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AUTHOR   Fox, Jill Englebright
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ABSTRACT
                One method teachers can use in educating themselves
about cultures different from their own is to read literature about
the cultural backgrounds of students in their classes. This
literature review is designed to provide teachers with descriptions
of sources of information about cultural influences on
African-American children. It also explains how an awareness of
African-American culture, with its unique combination of African and
Euro-American traditions, can help classroom teachers develop
relationships and structure relevant learning experiences for
African-American children of all ages. The review discusses the
impact of cultural experiences on the learning style, behavior,
social interactions, language, and values of African-American
children. The following topics are also covered: (1) the dual
socialization of African-Americans; (2) the role of the black family
in shaping the personality of children and in helping children
survive; (3) African-American children in single-parent families; (4)
the role of the extended family and African-American institutional
networks in providing emotional and social support; (5) the
socialization of African-American males; (6) the social orientation
of African-American females; and (7) the role of the African-American
church in providing fellowship, adult role models, and material and
human resources essential for the well-being of black families.
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A Selected Review of Literature On

African American American Culture

Jill Englebright Fox, M.Ed.

University of North Texas

Running head: AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURE

Abstract

Cultural understanding of students and their families is necessary if teachers hope to truly educate the children in their classrooms. The African American culture, with its unique combination of African tradition and enforced Euro-American values, provides a challenging area of study for teachers attempting to create a truly multicultural classroom. This paper offers an overview of African American cultural influences on child development and families. Awareness of these influences can assist classroom teachers in developing relationships and structuring relevant learning experiences for African American children of all ages.

A Selected Review of Literature On

African American Culture

Introduction

Multiculturalism is currently a trendy topic in
education circles. Much has been written on the need
to provide children with open, unbiased experiences
with other cultures, and to enhance and build upon the
inherent strengths of each child's own culture.
Educators and lay people alike realize that to ignore
the issue of culture in the classroom is to perpetuate
the negative cultural messages that historically and
currently exist in our society. As Derman-Sparks
(1989) states, in neglecting cultural concerns in the
classroom,

> ...all children are harmed. On the one hand,
> struggling against bias that declares a
> person inferior because of gender, race,
> ethnicity, or disability sucks energy from
> and undercuts a child's full development. On
> the other hand, learning to believe they are
> superior becasue they are White, or male, or
> able-bodied, dehumanizes and distorts reality

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for growing children, even while they may be

receiving the benefits of institutional

privilege (p. ix).

Thus in recent years a flurry of teaching materials has
been published, each providing detailed methodology and
curriculum on how to create a multicultural environment
in the classroom. Many of these materials are truly
excellent tools for teachers to use toward this goal.
Inherent in each is the too often under-emphasized
premise that before implementing a multi-cultural
education program, teachers themselves must first
attain a basic level of cultural understanding about
the children in their classrooms. As Kunjufu (1986)
states, "How can you teach a child whom you do not
understand?" (p. 12). The answer, of course, is that
you can't. Culture shapes the learning style, the
behavior, the social interactions, the language and the
values of a child. A lack of knowledge about that
child's culture leaves teachers with an unknown entity-
-one that they must somehow reach, educate, and prepare
for productive membership in a highly complex society.
It is difficult to give a child wings without knowledge

of his roots.

One method of cultural education for teachers is
community involvement. Berger (1991) encourages
teachers to become actively involved in events in the
community in which they teach. Such involvement will
provide teachers with direct experiences with cultural
values and customs. Another strategy is for teachers
to utilize parents as sources of first-hand
information, inviting them into the classroom to share
of themselves and of their culture, and visiting
parents and children in their homes to actually witness
the interaction of family and culture. Both of these
avenues offer exciting and meaningful experiences in
multicultural teacher education. A third, though
possibly less direct, method of cultural education is
for teachers to simply take advantage of the vast
amount of literature currently being published on
various cultures. Reviewing this literature and
placing it within a relevant framework may help
teachers to acquire valuable information on the
cultural backgrounds of each child in their classes.
Cultural influences on child development, language,

social interactions, and behavior can then be utilized
to make the education process more productive and less
frustrating for teachers, parents, and, most
importantly, for children.

It is toward this end that this paper is intended.
It is not an exhaustive review of the literature--such
an endeavor would probably require several years of
dedicated work by more than one researcher. Merely it
is an overview of several sources available to the
writer. Its focus is not to describe African American
culture in its totality, but merely to identify a few
of the cultural influences on African American
children, their development, and their families. This
paper is a beginning effort, initiated by a teacher who
is not culturally insensitive, but merely somewhat
culturally ignorant. Nevertheless, the desire to know
and to be a receptive vehicle for education is present
and will hopefully be visible throughout.

Overview

African American culture is a fluid and dynamic
interaction of many unique elements. Language,
religion, family, values, and history all work together

to create a distinct ethnic experience within the
dominant Euro-American culture.   This culture-within-a-
culture status has necessitated a dual socialization
process for some African Americans.   Peters (1981)
states that African American "socialization occurs
within the ambiguities of a cultural heritage that is
both Afro-American and Euro-American and a social
system that espouses both democratic equality for all
citizens and caste-like status for its Black citizens"
(p. 211).   Kunjufu (1986) contends that because of this
dual socialization process many African Americans may
feel as if they really do not have a culture.   This
belief rests upon the assumption that enforced contact
with and submission to the Euro-American culture has
diluted many cultural elements that the first African
Americans brought with them from their homelands.
Staples (1988a) states that "in the transition from
Africa to the American continent, there can be no doubt
that African culture was not retained in any pure form"
(p.307).   Pure is the key word in Staples' comments,
however, since sociologists are able to trace many
contemporary elements of African American culture back

to their African roots.

> Africanisms abound in Black culture in the
> United States. For example, Black dialect,
> including South Carolina Gullah, has been
> identified as originating from aspects of
> African language retained by enslaved
> Africans. Other examples are Black folklore,
> aspects of Black childrearing, Black music,
> and Black religious expressions (Hale-Benson,
> 1982, p. 183).

Obviously the, African American culture has been
transmitted in one form or another through the
generations. Historically, African Americans have
lived, worked, studied, and socialized together because
of the legal and social segregations imposed upon them
by society. Much of this segregation still exists,
although hopefully its incidence is declining. Hale-
Benson (1982) suggests that in spite of efforts toward
desegregation many African American communities
continue to be closely united because they "enjoy being
together and they feel more comfortable when they can
experience the beauty and the joy of Blackness" (p.

19). Given this importance of ethnic identity it is logical to assume that important cultural elements have been transmitted from one generation to the next with the goal of maintaining and extending ethnic pride and identity in the younger generations. Kunjufu (1986) states that these basic cultural elements include language, music, food, dress, religion, appearance, and learning style.

African American Families

Cultural influences on child development can not be separated from the study of the structure, dynamics, and interactions of the family as a cultural unit. The study of African American families has too often been distorted by the lack of understanding and personal biases of researchers in the field. According to Allen (1978) the first studies of African American families began shortly after the publication of Charles Darwin's Origin of Species in 1859. "It was the search for 'primitive' families which first drew attention to black families (in the form of Australian Aborigine and African families) as objects for scientific inquiry" (p. 167-168). Allen (1978) further states that

subsequent researchers have generally taken one of
three competing ideological perspectives when working
with the topic of African American families. The first
perspective, that of cultural equivalence, holds that
Black families do not constitute a distinct cultural
form in contrast to white families. The second
perspective, that of cultural deviance, acknowledges
the uniqueness of Black families and attributes the
differences between Black and white families to
deficits within the Black families. Cultural
variation, the third perspective, acknowledges the
differences between Black and white families and
attributes these differences to the unique situational
constraints under which the families operate. Any
review of literature in this area must first begin by
ascertaining the author's perspective and filtering the
information received to a usable status--a challenging
task for a lay person in the field.

Staples (1988b) states that although the Black
family unit has always been a vitally important force
in shaping the personality of its children and in
carrying out survival functions, it is basically an

adaptive unit that changes and modifies its form and
dynamics according to the needs imposed upon its
members by a predominantly hostile society. During
periods of intense turmoil or oppression, the Black
family unit has been "a strong and resilient
institution" (p. 20). This statement is considerably
at odds with the prevailing belief that under slavery
white slave-owners did not encourage or even permit
close family ties or bonding. Nonetheless, Staples
(1988a) states that the family unit "was one of the
most important survival mechanisms for people held in
bondage" (p. 305).

According to Staples (1988b) the African American
family as an institution has been influenced by many
negative forces. Slavery, industrialization, the
advent of technology, and changes in religious
institutions have all taken their toll on family form
and dynamics. Hillard (1984), however, believes that
these experiences provide Black families with a common
memory and common values that enhance cooperation
within the family unit and thus strengthen family ties.

Gary and Gary (1986) discuss seven traits

considered to be important to the characterization of
strong African American families. The first of these,
a strong economic base, provides security in good times
and in bad, and guarantees that the basic needs of all
family members can be met. This trait is personified
by a strong work orientation in the family, a tendency
toward stable employment and the importance of property
ownership. The second trait focuses on the importance
of religion in the family life. Since religion is also
a vital element in the African American community at
large, more will be said about it in later sections of
this paper. The third trait involves achievement
orientation and is manifested in the educational
aspirations, expectations, and attainments of African
American family members. The adaptability of family
roles is also common in strong African American
families, with various members sharing family
responsibilities and filling in for each other when the
need arises. In strong African American families
members share intense bonds of kinship, involving a
high degree of commitment to the family and a sense of
mutual obligation. The sixth trait, coping

capabilities, provides family members with the ability
to deal with crises in a positive manner and to
maintain support networks for each other during times
of need. The final trait is an emotional ability to
affirm one another and to respect and appreciate each
family member. As in any culture, these traits are not
present in all families. They do, however, seem to be
present in varying degrees in many strong African
American families whose members are successful within
the community and within society at large.

Children in the African American Family

Allen (1978) asserts that "black families
constitute distinct cultural forms in contrast to white
families" (p. 169). Glick (1981) states that one of
the distinguishing features of African American
families is that they are more likely to include young
children than are families of other races. According
to Glick, however, there are some indications that the
average number of children born to African American and
Euro-American mothers "may currently be in a phase of
convergence" (p. 111).

Regardless of the number of children in the

family, children are extremely important in most
African American families. Childrearing, already a
challenge in contemporary society, may be doubly
difficult for Black parents because of the conflicting
demands from the African American and Euro-American
cultures. "Black child-rearing must resolve a basic
conflict that exists between the European world view
and the African world view" (Hale-Benson, 1982, p. 61).
Nobles (1974) suggests that the traditional African
world view encourages cooperation and group dependence.
African values emphasize the individual's
responsibility to forward the tribal goals of group
survival and unity with nature. The Euro-American
worldview, on the other hand, stresses rugged
individualism and independence, and encourages children
to compete against each other. These characteristics
contribute to individual success and environmental
control in the American mainstream, but may be a source
of considerable conflict to children and parents
accustomed to traditional African values.

   According to Hale-Benson (1982), in many cases
Black parents are forced to ignore many tenets of Euro-

American childrearing simply to ensure the survival of
their children.

>White teachers never cease to be amazed as
>they teach children not to fight (but to tell
>the teacher if someone hits them) when a
>Black child reports that his parents have
>told him to hit anybody back who hits him.
>The white teacher has no conception of the
>kind of reality a Black child has to face.
>Perhaps no one is around for him to tell, and
>a child must be able to defend himself from
>attack (p. 62).

Hale-Benson (1982) further asserts that continuous
comparison of African American and white children has
influenced childrearing attitudes in African American
families. This comparison has challenged Black parents
to build their children's self-esteem and to soothe
their anxieties "when they engage in competition or
social comparison with white children" (p. 64). Hale-
Benson (1982) suggests that such comparisons have also
led African American parents to make stricter demands
for good public behavior and performance from their

children "because falling short would reflect

unfavorably upon the group" (p. 49).

African American Children in Single-Parent Families

A focus for much recent media and research

attention on African American families has been the

number of children born into families headed by single

females. Although Hall and King (1982) emphasize "that

the dominant black family structure is the two-parent

household" (p. 539), research reveals that large

numbers of African American children are being raised

by their mothers alone. Kunjufu (1985) states that "62

percent of all African American children live with a

single parent" (p. 11). Staples (1988b) corroborates

this information with his assertion that "the

statistical data reveal that the majority of Black

Children are born out-of-wedlock, many of them to

teenage mothers" (p. 23). The reasons behind this

phenomenon are complex and cannot possibly be

summarized by one global theory that refuses to take

into consideration the circumstances of individuals. A

beginning of understanding, however, may be glimpsed by

looking at theories that attempt to explain the

pervasive attitudes of males and females toward having
children. Hale-Benson (1982) says that many African
American women consider childbearing to be a
"validation of their femaleness" (p. 67) and thus have
a very positive attitude toward having children. Hale-
Benson suggests that "this validation may provide an
explanation for the disproportionate number of births
by girls in their early teens" (p. 67). Brown (1976)
states that one criteria of manhood for many African
American male youth includes "how many girls you can
impregnate and not get married" (p. 6). It is
important to recognize, however, that these theories
may be stereotypical. Socioeconomic and educational
status, as well as many environmental factors, impact
young people of all cultures and may have significant
influence on the number of teenage pregnancies in each.

Further understanding of the reasons for the
number of African American children growing up in
single-parent homes is reached upon consideration of
Hillard's (1984) statement that "Black people (do) not
give their children up for adoption if they were born
out of wedlock" (p. 7-8) as is common in many other

cultures.   Either new family units are created or the

children are incorporated into existing family units,

thus becoming part of the statistical pool.

Hill (1988) states that "the average age of unwed

(African American) fathers at the birth of their first

child (is) 17 years" (p. 3).   Although this may be a

young age for sexual activity and the resulting status

of fatherhood, Hill's (1988) research findings "suggest

that the initial bonds between young fathers and

adolescent mothers are strong and not casual" (p. 5)

but that they may weaken over time.   Kunjufu (1985)

expresses concern that these weakening bonds leave too

many African American children without fathers.

Although both boys and girls may feel the lack of a

male parent in their lives, boys in particular may

suffer if there is no positive adult male after whom

they may pattern their own lives and relationships.

> Very few African American women are
>
> consciously aware that their son needs a
>
> positive male role model, that the family,
>
> streets, television, school and church
>
> institutions come up lacking, and that a

concerted effort between them and a male

extended family member must actively fill the

void (Kunjufu, 1985, p. 27).

Kunjufu is quick to point out, however, that only "a

very few families receive no input from a male figure,

i.e., grandfather, father, brother, uncle, nephew,

cousin, neighbor, lover, or friend" (p. 27).

Statistics about African American female-headed

families are surprising, given the common beliefs about

the prevalence of out-of-wedlock births in the African

American community. According to Jackson and Watson

(1989) in 1988 approximately half of all African

American families were headed by females. Of these

households only 11.2% were headed by single women who

had never been married.

Family Support Networks

Regardless of previous marital status, McAdoo

(1988) states that "single mothers have been forced to

draw extensively upon the African American

institutional support networks provided historically by

Black churches, social and fraternal organizations, and

the formation of fictive family arrangements" (p. 19).

These networks provide families with emotional and
social support, and may also be a source of financial
assistance when needed. Jackson and Watson (1989)
report that in 1987 "African American female-headed
households averaged (an annual income of) $9,710, or
barely 57% of the income of white female-headed
households" (p. 3). Clearly then, financial assistance
is an issue for many African American women who are the
heads of their ouseholds. Hall and King (1982) state
that although government dependence for financial
assistance may provide a certain amount of economic
security, it ultimately reduces the family's status and
isolates it from the mainstream.

> Many families are reduced to a society of
> 'waiters.' They must wait in the clinic for
> medical care, on buses for transportation, in
> food stamp lines for meals, on the arrival of
> the postman for income. In other words, they
> have little control over their lives and must
> wait for their very sustenance" (p. 539).

Fearing the loss of this control has led many families
to look within the African American community for

assistance, drawing particularly upon the resources of
extended family and kin networks.

Staples (1988) states that "in African societies
kinship was and is the basis of their social
organization" (p. 24).   Ellison (1990) contends that
kinship is a key factor in African American
socialization as well.   Ellison states that extended
families make up the core of many Black social networks
and that "nonkin ties may be less reliable and less
durable than kinship bonds" (p. 298).   Hall and King
(1982) explain that the close relationships within the
extended family provide economic and moral support for
daily life, as well as additional help during times of
crisis.   "Families serve each other as loan agencies,
child care facilities, emergency bread baskets, nursing
homes, transportation agents, models, and morale
boosters" (p. 541).

Day care, an issue of concern for all families
with young children, may be especially troublesome for
African American female heads of households "because of
the geographic inaccessibility of many (child care)
centers and/or because of the mother's inability to pay

the fees, especially if there are two or more children"
(Hall and King, 1982, p. 541). Many African American
mothers are forced to rely on kinship networks for the
child care that allows them to work and bring in family
income. Beyond just providing informal daycare,
however, Staples (1988b) suggests that the extended
family offers young children a liberation from the
confines of the nuclear family unit. Children are able
to receive emotional nurturance and support from caring
adults other than or in addition to their own mothers
and fathers. "It also helps to socialize children more
effectively into the values that Blacks held more
strongly in rural and southern settings" (p. 24).

Accepting assistance from family members does not
bring with it the same stigma that might accompany
assistance taken from government or social
institutions. Ellison (1990) reports that "members of
Black extended families participate in broad support
networks, often exchanging financial aid and an array
of services (e.g., housing, household tasks)" (p. 299).
Unspoken in the offer and acceptance of assistance is
the understanding that those offers will be

reciprocated in the future, whenever the need arises. Hall and King (1982) assert that African American families expect to be called upon and to call upon others in the family to teach, to counsel, to encourage, and to provide financial assistance. "Family members who are homeless or unable to care for themselves because of age, illness, unemployment, and so forth, expect to be taken into the household of a relative on a temporary basis" (p. 540).

Staples (1988b) contends that a decline of the extended family system is one of the major problems facing African American families today. This decline is the result of the increasing urbanization of African American families as they relocate away from kinsmen. Hall and King (1982) assert that many family members may still continue to receive significant aid from relatives even after moving away. Hall and King (1982) call this phenomenon the "subextended family" (p. 540). Chapman (1991) explains the importance of maintaining family relationships, even those that become long distance, when she discusses the importance of family reunions. Chapman states that family reunions are a

"long-standing custom among Southern African Americans"
(p. 8) and are an important conduit for transmitting
cultural information and for relating family history.

Staples (1988b) also asserts that the importance
of the extended family is waning because of changes in
the attitudes of Black youth toward older members of
the family. Many youth have adopted an anti-authority
attitude that makes them considerably less responsive
to the authority, guidance, and knowledge of their
grandparents, parents, and other older family members.

African American Males

A lack of respect for authority seems to be a
stereotypical characteristic bestowed upon many African
Americans, particularly young males. Hill (1988)
expresses concern about the consistent media portrayal
of African American men as "street hustlers, drug
pushers, pimps, delinquents, violent gang members,
incarcerated felons, ex-convicts, and irresponsible
husbands and fathers" (p. 7). Hill (1988) states that
these types of portrayals have made it extremely
difficult for young African American men to develop a
positive conception of male roles within the family and

within the society, and have had a very negative effect
on their self-concepts.

Kunjufu (1985) asserts that many African American
boys, unfortunately, draw their examples of manhood
from the dominant Euro-American culture. They "are
taught to be aggressive, not to cry, show little
emotion and affection toward male children, ignore
health symptoms, and continue to bring home the "bacon"
(p. 23). Hill (1988) states that a common tendency of
African American mothers is to insulate their male
children from the devastating effects of racism by
coddling them or making them overly dependent. In
contrast, Hale-Benson (1982) states that African
American boys are most often given the responsibility
of filling their own economic needs and desires at an
early age. "Most boys by the age of eight have
newspaper routes, grass to cut or some other part time
job" (p. 65) to earn their own spending money or to
make a contribution to the family income.

Socialization of African American males occurs
both in familial and social contexts. It is a
complicated process influenced by many environmental

and interactional factors. Several elements in the socialization process of males may be unique to the African American culture and bear special discussion.

The first of these is an activity called "playing the dozens." Kunjufu (1986) describes the dozens as an activity in which two male opponents duel verbally, making derogatory comments about each other and about each other's families, especially their mothers. A peer audience watches the performance, urging the opponents on, and passing judgement as to whom the ultimate victor is. The dozens is considered to be a rite of manhood for young African American males because it involves the mastery of several skills. First, and most importantly, each boy must strive to maintain control of his emotions and his temper under the onslaught of insults to him and to his mother, to whom he may be very close. Second, while maintaining this emotional control, each boy must be able to "counter with an even more clever slur upon his opponent's mother" (p. 16-17). Kunjufu (1985) contends that this rigid emotional control is a trait that is emphasized in many aspects of the socialization of

African American males. Although "playing the dozens"
is an activity primarily associated with young African
American males, it may also be found in social groups
of other ethnicities, ages and genders.

Hale-Benson (1982) describes two other elements in
the socialization process. The first of those is the
special walk that many African American boys master.
Rhythm in movement is an expression of strength or
weakness within the African American culture. Using
older boys and men in the community for models, African
American boys may create and perfect a distinctive way
of walking and moving their bodies. Hale-Benson (1982)
states that this distinctive walk, usually mastered by
age 8, is often called "the pimp" or the "ditty bop"
(p. 65).

The second element of male socialization discussed
by Hale-Benson (1982) is perhaps familiar to males of
many cultures. In the African American culture
athletic prowess is taught by the peer group with
supplementary help from fathers or other important male
role models. Hale-Benson (1982) asserts that
"competitive sports are very important in Afro-American

culture" (p. 65). Competency in sports helps to assure a boy's status within his peer group and is an important rite of manhood.

Kunjufu (1990) expresses concern over the relatively small number of young black males in college, saying that African American females outnumber African American males by over 210,000. Jackson and Watson (1980) concur, stating that although high school drop-out rates for both African American males and African American females are about 16% in the 14 to 34 year-old age group, African American females are much better represented in institutions of higher education.

African American Females

Jackson and Watson (1989) contend that although highly educated African American women may earn even higher salaries than their white counterparts, the majority of the female African American population makes up the most impoverished racial gender group in the United States. While this statement provides an alarming description of the vast numbers of African American women living in poverty, it is not an accurate reflection of attitudes within the African American

culture toward women working outside their families and homes. O'Hare (1991) asserts that "working women were commonplace in the African American community long before a majority of white women entered the labor force" (p. 23). Hall and King (1982) agree when they state that even the feminist movements have not made major changes in (the) attitudes of African American women toward marriage, divorce and work. "Historically, the black female has been oriented to work and family" (p. 539).

Hale-Benson (1982) contends that African American women have a very strong orientation toward motherhood. She suggests that this orientation may be the result of the responsibilities for siblings and housework many African American girls assume at an early age. Unlike their male counterparts, young African American girls are generally not expected to earn income outside the home. "When girls have jobs, it is usually during adolescence, and they babysit or perform other domestic duties" (p. 66).

According to Hale-Benson (1982), facial beauty, a trait emphasized for females from birth on in the Euro-

American culture, is generally de-emphasized among

girls and women in the African American culture. This

is at least partly because society's standards for

facial beauty are largely based on Euro-American

standards. Instead, style and personal uniqueness are

emphasized for African American females, with

particular attention given to "clothing and the rhythm

with which she walks and dances" (p. 67).

The Role of the African American Church

African American women also play a vital role in

the lives of the community churches. According to

Hale-Benson (1982), African American women participate

in the largest numbers in church services and

activities. Participation in the church may provide

single women with fellowship and adult role models

similar to those in an extended family, as well as

material and human resources essential for the family's

well-being. Kunjufu (1986) asserts that many African

American males grow up believing that church is

primarily for women and attend only because their

mothers require it. Contrary to this belief, however,

Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) contend that "the Black

church continues to hold the allegiance of large numbers of African Americans and exerts great influence over their behavior" (p. 428). For those who take advantage of its offerings, states Hale-Benson (1982), the African American church is the center of social life.

Community outreach is also becoming a major concern of African American churches. Although historically the spiritual anchor for African Americans, the Black church is now "intensifying its role as a major resource for dealing with the social and economic problems of the black poor" (Carnegie, 1988, p.2). Research findings by Billingsley and Caldwell (1991) corroborate this statement. Billingsley and Caldwell interviewed church leaders (primarily senior pastors) to discover their "personal orientation toward the mission of the church" (p. 435). Findings revealed that fully 72% of these church leaders felt that both the religious needs of individual church members and the concerns of the larger community were important. Outreach programs in many African American churches may include activities

for members and nonmembers in child development, youth

service and development, education, family support and

aid, individual adult programs, elderly service and

aid, and community service and development. The

largest number of community outreach programs are

targeted toward children and youth (Billingsley and

Caldwell, 1991). In this manner the African American

church is redefining its traditional role in

maintaining the independence and self-sufficiency of

the Black community.

Conclusion

In summary African American culture may be seen as

a combination of traditional African values and the

surrounding, sometimes dominating, Euro-American

attitudes and beliefs. Although many African Americans

feel torn by the conflicts between the African belief

of group unity and the Euro-American tendency toward

individual competition, extended family networks and

religious institutions enable individuals to maintain

their ethnic identities and function comfortably in the

larger society. These two institutions also offer

significant support and assistance for those within the

community, such as members of female-headed households,
who have unique needs or who lack the necessary
resources.

As a culture, African Americans represent a vital
and dynamic force in American society. Classroom
teachers who learn to value and take advantage of the
assets of this culture will not only enhance the
learning experiences and potential of the African
American children in their classrooms, but will also
make a significant contribution to the multicultural
movement currently taking place in all facets of
education.

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