

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

www.BlackCommentator.com

Oct 11, 2012 - Issue 489

The Maroon Within Us Worrill's World By Dr. Conrad W. Worrill, PhD BC Columnist

Our late, great ancestor, Dr. Asa G. Hilliard's book, *The Maroon Within Us*, once again reminds us of a major problem by which we, as African people in America, are besieged. Dr. Hilliard described this problem as **cultural surrender**. In explaining the problem, Dr. Hilliard wrote, "African Americans remain one of the very few groups in the United States who do not honor their own cultural traditions, sometimes even when they are honored by others."

Continuing on this point, Dr. Hilliard states, "If there is a major illness among African American people it is that we unceasingly honor and utilize our culture less. All great nations and people do the opposite."

As Dr. Hilliard further explains, "Cultural surrender is more than a matter of rejecting one's father and mother culture. It means that one accepts a new definition as a person. The culturally dependent person is a mere spectator, a receptacle for the creativities of others. To demand freedom from slavery only to use that freedom to commit one's self to a voluntary cultural servitude is to lose the chance to be human."

The erosion of many of our African cultural traditions and foundations are most evidenced in our family and community life. Far too many African people in America are getting away from the essence of family life. The cultural tradition of African family life is that of the extended family that centers itself on the rearing of children and caring for the elders.

Family life is the basis for which a people maintain their cultural traditions, traditions that are important to the survival of a people. The way we raise our children in the context of extended family life for African people was always connected to the overall development of the larger community.

Dr. Hilliard writes, "There have always been Africans or Black people in America who have been both physically and mentally free. We have also had far too many of those who have yielded their bodies - and worse, their souls - to people and systems whose purpose was to exploit to take all and give nothing."

It is in this context that Dr. Hilliard provides several reasons why this devastating trend of cultural surrender is taking place. He says, "...we have tended to accept certain false dichotomies," such as the following:

1. "We have tended to equate sophisticated technology with culture, believing that such technology is exclusively European and that to affirm African culture is to reject technology.
2. We have tended to equate modern with technology, and to value modern as if it were cultural progress. At the same time, we have seen the affirmation of African/African American culture as a matter of retrogression. Further, we have seen African/African American culture as static rather than dynamic and adaptive.
3. We have tended to equate European culture with wealth and African/ African American culture with poverty.
4. We have tended to associate education with the acquisition of all the cultural forms of Europeans, and find it hard to conceive of educated persons who live the African/African American culture.
5. We have tended to equate self-affirmation with the hatred of others.
6. We have tended to equate religion with particular forms of European interpretations of Christianity and have not seen our people as religious or spiritual.

7. Generally we have failed to study ourselves and to know our culture.”

As we enter twenty-first-century, the challenges that African people face in American, and throughout the world, is to create programs, strategies, and institutions that will reclaim and preserve our rich culture. One such program that has emerged as one approach to preserving our culture and traditions and aimed at our youth is the growing **Rites of Passage Movement**. This Movement seeks to place African and African people at the center of independently working with our young people. Children in Rites of Passage Programs are generally taught aspects of our history that included our literary accomplishments, our accomplishments in music, science and technology, and the spiritual concepts of African people that direct our moral and ethical behavior and treatment of others.

As we look out and observe the African World Community, we can see a common set of problems that all African people face as a result of hundred of years of exploitation by Europeans and others against African people. This exploitation has developed into a worldwide system of white supremacy and white domination aimed at wiping out African culture. **We must resist and refuse any efforts to wipe out our culture.** Finally, Dr. Hilliard writes, **“Cultural surrender or cultural destruction leads inevitably to the loss of any possibility for a group to mobilize on its behalf. There can be no African/African American family in the absence of a cultural base.”**

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