

## Reading Asante's Myth of *Afrocentricity*: An Ideological Critique

James Palermo  
Buffalo State College

Recently, Afrocentricity has emerged as a key element of multicultural curricula for the schools.<sup>1</sup> The "subject matter of the Afrocentric paradigm is its placement of Africa at the center of any analysis of African history and culture, including the African-American experience."<sup>2</sup> Proponents describe Afrocentricity as "a humanistic philosophy, a scholarly methodology, and a model of practical action"<sup>3</sup>

In this paper I shall examine the Molefi, Kete Asante text *Afrocentricity*, as a curriculum model that powerfully captures the notion of education as political, social, and self-formation. Specifically, *Afrocentricity* is read at three levels as an ideological discourse meant to construct the reader's subjectivity. At level one, I appeal to Levi-Strauss and read the text as a cultural myth. The elements that structure the myth are seen as parts of a sign system. These elements are identified revealing the myth's structure. Level two briefly examines Lacan's psychoanalytic construct *The Imaginary*. The Imaginary previews the child's entrance into the symbolic field of language, culture, and the representation of self. The educational relevance of the Imaginary, and the critical core of my analysis follows Althusser's model of ideology. Level three connects both the Imaginary and Althusser's constructs to critique the myth of Afrocentricity. What is revealed is that Asante's view of Afrocentricity erects a representation of self that is politically imaginary, that is, an image that hides the real alienated conditions of most of Afro-America's material existence.

### LEVEL ONE, AFROCENTRICITY AS MYTH

I shall begin reading the text of *Afrocentricity* as Levi-Strauss reads a cultural artifact. As I have indicated, Asante's text shall be read as a cultural myth. The implications are twofold. The first implication is methodological, the second is definitional. Methodologically, to read the text as a cultural myth means that what is written shall not be taken at face-value. Instead my reading tries to discover the undiscovered, by recovering what is latent in the text"<sup>4</sup> The discovery of these latent meanings, exposes Asante's problematic or conceptual framework. Such an exposure tells us what counts as relevant data. Further, it spells out the forms and conditions within which problems can be posed for Asante. Following Levi-Strauss, I take cultural myth to mean the following:

A) The myth is the culturally sanctioned ground for understanding the world. The mythic ground functions to provide the individual with answers for cultural contradictions and dilemmas.

B) The myth has a narrative with a didactic, moral, and therapeutic message.

The conditions for the reception of the Afrocentric myth are obvious: *Afrocentricity* speaks directly to black America because it appears as the fulfillment of truths long hidden. The reasons? *Afrocentricity* reveals the story of an oppressed

people whose history has been fabricated, whose language has been devalued, whose names have derived from an alien culture and who are today suffering the severe economic exploitation of a capitalist/racist society. Indeed, in these conditions of alienation, the young underschooled, underemployed, black youth must see the mythic ideology of the American Dream as the Great Lie; in its place *Afrocentricity* creates an ideology of hope, telling the reader who s/he is, what s/he can know what s/he must do, and what true history is from an African perspective.

Once again, my critique of Asante's Afrocentric ideology is fundamentally political. The intent is to find answers to the questions: a) How does the Afrocentric myth work educationally as a mechanism of social and self formation? and b) How does the practice of this ideology affect the Afrocentrist politically in the production relationships of work?

Answers to these questions begin by looking at the Afrocentric myth as an ideology or a story that one lives. Such a story is like a religion; that is, it answers the Kantian questions "What can I know?" "What must I do?" and "What can I hope for?" And like a religion, the myth joins one to fellow believers. This group membership is a connection that works to reenforce one's assent to the didactic, moral and therapeutic messages about the world and one's place in it, which the myth delivers. To call Afrocentricity a religion is not hyperbole. Asante himself says: "Afrocentricity can stand its ground among any ideology or religion: Marxism, Islam, Christianity, Buddhism, or Judaism. Your Afrocentricity will emerge in the presence of these other ideologies because it is from you. It is a truth even though it may not be their truth"<sup>5</sup> With these introductory remarks I shall begin to excavate the structure of the Afrocentric religious ideology.

#### READING AFROCENTRICITY AS RELIGIOUS MYTH

The foreword to the *Afrocentricity* text begins with this moral injunction:

the need for an Afrocentric philosophy is so great that it is impossible for me not to insist on every black person reading this book. (Why?)...Afrocentricity resembles the black man, speaks to him, wants for him, what he wants for himself. Dr. Asante's book on Afrocentricity is the next step in a victorious consciousness. It is an answer to the intellectual black who wants to know why and analyze, it is the answer to the pragmatic black who wants to know where is the ritual and the support system and whose god will I be worshipping. It gives the answer to the man and woman...that we must quickly return to our centers for peace in our families.<sup>6</sup>

Later, I will show that the religion-mythic structure of *Afrocentricity* employs a pantheon of prophets, and a revisionist of historiography, a metaphysics and an ethical system. At this point I want only to preview the ways Asante confers upon Afrocentricity the status of religion by introducing the political function of sacred text.

He says, Afrocentricity is the one true religion of Africans world wide, and *Nija-The Way* is its sacred text. Asante's arguments for these claims take this line: "[All] religions represent the deification of someone's nationalism." Language is the vehicle of national cohesion and identity. The language of Afro-Americans is Ebonics (Black English), for Yoruba, the language is Yoruba, for Asante the language would be Twi.<sup>7</sup> But Christianity speaks to believers in the European

tongues and Muslim believers must speak an Arabic tongue. Both religions are contradictions of the lived experience of the Afrocentrist. Asante argues that *Nija*, the sacred text of Afrocentricity and that text alone, speaks to the diaspora of African peoples because it "recounts the collective expression of the world view grounded in the experience of African people. [*Nija*] represents the collective memory of the continent." *Nija* represents a religious commitment to the Afrocentric world view.<sup>8</sup> This religious structure in Afrocentricity gives believers not only a sense of community, it also appears to give them some political control over their lives. I shall argue that this is really an imaginary, ideological definition of the world. To introduce the notion of the Imaginary, I turn now to Lacan.

#### LEVEL TWO, LACAN ON THE IMAGINARY

Lacan is a Freudian revisionist whose work reinterprets the psyche using structuralist methods. My use of Lacan is limited to his construct the Imaginary and is introduced because it is central to Althusser's critique of ideology. Of necessity what follows is a schematized version of the Imaginary; and my point is to outline the *form* of Althusser's argument on the relationship between ideology and the formation of the subject. For Lacan, the formation of the subject has been movements: the pre-Oedipal or Imaginary phase, the Oedipal or Symbolic phase, and the resolution of both movements in the discourse of the unconscious.<sup>9</sup> Lacan begins by paying special attention to what he calls "the Mirror phase" of the Imaginary. The "Mirror phase" describes the earliest stage of Ego formation; that is, of the eight-month-old infant enthralled by the image of his own body which he sees reflected in the mirror. Lacan plays upon the radical unity and opposition contained within the constructs of image and imaginary, showing how both are the common path of conduct in which the Imaginary is substituted for the real. What happens is the systematic misrepresentation of the child to himself, this is an alienation rooted in the child's false belief in his own autonomy. In this illusion, the child sees a gestalt; the image of his body standing erect and moving this way or that, in a play of reflections which he controls with purpose and without hesitation. This gestalt is a lie that the child tells himself; his erect posture and his movements depend upon the adult holding him before the mirror. But this illusion of his autonomous body image is so absolute that the child's consciousness pushes aside even the physical presence of the adult. Essentially this play of the body image turns reality upside down: the child is caught up by the illusion of an autonomous double; this is the Imaginary self. To call this construction Imaginary is to recognize that self understanding is mediated by the image presented to others. Ironically, it is the others who mirror, define and shape that image. But the point is that for the child the Imaginary and the real become equivalents. Now, obviously this child is his own body and not his image. But the crucial point is that because his body is visible to others, a shift in conduct occurs from "the lived body to the visible body." From the perspective of the child's consciousness a "new content and new narcissistic function makes possible a sort of alienation. [Thus, the child believes] I am no longer what I felt myself immediately to be; I am the image of myself offered by the mirror, an ideal, fictitious, imaginary me which the specular image is outline."<sup>10</sup> Later, I will show the *form* of this psychological process is repeated with a new content as Althusser

adapts the Imaginary to decipher the politics of the subject constructed in and by ideological practices. With this preliminary data regarding myth, religion and the Imaginary in place, I want to turn now to Althusser's analysis of ideology and its application in the critique of the Afrocentrist model.

#### ALTHUSSER ON IDEOLOGY

Althusser is a neo-Marxist who uncovers the material role of ideology in the exploitative structures of capitalist economy. And, in the largest sense he uses the term ideology to mean a material, political, psychological apperceptive ground which is internalized by the oppressed and delivers to them a distorted picture of the real conditions of their existence. Ideology is effective whenever those who are exploited believe either nothing can be done to change their lives or worse, that they actually have control over their lives and their existence is not one of alienation.

To locate the ideological apparatus of the capitalist economy, Althusser begins by asking "how does the capitalist economy sustain itself? More specifically, what conditions allow capitalism to continue? And, how does the State legitimize, generate, and continuously replace an alienated labor force?" He finds answers located in the specific relations between "the *infrastructure*, or economic base (the 'unity' of the productive forces and the relations of production) and the *superstructure*, which itself contains two 'levels'...the politico-legal (Law and the State) and ideology (the different ideologies, religious, ethical Legal, political, etc.)."<sup>11</sup> My analysis focuses on the superstructure for reasons that will become apparent. The work of the superstructure or those institutions which Althusser identifies as the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) is not one of physical repression. The ISA is not itself the economic base. The ISA instead is a cultural mechanism of social formation: ie., institutions within the ISA mediate, define and legitimize the class system. Following this definition of the ISA, the school then is a strategic institution in the superstructure; that is, an institution whose main task is to prepare future workers by inculcating the capitalist ethos in the young.

My analysis will offer an ironic variation on this theme. I shall argue that the Afrocentric myth when used in the classroom as the core of the curriculum takes on the function of the superstructure as readily as the traditional classroom alluded to above. Put differently, the child who introjects the Afrocentric myth creates a self with a politically false and distorted view of the world. Adopting Lacan's work, Althusser calls this ideological deception the Imaginary. He means that the exploited classes live out an Imaginary relationship with the real conditions of their existence. In both the Afrocentric and the traditional school, the mechanism of the Imaginary is a belief system that works like a religion complete with practices and rituals that form the child-subject. The linchpin in this system is what Althusser calls interpellation. More on the Imaginary and interpellation will follow later.

However, before exposing how the school operates as an ISA, a prior question must be resolved. Namely, "how does the state immediately produce the labor power needed to reproduce itself?" Althusser's answer and the key to understanding alienated labor is wages. Further, he inserts the wage/labor, power/value equation into historical context. Wages constitute:

[The] wherewithal [sufficient] to pay for housing, food and clothing...is doubly historical in that it is not defined by the historical needs of the working class "recognized" by the capitalist class, but by the historical needs imposed by the proletarian class struggle (a double class struggle: against the lengthening of the working day and against the reduction of wages).<sup>12</sup>

Obviously, the discussion of wages and labor power are central to the marxist critique of the capitalism and the class division between the haves and the havenots. I highlight it for two reasons. First, this crucial insight is the foundation upon which Althusser builds his critique. And second, it similarly is crucial for my uses: As he embraces the wage-labor capitalist equation so also Asante explicitly rejects the Marxist analysis. But as Asante presents the wage as an end both to be hoped for and to worked for, his political critique of American culture is defanged. Asante at best can instill only black pride. The world stays as it is.

In Asante's words "one of the most important economic rights in the coming decades will be the right to a salary. [And] We shall have to fight the contest for salaries. It is increasingly true with whites also that the security of salary is more important than the right to real estate."<sup>13</sup> As must be obvious, Asante rejects Marx. Indeed, Asante explicitly characterizes Marx as a Eurocentric materialist<sup>14</sup> whose analyses spoke about class conflict while neglecting white racism<sup>15</sup> and ignoring the unique history of the African peoples. Moreover, in Asante's view Marx reduced the meaning of labor to manual labor and offered an eschatology which promised the victory of the working class.<sup>16</sup> Asante says, Afrocentricity rejects these views; and instead it values the labor of thinkers, culture, and spirituality. [Sic] indeed, from Asante's perspective, "Marxism explains European history from a Eurocentric view; it does not explain African culture." (Moreover, the Afrocentric eschatology is non material) a "history of harmony, stemming from a strong sense of God-consciousness in nature and each other."<sup>17</sup>

These remarks are crucial for a number of reasons: Not only is Marx's critique of culture (that is, the Superstructure) misunderstood; the centrality of wages as the engine in the reproduction of labor power is turned upside down; and we have previewed the Alpha and the Omega of Afrocentricity in the spiritualism of what Asante calls Afro-collective consciousness. With this connection of the economic base to the superstructure in mind, I shall now turn to Althusser's description of the school's functions within the ISA, then making connections between the Afrocentric model and the ISA.

#### THE SCHOOL AS ISA

To put things in order, the first question to be answered is, "What are the school's prime ideological functions?" Remembering that the dominant ideology is usually not recognized (that is, ideology defines the world "naturally" as the normal state of affairs or the taken for granted), Althusser speaks about the school on two levels.

On the surface, the school functions to teach subject matter and to prepare students for careers. But Althusser says, the school's deep functions within the ISA are of transmitting subject-matter wrapped in the ruling ideology and to operate as a social sorting mechanism. Specifically, What is learned are the basic subjects,

(language, arithmetic, natural history, the sciences, literature) or simply the ruling ideology in its pure state.<sup>18</sup> The ruling ideology is a hidden agenda secreted within the following disciplines: ethics, civics, and philosophy. Having inculcated these foundational studies as the core of the child's social formation, the school's most powerful intervention next occurs when the child reaches age sixteen (in the USA this social milestone is usually highschool graduation). At this time, the school's sorting function is most explicit. Here, the child's history of "scholastic adaptation" determines life chances. Althusser's description is that of a socio-economic Matterhorn with increasingly more selective and prestigious positions nearer the summit. Winners and losers alike are provided with a specialized ideology "which suits the role it has to fulfill in class society."<sup>19</sup>

Proportionally "a huge mass of children are ejected into production...another portion carries on...until it falls by the wayside [these are] petty bourgeois of all kinds." The portion that survives and reaches the summit are "the agents of exploitation (capitalists, managers), the agents of repression (soldiers, policemen, politicians, administrators, etc.) and the professional ideologist (priests of all sorts, most of whom are convinced 'laymen')." <sup>20</sup> The school then, reproduces the relations of the exploited to exploiters repeating the capitalist relations of production, and inculcating within the child the ideology of the ruling class wrapped up in an apprenticeship with a variety of know-how knowledge.

Each class has an ideology specific role: the exploited have... a highly developed professional, ethical, civic, national, and a political consciousness; the role of the agent of exploitation (ability to give workers orders and to speak to them...that of the professional ideologist [has the] (ability to treat consciousness with the respect, that is with the contempt, blackmail demagoguery they deserve, adapted to the accents of Morality, of Virtue, of Transcendence, of the Nation).<sup>21</sup>

Of course, for most students and teachers, none of this is obvious because the school is presented as ideology free. That is, the school is to place where teachers respect the "conscience" and freedom of those entrusted to them. Repeating the traditional school's work as an ISA, the Afrocentric model depicts power in society according to a three term hierarchical division of intelligence. Asante says "three types of intelligence exist in the world: Creative intelligence, Recreative intelligence, and Consumer intelligence."<sup>22</sup> These distinctions essentially specify the roles of those whose work is either to create, promulgate or receive, the Afrocentric ideology. Creative intelligence (the most valuable type of intelligence) is that which communicates with the whole earth by remaining open to associations, ideas, spaces, possibilities. [Creative intellects are] "disciplined [by] attitudes rooted in Afrocentric images and symbols."<sup>23</sup> Examples include Elijah Muhammad, Karenga, and King. Recreative intellectuals: poets, scholars, teachers, artists have the task of propagating the vision of creative intellectuals. Examples include: Malcolm X, Halisi, Baraka, Abernathy, and Jackson. But, the majority (by nature) are most suited as Consumer intelligence types, [people] who neither create nor re-create but rather consume and utilize ideas.<sup>24</sup>

Curiously, no mention of the *socio-economic divisions* implied in this structure are mentioned. Rather, these separations are leveled out in a unified, organic culture

of Afrocentrism. Indeed, Afrocentrism is all embracing and sanctified for "all intelligence is accepted as containing the God-force."<sup>25</sup>

To summarize the argument thus far, reconsider the question "How does the Afrocentric myth/curriculum work as a part of the ISA? The answers: First, Afrocentrism tacitly accepts the material and political conditions of capitalism by setting down wages as the central economic reward. Second, Afrocentrism tacitly accepts the class structure of capitalism by promoting the divisions in society as simply manifestations of differing kinds of intelligence. Third, Afrocentrism is a quasi-religion. That is, Afrocentrism is a belief system whose practitioners are sanctified by the Afrocentric God-force. But Afrocentricity as a religion works towards a spiritual end that does not change the believer's socio-material conditions. Indeed, the change that appears, in the believer's material existence, I will show is an Imaginary change.

#### AFROCENTRICITY: THE RELIGION

To this point I have asserted that Afrocentricity is a myth with a message delivered as a religion. The most important evidence cited described the *Nija* as Afrocentrism's sacred text. But as I earlier suggested, my use of the term religion also includes a pantheon of prophets and "saints," a revision of history, a metaphysics and an ethical system. Evidence for these claims begins with a consideration of Afrocentricity's holy figures.

The sainted in the Afrocentric Pantheon range from Afro-American religious and political personages to Egyptian and Nubian figures. Notable Afro-Americans here include: Martin Luther King, W.E.B. DuBois, Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm X. But Asante counts as most visionary, Marcus Garvey, a man whose political program articulated cultural and national liberation for Afro-Americans. Spiritual models of Afrocentricity are found in the lives of Piankhy, Nzingha, Tutankhamun, and Tinubu," as well as "ancient African priests in Egypt, Yoruba priests in Nigeria, and the Macumba priestesses of Brazil."<sup>26</sup> The prophets of Afrocentricity are Karenga and Asante himself. Speaking about the deliverance of the word, to himself, Asante quotes from the *Nija*. "This is the Way that came to Molefi in America; The Way that came to me is how it is and how it must be for the Abibi man."<sup>27</sup>

Asante locates the tainted history of the diasporan black people in the politicization of the concept of race and white historiography. Race is an ideological construct, a weapon with neither biological nor anthropological validity used to legitimize the white man's oppression of the black. Indeed, white historiography has incorporated a European ethnocentrism that has distorted the truth of human history and robbed the black African of a true identity. Asante's responses to this racism appeals to Diopian historiography; his intent is to revise the story of the black African in such a way that a new sense of subjectivity will be constructed within the individual that comes through a collective Afrocentric consciousness shared by all members of the African diaspora worldwide.<sup>28</sup>

He claims this "universal African consciousness is an awareness of our collective history and future";<sup>29</sup> that is, a consciousness of a "group of people thinking in the same general direction" that resurrects the origins of civilization in

the ancient Egyptians — a black people. Asante says: “Irrespective of present locations the roots of all African people go back to East Africa, the cradle of human history. We do not find the Hebrews or those related to them until thousands of years after the ancient Egyptians (Africans) and Nubians (Africans) had appeared.”<sup>30</sup> Indeed, “Eurocentric history defines the origin of human Western civilizations Africans gave the world Ethiopia, Nubia, Egypt, Cush...(And it is from these civilizations that) medicine, science, the concept of monarchies and divine-kingships, (as well as)...an Almighty God” have their source.<sup>31</sup>

Bound up with the sacred text of the *Nija*, the stories of the prophets and the revisionist of historiography, Afrocentricity is a metaphysical principle or Spirit which is unfolding. The elements of Afrocentric Spirit are a fusion of nature in the bicameral mind or God force, historical Africa and the present technicultural, African American.<sup>32</sup> Asante claims, the God-force speaks to all Africans directly in their own language,<sup>33</sup> and is everywhere present<sup>34</sup> as the continuum of the spirit and matter. In this view, natural things such as trees have essences, there is no absolute distinction between mind and matter and all things ultimately are a part of a spiritual core.<sup>35</sup> But, the fullness of the Spirit is yet to come with the rise (of the collective Afro-consciousness).<sup>36</sup> This collective consciousness of the Spirit grows toward a liberation of the African diaspora which finds itself at the center of post-modern history.<sup>37</sup>

As I have already shown, Afrocentricity combines a world view, a political program, and an eschatology aimed at producing a new Afro-centric subjectivity. The mechanism of this identity construction is a religio-ethical system that defines correct behavior. Discussion of the Afrocentric religio-ethical system is crucial because it reveals the construction of the Afrocentric subject at two levels: the totality or collective consciousness that is Spirit, and the life of the individual Afrocentric believer. Spirit is the totality because it embraces things: the *Nija* text, and revisionist history, behaviors: Nija rituals, political actions, ethical imperatives, and most especially, people who collectively identify themselves as Afrocentrists.<sup>38</sup> To make sense of the relationship of collective consciousness and the ethical system of Afrocentricity, things have to be put into political context. To that end, I shall return to Althusser's descriptions of ideology paying special attention to the dynamics of the religious formation of the individual subject.

#### ALTHUSSER ON SOCIAL/SELF FORMATION

Althusser specifies one institutional facet of the work of ideology in the functions of the Church. Specifically the behaviors of the believer are traced to an ultimate source in ideology. The key to all of this is the connection between the believer's ideas, his practices, church rituals, and the common source of each of these elements in ideology. To flesh out the argument I will begin with the question:

What are the relationships between the believer's ideas about self and religion? Put differently, what follows from the believer's belief? Althusser says that the individual thinks his religious belief has a spiritual source. Further, this is a belief that s/he (apparently) freely forms. But, true belief entails specific consequences. The individual in question, “behaves in such and such a way, adopts such and such

a practical attitude...participates in certain regular practices which are those of the ideological apparatus on which depend the ideas which he has...freely chosen."<sup>39</sup>

Althusser's examples cite behaviors predicated upon belief; that is the individual goes to Church, "prays, confesses, does penance."<sup>40</sup> Thus, the believer's belief in his/her ideas (which s/he thinks s/he freely accepts) demands that s/he act accordingly. If what s/he believes and what s/he does are not one and the same, then s/he appears to act upon other ideas s/he has in his/her head. In religious terms such actions are morally culpable as: "inconsistent, or cynical or perverse." On the other hand, the fact that the individual's living faith is embodied in precise material actions is taken seriously, means we can see a concrete expression of the Imaginary.

Althusser argues that the Imaginary here derives from the believer's false belief that his/her ideas are spiritual and that s/he is their source. In fact: 1) these ideas stem from a material source, the institution of the church; 2) the believer's belief is both verified and reflected in certain practices that are inserted in church rituals: and the believer acts in so far as he is acted upon by the institution, 3) these actions/practices rebound to the individual publicly naming him as a believer. The believer in Lacan's terms becomes a specular self reflecting the institution. This act of public verification in which the individual becomes the public specular subject of ideology Althusser calls interpellation.

#### ALTHUSSER ON INTERPELLATION

Interpellation records the transformation of the individual into the new subjectivity of the system. The process is dialectical: the system (church/school or other ideological institution) recognizes the individual, who now gains identity as a concrete subject. Althusser compares the experience to that of hailing someone in the street. In his example someone "calls to another: "Hey, you there!" The individual hailed, turns around and with this physical conversion becomes a subject. Why? Because he has recognized that the hail was really addressed to him, and that it was *really him* who was hailed."<sup>41</sup>

The function of this interpellation is to provide the individual with a personal identity that derives from his/her relationship to the institution. The interpellated individual now is a subject; one, who occupies a certain place in the world; one, who obtains recognition through his practices; and one who gains subjectivity as s/he mirrors an Absolute Subject larger than himself.

For purposes of clarity this can be set down as an equation; individual subject = lower case s. Absolute subject = uppercase S. The individual interpellated becomes a subject s out of his material relationship to an absolute other subject S, (God is Althusser's religion example). The new identity of the interpellated, specular subject is s=S=s.

My last concern is to develop the implications of this analysis for the Afrocentric model.

#### AFROCENTRISM AND THE SUBJECT

Throughout the text Asante has defined the totality of Afrocentrism as God, as the collective consciousness, the bicameral mind or the Spirit unfolding in time. The

subject who embraces Afrocentricity is at once: accepting the Spirit, understanding the world through a certain apperceptive ground, obeying certain moral imperatives and creating a new self. Following Althusser, this ideological mechanism can be treated as a relationship between the Spirit/Subject (S) and the subject/interpellated individual or true Afrocentrist believer (s).

On the other hand, the true believer whose behaviors are guided by the Afrocentrist ideology not only is creating a personal subjectivity s, s/he is also recreating the proper Afrocentrist collective consciousness S. But the test of Afrocentrism is correct behavior founded upon correct understanding.

Now, earlier I argued that the Afrocentric ethical system concretizes answers to the questions: "What must I do?" "What can I hope for?" Since, the Afrocentric ethical system is also a political reality as well, it appears easier to sort it out, if it is treated as a mechanism with an apperceptive ground and a set of ethical imperatives. The apperceptive ground of Afrocentricity embraces everything that is good and true; and everything that can be known about the self s, and world through the medium of African culture and toward the realization of collective consciousness, S. Asante says,

All political, artistic, economic and aesthetic issues are connected to the context of Afrocentric knowledge. [This includes] everything you do, all that you are [or] will become. [Anyone who is beyond the pale]...a non-Afrocentric person [is one who] operates in a manner that is negatively predictable. The person's images, symbols, lifestyles, and manners are contradictory and thereby destructive to personal and collective growth and development....[Again and again, the point to be remembered is]...there can be no effective discussion of a united front...until we come to terms with the collective consciousness (S). For the believer the imperative is clear....you are its ultimate test. You test its authenticity by incorporating it into your behavior...it becomes your life because everything you do, it is.<sup>42</sup>

If the test of faith is in the willingness to obey a moral imperative, then a crucial Afrocentric reality test is whether the individual is willing to dedicate his/her life to the fulfillment of Afrocentricism. This means that the true believer must constantly be on guard, examining his/her own actions and the actions of others. Asante says: "Deviations [from Afrocentrism] are intentional or unintentional misapplications of symbols and images which subvert the collective consciousness of our people."<sup>43</sup> All that anyone can do, know, or hope for must be found in Afrocentrism. This apperceptive ground puts an ideological glaze on the most mundane experiences from watching television to flying in an airplane. Even temporal experience is affected. That is, if someone were to ask "what time is it?" The complete answer must be placed in Afrocentric context: Is the question about the ordinary time of day? That is, "it's 8 o'clock?" Or is the question about the fulfillment of Afrocentric Spirit on earth, that is, "nation time?"

Indeed, this is a demanding leap of faith, with an epistemology whose logic Asante says, "is based upon the ever present reality of ourselves...deviations (from this faith) lead to the fog which surrounds those who wander from their centers."<sup>44</sup> Such a logic is, Asante claims, immutable, non-contradictory, and consolidating. I have argued it is all of these qualities because it is a logic founded upon the egocentric predicament of the Imaginary. Put differently, Afrocentrism attempts to

set down the limits and conditions of what the true believer can know about the world with Afrocentrism at its center.

Thus, the Afrocentrist who truly believes, creates a new individual subjectivity, *s*. This new *S* comes into being subjected to and circumscribed by the Afrocentric collective consciousness *S*. At the same time, *s* sustains *S* through this change of identity. In sum, this acceptance of Afrocentricity reflects a political commitment, a moral direction and a statement about psychological health. Each of the above cohere in the identity of the new Afrocentric subject = *S* + *s*. But with all of these changes, the material-political existence of Afro-Americans who are without privilege remains unchanged.

#### CONCLUSION

My analysis of the Afrocentric curricular model has attempted to show that Afrocentricity reenforces the Afro-American's alienation. Evidence adduced coupled the Afrocentric curricular model to the Ideological State Apparatus. The medium of this ideology was Afrocentricity as a religious myth. Appealing first to the Imaginary construct found in Lacan, the work of the Imaginary was found in the infant's false belief in his own autonomy. The latter was reinforced by a specular image which was a lie the child accepted. Although the content changed, the Imaginary was seen again in the Afrocentric myth. The myth provided the believer a new but false sense of autonomy. The Afrocentric myth was then treated as a religion having a sacred text, a history, prophets, saints, rituals, an ethical system, and a metaphysics. Each of these elements was seen as operative in creating the Afrocentric subject. Afrocentrism appears to improve the lot of the true believer, that is a new identity is forged, pride in oneself is restored and a better understanding of the world is developed. But once again my conclusion is that these conditions are politically Imaginary. Afrocentrism is an economic system that embraces wage-value and of consequence class divisions. Afrocentrism is an acritical ideology which describes the socioeconomic relationships in new ways. The fact is that the world remains unchanged, and for most Afro-Americans without privilege, conditions of alienation are reinforced.

But none of this should be taken to mean that I reject muticultural studies written from an African perspective. The need is for such a curriculum to be developed from a politically realistic view.

---

1. From the various models of Afrocentricity, Molefi K. Asante's paradigm was chosen for several reasons: his work is comprehensive, widely disseminated, and easily read by a lay public.

2. Bayo Oyeade, "African Studies and the Afrocentric Paradigm: A Critique," *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 2 (1990): 233

3. Abu Shardow Abarry, "Afrocentricity Introduction," *Journal of Black Studies* 21, no. 2 (1990): 200.

4. Miriam Glucksman, *Structuralist Analysis in Contemporary Social Thought* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974), 4.

5. Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1988).

6. *Ibid.*, viii.

7. *Ibid.*, 4.

8. Ibid., 53.
9. See Jacques Lacan, *ECRITS* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1977).
10. Jacques Lacan, "Le Stade due miroir comme formateur dufonction due je," *Revue Francaise de Psychanalyse* 13, no. 4 (October-December 1949): 449-55.
11. Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 134.
12. Ibid., 131.
13. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 98.
14. Ibid., 16.
15. Ibid., 33.
16. Ibid., 80.
17. Ibid.
18. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 135.
19. Ibid., 155.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 162.
22. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 37.
23. Ibid.
24. Ibid., 38.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid., 53.
27. Ibid., 100.
28. Ibid., 19, 48, 51, 106.
29. Ibid., 25.
30. Ibid., 7.
31. Ibid., 39.
32. Ibid., viii.
33. Ibid., 4.
34. Ibid., 5.
35. Ibid., 81.
36. Ibid., 29.
37. Ibid., 6.
38. Ibid., 31.
39. Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy*, 167.
40. Ibid.
41. Ibid., 178.
42. Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 66.
43. Ibid., 86.
44. Ibid., 87.