

Chief Fela Sowande, Traditional African Culture and the Black Studies Movement: A Student Remembers

by

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*African-Americans must ensure each new generation the existence of a sound knowledge base that informs and elucidates the history and experiences of black people....This is the continuing role of Black Studies programs as they struggle to exist in an era of advanced technology, with rapidly changing social patterns and limited resources. The promise of Black Studies ... lies in the ability to provide the foundation that supports and enriches; to nourish the vision and motivation of present and future generations; and to reaffirm the continuity between past, present and future.*¹

Introduction

In a very real sense, this paper is my way to say “thank you,” and to acknowledge, in a formal way, my own understanding of the teachings of Nigerian musician and philosopher Chief Fela Sowande; a mentor whose work has been a major influence, not only on my development as an artist and an educator, but also as a human being. Chief Sowande’s teachings allow me to appreciate the comments of Delores P. Aldridge and Carlene Young quoted above, which, in light of the crucial theme of the 2007 SIRAS conference, “Links and Relationships: Africans and the African Americans in the 21st Century,” express timely points of view.

As a faculty member teaching in a Department of Pan-African Studies, I am confronted by the challenge of making “Black Studies” relevant in a rapidly changing 21st century. I often find myself frustrated and depressed at each day’s end as I am forced to accept the fact that too many students do not know how to process the information we impart to them in our classes. Our students come to us with virtually no knowledge or sense of their history and heritage as Americans of African descent; that there might be “links and relationships” between Africans and African-Americans in the 21st century *is not* a thought on their personal radar screens.

In this paper, I will discuss the teachings and perceptions of Chief Sowande in an effort to assess his recommended approach to teaching Black or Africana Studies; an approach many now call “Afrocentric” or “African Centered.” Individual Black Studies units, be they degree granting departments or academic programs, must necessarily provide curriculum offerings designed to help faculty, staff, students and community stakeholders move from genuine African centered theory to practice.

Sowande presented the global African community with a viable blueprint for action that offers a healthy cultural vision both Africans in Africa and peoples of African descent living in the Diaspora can embrace. Given the legacy of colonialism in Africa and racial discrimination in the US, Sowande’s work is also instructive because we are now living in an era when “being or thinking African” is no longer solely a function of one’s origin of birth. My travels in West Africa—through Nigeria, Ghana and Senegal—have made it abundantly clear that many Africans in Africa, today, are in need of a fundamental reintroduction to their own “Old World” traditions. Too many of us have become more British than the British or more French than the French or more American than the Americans. We must finally resolve our collective identity crisis before we can improve the quality of life for our people anywhere we might find ourselves living in today’s world.

I will focus attention on selected works given to me by Chief Sowande during the 1970s: *The Africanization of Black Studies: From the Circumference to the Center*; *African Studies and the Black American in 1968*; *The Way of Life of Peoples of African Descent* and *The Learning Process, Part One*. I will use these now seminal writings to explore the philosophical center Sowande established to guide our investigation into what he preferred to call traditional African “Lifestyle.” I will consider Sowande’s ideas in relation to those expressed in Molefi Asante’s *Afrocentricity* (1980) and *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (1990), Malidoma Patrice Some’s *Ritual: Power, Healing and Community* (1993), and Asa Hilliard’s *African Power: Affirming African Indigenous Socialization in the Face of the Culture Wars* (2002).

Finally, I will also touch upon the special relationships Sowande developed with African-Americans, first during his London period—1930s/40s, and again with Black students during the heady days of the 1970s when Black Studies Programs were being created nationwide in response to a volatile Civil Rights/Black Liberation/Black Student Movement. Sowande understood the degree to which we needed to avoid what he called “*the tyranny of skin color identification*” and learn the appropriate use of traditional African notions in our efforts to reclaim and redefine our lives. Toward this end, it is imperative that our students, as well as those community supporters who look to our programs for guidance and direction, understand how to employ African centered strategies in their daily lives. It is my position that African centered values and ethical standards are needed in our lives today more than ever.

Iroko

Olufela Sowande was born in 1905 in Oyo, where his father, Emmanuel, of Egba origin, was an Anglican minister on the faculty of St. Andrews College. Music study was a requirement here of all students for the priesthood. Sowande thus was surrounded by music from his earliest years. When his father, his first music teacher, was transferred to Lagos, Sowande began his twenty year association ... with Thomas King Ekundayo Phillips (who had been the first Nigerian to study music in London), originally as a choir boy at Christ Church Cathedral and then as his student. Like Phillips before him, he was enrolled at the Church Missionary Society Grammar School and later at Kings College....On his graduation from Kings College, he was an accomplished pianist and was engaged as deputy organist under Phillips at the Cathedral.²

Retelling his story in *The Learning Process, Part One*, Sowande writes:

My parents were in the Anglican Mission field in Nigeria. My father was an ordained Priest of the Church of England, and my grandfather a converted Yoruba traditional priest, who was widely acknowledged as an adept in that field prior to his conversion. My father was inducted as the minister in charge of St. Peter’s Church in Lagos in 1910 or 1911.³

His father’s untimely death in 1918, however, would initiate a series of events that would change the direction of a young Sowande’s life. He continues:

Slowly but surely, they propelled me towards parting company with my own traditional past as a Yoruba, in favor of what I thought I saw of the life-style of the British, through those that were in Nigeria at that time, in various posts, including the missionaries.⁴

For our purposes, de Lerma points out Sowande's unique attraction to, and, affinity for, African-American culture that would ultimately shape his approach to teaching African Studies to Black Americans. Sowande first met jazz in the company of fellow Nigerians in 1932 listening to Duke Ellington on short wave radio. Added to this were broadcasts from France, the BBC, and from New York and Chicago, and recordings by Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson and Earl Hines. This led to his organization of the Triumph Dance Club Orchestra, in which he played piano. He was also a member of the jazz band, The Chocolate Dandies that had been organized about 1927 in Lagos. In 1935, he moved to London with the intent of studying civil engineering, but he arrived already experienced from his days in Lagos as a jazz musician.

African Americans were delighted by his ability to imitate the piano styles of jazz figures. By music, he was able to pay for his education. He organized a jazz septet, consisting largely of musicians from the Caribbean, and he was assumed to be a Black American. He abandoned his plans for civil engineering and dedicated himself to music, attending the University of London and Trinity College of Music as an external candidate. His work in Lagos with Phillips provided him with a European musical perspective, and he intensified that by studying with George D. Cunningham, George Oldroyd and Edmund Rubbra. However he was influenced by these contacts, it was in 1935 that he began coping with nationalistic impulses, which were articulated in his articles from 1965, "*The Development of a National Tradition of Music*" and "*Language in African Music.*" In essence, he felt music had the obligation to communicate with his fellow citizens and this could be accomplished by reference to a Nigerian musical language. He used the term *Ideation* to refer to an individual's ability to respond to an existing musical thought.

He had not neglected his interest in jazz or his curiosity about African American culture. He took lessons in jazz piano with Jerry Moore and began performing, not just on piano but on the Hammond organ, and he made friends with such visitors as Paul Robeson, Fats Waller, the Nicholas Brothers, Peg-Leg Bates, Valaida Snow and Tim Moore (later to play the role of Kingfish on the Amos and Andy radio broadcasts). He performed with J. Rosamond Johnson, choral conductor of Lew Leslie's *Black Birds of 1936* (in which he performed Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*), and it was Johnson who introduced him to the music of R. Nathaniel Dett. He joined Adelaide Hall as her cabaret pianist and recorded with her in the last years of the 1930s.

Returning to *The Learning Process*, he reveals, "So I turned to Pop Music and to jazz with Earl Hines, Art Tatum, Teddy Wilson, Count Basie and Duke Ellington as my top models. When Lew Leslie brought the American cast of BLACKBIRDS of 1936 to London, I was fortunate enough to join the group and thus came into direct and constant contact with the Hall Johnson Choir, James Rosamond Johnson and several other African-American artists of high caliber.

I had my first real baptism into the Negro Spirituals. It was like water on parched ground. I think it was this experience that began to reactivate the African-Yoruba in me below the surface of my consciousness....I found myself taking stock, eventually asking myself, 'Who am I?' ... I looked at myself in the forties in London and sought in vain for the African-Yoruba in myself, and became troubled."⁵

In 1940, he began a series of radio broadcasts, *West African Music and the Possibilities of its Development*, which he exemplified with his own works. Recordings of these broadcasts were aired in Nigeria in the 1960s. In 1953, he returned to Nigeria to head the Music Section of the Nigerian Broadcasting System....In this post he produced weekly radio programs based on field research of Yoruba folklore, mythology and oral history presented by tribal priests....From 1962 until 1965 he was a senior research fellow at the University of Ibadan, then becoming musicology professor at the university's Institute of African Studies....He was a visiting scholar for the 1961 school year at Northwestern University's anthropology department. The Music Department at the University of Nigeria-Nsukka was renamed the *Sowande School of Music* in his honor in 1962. His writings during this period were unpublished for the most part because his metaphysical orientation ran counter to prevailing philosophies in music.

He was professor of ethnomusicology at the University of Ibadan's Institute of African Studies from 1965 to 1968, leaving that position to join the faculty of Howard University where he remained until 1972. He was awarded a Traditional Chieftaincy and named "*Bagbile of Lagos*" in 1968. From 1968 to 1971, he produced a series of recordings on various aspects of Nigerian history, language, literature and music that was distributed by the Broadcasting Foundation of America. He became a Professor of Black Studies at the University of Pittsburgh in 1972, and was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Ife that same year. His last position was as a Visiting Professor in the Department of Pan-African Studies at Kent State University from 1976 until his retirement in 1982. His final days were spent in a nursing home in Ravenna, Ohio where he died of a stroke on March 13, 1987.

Wisdom Under the Iroko

I look around in wonder today and I hear Chief Sowande's voice echoing from somewhere deep inside my inner ear. I was first introduced to his work through videotaped lectures in the early 1970s. I remember being baffled. I remember attempting to read his article *The Way of Life of Peoples of African Descent* a first time and be baffled again. Who was this man speaking to me from these pages? I was a second year college student enrolled in Black Studies courses for the first time. I only knew that I was searching for something vague and undefined. Meeting my first "African from Africa" had startled me into a painful awareness. If he was an African, what did that make me?

This chance encounter had literally forced me to look into a mirror to search for Africa in my own face. At that moment, I became aware of my life changing. Somehow, I instinctively knew I would find the answers I was searching for revealed in the teachings of this mysterious man talking back to me from a flickering video.

Although I can remember vague, nagging, and unasked questions linger from my childhood, my process of self-discovery did not begin in earnest until my days as a student in the fledgling Institute for African American Affairs at Kent State University. I would meet Chief Sowande for the first time as a graduate assistant in 1976. I was excited to meet this man who had sounded such a strident alarm in his lecture, *African Studies and the Black American in 1968*: “The Negro in America must choose between recovering and becoming fully conscious of his own identity or being washed down the plumbless drains of history as a mindless freak of nature.”⁶ We heard him, but, there was nothing in our experience that had prepared us to *hear* him. We did not know *how* to understand wisdom coming from a genuine African Elder. We thought the Chief was too deep. Yet, we knew enough to fear being flushed away down those “plumbless drains of history.” We knew enough to know we had become trapped inside the virtual prison of thinking like an American. I could not articulate it then, but, Sowande offered us a key to unlock the prison door. He became our searchlight as we groped blindly through the fog of white-darkness obscuring our collective vision. He understood the true nature of our identity conundrum.

He attempted to share with us his sense of our experience as Americans of African descent and what that might mean in relation to Africa’s future. Returning to *African Studies and the Black American in 1968*, he contended that “Here in America, a new type of Human Consciousness is being formed and the elements that are going into this new Human Consciousness comes from the distilled essences of the various types of Racial-Consciousness in the old world. In this context, the Black American does not merely represent Africa; he IS Africa. What the cultured Black American is today, the cultured African must be tomorrow, or else become a relic of History. Thus the Black American is perhaps the most direct link Africa will have with the New World now on the horizon, already casting its shadows on the old.”⁷ Sowande offered his students, and, by extension, the Black Studies Movement, an approach to development that can be related to what Molefi K. Asante calls “Afrocentricity” or what Asa G. Hilliard refers to as “African indigenous socialization” and others now label “Africentric” or “African Centered.”

Although a more detailed discussion of Sowande’s teachings is not possible here due to space limitations, it is necessary to clarify his notion of a “cultured Black American,” and the extent to which his approach to Black Studies was designed to nurture just such a person.

It is now evident to me that Sowande saw and felt a common bond between his experience as a colonized and thoroughly assimilated African and our experience as so-called “Black Americans” in these terms. I also understand the extent to which he viewed “our struggle” in this country through the lens of one who saw the unspeakable devastation of Nigeria’s Civil War. This deadly “tribal” conflict caused him to warn us against succumbing to the destructive effects of what he called, the “tyranny of skin color identification.” I did not realize it then, but, he believed that our preoccupation with “Blackness” could potentially lead us down the road to our own “African-American” tribalism.

Writing in the monograph, *The Africanization of Black Studies: From the Circumference to the Center*, he provided a context and an approach: “I see the Africanization of Black Studies as requiring the restructuring of Black Studies—a total restructuring if need be—so that it rests on the traditional Thought-Patterns of Traditional Africa, which thereby become its reason for being, its life-essence, the actualization of these Thought-Patterns in the day to day lives of common folks being its specific objective, to achieve which nothing will be allowed to be an insurmountable obstacle.”⁸ He also added this cryptic warning: “...the Africanization of Black Studies today is not a choice but a dire necessity, if [it] is to survive and be meaningful....[it] is not to be regarded as a political platform or a new ideology; it is not to be approached in the manner of the chef who adds a little more of this or that to the soup that is all but cooked on the stove; it is not to be confused with the adoption of African names or dress-styles, although these may have their place in it, but Africanization means the total adoption of the World-View of Traditional Africa as the foundation on which to build.”⁹

More importantly, he correctly identified our biggest stumbling block as we move slowly into and through the 21st century. He concluded his caution with this caveat, “Such adoption will require substantial changes in our ways of thought and of action; it will require the jettisoning of many of our prejudices and fond beliefs, and it is here that the real problems will arise.”¹⁰ He understood that our struggle to rediscover and reclaim a true sense of our identity as peoples of African descent translates into nothing less than the attempt to recreate ourselves as new human beings; but “cultured” human beings who understand and embrace our heritage as African derived people. Sowande’s work points us toward the realization that *being African* is no longer just a function of geography; rather, it is a function of our “Thought-Patterns.” It is the sum total of how we think. And, changing how we think, in relation to African ideals and values, is a daunting test of our collective will in the present.

Hard Lessons

It remains to be seen if Black people in the Diaspora and in Africa will respond to our history's clarion call. Chief Sowande came to America at a time when Europeanized Africans in Africa were not willing to build their future on the solid foundation of their traditional African past.

The mad dash to become "modern" rendered too many Africans too eager to become Black Englishmen or Black Frenchmen. Africans in Africa do not understand that all which glitters in London, Paris, Toronto, or New York is not gold. Here in the US, being "Black American" is too often in conflict with our own best interests as a group; that Sowande saw African traditions as the basis for a new "cultured Black American" remains a perplexing riddle just beyond our American comprehension. As we stagger into the 21st century, the sad truth is too many Africans want to flee Africa in the same way too many Black Americans want to "escape" the so-called 'hood. No matter where we find ourselves on the planet, there are no hiding places to shield African people from the challenges that confront us.

When I was a graduate student, I did not understand when Sowande tried to teach us the significance of the number two in Bantu philosophy. He was trying to get us, as young militants, to realize that if we simply saw our struggle in overly simplistic black versus white terms, the power of division would surely lead us to eventually turn it upon ourselves. He tried to get us to see that "the attempt to separate blacks from whites as mutually exclusive groups brings into effective action the Number 2 of the Bantus, that is *Kubili*, as representing divisiveness, which then operates on the Black Studies Departments themselves, so that the seeming unity which the black leaders started is soon full of holes, and factions spring up unbidden."¹¹ It is all making sense to me now that I have returned as a faculty member to teach in the department I helped to create as a student activist during the 1970s.

The more dangerous threat to the Black Studies Movement in this current phase is no longer external. This does not mean the age old outside forces are any less hostile. Those forces, however, are predictable. The surprises now come from those who are close to us; crucial internal strife now threatens to cripple our continued growth in the present. Too many programs have been rendered dysfunctional. Our unity is now "full of holes" and factions have sprung up "unbidden." We have too many divided houses, although no one wants to admit or acknowledge this fact. The powers of *Kubili* have taken hold. We now undermine each other in ways even our proverbial masters could not imagine.

In a very real sense, we have lost our way as faculty, tenure, promotion and career objectives now skew our priorities. Black student groups with competing agendas routinely refuse to work with each other. The lessons of the Chief that once floated just outside the grasp of my understanding now haunt us in the present.

Numerous problems have reared their ugly heads in direct proportion to our stubborn refusal to even consider the need for change. We find it difficult to admit to ourselves those solutions which worked twenty or thirty years ago are no longer suitable today. Using post-colonial Nigeria as his frame of reference, Sowande tried to teach us this crucial point:

The true activist is the blatant patriot from within who is concerned with the emancipation of the common man; but the old saying 'good intentions pave the way to hell' applies here. The activist knows how to destroy; he has no conception of how to create. He thinks only in terms of the immediate present; his mind is incapable of grasping the possible results that might face him tomorrow...he must reduce every situation to such a level that it shows the element of confrontation embedded in it, and only then can he act...Lacking the creative faculty in his mind, he is highly suspicious of those of his own group who possess that faculty, and considers that they must have sold-out to the 'enemy' or are 'infiltrators' for the System.¹²

When long time colleagues began dividing into factions over leadership and calling each other traitors, sell-outs and dangerous, I knew Chief Sowande's cautions had become prophetic.

There are those amongst us who seem to be stuck in the "confrontation" mode; who see the "mythical white" enemy lurking everywhere. There is little dialogue with colleagues who see the need to create new methods and strategies based upon the solid foundation of our past, but designed to meet the new realities of the present. To make matters worse, our failure to set better examples as potential role models for our students borders on the criminal. At a time when our students are looking to us—their elders—to provide them with meaningful ways to resolve their differences, what can we offer them in the face of our glaring failure to resolve our own? Sowande always stressed that our students should be able to see evidence of the very African principles we are mandated to teach them operating in our lives. It is on this level that our internal contradictions now threaten to "wipe out years of hard work."

I find myself returning to the teachings of Chief Sowande because I think we have strayed from our philosophical center. It is our own failure to honestly reevaluate and learn from our history that is hindering our progress in the present. The Chief recognized the damage done to African people at home and abroad as a result of our forced contact with Europe and the twin evils of chattel slavery and imperial colonialism.

He wrote, “The Negro in Africa, like the Negro in America, [is] culturally sick....It seems...the Negro was faced with Colonialism in Africa, and with Racism in America. In this context, I see Colonialism as a battle royal for the material possessions of the Negro in Africa as symbolized by his land, and for his spiritual possessions as symbolized by his mind. In America, racism was a battle royal for the mind of the Negro, since he had no material possessions....”¹³ We have to recognize we are a wounded people who are in desperate need of healing. We are boldly attempting to recreate and embrace ourselves as what I have come to call *New Afrikan* people.

New Afrikan

Chief Sowande taught us that the *real* Africa was not a place to be found outside of ourselves in a predetermined geographical location. Our journey had to be inward in nature; to discover the Africa which lived and breathed at the very core of our being. Sowande would have us *open and enter that* place. My first reading of Molefi Asante’s *Afrocentricity* guided me to that place. Asante writes, “I speak of it [Afrocentricity] as a transforming agent in which all things that were old become new and a transformation of attitudes, beliefs, values and behavior results. It becomes everywhere sensed and is everywhere present. A new reality is invoked; a new vision is introduced....Our eyes become new or rather what we see becomes clearer.”¹⁴ Asante’s landmark book served to reinforce and illuminate Sowande’s essential position. Like Sowande, he was calling for a reordering of our cultural or ethnic perspective based upon a return to African traditions as the foundation.

In *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, Asante deepens his discussion of Afrocentricity by defining his concept of *place*. He writes, “My claim is one of freedom from the constraints of Eurocentrism in connection with critical theory; yet I do not claim that the final emancipatory moment will have come when I am finished....Stepping outside of the historical moment might permit new interpretations, new criticisms, ultimately the acquisition of new knowledge.”¹⁵ If Black Studies, as an academic discipline, is to remain vital and relevant, it must not only exist outside of a Europe centered historical moment, it must also provide the modes as well as the means to assist our students in making that same leap. We must consider the effects of our American reality in terms of psychological and spiritual “dis-ease.” The degree to which we have been thoroughly socialized inside a basic Eurocentric paradigm makes thinking and acting in a new way our ultimate challenge. As a people in the 21st century, therefore, our true dilemma is cultural in nature.

Like Sowande, however, Asante offers his own disclaimer:

*I am challenging the Afrocentrist to maintain inquiry rooted in a strict interpretation of place in order to betray all naïve racial theories and establish Afrocentricity as a legitimate response to the human condition....the place remains a rightly shaped perspective that allows the Afrocentrist to put African ideals and values at the center of inquiry. If this does not happen then Afrocentricity does not exist.*¹⁶

To move from an African center to a *New Afreekan* lifestyle, then, is to move from philosophy and theory into practice; to move from big dreams and a new vision into realization and implementation. It is on this level that the key to becoming what Sowande calls a “cultured Black American” lies in our ability, both individually and collectively, to answer four basic questions of Black identity: 1) Who am I? 2) How did I come to be who I am? 3) Am I really who I think I am? and 4) Am I all I ought to be?¹⁷ Without answers, we will continue to be a still lost and wandering people in search of our own destiny and *proper name*. Black Studies Programs must necessarily produce culturally grounded students who will be able to seize *their* “historical moment” in relation to our ongoing struggle to answer these questions. And, we cannot answer these crucial questions of identity if we do not accept the total futility of skin color identification. Toward this end, Sowande taught us Blackness has nothing to do with skin color. It is an *attitude of mind*; an orientation vis-à-vis our cultural perception of reality.

According to Sowande, Blackness has no significance as a moral quality. Instead, it is an inner awareness. The World of the Spirit is the true and permanent Reality. In this way of thinking, Whiteness becomes an awareness of the Material World of Nature exists as the temporal ‘Shadow’ of the World of the Spirit. In African terms, then, Blackness and Whiteness function as different degrees of the same thing; that is, one cannot exist without the other. Sowande understood the need to redefine Blackness and Whiteness in order to achieve the beginning of any new human consciousness in this society. He attempted to provide us with new definitions in an effort to free us. But, he also understood that we could never be truly free until we were first comfortable *in* our skin. We have to make peace with skin color in order to transcend its inherent limitations.

Returning to his work, *The Learning Process*, Sowande once again offers his unique view of the importance of African-American culture relative to the implications of our distinctive language. He writes, “I see ‘Black Talk’ ... as representing the determination of the African-American to re-discover and re-possess those thought-processes that are his inheritance as a person of African Descent.

The ability to do this through the medium of a language that is non-African is ... clear evidence of an incredible virtuosity. For 'Black Talk' is ... an intuitive and instinctive response to the demands of the 'souls of Black' ... In my view, we are witnessing here only the beginning of the Overture to a Drama that has yet to begin to unfold itself on the World-Stage. I think we are in for quite a few surprises in a future that may be much nearer than we think."¹⁸ In other words, Sowande's "cultured Black American," or, what I prefer to call a *New Afrikan*, is within reach just beyond a new horizon.

In his book, *African Power: Affirming African Indigenous Socialization in the Face of the Cultural Wars*, Asa Hilliard echoes Sowande when he writes, "Numerous documents and oral histories outline the vast traditions which were practiced by our ancestors and passed down through the generations. We must critique these traditions and, when needed, improve upon them so that they will address the contemporary challenges that Africans face around the world. We must also understand that our indigenous socialization practices can help us clarify our purpose and vision as an African family. Today, as we continue to face the culture wars against African people, we must not surrender or neglect our vision of an appropriate destiny that derives from who we are as a people."¹⁹

Conclusion

In his book *Ritual: Power, Healing and Community*, Malidoma Patrice Some identifies the following seven criteria as a partial list of the characteristics of a community based on his observations living in his own village in Burkina Faso:

1. Unity of Spirit
2. Trust
3. Openness
4. Love & Caring
5. Respect for the Elders
6. Respect for Nature
7. Cult of the Ancestors

He suggests, "We need ritual because it is an expression of the fact that we recognize the difficulty of creating a different and special kind of community. A community that doesn't have a ritual cannot exist. A corporate community is not a community. It's a conglomeration of individuals in the service of an insatiable soulless entity. What we need is to be able to come together with a constant mindset of wanting to do the right thing, even though we know very well that we don't know how nor where to start."²⁰ For our part, we must acknowledge the real difficulty in trying to create and maintain a true community based on a traditional African model.

More than saying what we mean and meaning what we say, it is now time for us to behave in ways that are consistent with the African centered philosophy we so eloquently proclaim. Looking back, when we were with Sowande, we never envisioned a time could come when *we* would become our own worst enemy. For my part, I never really envisioned myself as an Elder; now, the Chief's words resonate with a new clarity: "Power without wisdom is but another name for death....Power without wisdom therefore boils down ... to power without love. It is not the presence of power that is evil; it is the absence of love that makes power evil and destructive. That is why Black power structure in Africa can be, and has been, much more to the disadvantage of the Negro in Africa than White power structure has been to the Negro in America."²¹ It seems we have forgotten how to love and respect ourselves as human beings on both sides of the Atlantic.

It is time for us to renew our vision and to realign it with our own African traditions to meet the uncertainties of this new millennium. Hilliard is correct when he states, "The alienation of Africans from other Africans has enormous consequences. No matter where Africans are in the world, our circumstances are basically the same....The reality is that there is no chance that anyone other than Africans will act to move us from the bottom of the heap."²² The ways of our ancestors can provide valuable lessons that will help guide us as we navigate these treacherous waters of *our* time. Sowande, Asante, Some and Hilliard have produced work in the African tradition. As Master Teachers, they would have us *know* that understanding our past will enable us to truly "walk the way of a New World." It is time to make the poet's vision be a new reality.

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¹ Delores P. Aldridge and Carlene Young, *Out of the Revolution: the Development of Africana Studies.* Lanham: Lexington Books, 2000, Pg. 10.

² This section is culled from a yet to be published manuscript, *The Music of the Black Composer,* by Dominique-Rene de Lerma:

³ Chief Fela Sowande, *The Learning Process: Part One.* Kent: Unpublished Manuscript, 1978, Pg. 1.

⁴ Chief Fela Sowande, *The Learning Process: Part One.* Pg. 2

⁵ Chief Fela Sowande, *The Learning Process: Part One.* Pg. 8.

⁶ Chief Fela Sowande, “African Studies and the Black American in 1968,” Hansberry Memorial Lectures, Howard University, December 12, 1968, Pg. 9.

⁷ Chief Fela Sowande, "African Studies and the Black American in 1968," Hansberry Memorial Lectures, Howard University, December 12, 1968, Pg. 38.

⁸ Chief Fela Sowande, *The Africanization of Black Studies: From the Circumference to the Center*. Kent State University: African American Affairs Monograph Series, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1975, Pg. 1.

⁹ Chief Fela Sowande, *The Africanization of Black Studies*. P. 5-6.

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¹¹ Chief Fela Sowande, *The Africanization of Black Studies*. P. 3.

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¹⁴ Molefi K. Asante, *Afrocentricity*. Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1988, Pgs. 1-2.

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¹⁹ Asa G. Hilliard, *African Power: Affirming African Indigenous Socialization in the Face of the Culture Wars*. Gainesville: Makare Publishing Co., 2002, Pg. 3.

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²¹ Chief Fela Sowande, *The Africanization of Black Studies: From the Circumference to the Center*. Kent: African American Affairs Monograph Series, 1975, Pg. 19.

²² Hilliard, Pg. 5.