

Black Education

A Transformative Research and Action Agenda
for the New Century

Edited by
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Foreword

Living long enough gives one perspective to see life not as a series of random events but, rather, as a continuum of sorts that we move along—sometimes smoothly, sometimes slowly, sometimes back and forth and sometimes running in place. We are not functioning in isolated, disjointed episodes. Our learning, our relationships, our careers each represent multiple, multitextured events, times, encounters, and thoughts. Yet, in an attempt to document our stories, be they histories, studies, experiments, or fictions, we look for the "moment," that something or event that places in high relief what we try desperately to express about what matters.

As we try to understand something like the fight for equity and justice in schools, we may point to May 17, 1954, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision as an event or moment in time, but we know in truth, *Brown* is emblematic of a lifetime of struggle for civil rights and social justice. Indeed, one of the first challenges to separate and unequal schooling took place in Boston in 1849 when Benjamin Cushing sued the Boston School Committee for not allowing him to enroll his daughter in one of the white schools near their home. But, we are focused on the 1954 moment. Viewing life through moments is how we economize both thought and language to create coherence.

And so it is with this volume. It is an artifact, a symbol, a material product of the moment, but in actuality it represents a very long and difficult path of scholarly and social justice work. The fact of this volume may, in some way, occlude the struggle it represents. It appears in a moment, but it was conceived, constructed, and carried out over a long period of struggle within educational research in general and the American Educational Research Association (AERA) in particular. As a result of a publication conflict, the Research Focus on Black Education Special Interest Group mobilized to address ongoing issues of equity and justice in the association.

Appendix B-1

Black Education, Toward the Human, After “Man”: In the Manner of a Manifesto Framing a Transformative Research and Action Agenda for the New Millennium

Commission on Research in Black Education
Working Colloquium June 30–July 2, 2000
St. Simons Island, GA

“Rethinking Origins/Knowledges/The Achievement Gap: Black Education After ‘Man’” Sylvia Wynter in Conversation with Asa G. Hilliard, III and Edmund W. Gordon

No one would dream of doubting that its major artery (i.e., of the Black student’s self-doubt and division) is fed from the heart of those various theories that have tried to prove that the Negro is a stage in the slow evolution of monkey into man.

—Frantz Fanon, *Black Skins/White Masks* (1967)

We who are gathered here, all actualize and embody ethno-class, *Man*, as the first purely secular or nonreligious conception/mode of the human in history. Indeed, the fact that, whatever our religions and cultures of origin, we have all, as middle-class academics and administrators, been socialized in the same “set of instructions” or mode of sociogeny (Fanon, 1967),

APPENDIX B-1

Aimé Césaire first proposed in 1946 as a science of the Word, in which the study of the Word (i.e., of the phenomenon to which we give the name *culture*), will condition the study of nature (of the neuro-physiological mechanisms of the brain) as a new science able to complete what he defined as our present "half-starved" natural sciences, and to, thereby, make possible a new "humanism made to the measure of the world."

Sylvia Wynter
June 30, 2002

which institute us hegemonically, as human in the ethno-class (i.e., Western-bourgeois) terms of *Man*, is the fact that provides the indispensable condition of our being able to understand each other.

Because the laws that govern our cognizing behaviors as hybridly nature-culture beings are precisely analogous to those that govern the behaviors of purely organic species, we must, as ethno-class subjects, know our social reality in terms that are *adaptively* advantageous to the realization, production, and reproduction, of the mode of being human that *we* embody and actualize.

Furthermore, because as academics and teachers, our task is to elaborate, guard, and disseminate the kind of knowledge able to ensure the well-being of our present mode of the human, *Man*, one which represents its well-being as if it were that of the human itself, we cannot normally address the contradictions to which this overrepresentation leads. Yet, the phenomenon called the achievement or IQ gap between White and Black, as well as between non-Black and Black, is a direct consequence of this overrepresentation, one of the central contradictions to which it leads.

The hypothesis here is that it is this overrepresentation, together with its corollary subordination of the well-being of the human as a species to the well-being of ethno-class *Man*, that a Black Education Project will have to call in question, dismantle, and deconstruct. To do so to *complete* the Second Emergence of the human (that is, from our subordination, hitherto, to the hybrid nature-culture "set of instructions" that institute us as specific modes of the human, of the /and of the We), as an Emergence that the two scientific revolutions of the West have brilliantly set in motion, with a third scientific revolution. One that, moving beyond the limits of the Human Genome Project, and therefore, of the *natural* sciences, will take as its object of investigation our hybrid nature-culture, ontogeny /sociogeny modes of being human together with their resultant orders of consciousness, including the insights and blindnesses of our present ethno-class own, as its new object of knowledge and of inquiry.

In summary, if the scientific revolutions of the West began with the lay humanists of Renaissance Europe going back to Greece and Rome, in order to find an alternative secular model of being human beyond the limits of the medieval order's then theocentric conception, so, too, in order to find an alternative model to our present biocentric and ethno-class one, our intellectual revolution will begin by going back to the continent of Africa where the event of *singularity* to which I give the name of the First Emergence—that is, our emergence from subordination to the genetic programs which prescribe the behaviors of purely organic life, and our entrance instead into the behavior-programming mechanisms of the Word/of Myth—first took place. Doing so to bring into existence what

Appendix B-2

Race and Our Biocentric Belief System: An Interview With Sylvia Wynter

JK: Can you explain what you mean by "our biocentric belief system"?

SW: The central point of biocentrism is that this conception of the human is the first universally applicable conception, which is, since Darwin, that we are biological beings. Race and racism are logical outcomes of the biocentric conception of the human that we elaborate and enact in academia, because in all human cultures this is the role of the intellectuals from the shamans to ourselves—to effect both this inscripting and therefore the lawlike order of knowledge. Therefore, just as a bat knows the world from the perspective of a bat, if you were a feudal Christian, you knew the world in those terms. If now, we are Western ethno-class bourgeois modes of the subject, we know the world in such modes. But the belief is that we are biological beings who then create culture. Whereas my proposal is that we are bioevolutionarily prepared by means of language to inscript and autoinstitute ourselves in this or that modality of the human, always in adaptive response to the ecological as well as to the geopolitical circumstances in which we find ourselves.

FANON'S REVOLUTION

I am making the hypothesis that the modern world has actually been brought into being on the basis of three very powerful revolutions. One was the "Copernican Revolution," which gave rise to the physical sciences. The next was the "Darwinian Revolution," which gave rise to the biological sciences. And Fanon's revolution is the one that will give rise to an entirely new science, which will be that of the nature-culture mode of being human. Notice. This is very important. It's not one or the other (nature versus culture). It is the *co*-relation. Fanon came up with this in his book, *Black Skins, White Masks*. What he suggested is that—he wanted to find out for himself: He said, "Look. In the Caribbean it is normal for the Antillean subject to be anti-Black, to be anti-Negro." But he said, if you went to Africa and you saw the Pygmy in his traditional cultural constellation, there he is the normal human being. And it is impossible for him to experience himself as a Negro because he is the norm, and to be a Negro is to be the opposite to the norm.

Then Fanon made the leap. He said that if a Black person can be aversive to himself, so that—just as the White person is—the White person will shout, "dirty nigger," but the Black person will also have that same response to himself—then this is because, in the case of the human, while Freud spoke about the ontogenetic subject, that is to say, the ontogenetic individual (let us think of the child: it's born as an embryo, the embryo grows—we watch with awe as this beautiful miracle unfolds itself). But, Fanon said that from the moment this is happening, it is also being socialized within the terms of a specific—we have to use the word "culture," we have no better word—a specific cultural conception of what it is to be human; of what it is to be a good man or woman of your kind. And so Fanon says, in the case of the human, besides "ontogeny," there is "sociogeny." And the moment we have said that, we now have moved outside of an entirely biological conception of being which underlies our present conception. We live in a mode of sociogeny, a conception of the human, in which to be human you must be anti-Black. This is the point he is making.

THE WELL-BEING OF THE HUMAN VS. ETHNO-CLASS 'MAN'

We define the human as *homo-economicus*. What we call capitalism is the only mode of production that can produce the material conditions of existence of the definition of the human as *homo-economicus*. That is why, although our economies in the third world want a new economic order, we cannot have a new economic order. This is the best that we can possibly hope for within the terms of the conception of the human as an economic

being. But, if we now move toward the conception of the human as being fundamentally a social being, a being that is always instituting itself as social, and we then ask: The economic system we have now functions for the well-being of the ethno-class conception of the human man. What system of economics would we need to function for the well-being, not just of the global middle classes, but of the human itself? People are massively poor in the midst of great abundance. Never before has the productive capacity of humankind been greater. So, therefore, we are faced with a contradiction.

Obviously, the contradiction has to do with distribution. So the question then is: What determines distribution? Adam Smith gave a wonderful clue, when he was attacking the landlord class and he said—you know the landlord has these vast fields and he enjoys the products, but his stomach is limited. So he can not eat all that food, right? So he has to distribute it. But what drives him to distribute that little that he pays his workers is due to his desire to keep up and to reproduce his "economy of greatness." Marx told us the key is the mode of production. I knew he was partly right. And then I realized what is produced is not just the material conditions. What is produced is our conception of being human. Every mode of production is a function of producing that conception. That is why our system of capitalist production, brilliant as it is, cannot deal with the issue of the poor or the impoverished nations. Because its function is to produce for the well-being of the global middle classes—for a conception of the human. And so our great problem now, the great struggle is between the well-being of "Man" or the well-being of the human.

BLACK AS A LIMINAL CATEGORY

In every order, there is always a liminal category. That liminal category is a deviation from the norm. It is through the deviation from norm that the rest of the society can recognize themselves as kin. For example, America is held together on the basis of Whiteness. The middle-class has been able to "sucker" the lower middle-class by bonding it to itself on the fact that "We are all White." So transgender, transrace, transeverything, they are held together by the concept of White. But, "White" is a cultural conception that is only possible as an opiate-triggering reward conception by means of the degradation of the "Black." And by the way, for homosexuals and heterosexuals, it is the same. Heterosexuality also binds the lower classes to the middle classes by saying we are all one against that scapegoat "other." This was also the role of the Jews in medieval Europe and later, of course, the concept of "life unworthy of life" within this dangerous biological conception of the human that there could be life unworthy of life. This is also what is really happening to Blacks in the prison-industrial complex.

The price of our incorporation as middle-class Blacks was their extrusion because they now become the "name of what is evil" rather than the entire Black population, as it had been before.

Somehow the Western bourgeoisie has come to see its own physiognomic being as the only possible mode of being human. Now, this is funny, because this is a late mutation. Genetics have now proved—because there is ethnogenetics, which is *The Bell Curve*, and there is genetics—ethnogenetics is a function of a genetics whose function is to legitimate the structure of the order. Genetics has to move entirely outside that and what it has proved, of course, is the origin of the human in Africa. Africans are the oldest people. The greatest degrees of genetic diversity remain, as has been said, in a small village where there is genetic more diversity than in all the world. And, yet, it is being wiped out by AIDS. When I say that the rest of my life will be dedicated to fighting the belief system of biocentrism, as the obverse of the medieval belief system of theocentrism, you can really see that we don't fight racism. Racism is an effect of the biocentric conception of the human.

WHAT AFRICA OFFERS US

The West has always been arguing about "civilization" because it has always had the belief system that to be "human" is to be "civilized." Civilization is a far later and derivative form of the first mechanisms of what Africa offers us. When we go back to Africa—Egypt is wonderful and I am not putting it down—but the great, the dazzling moment is when you go back 50,000 years ago, you are seeing the first manifestations of the techniques by means of which the human is producing and instituting itself as human. I am suggesting that we should be able to see there the fundamental rules that still govern us today. That is what Africa has to offer. It is a tremendous challenge because this is to say that we make ourselves human through words, through meanings, through institutions. We are not interested in what I call the "I got a shoe, you got a shoe," mentality: "You got a civilization, I got a civilization." Rather, it is the way in which in Africa we can say an "other" exists to what the West calls human. When you are looking at Voudun, we are seeing an "other" to what the monotheistic religions have called "human." We are going back to our very origin as humans and the processes of hominization and that is to me what Africa has to offer, when we look at it this way.

By the way, taking this magnificent body of knowledge that has been built up by the West, but seeing it differently from them because they could not see these ("others") as alternative forms of life. So when Evans Pritchard says so brilliantly about the Azande and their belief in "witchcraft": "It is the very texture of their thought and they couldn't think that their thought was

wrong, not as long as they were Azande," so it is with us as the embodiment of ethno-class "Man" in the mode of the Western bourgeoisie. All of our beliefs about IQ, about the Bell Curve, these are the very texture of our thought and we can not normally think that our thought is wrong. So that is what Africa will give us: the fundamental rules. By the way, this wonderful Italian, Vicco, has said that we should look for that institution which is common to all humankind then we will have the makings of a new science, which would be the science that we are talking about—the science of being human, of the Word.

TOWARD THE SCIENCE OF BEING HUMAN

The way out, as Fanon has said, "Besides ontogeny, there is sociogeny." He is giving us a description of ourselves because then we can ask, "What is the mode of sociogeny in which we are?" Do you see? Because we have been doing it. We have been putting it in place but we have been doing this nonconsciously, as a spider spins its elegant web. But the fact is that we have also been changing these conceptions (of the human). All the great movements of history have actually been changes and struggles against (the prevailing) conception. Now, for the first time, we would literally come into full consciousness of the fact that it is we who are the agents and authors of ourselves and that we do it according to rules. And these rules function in the same way for the first human cultures. When we look at circumcision—a biocentric perspective—we see genital mutilation, because we can't afford to see what we are seeing. We see the first "writing" on the flesh, as Nietzsche says: "That tremendous labor of the human upon itself by means of which it was to make itself calculable." So in instituting ourselves, we institute our order of consciousness. As Fanon would say, "We are going to have to become enemies to our own consciousness."

TOWARD A TRANSFORMATIVE RESEARCH AND ACTION AGENDA

Woodson in 1935 had looked at the entire educational system and he said that it is set up in such a way as to motivate White students by telling them that they had done everything and to de-motivate Black students by telling them they had done nothing. So the question that we have been running away from is the body of knowledge in the university and schools itself. It is not any other extraneous factor. It is the body of knowledge. It is the system of representation. When people have struggled, asking, "Why is there no Black history?" This is not arbitrary. This is indispensable to the instituting of our present bourgeois conception of being human. So, we are all accomplices. We are all in complicity. We can't come up

with a "good-guy/bad-guy." We are necessarily in complicity with the order in which we find ourselves. But also, as intellectuals, remember, we are social, but we also have a vocational interest. And so, the Faustian temptation will always drive us, hopefully, to go beyond the immediacy of what would be our social interest in continuing to know the world *adaptively*. Because we want to say, "Oh that's how it works."

Palo Alto, California
June 2000

Appendix C

Glossary of Terms

Djanna Hill and Joyce E. King

Cooperative Economic Development: Promotes pooling of resources, shared wealth, and economic and political enfranchisement that puts community members in control over economic activity and wealth creation through noncompetitive business practices for the collective benefit of all local residents. Parallels one of the seven principles of the African American value system celebrated as KWANZAA that encourages African Americans to build and maintain stores, shops, and other businesses and to profit from them together.

Cultural Annihilation: The destruction of values, practices, beliefs, and language via assimilation or some other form of domination.

Culture-systemic Framework: A theoretical conception of the way a particular order must represent itself in the academic disciplines in order to reproduce itself.

Culturally Nurturing Research: Investigation that produces knowledge and understanding of ways to dismantle the aggressive beliefs, behaviors, and strategies of domination through an affirmation of voices and perspectives of those who share a commitment to Black people's survival and advancement.

Digital Divide: The disparity in access to and facility with computer technology for low-income families and people of color that also includes