

Africana Studies Moving Toward Dereliction, Savaged by Invisible Jim Crow, Warrior-Scholars in Chaos: What to do? Embrace the Irrefragable African-centered Worldview

by

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Abstract

In this invited 20-year retrospective since the publication by Daudi Ajani ya Azibo of "Articulating the Distinction between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks: The Fundamental Role of Culture and the African-Centered Worldview," the field of Africana Studies is seen to be headed toward dereliction because it has not settled on the African-centered worldview for its conceptual framework. A mental Jim Crow has cast a pall on Africana Studies warrior-scholars who are in chaos as a result. Implications are drawn for genealogy of the development of the African-centered worldview, methodology and methods in Africana Studies, melanin scholarship, Africana Women's Studies, the name of the discipline, social theory and survival thrust, and clarification of the term worldview as used in African-centered scholarship.

My Mixed View on Africana Studies 20-years Later

The editors honor me with the invitation to share views on Africana Studies 20-years after my (Azibo, 1992) “Articulating the Distinction between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks: The Fundamental Role of Culture and the African-Centered Worldview” (hereafter “Articulating”) was published in the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) journal *The Afrocentric Scholar* under ancestor William “Bill” Little’s editorship. The present article assumes the reader’s familiarity. It is true, good, and personally gratifying that “Articulating,” “has been extremely useful for those of us utilizing an African-centered framework *that is grounded in the concepts of culture and worldview*” (Karanja Carroll, personal communication, September 18, 2011, emphases added).

But, the remainder of the Africana Studies professionals appear to constitute a significantly larger majority within which exists varied paths and frameworks (e.g., Burgess & Agozino, 2011; Fenderson, 2009; Norment, 2007; Western Journal, 2010). This is a problem because the existence of this type of in-profession diversity is not disciplinary diversity or interdisciplinary functionality, which may be healthy. This diversity is instead an attack on the discipline of Africana Studies because, as I contended then (“Articulating”) and still do, the discipline can only be based in African-centered culture-based worldview if it is to be epistemologically sound.

Thence comes my decidedly mixed view on the status of the discipline. I know well the upside that “our shoulders are broad enough, our arms strong enough, our intellect keen enough, and our observance of our duty diligent enough to carry on in the work started by our ancestors” (Azibo, 1996a, 23). A fundamental truth within the clever phraseology is that the *original* and *enduring* disciplinary base for Africana Studies is the irrefragable African-centered worldview. I specifically refer to the worldview that our African ancestors articulated: “what makes Black Studies ‘Black’ is the usage of the conceptual universe afforded by the African [centered] worldview” (Articulating, 66) *and nothing else*.

I know the downside also: history informs that the white man is the bitter enemy of the Blacks (Williams, 1976) and that “nothing happens under White supremacy that is not about [supporting] White supremacy” (Frances Welsing lecture, August 1988). And, “the Afrikan Way ... has been most targeted for destruction [by Western civilization]” (Baruti, 2010, 53). Not surprisingly, then, Africana Studies has been targeted for external direction from jump street or get-go or straight out the gate (“Articulating”). That Africana Studies exists in the Western Academy is a disadvantage of epic proportions that practically ensures external control by Eurasians who control this space and who will concede nothing without a demand backed by power. This is the reality that prevails as Africana programs are denied, cut back, and overwhelmingly staffed by the non- and anti-African-centered academics, many of whom appear guilty of the *Betrayal* of African-U.S. people that Baker (2008) analyzed. As a result, dereliction fueled by invisible Jim Crow has the Africana Studies warrior-scholars in chaos.

Moving Toward Dereliction

Tommy Curry (2011a, 2011b) identifies the “derelictical crisis” gripping Africana Philosophy from its inception as a “continuing to neglect its only actual duty—the duty to inquiry into the reality of African-descended people *as they* [Africana people themselves] *have revealed it*” (Curry, 2011b, 144-145, emphases added). Curry (2011b) cogently argues that Africana Philosophy has failed to inquire seriously into the culturally particular epistemologies of African-descended people [pursuing instead] an epistemological convergence with white philosophical traditions. Curry points out the bottom line effect of this is the distracting of African descent philosophers from understanding the thought of their ancestors. This is almost always accompanied with the practice of revising authentic ancestral thought to jibe with established Western philosophical traditions and hegemony. Thus, Curry points out, the centrality of African-centered culture is read out of African-U.S. philosophical thought and there is no advancing of the self-understanding of Africana people possible in Africana philosophy conducted this way. Instead, what is yielded is a solidification of “the epistemic capture of differing racial and cultural experience [by the European-centered canon in Africana-face]” (Curry, 2011b, 147). Unable and unwilling in some cases to conceptualize the world in ways contiguous with Africana people’s history, the African-U.S. philosopher is in dereliction of duty.

Africana Studies avoided this derelictical crisis at its inception as it was born in protest against it (e.g., Anderson & Stewart, 2007). The point to be taken, however, is that Africana Studies is presently catapulting toward dereliction as it is effectively distracted from using the African-centered thought of its ancestors.

Invisible Jim Crow

It would seem that the bottom-line pressure toward dereliction emanates from what Tillotson (2011) aptly identifies as *Invisible Jim Crow*. He explains how in the 1980-2007 period the Western thought imposed on African-U.S. people through American civilization was ideologically threatening to African-U.S. security and forced a shift of African-U.S. people’s intra-racial social landscape in a manner “*that distracts, neutralizes, or reduces the need and desire for assertive collective agency* (original emphases, 60). Based on Tillotson’s analysis, it seems the Africana Studies scholar and the rank and file African-U.S. person has been savaged to the point of dereliction by Western-based thinking on postmodernism, essentialism, color blindness, social construction of race, and post-racial contract to name a few as well as enslavement-based social structures. Ideological domination therefore remains an obstacle (Tillotson, 103). The false promise of integration (Ukombozi, 1996) as a social theory is a perfect example. The Caucasian, after all, is adept at military and ideological warfare (Baruti, 2006). No wonder then Africana Studies scholars are in chaos.

Africana Warrior-Scholars? In Chaos?

I will enumerate some indices of chaos without detailing them since acknowledging them as accurate or more true than not true is sufficient to sustain the chaos attribution. First, Africana scholars for years have been running away from the concepts of race and essentialism (Azibo, 2011b). It follows that the related concepts of racial awareness, preference, and identity (Azibo, 2010) are being undermined as well. Indeed, there is a societal attack on Blackness/Africanity that is in full swing (Jones, 1997). Second, it seems that Africana Studies scholars do not appreciate what Curry (2012) is clear on: (a) that race as a socio-historical construct lends itself to an analysis of how African-U.S. people mediate the social context of race toward an understanding of themselves and their survival. Thus, (b) an analysis of race cannot look at race outside of its inherent cultural fusion with African people's cultural and philosophical tenets. Third, paraphrasing ancestor psychologist Bobby Wright, Africana people are in a race war, but refuse to accept that fact, and are the only ones who do not know what race they are in! Fourth, Africana Studies scholars appear not to appreciate that what passes as "race relations" since Columbus' time (Chomsky, 1993) is actually war conducted against African descent people (Jones, 1992; Obadele, 2003). Fifth, if the Africana Studies scholar in the first place runs from race as a legitimate concept, then more often than not s/he also runs from or does not run toward African ancestral thought because the terrain of intellectual ideas is being won by the race war perpetrators who know what race they are and on which side they fight. This qualifies as chaos for Africana Studies scholars. As a result, Africana people will always lose if the Africana Studies scholar does not conduct intellectual warfare (Carruthers, 1999) outside of these indices.

Since war is being waged on Africana people by Eurasian civilization, it stands to reason that the Africana Studies scholar must be a *warrior-scholar*. Africana Studies warrior-scholars engage scholarly activity knowing they are at a war that must be won. Mwalimu Baruti (2010) in a thoroughgoing analysis *IWA: A Warrior's Character* informs that as warrior-scholars Africans must be oriented like "lions who refuse to glorify the [white] hunter" (47-48) and "cannot tolerate voices intent on dragging us away from this [the African-centered] Way" (231). Taking Baruti's points as axiomatic, clarity on this African-centered Way will always be in order even, perhaps especially, for warriors and warrior-scholars.

Azibo's (1992) Articulating in Retrospect 20-years Later

I have argued that it is accurate to think of a single or the one and only African-centered worldview perspective on reality (Azibo, 1990). In "Articulating," the parameters of exactly what the African-centered Way is was presented after the asseveration of a singular African-centered worldview. Drawing from Curry (2011b), the African-centered worldview is an articulation of the particular logics Africana peoples use to mediate and direct the socio-historical context toward their own understanding. It is the root metaphors that characterize and constitute African based cognitive systems used by African descent people to structure and make sense of their existence that Africana Studies warrior-scholars must be attentive to (Baruti, 2010;

Headley, cited in Curry, 2011b).

Because they were plumbed in “Articulating,” these root metaphors and particular logics will not be re-plumbed here. Suffice it to point out that they can be completely ascertained by immersion in the formal literature on African-centered thought (“Articulating”). Minimally, the particular logics and root metaphors entail knowing the positions African ancestors articulated on cosmology → ontology → axiology the three of which cybernetically→ worldview → ethos → ideology and the six of these together cybernetically→cultural manifestations which mark a people’s experiences and practice (“Articulating,” 68-71). Since freedom is best defined as the ability to conceptualize the world in ways contiguous with one’s race’s history and literacy as the application of this freedom in the contemporary era (see Harris, 1992), the Africana Studies professional who rejects or refuses to engage the formal African-centered worldview is neither free nor literate. Sadly, African-U.S. people appear overall as un-free and not literate amnestics (Azibo, 2011a). What an ignoble and shameful state of existence for the Africana Studies professional especially.

Some Implications

Genealogy. A genealogy covering the history of work on the African-centered worldview can be invaluable in ascertaining the construct’s legitimate history, limits, aims, and scope. Curry (2011b) has called for this in Africana Philosophy and Karanja Carroll’s (2010, 2012) articles are an excellent beginning for Africana Studies. Discussed in “Articulating,” the work of Jacob Carruthers and colleagues in the early 1970s yielded in 1973 the journal *The Afrocentric World Review*. This was the first time “Afrocentricity” as a distinct concept was introduced, defined, and applied systematically in African-centered scholarship (see Association of African Historians, 1973). Making the mistake that “Afrocentricity” has its origins, authorship, and authoritative utterances elsewhere as did Burgess & Agozino (2011) should be anathema (see “Articulating”).

Methodology and methods. Following McDougal (2011), research methodology represents the paradigms, theories, concepts, and models used to guide and interpret research whereas research methods refer to the data collection tools such as scientific epistemology, historiography, experiments, surveys, case studies, content analyses, and so on. Apprehending the relevance of African-centered worldview for methodology (Carroll, 2008) is instantaneous: it is the African-centered worldview that makes Africana Studies methodology Africana! The key question 20 years ago is the same today as well as in 1972 when first posed by Cedric X Clark/S. M. Khatib: Black Studies or the [Eurasian-centered] Study of Blacks? (“Articulating”). Simply put, the particular logics and root metaphors used in producing the methodology—and therefore in *guiding* and *interpreting* the research—are those we derive and inherit from centered African worldview.

Regarding methods, consider George Washington Carver whose legendary accomplishments need no mention. He was queried how he came to have such achievement? His reply, in paraphrase, was:

I get up early in the morning when it is still dark and very quiet. I go into the woods and I talk to the plants. I ask them what are you good for? Why did God put you here? And, the plants talk back to me with answers. Then I go to my laboratory and go to work.

Centered African worldview methodology informs us that Dr. Carver was not hallucinating, but communicating with the plants on a spiritual level. Most likely this communication involved some right cerebral cortex intuitive functioning, the results of which were transferred to the left cerebral cortex for scientific processing. Dr. Carver's empirical scientific results speak for themselves. However, Africana Studies is without tools to study the evident spirituality based functioning. Thus, centered African worldview informs that research methods other than those in place today are possible and needed. But, it does not remotely suggest throwing out the baby with the bath water or making anathema prevailing methods.

Carruthers (1996) has provided a classic instruction on this last point showing how to use science for liberation. I also have addressed it by articulating a research approach for framing psychological studies of Africana people which mandates research conceptualization and results interpretation (i.e., methodology) from the centered African worldview while using prevailing methods (Azibo, 1996c). It is apparent in my work that the African-centered worldview seamlessly serves as bedrock framework for methodology regardless of the method (see, for example, my guest edited issue on African-centered epistemology in *Black Psychology, Humboldt Journal*, 2006).

Melanin scholarship. Twenty years ago I stated “[t]he Black Studies scholar who is skeptical about melanin is advised to hold in abeyance her or his position until more definitive and soundly conducted studies are produced” (“Articulating,” 79). Physiological psychologists have answered this bell (Bynum, 1999; Bynum et al., 2005; Moore, 1995, 2002; Stewart, 1996). Melanin circulates in the inner body as neuromelanin and the *scientific* research is unequivocal that it has psycho-behavioral correlates. Why does the Africana Studies scholar in knee-jerk fashion run from melanin like s/he runs from race? Doing so is insulting and contemptible. After all, melanin is a hormone like melatonin, serotonin, adrenalin, and the like. Yet, only melanin is dismissed out of hand by Africana Studies scholars—not any other hormone or body chemical—as not having relevance for behavior and therefore scholarship. There are gifts in the blackness to include implications for enhanced spirituality (as human motivation in the scientific context; no religious context implied). And, historically Nilotic civilization took melanin studies seriously (King, 1990). How long will it be for contemporary Africana Studies scholars to get serious about melanin studies? When will it become part of the curriculum?

Africana Women's Studies. As addressed in "Articulating" and Azibo (1994), my position is "Black Women's Studies enters as female gender foci under the auspice of Black Studies [proper]" (Articulating, 83). When conceptualized using the African-centered worldview, the paradigm does not allow for an Africana Women's or Men's Studies epistemologically and pedagogically distinct from Africana Studies and each other. There is little basis for controversy regarding Africana Men's or Women's Studies when that simply means applying the African-centered worldview to the study of a gender as a focus. The big question for Africana Women's Studies in relation to Africana Studies is: Will the curriculum be inclusive? It should according to our worldview, but the Western Academy and traditions are opposed to this. Perhaps Africana Studies warrior-scholars will find it worth fighting for building an African-centered worldview-based grounding between formal studies of Africana sisters and the rest of Africana Studies. After all, it is undeniable that the centered African logics and root metaphors precede Africana people's male- and female-centered narratives which provide vital gender-based slants on Africentrically guided and interpreted reality (Azibo, 1994). *Note bene*, however, that is all they provide.

What nomenclature for Africana Studies? Extending the logic of Africana Studies based in centered African worldview that instructs us to conceptualize the epistemological unity of Africana Men's and Women's Studies thereunder, it is seen that Africana Studies of non-Africans is desirable. It would entail applying the African-centered worldview to guide and interpret scholarship on Eurasians and others ("Articulating"). Consequently, much nomenclature like Afrology, Africalogy and all others that define the scope of the field to only encompass the study of African phenomena with Africans as subjects or at the center is too narrow, albeit historically interesting. My position is the same 20-years out:

that the discipline can be properly called by any nomenclature that does not vitiate, deny, or preclude all or any part of what is connoted by the African worldview, especially its cross-national/ethnic/geopolitical character and its applicability to all manner of phenomena (not just African phenomena) Perhaps the better term is the obvious one: African Worldview Studies. ("Articulating," 75)

Social theory and survival thrust. By social theory is meant those principles which derive from the particular logics of a people that determine the relationship of a people to one another (i.e., collective self), to other humans (i.e., those who are other than self), and to nature. In turn, survival thrust or the characteristic ways a people negotiate reality/the environment to extract their material sustenance derives from their social theory (Azibo, 1999). In brief, the particular logics of a people → collective social principles of that people → that people's way of meeting survival dictates. To be functionally African, then, requires Africana people to employ social theory and survival thrust based on an African-centered worldview.

Non-African-centered worldview logics and root metaphors can be properly *adopted* by

Africana people only if they neither contradict nor are inconsistent with the African-centered ones and, moreover, only when said Africana people are operating from the irrefragable African worldview center in the first place. When imposed on Africans by others or accepted by Africans functioning outside the African center, the state of affairs is neither an adoption of part of some alien way nor is it diversity, acculturation, assimilation, or bi- or multi-culturalism. It is instead mental illness resulting from faulty *adaptation* to alien-centered hegemony (Azibo, 2011a; Azibo, Robinson, & Scott-Jones, 2011) in which the afflicted African's psychological Africanity (racial identity), defined as self-consciously prioritizing the defense, development, and maintenance of African life and culture (Azibo, 2006a), is disorganized within his/her personality (Azibo, 1989) and/or diminished (Azibo, 2006b). Broken psychological Africanity can be fixed (Azibo, Robinson, & Johnson, in press) and the fixing is prerequisite for an authentic return to African-centered social theory and survival thrust. Given its activist roots, it would seem that Africana Studies warrior-scholars would dedicate themselves to this vital task of fixing, unless s/he is participating in the *Betrayal* (Baker, 2008). Nothing short of *The Re-birth of African Civilization* (Williams, 1993) is at stake.

The term "worldview". Worldview has been used in two distinct meanings in this article as well as in "Articulating" consistent with how it has come through the African-centered literature where it was spawned. Whenever the term is used in regard to a people's particular logics and root metaphors, worldview refers to the grand structure of reality generated by cultural asilis (Ani, 1994) or deep structures of culture (two synonymous terms). This might be referred to as the broad usage. It is the most popular usage as the second usage is specific to the theory of cultural deep- and surface-structure used in "Articulating". This can be seen as the narrow usage where worldview defined as a people's most comprehensive ideas about order refers to one of the three particular logics of cultural deep structure, to wit: worldview → ethos (a people's set of guiding principles) → ideology (a people's perspective on how things should be or are supposed to be). Since the two usages cannot be conflated and neither deserves abandoning, Africana Studies warrior-scholars must understand the contexts in which they are used.

Conclusion

The brilliant warrior-scholar Tommy Curry perspicaciously explains that: [the African-centered worldview] is decidedly conceptual it is concerned with the ways by which historical groups of people [Africans] use culture—those meaning endowing practices that grasp onto, inject into, and contour reality—to cast into the world its shadows, those inevitable imprints onto the world offering testament to that people's [African's] existence describ[ing] the process of co-authorship, *where epistemological and ontological distinctions are co-dependent* [thus] sustain[ing] what our ancestors have left us generations before. (Curry, 2011b, 162, emphasis added)

As long as Amen-Ra's sun shall shine, the African-centered worldview will shine as Africana Studies' methodological bedrock and socio-cultural cornerstone. Thus the African-centered worldview is our s/hero, our savior. Proceeding from any other location is dereliction. For starters, then, embracing the African-centered worldview is what to do.

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