A Pan-Africanist Analysis of Black Seminole Perceptions of Racism, Discrimination, and Exclusion

by

Ray Von Robertson, Ph.D.
rvrobertson@my.lamar.edu
Associate Professor of Sociology, Lamar University

Abstract

This study selected nine responses from a pool of twenty-six interviews, covering two time periods, with identifiable Black Seminoles. The interview responses were utilized to discern feelings of racism, discrimination, and exclusion of Black Seminoles by the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma. The selected interviews were evaluated through the line of sight provided by Staples' (1976) Pan-Africanist model using latent-content analysis. Hence, it was concluded that the selected Black Seminoles perceived racism and discrimination, by both the government and the Seminoles, were prominent in their exclusion from full acceptance within the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma.

Introduction

Black Americans have been denied legitimate access to their history. Despite being permitted to attend educational institutions, albeit not always equal to and of the same quality of those of whites, the pedagogical style, along with the informational content, has in no way been African-centered. Schools, both secondary and post-secondary, have done relatively little to alleviate the indelible mark that the aforementioned has placed upon the black psyche. Additionally, schools have done little to inculcate Black students with any sort of knowledge of the Black Holocaust (Lusane, 2002). The information routinely dispensed to students regarding Black Americans and our struggles has focused primarily on the following: 1) crime; 2) poverty; 3) civil rights; 4) enslavement; and 5) how the aforementioned are no longer relevant due to the alleged entrance into a post-racial period fostered by the election of President Barack Obama (Wise, 2010). Consequently, peoples of African descent, and the variables that make up their sociological milieu, are frequently excluded from educational discourse (Karenga, 2002). An example of a group that has made significant contributions to the history of Black people yet are excluded from historical and sociological discourse pertaining to peoples of African descent, are the Black Seminoles.[i]

The Black Seminoles go by several monikers. They are often referred to as Seminole Freedmen or the Estelusti (Muskogee Indian word for Black), (Robertson, 2002). The different monikers will be used throughout this work. The Estelusti consists of individuals of both mixed Seminole and African American ancestry (and non-mixed people of African ancestry who came to live among them in 1866 that are dispersed throughout Oklahoma, Florida, Mexico, and the Caribbean (Jackson, 1999, Robertson, 2009; & Twyman, 1999).

The purpose of this work will be to examine the sojourn of the Black Seminoles culminating with their current tenuous status position within the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma from an African-centered sociological perspective. Previous works (e.g., Katz, 1997; Mulroy, 1993) focus on symbiotic relations between the two groups but do not tap into the unique sensibilities and nuances of the African/Black experience in the same manner that an approach which puts the concerns of Africans at the center as opposed to the periphery would.[ii] More poignantly, my work seeks to answer the central question: "Why are the Black Seminoles marginalized within the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma"? The preceding question will be explored by an investigation of the historical antecedents which have resulted in exclusion and marginalization of blacks within the Seminole Nation through the line of sight offered by a Pan-Africanist sociological approach.

An African-centered Approach to Sociology

This paper represents an attempt to develop a sociological epistemology that is grounded in the concerns and thought processes of Africans across the Diaspora. So when Staples (1976) says "the purpose of Afro-American sociology is to study life and culture which when seen from a Black perspective can serve to correct myths about Afro-Americans found in the sociological literature and to further study Black life as it is affected by political and economic factors" (pg. 21), he has articulated the foundation of a Pan-Africanist sociological approach. Moreover, Pan-Africanist/African-centered sociology will examine Black life and circumstances as non- pathological. Consequently, the aim of Afro-American, i.e., Black sociology, can be viewed as inclusive of several themes:

(1) The study of Black life and people from a Black perspective;
(2) The correction of myths about Blacks in popular sociological discourse;
(3) The Study of Black life as affected by political and economic factors;
(4) Black, i.e., African-centered sociology, must be an emancipatory and liberating endeavor.

The aforementioned tenets, with a particular emphasis on principles three and four, were utilized in this study to examine the selected responses of Black Seminoles as they negotiated the circumstances surrounding their experiences with the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma.

It can be argued that W.E.B. Du Bois makes a strong case for consideration as the father of African American sociology, and by extension, the intellectual progenitor of any attempts to formulate an Africancentric or African-centered approach to sociology (Staples, 1976; Wright, 2002). In particular, Du Bois' *Philadelphia Negro (1899)*, in analyzing the stratification system of Philadelphia's Black community, posited that problems of Blacks of lower socioeconomic status were residual effects of adaptive responses to the horrific conditions of Black enslavement. The aforementioned analysis represents a departure from the paternalistic, pathological, and Eurocentric racist summations of Black behavior and Black people as a whole that was common in mainstream, i.e., white, sociological discourse (Bauner and Wellman, 1936; Park and Burgess, 1924; Staples, 1976).

In *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903), Du Bois illustrates the utility of sociology in the examination of racism and the need for Black independence from European hegemony. Further Du Bois advocated for civil rights and Pan-Africanism, and organized five different Pan-Africanist congresses from 1900-1945 (Collins and Makowsky, 1998). Ultimately, as an intellectual progenitor of African-centered sociological thought, Du Bois can accurately be perceived as using sociology to re-define what it meant to be Black/African and also to provide a non-pathological explanation of the dilemmas encountered by Africans.

In laying the foundation for an African-centered sociological approach, Ani (1994) provides some valuable insight in her definition of 'Yurugu.' Specifically, Ani (1994) defines 'Yurgu' as "a being in Dogon mythology that is responsible for disorder in the universe" (p. xxviii). Ani (1994) uses the aforementioned term as a metaphor for European intellectual hegemony.

Ani's (1994) intellectual contribution is her elucidation of the problems that Eurocentric foundations of knowledge present for explaining the experiences of African people. Put more succinctly, when European epistemologies are used to explain the circumstances of an oppressed people (Africans across the Diaspora), universal disorder occurs. The aforementioned disorder manifests itself in the form of intellectual marginalization of scholars and scholarly works that attempt to transcend the boundaries of the Eurocentric intellectual paradigm (Hotep, 2008). Thus, the contributions, accomplishments, and the historical precedents to the contemporary status of the Blacks Seminoles are not acknowledged. Why? Because as victims of physical and psychological enslavement, oppressed Blacks are left without a cogent analysis of their plight and without the agency to define it. The inability of peoples of African descent to facilitate a large-scale, global movement toward complete liberation is one of the many reasons for the disconnectedness of Africans globally (Ben-Jochannan, 1971; Williams, 1987).

Black Enslavement by Native Americans: An Untold Component of Maafa

Maafa is the Swahili work for great disaster (Ani, 1994). It is a term used to describe the sojourn of descendants of Africa during the transatlantic system of enslavement (Ani, 1994). The unequal treatment of Blacks during the system of enslavement has been addressed by African-centered scholars (e.g., Ben-Jochannan, 1974; Karenga, 2002; Williams, 1987). Conversely, relatively few scholars have discussed the interconnections between the enslavement of Blacks by some Native American cultural groups and the larger struggles of peoples of African descent to overcome oppression.

There are several reasons why an examination of the Native American enslavement of Blacks is a necessary component of any study which assesses the plight and perspectives of the Estelusti. First, enslavement connotes a system of stratification (Anderson, 1995). Thus, one group, the enslaver, will be treated more favorably than the enslaved. Therefore, one can logically deduce that the enslaved will be subjected to racism, prejudice, discrimination, and a subservient status position. Second, the fact that the Black Seminoles were enslaved is at the centerpiece of the Seminole argument as to why they should be excluded from monetary disbursements and complete cultural group membership (Robertson, 2008). To further elucidate the aforementioned, Bateman (1991) and Miller (2005) assert that the Seminoles viewed Blacks as slaves and nothing else despite the reality that many Blacks (e.g., Abraham and Cudjo) played prominent roles and enjoyed high status within the Seminole Nation (Robertson, 2008).

A third reason that enslavement warrants discussion is that at times when Whites made status distinctions between Native Americans and Blacks (e.g., during and after removal), Native Americans distinguished themselves from Blacks (Littlefield, 1977; Robertson, 2008). Thus, we can deduce that, at least in a collective sense, the partnering with African Maroons/Black Seminoles was pragmatic beyond anything else (Bateman, 1991; Littlefield, 1977). This point is important because it serves as an explication that the Seminoles, as a collective group, never viewed Blacks as their complete equals.

Willis (1963) posited that Native Americans had a natural dislike of Blacks. However, this statement should be taken with some caution because there were many instances in which Blacks and Native American groups had collegial relations (Katz, 1997; Littlefield, 1977; Opala, 1981). Perhaps the aforementioned is not surprising since as early as 1693 the English were able to purchase Black slaves from Native Americans (Durant and Moliere, 1999). The aforementioned is buttressed by the reality that many nations/cultural groups, particularly the Creeks, which later formed into the Seminoles, adopted many southern enslavement codes in 1825 (Durant and Moliere, 1999; McLoughlin, 1974). The preceding points establish a foundation for both the firmly entrenched racist views held by some Seminoles and the institutionalization of enslavement among the Seminoles and the remaining “Five Civilized” cultural groups.

Most striking is that the Seminoles, in relation to Black enslavement adopted by some other Native American cultural groups, developed syncretic creation stories (Lawuyi, 1990). Syncretic creation stories represented an amalgamation of both indigenous beliefs and the European contrived "curse of Ham" story (Lawuyi, 1990). These stories provided moral legitimation for the enslavement and disparate treatment of Blacks who were placed at the bottom of the human racial hierarchy (Lawuyi, 1990). The syncretic stories, just like the "Curse of Ham" stories, placed blacks at the bottom of the human hierarchy and was used as a justification for enslavement by insisting that Blacks are inferior (Lawuyi, 1990; Robertson, 2006).

The actions of the Seminoles at the culmination of the Civil War are instructive in any delineation of enslavement and racism as precipitators of the current treatment of Blacks within the Seminole Nation. Stan Watie, a Seminole, was the last confederate general to surrender at the end of Civil War (Anderson & Anderson, 2005). More importantly, Littlefield (1977) posits that Seminoles were unwilling to free their enslaved Blacks as mandated by the United States government at the end of the Civil War. Such information counters the logic of Opala (1981), who contends that Blacks among the Seminoles were enslaved in name only. Contrarily, the relationship between Blacks and Seminoles has been quite complicated. In many ways, the Seminoles treated Blacks better than the other civilized cultural groups (Bateman, 1991; Opala, 1981; Robertson, 2009). For instance, the Black Seminoles often lived on small separate plots of land and were required to pay a small tribute similar to sharecropping (Mulroy, 2007; Opala, 1981). Thus, the institution of enslavement was not as firmly entrenched among the Seminoles as it was in some cultural groups (Opala, 1981; Robertson, 2009). In spite of this, the more the Seminoles saw that they could separate themselves from Blacks; they began engaging in chattel enslavement similar to Europeans (Littlefield, 1977; Robertson, 2008). And therefore, Blacks were always viewed as a conquered people and nothing more than an enslaved group according to at least some Seminole scholars (Miller, 2005).

Discrimination: A Sign of Disparate Treatment

Regarding the Seminole Maroons, the very fact that they can be referred to as enslaved is a manifestation of the fact that they occupied a status subservient to their enslavers, no matter how mild the form (McLoughlin, 1974; Mulroy, 1984, 2007; Twyman, 1999). This inferior status resulted in the Seminoles taking several steps to separate themselves from the Black Seminoles, most saliently after Oklahoma became a state in 1907 (Bateman, 1991; Mulroy, 2007; Robertson, 2008). Second, the enslavement of Blacks by the Seminoles is one of the major contentions of the Seminoles as to why the freedmen should not be included as full members of the cultural group and thus be entitled to the benefits (e.g., educational, housing loans, medical care, and other cultural group monies) that such status entails (Miller, 2005). As Bateman (1991) asserts, the Seminoles view them as formerly enslaved and nothing else.

Third, is the general lack of knowledge on the subject of "Native American enslavement" by people of African descent?[iii] Furthermore, the "five civilized cultural groups" that settled Oklahoma were referred to as such because they both had adopted a more Eurocentric view of Blacks (i.e., that they were inferior) and began to practice chattel slavery (Bateman, 1991). This resulted in: (1) although initially the freedmen were allowed autonomy, they were rarely, considered equals (Bateman, 1991; Mulroy, 1984; 1993); (2) freedmen who were most likely to be viewed as "equals" were those that occupied higher "status" positions (e.g., interpreters, guides, proficient warriors, etc,), (Mulroy, 1984; Porter et al., 1996); (3) Despite the fact that miscegenation took place, the Seminoles practiced a matrilineal form of descent, therefore, the offspring from a Seminole man marrying a Black woman would not have been considered a member of the cultural group. Fourth, the more economics became a factor in the Seminoles' plight, the more the enslavement argument came to the forefront to justify unequal treatment (Bateman, 1991; Littlefield, 1977; Mulroy, 1984). The preceding was particularly true during the removal period (1838-1843) and onward (Mulroy, 1984).

Money: A Factor That Facilitated Division

The crystallization of money as a divisive factor between the Black Seminoles and the Seminoles occurred when the Indian claims commission awarded monies to the Seminole Nation in 1991 for lands ceded in the treaties of Fort Moultrie Creek, Payne's Landing, and also when the Indian Reorganization Act was enacted in 1934. Furthermore, as money became abundant, and the Seminoles could be recognized as independent from the Creeks, Seminole enslavement resembled European chattel enslavement (Littlefield, 1977; Robertson, 2008). I argue that discriminatory actions on the part of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Seminoles (e.g., the ideological nullification of U.S. Seminole Treaty of 1866) entailed attempts to formulate new constitutions to exclude freedmen, non-inclusion in monetary disbursements, and illegally removing them from the Seminole Nation altogether in July 2000 (Mulroy,2007; Robertson, 2002).

A foreshadowing of the divisiveness associated with money has its origins in the 1950s. In 1950 and 1951 the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma filed claims for lands in Florida that were ceded to the United States in the treaties of Fort Moultrie and Payne's Landing (Gardne, 2001; Saito, 2000). The Seminole Nation was awarded $16 million in 1976 by the Indian Claims Commission, which was placed in a trust. In 1990, Congress passed an act that allowed for the distribution of the funds with interest. By 1991 (when the money was disbursed), the amount had grown to $56 million, seventy-five percent of which was designated to the Seminoles of Oklahoma, twenty-five percent to the Seminoles of Florida, and none to the Black Seminoles (Gardne, 2001). Interestingly, the Seminole Nation as it existed in 1823 clearly included the Black Seminoles (Saito, 2000). Thus, it is assumed that the aforementioned was one of the principal reasons that the U.S. government took land from the Seminoles.

Each of the preceding events can be traced to a legacy of enslavement. The very fact that the Blacks were "formerly enslaved" and "not equals," raises moral dilemmas for contemporary Seminoles. The dilemma compels the Seminoles to admit that they benefited from enslavement, in many instances, in the same manner as Europeans. Consequently, such an admission would result in their loss of status from "being oppressed by whites" to being the oppressors! Further, by asserting that the freedmen were merely enslaved, did not the Seminoles benefit from the presence of Blacks within this inherent stratification system? The preceding argument is reflected in the characterization of the Second Seminole War by U.S. General Thomas Sidney Jessup (the most successful commander in the Second Seminole War) as a Negro, not an Indian war (Mulroy, 1993). This statement elucidates that the U.S. military knew the Black Seminoles, not the Seminoles, were more of a physical threat in combat and that it was the tactical innovations of former that made their military endeavors unsuccessful. This is a fact that many Seminoles and scholars (e.g., Miller, 2005) are reluctant to acknowledge. For this reason, can it not be surmised that without the inclusion of the freedmen's tactical fighting skill, the U.S. would not have been obliged to make any concessions to the Seminoles (see all of the treaties)? Moreover, would not any attempt to deny the freedmen compensation be both discriminatory and hypocritical?

Expulsion and Reintegration

Discrimination, as it can be applied to the Seminole Maroons, would entail having the power to systematically deny opportunities (in the form of monetary compensation) by both the Seminoles and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. Such non-actions are hypocritical, in that the Seminoles feel that the government owes them compensation (and rightfully so) for land that was taken, would not at the very least the same be owed to those who helped defend and cultivate the land, allowing you to be in a position to receive compensation, deserve reparations also?

The most blatant and salient act of discrimination by the Seminoles against the freedmen involved expelling them from the cultural group on July 1, 2000 (Gardne, 2001; Sharpe, 2002). This act was initiated by a constitutional referendum wherein nine questions were voted on and approved. Three of these questions would disenfranchise the freedmen who were made citizens by the U.S.-Seminole Treaty of 1866. This act was in violation of Article 13 of the Seminole constitution and section 1302 of the Indian Civil Rights Act. Article 13 of the Seminole Constitution provides that the "constitution may only be amended by a majority vote of the qualified voters" (Sharpe, 2002, p. 2). However, the amendments were illegal because they did not include votes cast by the Black Seminoles (who have always had council voting privileges).

In October 2003 the Bureau of Indian Affairs issued a memorandum welcoming the Seminole Freedmen back into the cultural group (Bentley, 2003; Mulroy, 2007). Nevertheless, several questions remain as to the long-term implications of this ruling. First, since the Seminole Maroons are still ineligible to participate in monetary disbursements, will they truly be treated as equals in the actual sense of the word? Second, will the Seminole Freedmen become a significant part of the group's decision making apparatus? Third, would this ruling bolster the legitimacy of the claims of freedmen of the other cultural groups (e.g., Chickasaw, Cherokee, Choctaw, and Creek)?

Method

A total of twenty –six interviews, selected using snowballing sampling, were conducted during two time periods with identification card-carrying Seminole Freedmen. The first wave consisted of ten interviews, of which five were selected, were conducted from March through May of 2002 after the Black Seminoles were expelled from the Seminole Nation. The interviews included in both waves of the study were those from which the author was best able to discern Black Seminole perceptions of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. The second wave of interviews took place from October 2006 through May 2007, after the Black Seminoles were welcomed back into the Seminole Nation. The interviews included in the present study came from two different time periods because the included time periods were pivotal in explicating Seminole Maroon status.

Staples' (1976) African-centered sociological approach was utilized as a theoretical framework in conducting latent-content analysis of semi-structured interview responses. There are several reasons why the current study was conducted in this manner. First, the Pan-African/Black sociological approach of Staples (1976) was useful in its emphasis on the circumstances effecting Black people devoid of pathology, while focusing on precipitating social, political, historical, and economic variables (Staples, 1976). Second, the use of latent-content analysis, in the format delineated in Berg (2007), was beneficial in that it is the most "obvious way to analyze interview data" (p. 134). Berg's (2007) schemata allows for the identification of recurrent themes presented by respondents. Additionally, latent-content analysis in the present study enabled the author to discern the "deep structural meaning conveyed in the message" while conducting interviews (Berg, 2007, p. 308). Finally, the semi-structured question format permitted the author to ask additional probing questions for a more complete grasp of how the station of the Black Seminoles framed their perceptions of racism, discrimination, and exclusion.

Wave 1

The interviews that are part of the first wave of selected responses were conducted between March and May of 2002. The interviews were significant to this study because they took place after the Black Seminoles were expelled from the Seminole Nation on July 1, 2000. Thus, it can be gleaned that the following responses were an illustration of the feelings of some Black Seminole members following a pivotal event regarding their cultural group status. The following respondents were asked to give their take on the relationship between the Black Seminoles and the Seminoles. A female named Sarah opined:

> Segregation destroyed the relationship between the two groups. Also, funds have been misused since the 1980s (within the Seminole Nation). They shut down programs because of the misappropriation of funds. Just like now they recognize Kenneth Chambers instead of the Chief Jerry Haney who the Bureau of Indian Affairs recognizes. They (progressive faction) tried to say that chief Haney stepped down voluntarily but the BIA did not recognize the election of Kenneth Chambers. Out of 13,000 only 800 voted and you have to have at least a two-thirds majority to approve a referendum. The Black Seminoles did not get a chance to vote. [iv]

Sarah's response provided an interesting starting point for a Black sociological approach to understanding the plight of the Black Seminoles. First, Sarah blames the government, i.e., the Bureau of Indian Affairs, for fomenting descent between the two groups in order to more easily separate them. This perspective at best can be assumed to be only partially correct for it was economically expedient for the government to exacerbate the tension that already existed between the two groups (Littlefield, 1977). However, as far back as the 1600s Native American cultural groups have engaged in Black enslavement (Robertson, 2009; Willis, 1963). Therefore, only through a critical examination of how Black life is affected by economic and political factors can one adequately assess the train of thought expressed by Sarah. Joan argued:

> When I found out about open enrollment, they had put a freeze on it because of the lawsuit (*Davis v. United States, 1996*) where freedmen (Black Seminoles) could not enroll. It did not matter if you could prove it (your lineage) and bring all of the documents to prove it, freedmen could not enroll. I went to the Bureau of Indian Affairs regional office to try to enroll and I was told: "We are not enrolling freedmen at this time." I then called the office and I did not tell the person who I talked to on the phone that I was a Seminole Freedmen and I told them that I was eligible to enroll on the blood roll and I can prove it—by your standards—can I enroll at this time, and they said sure![v]

A Black sociological critique of Joan's statement illustrated the confluence of several factors. Chiefly, from the denial of Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood cards to the majority of the Black Seminoles, I discerned an affirmation of the rule of hypodescent. The rule of hypodescent, i.e., the one drop rule, contends that the slightest hint of African blood makes one Black (Hill, 2001). The importance of this standard of racial categorization, dating back to the days of colonial enslavement, is that it was used by the Dawes Commission census takers to place cultural group members with African ancestry on the freedmen (Black Seminole) roll (Bateman, 1991).

Upon being placed on the freedman roll, those persons with visible African/Black ancestry were categorically denied full cultural group membership and all the benefits that such membership entails (Robertson, 2008). Further, such differentiation between those on the "freedmen" roll and the "Seminole by blood" roll can be perceived as a stimulus for a racial hierarchy between the two groups that mirrored the racial differentiation during Jim Crow segregation.

To buttress the previous respondent's account, another Seminole Freedman, Yolanda, tells a similar story upon attempting to enroll and obtain a CDIB card:

> I went to the regional BIA office and brought documentation of my relatives being on both rolls (freedmen and Seminole by blood). Each time when I would present documentation, I was told to bring more. Also, each time I would bring the documentation that was requested, which I knew was a lot more than people who were already enrolled were required to bring, I was told to bring more. After three or more visits, the supervisor of the office would ask me questions like: "Where did you get this?" I was also told: "we need to keep this." But I knew what they were doing. When I began to question why I had to keep bringing more and more documentation, I was called a "porch monkey" and also told that "I needed to go back to Africa." The man that told me that I needed to go back to Africa was basically White. A lot of these Indians are basically White people.[vi]

Yolanda's response can be used to correct several myths about Black Seminole-Seminole relations. The first myth is the assertion that there have always been collegial relations between the two groups (Opala, 1981; Twyman, 1999). Further, the lack of good relations was exemplified by the fact that the BIA office worker, according to Yolanda, told her to leave, asked for more than the required documentation, and told her to go back to Africa, clearly destroys the aforementioned myth. Such views have been reaffirmed by some Indians in the past. For instance, Robertson (2009) cites how Seminoles have on several occasions referred to Blacks as "niggers." Anderson and Anderson (2005) posits that it is a complete mystery as to why Blacks believe in the fairy tale of complete beneficial and unified relations between the two groups.

Seminole scholar Susan Miller (2005) maintains that the Seminole Nation has always viewed Blacks/Africans as enslaved persons and nothing else. Finally, even Joseph Opala (1981), who has wrote about coalitions and symbiotic relations between the two groups, suggested that the Black Seminoles were always required to live on separate plots of land and pay the Seminoles a small tribute for farming the land on which they lived. In all fairness to Opala (1981), it can be perceived that the separate living quarters were merely to discourage whites from trying to re-enslave the Seminole Maroons. On the flipside, many scholars posit that at least some of the Seminoles had contempt for Blacks before Oklahoma was granted statehood (Anderson and Anderson, 2005; Bateman, 1991; Lawuyi, 1990; Littlefield, 1977; Robertson, 2008). And, if the enslavement of Blacks by the Seminoles was only about deterring slave holding whites from re-enslaving Seminole Maroons, the U.S. government would not have had to force an end to enslavement among the southern faction of the Seminoles after the Civil War (Littlefield, 1977).

Along the same line of thought, Steve claims,

> They don't want the Black Freedmen to have cards. Our ancestors are on the rolls but we have not been accorded the right to be a part of that program where we would be able to have a CDIB card and entitle us to those benefits.[vii]

Similarly, John adds:

> Not yet, it (the CDIB cards) is one of the things that we are fighting for. As you know, it was one of those things that we are guaranteed according to the Treaty of 1866. We were guaranteed that we would receive the same rights that the Seminole Indians by blood get. Some of us are by blood, just not enough blood. But we do not have CDIB cards and we are asking in this lawsuit that we will be able to get those cards-we were only issued membership cards—kind of like identification cards.[viii]

Steve laments on how the denial of Certificate of Degree of Indian Blood Cards (CDIB) to the Freedmen descendants was the work of the government and tacitly approved by the current Seminoles. In analyzing this assertion from a Pan- Africanist sociological perspective, Steve's comments reach back to a long history of the U.S. government's denial of Blacks any form of reparations (Robinson, 2000). Moreover, the rejection of compensation to Blacks, but granting them to some Native American cultural groups, is a further illustration of the lower position in the racial stratification hierarchy of Blacks (Anderson, 1994).

The thoughts articulated by John are similar to those communicated by Steve. Chiefly, John's opinions detail the inherent discrimination that emerged from the creation of separate rolls by the government and in not allowing the Black Seminoles to receive CDIB cards. Secondly, John's sentiments point to the ideological nullification of the U.S.-Seminole Treaty of 1866. The treaty basically called for all Blacks (both those with and without Indian ancestry) to be included as official members of the Seminole Nation but it was illegally violated on several occasions by the Seminoles (Bateman, 1991; Robertson, 2008).

Wave 2

The second group of interviews used in the study is important for several reasons. First, these interviews were conducted after the Black Seminoles/Seminole Freedmen were allowed back into the Seminole Nation. Secondly, the respondents' statements offer a glimpse into the feelings of Seminole Maroons regarding their new status position in the cultural group. Namely, whether or not that they are "truly" accepted. The aforementioned is due to the fact of being welcomed back into the cultural group while still not being able to share in the monetary disbursements (Mulroy, 2007). Finally, the responses give a starting point for the subsequent Pan-Africanist based sociological analysis of inter-ethnic conflict between African/Black and Non-white groups.

In September 2003, BIA decided to welcome the Black Seminoles back into the cultural group---- What did this mean to you?

Eric opined,

> Nothing. What they want is your vote. They want your support. The last election for the chief, we were sent special invitations (by one of the candidates) to a banquet for us to attend. Thus, we were welcomed back so that we could help the chief win the election. When they send out newsletters, the newsletters discussed the building of homes. Those homes were for Indians. We were being used. The government twisted the arm of the Seminoles. When you look back we had several different court rulings. The government actually cut all of the funds off. The casinos were shut down. So, by them accepting us back was only to get their programs back. Therefore, they gave only what they had to. *How did the Seminoles at meetings act toward the freedmen after this***?** I kind of got away from it (the cultural group and attending meetings). It drained us. I have not been to a meeting in a long time. When you go to the Seminole Nation Office now, everyone is more professional. In the past, they were not friendly to you. However, some of the older ones never changed. Some of the older Seminoles knew that we deserved to be accepted and they always treated us nicely. But some of the newer ones felt we were taking their medical programs. The Seminoles get free medical services. The freedmen are only eligible for welfare programs if they qualify, like cheese. The newer ones are motivated by greed. My mother used to tell me in the past the blacks and the Indians used to live and work together. They used to speak Indian language. My mother would say things in Seminole all the time.[ix]

The first reply, given by Eric, suggested that the Seminole support for bringing the Black Seminoles back into the cultural group was an exercise facilitated by political expediency as opposed to a step towards actual justice. Further, it demonstrates that many of the Black Seminoles are unaware of the fact that there have always been factions of the Seminoles that viewed them as inferior (Lawuyi, 1990; Miller, 2005). In the Pan-Africanist sociological sense, the aforementioned is true for several reasons. First, the Black Seminoles 'voting privileges were restored, allowing them to be members of the Seminole Nation but they were not allowed to participate in monetary disbursements. Secondly, when the BIA programs were restored, the Black Seminoles were never allowed to take part in the majority of these programs. So, their "reinstatement" was more symbolic than substantive (Robertson, 2009). Hence, questions still remain as to whether anything has really changed.

In 2003 the BIA decided to issue CDIB cards to the Freedmen, giving them access to some Seminole benefits. How did this impact the cultural group?

Jason responded,

> That was a mere smokescreen. In other words, prior to this ruling/proclamation, freedmen, if they could trace their ancestry to someone on the Indian roll, would be eligible for a certificate of degree of Indian blood card. Further, the chief at that time stated that he had the final say on who was to receive benefits. Also, those who had voting privileges were allowed to vote again. So basically, nothing really changed.[x]

Jason suggested that the Seminole support for bringing the Black Seminoles back into the Seminole Nation was an exercise facilitated by political and economic needs as opposed to a step towards actual justice. In the Pan-Africanist sociological sense, the aforementioned is true for several reasons. First, the Black Seminoles' voting privileges were restored with no discernible increase in status within the Seminole Nation. Secondly, the restored programs were those that only Seminoles by blood could take part in. So, their "reinstatement" was not the watershed moment that it was propagated to be (Robertson, 2009). Hence, questions still remain as to whether anything has really changed.

How do blacks respond when you inform them that you are a Black Seminole?

Sharon replied,

> They often seem excited to meet one (a Black Seminole) and are eager to learn more about us. Most African Americans have heard some stories but they have never got the chance to meet one of us. Additionally, Education in the state does not even speak about the Black Seminoles. The Seminoles are discussed, but not the Freedmen.[xi]

Sharon's retort underscored the reaction of Non-Seminole Blacks when learning of her Seminole ancestry. Her perspective on their views exemplifies the deleterious impact of the White/Eurocentric educational system that Black students at all levels are exposed. Interpreting Sharon's answer from a Black sociological standpoint, the influence of the Maafa, i.e., the Black Holocaust, emerges in that many of Sharon's acquaintances can be presumed have not uncovered the historical contributions of their Black brothers and sisters (Ani, 1994; Karenga, 2002). Thus, the aforesaid coincides with Staples' (1976) perceived fourth objective of Black sociology which entails correcting myths about Black life and emancipating the minds of Black people. Moreover, Lawuyi (1990) provides information on how Blacks and Black Seminoles in some instances viewed each other differently due to a lack of understanding their ancestral connection to Africa. This can aptly be perceived as one of a number of reasons that the larger population of African Americans do not really know about nor have fully embraced the struggle of the Black Seminoles (Robertson, 2008). The following respondent was asked about her participation in the Seminole cultural group.

Andrea lamented,

> I can remember riding horses when I was younger in Wewoka, Oklahoma with my parents. Now my participation in the cultural group was limited after my move. Over time, I missed many family reunions, many relatives have died. But there has been a change in recent years. The past twenty to thirty years we weren't able to reconnect due to poverty. We have been able to have family reunions every two years. We want the younger generation to understand the importance of our ancestry.[xii]

The next participant was asked to describe the present relationship between the Black Seminoles and the Seminoles of Oklahoma.

David added,

> The Seminoles do not really want us in the cultural group. We can vote, but it does not really count.[xiii]

The issues mentioned by Andrea and David were thought-provoking. Andrea asserted the need to learn and participate more in the cultural group and to teach younger Seminole Freedmen/Seminole Maroons about their ancestry. David, on the other hand, suggested that the Seminoles really do not want them in the Seminole Nation and their votes do not really count. Opala (1981) and Mulroy (1993, 2007) both can be perceived as positing that the Black Seminoles need to get more involved in Seminole Nation affairs. Further, Mulroy (1993, 2007) and Miller (2005) also express that what this author perceives as reluctance by the Seminoles to encourage the Seminole Maroons to participate in Seminole Nation affairs.

Conclusion

In this attempt to analyze the selected perceptions of Black Seminoles' feelings of having experienced racism, discrimination, and exclusion from a Pan Africanist/African-centered sociological perspective, several problems occurred. First, the lack of an ongoing random sample of Black Seminoles from which to make longitudinal comparisons was missing. Therefore, no generalizations could be made to the larger population of Black Seminoles from this study. At best, this effort represented a glimpse into the feelings and concerns which can be used to facilitate future studies. Second, is that the development of a Pan-Africanist sociological approach, which served as a prism for the analysis of interview responses, is in its infancy. I do not say this to belie the works of Du Bois (1899, 1903), Staples (1976), Wright (2002), and countless others. More specifically, the aforementioned was brought up because those works, more often than not, are acknowledged as African American and Black sociological scholarly efforts. My endeavor was a modest attempt to take the precepts of the previously mentioned approaches, primarily Staples (1976), and apply them into areas and ways that sociologists generally do not use them. Thirdly, sociological writings on the Black Seminoles are scarce (e.g., Cromartie, 2006; Robertson, 2002, 2005, 2008, 2009). Most other writings on the Black Seminoles have been the domain of historians (e.g., Littlefield, 1977; Mulroy, 1993, 2007; Sattler, 1987) or anthropologists (Bateman, 1991, Lawuyi, 1990; Opala, 1981).

The promise that the development of a Pan-Africanist/African-centered sociological paradigm holds cannot be emphasized enough. Such an approach would stimulate new epistemologies and perspectives on how sociological factors impact the behavior, interactions, and conditions of Africans across the Diaspora. More importantly, it would promote self-definition and the use of scholarship for the total liberation of Black people.

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Notes

Depending on the author, the Black Seminoles are referred to by many names. At times, they have been referred to as Black Indians, Black Seminoles, Seminole Maroon descendants, African Maroons, Estelusti, and freedmen. The bulk of the Black Seminoles were Maroons who escaped enslavement and lived among the Seminoles along with some who were the offspring of miscegenation between Blacks and Native Americans. Each of the preceding terms will be used interchangeably throughout this work.

The terms African and Black will be used interchangeably throughout this work. Both terms will be used to describe individuals who ancestrally hail from the African continent and live throughout the Diaspora.

Twyman (1999) and Mulroy (1984) argue that at least thirteen Native American cultural groups had enslavement officially written into their constitutions and most, if not all, of the "five civilized cultural groups" fought on the side of the Confederacy during the Civil War.

(Interview # 1 with author, Oklahoma City, Ok. 3/17/02).

(Interview # 2 with author, Oklahoma City, Ok. 3/25/02).

(Interview # 7 with author, Shawnee, Oklahoma, 4/13/02).

(Interview # 10 with author, Oklahoma City, Ok. 5/27/02).

(Interview # 5 with author, Oklahoma City, Ok. 4/4/02).

Interview #14 with author, Oklahoma City, OK., 5/28/07)

Interview #13 with author, Oklahoma City, OK, 5/26/07)

Interview # 15 with author, Oklahoma City, OK, 7/11/07)

Interview #12 with author Oklahoma City, Ok, 12/20/2006)

Interview #11 with author Oklahoma City, OK, 11/6/2006)