

SOME ASPECTS OF BLACK CULTURE AND ITS VALUE IN THE BLACK WORLD.

"The sum of cultural values of the Black World, as these are expressed in the life, the institutions, and the work of negroes to assume this NEGRI^TUDE by living it, and, having lived it to seek for its deeper meaning; to present it to the world as the cornerstone in the construction of the 'civilization of the universal', which will either be the work of all races or will never exist at all. In this respect, this open NEGRI^TUDE is a humanism. It has enriched european civilization and has been enriched by it. Humanism, in this twentieth century of 'pan-human convergence' consists of nothing but this intercourse of heart and mind, in this 'give and take'."

LEOPOLD SEDAR SENGHOR.

What, perhaps, exists in this passage by Senghor sums up the whole of existence in the world - but in this context refers specifically to us, the Black people of the world. Senghor found it necessary to associate the liberation of himself with liberation of the entire people of colour. For as long as two-thirds of the world population is being eroded by "white racism" Senghor as an individual realised that he would be caught in the evil clutches of caucasian atrocity.

And, today, I wish to examine the concept of Black Consciousness with ^(a) especial reference to Black Culture and its value in the Black World. Obviously the whole examination will revolve around the situation as we experience it in South Africa. I want to propound the validity and ^(b) necessity of a Black Culture. However, that would entail a whole account of our cultures that it would cover a full volume. Thus I will deal with those areas that I see fit and relevant to this paper.

* Basically, culture is an improvement of the race. Yet these improvements cover such wide spectrum of attainments, proficiencies and mastery of letters and literature, humanities, the arts, education and the life - style of a particular community, that it sometimes can confuse one to try to distinguish between culture and behaviour. I personally cannot find any clear distinction for each is dependent on the other.

In South Africa at the present time culture is obviously being dominated by the anglo-boer culture and values. It has seeped into the life style of all Black people. Although unavoidable it is indeed regrettable. It is, therefore, necessary to examine the process of this aculturation in its historical context.

With the advent of the whiteman into this country came the forerunner to the coloniser the missionary. This evil, blonde haired paled skinned blue-eyed satan equipped with the bible and a cruel god began to frighten Blacks with his fire and brimstone fantasies of damnation in hell, punishment and the stupidity of African worship. The Blacks who were fearfully religious were amazed and to an extent frightened by this god who punished people for their sins. Slowly the missionary began to prepare the ground for the eagerly waiting colonizers. The younger Blacks began to ridicule his forefather because the missionary education beguiled him into seeing his forefather as a "savage" or "barbarian" and the pale skin as a "civilised" and "intelligent" being. Slowly but surely the Blackman, erroneously, began to adopt, to copy, to imitate the the ways of the whiteman. He began to dress like him, to talk like him, to think like him. And so began his "deculturation". But the blasian imitator can never emulate the true copy. Thus in all spheres of his adoption the Black had to keep looking to the white for approval.

The attack on the culture is seen as a work on the part of the white man.

This whole process accelerated with the advent of the colonizer. Equipped with technical and military superiority the whiteman was able to turn the blackman into a black skin with a white soul.

All the good cultural and moral aspects of his own culture was shoved aside as more blacks began to change into little white "puppets". Concepts of time, work and play were rearranged or completely thrown out. The whiteman's dominance and his arrogance of precedence cowed down the blackman completely.

Yet deep within his subconscious the thread of his ancestral culture held fast. His acquisitiveness for music and rhythm, his sincerity for his religion - all these factors contributed to a new approach to music and prayer. Yet the overriding factors of oppression did not allow these to come to the surface, but remained well in the background.

Before I continue I want to bring in the minority black groups - the Indian and the Coloured.

The Indian was imported as a slave into this country in 1860. To a large degree he was oppressed by the whiteman in India. Promises of gold, of land, ostracized by his own community; the extreme poverty in India at the time; and the snake-like guile of the white recruiting agents saw the first batch of Indians landing in South Africa in 1860.

The Indians arrived in Natal and were completely disappointed with what they saw. Virtually a slave in the country, maltreated, disrespected and hurt they strove to pull themselves out of this morass. Here the Indians erred and thought acceptance into white society was the answer to removing the yoke of slavery. Thus they began to improve their financial and material status. Little did they realise that the whiteman saw in them the natural stop-gap between them (the whites) and the Africans. Dangling a carrot before a donkey was the easiest thing to do with the Indian. Promise him the world if he has his own education, his own home, etc. and he will become the natural "middle class" who because he has been taught to fear the African will always look to the whiteman for his "protection." Even the 1949 incident engineered and sustained by whites did not teach the Indians a lesson. They were firmly convinced that the African hated them. And I believe that the African, if he does hate the Indian, is quite justified. * If one oppressed group is prepared "to sell its soul" at the expense of the liberation of the majority group then surely the majority must hate that group.

Thus the Indian also relinquished the essence of his rich cultural heritage, which in fact was his religion: Hinduism. The only way he could maintain his religion was to retain the ritual practice of prayers and the handing out of garlands. The whole philosophy and code of behaviour in Hinduism was completely discarded. The Indian now had to adopt western white attitudes. White styled living, white styled homes, eating habits, dress to an extent, and education completely was geared towards a white typed existence. The ritual says, does and means nothing, except confuse. Even the ritual of weddings and funerals have degenerated into ridiculousness for the essential truth of the power of creation, and destruction, and the essence of re-incarnation is to the vast majority of Indians - mere mysticism or farce. Nothing has become more painful than to see the beauty of a philosophy that can lead to the realisation of a simple moral truth - about liberation - being so abused. The white affluence that exists among Indians and their satisfaction at being used by whites as a "buffer" against the African is shown in their willingness to accede to the demands of the whiteman.

This "willingness" is so evident in the fact that the Indian sincerely believes he can bargain with the whiteman, from a position of powerlessness; that we because we have a "beautiful" university the whiteman is not so bad after all; that because the Indian earns more than the African the white likes us better than he likes them. How unfortunate for the Indian that in his naivete, his greed, his fear and his ignorance that back in Pretoria the white power structure is laughing at us puerile "coolies" so easily falling into their trap.

Yet, there is the majority of Indians who falls outside this description. They are the ones who live in the poor ghettos of Chatsworth, Merebank, Clairwood, parts of Lenasia, and TinTown plus many others. Completely confused by the actions of the conniving Indian from the rich middle class who live in the "rich ghettos" of Reservoir Hills, Asherville and Westville - for to me they are nothing but poor imitations of a well planned suburb, the real oppressed Indian has become fed up with this elitist group who behave whiter than most whites.

A "Black Culture" should then become axiomatic to you in the light of the above truths. Yet all of us tend to exclude or ignore the presence of the Coloured person in South Africa. He too has fallen in to the trap of aspiring to values that are meaningless in the search for liberation. Some want to be white skinned, straight haired and blue eyed; others go even further and claim to be "bruin Afrikaaners". Is the Coloured man justified in claiming ownness - for really he has no culture. This is the time-old question. And, positively, the Coloured does have a code of behaviour that is basically of the Coloured. Folk songs, carnival, the Cape Malay cooking, and a great number of afrikaaner folk songs were stolen from the Coloured heritage. Unfortunately, the tag given him by white society has dealt a severe blow to an independent culture. The other factor of the Coloured appearing at a time when South Africa was dominated by white racism and its dominating culture killed the inner "uninhibitedness" of the Coloured completely misdirected it.

All the above factors are realities which exist in the various Black communities. The African, The Indian, and the Coloured have been almost completely detribalised. This besides the fact that there are numerous cultural dissimilarities in the various Black communities makes it appear as if a "Black Culture" is a well nigh impossible feat to achieve.

But to think this, would be defeatist and completely "negativist". Definitely there is a very valid and strong case for a common "Black Culture". If culture is a humanism and humanism is in turn a "give and take" in this "pan - human convergence" then most definitely black people can come together on the grounds of a common "Black Culture". The mere act of coming together implies the acceptance of people as human beings. In South Africa are "non - whites" in the eyes of white supremacy. It is then obvious that to accept ourselves as human we must first accept ourselves as Blacks. Adam Small says, "This Blackness of which we speak is certainly, amongst other things, a matter of the 'colour of the skin'; however, as such it is something to which not we, but whites have drawn attention in the first place, and we have no intention of defining basically in terms of anything that whites have marked out, or mark out, for us. Therefore it is not colour of the skin in terms of which we see our Blackness in the first place. It is in the first place, a certain awareness, a certain insight."

In the light of this essential statement by Adam Small where does

Black Culture fit in?

The whole behavioural pattern of the Black people in this country varies very minutely in response to white "landmarks." We all use the same buses, the same toilets, the same lifts, the separate entrances. All of us travel in the same coaches - the 2nd and 3rd class. Any blackman, if he were faced with two choices where there is a clean desk and a dirty desk automatically chooses the dirty desk. All the Black ghettos have similar lack of facilities, be they rich or poor, and all of us experience the same paranoic psychological oppression. Who is our real enemy? - the whiteman! What is our common end? - a total liberation and the desire to live in a free and open society.

This is the basis of the new "Black Culture" - our common oppression, our common enemy and our common goal.

Earlier I had mentioned that there is deeply embedded in the subconscious of the African the desire to express his own rhythm and music. This is again the basis for a common "Black Culture". The Indian also has his own subconscious leanings towards the expression of his own heritage.

Again a deeper look into the Indian and African attitudes to family tradition serve well in the consolidation of this new approach to our oppression. The very essence of the family structure was built around the "compound family" where up to three generations of a family lived together. A deep philosophical attachment comes out of this tradition which is based in the concern for the whole rather than the individual. This accrues out of numerous factors in the African community. Basically, it dealt with the "African Socialistic" attitude as is espoused by Nyerere in his UJAMAA where the community depended on the solidarity of the community to act as a functional unit in the face of famine, disease, war, and rejoicing.

With the Indian community much the same practise exists. Most Indian families have three or four generations living together. With the Indian family, the family was the prime functional unit and subsequently the community was embraced for protection against all evils.

Today in South Africa this practice of the groups of families living together has taken on a different outlook. The living together has become a necessity to overcome the evil stroke of poverty. Combined wages means ability to solve financial problems.

The vast majority of Coloured families live this way as well. Again it is the necessity to overcome the day to day bread and butter issues of life. At the moment this practice is largely misdirected in terms of a pursuit for a new type of society. But if we are aware of our common oppression and how all three communities seek to survive in this country, perhaps, we can gear this "tradition" towards eradicating this psychological oppression, the fear, and re-institute a sense of pride in our family structures and create a sense of self-reliance.

Black artists, playwrights, writers and poets have a common theme - a search for Black realisations. If we infuse in our poetry, our literature, our art and our theatre a positive approach to breaking free the shackles of physical oppression then we are one giant step forward towards physical freedom. Too often our Black artists impress and heighten in their works the nature and suffering of our oppression. Very few look at possibilities of expressing in a new light our ability as Black people to remove this psychological oppression.

Most poetry is a long complaint about our suffering; most theatre we present screams that Blacks are as good as whites and seeks to tell the whiteman this. Whites, generally, lap up our complaints, shake their heads in sorrow and say, "What can WE do about the problem." The WE here implies that Blacks are a part of the problem and therefore we must help them solve this evil existence - "white racism". Our art, again, paints miserable pictures of tormented Blacks dying in ghettos, stabbed in alleys, giving birth to malnourished babies and sells at high prices to liberal whites who need this merely to have some manifestation that they are "aware".

It has become painfully obvious that our theatre, our poetry, our art, our literature, must begin to examine the positive aspects of Black endeavours. All these works must be directed to Blacks, and whites must be ignored for they serve no purpose except to confuse and militate against the determination of Black people. As a part of the privileged society they cannot and will not appreciate the task that faces the Blackman.

Under the umbrella of Black Culture must come a re-examination of our education and our history. At the present time education and history are designed so as to make a Blackman a "non-white" stereotype where the emphasis of valuableness is equated with whiteness. A sincere investigation into Black Culture will give rise to Black Resource Centres where history can be examined again. I do not believe for one moment that Africans thought of "massacre" when they were so ready to lend their own land to the whites. But these arrogant whites then fenced off this land and planted a flag claiming ownership.

Another field of activity that will really make our Black Culture a reality is to impress upon the people the necessity to develop our own Black sportsmen as sport is such a vital enjoyment among all Blacks. Soccer, Cricket and Tennis are some of the sports where Blacks together can create a precedence in the moulding of a truly Black sports endeavour.

I am sure there are numerous other avenues that can be explored in the search for and the creation of a "Black Culture". As I said earlier to examine all would necessitate the compilation of a book. In this paper I have chosen a few aspects that can lead to a stronger union of Black people in South Africa and at the same time instil them the necessary consciousness that is needed to create a sense of self-reliance and a firmer faith in the worth of the Blackman.

Perhaps, at the conclusion of this paper you will claim that Black Culture does in fact exist. If it does then it is merely a subconscious thing in the minds of the black people. To make it a reality it must be brought to the surface, it must be spread and must be the prime tool in the realisation of our common Blackness and the militating factor for the creation of a Black Solidarity Front.

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BLACK CONSCIOUSNESS: ITS ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE IN THE COMMUNITY.