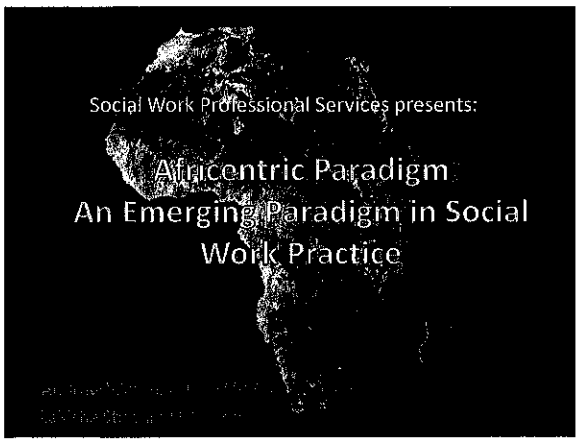

Social Work Professional Services presents:
Africentric Paradigm
An Emerging Paradigm in Social Work Practice

1

Summary

This workshop will enhance the participants understanding and consciousness of how their unconscious Eurocentric Western Worldview may not be used across cultures and the need to infuse the Afrocentric paradigm with traditional models of social work practice when working with people of color. This presentation calls for social work practitioners and scholars to engage in increased discussions and the literature to advance the Afrocentric model and to integrate the paradigm in working with people of African descent.

2

Africentric Paradigm: An Emerging Paradigm in Social Work Practice

- **Objectives:**
- To enlighten participants to research, implement and advance the Africentric paradigm when working with individuals of African ancestry.
- Provide theoretical orientation and application of African Centered Social Work Practice.
- Provide examples of cross-system, state and country and other collaborations that aim to promote self-determination and liberation of people of African decent through out the Diaspora.
- To discuss practice models that can be replicated in the Black Community to further enhance the quality of life for our communities.
- Participants will explore considerations of modifying traditional mental health treatments to match clients' cultural context.

3

Ubuntu: "I am what I am because of who we all are"

- The South African Nobel Laureate Archbishop Desmond Tutu describes Ubuntu as: "It is the essence of being human. It speaks of the fact that my humanity is caught up and is inextricably bound up in yours. I am human because I belong. It speaks about wholeness, it speaks about compassion."
- The word Ubuntu originates from one of the Bantu dialects of Africa, and is pronounced as uu-Boon-too. It is a traditional African philosophy that offers us an understanding of ourselves in relation with the world. According to Ubuntu, there exists a common bond between us all and it is through this bond, through our interaction with our fellow human beings, that we discover our own human qualities.

4

The Sankofa bird symbol is derived from an African proverb, "Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi," *which translates as* "It is not wrong to go back for that which you have forgotten."

Sankofa. Look it up

5

AFROCENTRICITY OR AFROCENTRIC PARADIGM

- Afrocentricity should be seen as a decolonization process of African from cultural and psychological chains of Eurocentric tradition. This decolonization process should be viewed as a special form of decolonization which is different from practical or ordinary decolonization. Europeans relinquished colonial power in 1940s and onward, but the legacy remained unchallenged.
- Asante (2007).

6

Afrocentricity: An emerging paradigm in Social Work Practice

- Although several models of social work practice that can better assist people of color have emerged, the cultural values of this population generally have not been used as a theoretical base to develop new practice models.
- This situation reinforces the hegemony (influence) of Eurocentric concepts for explaining and solving human and societal problems.

7

Afrocentricity: An emerging paradigm in Social Work Practice

- Increasingly psychologists, counselors and social workers are in a position of providing treatment for clients whose cultural background differs from their own. Because African Americans have historically underutilized mental health services, sensitivity to the cultural variables represented by this group is a growing concern.
- An integrated approach to conceptualizing, evaluating, and diagnosing African Americans from a culturally sensitive, Afrocentric perspective is needed.

8

Afrocentricity: An emerging paradigm in Social Work Practice

- Social workers are encouraged to embrace the Afrocentric paradigm because of its emphasis on eliminating oppression and spiritual alienation.
- Moreover, the failure to use the cultural values of people of color in developing new models can be viewed as an implicit expression of Western ethnocentrism, or the belief that Eurocentric values are the only values that can explain behavior and should be the basis for solving people's problems.
- Culture is a central concern in Afrocentricity. It embeds things like language, education, religion, and/or psychological processing.

9

Afrocentricity: An emerging paradigm in Social Work Practice

- Many of the established social work practice models do not mirror the diversity of cultural values and worldviews found in the broader U.S. society with little regard to people of color.
- In addition, because people of color, especially African Americans and Hispanics, experience greater poverty and have fewer material resources than the general population (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1994), it is important that practice models reflect the cultural values and worldviews of these most likely social work clients.

10

Afrocentric Paradigm Origins and Reasons

- These writers maintain that the application of Eurocentric theories of human behavior to explain the behavior and ethos (guiding beliefs of a culture, group or people) of African Americans is inappropriate (to varying degrees).

(Akbar, 1979, 1984; Baldwin & Hopkins, 1990; Bell, Boyle, & Baldwin, 1990; Kambon, 1992)

11

Objectives of the Paradigm

- Afrocentricity has three objectives:
- (1) it seeks to promote an alternative social science paradigm more reflective of the cultural and political reality of African Americans;

12

Objectives of the Paradigm

- (2) It seeks to dispel the negative distortions about people of African ancestry by legitimizing and disseminating a worldview that goes back thousands of years and that exists in the hearts and minds of many people of African descent today (Carruthers, 1981; Diop, 1978).

13

Objectives of the Paradigm cont…

- 3 It seeks to promote a worldview that will facilitate human and societal transformation toward spiritual, moral, and humanistic ends and that will persuade people of different cultural and ethnic groups that they share a mutual interest in this regard.
- Afrocentric speaks to the specific liberation needs of people of African descent and to the spiritual and moral development of the world.

Karenga (1993)

14

Historical European Influence

- In the past five centuries or so, Europeans colonized countries mainly in Africa, Latin America, Asia, to name but few. In documenting history around the colonization era, "most of history books in the last five hundred years have been written to glorify Europeans at the expense of other people." (Hoskins, 1992:248).
- This means one is possibly fashioned into Eurocentric form. This state of mentality shapes what one thinks, how one acts, and possibly how one make sense of reality.
- Eurocentrism is a set of beliefs which places Europe at the centre, and relegating all other ways of thinking to the periphery position by setting standards in which reality can be tested (Shohat & Stam 1994:1-2).

15

Eurocentric Knowledge Hegemony

- Afrocentrists also contend that the application and imposition of Eurocentric theories of human behavior, especially to explain the behaviors and lifestyles of African Americans, are implicitly oppressive.
- Most of the theories of human behavior to which social workers and social scientists in the United States are exposed have sprung from a Eurocentric perspective because of the political and economic hegemony that European Americans exercise over U.S. social institutions.

16

Eurocentric Basis for Racism

- Eurocentric theories of human behavior and society have historically vilified people of African descent and other people of color (Akbar, 1984; Ani, 1994; Asante, 1990).
- The Measurement of Intelligence and the works of other writers, who explicitly or implicitly have claimed that people of African descent were inferior or pathological in their personality, social, or moral development.
- The origins of this denigration can be found in the European slave trade. Slave investors, traders, and owners were pressed to justify the enslavement of Africans (Ani, 1994; McIntyre, 1993).

17

The Eurocentric Worldview and Assumptions about Poverty

American social welfare philosophy is undergirded by the Eurocentric worldview. three basic assumptions about poverty are examined. These assumptions tap into the core of American social welfare philosophy on poverty. The assumptions are as follows:

1. Poverty is a function of individual deficits and behaviors.
2. Despite economic hardships and societal inequalities, people should be able to maintain self-sufficiency and economic independence.
3. The poor should be punished, not helped, because they lack the initiative and perseverance to be financially self-sufficient.

18

The Eurocentric Worldview and Assumptions about Poverty

- These assumptions negates the role of the social, political, and economic milieu in poverty and neglects to acknowledge that milieu's connection to an oppressive world view that can cultivate human misery.
- By viewing poverty as solely an individual matter, the existence of poverty is thought not to be an indication of an oppressive worldview but as evidence of individual failure at internalizing and manifesting core values such as the work ethic, fortitude, and individual initiative.

19

Afrocentric Assumptions about Human Beings

- The Afrocentric paradigm asserts three major assumptions about human beings:
- (1) Human identity is a collective identity;
- (2) The spiritual or nonmaterial component of human beings is just as important and valid as the material component; and
- (3) The affective approach to knowledge is epistemologically (study of knowledge and belief) valid.

(Akbar, 1984; Asante, 1988; Bell et al., 1990; Boykin et al., 1985; Dixon, 1978; Evans et al., 1991; Harris, 1992; Kambon, 1992; Myers, 1988; Nobles, 1980; Schiele, 1990)

20

Eliminating Oppression and Enhancing Human Potential

- Although Afrocentric social work research is committed to abolishing all forms of oppression, it is primarily committed with eliminating racial and cultural oppression because both pervasively affect the lives of persons of African descent.
- **Racial Oppression** can be defined as the practice of subjecting a group to unfair, immoral, and belligerent treatment simply because of visible characteristics, especially skin color, that are assumed to be racial.
- **Cultural oppression** refers to the "universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm" (Young, 1990, P.59).

21

Eliminating Oppression and Enhancing Human Potential

The Afrocentric paradigm is a form of knowledge and interpretation in that it challenges interpretations of people of African descent that stem from groups who benefit from the oppression of people of African ancestry and advocates that these interpretations emerge from the narratives of Black people themselves.

22

Victims in a Hostile Situation

- For youths who commit violent crimes, the Afrocentric paradigm maintains that oppression and spiritual alienation are the fundamental causes of the commission of these violent acts.
- It is this researcher perception that youths commit violent acts because they live in a society that institutionalizes impediments to their economic mobility and livelihood and legitimizes the disconnection of people from nonmaterial and morally affirming values about human self-worth and social relationships.

23

Violence and Spiritual Alienation

- Spiritual alienation also can provide some explanation of youth street violence in the United States. Spiritual alienation is the disconnection of nonmaterial and morally affirming values from concepts of human self-worth and from the character of social relationships.
- The key concept here is **disconnection**, the disconnection that allows people to take on an illusionary detached identity of self-individualism and to view themselves primarily (if not exclusively) as material beings.
- This transformation from materialistic individualistic thinking to spiritual holistic thinking, among those who seek professional help can be brought about by a therapeutic process known as belief systems analysis (Myers, 1988).
- Although this helping process can be conducted through direct one-on-one practice, the **Afrocentric paradigm in social work practice views the Eurocentric worldview as the primary target for change.**

24

Violence and Spiritual Alienation

- The lack of awareness of this sacredness and spiritual interconnectedness provides a justification for exploiting and intentionally harming people, because people are seen as mere things or objects. I am because we are. In my view, youth violence is a process of reciprocal objectification of human beings wherein physical aggression becomes the primary mode of expression that can be overcome only through an Afrocentric perspective.

25

Applications in Social Problems

- Under the Afrocentric paradigm, these youths commit these acts as a result of oppression and alienation. They get discouraged and angry by the lack of economic opportunities and turn to a life of street crime for acceptance and comfort.
- The model not only views these youths as violent offenders, but also as victims of US exploitation and hypocrisy. (289) According to this paradigm, intervention should include socially caring policies that enhance positive potential of all people.
- Systems accommodation and systems replacement models are very important, and the social worker should take on policy practitioning and community organizing roles. (289)

26

Afrocentric Essentials in the Helping Process

- The Afrocentric paradigm maintains that the personalization of the professional relationship and reciprocity within professional relationships are essential components of the helping or healing process.
- For Afrocentric social work, emotional distance is seen as unproductive because it prevents the complete development of a trusting, authentic helping relationship.

(Brisbane & Womble, 1991; Jackson, 1976; Myers, 1988; Phillips, 1990)

27

Afrocentric Essentials in the Helping Process

- The demonstration of positive feelings by the helper cues the person being helped that the helper does indeed care about his or her life. This perception of caring provides the foundation for the relationship to be viewed and practiced as a sacred and special one—a unique point where people meet to advance human transformation.
- It leads to the formation of a shared consciousness between the helper and helped, and the helping relationship becomes an avenue through which both the helped and helper tune into an aspect of life that has implications for both their lives. (Phillips, 1990)

28

Afrocentric Essentials in the Helping Process

- Afrocentricity realizes that the worldview to which all are exposed can have detrimental consequences for all.
- Thus, "feeling" the client's problem (that is, personalizing the problem and understanding that it directly or indirectly affects the helper's life too) is an essential skill in Afrocentric social work.

29

Reciprocity in the Helping Relationship

- The Afrocentric paradigm also emphasizes reciprocity in the helping relationship. Reciprocity not only implies the identification of problems mutually important to the client and helper but also means that the helper can learn and be assisted by the helped. Both the helper and helped can be the sources and recipients of information and assistance.
- To this extent, the Afrocentric paradigm is not elitist. It does not view the worker as the only expert in the helping relationship. To do so is to de-emphasize and devalue the experiences and knowledge of the client in a way that is dehumanizing and oppressive.

30

African Values

- African people have various moral and societal values meant to regulate interpersonal relationship and to perpetuate the entire community. Africans have certain standards or norms to be observed.
- These standards or norms are meant for social cohesion and smooth running of the community. They are to prevent members of the community from becoming rebellious and thereby endanger the welfare of the society.
- In African society, there are a set of values that guide the behavior of every member. Specific mention could be made of values such as hospitality, chastity before marriage, truth and respect for old age, covenant keeping, hard work and good character.
- In African community there are proverbs/maxims used to inculcate social and moral values in order to regulate their interpersonal relationships. The following are illuminating examples from the Yoruba of Nigeria and Akan people of Ghana.

31

African Values

S/N	Values fostered	Examples of Proverbs/ Maxims
1	Respect and honour for elders	A[illegible] agba fun enikan ko je ki aye o gun (Failure to give regards to other is the fundamental cause of societal abnormality
2	Regard and appreciation for one's family and benefactors	A ki i fi owo osi juwe ile baba eni (we should not point at our father's home with the left hand)
3	Self-control and courtesy	[illegible] (Falana-a generic name, mind your business)
4	Virtues of forgiveness, harmony and peaceful co-existence	Bi a ko ba gbagbe oro ana, a ko ni ri enikan abasere (Unless we overlook the past misdeeds, we will not be able to relate
5	Diligence and industry	Ise ni ogun ise (Hard work is the cure for poverty)
6	Truth and honesty	Otito ki i sina iro ni i fi oni gbogbe (Truth does not make mistake, falsehood lead astray)
7	Unity and cooperation	[illegible]

Source: Falade, D.A. et al. (2009) *Proverbs as Traditional Means of Moral and Social Learning among the Yoruba of Nigeria*. [illegible] (Eds) Oral Traditions in Black and African Culture (CBAAC) [illegible]

32

African Values

	Beauty	Beauty does not pay off a debt.
	Chiefship, People and Political Authority	It is when a chief has good counselors that his reign becomes peaceful.
	Children	There is no wealth where there are no children.
	Community	The reason two deer walk together is that one has to take the mote from the other's eye.
	God	Goodness is the prime characteristic of God.
	Humanity	Humanity has no boundary.
	Immortality	When a person dies, he is not really dead.
	Individualty	It is by individual effort that we can struggle for our head.
	Knowledge	Knowledge is like a garden: if it is not cultivated, it cannot be harvested.
	Morality	Life is mutual aid.

33

African Values

	Personal responsibility	He who gets blisters from the hoe handle will not die of hunger.
13		Only he who goes into the forest comes back with firewood.
		What one cultivates is what one harvest.
	Virtues	Good character is a person's guards. An unpleasant truth is better than a pleasant falsehood.
	Wealth	When wealth comes and passes by nothing comes after.
	Wisdom	The wise person is spoken to in proverbs, not in words.
	Wife	The beauty of a woman is due to her husband.
	Work	Treat your guest as a guest for two days; on the third day give him a hoe.
		There is no other things you get out of laziness than poverty.
		There is no other things you get out of laziness than poverty.

34

AFRICENTRIC INTERVENTIONS

- **Child, Adolescent and Family Development**
- Structural racism, poverty, high rates of violence in the community, and poor racial and ethnic identity are some risk factors that work against positive wellbeing among African American youths.
- However, strong racial and ethnic identity and Africentric values among children and adolescents have been shown to be positively correlated with healthy development in several studies.
- Here are several programs that support these identities and values.

35

Implications in the Helping Process

- Personalizing relationships involves reducing the emotional distance between the helper and the client and developing a more trusting and helping relationship. It is important for the helper to disclose positive feelings towards the client and his situation so that the client can feel like the helper cares. An essential skill in this social work paradigm is that the helper should personalize the client's situation and realize that this issue not only affects the client's life but his own life as well.

36

Implications for Practice

- Many social workers today know very little about their African American clients and fail to see the importance of immersing themselves in African American history and culture. Martin and Martin (1995) contended that social workers must understand that African Americans are both creatures and creators of history in that history has placed where they are right now and has shaped their point of view, their identity, and their aspirations.
- Martin and Martin further noted that historical understanding fosters sensitivity to the plight of African American people in contemporary society by providing a sense of historical continuity that helps one to see the relationship and the parallel between the past and the present.

37

Implications for Practice

- The "race lens" is certainly important in addressing practice issues for which racial tensions continue to impede professional helping (Proctor & Davis, 1994).
- According to Allen-Meares and Burman (1995), the social work profession maintains a discomforting silence when viewing inequalities and special conditions that affect African American families.
- A similar silence exists when schools of social work participate in perpetuating these inequalities through differential treatment of African American faculty and students.

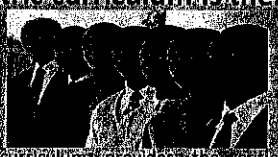
38

Implications for Practice

- Swigonski (1996) maintained that "all forms of oppression results in privileges for the oppressor" (p. 156). A denial of privilege and unearned advantage go hand in hand. Unearned privilege supports and maintains the unequal distribution of power and resources that confronts us daily (hooks, 1990; Swigonski, 1996).
- People who have privilege but deny it are likely to misinterpret the lack of privilege as a pathology when they encounter oppressed groups. The privilege serves to distance them from others (Pinderhughes, 1989).
- If social workers are to be effective, they must develop greater self-awareness, engage in activities to alter patterns of social privilege through the habit of resistance, and work to change the social structure.

39

Afrocentric curriculum is therapeutic.



Afrocentric curriculum provides the critical consciousness necessary for African people to overcome past (and present) oppression. It does so in a myriad of ways (e.g., by helping them to regain a more correct and positive sense of self, unite with one another to solve their problems, reengage in nation building, and resist all types of foreign hegemony).

Yet, the critics of Afrocentric discourse often deny the right of African people to utilize their great history and past cultural practices to repair the damage that they have suffered (and continue to suffer). No one other than the assailant, and possibly his/her accomplice, denies the victim the right to heal.

40

Conclusion

Because the depth and scope of Afrocentric thinkers' work is so great and because my understanding of Afrocentric discourse is still developing, I have undoubtedly only managed to scratch the surface of research and scholarship that these individuals have amassed.

A basic premise of an Afrocentric approach is that culture matters in the past, in the present, and in the future.

It is time for undergraduate and graduate schools of social work to offer courses and textbook courses on the Afrocentric paradigm and to advance the research and literature on this important and critical paradigm.

We need to search for educational methods that will help us to counter the poor educational conditions that the majority of us and our children suffered. Leave here today thirsting for more information about your origins, traditions, cultures and sense of loss. (See Hoskins, 1991; Ladson-Billings, 1994; Hilliard, 1998; Wilson, 1998)

41

Conclusion

- Afrocentric educators should teach students that Afrocentricity is one of a number of different ways to view the world (i.e., there are multiple cultural viewpoints within our pluralistic society), whereas the standard curriculum of the public schools, being based on a hegemonic form of Eurocentrism, is promoted as universal.
- Our universities, especially our HBCU's should make it mandatory as a part of their Social Work Curriculum to offer African Centered Courses so that our students can think more holistically when viewing individuals from African descent.
- This research informs that good African-centered pedagogy (method of teaching) and curriculum are built around solving the problems of African people. Therefore, African-centered pedagogy and curriculum involve the following eight processes:

42

Conclusion

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- A basic premise of an Afrocentric approach is that culture matters—in the past, in the present, and in the future.
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43

Conclusion

- (1) the reconstruction and preservation of African history, culture, and identity;
- (2) the engagement in counter-hegemony;
- (3) the engagement in transformation;
- (4) the engagement in the activity of nation-building;
- (5) the construction of positive concepts of African womanhood and manhood;
- (6) the study of (asymmetrical) power relations;
- (7) the integration/balancing of technical, moral, and spiritual dimensions of education; and
- (8) the incorporation of the learning styles of African children.

44

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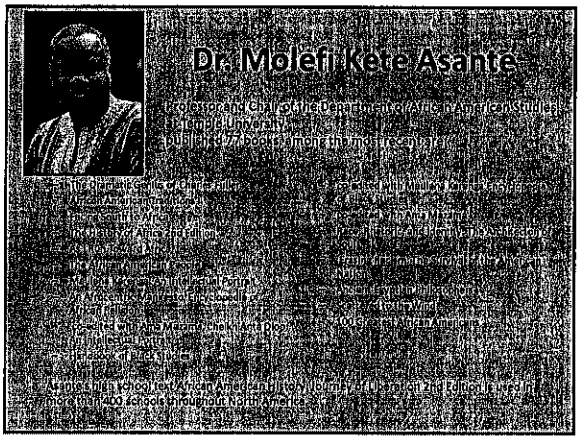

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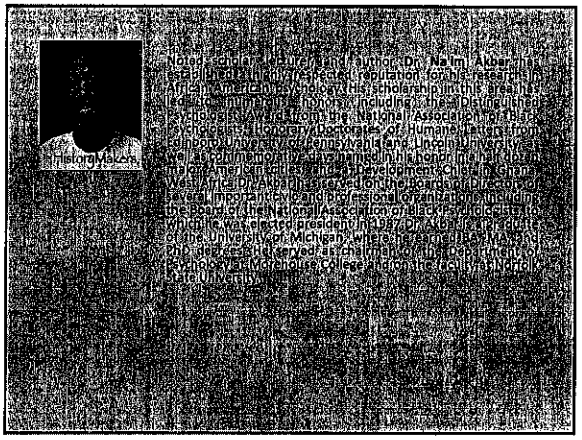

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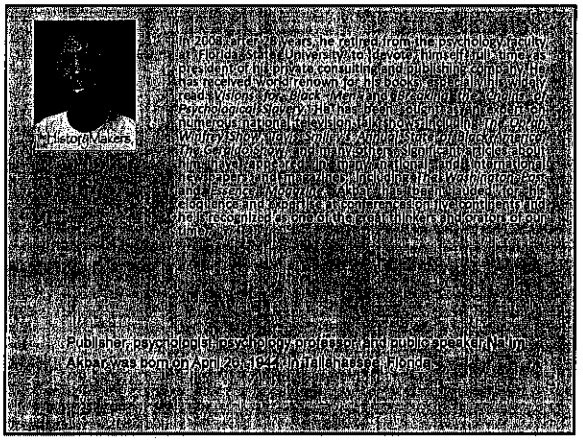

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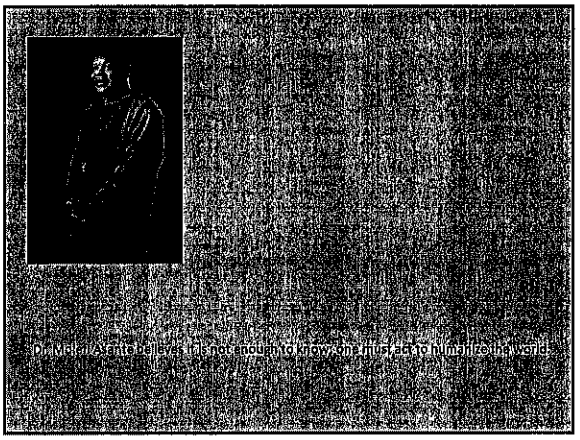
Dr. Molefi Asante believes it is not enough to know, one must act to humanize the world.

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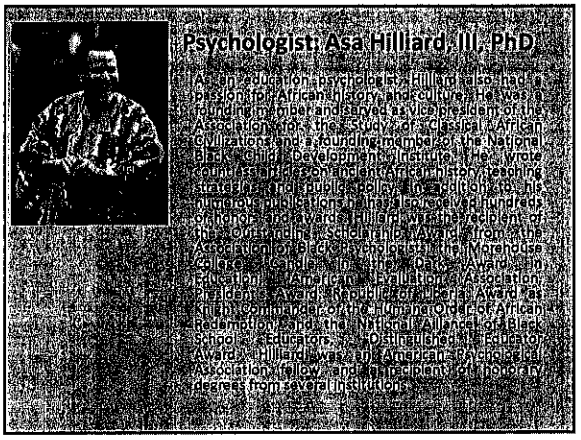
Psychologist: Asa Hilliard, III, PhD
As an education psychologist, Hilliard also had a passion for African history and culture. He was a founding member and served as vice president of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations and a founding member of the National Black Child Development Institute. He wrote countless articles on ancient African history, teaching strategies and public policy. In addition to his numerous publications he has also received hundreds of honors and awards. Hilliard was the recipient of the Outstanding Scholarship Award from the Association of Black Psychologists, the Morehouse College Candle in the Dark Award in Education, American Evaluation Association President's Award, Republic of Liberia Award as Knight Commander of the Humane Order of African Redemption, and the National Alliance of Black School Educators Distinguished Educator Award. Hilliard was an American Psychological Association fellow and a recipient of honorary degrees from several institutions.

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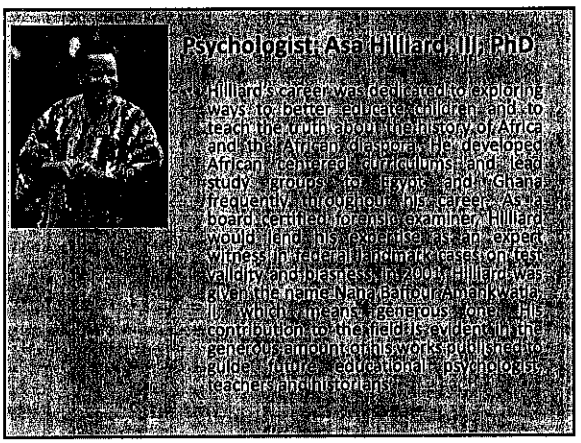
Psychologist: Asa Hilliard, III, PhD
Hilliard's career was dedicated to exploring ways to better educate children and to teach the truth about the history of Africa and the African diaspora. He developed African centered curriculums and lead study groups to Egypt and Ghana frequently throughout his career. As a board certified forensic examiner, Hilliard would lend his expertise as an expert witness in federal landmark cases on test validity and biasness. In 2001, Hilliard was given the name Nana Baffour Amankwatia, II, which means generous one. His contribution to the field is evident in the generous amount of his works published to guide future educational psychologist, teachers and historians.

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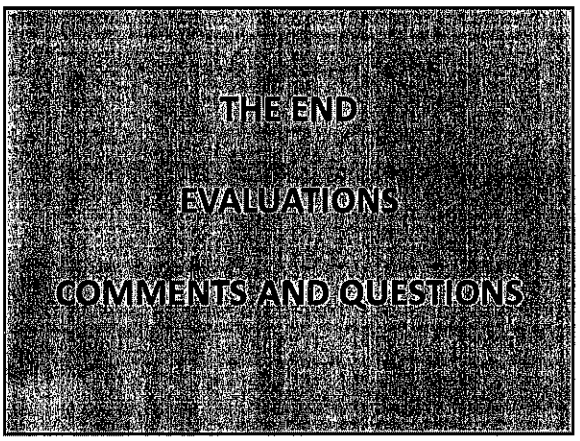

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