

Jacob H. Carruthers and the African-Centered Discourse on Knowledge, Worldview, and Power

by

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Abstract

For Jacob H. Carruthers, knowledge is always linked to power. In fact, he contended that knowledge is always constructed within the ontology of the culture in question. Which means that the production of knowledge is inextricably linked to the structural and to the epistemological foundations of a society. Carruthers contrasted the Kemetic ideal of *divine speech* to the European praxis of *fundamental alienation*. He would argue that this difference of worldview carried with it enormous ramifications for the production of knowledge and the organization of societies. This essay seeks to explicate Carruthers' varied discourse on knowledge, worldview, and power. It offers an analysis of his work as a compelling site of cultural critique and African-Centered knowledge production, which continues to inform our on-going conceptualization of Africana Studies as a liberatory enterprise.

Introduction

What is the Sociology of Knowledge?

The sociology of knowledge is the study of the social construction of knowledge (Berger and Luckman 1967). It seeks to explicate the social-contextual, political-economic, and cultural moorings inherent in all facets of human knowledge (Carruthers 1995; Parsons and Shils 1990; Shujaa 2003; Thompson 1997). Thus, whether we are interrogating the conceptual imperatives of the state or capital, the mandates of school curriculum, or even the policy directives of white supremacy and the worldview orientations that it seeks to impose, we are still speaking of knowledge, its social construction, and the broader social milieu in which it occurs. Thus, before delving into the main ideas of this particular study, it is necessary to explore two dichotomous trends within the construction of knowledge - that is, knowledge as an instrument of hegemony and knowledge as an instrument of liberation.

Knowledge and Hegemony

When considered from the state's perspective education must inevitably entail notions of legitimate knowledge. However, what is hidden within the language of legitimacy is the political-economy of hegemony. The notion of "legitimate knowledge" is merely a ruse. It is a means of controlling the conversation about the process of formal socialization-which is schooling. Schooling in the United States is a process that does not typically privilege critical thought and action, but instead encourages conformity to hegemony, rewards apathy to the status quo, and punishes agency with regards to radical social change. Mwalimu Shujaa states:

The society's achievement rewards and the means of accessing them are controlled. Not only does a student have to demonstrate the capacity to meet academic achievement benchmarks, such as standardized test performance at prescribed levels, a student must also play the game according to the rules that the politically dominant culture's elite establish and control. Students who rebel rarely make it-the society's institutional structures are designed to promote conformity to those rules. (Shujaa 2003, 181)

Hence schools do not typically exist as embodiments of the masses' will, but rather as a reflection of state power and the related mandates of capital and white supremacy (Hilliard 1995; Hilliard 1998; Shujaa and Afrik 1996; Stovall 2006; Watkins 2001).

When I refer to *hegemony* I am referring to *terror*. But not the terror (or terrorism) symbolized by the color-coded warnings issued by the Department of Homeland Security. Not the *terror* of religious fanaticism. Nor am I referring to the *terrorism* of the state as expressed by

water cannons, secret prisons, indefinite detention in Guantanamo Bay Prison, and so on. I am referring to the hegemony that Edward Wilmot Blyden alluded to over 130 years ago (Carruthers 1999, 253). I am referring to the conscious mind that is made pliable via terror and trauma spanning centuries. A *seasoning* process of sorts; one that is born of the most wretched legacy of oppression and its political, cultural, economic, and psychological expressions. Thus *terror* in this view gains its highest expression as it applies to the assault upon the minds, bodies, and social systems of Africans.

Therefore, when the state concerns itself with "legitimate knowledge" it is not a departure from the historical processes that have established the supremacy of the West or the dominance of capital. This knowledge is of necessity a discourse interested in maintenance of the existing power relations. It seeks, as Blyden has asserted, to establish a most pernicious system of domination. It is the "slavery of the mind" (Carruthers 1999, 253).

Africana Studies and Intellectual Warfare

For Carruthers, Africana Studies was not simply an area of theoretical inquiry, but was a critical ground upon which "Intellectual Warfare" was waged. This intellectual war was not simply over the development of a body of knowledge focused upon African people, but was over (if I may borrow a phrase from Karl Marx) the means of intellectual production, that is, the ideational matrix that interprets the world through a particular cultural lens, and seeks to reorder the world's political-economy along lines most consistent with this interest. Therefore Carruthers' focus on history, and often Nile Valley history, was generally subsumed by his study of historiography and with it the study of the craft of historical knowledge production from antiquity to the present and its inextricable links to the political-economy of nations (Carruthers 1997; Thompson 1997). Furthermore, his concerns regarding historiography were wedded to his concerns about worldview and the role of African scholars—each of which captures key aspects of Carruthers' reflections upon and contributions to Africana Studies (Carruthers 1994).

As a founding member of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations and the Kemetic Institute of Chicago, Carruthers was keenly focused on the political nature of historical knowledge production, and sought to create organizational structures that could enable Africana scholars, and by extension the African masses, to escape the strictures of European Historiography, an enterprise that he argued was devised to construct an intellectual and moral justification for the political and economic domination of the world. He states that "...while Germanic armies were invading and conquering the people of the world, intellectuals of German ancestry were constructing an ideological universe dominated by Germanic concepts of Western Superiority" (Carruthers 1997, 53), a process which ascribed European dominion as inevitable and righteous, and African subordination as a necessary step in a long and protracted civilizing mission by Europeans for African benefit (Armah 2006; Du Bois 1965). For Carruthers, European historiography offered little in terms of facilitating the reclamation of African history

and culture in the wake of the European conquest. Instead he argued that Africans had to reclaim an African Historiography, but in order to do this they would first have to develop an African-Centered worldview.

Carruthers states that worldview "...includes the way a people conceive of the fundamental questions of existence and organization of the universe" (Carruthers 1994, 53). In this sense worldview is inextricably linked to culture, identity, social organization, and so forth. Worldview is the epistemological glue that holds cultural systems together. He argued that in the absence of an African-Centered worldview, Africana scholars would be unable to decouple themselves from the interests, perspectives, methods, and goals of Europeans. This was important, as European knowledge systems have been constructed in a manner consistent with a global political economy in which Europeans are superordinate and Africans subordinate. Carruthers argued that in order to truly effect the liberation of the African masses and reorder the global political-economy, an African-Centered worldview was imperative. This African-Centered worldview would provide the epistemological and structural bases for an emancipatory social order and the restoration of African civilization (Carruthers 1999). Yet, while Carruthers advocated for a diffuse approach to the dissemination of African-Centered knowledge production, he also recognized the critical role that Africana scholars played in such a struggle.

In describing the nature of the intellectual war in which critical Africana scholars were embroiled, Carruthers argued that they were compelled to fight on two fronts.

...those who have been waging the long war to liberate African history and culture have been fighting the following two battles: (1) an international war against European intellectuals and (2) a civil war against the colonized African spokespersons who are trained by Europeans to undermine African independence. The war is truly, as Anderson Thompson says, a battle for the African mind, or as Asa Hilliard and the First World Alliance put it, a battle to free the African mind. (Carruthers 1999, 4)

The conceptualization of Africana scholars and the field of Africana Studies as a key battleground for African self-determination was a major concern of Carruthers. While he advocated for broad-based participation in this intellectual war (Carruthers 1999, 16), he envisioned Africana scholars as providing the critical intellectual leadership to this movement (Carruthers 1994). To this end he queried, and in doing so echoed E. Franklin Frazier (Carruthers 1994; Frazier 1973) and Harold Cruse (1967), as to whether Africana scholars were simply the instrumental by-products of their European-Centered training, or whether they had *broken their chains* and joined the struggle for African liberation. Carruthers sought to situate the field of Africana Studies within the vast historical continuum of world African history (Carruthers 1997), to link the study of African history to the process of cultural transformation, and to compel scholars in the field of Africana Studies to reconceptualize their roles, not merely as intellectual pacifists, but as intellectual warriors committed to the unimpeded recovery of African history and culture and the restoration of global African sovereignty.

The Relevance of Jacob H. Carruthers

For African-Centered scholars knowledge is always linked to power. Moreover, they have argued that knowledge is constructed within the ontology of the culture in question (Carruthers 1995; Thompson 1997). If it is a cultural group that has declared itself supreme, and all others innately inferior, then the knowledge constructed will seek to establish and preserve a system of rigid oppression. It will on one hand exalt the oppressive culture as the apex of human achievement. Schools, religion, popular literature, intellectual production, law, policy, and art will all reflect this assertion.

An oppressive culture will also problematize the humanity of the oppressed. The oppressed may be positioned as *proto-humans*, or *primitive humans*, or simply *sub-humans*. Their problematic or tenuous humanity relegates them to either the periphery of human endeavor, or simply beyond the pale of human activity and accomplishment. This status deems them unworthy of the privileges typically accorded to those who are defined as human in the fullest sense. Further, this doctrine is taught and reinforced across the spectrum of social institutions (Armah 2006, 44-46; Wilson 1993).

The pervasiveness of an oppressive discourse is essential in compelling the oppressed to accept the fundamentals of two things: 1) the inherent legitimacy of the dominant social discourse and 2) the inherent legitimacy of the social structure that undergirds it. When I speak of the dominant discourse I am referring to *worldview*. Succinctly stated, *worldview* is the conceptual lens that determines how we interpret the social world and construct meaning out of its many facets (Carruthers 1994; Shujaa 2003, 183). This dominant discourse seeks to both obscure and rationalize the existence of an oppressive system by erecting a worldview construct that reinforces its claims of legitimacy. Moreover, with regards to social structure I am referring to the structural arrangements of society including its institutions, its social units and networks, as well as the roles and positions that individuals occupy within society. Having established the inviolability of the dominant social discourse—the conceptual basis for oppression and the social structure—oppression's physical framework, it is presumed that even the intransigent will find liberation both impossible and inconceivable (Karenga 1997, 10).

The innately political character of knowledge therefore compels us to consider the consequences of such a tradition for the global African community. W.E.B. Du Bois, noting education's inextricable links to knowledge and political-economy, was keen to note the basic contours of this reality when he wrote "...education means ambition, dissatisfaction and revolt. You cannot both educate people and hold them down" (Du Bois 1986, 1139). Du Bois recognized that education, like the production of knowledge more generally, was inherently a political act. He maintained that education could compel a people to either acquiesce to domination or struggle for liberation.

This view has been embraced by a cross section of African intellectuals including Jacob

H. Carruthers. Carruthers' scholarship on the social-political dynamics of knowledge covers four broad areas. These are (1) the cultural epistemology of ancient Kemet (Ancient Egypt), (2) European culture and the discourse of fundamental alienation, (3) African-Centered consciousness and struggle for social transformation, and (4) the classical and contemporary dynamics of African education.

In his studies of Kemetite cultural epistemology, Carruthers has been particularly significant in explicating the cultural values and exploring the social structural dynamics of the ancient Nile Valley civilization of Kemet. Among other things, he has emphasized the conceptualization of speech in ancient Kemet as an essential expression of being (Carruthers 1995; Carruthers 1999). He has also discussed the transcendence of the concept of Maat, as a discourse on the ancient African view of both the cosmos and the human social world (Carruthers 1984). Lastly, he identified the earliest known cultural renaissance, the Weheme Mesu, which is literally "repetition of the birth" or rebirth (Carruthers 1997; Carruthers 2007). The Weheme Mesu was an effort to restore the culture of Kemet to its earlier heights, thus transforming the society and initiating a new golden era. Carruthers' study of Ancient Kemet gives us insight into the social structure of Kemet and also provides an evaluative criterion, which can guide our attempts in the present towards cultural transformation.

Carruthers has also been instrumental in developing an African-Centered critique of European thought and culture. This work has been comparable to the works of Marimba Ani (1994) and Mwalimu Baruti (2006), and also anticipates the more recent emergence of critical whiteness studies, which address the social construction of whiteness (Ignatiev 2008; Roediger 2007; Takaki 1993). What Carruthers has contributed to this body of literature has been his elucidation of the evolution of European thought from antiquity to the present (Carruthers 1995). Thus Carruthers has enabled us to historicize this intellectual phenomenon and to link it to European social practices both relative to and preceding the advent of modern colonialism.

Moreover, Carruthers' scholarship is firmly rooted in the African-Centered tradition, whereby cultural transformation is understood as a critical component in the process of social transformation (Hilliard 1995, 57; Shujaa 2003, 182). This discourse has addressed a dichotomy that is often illuminated in African-Centered scholarship. This dichotomy simply states that knowledge can and does serve the ends of liberation or the ends of oppression. Carruthers' work examines this dilemma relative to the condition of the African world. In exploring the social-political dynamics of knowledge as it relates to the legacy of White supremacy and the capacity of Africans to affect their liberation, Carruthers noted the importance of reclaiming and restoring the culture of Ancient Kemet as a means of informing the reconstruction of an emancipatory African culture and social order (Carruthers 1999, 13-14).

In a related vein, Carruthers has examined the critical role served by education in the process of knowledge construction and worldview acquisition. In discussing the need for African-Centered education he stated that "Our people are subjected to an educational process

and content that, either by design or as an unavoidable byproduct, deforms most African minds” (Carruthers 1999, 14). Carruthers’ argument reflects the reasoning that all knowledge is politically and culturally constructed. As such its imperatives often reflect those of the dominant group. Therefore its impact upon the consciousness of the oppressed is generally negative, whether this has or has not been prescribed by mandate (Carruthers 1999, 253-254). Thus Carruthers compels us to consider the imperative of institution building for the sake of freeing the African mind (Carruthers 1999, 270-272).

This essay examines Jacob H. Carruthers discourse on the social-construction of human knowledge. Specifically, I will discuss his reflections on knowledge and its relationship to culture and epistemology. Additionally, I will look at his educational discourse as an institutional model of his ideas regarding knowledge, worldview, and power. Here I will endeavor to explicate the major themes inherent in his educational perspective, the critical aims that he contended education served, and the structural dynamics that dictated education's implementation as a instrument of oppression or as a tool of emancipation within a broader sociology of knowledge.

Laying the Foundations for an African-Centered Sociology of Knowledge

The Europeans, since 1440, have been reorganizing the world. The world we now live in was organized by them. They conquered the lands of all continents and unilaterally redesigned the social and biological modes of existence. They changed the course of rivers, removed mountains, and built deserts. They created scarcity in the land of abundance. They moved populations from one continent to another. They created new races. They established themselves as the master race and all others as their servants. They made what they like good and everything else bad. In order to liberate ourselves we must take the world and then reorganize it according to our worldview. Only then will mankind be allowed to live in harmony with the universe. Only then will we be truly free. (Carruthers 1999, 261)

Carruthers’ writings on knowledge construction and its implications can be summarized as follows. First, Carruthers maintained that our worldview constructs must undergird everything, including our attempts at reconstructing classical African culture (Carruthers 1999). Hence, Carruthers’ study of Kemet as a cultural exemplar was focused on informing this reconstructive process. Second, Carruthers argued that we must understand the intractable problematics of European epistemology and by extension European culture itself—this is especially true as it relates to his theory of *fundamental alienation* and its implications within the political-economy of White supremacy (Carruthers 1995, 21-22, 174). Third, moving from these first two positions Carruthers insisted that we must create an emancipatory praxis that compels Africans to both reclaim their classical culture and struggle to restore the self-determination of African communities globally (Carruthers 1999, 10-14, 16-18). Thus he argues that we must

diffuse an African-Centered consciousness. Fourth, Carruthers argues that we must institutionalize this worldview, insuring the intergenerational survival and expansion of a movement for Pan-African empowerment (Carruthers 1999, 261).

Epistemological Reflections on Kemetic Society

Jacob Carruthers argued that for contemporary scholars to attempt to explicate the worldview and knowledge of Ancient Africa they would have to decouple themselves from the moorings of European conceptual frameworks. He maintained that these conceptual fetters, both epistemological and methodological, failed to allow a deep appreciation and understanding of African culture, and by extension Africa's indigenous discourse on knowledge (Carruthers 1995; Carruthers 1999). In his own efforts to explain the African worldview Carruthers focused a great deal on the knowledge production, ethics, and worldview of ancient Kemet in addition to other African states and societies (Carruthers 1984; Carruthers 1995; Carruthers 1999). This exploration has included various themes including the centrality of speech to explicating African deep thought, governance, historiography, ethics and moral instruction, spirituality, and socialization or cultural transmission.

Among all of the themes featured in his work *Mdw Ntr* or *Divine Speech* may be the most profound expression of his efforts to characterize the worldview and knowledge production of Kemetic society. *Mdw Ntr* is both the Kemetic term for their language as well as a key aspect of Kemetic cosmology (Carruthers 1984; Carruthers 1995). He stated that *Mdw Ntr* on a primordial level was reflective of the progenitive process, whereby the people of Kemet conceptualized the process of universal creation as one that was executed by the divine via the use of the spoken word (Carruthers 1995, 39-40). Carruthers stated that speech's centrality was based on the fact that speech was understood as a conduit connecting the living to the wisdom of their ancestors, and beyond them to the divine. This idea of speech informed all other aspects of Kemetic life including philosophies of governance, historiography, ethical praxis, spirituality, and education (Carruthers 1984; Carruthers 1995; Carruthers 1997; Carruthers 1999). Humans were compelled to engage in *Ndw Nfr—Good Speech* as a means of aspiring towards *Mdw Ntr*.

Carruthers argues that knowledge as social phenomenon in Kemetic society was inextricably linked to what can be termed the cosmological and theological bases of Kemetic thought. Further, he suggests that the conceptualization of speech as the central act in the unfolding cosmic and human drama represented an attempt to reconcile human ideation and action, as expressed by *Mdw Nfr*, with the process of divine creation—*Mdw Ntr*. Thus human knowledge becomes an expression of the sacred principles that were believed to govern the universe.

Fundamental Alienation

While the African worldview emphasized continuity, both in the cosmic and social domains, Carruthers argued that the classic Eurasian worldview diverged markedly from this ideal (Carruthers 1984). The pernicious effects of this difference are made clearer via Carruthers' efforts to problematize the cultural epistemology of Europeans, particularly as it relates to their cultural representations of Africans during the modern era. Africans were seen as parts of nature by 17th Century Europeans. Africans' supposed boundedness within the physical and cultural topography of nature was analogous to that of the flora and fauna of which nature is actually comprised. Thus just as one would fell trees for lumber or harness a river as a source for irrigation, hydration and other uses, as objects of nature, Africans were also objects to be exploited for their land, labor, and cultural productivity. This presumption was reflected in Francis Bacon's thesis that nature was a thing to be used for human benefit (Carruthers 1999, 42-45).

To underscore this contention Carruthers maintained that classical European culture was characterized by "fundamental alienation" (Carruthers 1999, 42), a worldview that perceives conflict as being endemic to the human condition (Carruthers 1984, 70-72; Carruthers 1995; Carruthers 1999, 42). One aspect of this view is the belief that nature is a primal adversary of humanity, and by extension humans must control nature, thus besting their nemesis (Carruthers 1999, 42-44). With the ascendance of Europe in the modern era, Africans and other non-European people become aspects of nature and thus objects to be controlled and exploited for European benefit. Echoing this argument Ayi Kwei Armah discusses the construction of the non-European *other* in European culture. He states that Europeans deemed themselves the masters of the natural world because they "...were entitled to dominate all nature because they were superior to nature by virtue of their character and civilization. Other peoples, by contrast, were part of nature; as such they were fated to submit to European rule (Armah 2006, 45). Therefore Carruthers argues that for Europeans, knowledge emerged within the cosmological and epistemological context of *fundamental alienation*. As such knowledge production and the attendant social structure were expressive of a worldview where human survival necessitated aggression, and human flourishing required predation. Building off of Cheikh Anta Diop's "Two Cradle Theory," Carruthers maintains that this worldview had profound implications with regards to the production of knowledge and ultimately the refinement of the philosophy and political-economy which would enable modern White supremacy.

Lastly, Carruthers compelled African intellectuals to break from European constructs, and to create a Pan-African critical theory that could inform the struggle for African empowerment globally (Carruthers 1999). He maintained that such a rich tradition must draw upon the rich legacy of African culture and the spirit of African resistance movements as a means toward demarcating knowledge production in the interest of African liberation from its opposite.

Intellectual Warfare: The Educational Front

Directly related to Carruthers' discourse on knowledge, culture, and social transformation is his conceptualization of education. Various African scholars have noted the imperative of socialization to the creation of a critical awareness among African people. Carruthers joins this tradition by recognizing the need for scholarly, grassroots, and educational solutions. However, what he endeavored to add to this movement was an expansion of our temporal and spatial considerations as it relates to education. This discourse generally spanned three contexts. These were (1) education in Ancient Kemet, (2) education for Africans in the interest of European hegemony, and (3) African-Centered education.

The structure of Carruthers' educational discourse is explained via the historical journey of Africans from antiquity to the present. This discourse has generally consisted of the following components: an analysis of the education of sovereign African states and societies, a critique and analysis of education's role as a instrument of oppression within the context of the Maafa, and finally, the development of an educational paradigm aimed at restoring the cultural and political integrity of the African world community as a means of counteracting the ravages of the Maafa. What follows is a discussion of Carruthers' educational discourse in each of these three contexts.

Wise Instruction: Pedagogy in Ancient Kemet

Prior to the European and Arab conquests and cultural penetrations, African education was generally delivered in two settings. In some instances it was *communal*, wherein youths were instructed by their elders and acquired skills in particular areas of social life (Carruthers 1994, 41-42). Conversely, urban African societies also provided *formal* and/or *higher education*, wherein select youths attended academies to acquire advanced technical skill or training (Carruthers 1984, 103; Carruthers 1994, 41-42; Hilliard 1998; Hilliard 2002).

As an urban, nation-state of immense historical significance, Kemetic education was well regarded in the ancient world. Greek philosophers connected the advanced achievements of Kemetic society with Kemet's comprehensive system of education (Carruthers 1999, 61-64; Hilliard 1995; Obenga 2004, 262-268). Carruthers attempted to identify the central goals of Kemetic education. He maintained that education in ancient Kemet was concerned with moral instruction for character development, technical training for vocational professions, and advanced instruction for the society's most prestigious professions (Carruthers 1984, 103; Carruthers 1994, 42; Carruthers 1999, 257-258).

In remarking upon the moral philosophy of Kemetic education Carruthers stated "Education is the intergenerational transmission of the wisdom of the ancestors which begins with the original message from the Creator, i.e., Mdw Ntr (Divine Speech)" (Carruthers 1995, 171). Thus education in the Kemetic sense serves several basic objectives. First, it seeks to inform the creation of a divine order within human society. This notion of divine order or

divinity was based upon the Kemetic concept of that core principles governed the universe (Carruthers 1984). These principles, often exemplified by the Ntrw, which were Kemetic expressions of divinity, were numerous; however, a few examples have been provided. First among these is the concept of an interrelated cosmic/social order, which perhaps can be called *transcendent order*, is *Maat*. Another principle is the seamless integration of the Earth with the heavens, the mundane and the metaphysical, and also male-female complementarity, which the Kemites referred to as *Geb* and *Nut* respectively. Lastly, is the role of the physical universe in providing the means for humans to live and enjoy comfort, most clearly reflected by the sun or *Ra* (Carruthers 1999, 286-288). As ethical, behavioral, or institutional exemplars then the Ntrw demonstrated key components necessary for a good society: justice and harmony for all, balance and mutual regard between men and women, and the creation of institutions that support and sustain life. Therefore, education endeavors to inform the integration of these divine themes within the realm of human affairs.

The second major function of Kemetic education was to ensure intergenerational continuity, whereby the wisdom of the ancestors was passed down to future generations. This is most evident in the various books of wise instruction authored in ancient Kemet. These texts, such as the *Instruction of Ptah Hotep*, were often written as messages from fathers seeking to convey their accumulated wisdom to their sons (Carruthers 1995, 119). However these texts were also instrumental in informing the dispositions and behaviors of those individuals who would sustain the society's highest institution—the state. Carruthers states that this meant the application of these texts as the core textual materials in scribal education, wherein students would study and copy them, and by doing so would learn the “decorum, ethics, and social values” expected of everyone, and requisite of public officials (Carruthers 1995, 116-117).

Thus education in Kemet sought to create and sustain a seamless connection between the human person, the society, and the divine. This integration was based upon the premise that divinity was fundamental and ubiquitous within the cosmos, the ecosphere, the community, and the human psyche. This premise further contended that humans could apprehend this divine order and reflect it within their culture via their historiography, spiritual practices, social structures, and behavior. The final premise was that the maintenance of cultural continuity was the surest means to ensure the necessary human capacity needed to envision and sustain a good society (Carruthers 1995; Hilliard 1986).

In addition to his discourse on the basic philosophy of Kemetic education, Carruthers also noted its three primary forms. As previously stated these were moral instruction for character development, technical training for vocational professions, and advanced instruction for the society's most prestigious professions (Carruthers 1984, 103; Carruthers 1994, 42; Carruthers 1999, 257-258). Carruthers' discussion of Kemetic education has principally been concerned with moral instruction, therefore I shall devote the bulk of this section to this topic.

Moral Instruction in Ancient Kemet

Moral instruction was the perhaps the most intimate and pervasive aspect of Kemetic education, as it was centered within the family and also embedded in various aspects of the social structure including literary productions, scribal education, and philosophies of governance (Carruthers 1984, 1995, 1999). Carruthers stated, “We discover that the process of education was founded on the family model. In other words, instruction was conceived of as the teaching of a parent to a child, or a father to his son. The foundations for the instruction was the moral guidance that the father, as a responsible elder, was obligated to pass on to his children” (Carruthers 1999, 258). Thus in the Kemetic model, the family was an educational unit. It had achieved the pivotal role of *cultural unit* in its efforts to reproduce the ideals of African culture (Du Bois 1973, 152-153). Additionally, this “family model” expressed the relationship between national elders and subsequent generations of youth in Kemetic society. Ptah Hotep’s instructions are indicative of this. Here an elder statesman offers a moral instruction to the *national family* (Carruthers 1995, 119-122).

The importance of moral instruction cannot be understated as it was seen as being vital to the preservation of the society’s core values. Carruthers stated that “Teaching by elders and learning by children is the only method for preserving the culture and for passing on the wisdom” (Carruthers 1983, 102-103). Thus in the Kemetic model, the family was upheld as the core unit of socialization. It was the institution that did not simply ensure the reproduction of society’s inhabitants, but also the reproduction and intergenerational transmission of the culture which sustained them. This process mitigated the occurrence of a corrosive and alienating intergenerational discontinuity as “...education is an intergenerational conversation” (Carruthers 1995, 115). It ensured that the cultural values of the society were transmitted from the ancestors via the elders to the youth, who were the future.

One of the most notable of Carruthers’ contributions to the study of Kemetic education is his discourse on *Mdw Nfr* or Good Speech as an essential expression of wisdom in Kemetic society (second only to Divine Speech or *Mdw Ntr*). Carruthers states that Kemetic culture viewed the process of human consciousness and engagement as being inextricably linked to the process of speech.

The wisdom of Shabaka begins with the recognition that experience defined as sensory perception is an initiator of the process of knowing. This epistemological principle which Francis Bacon and his followers (i.e., the modern scientists) elevated to the position of the one and only source of knowledge was only part of the Kemetic epistemology. For the Kemites, speech is really the operational base of knowledge, i.e., it is through speech that we know. Let me reconstruct the explanation: the senses bring impressions to the mind which forms perceptions; *then* the tongue repeats what the mind thinks. Whatever the thinking process is, in its own right, when one learns to speak, speech takes over the process. In other words, one thinks in speech. . . . Thus one may say the “word” truly creates for human consciousness. (Carruthers 1995, 43-44)

Therefore it is due to the importance of speech that one's speech had to be carefully measured. Ptah Hotep stated, "All conduct...is measured" (Carruthers 1995, 123). Carruthers added "Measurement is the symbol of justice or Maat" (Carruthers 1995, 123). Hence this idealization of speech was not merely rhetorical, but was a fundamental part of the culture and the socialization processes (both formal and informal). It was expected that the truly educated person would demonstrate their practice of Maat through Mdw Nfr (Good Speech) (Carruthers 1999, 258-259).

Other Forms of Education in Kemet

In addition to moral instruction in Ancient Kemet, technical training was essentially training for vocational professions. Carruthers surveys the various professions or trades for which one might receive training. These professions included hunting, brick laying, carpentry, baking, farming, fishing, and so on (Carruthers 1984, 103; Carruthers 1999, 257).

An additional component of professional training consisted of advanced instruction in the form of the scribal schools (Carruthers 1999, 257). Those who attended the scribal schools became literate in not only the written language of Kemet, but also the core principles and history of the nation. Attendance and completion of one's education within the scribal schools opened the door to the country's most revered professions: medicine, astronomy, architecture, civil administration, and so on. These professions required facility with the written word, highly specialized skills, and presumably a grounding in the loftiest ideals of the civilization itself. It is here where the training for the advanced professions converges with the first aim of Kemetic education—moral instruction.

Education for Domination: Enslavement, Colonialism and the African Mind

The gradual decline of African states and societies was occasioned by the ascendancy of Eurasian states and societies. One need only look at the conquerors of Kemet to observe the sequential rise of various Eurasian powers. These conquering states included the Assyrians, the Persians, the Macedonians and Greeks, the Romans, the Arabs, the French, and the British (Davidson 1991; Harris 1998; Hornung 1999).

The eventual conquest of African states by various Eurasian powers created the dilemma of maintaining social controls. These social controls were a means of compelling the conquered populace to acquiesce to the dictates (be they cultural, political, or economic) of the new dominant power. It is quite plausible that the Arabs and Persians were the first to solve this problem during their occupation of much of East Africa by the 11th Century (Harris 1998). Their

solution may have been to use their religious system, Islam, as a means of creating a populace of sympathetic, loyal, and eventually compliant “natives.” It worked, and this model of “cultural penetration” would prove to be one of the most effective weapons of Africa’s invaders (Karenga 2001, 119-120).

Europeans would eventually try a similar approach beginning in the late 15th Century (Carruthers 1994, 43-44; Carruthers 1999, 255). This approach would be initiated by the Portuguese in Central Africa and would culminate in the cultural penetration of African states and societies by Europeans. Christian religion was especially potent in its ability to undermine the legitimacy of indigenous African institutions as well as reorienting the loyalties of Christianized African leaders towards Europe. It is here where the process of mis-education begins (Carruthers 1999, 255; Rodney 1973, 252-253; Woodson 1990).

The beginnings of this miseducation go back to the beginnings of the exploration of the African coast by Europeans who had been hemmed in by Arabic power for six hundred years. In 1481, when the Portuguese arrived at the Congo-Ngola area, they initiated the process of miseducation of blacks as an instrument of exploitation. The Portuguese invaders persuaded the royal and noble families of the area to send their sons to Portugal for a European education. When these sons returned with Christian names, they began directing African society in the interest of the Portuguese. The physical slavery which the Portuguese started was facilitated by the mental slavery of the African leaders who had been educated by the Europeans. This model has endured for five hundred years as the most successful method by which Europeans defeat, control, exploit, and annihilate Africans. (Carruthers 1999, 255)

Carruthers noted that while Carter G. Woodson’s characterization of the education afforded to Africans as *mis-education* was quite apt, he also argued that it did not sufficiently capture the myriad of ways in which Europeanized/Americanized education constrained African agency (Carruthers 1994, 45). Woodson characterized *mis-education* as essentially a formal process of socialization that trains its recipients to assist in the maintenance and reproduction of an unjust and oppressive social order. Carruthers simply defined it as “a schooling process through which Black people are taught to think and act in European ways,” thus resulting in an appropriation or colonization of the consciousness of the oppressed (Carruthers 1994, 45). He would argue that this appropriation of consciousness was the first requisite step in compelling the oppressed to maintain an oppressive system (Armah 2006; Carruthers 1994; Shujaa 2003; Wilson 1993).

Carruthers argued for a second category of analysis which he termed *deeducation* (Carruthers 253, 1999). *Deeducation* is a formal process of socialization that seeks to enfeeble the consciousness of the oppressed, thus undermining their capacity to engage in higher order

reasoning, problem solving and the like. Deeducation diverges from mis-education in that mis-education seeks (in viral fashion) to reproduce the worldview and knowledge base requisite with the maintenance of an oppressive social order within the minds of the mis-educated, yet subservient African elite. Therefore it is a means of subverting the capacity and agency of those individuals, who if truly educated, would provide critical intellectual leadership for the African masses. Deeducation by contrast is directed towards the African masses, not the elites. It also seeks to constrain capacity and agency, but by effectively suppressing the intellectual engagement and critical awareness the masses. Carruthers argued that these two processes, mis-education and deeducation, are endemic to European-dominated societies.

One of Carruthers' noted contributions is his historical consideration of these two interrelated phenomenon. I have already mentioned his identification of 15th Century Portuguese cultural penetration as an early form of mis-education. But he was also critical in explicating the emergence of mis-education and deeducation in the United States in the late 19th Century.

The Negro education system was carefully planned and implemented. As a case in point consider the Lake Mohonk Conferences on the Negro Question. Some of the leading White educators of this country met at Lake Mohonk, New York (a resort area) on June 4-6, 1890, and June 3-5, 1891, to read papers and discuss what they officially called the "Negro question." By the time the second conference ended they had decided that the primary goals of education for Blacks should be morality and the dignity of labor (i.e., working for White folks). (Carruthers 1994, 46)

Carruthers argued that the formalization of African American education subsequent to the Civil War was not centrally concerned with conflicts over the respective merits of classical versus vocational education; instead, it was concerned with creating an effective system of social control (Carruthers 1994, 47-48; Carruthers 1999, 256). Watkins echoes this thesis in his treatise on the construction of African American education in the post-Civil War era. Watkins contends that the construction of schools for African Americans during this period, insofar as they were conceptualized by society's industrial elite, was not focused upon the utilization of literacy as a means towards enfranchisement, empowerment, and self-determination. Instead schools reflected an effort to appropriate the formal means of socialization in the hopes of insuring social stability via the pacification of the African American masses, in addition to their proletarianization and ultimate placement at the lower rungs of the wage labor hierarchy. Indeed as William Watkins noted regarding the post-Civil War era, the objectives of industrialists were the achievement of "...a stable and orderly South where subservient wage labor and debt farming or sharecropping would provide livelihood for Black Americans" (Watkins 2001, 22), adding that "Blacks must lean their 'place' in the new industrial order" (Watkins 2001, 23).

This system of control consisted of a simple bifurcation. The first strand of this bifurcation consisted of the creation of a system of state-sponsored schooling that would provide

vocational training to the African masses. The second strand was the establishment of institutions of higher education that trained an African American elite. With regards to the first strand, what should be noted is that this vocational education was seldom relevant to current labor market trends of the current levels of technological development at the end of the 19th Century and the beginning of the 20th Century (Anderson 1988). Thus we can surmise that the principle objective of the architects of this system was something other than preparation for the burgeoning industrial labor market. Carruthers' contention is that their objective was the maximum subordination of the African masses (Carruthers 1995; Carruthers 1999). In one way this became a tool for the suppression of African American labor. In another way it became a means of intellectually enfeebling the Black masses through their deeducation, which it was believed would make their subordination all but inescapable.

The second strand of this bifurcation was focused on creating the educated African American leadership who could be trusted to perpetuate the interests of the White elite by ensuring the suppression, mis-direction, and neutralization of the masses. Building upon Woodson's thesis Carruthers attempted to connect the process of mis-education among Africans in the United States with the colonial enterprise of Europeans in Africa centuries earlier (Carruthers 1994, 43-45; Carruthers 1999, 255). In a basic sense he argued that mis-education was a means of co-opting and redirecting African American leadership. However, because he maintained that ideation and action were intimately wedded to worldview, he insisted that the process of mis-education had to be one of worldview transmission (Carruthers 1994, 52-54). Thus in this sense, mis-education was a tool for the reproduction of the European worldview in the minds of the educated African elite who, if sufficiently mis-educated, would pursue the interests of Europeans to the detriment of African well-being. Lastly, he maintained that the perpetuation of this careful balance of deeducating African masses and mis-educating African elites was essential for the maintenance of White control, White supremacy (Carruthers 1999, 253-257).

Finally, Carruthers did not believe that this system of control had ceased to exist in the wake of desegregation in the 1960s, or the gradual erosion of the vestiges of the state-sponsored mandate for racial subordination, otherwise known as segregation. Instead, he argued that these systems were alive and well (Carruthers 1994, 48-50; Carruthers 1999, 253-255). For instance, while the "achievement gap" remains a great preoccupation for many scholars who study African American education, Carruthers argued that this gap and its underlying challenges are to be expected. This manifestation of deeducation is simply the result of an intergenerational process of psychological assault coupled with the systemic dismantling of the social structure of the African American community (Carruthers 1999, 253-254; Shujaa and Afrik 1996; Wilson 1993). Moreover, he maintained that this pernicious state of affairs is augmented by the impotence of mis-educated African American intellectuals to construct a liberating and African-Centered paradigm that would facilitate the empowerment and Re-Africanization of the masses (Carruthers 1994, 51-52).

African-Centered Education Today

While Africans have been the subjects of European sciences, be they physical, political, or social, what must be emphasized here is the African response to European attempts at control. Carruthers argued that Africans resisted on all levels (Carruthers 1994, 48-50; Carruthers 1999, 255).

Carruthers considered education as a critical domain in the struggle for African self-determination.

The endemic crisis in black education is at the base of the process which Bobby Wright calls "Menticide." Menticide is the most sophisticated phase of the war strategy of the white supremacists against the black race. If we lose the war, there will be no more problems in black education, no more black education, and no more blacks...If we are to win the war against white supremacy, if we are to live, then we must take education away from our enemies. (Carruthers 1999, 260)

Carruthers' challenge forces us to ask and answer the basic question of what does an African-Centered education look like, and what practical functions does it serve. He addresses these questions on two levels. First is with regards to K-12 education. Second is with regards to higher education.

In his 1994 essay entitled "African-Centered Education" Carruthers provides five basic reasons that necessitate an African-Centered curriculum. They are (1) the restoration of truth regarding Africa's authentic place in the history of the world, (2) the facilitation of a greater appreciation of cultural diversity in 21st Century society, (3) the critical role for a socialization apparatus focused on reconstructing the African American community in the wake of the Maafa, (4) the dynamic role that African-Centered education can play in the reformation of American education more generally, and (5) to provide a curriculum that is centrally concerned with the political, economic, and cultural empowerment of the African American community (Carruthers 2007, 52-53).

Additionally, Carruthers' essay captures several important considerations. First is the critical dilemma of European racialization of Africans. By this I am referring to the efforts of Europeans to construct African identity in a manner that assaults African humanity and undermines African agency (Carruthers 2007, 51-52; Carruthers 1999, 64-68). Second is the social justice dynamic of education as an effective means of reclaiming and restoring African humanity despite the ravages of the Maafa. Third, is the reclamation of the physical and conceptual spaces requisite with the establishment and expansion of a radical-reconceptualization of the world.

In commenting upon the challenges of higher education, Carruthers also called for an

African-Centered curriculum in training of African intellectuals. He stated, "African-Centered education represents a point of departure whereupon African-American intellectuals can declare their intellectual freedom" (Carruthers 1994, 51). He maintained that African American intellectuals had to throw off the fetters of their Eurocentric education if they were to maximally contribute to the empowerment of the community. However, he cautions that the simple acquisition of power, while a well-intended notion, was potentially disastrous unless wedded to a broader campaign for reality-transformation (Carruthers 1994, 51-52).

What is important here is that Carruthers' discussion of empowerment is not simply a reflection upon power as a political instrument. Rather he interprets power through a cultural lens and understands its acquisition as means of reinforcing and concretizing cultural values consistent with African self-determination and reality transformation. Therefore he explains empowerment as essentially a process of *Africanization*. He emphasizes that *Africanization* is an indispensable component in our efforts to "transform the world" (Carruthers 1994, 52).

The process of Africanization and transformation cannot be separated neatly into two stages-they overlap. To transform the world according to an African-centered worldview means establishing a new African culture and a new African world civilization. We have to restore the African value system. Rather than continually struggling to make European-centered value systems more humane, we have to replace those value systems with one that is African-centered. We have been dealing with the alligators, we must now face the possibility that the solution to our problems may require that the swamp be drained. Too few of us have prepared ourselves to deal with this possibility. (Carruthers 1994, 52)

Thus, Carruthers viewed higher education, or the training of African intellectuals, as an essential stage in the liberation struggle. He maintained that African intellectuals, if properly educated, would break the chains of mis-education and commit themselves forthrightly to the reclamation of African culture and the restoration of global African empowerment. Echoing these sentiments Asa Hilliard stated that Africans would be unable to radically transform their condition,

...until there is a return to an independent consciousness among our leadership in general and our educational leadership in particular. By this I mean that African leadership, guided by a deep grounding in our cultural heritage and guided by a sense of destiny, must frame courses of action and must design the essential education/socialization direction for our people. (Hilliard 2000, 12-13)

In closing, it must be noted that Carruthers' discourse on education emerges out of his reflections upon the journey of African people through time and space. This journey begins in remote antiquity where Africans constructed elaborate systems of education focused on ensuring

intergenerational continuity and diffusing the society's highest cultural values into every facet of the social structure. The Maafa represents a fundamental disruption to this process, wherein Europeans subvert African education to create a population of compliant and self-managing subjects. Finally, he envisions African-Centered education as an attempt to reconnect contemporary Africans with the cultural-continuum of African history and culture that emanates from remote antiquity to the present. He argues that only by controlling the socialization processes that shapes the minds of African people does the prospect of liberation become both possible and practical.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to examine Jacob Carruthers' writings on knowledge, culture, and power. Jacob H. Carruthers has offered an expansive reflection upon these phenomena, which we might term an *African-Centered sociology of knowledge*. He compels us to consider the structural and epistemological bases of knowledge, in addition to the social praxis that systems of knowledge engender. In my efforts to explicate Carruthers' thinking in this area I examined his writings in two related domains. First, I discussed his thinking about knowledge and epistemology as contrasted between the culture of ancient Kemet and Europe. I noted the impact that Kemetic cosmology and epistemology had on the conceptualization of knowledge as *Mdw Nfr—Good Speech* or ideally as *Mdw Ntr—Divine Speech*. By conceptualizing the Kemetic discourse on knowledge through the phenomenon of speech, Carruthers represents knowledge as theological, epistemological, and ethical praxis. Additionally, I discussed Carruthers' critique of European thought and culture through a lens of *fundamental alienation*, and in doing so demonstrated the connections between this epistemological framework and the problematization of African humanity within the political economy of White supremacy.

Next I discussed Carruthers' writings on education as an example of the operationalization or institutionalization of knowledge systems. Carruthers offers an analysis of African education, its ends, and implementation from antiquity to the present. His narrative consists of three major phases: Kemetic education, education during the Maafa, and African-Centered education today. He stated that in antiquity Africans created complex societies in which education was seen as an effective means of maintaining the social order. Subsequent to the decline of African civilizations, Europeans attempted to use education to impose their knowledge and worldview priorities upon Africans globally. Lastly, Africans, in an effort to divest themselves of European cultural hegemony, have attempted to seize upon the educational process and refashion it in the interest of African liberation.

Finally, Carruthers offers a bold challenge for those of us concerned about the present and future of the African communities the world over. He compels us to examine the inextricable linkages between knowledge, culture, and power, and the role of schooling practices in sustaining or disrupting these patterns. Carruthers challenges critical scholars to "...break the

chain...” that constrains them both epistemologically and politically in the intellectual war for African ideas and ideation (Carruthers 1995, xviii).

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