

Africana Studies and Research Methodology: Revisiting the Centrality of the Afrikan Worldview¹

by

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Abstract

This essay engages questions of methodology and philosophical assumptions as they impinge upon discipline-specific scholarship in Africana Studies and ultimately on arguments in Africology. Through an investigation of the worldview concept as discussed within the scholarship of Vernon Dixon, the Afrikan/Black psychologists and other Afrikan-centered scholars this essay attempts to reorient this discussion to questions which are pertinent to the development and utilization of the Afrikan Worldview as a research methodology in Africana Studies. We conclude with the possible implications this analysis can have on Africana Studies and Africological scholarship.

It would be the mission of African social scientists, at home and in the Diaspora, to devote their energies to the radical reconstruction of the disciplines in which they have been trained. Without such an approach, African peoples run the risk of incorporating the theoretical, mythological and ideological models of white social science into their own methodologies, thereby unknowingly internalizing the values of Western European society, including the negative image of Africa which white racialism and culturalism has created.²

I. Introduction

Africana Studies, as a product of the 1960s Black Liberation Movement is currently flourishing throughout many institutions of higher education within the western world. In doing so, it has provided students and scholars a dynamic means to investigate the current conditions and future prospects of Afrikan people. However, at the same rate, in many instances the original mission and intention of Africana Studies has been confused with certain scholarly projects which are only “Africana Studies,” in name.³ One principal mean of truly touching the heart of Africana Studies, is to investigate questions of research methodology, or as some would argue the philosophical assumptions specific to Africana Studies and the investigation of Africana people, history and cultures. Through the investigation and clarification of the philosophical assumptions (ie. research methodology) specific to Africana Studies, the Africana Studies practitioner etches out a discipline-specific space which grounds those scholarly projects that can rightfully be referred to as Africana Studies.

This analysis is extremely important due to the resurgence in Africological analysis as exemplified within the work of Asante, Nelson and Van Horne.⁴ Nathaniel Norment Jr.’s second edition of *The African American Studies Reader* has also contributed to this resurgence given his inclusion of the previous authors’ works, which all attempt to relocate the discussion of Africology within Africana Studies literature.⁵ Principally William Nelson and Winston Van Horne have crystallized their arguments not only in the more recent call for Afrocentric analysis but also a form of analysis which is consistent with the goals and intentions of early Black Studies scholars who were concerned most fundamentally with a transformative educative process that had the ability to change the lives of Afrikan descended peoples. It is this understanding of Africology which informs this analysis of methodology within Africana Studies.

Consistent with this dialogue is the discussion of not only changes in nomenclature specific to the discipline but those questions of theory, methodology and disciplinary paradigms that go beyond merely issues of naming. And while within the Afrikan tradition the power of the word undergirds and exudes our creative production, our intellectual developments and projects must function as truly intellectual and rigorous investigations of phenomenon and not merely hodgepodge pseudoacademic developments. By revisiting issues of methodology within Africana Studies related research this paper attempts to ask those pointed questions which were once investigated at the institutional inception of Black Studies, but have been brushed to the side within certain discussions of Africana Studies and Africology, today. While the author currently prefers the nomenclature of Africana Studies, it should be noted that the interest in advancing Africology as a direct outgrowth of Black Studies is welcoming for the future advancement of the discipline.

But first, what exactly is Africana Studies? Currently there are many definitions of Africana Studies used throughout higher education. Most Africana Studies scholars suggest that any definition of Africana Studies must rely upon at least three key components.⁶ These include: subject matter, perspective and goal (function/purpose). The following definition continues in the same manner as previous definitions found throughout the discipline. Therefore, Africana Studies can be defined as the critical analysis of the Africana experience, people and culture, through the usage of the Afrikan worldview, with the ultimate goal of changing the life chances of Afrikan descended peoples.

The subject matter of the discipline is Africana culture, along with Africana people and their experiences. The term “Africana” refers to the global population of Afrikan people, whether on the continent or in the diaspora.⁷ Culture, defined by Wade Nobles, refers to “a general design for living and patterns for interpreting reality”.⁸ In this instance, Africana culture refers to the beliefs, values and morals of Africana people, along with their outward expression. Many scholars within Africana Studies differentiate these components of culture through the usage of the concepts a deep structure and surface structure of culture.⁹

The perspective according to this understanding of Africana Studies is grounded in the concept of the Afrikan worldview. Generally speaking, “A worldview refers to the way in which a people make sense of their surroundings; make sense of life and of the universe”.¹⁰ Mack Jones adds clarity to this definition by stating that all “people have a worldview that is a product of [their] lived experience and that constitutes the lens through which the world of sense perceptions is reduced to described fact”.¹¹ Azibo, relying upon the arguments of Jacob Carruthers, has argued that the Afrikan worldview is, “the universal and timeless worldview characteristic of African people throughout space and time”.¹² Functioning as a perspective, and also as the most fundamental methodological framework within Africana Studies, the Afrikan worldview refers to a universal orientation and interpretive reference point that Afrikan people share. This should not suggest a static means of interpretation across the Afrikan world, however it does suggest that there are common interpretive processes that Afrikans utilize in their attempts at understanding a given phenomenon, and thus reality. Kwame Gyekye, clarifies this point when speaking in reference to continental Afrikan cultural unity (and we might add to Afrikan world cultural unity), by arguing that “[a] painstakingly comparative study of African cultures leaves one in no doubt that despite the undoubted cultural diversity arising from Africa’s ethnic pluralism, threads of underlying affinity do run through the beliefs, customs, value systems, and sociopolitical institutions and practices of the various African societies”.¹³ Thus, the Afrikan worldview, as a component of Africana culture, functions as a unifying interpretative reference point for Afrikan peoples and therefore functions as a common philosophical component of the discipline of Africana Studies, giving it a common philosophical framework.

The third key concept, goal (function and purpose) of Africana Studies, is grounded in changing the life chances of Africana people, and by extension humanity. This is done through the processes of knowledge production, transforming consciousness and motivated action. Knowledge production functions as a means of changing Africana people's life chances by providing useful information that can be used to transform how they see themselves, the world and their particular place within it. The transformation of one's consciousness is the first step in creating culturally responsible members of the Africana community, who will then make contributions to their own communities.¹⁴ The first two processes contribute to the final process of motivated action, whereby students are able to be productive contributors to the larger society. Therefore Africana Studies functions, as it did during its institutional inception, not only as an intellectual project but more importantly as a means for social change.

Thus, as previously stated Africana Studies functions as a critical analysis of the Africana experience, people and culture, through the usage of the Afrikan worldview, with the ultimate goal of changing the life chances of Afrikan descended peoples. The components and definition of Africana Studies, as previously discussed provides the necessary starting point for investigating the issue of research methodology within Africana Studies. The Afrikan worldview, in this instance, not only functions as the perspective, but it is most importantly the root of the philosophical assumptions which determine the research methodology as will be discussed below.

II. Methodology?

Since the institutionalization of Africana Studies, scholars within the discipline have been critical of mainstream methodological approaches to research, on and about Africana people. Whether these scholars came out of sociology, including Alkalimat¹⁵ and Scott¹⁶; psychology, including Clarke, et. al.¹⁷, Nobles¹⁸, Akbar¹⁹ and Banks²⁰; political science, Carruthers²¹, Walters²² and Jones²³; anthropology, Richards²⁴ or economics, Dixon²⁵, all of the previously mentioned scholars, and others, questioned the methodological foundations of their particular discipline. Since all of the previously mentioned areas of knowledge, and others, contribute to the intellectual infrastructure of Africana Studies, their critical stance was taken up by later scholars who would work towards articulating a discipline-specific methodology for Africana Studies.²⁶

The methodology that this paper proposes is based upon and guided by the work of these scholars, and others, who were at the forefront of creating a culturally specific methodological approach to the study of Africana culture, people and experiences. Central to this discussion of research methodology in Africana Studies is a clear grasp of the relationship between worldview and methodology.²⁷ This relationship lays at the foundation of Africana Studies giving clarity to the cultural specificity of the discipline. Thus Africana Studies, is not and can not be, white studies in Black face, but it is rather a culturally-specific approach to understanding human phenomenon, Afrikan phenomenon in particular.²⁸

Central to this discussion is the ground breaking work of the Africana economist Vernon Dixon.²⁹ Dixon has significantly influenced the work of a group of scholars, calling themselves “the Afrikan/Black psychologists.”³⁰ Most importantly, Dixon has shaped how this group of scholars operationalizes key components of the worldview concept. While the Afrikan/Black psychologists have extended Dixon’s original argument, it is imperative that Dixon’s role within this intellectual trajectory is properly situated.³¹ Therefore, after a review and discussion of Dixon’s approach to worldview and research methodology, we will then engage the contributions of the Afrikan/Black psychologists to this dialogue. We will conclude with a review of the importance of these arguments to the Africana Studies practitioner and the future of the discipline.

III. Worldview and Methodology

The relationship between a researcher’s worldview and their particular research methodology is of extreme importance, especially when they are attempting to investigate culturally specific phenomenon. Vernon Dixon, emeritus professor of economics at Haverford College, discusses this relationship in great detail on a number of occasions.³² According to Dixon, a research methodology, in part, refers to the assumptions that one brings to the research project. Dixon argues, “Assumptions are statements about phenomena that are accepted as valid without submission to tests of their validity”.³³ Within the process of research, assumptions constrain the research methodology. Able to acknowledge the importance of assumptions to one’s research methodology, Dixon asks an important question: “What are the sources of these assumptions”?³⁴ Unequivocally, the sources of these assumptions are a person’s worldview. Therefore, a researcher’s worldview must be interrogated in order to properly understand the cultural implications on research projects on and about people of Afrikan descent. As Dixon argues,

...there are certain philosophical characteristics in any given world view which determine the choice of assumptions in particular, and research methodology in general. Research methodology has world view specificity, which results from differences in axiology, epistemology, and logic. If the model is valid, then it will be possible to set forth different approaches to research, each consistent with its respective world view.³⁵

Since worldviews are products of culture, it is pertinent to acknowledge one's worldview orientation within the research project. This can not be stressed enough, especially given the cultural specificity of research and scholarship within Africana Studies.³⁶

It is the cultural specificity of Dixon's worldview methodology that many scholars within Black Studies have found useful for work in the discipline. While Dixon did not explicitly articulate application of his worldview methodology to or in Black Studies, it should be noted that it has been used by many disciplinary practitioners. Johnella Butler was most likely the earliest of Black Studies practitioners to incorporate Dixon's work into her discussion of a discipline-specific pedagogy for Black Studies.³⁷ Through Butler and those that will follow, Dixon's work would be found within arguments on and about Black Studies.

We should also note that the main worldview frameworks Dixon is concerned with are what he refers to as the "Euro-American" worldview and the Afrikan worldview. The Euro-American worldview is merely an outgrowth of the original European worldview which orients western intellectual projects. Marimba Ani supports this notion in her discussion of the European *utamawazo* which she refers to as "culturally-structured thought" that was introduced via Plato and currently masquerades as the only means of understanding scholarly phenomenon, today. Ani argues that

...the European cognitive style (*utamawazo*) became an extension of Platonism. Not only all European intellectuals but *all* intellectuals would be trained in the academy (Plato's legacy), a testament to the success of European cultural imperialism. The Academy has preserved a cultural tradition, a race of people, and a dominant society. No matter the internecine controversies and so-called political revolutions that might occur, the Academy ensures that the ideological infrastructure will remain intact.³⁸

Thus Dixon can not only be concerned with the "Euro-American" worldview, in fact his analysis directly engages both the European and Euro-American worldviews because the latter is a direct outgrowth of the former. Similarly, the Afrikan worldview which Dixon relies upon is understood as a direct outgrowth of the cultural and historical experiences of Afrikan people.

Axiology, Epistemology and Logic

Therefore Dixon argues that axiology, epistemology and logic are central tenets of a culture's worldview. Following the etymological origin of the term axiology (*axios* – Greek, values), Dixon³⁹ and others, understand axiology to refer to the nature of values.⁴⁰ Put another way, what do you value? Or, what do your values consist of? Dixon follows with, “The dominant value-orientations in the Euro-American world view is what I term the Man-to-Object relationship; while for homeland and overseas Africans, it is what I term the Man-to-Person relationship”.⁴¹ Among Euro-Americans the value orientation of their worldview is guided by “Doing, Future-time, Individualism and Mastery-over-Nature”.⁴² Among Afrikans, homeland and overseas, the value orientation of their worldview is based upon “Being, Felt-time, Communalism and Harmony-with-Nature”.⁴³ The fundamental axiological difference between the two worldviews is clearly grounded within the relationship between the self and the other.

Linda James Myers and Kobi Kambon are two Afrikan/Black psychologists who support Dixon's claims regarding the axiological differences between Afrikan and European peoples. Myers argues that the distinctions between axiologies are found within an optimal (Afrikan) axiology where the “Highest value [is] in positive interpersonal relationships among people,” and a suboptimal (European) axiology where the “Highest value [is] in objects or acquisition of objects”.⁴⁴ Kambon also distinguishes between values among the two worldviews, by arguing that the Afrikan worldview's axiological basis is grounded in cooperation and collective responsibility; corporateness and interdependence; and spiritualism and circularity.⁴⁵ This is in contradistinction to the European axiology which is founded on competition and individual rights; separateness and independence; and materialism and ordinality.⁴⁶

The worldview differences in axiology have a variety of ways of manifesting themselves for a research project, and Dixon⁴⁷, Myers⁴⁸, Kambon⁴⁹ and others, all provide sufficient examples to support the existences of these values in research projects. However, when it comes to one's research methodology, Dixon is correct to assert, “axiological or value orientations implicitly influence the content and, therefore, models or hypotheses”.⁵⁰ Thus, given the value of independence at the expense of interdependence, or collective responsibility in comparison to individual rights, or even communalism as opposed to individualism, the value orientations influence the nature of your research methodology. This will be evident within the nature of your hypotheses and models that you attempt to interrogate through your research project.

Dixon then investigates the concept of epistemology. Following its etymological origin (*episteme* – Greek, knowledge/to know), epistemology refers to the nature of knowledge, but more importantly, how do you know what you know? What are the processes that are used in order to know something? As Dixon states, “the focus is on how, or the way in which one knows reality or phenomena; i.e., the grounds or method of knowledge”.⁵¹ The distinctions between the two epistemological orientations, Dixon argues can be found between the Euro-American epistemology which he refers to as “Object-Measure Cognition” and the African view which he refers to as “Affect-Symbolic Imagery Cognition”.⁵² The epistemological difference between the two worldviews is found in what Dixon refers to as “empty perceptual space”.⁵³ It is the existence of this “empty perceptual space” within the Euro-American epistemology that distinguishes it from an Afrikan epistemology.

Within the Euro-American worldview the knower will distance him/herself from the phenomena they are attempting to know. While within the Afrikan worldview, the knower attempts to be a part of the phenomena s/he is attempting to know. Dixon adds clarity to this distinction when he states, “Affective-oriented persons know reality predominantly through the interaction of Affect and Symbolic Imagery, i.e. the synthesis of the two factors...” Furthermore,

Affect personalizes the phenomenal world. It is one factor in the affect mode of knowing. Affect, however, is not intuition, for the latter term means direct knowledge or immediate knowledge (instinctive knowledge) without resource to reference from reason or reason about evidence. Affect does interact with evidence, evidence in the form of Symbolic Imagery.⁵⁴

Clarifying the concept of symbolic imagery, Dixon states it “is the use of phenomena (words, gestures, tones, rhythms, objects, etc.) to convey meaning”.⁵⁵ Symbolic imagery, therefore, refers to any occurrences that can be ascertained on the material level of reality. However, symbolic imagery is made sense of through its relationship with affect.

Dixon summarizes the epistemological assumption of the Euro-American worldview by stating, “I step back from phenomena, I reflect; I measure; I think; I know; and therefore I am and I feel”.⁵⁶ While the Afrikan epistemological assumption, states, “I feel phenomena; therefore I think; I know”.⁵⁷ The centrality of empty perceptual space is found within the Euro-American assumption which “steps back,” while the Afrikan does not, thus negating the existence of empty perceptual space.

Myers, adds clarity to this understanding regarding the epistemological distinctions between the two worldviews. According to Myers, an optimal worldview posits that self knowledge is the highest form of knowledge, and that knowledge comes through symbolic imagery and rhythm.⁵⁸ While a suboptimal worldview posits that knowledge is external and known through counting and measuring. In both discussions of the epistemological assumption the relationship between the knower and known, ie. perceptual space, is central to the differences between the Afrikan (optimal) worldview and Euro-American (suboptimal) worldview. Similar distinctions can be found among the work of Akbar, Kambon and others.⁵⁹

It should be noted that these realities of epistemological differences have a variety of ways of manifesting themselves within the research process. Dixon provides sufficient examples to support himself. In addition, Akbar⁶⁰ and Myers⁶¹ provide more recent and up-to-date evidence for these distinctions. The relevance of the relationship between epistemology and research methodology is exemplified by Dixon, as he argues that “epistemology or the mode of knowing reality implicitly controls the methods of verif[ication]”.⁶² Therefore, while axiological differences determine value orientations, the epistemology in turn determines the technique(s) by which this knowledge is accessed.

The question of epistemology in relation to worldview differences is extremely important especially in relation to the role of objectivity within social science research. The term “object,” which is at the core of the words “objectivity” and “objective,” refers directly to separation. Etymologically, the root of the term “object,” –ject, comes from Middle French *jeter* – to throw. Thus at the heart of objectivity and/or being objective is the need to throw space or distance between yourself and what you are studying. This separation is consistent with the need for empty perceptual space as discussed by Dixon. The question of objectivity, which will be discussed in greater detail below, should be understood as rooted in the European proclivity for separation and distinction. The question of objectivity is probably the most explicit imposition of this culturally-specific epistemological assumption on modern-day research process.

Finally, Dixon investigates the notion of logic between the two worldviews. Logic refers “to the canons and criteria of validity in reasoning or how one organizes what one knows”.⁶³ Dixon believes that there exist distinct approaches to logic, which will vary in relation to the researcher’s worldview. Among the Euro-American the logic is either/or, and among Afrikans it is diunital.

According to Dixon, either/or logic is also a reflection of the existence of perceptual space. For example, when discussing either/or knowledge Dixon argues that,

[s]uch logic means that a person's knowledge cannot take the form...of a room being simultaneously empty and not-empty. This type of discontinuity or gap among phenomena is quite consistent with a world view oriented towards a perception of a conceptual distance between the observer and the observed along with similar empty perceptual space among the observed.⁶⁴

The term diunital, on the other hand, refers to "something apart and united at the same time".⁶⁵ Diunital logic, however, is reflective of the nonexistence of perceptual space. Within the Afrikan worldview "a person becomes oriented towards a harmonious oneness between the observer and the observed and in which there is an absence of empty perceptual spaces among phenomena".⁶⁶ Both Myers⁶⁷ and Azibo⁶⁸ advance similar interpretations of the distinctions within logic. When it comes to research methodology, Dixon is correct to assert that "logic or the mode of organizing knowledge implicitly shapes the form of...assumptions and models".⁶⁹

Accordingly, axiology, epistemology and logic play central roles in defining the worldview orientation of research methodologies. A researcher's values and logic shape the content and form of assumptions implemented in the research process. These assumptions are in turn developed into models and/or hypotheses that are then verified through a particular way of knowing. Since distinct axiologies, epistemologies and forms of logic are products of particular worldviews and cultures, this understanding is essential given the cultural specificity of Africana Studies.

While Dixon's analysis of worldview and its relationship to one's research methodology clarifies the components of axiology, epistemology and logic, the Afrikan/Black psychologists, building upon Dixon's original arguments, advance other components of the worldview concept. Therefore, we must discuss the components of cosmology, ontology, teleology and ideology, for a more wholistic understanding of the Afrikan worldview and its impact upon research methodology in Africana Studies.

Cosmology, Ontology, Teleology and Ideology

The transmission of ideas and concepts within Africana Studies underlies many of the arguments found within this essay. Just as Vernon Dixon originally introduced the concept of worldview, along with the constituent parts of axiology, epistemology and logic, another group of thinkers advanced four more key components which currently define the worldview concept as used in Africana Studies scholarship. The Afrikan/Black psychologists consisting of scholars such as Wade Nobles, D. Philip McGee, Cedrix X. Clarke (aka Syed Khatib), Luther X. Weems (aka Naim Akbar), Joseph Baldwin (aka Kobi Kambon), Linda James Myers and others have used Dixon's original argumentation as a starting point for their discussions of worldview differences in the interpretation of human behavior. Thus it is to these scholars that we look to for a continuation in thought regarding the relationship of worldview to research methodology.

Beginning with the cosmological assumption, the etymological origin of the term cosmology (*cosmos* – Greek, universe) refers to the nature/structure of the universe.⁷⁰ Afrikan/Black psychologists posit that the Afrikan cosmology is based upon “an interconnected and interdependent edifice,” where “all things in the universe are interconnected and interdependent”.⁷¹ Therefore, all things within the universe are connected. Whether apprehensible logically or illogically, we live in a fundamentally communal universe. The cosmological assumption of independence and separation, which is reflective of the European worldview, guides the majority of research methodologies in western social sciences. However, this assumption requires separation between interrelated areas. This understanding of the European cosmology is also grounded in Dixon's concept of “empty perceptual space.”⁷² However, the multi/interdisciplinary nature of Africana Studies requires the acceptance of the cosmological assumption of the Afrikan worldview as relevant to a discipline-specific methodology. Dixon, originally trained in economics, validates this necessity in his discussion of Black economics, suggesting that it is necessary to also include, “philosophical notions, sociological concepts, anthropological information, etc. (noneconomics)” in the investigation of economic phenomena.⁷³ The cosmological assumption of the Afrikan worldview suggests that in our analysis of Africana people, culture and experiences, we must utilize all areas of culture and knowledge to come up with the most accurate and relevant data on and/or about Africana people.

The ontological assumption of the worldview concept engages questions pertaining to the nature of reality and/or nature of a being. Etymologically, the concept of ontology is rooted in the Greek root *ontos*, referring to being. An Afrikan ontology suggests that the nature of reality and being is spirit/energy. Therefore, at the most fundamental level of all that exists within the universe is a spiritual/energy force manifesting itself on material and immaterial levels. Dona Richards argues that

[t]he essence of the African cosmos is spiritual reality; that is its fundamental nature, its primary essence. But realities are not conceived as being in irreconcilable opposition, as they are in the West, and spirit is not separate from matter. Both spiritual and material being are necessary in order for there to be meaningful reality. While spiritual being gives force and energy to matter, material beings give form to spirit.⁷⁴

Therefore, at the fundamental level of all existence is a spiritual/energy force manifesting itself on all levels of human reality. This component of the worldview concept grounds one's investigation of the Africana experience in the most basic level of reality, which is spirit.

However, the ontological assumption manifests itself as solely material reality within the Euro-American and European worldview orientation. This constricts the researcher when they assume that all that can exist and thus all that can be known must be apprehended with only the five senses. Africana Studies scholars acknowledge the necessity of the five senses in the understanding of reality, but we must not limit reality and knowledge of this reality to *only* the five senses. This is clearly evident, as previously discussed, in Vernon Dixon's discussion of the Afrikan epistemological assumption. Furthermore, if we reconsider the cosmological assumption of the Afrikan worldview which suggests that all in the universe is interconnected, it is only logical that that which connects all of reality is a spirit/energy force.

The teleological assumption of the Afrikan worldview was initially introduced via the work of W. Curtis Banks, another Black psychologist. In his critique of an Africentric research methodology, he correctly argued that one missing component of the Afrikan worldview as research methodology within Africentric scholarship was the question of teleology.⁷⁵ Banks argues that "the absence of a dimension within the Africentric framework of what traditionally is called teleology deprives the framework of an essential source of justification for programs of African-American development".⁷⁶ Banks, correctly states that Afrikan people have consistently held a "sense of directedness, of definite ends, of definite purpose" which we can understand through "the sense of commitment and extended investment that characterize" an Afrikan notion of self.⁷⁷

This teleological assumption impacts an Africana Studies research methodology in that it suggests that there is an intended goal for the research, scholarship and intellectual projects that we produce. This must be seen in distinction to “knowledge for knowledge sake,” which is so common within the western intellectual tradition. The teleological assumption is clearly reflective of the calls for relevant and functional education, which have been at the heart of Africana Studies since its institutionalization.⁷⁸ Therefore, any research methodology within Africana Studies, must question the relevancy and functionality of the particular research project, along with its intended goal.

Furthermore, Carruthers was correct to assert that “Our students are caught between the philosophy of liberation and the methodology of oppression”.⁷⁹ In being in this predicament, Carruthers is suggesting that while Africana scholars and students are philosophically and ideologically committed to engaging the problems facing Africana people vis-à-vis (social) science, this is utterly impossible since we have not constructed the proper methodology.

Alkalimat also spoke to these points when he argued that Africana Studies must be guided by a Black ideology. In explaining the importance of ideology, Alkalimat states, “Ideology involves the prophetic vision of a thought as well as the action orientation of a moral commitment to serve. Thus, ideology combines an interpretation of the social world with a moral commitment to change it”.⁸⁰ Therefore, it should be the role of Africana Studies to use an interpretative framework which will engender change within the Afrikan world. The previous examples all support the relevance and existence of the teleological assumption of the Afrikan worldview methodology in Africana Studies and its relation to the ideological assumption.

Banks also provides a discussion on the relationship between ideology and methodology.⁸¹ As Azibo⁸² and Nobles⁸³ maintain, ideology is another key component of the worldview concept. Banks suggests that an ideology reflects the beliefs and ideas used to advance the needs and social aspirations of a (cultural) group. Marimba Ani is also correct to make this same assertion.⁸⁴ In the case of Afrikans in America, Banks maintains that, “The Africentric conception is one ideological system that is contending for position of preeminence in expressing the interests and guiding the actions of the African American community today”.⁸⁵ Therefore, when attempting to discuss an Africana Studies methodology, it is necessary to recognize that this methodology must reflect the interests and needs of Africana people. While Banks provides a rather complicated and abstruse discussion of the relationship between ideology and methodology, others have provided a more clearly discussed articulation.

For example, Richards has explicated the relationship between ideology and methodology through the European imposition of objectivity, progress and dominance.⁸⁶ The ideological nature of these three concepts is found within the fact that they all emanate from a European cultural orientation, and therefore in keeping with the definition of an ideology, their ultimate goal is to advance the interests of Europe and her descendants. For instance, objectivity is understood as an outgrowth of the European epistemology and therefore determines the manner in which one comes to know and/or attain information about phenomena. This concept of objectivity is directly related the European epistemology, and adds clarity to Dixon's previous notion of "perceptual space".⁸⁷ In discussing the ideological nature of objectivity, Richards states,

The knowing subject must disengage himself from that which he wishes to know. He must become emotionally uninvolved--detached. Indeed, he must become remote from it. By doing this, he successfully controls that which he wishes to know and thereby makes of it an object. The object has been created by the distance of the knowing self from the thing to be known.⁸⁸

By objectivity functioning within this manner, and by being a key component of western social science, it is obvious that this concept is detrimental to accurately and wholistically understanding Africana peoples. First, the assumption of objectivity is an affront to the Afrikan cosmological and epistemological assumptions, as previously mentioned. But more importantly,

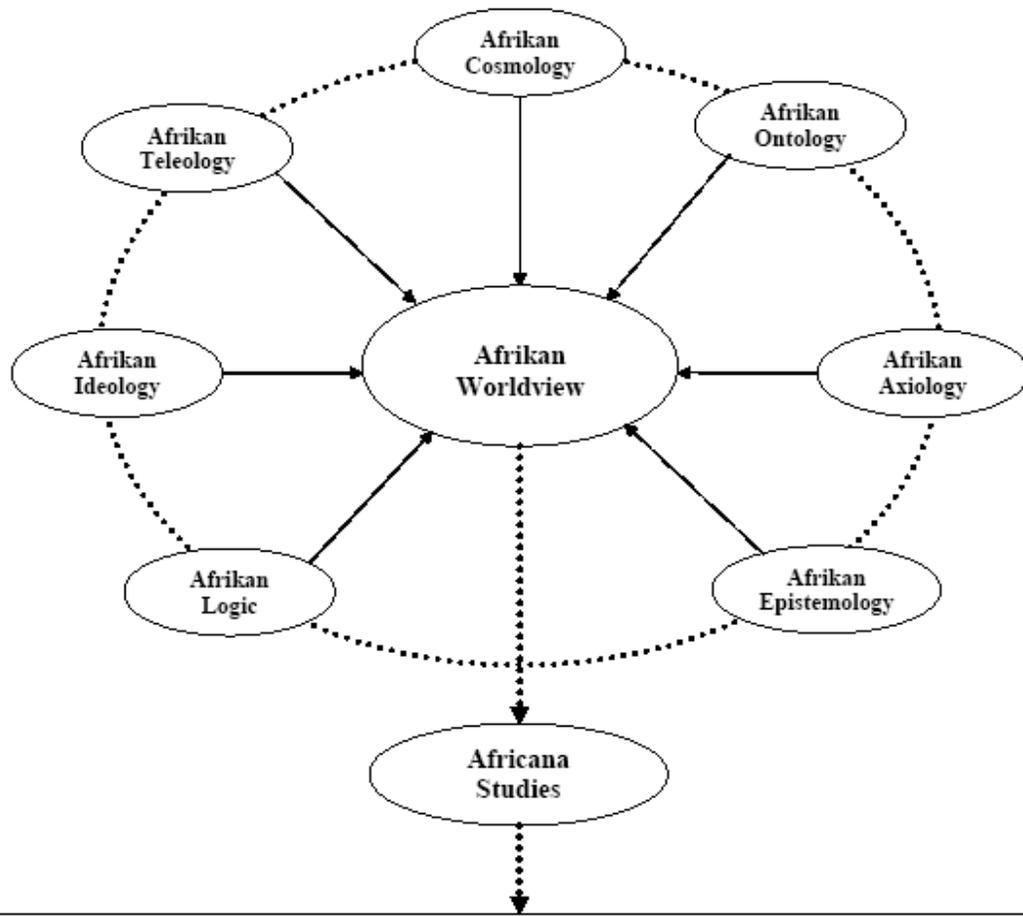
The African worldview immerses us in a vibrant universe. It seeks to close gaps—to do away with discontinuity—to bring us close to the essence of life. The epistemology it generates does away with distance. Since there is no distance, there are no mediators. The mode of our epistemological method is that of participation, and relationship rather than separation and control.⁸⁹

The ideological value of objectivity is laid out rather clearly. As Richards further argues, an Africana Studies methodology must acknowledge this extremely important reality in order to develop "a holistic approach identified with Pan-African Studies [Afro-American, African American, Africana, Black Studies, etc.] *as a discipline*, rather than with the fragmentary divisions of European academic thought. We must not be afraid to create new concepts, theories, and methodologies to fit our vision of the future..."⁹⁰

The ideological nature of progress manifests itself with the consistent need of Europe and her descendants to advocate development, linearity and expansionism.⁹¹ This manifests itself with a person's research methodology through the assumption that humanity is moving towards an undefined end. Within the areas of science and technology, Richards argues, "Progress became identified with scientific knowledge," and therefore, the epistemological cornerstone of western society would be a commitment to scientific advancement.⁹² However, this commitment has come at the expense of ecological insanity, nuclear weapons, and a deteriorating ozone layer, among other disastrous realities. Within an Africana Studies methodology the question needs to be asked, are we understanding Africana people, culture and experiences in order to progress within a European sense, or is the teleological assumption of the Afrikan worldview clearly reflective of Afrikan cultural reality? Finally, Richards' general discussion of the ideology of dominance is important in that she suggests that our use of western social scientific assumptions may actually lead to imposing culturally detrimental assumptions on Afrikan people.⁹³

As the Afrikan/Black psychologists and other like minded scholars of Afrikan ancestry have attempted to extend Vernon Dixon's original discussion of worldview and research methodology they have found it pertinent to include a discussion of cosmology, ontology, teleology and ideology, as central to the worldview concept. A synthesis of these seven concepts functions as a wholistic understanding and evaluation of the worldview concept for an Africana Studies research methodology. Together each component provides the basic level of inquiry needed for research projects specific to Africana Studies. Chart 1 clarifies this relationship and suggests the implications of the Afrikan worldview framework on Africana Studies. Each component of the worldview is related to a basic question of inquiry. This functions as a starting point for questions of inquiry at the initial stages of the research process for scholarship within Africana Studies. [See below.]

Afrikan Worldview Framework
and Methodological Implications ©



Implications of an Afrikan Worldview Framework on the Research Methodology of Africana Studies

- How does this research project reflect the interdependent and interconnected nature of the universe?
- How does this research project compensate for the spiritual and material nature of reality?
- How does this research project reflect the communal nature of Afrikan people?
- How does this research project access nonmaterial reality?
- How does this research project reflect both/and logic?
- How does this research project advance the interests of the Africana community?
- How does this research project contribute to the liberation of Africana people?

I. Conclusion

The previously mentioned components of axiology, epistemology, logic, cosmology, ontology, teleology and ideology, as components of a worldview clearly have a role to play within the research process, especially as outlined above. This discussion should clarify the importance of the Afrikan worldview to Africana Studies, not only in regards to the perspective of the discipline, as discussed above, but at present, as central to the methodological infrastructure of Africana Studies. While scholarship on and/or about Africana people, history and cultures, will still be produced, it will be up to the future generations of Africana Studies practitioners to revisit those discipline-specific methodologies that have been developed and question their relevance to current projects in Africana Studies. For Africology it will be necessary to advance similar critical questions that speak to the central issues of theory, methodology and paradigm construction within our discipline. All of which are central to the growth and development of Africana Studies as an autonomous academic discipline.

Notes

¹ Medasi to Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo and Vernon Dixon for providing the spark and guidance behind this continued discussion of the Afrikan Worldview as research methodology in Africana Studies. Medasi also to Danielle Wallace, Sekhmet Ra Em Khet Maat (Cher Love McCallister), Serie McDougal, Itibari Zulu and Nathaniel Norment, Jr. for your support and critical feedback. Finally, I must also acknowledge all of my “Introduction to Black Studies” and “Introduction to African American Studies” classes at Temple University, Montclair State University and the State University of New York at New Paltz, for providing criticism of these and other related arguments on questions of methodology and the varied philosophical assumptions in Africana Studies.

² Dona Richards (aka Marimba Ani), “The Ideology of European Dominance,” *Western Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 4 (1979), 249.

³ By “Africana Studies in name,” I am referring to a particular type of scholarly production which masquerades as Africana Studies but is quite far from the intellectual project which will be discussed in this essay. Please see Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo, “Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks: The Fundamental Role of Culture and the African-Centered Worldview,” in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 420-441 and/or Karanja Keita Carroll, Book Review of *Not Only the Master’s Tools: African American Studies in Theory and Practice*, edited by Lewis Gordon and Jane Anna Gordon. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 1.4 (2006): 64-69.

⁴ Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1990); William Nelson, “Africology: Building an Academic Discipline” in *The African American Studies Readers* ed. Nathaniel Norment, (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 68-73; Winston Van Horne, “Africology: A Discipline of the Twenty-First Century” in *The African American Studies Readers* ed. Nathaniel Norment, (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2007), 411-419.

⁵ Norment, *The African American Studies Reader* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001).

⁶ James Stewart, "Reaching for Higher Ground: Toward an Understanding of Black/Africana Studies," in *The African American Studies Readers* ed. Nathaniel Norment, (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 349-366; Terry Kershaw, "Toward a Black Studies Paradigm: An Assessment and Some Directions," *Journal of Black Studies* 22, no. 4, (1992b): 477-493; Terry Kershaw, "The Black Studies Paradigm: The Making of Scholar Activists," in *Afrocentricity and the academy: Essays on Theory and Practice*, ed. James Conyers (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers, 2003); Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies*; Norment, *The African American Studies Reader* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001); Alkalimat & Associates, *Introduction to Afro-American Studies*.

⁷ John Henrik Clarke, "Africana Studies: A Decade of Change, Challenge and Conflict," in *The Next Decade: Theoretical and Research Issues in Africana Studies*, edited by James E. Turner, (Ithaca: Africana Research and Research Center, 1984), 31-45.

⁸ Wade Nobles, *Africanity and the Black Family*, (Oakland: A Black Family Institute Publication, 1985), 102.

⁹ Linda James Myers, "The Deep Structure of Culture: The Relevance of Traditional African Culture in Contemporary Times," *Journal of Black Studies*, 18, no. 1 (1987): 72-85; Linda James Myers, "Expanding the Psychology of Knowledge Optimally: The Importance of Worldview Revisited," in *Black Psychology*, ed. Reginald Jones (Berkeley: Cobb & Henry Publishers, 1991), 15-32; Linda James Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal Psychology* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1993); Wade Nobles, *Africanity and the Black Family*; Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo, "Africentric Conceptualizing as the Pathway to African Liberation," *International Journal of Africana Studies* 5, (1999): 1-31; Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks".

¹⁰ Marimba Ani, *Let the Circle Be Unbroken*, (New York: Nkonimfo Publications, 1980), 4.

¹¹ Mack Jones, "Political Science and the Black Political Experience: Issues in Epistemology and Relevance," *Ethnic Politics and Civil Liberties* (1992): 30.

¹² Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks," 422.

¹³ Kwame Gyekye, *African Philosophical Thought: The Akan Conceptual Scheme*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995), 192.

¹⁴ Philip T. K. Daniels, "Theory Building in Black Studies," in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 372-379.

¹⁵ Abdul Alkalimat (aka Gerald McWhorter) "The Ideology of Black Social Science," in *The Death of White Sociology*, ed. Joyce A. Ladner, (Baltimore: Black Class Press, 1973), 173-189.

¹⁶ J. Scott, "Black Science and Nation-Building," in *The Death of White Sociology*, ed. Joyce A. Ladner, (Baltimore: Black Class Press, 1973), 289-309.

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- ¹⁷ Cedric X. Clark, D. Phillip McGee, Wade Nobles, & Luther X. Weems (aka Naim Akbar), "Voodoo or IQ: An Introduction to African Psychology," *The Journal of Black Psychology* 1, no. 2 (1975), 9-29.
- ¹⁸ Wade Nobles, "Toward an Empirical and Theoretical Framework for Defining Black Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 40, no. 4 (1978), 679-688.
- ¹⁹ Naim Akbar, "Africentric Social Science for Human Liberation," *Journal of Black Studies* 14, no. 4 (1984), 395-414; Naim Akbar, "Our Destiny: Authors of a Scientific Revolution," in *Black Children*, eds. Harriet McAdoo and John McAdoo (Beverly Hills: Sage, 1985), 17-32.
- ²⁰ William Curtis Banks, "The Theoretical and Methodological Crisis of the Africentric Conception," *Journal of Negro Education* 61, no. 3, (1992), 262-272.
- ²¹ Jacob Carruthers. *Essays in Ancient Egyptian Studies*. Los Angeles: University of Sankore Press, 1984.
- ²² Ronald Walters, "Toward a Definition of Black Social Science," in *The Death of White Sociology*, ed. Joyce A. Ladner, (Baltimore: Black Class Press, 1973), 190-213.
- ²³ Mack H. Jones, "Scientific Method, Value Judgements, and the Black Predicament in the U.S.," *The Review of Black Political Economy*, 7 (1976), 7-21.
- ²⁴ Richards "The Ideology of European Dominance"; Dona Richards, "European Mythology: The Ideology of 'Progress'," in *Contemporary Black Thought*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1980), 59-79; Dona Richards, "The Demystification of Objectivity," *Imhotep, Journal of Afrocentric Thought*, 1, no. 1 (1989), 23-34.
- ²⁵ Vernon J. Dixon, "The di-unital approach to 'Black economics'," *The American Economic Review*, 60, no. 2 (1970), 424-429; Vernon J. Dixon, "Two approaches to Black-White relations" in *Beyond Black or White: An Alternative America*, eds. Vernon J. Dixon & Babi G. Foster, (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971a) 56-84; Vernon J. Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews: Research methodologies and economics," *Review of Black Political Economy*, 7, no. 2 (1971b) 119-156; Vernon J. Dixon, "Worldviews and research methodology," in *African Philosophy: Assumption and Paradigms for Research on Black Persons*, ed. Lewis King, (Los Angeles: Fanon R & D Center, 1976), 51-102.
- ²⁶ Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo, "Africentric Conceptualizing as the Pathway to African Liberation," *International Journal of Africana Studies* 5, (1999), 1-31; Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks: The Fundamental Role of Culture and the African-Centered Worldview," in *The African American Studies Reader*, ed. Nathaniel Norment, (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001), 420-441.
- ²⁷ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews"; Jones, "Scientific Method, Value Judgements, and the Black Predicament"; Nobles, "Toward an Empirical and Theoretical Framework"; Wade Nobles, *Africanity and the Black Family*, (Oakland: A Black Family Institute Publication, 1985); Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks".

²⁸ Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks".

²⁹ Dixon, "The di-unital approach to 'Black economics'"; Dixon, "Two approaches to Black-White relations"; Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews"; Dixon, "Worldviews and research methodology"; Vernon J. Dixon, "Some Thoughts on Teaching Predominantly Affective-Oriented Groups," in *Introducing Race and Gender Into Economics*, ed. Robin Bartlett (New York: Routledge, 1997), 177-189.

³⁰ The "Afrikan/Black psychologists" refer to a specific group of scholars originally trained within western psychology who have taken a radical stance on the nature of psychology and have argued for an Afrikan/Black psychology which is specific to the culture and values of Afrikan people. Principal within this group are Cedric X. Clark (Syed Khatib), Wade Nobles, D. Phillip McGee, Joseph Baldwin (aka Kobi Kambon), Linda James Myers, Luther X. Weems (aka Naim Akbar), Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo and others. It should also be noted that Vernon Dixon's relationship to these scholars is based upon his presentation in 1975 at the First Annual J. Alfred Cannon Research Conference, of "Worldview and Research Methodology" (see endnote 22). In attendance were, Nobles, Akbar, McGhee, among others. Please see the work of, Cedric X. Clark, D. Phillip McGee, Wade Nobles, & Luther X. Weems (aka Naim Akbar), "Voodoo or IQ: An Introduction to African Psychology," *The Journal of Black Psychology* 1, no. 2 (1975), 9-29; Wade Nobles, "Toward an Empirical and Theoretical Framework for Defining Black Families," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 40, no. 4 (1978), 679-688; Kobi Kambon (aka Joseph Baldwin), *The African Personality in America: An African-Centered Framework* (Tallahassee: Nubian Nation Publications, 1992); Kobi Kambon, "The Africentric Paradigm and African-American Psychological Liberation" in *African Psychology in Historical Perspective and Related Commentary*, ed. Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1996), 57-69; Kobi Kambon, *African/Black Psychology in the American Context: An African-Centered Approach*, (Tallahassee: Nubian Nation Publications, 1998); Linda James Myers, "The Deep Structure of Culture: The Relevance of Traditional African Culture in Contemporary Times," *Journal of Black Studies*, 18, no. 1 (1987), 72-85; Linda James Myers, "Expanding the Psychology of Knowledge Optimally: The Importance of Worldview Revisited," in *Black Psychology*, ed. Reginald Jones (Berkeley: Cobb & Henry Publishers, 1991), 15-32; Linda James Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal Psychology* (Dubuque: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company, 1993).

³¹ It should also be stressed that the Afrikan/Black psychologists were not alone in attempting to rethink the disciplines in which they were trained in. As the opening quote suggests, this was something that was terribly needed in order to develop applicable areas of knowledge for Afrikan people. Jacob Carruthers, Mack Jones, Marimba Ani are just a few scholars who relied upon a worldview based argument as central to the critique of the disciplines in which they were originally trained.

³² Dixon, "Two approaches to Black-White relations"; Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews"; Dixon, "Worldviews and research methodology"; Dixon, "Some Thoughts on Teaching Predominantly Affective-Oriented Groups".

³³ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews," 119.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 120.

³⁶ It is important to recognize that both Abraham and Okanlawon use the concept of worldview in their discussion of Afrikan culture, and represent an earlier discussion of this concept prior to Vernon Dixon. However, it is Vernon Dixon who is consistently cited among Afrikan/Black psychologists, suggesting that Dixon holds a central role in initially articulating this concept for this community of scholars.

³⁷ Johnella Butler, "Black Studies: Pedagogy and Our Adventure with Western Culture." Paper presented at the Harvard University Department Afro-American Studies Lecture Series (Cambridge, MA, October 24, 1979) and at the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History meeting (October 27, 1979), ERIC document available ED183653; Johnella Butler, *Black Studies: Pedagogy and Revolution, A Study of Afro-American Studies and the Liberal Arts Tradition Through the Discipline of Afro-American Literature* (Washington, D. C.: University Press of America, 1981).

³⁸ Ani, p. 105

³⁹ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews"; Dixon, "Worldviews and research methodology".

⁴⁰ Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*.

⁴¹ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews," 121

⁴² *Ibid.*, 126-127.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁴⁴ Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*, 97

⁴⁵ Kambon, "The Africentric Paradigm and African-American Psychological Liberation".

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁴⁷ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews"; Dixon, "Worldviews and research methodology".

⁴⁸ Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*.

⁴⁹ Kambon, "The Africentric Paradigm and African-American Psychological Liberation".

⁵⁰ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews," 139.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 131.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 131. See also T. Owens Moore, "Revisited Affected-Symbolic Imagery," *Journal of Black Psychology*, 22, no. 4 (1996), 443-452 and T. Owens Moore, "Affect-Symbolic Imagery Revisited: Erratum," *Journal of Black Psychology*, 23, no. 1 (1997), 90.

⁵³ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews," 131-138.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 134.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 133.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 136.

⁵⁸ Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*.

⁵⁹ Naim Akbar, "The Evolution of Human Psychology for African Americans," in *Black Psychology*, ed. Reginald Jones (Berkeley: Cobb & Henry Publishers, 1991), 99-123; Kambon, *The African Personality in America*; Kambon, "The Africentric Paradigm and African-American Psychological Liberation"; Kambon, *African/Black Psychology in the American Context*.

⁶⁰ Akbar, "The Evolution of Human Psychology for African Americans".

⁶¹ Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*.

⁶² Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews," 139.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 138.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

⁶⁷ Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*.

⁶⁸ Azibo, "Africentric Conceptualizing as the Pathway to African Liberation"; Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks".

⁶⁹ Dixon, "African-oriented and Euro-American-oriented worldviews," 139.

⁷⁰ Myers, *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*; Azibo, "Africentric Conceptualizing as the Pathway to African Liberation"; Kambon, *The African Personality in America*; Kambon, "The Africentric Paradigm and African-American Psychological Liberation"; Kambon, *African/Black Psychology in the American Context*.

⁷¹ Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks," 424.

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- ⁷² Dixon, "Worldviews and Research Methodology".
- ⁷³ Dixon, "The di-unital approach to 'Black economics'," 426.
- ⁷⁴ Dona Richards, "The Implications of African-American Spirituality," in *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, ed. Molefi Kete Asante & Kariumu Welsh-Asante, (Trenton: African World Press, 1990), 210.
- ⁷⁵ Banks, "The Theoretical and Methodological Crisis of the Africentric Conception".
- ⁷⁶ Banks, "The Theoretical and Methodological Crisis of the Africentric Conception," 266.
- ⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.
- ⁷⁸ Nathaniel Norment, ed., *The African American Studies Reader* (Durham: Carolina Academic Press, 2001); Maulana Karenga, *Introduction to Black Studies* (Los Angeles: The University of Sankore Press, 2002).
- ⁷⁹ Jacob Carruthers, "Science and Oppression," in *African Psychology in Historical Perspective and Related Commentary*, ed. Daudi Ajani Ya Azibo, (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1996), 190.
- ⁸⁰ Alkalimat "The Ideology of Black Social Science," 174.
- ⁸¹ Banks, "The Theoretical and Methodological Crisis of the Africentric Conception".
- ⁸² Azibo, "Articulating the Distinction Between Black Studies and the Study of Blacks".
- ⁸³ Wade Nobles, *Africanity and the Black Family*.
- ⁸⁴ Marimba Ani, *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior* (Trenton: African World Press, 1994).
- ⁸⁵ Banks, "The Theoretical and Methodological Crisis of the Africentric Conception," 262.
- ⁸⁶ Dona Richards, "The Ideology of European Dominance," *Western Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 4 (1979), 240-255; Richards, "European Mythology"; Richards, "The Demystification of Objectivity".
- ⁸⁷ Dixon, "Worldviews and Research Methodology".
- ⁸⁸ Richards, "The Demystification of Objectivity," 24.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.
- ⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, author's emphasis, p. 32.

⁹¹ Richards, “European Mythology”.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹³ Richards, “The Ideology of European Dominance”.