Abdullah, Ms. Robin S. Brazley, Dr. Alfrieda A. Daly, Dr. Leslie Fenwick, Mr. Alphonso Murrill, and Dr. Ronnie Stewart.

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Although Dean Bowles and Associate Dean Lyle gave me the time to write, it was Dr. Molefi Asante, the renowned Afrocentrist and former chairperson of Temple University's black studies department, who planted the idea of this book in my head, and, more important, my heart. In the Summer of 1994, Dr. Asante invited me to present at the Sixth Annual Chiekh Anta Diop Conference held in October of that year in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was there that he suggested I write a book on Afrocentric social work. Asante Sana (thank you, thank you) Dr. Asante.

I would also like to offer my sincere appreciation to The Haworth Press, Inc., for publishing the ideas in this book. Although I am appreciative of all who had a hand in the book's production, special gratitude is offered to Mr. Bill Palmer, Vice President/Managing Editor, Book Division; Dr. Carlton Munson, Social Work Editor; Ms. Melissa Devendorf, Administrative Assistant; Ms. Marylouise Doyle, Cover Design Director; Ms. Dawn Krisko, Production Editor, Mr. Andy Roy, Production Editor; Ms. Patricia Brown, Editorial Production Manager; Ms. Nancy Foster, Typesetter; and Ms. Jennifer Gaska, Cover Designer.

Last, but certainly not least, I offer the greatest and most humble appreciation to the Creator or God. I sincerely believe the Creator has worked positively through the actions of others to help bring me to this point. Indeed, all praise is due to God.

Jerome H. Schiele
Atlanta, GA

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Chapter 1

Introduction

WORLDVIEWS AND CULTURAL OPPRESSION

The struggle for liberation and advancement of an oppressed group is not limited to its goals of equal rights and economic empowerment. The struggle fundamentally is to affirm the traditions, history, and humanity of the oppressed by validating and promoting their cultural worldviews. The notion of worldview has received increasing attention in the social science literature (see, for example, Ani, 1994; Baldwin and Hopkins, 1990; Dixon, 1976; English, 1984, 1991; Myers, 1988; Schiele, 1994). A worldview can be defined succinctly as the overarching mode through which people interpret events and define reality. It is a racial or ethnic group's psychological orientation toward life (Kambon, 1992; Schiele, 1993). It provides a group with a structure for expressing its own cultural truths (Karenga, 1996), a way to organize its experiences and interpretations into a logical and fairly stable conceptual scheme.

This conceptual scheme, some believe, is the basis for knowledge development in a given culture or society. Though there may be common elements of knowledge development across various cultural groups, it is generally believed that these groups have their own unique cultural ethos (Chau, 1991; Hutnik, 1991). Under the unnatural conditions of cultural oppression, the worldviews of various cultural groups who occupy a common space and time are not equally validated. This is because in a society that practices cultural oppression, the dominant group uses its control to universalize its experiences, history, and interpretations, thereby establishing them as the norm (Blauner, 1972; Kambon, 1992; Young, 1990). The fallout of this is that a false sense of cultural superiority of the dominant group's ethos takes hold in the minds of not only the culturally dominant but also the culturally oppressed. More seductively, both the culturally dominant and the culturally oppressed are susceptible to the belief that the variance in human interpretations, experiences, and values is minimal and

that these differences should be downplayed. Furthermore, the social construction of how others differ from the culturally dominant is often couched in language that vilifies and negates the humanity of these oppressed "others" (Rothenberg, 1990). The significance this has for the culturally oppressed is that they are at risk of viewing their own unique history and culture as nonexistent, illegitimate, or marginal to that of the history, experiences, and interpretations of the culturally dominant (Asante, 1988; Cabral, 1973; Schiele, 1993). From this, a sense of low cultural self-esteem can emerge that precludes the culturally oppressed from having the complete knowledge of themselves that is essential for a group to maximize its self-perceived humanity, its level of group self-determination, and its contributions to the advancement of the human family (Akbar, 1996; Karenga, 1993, 1996).

CULTURAL OPPRESSION AND SOCIAL SCIENCE

The dynamics of cultural oppression that are played out in the wider society are also manifested in the social sciences and professions, such as the human services, that apply social science theory and knowledge. Many American scholars of African descent, over the last twenty to thirty years, have suggested that the knowledge base of the social sciences is characterized by a European-American cultural hegemony that validates the paradigms and theories that have emerged from European-American and European intellectual history and thought (see Akbar, 1976, 1979, 1984, 1994; Ani, 1994; Asante, 1980, 1988, 1990; Baldwin, 1981, 1985; Baldwin and Hopkins, 1990; Boykin, 1983; Cook and Kono, 1977; Dixon, 1976; Hale-Benson, 1982; Hilliard, 1989; Kambon, 1992; Karenga, 1993; Khatib et al., 1979; Myers, 1988; Nobles, 1974, 1980; Semmes, 1981). These writers believe, as intimated by Billingsley (1970), that "American social scientists are much more American than social and much more social than scientific" (p. 127). Still others, such as Nobles (1978), contend that, similar to the political and economic institutions in society, Western social science is a tool to achieve the more efficient domination of people of color, generally, and people of African descent, specifically. Thus, increasingly, among many African-American social scientists, social science in the United States is conceived as a subjective and political enterprise that primarily, if not exclusively, reflects the ideas, interpretations, and racism that imbue European-American culture. For this book's purpose, European-American culture (also referred to in this book as "Eurocentric" culture) is defined as a collective hybrid of European traditions that have

been maintained and modified by the unique history and experiences of the descendants of Europe who occupy the United States.

The Afrocentrists

Many of these African-American social scientists who have critiqued the hegemony of European-American cultural ideas in the social sciences have begun to refer to themselves as *Afrocentrists*. They are Afrocentrists in that they believe that social science should and does reflect the worldviews of a particular cultural group and that since they are social scientists of African descent, the worldview that should inform their research and scholarship is that which emerges from traditional West African societies and is assumed to have been preserved by the descendants of West Africa in the United States, known as African Americans. For Asante (1987, 1988), one of the leading proponents of Afrocentricity, who is often credited with coining the term, this emphasis on Africa as the basis from which African-American social scientists interpret social reality fosters the belief in the centrality of African culture and history as valid frames of reference. This, according to Asante (1987, 1988), can encourage a new conception of Africa and people of African descent as subjects and not just objects of Eurocentric interpretations. In this way, Asante maintains that an Afrocentric framework centers the scholar of African ancestry in his or her own history and culture and that this “centering” can help the scholar of African descent recapture and resurrect traditional African cultural values and worldviews, from which a more authentic narrative of African people can take form.

As implied by Asante’s comments, Afrocentrists contend that although slavery and Eurocentric cultural oppression have caused considerable psychological, physical, and political harm to African Americans, the vilification of African culture inherent in both slavery and Eurocentric cultural oppression did not destroy all relics of traditional African culture for African Americans. Traditional African culture is defined here as those cultural beliefs and traditions which predate the effects that European colonization and enslavement have had on continental and diasporic Africans and which are assumed to continue today among the descendants of Africa, albeit to varying degrees. The assumption about the survival of traditional Africa among African Americans is best captured in Nobles’ (1974) assertion that African Americans are of “African root and American fruit.” This assumption implies that African Americans have retained some of their fundamental “Africanisms” and have adapted them to the unnatural conditions of Eurocentric cultural oppression that shapes the character of the American cultural landscape. In this vein, some Afrocen-

trists, such as Boykin (1983), posit a tripartite influence on African-American behavior and worldviews. The elements of this influence are (1) the survival of traditional African culture, (2) the experience of racial discrimination and injustice, and (3) the overlay of European-American culture.

The Dual Disservice of Cultural Oppression

For Afrocentrists, the imposition of paradigms and theories in the social sciences that emerge from European and European-American intellectual thought and history does a disservice to social scientists of African and European ancestry. For both groups, the imposition of Eurocentric paradigms and theories creates the illusion that social science ideas are culturally universal and applicable to all cultural groups in all time periods, or at least time periods with similar technological and economic circumstances. To this extent, an illusion that promotes the notion that the paradigms and theories of Eurocentric social science can be employed to explain events of the contemporary world and of history develops. Afrocentrists assert that the belief in Eurocentric or Western social science universalism among social scientists of European descent can engender a sense of sociocultural arrogance, the kind that implicitly reinforces the idea of the intellectual superiority of people of European ancestry. It also can effectuate sociocultural ignorance among this group's members in that their opportunities to gain insight into the worldview integrity of other cultures and to acknowledge the significant contributions to human history and thought made by these cultures are restricted, at best, and precluded, at worst.

For social scientists of African descent, Afrocentrists claim that Eurocentric social science universalism has created ignorance among this group and, more important, has restrained this group's ability to materially liberate itself from political and economic oppression. Because African-American social scientists, similar to European-American social scientists, are trained in paradigms and theories that advance ideas about human nature, morality, and behavior emanating from European-American culture, they are not exposed in their training to ideas about human nature, morality, and behavior stemming from traditional African culture (Hilliard, 1995; Woodson, 1933). This renders them incognizant of the traditions of their ancestors, and there are few incentives for them to construe these traditions as a foundation for establishing alternative social science paradigms and theories.

Second, the lack of exposure to the intellectual traditions of Africa in their training prevents African-American social scientists from tapping into an essential source of their liberation: a sense of pride in the intellectual contributions of Africa. This absence of pride in, and knowledge of,

the intellectual contributions and traditions of Africa can influence African-American social scientists to become what Kambon (1992) calls psychologically or culturally misoriented. Psychological/cultural misorientation describes African-American social scientists, and other African Americans, who mentally affirm the traditions and worldview of European-American culture to the oblivion and self-degradation of their African/African-American cultural worldview and traditions. In essence, they run the mental risk of internalizing the demeaning values and images of Africa, and by extension people of African descent, as uncivilized, culturally impotent, and intellectually inferior. These images of Africa have been perpetuated historically by such works as Hegel's (1837/1956) *The Philosophy of History* and other social science theories that have portrayed people of African descent as mentally inferior, as having unstable and dysfunctional families, and as being inherently criminal. This unfavorable image of Africa continues to be promulgated through recent news stories underscoring African famine and political chaos without examining the lingering and pernicious effects of European colonialism on the continent's stability.

Afrocentrists believe that the pejorative internalization of Africa among African-American social scientists can restrict their capabilities in contributing to African/African-American liberation because they fail to acknowledge the importance of using traditional African philosophical concepts, (1) as a means to validate and codify the collective narratives and experiences of people of African descent as a basis for creating new paradigms and theories, and (2) as a method to organize these collective narratives and experiences as a foundation to advance new models of societal relationships that can help people of African descent to empower and liberate themselves economically. In short, Afrocentrists firmly believe that African-American social scientists should use their scholarship and knowledge to critique Eurocentric social science universalism and to liberate people of African ancestry from political and economic oppression.

TOWARD AN AFROCENTRIC HUMAN SERVICE PARADIGM

Since the knowledge base of those who work in the human services (e.g., social workers, case managers, human service administrators, psychologists) is heavily dependent upon social science theory and research, human service paradigms also suffer from the Eurocentric cultural universalism previously described. In the human services, this hegemony is best expressed through two modes: (1) the theories and models for

explaining and solving social problems arise from a Eurocentric conception of human behavior and social problems, and (2) the cultural values of people of color, generally, and African Americans, specifically, have not been used sufficiently as a theoretical base to establish new human service practice paradigms and methods.

Attributes of Eurocentric Knowledge Base in the Human Services

As it concerns the first mode, the theoretical foundation of the human services' knowledge base is not only shaped immensely by European American intellectuals but also tends to have an individualistic, materialistic, mechanistic, and pessimistic character. The individualistic focus is manifested in human service paradigms that spend an inordinate amount of time delineating and explaining individual traits/attitudes, personality dispositions and disorders, ego functions or dysfunctions, or individual psychosocial crises. Indeed, personality characteristics such as independence, internal locus of control, and assertiveness are generally valued over attributes such as dependence, external locus of control, and submissiveness (Akbar, 1984; Baldwin and Hopkins, 1990; Cook and Kono, 1977). The fundamental problem is that although there are human service paradigms, such as the ecological and systems approaches, that contextualize the individual and his or her problems, there is still a penchant to view the individual as a sort of isolated, autonomous entity. The tendency is to impose dichotomous logic to separate or decontextualize the individual from his or her immediate and wider social milieu. This is best expressed in the social work profession's "person in situation" paradigm. Even though the situation or milieu is acknowledged, considerable emphasis in social work is placed on the "person" side of the equation (Rose, 1990). In addition, the concept of situation often is restricted to connote the immediate environment, such as the individual's family. Furthermore, the ecological and systems approaches have received wide exposure recently in the social work literature, but rarely—if ever—is there a connection made that demonstrates how the African and Eastern worldviews can complement these approaches. Because both worldviews are more holistic in their focus than is the fragmentary logical character of the Eurocentric worldview (Cook and Kono, 1977; Myers, 1988), the application of philosophical concepts inherent in each might better elicit the holistic conception of human beings and social problems that could facilitate smoother integration of the "person" with the "situation."

The dichotomy between the person and situation is also found in the bifurcation of practice methods within social work training. These methods are usually bifurcated along the dimensions of those who desire to

specialize in the individual or person (direct practice) and those who desire to specialize in the situation (i.e., macro/policy practice and administration). Though appropriate within the context of the broader professional marketplace in which specialization is encouraged, the separation of the person and the situation limits the ability to integrate knowledge of the two in a way that prevents further understanding of human behavior and social problems. From an Afrocentric viewpoint, this excessive focus on fragmentation reflects the particular logical style of European-American culture, which, at least in the professional world, has been significantly influenced by Cartesian dualism (see Descartes, 1641/1986).

The second feature of the current knowledge base in the human services is that the models tend to be heavily materialistic. They are materialistic in that an intense, almost exclusive, focus is placed on sensory perception as a means of determining reality, and there is a proclivity to downplay or reject the legitimacy of the unseen. In this way, information on how the unseen or spiritual world affects human behavior and human values and how this world can be a means for positive human and societal transformation is usually suppressed. The materialist focus, which nurtures a conception of humans as primarily material and physical beings, can considerably confine human service practitioners' understanding of the extensive and latent capabilities of their consumers and themselves.

Except for those human service practitioners who rely on the existentialist, humanistic, and transpersonal schools of thought, including the works of Carl Jung, most human service paradigms have omitted content on spirituality and the soul (Myers, 1988; Schiele, 1996; Sermabeikian, 1994). Eurocentric human service and social science paradigms have traditionally viewed spirituality as too esoteric to examine and as fitting better within the domains of theology or philosophy (Akbar, 1984; Canda, 1988, 1998; Myers, 1988; Sermabeikian, 1994).

Eurocentric human service paradigms, with some exceptions, also tend to be mechanistic. This mechanistic flavor and feature is manifested poignantly in the predominance of stage theories and the reliance on unilinear causation. The reliance on stage theories is best discerned in the preeminence of the psychosocial model used to explain normal human growth and development. Based on the assumption that psychosocial development at a previous stage will have a significant impact on psychosocial development at a subsequent stage, human development and interpersonal problems are primarily conceived as sequential and additive, with limited focus on the human being's capacity for spontaneous change that nullifies the influence of previous psychosocial dysfunctions. The tendency exists, therefore, to conceive the individual as a machine or robot with a predeter-

mined path or set of rules by which he or she must abide to become a fully functioning human being. Although some paradigms, such as the strengths perspective (see Saleebey, 1992, 1996), promote a more spontaneous concept of human change and development that is not bounded to the individual's past, they have not gained widespread popularity among human service practitioners.

The focus on unilinear causation, which is also found in the predominance of stage theories, is best expressed in the epistemological model used to explain human behavior and to evaluate human service interventions. Known as empiricism, positivism, or, more recently, postpositivism (see Fraser, 1993; Smith, 1993), the model assumes that cause and effect are invariably separate entities in human behavior, and thus, should be treated as such when attempting to explain behavior or to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions. The notion of a variable being independent of another that is assumed to be dependent on the one preceding it reinforces this fragmentary, unilinear model. Furthermore, the practice of attempting to isolate the effects of a human service intervention on some desired treatment outcome and referring to extraneous factors as "threats" to internal validity, without considering the value that those "threats" might have in human transformation, also demonstrates the allegiance to unilinear causation. Like stage theories, unilinear causation imposes a deterministic view of human behavior, one that not only deemphasizes the possibility of reciprocity and interchangeability between cause and effect but, because of the materialistic thrust, also rejects the interaction of the material with the spiritual.

Last, the Eurocentric hegemony in human service paradigms has been manifested in the ascendancy and popularity of human behavior theories that are pessimistic about people's intentions. For example, in Freud's psychodynamic theory, humans are conceived as being motivated by sex and aggression, and civilization as an essential structure to monitor the drives of an uncontrollable id seeking immediate pleasure. In ego psychology, the ego is thought to experience perpetual conflict in not only adapting to the outside environment but also in regulating anxiety produced by unacceptable instinctual impulses and intrapsychic dissonance. In both classical and operant behavioral conditioning, the fundamental assumption is that humans need some kind of external stimuli to regulate or extinguish undesirable behavior because they lack internal self-mastery, discipline, and free will. In exchange theory, people are said to be motivated by self-interest, to analyze human interactions in terms of the degree of costs they expend and the benefits they accrue. Last, Marxist theory presupposes that the ruling elite in any society is subject invariably to

avarice and the insatiable need to monopolize material resources and power, thus limiting the possibility of “compassionate” leadership or rulership.

A common theme of the paradigms and theories that have gained prominence in Eurocentric human service and social science is an overemphasis on conflict. It is this conflict-oriented worldview that assumes, of ten-times implicitly, that antagonism is a normal attribute and outcome of human behavior, development, and social interaction. Though some paradigms within the Eurocentric tradition underscore a more optimistic picture of humans and their potential, these paradigms are often relegated to the margins of mainstream Eurocentric thought.

Cultural Values, People of Color, and Eurocentric Hegemony

The insufficient use of the cultural values of people of color as a theoretical base to construct new human service paradigms and theories also reflects the Eurocentric hegemony in the human services. Those who have given attention to cultural values of people of color have usually referred to their form of human service practice as “ethnic sensitive,” “ethnic minority,” or “cross-cultural.” Although this attention represents an important step toward cultural sensitivity and political correctness, these models generally have fallen short in conceiving the cultural values of people of color as a legitimate foundation to establish new human service paradigms and theories (Schiele, 1996, 1997). These human service paradigms usually underscore the following: (1) how racial discrimination and minority status have blocked opportunities and caused disproportionate psychosocial pain for people of color; (2) how the human service practitioner should be aware of the cultural values and nuances of a consumer of a different racial/ethnic group; and (3) how the human service practitioner should be cognizant of his or her biases and preconceptions when working with someone of another racial/ethnic group (Schiele, 1997). These clearly are critical areas that need to be considered when delivering human services, but by not conceiving the cultural values of people of color as theoretical foundations for establishing additional human service paradigms, the significance of these values in helping to diversify and expand the human service knowledge base is attenuated. The lack of diversity also obviates the formation of innovative methods and strategies that might lead to greater and more effective success in bringing about human and societal transformation.

As it concerns more effective service, the Afrocentric paradigm maintains that since the consumers assisted by many human service practitioners are members of groups of color, it is imperative that human service

paradigms reflect the cultural values and worldviews of these groups (Everett, Chipungu, and Leashore, 1991; Schiele, 1996). Because these groups, especially African Americans and Hispanics, disproportionately experience poverty, they are more likely to be the consumers that human service practitioners serve, especially in public settings or agencies. It is essential, therefore, that human service organizations employ the worldviews of these groups as theoretical foundations to implement different interventive strategies that are more compatible with the particular cultural styles, experiences, traditions, and interpretations of these groups, which can lead to more effective human service practice. It has been demonstrated that when the cultural values of consumer groups of color are integrated into the helping process, the likelihood of achieving desired treatment objectives increases (Brisbane and Womble, 1991; Chau, 1991; Devore and Schlesinger, 1981; Green, 1982; Jeff, 1994; Lum, 1992; Phillips, 1990; Sue, 1977).

Another corollary of not using the cultural values of people of color to form new human service paradigms is that the values, norms, and visions inherent in European-American culture are perceived as the chief—if not exclusive—precepts through which human behavior can be explained and social problems eliminated. This reinforces the illusion of cultural universalism and promotes the idea that the cultural background and milieu of a social theorist is meaningless—that theorizing and the emergence of professional ideas is an objective activity, or at least a culturally devoid one (Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1987; Carruthers, 1972; Schiele, 1997).

In addition, by not conceding the cultural values of people of color as foundations for new paradigms and theories and by relying primarily on Eurocentric paradigms and theories, the misconception that the variance in perspectives within Eurocentric models is large enough to explain human behavior and solve social problems is perpetuated. Drawing on the critical theory wing of Marxist thinking, it can be suggested that the variability and competition among Eurocentric human service and social science paradigms is a means to camouflage the unity that exist among these paradigms so as to protect their hegemony in the marketplace of ideas. If this is true, the Afrocentric paradigm would advocate that the marketplace of ideas be viewed as the locus of change. This change should not be dependent on the capriciousness of the market or a “survival of the fittest or most acceptable ideas” framework, but, rather, in a multicultural society in which the participation of people from diverse cultural backgrounds is crucial, conscious and deliberate efforts should be aimed at rendering the marketplace of ideas culturally inclusive, at least inclusive of the cultures represented in that society. The relevance here for the human services is

that each cultural perspective, represented in the human services by the ethnically diverse consumer and service provider populations, should have an equal opportunity to assert its own particular cultural truths concerning the causes of, and remedies for, social problems.

Definition and Objectives of Afrocentric Human Service

Afrocentric human service can be defined as methods of human service practice that arise from the sociocultural and philosophical concepts, traditions, and experiences of African Americans. Its fundamental philosophical thrust emanates from traditional African philosophical assumptions about human behavior and nature that have been documented to have survived among many African Americans (see Akbar, 1979; Asante, 1988; Daly et al., 1995; Dixon, 1976; Herskovits, 1941; Kambon, 1992; Martin and Martin, 1995), though modified by experiences of racial and cultural subjugation. The African root, American fruit metaphor discussed earlier can be applied to describe the philosophic bases of Afrocentric human service.

Similar to many other human service paradigms, Afrocentric human service seeks to describe, explain, solve, and prevent the problems that people face. Although it is especially concerned with the problems confronted by people of African descent living under conditions of cultural oppression, the focus of Afrocentric human service extends beyond the scope of people of African ancestry to address problems confronted by all people. From an Afrocentric framework, the problem of cultural oppression, for example, is believed to have adversely affected most people, the culturally dominant and the culturally oppressed. Thus, the Afrocentric paradigm of human service is both particularistic and universalistic: it endeavors to address the distinctive liberation needs of people of African descent and to foster the spiritual and moral development of the world (Akbar, 1984; Karenga, 1993; Kershaw, 1992; Schiele, 1996, 1997). This dual perspective is captured in the following major objectives of the Afrocentric paradigm, as discussed by Schiele (1996):

- (1) it seeks to promote an alternative social science paradigm more reflective of the cultural and political reality of African Americans;
- (2) it seeks to dispel the negative distortions about people of African ancestry by legitimizing and disseminating a worldview that goes back thousands of years and that exists in the hearts and minds of many people of African descent today; and
- (3) it seeks to promote a worldview that will facilitate human and societal transformation toward spiritual, moral, and humanistic ends and that will persuade

people of different cultural and ethnic groups that they share a mutual interest in this regard. (p. 286) (Copyright 1996, National Association of Social Workers, Inc., *Social Work*)

It is the latter objective that is often omitted in contemporary debates on the Afrocentric paradigm. Too often, in some social science circles and in the popular media, Afrocentricity is associated erroneously with ethnocentrism. Afrocentricity is viewed by some as cultural chauvinism (see, for example, Chavez, 1994; Schlesinger, 1991). As Verharen (1995) observes, however, Afrocentricity is not cultural chauvinism because it is not ethnocentric. Ethnocentrism generally implies that one group views its cultural values as superior to other groups or as the center of the social universe and, therefore, believes that its values should be imposed or universalized. The Afrocentric paradigm acknowledges the importance of being grounded or centered in one's historical and cultural experience, but it does not promote the notion that the Afrocentric view is the only or superior view, as does ethnocentrism (Asante, 1988, 1990; Bekerie, 1994; Verharen, 1995). Instead, the Afrocentric paradigm acknowledges that it is only one component of an enormous human web of "polycenters" of culture and history that represent the assorted worldviews of divergent cultural groups who occupy the planet (Bekerie, 1994; Welsh-Asante, 1985; Verharen, 1995). Although it advocates that people of African descent, especially under conditions of cultural oppression, should be centered in their cultural experience and history, the Afrocentric paradigm does not suggest that people of African descent are at the center of humanity (Asante, 1988; Bekerie, 1994; Verharen, 1995).

The universalistic feature of the Afrocentric paradigm is important because it underscores the adverse consequences of cultural oppression on both the culturally dominant and the culturally oppressed. Both have been demoralized and dehumanized psychologically, and oppression, itself, as a political/economic and sociocultural entity, impedes social change that would assist all people to better elicit and fully actualize positive human potentiality. To maximize positive human potentiality, the Afrocentric paradigm of human service advocates for substantive change in the worldview that pervades the social institutions and the intricacies of the most intimate interpersonal relations in the United States. Discussed in more detail in Chapter 4, Afrocentric human service asserts that this worldview is characterized by oppression and spiritual alienation, which are viewed as primary sources of the human problems that human service practitioners address.

Assumptions of Cultural Differences

Because the Afrocentric paradigm has culture at the center of its paradigmatic thrust, it is important to briefly identify its ideas about cultural differences in a multicultural society, such as the United States, in which the human services exist. Fundamentally, the Afrocentric paradigm of human service endeavors to promote cultural pluralism in both the knowledge base of the human services and the wider society. Cultural pluralism can be defined as the belief in the equal affirmation and contribution of the various groups who constitute a multicultural society, in other words, equal cultural affirmation of all groups without political hierarchy. To this extent, the Afrocentric paradigm maintains that, although similarities exist between and among people of divergent cultural groups, important differences also should be acknowledged and celebrated (Asante, 1992; Bekerie, 1994; Karenga, 1993; Verharen, 1995). Afrocentrists believe that the concept of difference does not have to be construed as negative or antagonistic, and a focus on cultural similarities, though necessary, is not inherently better or more moral than a focus on cultural differences (Asante, 1988, 1992). From an Afrocentric framework, the greater test of one's humanity is the ability to tolerate the perspective of a person or group operating within a divergent cultural worldview.

Though the Afrocentric paradigm recognizes differences in the internalization and manifestation of a cultural ethos among members of a specific cultural group, it assumes that these within-group differences are not as great as the differences that exist between and among cultural groups (Swigonski, 1996). The Afrocentric paradigm, therefore, regards a cultural or ethnic group as distinctive, but not monolithic.* The problem in a multiethnic and multicultural society in which cultural oppression prevails is that, oftentimes, the cultural distinctiveness of the culturally oppressed is hidden or suppressed. The control the culturally dominant have over societal resources and institutions compels the culturally oppressed to adapt to the dominant group's lifestyle, at least publicly. But, cultural adaptation is not cultural adoption, and, thus, it is possible for a culturally oppressed group to maintain some degree of distinctiveness, especially if it takes on a bicultural or traditional ethnic identity (English, 1984, 1991; Hutnik, 1991; Schiele, 1993). Both the bicultural and traditional identities, as opposed to the assimilated and marginal ones, demonstrate high levels

*The phrase "distinctive but not monolithic" is borrowed from the Howard University School of Social Work Mission Statement, which uses the phrase to describe the "Black Experience" in America.