

Reflections on Pedagogical Approaches to Utilizing Amos Wilson's The Falsification of African Consciousness in Community Psychology Classes

by

Danna Dennard, Ph.D.
Aakhet Center for Human Development

Dr. Dana Dennard (Baba Kheper Ka Ra KaMau) is a licensed clinical psychologist, practicing in Tallahassee, Florida. He is a co-director and founder, with his wife Sharon Ames-Dennard, of the Aakhet Center for Human Development, Amen-Ra's bookshop and Gallery and the Sakkara Youth Institute. As a licensed trainer of the HAWK Federation of Perfected Black Manhood Training, Dr. Dennard has facilitated numerous rites of passage programs. He is an adjunct professor of psychology at Florida A & M University where he has taught since 1987 and was a fulltime assistant professor at Florida A & M University from 1990 to 1996. Dr. Dennard is a former president of the National Association of Black Psychologists and is the author of *The RE-Ascension of the Black Man's Mind: Coming Forth By RA*.

Among the writers articulating the African-centered paradigm, as applied to the discipline of psychology, Amos Wilson stands among those at the top of the list. His insights and descriptions of depth analysis are clear, easily accessible to the novice reader, and thought provoking. In his text, "The Falsification of African Consciousness: Eurocentric History, Psychiatry, and the Politics of White Supremacy" (1993), Dr. Wilson presents a thesis on the patterns and methods of psychology used to manipulate mass consciousness, and how the scholastic/ professional enterprise is engaged in that process. The concepts addressed by Dr. Wilson add depth & relevance to the general themes that emerge in the community psychology paradigm. Dr. Wilson is a master at bridging theory to practical application and the writing style of this text is consistent with his intent. I will discuss the relevance of the text to understanding the African-centering movement in academia, and how it is used to facilitate a better comprehension of the principles of community psychology among students. The text is divided into three themes – (1) Addressing how history is taught to create consciousness, (2) Understanding the practice and function of Eurocentric political dogmatism in society and academia, and (3) Engaging the necessity of people of African descent to develop an African-centered psychology to generate an understanding of the need for and role of power in genuine problem solving.

Historiography

Dr. Wilson uses the term “Historiography” to emphasize the role of history in generating consciousness on a mass scale. He emphasizes the point that “history” is not simply a reporting of facts, but rather, that history is created. History is presented to the masses, and thereby, establishes a worldview that becomes the consensual framework for evaluation and analysis by individuals who absorb that history as fact. “History” is history telling, and history telling then creates in the mind of the receiver, a human geography of the individual within the context of life itself. This geography provides meaningful references that thereby inform the individual (and therefore masses) of his/her place and also relevance in human time. Since the masses are, for the most part, presented with a European frame of reference emphasizing Europeans as the standard of human activities and accomplishments, masses of peoples are programmed through historiography to view their very existence only through European frames of reference. Consequently, the masses assimilate into the world as it is reported to them; without critical analysis. This fact necessarily directs the level and focus of inquiry within the context of the scientific arena. All questions and answers emanate from relevance to the survival of European people. Dr. Wilson notes that historiography is used intentionally to manipulate the interests and activities of the masses in such a way as to invest in the survival of Europeans, even to the detriment of themselves. History telling often means intentional lying and disregard for certain truths so that those in power can maintain continuity of the “history” as it has been told. By introducing this concept, I have been able to help students re-think the manner in which they come to understand problems, and therefore, evaluate possible solutions. For example, Dr. Wilson notes how historiography creates “time” as a mental construct. By evaluating how members of American society view time, it is easy to address the power of “Seasonal Time” (the creation of time by holidays) as it is used to generate energy, to manipulate emotions and interests, and to create the desire to willfully spend hard earned capital in an effort to acknowledge or be a part of the fabricated necessity of celebrating. In effect, we can analyze how this one concept is based on mythos programmed into citizens from birth, and used ultimately to manage a major portion of the economy. Not only do African people participate wholeheartedly in the activities that drain them financially and energetically, African people do not question the reality/origins of such holidays. They do not seem to notice that the holidays do not promote black survival. In reality, these holidays establish the primacy of white culture year after year and generation after generation.

European Cultural Dominance

Amos Wilson's "The Falsification of African Consciousness: Eurocentric History, Psychiatry and the Politics of White Supremacy" (1993) is incorporated in the classroom to help students systematically problematize contemporary issues and think of possible solutions. Through the use of the concept of historiography as it relates to the falsification of time versus the assessment of a problem using an African cultural concept of time students begin to understand the importance of the systematic study of cultural dominance and its relationship to the maintaining of a paradigm that promotes white supremacy. The foundation for European cultural dominance is set in motion by the internalization of the European paradigm. By incorporation of the "telling" of reality and time, the masses, including experts within the society, are regulated to interpret problems and create solutions based on the assumption that the telling is the reality. Generally speaking, in spite of some lip service to the notion of cultural diversity, graduate programs in psychology (and all other disciplines) adhere to the paradigms and theories handed down by their European makers as the final and correct understanding/descriptions of all human nature. Even when theories of non-white thinkers are presented, this information is presented superficially as possibly a counter exchange to established "science" that is not to be entertained seriously. The fact that whole societies have operated for centuries on different paradigms is completely ignored. Even well-known philosophers of other ethnic groups are not viewed as relevant to the discipline, nor described as offering an intelligent analysis.

One of the greatest contributions of Dr. Wilson's is his observation that problems faced by African peoples are misdiagnosed and mislabeled by mainstream psychology, and reinforced by all of the institutions within the context of the society. Consequently, the paradigm established is so imbued with a European point of reference that pathologies are labeled as normal. There is no acknowledgement of the impact of living in a hostile environment on psychological expressions. There are no diagnostic categories to identify natural psychological disorder emanating from oppression, racial hating or systemically created stressors. Furthermore, there is no diagnosis offered when non-white persons lose their cultural anchoring and assimilate into European thought and behavior. In fact, assimilation status qualifies the individual to be classified as being "normal" and "cured". Mainstream psychology is utilized to give "scientific" justification for the usual business of victim blaming and the support of enterprises that allow Europeans to manage financial negotiations at the expense of the decline of non-white peoples. Granting agencies are created based on the scientific assertions and thus grants are not given to those with innovative concepts that are outside of these Eurocentric positions.

African-Centered Paradigm

Dr. Wilson has always emphasized the necessity for African people to become more practical in our analyses and this dialogue continues in this text. Wilson asserts that the end goal of incorporating the notion of historiography and appreciating European cultural dominance is to establish a base of psychological freedom so that the masses of African people can behave in a manner that is consistent with a world revolution. It is evident that a world revolution would be in conflict with the purpose and intent of European cultural dominance. For this to occur, African people must understand the role of power in social change and must assume the responsibility of gaining real power. Wilson asserts that the beginning of gaining power is the practice of embracing an African-centered frame of reference. Obviously, this requires members of the African community to have a shift in consciousness. Thus, it is necessary to re-create history in the image and interest of our community. The orientation of scholar/activists, whether we are in established institutions or create our own private institutions, should be to establish means of promoting the telling of an African-centered historiography.

Reference

Wilson, A.N. (1993). *Falsification of Afrikan Consciousness: Eurocentric history, psychiatry and the politics of white supremacy*. Brooklyn, NY: Afrikan World Info Systems.