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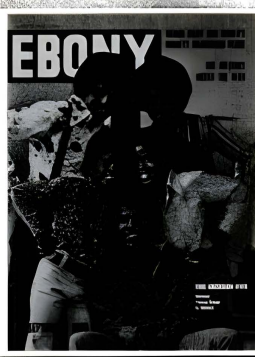
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COVER:

The Jackson Five (clockwise from upper l.: Jackie, Jermaine, Marlon, Toriano and Michael) are the new "kings of the mountain" in the record industry. Three of their releases, *I Want You Back*, *A-B-C* and *The Love You Save*, have sold more than seven and a half million records between them, and the brothers are now threatening the Beatles in current sales around the world. To top it all, the Jackson brothers are a bunch of unspoiled kids. For more on the group and its "bubble gum soul," see story beginning on page 150. Cover photo: Don Ormiz-Globe Photos.



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Toward A Black PSYCHOLOGY

White theories ignore ghetto life styles

BY JOSEPH WHITE

REGARDLESS of what black people ultimately decide about the questions of separation, integration, segregation, revolution or reform, it is vitally important that we develop, out of the authentic experience of black people in this country, an accurate workable theory of black psychology. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to understand the life styles of black people using traditional theories developed by white psychologists to explain white people. Moreover, when these traditional theories are applied to the lives of black folks many incorrect, weakness-dominated and inferiority oriented conclusions come about.

In all fairness it should be said that only a few white psychologists publicly accept the idea most recently advanced by Dr. Jensen (see Carl Rowan's review of Jensen's work in the May issue of *EBONY* Magazine) that black people, according to his research findings, are at birth genetically inferior to whites in intellectual potential. Most psychologists and social scientists take the more liberal point of view which in essence states that black people are culturally deprived and psychologically maladjusted because the environment in which they were reared as children and in which continue to rear their own children lacks the necessary early experiences to prepare us for excellence in school, appropriate sex role behavior and, generally speaking, achievement within an Anglo middle class frame of reference. In short, we are culturally and psychologically deprived because our experiential background provides us with inferior preparation to move effectively within the dominant white culture.

A simple journey with the white researcher into the black home may provide us with some insight into how such important, but somewhat erroneous, conclusions are reached. During this visit to the black home the researcher may not find familiar aspects of the white culture such as Book-of-the-Month selections, records of Broadway plays, classics, magazines such as *Harpers*, the *Atlantic Monthly* or the *New York Review of Books*. He also might observe a high noise level, continuously reinforced by inputs from blues and rhythm radio stations, TV programs and several sets of conversations going on at once. This type of observation leads him to assume that the homes of black children are very weak in intellectual content, uninteresting and generally confusing places to

grow up. Somehow he fails to see the intellectual stimulation that might be provided by local black newspapers, informative rapping, *JET*, *EBONY*, *Sepia* and the Motown sound. Black children in these same homes who supposedly can't read (even preschoolers) can sing several rock and blues tunes from memory and correctly identify the songs of popular entertainers. These same researchers or educational psychologists listening to black speech assume that our use of non-standard oral English is an example of bad grammar without recognizing the possibility that we have a valid, legitimate, alternate dialect.

As the white educational psychologist continues with what for him has become a standard analysis, the next step becomes one of setting up programs which provide black children with the kind of enrichment he feels is needed to overcome and compensate for their cultural deprivation. As a consequence of this type of thinking, in recent years from *Headstart*, *New Horizons* to *Upward Bound*, we have repeatedly witnessed the failure of compensatory and enrichment educational programs. Possibly, if social scientists, psychologists and educators would stop trying to compensate for the so-called weaknesses of the black child and try to develop a theory that capitalizes on his strengths, programs could be designed which from the get-go might be more productive and successful.

Many of these same so-called culturally deprived youngsters have developed the kind of mental toughness and survival skills, in terms of coping with life, which make them in many ways superior to their white age-mates who are growing up in the material affluence of Little League suburbias. These black youngsters know how to deal effectively with bill collectors, building superintendents, corner grocery stores, hypes, pimps, whores, sickness and death. They know how to give school counselors, principals, teachers, welfare workers, juvenile authorities, and, in doing so, display a lot of psychological cleverness and originality. They recognize very early that they exist in an environment which is sometimes both complicated and hostile. They may not be able to verbalize it but they have already mastered what existential psychologists state to be the basic human condition; namely that in this life, pain and struggle are unavoidable and that a complete sense of one's identity can only be achieved by both recognizing and directly confronting an unkind and alien existence.



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Young black boys may grow up taking their small hurts to a sister who subs for a working or overburdened mother (above) but in turn will have the male responsibility of "protecting" the older sister in walk home in lonely, poorly-lit neighborhoods at night has fallen (opposite page).

A BLACK PSYCHOLOGY Continued

The black family represents another arena in which the use of traditional white psychological models leads us to an essentially inappropriate and unsound analysis. When the black family is viewed from a middle class frame of reference which assumes that the psychologically healthy family contains two parents, one male and one female, who remain with the child until he or she becomes a young adult, the fact that the same black male is not consistently visible to the white observer of the black family leads to a conclusion that the black family unit has a matriarchal structure. Once the idea of the matriarchal family is accepted, it is very tempting to use Freudian psychological theories to explain why black children, especially black males, who are reared in this type of one-parent family with an absent father develop psycho-sexual and identity hang-ups. Even more damaging, the male and female offspring of the matriarchal family carry their hang-ups into the next generation, only to have the matriarchal cycle repeat itself. Indeed, one white social scientist in making the black family a case for national action took the view that the major problem confronting black people had to do with reorganizing our family into a two-parent unit.

A closer look at the black family might show that the matriarchal or one-parent view fails to take into consideration the extended nature of the black family. Looking at the number of uncles, aunts, big mamas, boyfriends, older brothers and sisters, deacons, preachers, and others who operate in and out of the black home, a more valid observation might be that a variety of adults and older children participate in the rearing of any one black child. Furthermore, in the process of child rearing, these several adults plus older brothers and sisters make up a kind of extended family who interchange roles, jobs and family functions in such a way that the child does not learn an extremely rigid distinction of male and female roles. A case comes to mind of a young white social worker, who, after observing a teen-age black male going about the business of cooking, cleaning house, washing clothes and obviously helping his mother care for the younger children in his family, wrote in her report that his masculine development might be harmed by such obviously feminine activities. What the social worker failed to see was that this particular black male teen-ager did not rigidly separate these male and female roles in his own mind, and more importantly he also helped out his mother with a part-time job, was a member of the track team at a local high school, an able student, had a very healthy sex life with some of the younger women in the neighborhood and was respected by the street brothers of the gang culture when it came down to his abilities to "throw hands" when such activities were necessary.

If the extended family model proves to be more accurate than the matriarchal conception describing the black family this means that we can turn our attention away from continuous description of the unhealthy psycho-sexual and social role conflicts in black children and young adults and move toward ways of strengthening the extended family, as opposed to some basic reorganization of the black family. Furthermore, if the concept of the extended family is accurate, our teen-agers and young adults may have potentially fewer identity conflicts than those who come from families who expose them to extremely rigid distinctions between male and female roles and duties. Maybe, people who want to make the black a case for national action should stop talking about making the black family into a white family and instead devote their energies into removing the obvious oppression of the black community which is responsible for us catchin' so much hell.

These examples of the cultural-deprivation hypothesis and the matriarchal family model were used to illustrate the need for a psychological explanation and analysis of black life styles which emerges from the framework of the black experience. Not only will the understanding of the black frame of reference enable us to come up with more accurate and comprehensive explanations, but will also enable us to build the kinds of programs within the black world which capitalize on the strengths of black people. This is especially critical in the field of education because the most successful educational models tend to capitalize on the experiences which the child brings to the classroom, as opposed to constantly reminding the child of his weaknesses. Not all traditional white psychological theory is useless. It has already been implied that the views of the existential psychologists, with their notion of pain and struggle as an unavoidable condition, apply

to the lives of black people. The views commonly advanced by a group of psychologists called self-theorists may be helpful because the self-theorists take the view that in order to understand what a person is and the way he views the world, you must have some awareness of his experiential background especially as it might include experiences with the institutions such as the home, family, immediate neighborhood and the agencies of both cultures which directly affect the person's life.

To continue our discussion rather than argue that black people are totally psychologically unique, it would seem that our experience with—and management—of key psychological concepts as it pertains to handling of contradictions, role of the hero, language systems, the meaning of work and a healthy sense of suspiciousness differs profoundly as we compare the black experience with the white Anglo experience.

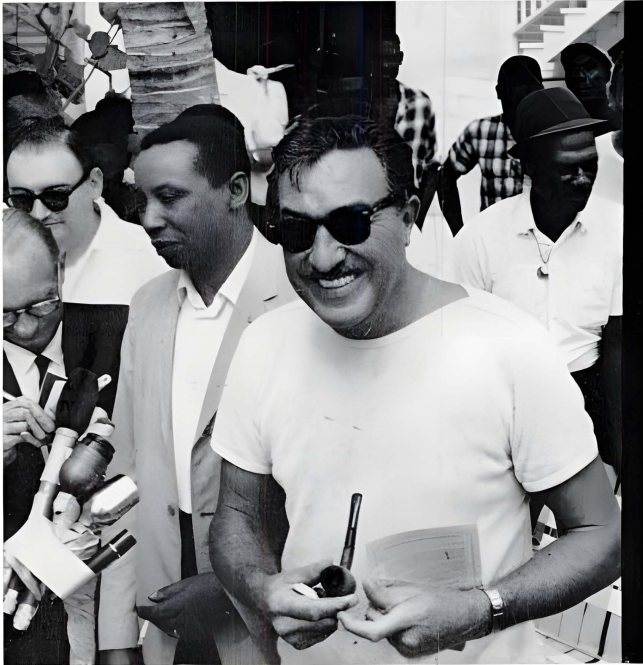
In a feeling-oriented culture, apparent and when examined closely, superficial logical contradictions do not have the same meaning as they might have in the Anglo culture. A white psychology student became thoroughly confused when he was provided with the opportunity to observe a particular brother one Sunday in what the student



thought to be three very different and contradictory sets. The student by prior arrangement was allowed to watch the brother interact within the context of a 1968-type black nationalist rally. The brother in question was a very active participant in the audience. He seemed to enjoy the anti-honky rhetoric, shouted and clapped at appropriate moments and gave the speakers repeated replies of "Right on." Immediately following the rally this same brother walked across the street to a black, storefront church-type revival, grabbed a tambourine, rocked with the sisters, called on the Holy Ghost, and sang an unsolicited solo entitled *Where Shall I Be When the First Trumpet Sounds?* Next, the brother walked to a bar a block away, drank more than a little gin and began to hum and keep time with the lyrics of *Chain of Fools* by Aretha Franklin. During the interview which occurred in the bar, the white psychologist opened by asking "Don't you see any basic contradiction between participation in a black nationalist rally, a storefront revival, and sitting in this bar drinking gin (and I might add popping his fingers)?" The brother replied to the question by stating that not only did he not see any contradiction but that he looked forward to all three sets every Sunday because he basically just "dug on it." What might have represented a contradiction to the white psychologist meant nothing to the brother in the sense that all three sets were part of the same experience for him at a feeling level. As part of the same experi-

ence pool, with unimportant surface differences, the brother felt equally at home during all three activities. Within the black experience the church can be seen as an arena of strength or as an escapist movement. What is important is that these two views do not negate each other and can exist within the same person side by side. Closely related to the easy style of handling contradictions, it can also be stated that black people have a greater tolerance for conflict, stress, ambiguity and ambivalence. White psychologists fail to take this into consideration when they assume that because we have a lower class background, black people are therefore more impulsive, emotionally immature and have less tolerance for stress.

In terms of the role of the hero, the dominant white culture is steeped in the tradition of a hero who is infallible, scores his triumphs with god-like skill, follows all the rules and finally retires undefeated. The whole psychology of the hero in black and white cultures is different. In the black culture the hero is by and large the brother who messes with the system and gets away with it. Black people on the whole could care less about



Eldridge Cleaver (opposite page) and Rep. Adam Clayton Powell (above) have something in common according to author's theories—both have become heroes to the black man on the street because they have challenged the system and, to a large extent, have beaten it. The black man was not surprised when Black Panther Leader Cleaver jumped bail and went to Algiers. Nor was the black man shocked at the exposure that Powell used government money to pay for so-called "pleasure junkets" abroad.

a few political figures partying it up in the West Indies at The Man's expense. They can dig it and can identify with it. Whereas this same hero, according to the white psychologists, is interpreted as the villain. In literature the two hero themes come together in John O. Killens' novel *And Then We Heard the Thunder*. Solly Saunders, as the noble savage, is a black college graduate serving as an officer in the Army during World War II. He runs into a brother in his outfit who, as the villain, talks back to the officers, ignores the rules and follows his own self-determination-oriented mind. Because of this bad brother, Solly goes through some changes and at the end of the book the "bad nigger" emerges as the hero. Nowadays the bad nigger is very much in vogue as the hero in the black community, yet white people continue to perceive this person as the villain and cannot understand why black folks are currently rejecting white people's favorite Uncle Toms. As a people we have to trust our own kinds of perceptions and not absorb white expectations of super-heroes and villains.

Black people have a genuine understanding of brothers like Eldridge Cleaver. Eldridge became kind of a cultural hero in the United States. A lot of white people, including white radicals, were disappointed because he didn't stand trial. They said that



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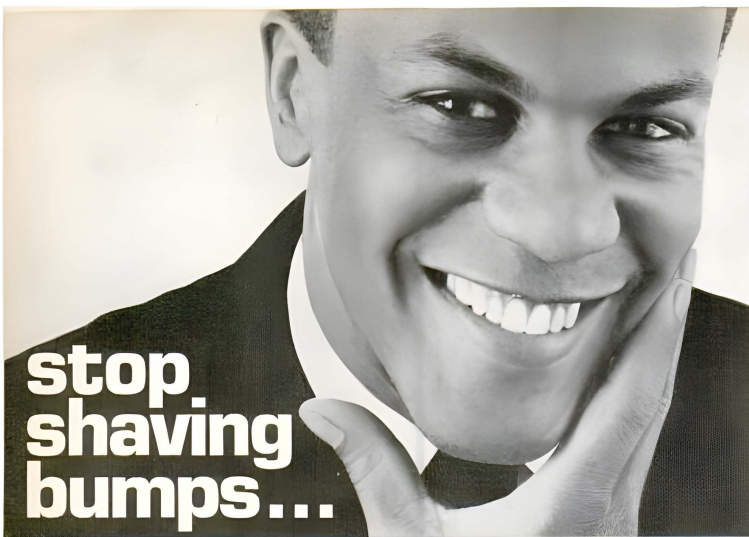
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A BLACK PSYCHOLOGY Continued

he had let down his responsibility to his people and wasn't "a credit to his race." But anybody who had heard Eldridge, read his books or knew anything about his life and where he had been, knew that he was not going to go back there again.

Heroes are also important because they serve as role models for children and in children's books produced by white publishers the black role model is often notoriously absent. Black children in the process of growing up need to see themselves realistically reflected in books, movies, radio, TV and the like. By seeing themselves reflected it confirms that they exist and provides them with identification figures and images. After a righteously profound rebuking by black educators, a few white publishers of children's literature and TV producers are slowly trying to correct the situation. Let us take a brief look at their efforts. A typical children's story might start out with some white boys playing baseball. At the beginning of the ball game a black child is on the sidelines watching. At about the middle of the game a white boy's mama makes him come home for lunch, the white players talk it over and finally invite the black youngster to join the ball game. The brother proceeds to strike out six people in a row, hits four home runs, picks a runner off at second base and later wins the game by setting up a double play. Psychologically, what this story does is to project the image of a "super-nigger" and implies that they are okay in ones and twos. On the other hand, one does not have to be a super white boy to gain membership on the team or a respectable position in life. The average everyday white boy sees himself reflected throughout the white culture in pictures, books, films, radio, TV during the process of growing up. Whereas the black child has to settle for distorted images—recently the super-nigger image and prior to that images projecting the noble savage, beast, Bojangles and other clowns. From a black psychological standpoint we have to work to make the kind of breakthrough that puts black children into typical situations rather than into distorted unreal worlds.

With respect to the use of language, the oral tradition with its heavy rap, folk tales, blues, spirituals and down-home sermons has a vital impact within the black experience. Historically speaking, any discussion of the black experience with language is further complicated by the fact that words were used to express and conceal at the same time. Certain ideas had to be conveyed to the brothers and the same ideas had to be hidden from the white man. The slavemaster in the ante-bellum South listening to the field "nigras" singing "Steal away, steal away to Jesus, steal away home" were deceived into believing that the brothers and sisters were thinking only about Heaven. The real message was about stealing away and splitting up North. Black language is also very deep in hidden meanings, intuition and nuances. A poem like *The Signifying Monkey* confuses even the most hip revolutionary ofay, yet brothers who cannot read or write know exactly what the poem means—it is foolish, if not suicidal, to fight a powerful enemy on its own ground and to neutralize obvious advantages the monkey engages effective trickery, deceit and a black form of psychological warfare known as "signifying". These same so-called illiterate brothers also intuitively know when the white power structure is being dishonest, jiving, and otherwise engaging in tricknology. As part of our oral tradition, the dozens, as a game of one-up-man-ship in which clever remarks are exchanged about the mamas, aunties, and grandmamas of the contestants, causes white psychologists and linguists nothing but confusion. Assuming the dozens to be part of our matriarchal bag they literally think we want to have destructive sexual encounters with our mamas. An alternate historical explanation from the black experience might be that the brothers and sisters use the dozens as a game to teach them how to keep cool and think fast under pressure, without saying what was really on their minds. In translating black language forms into standard oral English we should remember that some of the meaning will automatically be lost because these words and idioms are accompanied by a very rich background of gestures, body motions and voice changes. Despite the loss in translation, black educators should continue with their efforts to write black

A BLACK PSYCHOLOGY Continued

language programs with standard English equivalents. Since black children are exposed to two cultures they should be able to express themselves in more than one dialect of the English language.

The folklore of white American culture repeatedly emphasizes the value and virtues of hard work. Work is supposed to cleanse us, move us ahead economically and allow us to advance to positions of higher prestige and authority. In a sense, hard work pays off and generations of Americans were reared to believe in the idea that through personal effort one could go from rags to riches. Stokely Carmichael has repeatedly stated that if hard work was the key to advancement "Black people would be the richest people in this country." We have worked in the fields from sun up to sundown, laid rails, picked cotton, scrubbed floors, messed with chain gangs, reared other people's children and at the end of three centuries have very little to show for this monumental effort at hard work. Since hard work has not dramatically altered the future of black people, we have evidence to believe that what happens to a person is more related to luck or chance than it is to hard work. To plan with the belief in the future is to plan for disappointment and heartbreak. Hence black folk have done their best to deal with the concrete realities and needs of the present. This does not mean that black people are present oriented in the sense that they are impulse ridden or incapable of delayed gratification. What it means is that the benefits of the white dream of hard work have not paid off for us. That being the case, as a group, our management of time is not bound or guided by a future orientation and time is not measured in the work unit values of the dominant white culture.

Part of the objective condition of black people in this society is that of a paranoid condition. There is and has been, unwarranted, systematic persecution and exploitation of black people as a group. A black person who is not suspicious of the white culture is pathologically denying certain objective and basic realities of the black experience. The late sociologist E. Franklin Frazier touched on this very well in *Black Bourgeoisie* and the authors of *Black Rage* discuss the value of healthy black paranoia. White psychiatrists and psychologists often have considerable difficulty working constructively with the hostility and suspiciousness of black patients. This is because their frame of reference tells them that excessive suspiciousness is psychologically unhealthy. If a white dude were to tell a white psychiatrist that people have been systematically picking on him from his front door clear to the White House, the psychiatrist would diagnose him as psychotic, paranoid state and hospitalize him. Using a black frame of reference with a black patient should not result in the same diagnosis and possibly white psychiatrists should stop diagnosing us and spend some of their time working to change the system which persecutes black people.

A comprehensive theory of black psychology will have to explain in much greater detail the dynamics of the black home, family, hero, role models, language systems, work and time management and the nature of suspiciousness. Many other areas will have to be included and hopefully the challenge of excellence will be met by a younger generation of black students who are deeply committed to the development of a true psychological picture of the black experience.

One of the primary reasons why interracial group sensitivity encounters often fail to make adequate progress may be due to the fact that black people and white people have different priorities, expectations, ways of viewing the world and life styles. When black people confront white people, what they primarily want is a legitimate acknowledgement of their point of view and a follow-up with appropriate actions. But when a white person is pushed up against a wall, the worse thing he can do is admit that the party who pushed him up there has a valid point of view. In a group encounter when black people escalate the verbal fireworks the white reaction is to feel angry, threatened, alienated, or guilty. Were whites to drop their defensiveness and acknowledge the legitimacy of the black point of view, they might be able to move from there to a more cooperative relationship. But the white culture is so deeply entrenched in the whole concept

of face-saving sin, and repayment for past wrong-doings that it expects an Old Testament eye-for-an-eye type of retaliation.

On TV recently, NET showed a black/white encounter in which each group was forced to take the roles of the others. White masks were put on black people, and black masks were put on white people. While this was a short encounter, perhaps in the future for training people in the black experience we should have them try to be black for a longer time with some of their experiences taking place outside the protective setting of the group.

In closing, one further comment on group encounters might be considered. While white people in their group encounters with other white people may need to deal with the questions of sex, aggression, affection, tenderness, shame and guilt, black people especially black change agents, have a completely different set of priorities. In moving from one pattern to another and more rapidly from one crisis situation to another, if one is not careful, it is easy to slip into a state of psychological fatigue with the accompanying symptoms of depression and angry despair. In this state of mind, without realizing it, we begin to use words like revolution, liberation, Tomming, imperialism, agent-provocateur, and many others in a very general, undefined global way—sometimes more for self-affirmation than for real communication. Furthermore, in such a psychological state of fatigue it is very difficult to see clearly both the goals one is striving for and the relevance of the tactic to the immediate situation. We mix up rhetoric about change with the process of change itself. Rhetoric properly applied can make us psychologically conscious of what it means to be black. But we must not equate the imagery of this black consciousness with the actualities of concrete social progress. A carefully developed psychological group encounter conducted with change agents, coordinated by a black person with psychological training in the black experience might facilitate the process of regeneration, self-renewal and meaningful communication. Like any human endeavor, in order to continue to be creative and productive, the black struggle must construct models which will take care of the process of internal cleansing, meaningful reflection and as such serve as self-corrective guides.



Helping to "mother" a brood of younger brothers and sisters (right) is an experience often shared by black girls in inner city neighborhoods. They seldom experience a "family dinner" which is more common with black families in rural South (below).

