AFRICAN WOMANISM[1]
An Afrocentric Theory

NAH DOVE
Temple University

BACKGROUND

This article evolves from my study (see Dove, 1993, 1996) of the life herstories[2] of African mothers who send their children to culturally affirming schools. I focus on conceptualizing and defining the racialization of the world through European domination/White supremacy. In doing this work, I find it impossible to ignore the specificity of the oppression of African women living in male-centered Western society. My original study included 21 herstories. A significant number of these mothers had experienced negative relationships with men who played critical roles in their lives. In what seemed to be a paradox, these women neither hated nor separated themselves from men. To the contrary, those who had sons, for instance, recognized their responsibilities to their sons. They feared for their sons' survival and for the safety of African men living under White supremacy. They wanted their sons to be fearless and to respect women. To be true to their feelings required that I not only use their words to tell their stories but develop a culturally based theory that could be sensitive to their experiences as African women.

Theories pertaining to the particularized nature of African women's experiences have largely been inadequate. Those related to the feminist tradition, both White and Black, have critiqued the social conditions of women within Europeanized societies and sought solutions within European paradigms. In a departure from this pattern, Hudson-Weems's (1993) Africana womanist theory critically examines the limitations of feminist theory and helps to

explain, comprehensively, the ideas and activism of some African women who have contributed to womanist theory from differing ideological perspectives. In this way, she begins the construction of an Afrocentric paradigm that can embrace the activism of all African women, recognized or ignored, who have struggled to liberate African people on a global scale.

My theoretical perspective accepts Hudson-Weems's (1993) invaluable analysis. My contribution is to further emphasize the concept of culture as a tool of analysis for understanding the nature of African women's experiences. I specifically address culture as a weapon of resistance and as a basis for defining a new world order. I emphasize the validity of the experiences of mothers, who look to their re-Africanization[3] as the solution to challenging alien social structures and inappropriate values and behaviors among African women and men. In light of this, I use the term *African*[4] to define African people and their diaspora because there is a belief that we, despite our different experiences, are linked to our African cultural memory and spirituality and may at any time become conscious of its significance to our Africanness and future. Furthermore, my intention is to add credence to the Afrocentric perspective (Asante, 1980) by highlighting African womanist theory as a central component to the construction of African worldview.

INTRODUCTION

To bring clarity to the impact of European cultural oppression as a mental, spiritual, physical, and material reality, it is no longer plausible to define ourselves based on the Eurocentric concept of race—the Black, Brown, Yellow, Red, and White. The White race, recognized as the most powerful, militarily and economically, essentially controls, directs, and manages, through the structure of capitalism, the world's resources, including the energies of the peoples. However, as a European institution structured to maintain the interests of Western development, it may also be defined as White supremacy. The use of a cultural analysis enables one to trace the social and ideological construction of race, gender, and class

structures to their European antecedents. At the same time, it becomes evident that these structures' exploitative characteristics demonstrate their centrality to the operation of Europeanized societies and the process of Europeanizing societies. Although there is a recognition of the complex interplay among these unequal and unethical power relations, primacy is given to race as a social construct because racist oppression/White supremacy for African women, men, and children takes precedence over and affects the natures of gender and class oppressions. However, it will be also argued that European patriarchy underlies the Western social inequalities that affect African women and men in equally perverse ways.

A CLASH OF CULTURAL INTERESTS

What was the relationship between European and African people prior to and during the invasion of Africa? What effect did the invasions of Africa have on African people? What were the contributing factors that aided Europeans in their attempt to conquer the world? These questions will be answered, in part at least. Underpinning the conceptual framework of this work is the belief that a clash of cultures between European and African people was instrumental in facilitating the European domination of Africa and her people. Importantly, although this focus is on the African experience, there is the recognition that the European domination has altered and often destroyed cultural groups other than that of the African people.

As Cheikh Anta Diop (1955/1974, 1959/1990, 1981/1991a, 1991b) and others have shown, Africa is the cradle of human civilization and therefore culture. Despite this fact, racist scholars have long since denied the connection between European and African civilization. However, as recently as 1995, bone tools dating 90,000 years old, found in Zaire (the Democratic Republic of the Congo), challenge the belief that Europe was the home of modern humans. These data show that Africa was the home of people whose tools were advanced some 50,000 years before those

of Europe (Yellen, Brooks, Cornelissen, Mehlman, & Stewart, 1995). Although this knowledge may have shaken the foundations of White supremacist beliefs, it is not new to some Europeans and African-centered thinkers whose scientific research has focused on Kemet (ancient Egypt) as a major center of African culture that grew out of central Africa and influenced the West.[5] Their discovery is that much of the knowledge of the technology, philosophy, writing, spirituality, health care, schooling, and education from ancient Africa has influenced the development of what the West believes is its "modern" world. European cultural thought, however, has denied the relationship between Africa and Europe, and has fabricated a belief that the modern world has no basis in the knowledge of the ancients. In this way, the prevention of access to benefits accrued within the modern world can be justified. Although it may be true that ancient African women and men could never have designed a global social order of this type (based on what we know or are learning of our ancestors' principled spiritual beliefs), nonetheless, African ideas have been imperialized to serve a European rationale.

For the purpose of understanding the significance of this condition, I use Diop's (1959/1990) analysis of how these two major cultural groups, one an outgrowth of the other, manifest as antithetical entities. Diop develops the concept of cultural unity in his examination of the genesis of African and Indo-Aryan or Indo-European culture. The idea that it is possible to trace Africa-wide similitude among institutional systems challenges contemporary Eurocentric arguments that claim that Africa is so diverse that cultural unity cannot be found as a social reality. Gyekye (1995), who argues that there is an African philosophical expressiveness that is grounded culturally in Africa, relates this European notion of African differentiation to an "exaggerated diversity" created by the European "invention of Africa" (p. xxiv). From an Afrocentric perspective, there is a recognition of the diversity among African ethnicities; however, diversity does not preclude sameness. In this light, one can only marvel at how European ethnicities were able to come together as a critical cultural mass to procure Africa from a people whom they claim today have few similarities. It is evident

that the planning and executing of the conquest of Africa and its people was undergirded by a general European belief that African people were very much alike. This belief was so prevalent that it manifested in well-documented data that attempted to prove the cultural, genetic, psychological, and mental inferiority of African people through scientific racism. Moreover, such ideas were supported by and were fed into the academic world through fields such as history, biology, sociology, anthropology, psychology, and education (see Dove, 1990, 1993). At that time, it seemed politically expedient to support this idea to justify the subjection of African women, men, and children to analogous forms of barbarian treatment under the auspices of European domination. Today, it is expedient to deny the earlier claim of cultural unity because this concept, retained in the minds of African people who are challenging academic racism and scholastic dishonesty, has taken on a new meaning. It poses a threat to the fundamental doctrine of White supremacy within the ivory tower.

The concept of cultural unity is the bedrock of the more recent academic movement in the development of African-centered and/or Afrocentric thinking that reclaims and reconstructs an African worldview as central to the renovation of African values and beliefs and the restoration of Africa and her people (Shujaa, 1996). This assertion does not preclude the works of great thinkers or the ideas of social activists who were for centuries, prior to Diop, aware of the role of Africa and her people before European conquest. Much free thinking about the greatness of Africa and her people has taken place outside the academic world (Dove, 1996). Importantly, cultural unity highlights the intergenerational transmission of values and beliefs that takes place despite and regardless of an academic consciousness of Africanity. Awareness of this ongoing process may allow one to understand the link between the source of these ideas and the academic validation of them. The monumental research of Chancellor Williams (1987) adds credence to this concept. He found that all over Africa a single constitutional system existed as though African people, regardless of differing social patterns, lived under one government. His study of continentalwide social and economic systems throughout history revealed "the same

overall patterns of unity and sameness of all fundamental institu-
tions" (p. 21). The earlier comparative cultural study of Herskovits
(1958/1990), carried out in 1958, although methodologically inclu-
sive of Eurocentric values, provides conclusive evidence of Afri-
canisms[6] among differing nations in Africa as well as African
people living in the Americas. The more contemporary works of
Holloway (1990) and Asante and Welsh Asante (1990) and others
serve to support such assertions. Cultural unity as a concept enables
one to understand how Europeans collaborated despite ethnic or
national differences to enforce their supremacy over the world. At
the same time, one may understand how African people were able
to survive that imposition and act continually to liberate themselves
from it.

To develop the clash of cultures concept, I use Diop's
(1959/1990) cradle theory. He argues that two distinct cradles of
civilization—the southern cradle is Africa, and the northern cradle
is Europe—created modes of societal structures almost antithetical
to each other. Africa, where humanity began, produced matriarchal
societies. Over time, the migration of peoples to the northern clime
produced patriarchal male-centered societies. Diop challenges
European evolutionist theories that claim that matriarchy is an
inferior stage in human development and social organization. Quite
simply, he attributes matriarchy to an agrarian lifestyle in a climate
of abundance and patriarchy to nomadic traditions arising from
harsh environments. The concept of matriarchy highlights the
complementarity aspect of the female-male relationship or the
nature of the feminine and masculine in all forms of life, which is
understood as nonhierarchical. Both the woman and the man work
together in all areas of social organization. The woman is revered
in her role as the mother who is the bringer of life, the conduit for
the spiritual regeneration of the ancestors, the bearer of culture, and
the center of social organization.

The role of motherhood or mothering is not confined to mothers
or women, even in the contemporary conditions. As Tedla (1995)
explains, the concept of mother transcends gender and blood
relations. A family member or friend who has been kind and caring
can be said to be one's mother. It is an honor to have such a title

bestowed upon one (p. 61). Values of this nature have been critical to the survival of African people during the protracted and continuing holocaust. Motherhood, thus, depicts the nature of the communal responsibilities involved in the raising of children and the caring of others. However, although the role of women and mothering in the process of reproduction is critical to the continuation of any society and culture, in a patriarchal society, this role is not ascribed with the value that it bears in a matriarchal society.

In the European context, as Diop (1959/1990) explains, the woman is considered little more than

> a burden that the man dragged behind him. Outside her function of child-bearing, her role in nomadic society is nil. . . . Having a smaller economic value, it is she who must leave her clan to join that of her husband, contrary to the matriarchal custom which demands the opposite. (p. 29)

The differences that arise from these two cultural orientations are significant. The debasement of women in one culture and the respect for women in the other are distinctions that should not be ignored when analyzing the contemporary difficulties for African people, especially African women living in Western-oriented societies.

When viewed as a spiritual entity, matriarchal values are an important component in the relationship between social structure and the spiritual world. Stone's (1976) investigation into the devaluation of women in Western society focuses on religion as an instrument of this oppression. She sought to discover how and why the ancient worship of or, rather, reverence for the goddess and female deities became subjugated or even destroyed and replaced by the worship of God as a male. Although Stone does not refer to Diop's work, first published in English in 1963, her research is illuminated by his cradle theory and his cultural unity concept. Although the southern and northern cradles of civilization are given prominence in Diop's (1959/1990) theoretical analysis of cultural distinctions, he also refers to a third cradle: the zone of confluence where these two cradles meet. One such area includes what we now refer to as the Middle East, which was once populated by African

people. Here, peoples migrating from the northern cradle arrived and stayed in the terrain of the southern cradle. Over time, this essentially Indo-European invasion and conquest of African peoples resulted in the cultural and genetic amalgamation that produced the peoples to whom we refer, racially, as Semitic. Linguistically, they constitute Arabic and Hebraic, whereas religiously, they are Islamic, Judaic, and Christian. It is through the imposition of these male-centered religions, according to Stone (1976), that the earlier (southern cradle) reverence for the female goddess was eventually destroyed.

Like Diop (1959/1990), Stone (1976) views the Indo-European conquest of the Middle East, particularly of ancient Palestine, as that of patriarchy over matriarchy or the process of male domination over female power. With reference to the Judaic-Christian Bible story of creation, Stone notes how the debasement of the woman is mythologized through the story of Eve, the mother of creation. Eve is responsible for the fall of humanity from the grace of God and the Garden of Eden. It is she who works against God and tempts the man Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit. In this way, humanity is born into perpetual sin. According to Stone, this story is an integral part of the contemporary European belief system. As with Christianity, Islam, in the attempt to destroy the reverence for the goddess, viewed this spiritual system as pagan. She quotes from the Koran, " 'Allah will not tolerate idolatry. . . . The pagans pray to females' " (p. xviii). In this light, the domination of women by men may be seen as morally essential.

Stone's (1976) important findings uncover the matriarchal (African) roots of Semitic/Middle Eastern and African culture. Her intention is to link the contemporary status of women in Western society to the conquest of women and the continuing subversion of women's power through religion. However, her analysis lacks a clear cultural or even racial analysis in that the conquest of matriarchy by patriarchy may also be viewed as the conquest of African women, children, and men by Europeans. In addition, Diop's (1959/1990) definition of matriarchal culture and society as one based on reciprocal, complementary, and therefore nonhierarchical relationships does not suggest that women were at one time superior

to men, as Stone (1976) implies. Rather, Diop (1959/1990) states that a "matriarchal regime, far from being imposed on man by circumstances independent of his will, is accepted and defended by him" (p. 120). Thus, one may glean from these studies that patriarchy produces and perpetuates an imbalance in female-male relations that has had far-reaching and negative consequences in every aspect of life within the contemporary world.

Diop's (1955/1974, 1959/1990, 1981/1991a, 1991b) critical contribution to African womanist theory leads us to surmise that the conquests of Africa by Europeans from antiquity until the present may be viewed as conquests of matriarchy by patriarchy. The domination of African women, men, and children by European women, men, and children leads to the potential subjugation of African women by White men and women, as well as by African men. In this light, it is possible to understand how the imposition of Western values on African people's more egalitarian female-male relations is so insidious, especially when humanity is required to view this condition as progressive, universal, and natural.

THE ROOTS OF RACISM

Where does racist ethos and behavior originate? With reference to the ancient roots of Indo-Aryan patriarchy, Diop (1959/1990) importantly notes that a characteristic of Indo-Aryan culture was xenophobia,[7] which he attributed to the harsh existence in the northern environment. During the development of city-states in Greece and Italy, it was not considered a crime to kill a visiting stranger (p. 146). However, in the matriarchal society in which xenophilia[8] was the accepted norm, as has been documented in Kemet during the 12th dynasty (4,000 years ago), "Black, White and Yellow (wo)men had already been admitted to live as equal citizens" (p. 147).

By looking at the continuum of cultural transference, retention, and unity, it is possible to link xenophobia to the later development of racist behavior and ideology, which can be viewed as the manifestation of a fear of foreigners or difference. The resulting

concept of race has been the subject of discussion since its pseudo-scientific entry into the intellectual and academic world of European scholars and politicians in the 1700s (Bernal, 1987; Fryer, 1984; Gould, 1984; Stepan, 1982; Stocking, 1982). White superiority has become the genetic-based rationale behind this belief. Based on a cultural analysis, the ideological construction of race predates scientific attempts by Europeans to substantiate supposed genetic inequalities. This assertion challenges Marxist ideas that racism rose out of capitalism. In reality, racism was fundamental to the development of capitalism because racist ideology defined the nature of the terms of global capitalistic development (Dove, 1995). There is evidence to show that the social construction of racialized power relations was developed in concert with European/Aryan control of traditional social structures, which in some cases predated capitalism proper.

The belief in White superiority and the practice of White supremacy or racism may be conceived of as mental illness (Hilliard, 1987; Welsing, 1991; Wright, 1984/1994). Such a belief is a cultural component of European logic. As Hilliard (1987) contends, a Eurocentric determination of African humanity (one that is debased) allows Europeans to deny the reality of their historical role in the destruction and debasement of Africa and its people. Furthermore, victims of racism may be "proracist" (identifying with the aggressor) regardless of their genetic makeup. Thus, it is possible for people who look African to perpetuate Eurocentric ideals that are inconsistent with the well-being of African people. Welsing (1991) attributes the depravity of racist behavior to the theory-of-Caucasian[9] fear of genetic annihilation. In other words, Europeans believe that they will lose their power base, which is predicated on their Whiteness, if they procreate with Black, Red, Brown, or Yellow people. Therefore, to sustain European power and control, they must retain through segregation their supposed genetic superiority, which is linked to a lack of melanin.

Ideas of racial superiority that crystallized in Europe in the 1700s were reflective of ideas and behaviors that were apparent much earlier. Bradley's (1978) theory supports this idea. Using a socio-

biological analysis, he traces Caucasian aggressive traits to Nean-
derthal origins. He also draws a correlation between the predilec-
tion of Caucasians toward aggressive behavior and the propensity
for male violence against females. Not unlike Bradley, Welsing
(1991) draws a similar parallel between sex and violence. Rape is,
she believes, a symbol of White culture and an unjust, sick behavior
in which the genitals become a weapon. Sexual inadequacy is, she
argues, the basis for the development of weaponry as a mode of
European conquest or control in the development of White suprem-
acy (pp. 176-178). Welsing connects the high level of rape within
the African urban experience with the debasement of the African
male under White supremacy (high levels of unemployment, un-
deremployment, incarceration, police brutality, negative portrayal,
etc.) and the African male's attempt to reduce what he perceives to
be the higher status of the African woman and her possible lack of
respect for him by debasing her. In this respect, the African male
as a degraded human under White supremacy employs the cultural
norm of Europeans to display his aggression.

Following the line of reasoning, Wright (1984/1994) argues that
White supremacy is a psychopathic disorder, suggesting that his-
torically, psychopathic sexual inadequacies have translated into the
construction of the belief in the oversexed Black person as the
justification historically/herstorically for the rape of the African
woman and the castration of the African man (pp. 7-8). Bradley
roots the Caucasian penchant for racism in the sexual aggression
demonstrated toward females. Later, this sexual aggression was
transferred to challenge physical differences based on racial fea-
tures. In effect, sexual aggression translates to racist aggression,
which is played out against both non-Caucasian males and females.

As Welsing (1991) and Wright (1984/1994) argue, the psycho-
logical aspect of the White supremacist belief has had severe
ramifications for African people in particular. Their analyses can
be used to understand the impact of racialized hierarchies on other
oppressed groups and on male and female relations within those
groups. Although I do not support the sociobiological idea that race
is the major determinant of human behavior and practice, it appears

that there is a significant relationship between cultural groups and the genetic similarities within these groups, especially in relation to environmental factors. King (1990) brings clarity to this point in his belief that all humanity is of African origin and therefore of the Black race. His theory is that the Black Dot is the Black seed of humanity; knowledge of its significance as the gateway to under-standing supreme knowledge of life may be rediscovered by Black people who, genetically (because of the concentration of melanin), potentially hold the key to discovering mysteries once known to the ancients—the early Africans. In other words, Black/African people have more interest to love Blackness as an integral part of African cultural identity and human-ness. It may further be said that the migration of African people to the north and the genetic changes that took place over thousands of years alienated those depigmented African people from knowledge of their African cultural memory. In light of this genetic reality, King asserts that

> the ancestral memory bank (collective unconscious) is a collection of African experience and wisdom thereby requiring a profound grasp of African history and a Black approach for the efficient translation of ancient African images in today's world. . . . Today's racist is afraid, ignorant of his/her blackness, choosing to run from the ancestral black core. (p. 24)

Thus, using King's theory, it is possible to link the hatred for today's African people and the debasement of Blackness that is exalted in the European hierarchical construction of White supremacy and the racialization of humanity as manifestations of the psychological sickness (Hilliard, 1987; Welsing, 1991; Wright, 1984/1994), ge-netic distinctions (Bradley, 1978), and cultural antithesis (Diop, 1955/1974, 1959/1990, 1981/1991a, 1991b) that may be attributed to European's/White's alienation from their African/Black genetic origins.[10]

As Diop (1959/1990) pointed out, culture may be viewed as having evolved as a consequence of climatic conditions. It follows that although it is possible to relate a people's genetic makeup to a cultural group, generally, culture will determine the way that a people view themselves and, therefore, behave. Through a process

of domination and deculturalization,[11] it is possible to produce Europeanized people who look genetically African but whose minds have been incarcerated by Eurocentric concepts, values, and beliefs. Such women and men, if they are unable to gain an understanding of who they are, will very likely believe in the European fabrication of the cultural and genetic inferiorization[12] of African people and become, as Frantz Fanon (1983) believed, alienated from their own humanity.

Rooting racist behavior, social structure, and ideology in the character of the European patriarchal experience lays the ground-work for understanding its importance to the construction of White supremacy. The ability to conquer the world (from the 15th century) and annihilate hundreds of millions of humans and then justify that conquest with the notion that some members of humanity are inferior and thus expendable requires a particular cultural orienta-tion, one that was quite outside the experience and practice of matriarchal Africa. In this sense, the violently imposed raciali-zation of the world may be seen as a European fabrication that is essentially culturally patriarchal and genetically influenced in origin.

RACIST IDEOLOGY AS AN ASPECT OF EUROPEAN CULTURE

Although racist behavior can be linked to European antecedents, its manifestation as social hierarchy can be traced and documented at least to the Aryan influence on the Hindu spiritual system of India. The realization of Hinduism as a racialized social hierarchy is not much different from the more recent types created in places like the Americas, Europe, South Africa, Australia, or New Zealand. It can be traced to at least 800 B.C.E. (Rashidi, 1992) with the Aryan conquest of the Indus valley in Pakistan, which was populated by Dravidians. This area is viewed in Diop's (1959/1990) work as a zone of confluence, like the so-called Middle East, where the northern cradle met the southern cradle. In the same way, northern patriarchy overpowered southern matriarchy. This conquest began

about 1900 B.C.E. The Dravidians, descendants of the Ethiopian or Cushite people who populated Kemet, practiced their Hindu religion (Houston, 1926/1985; Rashidi, 1988, 1992), which was later transformed through Aryan domination into a caste system not based on labor but on skin color (Rashidi, 1992, p. 87). The *Rig Veda*, the (Aryan) sacred text of the Hindu spiritual system, describes four castes that sprung from the God Brahma. Each caste is identified with a color. White is associated with the Brahmins—the priests (the Aryans). Red is affiliated with the administrators and the military. Yellow represents the color of the mercantile and agricultural caste, whereas Black is distinguished by the lowest caste (Rashidi, 1988, 1992). The life of the Sudras (Dravidians), the lowest caste, known as the untouchables, was one of humiliation and degradation. It was believed that even their shadows polluted the Earth (Rashidi, 1992, pp. 90-92). The point in noting this racialized social hierarchy is that the present ideas about race are documented in a belief system created almost 3,000 years ago that can be traced to an Aryan ideology emanating from the northern cradle. Stone (1976) notes the irony of the reference to women in the *Rig Veda*, which states that " 'the mind of woman brooks not discipline. Her intellect has little weight' " (p. 70). Again, it is possible to draw the link between patriarchy and racism.

Later, we find traces of the idea of skin color and its association with behavior in the works of Aristotle (389 B.C.E. to 332 B.C.E.), the Greek philosopher. Considered one of Europe's greatest classical thinkers, Aristotle, in *Physiognomy*, claimed that

> "those who are too black are cowards, like for instance the Egyptians and the Ethiopians. But those who are excessively white are also cowards as we can see from the example of women, the complexion of courage is between the two." (as cited in Diop, 1991b, p. 17)

This statement reveals the racist attitude toward African women and men and the sexist attitude toward Greek women and, therefore, all women. Ironically, visitors, especially the Greeks, traveled to Kemet—at that time the cultural center of knowledge—to learn from their African tutors. Furthermore, for at least 2,000 years prior

to Aristotle's observations, as Barbara Lesko's (1977) research shows, women had "enjoyed more legal rights and privileges than women have in many nations of the world today. . . . There were certain features—such as the principle of matrilineal descent and matrimonial inheritance rights—which were basic to the Egyptian culture in antiquity" (p. i). Conversely, in Greece, even as late as the fifth century B.C.E., the written observations of Herodotus state that Greek women, even in Athens, had few freedoms (Lesko, 1977, p. 14). In light of Aristotle's opinion, it is interesting that he was present when his pupil Alexander "the Great?" began the process of the conquest and colonization of Kemet (James, 1954/1989). Perhaps Aristotle's opinion was no more than that of the conqueror remarking on the ease of conquest.

Locating the genesis of racial ideology and its expression is important for understanding contemporary racialized power relations as a feature of European cultural domination. The Aryan conquest of the Dravidian people provides a perfect example of how a belief in superiority and inferiority based on skin color can become a religious faith, such as Hinduism—not so much different from the Euro-Christian representation of White as good and Black as evil or the curse of Ham. At the same time, its expression in India's modern social hierarchy bears a resemblance to the contemporary conditions of African people living in the West under White supremacy (Rajshekar, 1987). It is possible to see how racist ideology may be culturally transferred to act as a cohesive force to bring together differing European ethnicities and subdue their hostilities under the auspices of White supremacy in the pursuance of the conquest of the world.

PATRIARCHAL FOUNDATIONS OF
A DEVELOPING WHITE SUPREMACY

I have explained the conquest of Africa by Europeans as the conquest of matriarchy by patriarchy. At the same time, the zone of confluence in the area of today's Middle East was also a parallel

experience for the indigenous African people who populated that area prior to the Indo-Aryan conquest. The point I am making is that the matriarchal values that African people retained had a major impact on Europe during and after Kemet's destruction. Their influence spread throughout Europe, inspiring women under the tyranny of patriarchal oppression to practice spiritual beliefs that invoked the feminine principles of the creator. As previously noted, African people had settled in Europe prior to the Moorish settlement from as early as 1000 B.C.E. (Van Sertima, 1988, pp. 134-137). Moreover, the conquest of Kemet by the Greeks in 332 B.C.E. and the Romans from 30 B.C.E. until 323 C.E. would certainly have had a major influence on Greek and Roman women. Diop's (1959/1990) research reveals a European tradition of killing women because of their support of matriarchal values that can be traced to Greece and Rome when women were forbidden from practicing the worship of Dionysus, an Egyptian (Kemetic) national god (p. 175). Dionysus stood for the duality of the sexes and the development of humans, especially women. Diop says that "he is the god whose teaching contains all the secret aspirations of the Aryan woman, so constrained and stifled by society" (p. 174). It seems that the goddesses Diana and Isis (Auset) were revered all over Europe from at least the fifth century. It is significant that both Diana[13] and Isis (Auset) were Afrikan. Diana was Ethiopian (Diop, 1959/1990, p. 80) and Isis (Auset) was from Kemet.

The Moorish presence in Europe would have done little to alleviate this problem. If the impact of Afrikan people in Europe inculcated a fear within Christianity of Moorish knowledge and its connection with Blackness, it must also have transmitted a fear about the power and role of African women because, at that time, the Islamic faith practiced by the African Moors in Spain still retained matriarchal influences as opposed to the patriarchy of Catholic Christianity. Reynolds (1992) notes that the Moors "were known to have been ruled by female chiefs, holy women or queens even in the time of the Islamization of North Africa" (p. 111). This would account for both girls and boys attending school and the high status of women who were, for example, lawyers, doctors, and professors in Moorish Spain (Jackson, 1992).

According to Mies (1986), millions of women were murdered as witches from the 13th century until the 19th century. She relates this holocaust to the protracted war carried out by European men against European women for control over female-centered institutions during the development of capitalism (p. 70). Sale (1991), Walker (1983), and Stone (1976) link the witch burnings to the Christianization of Europe. The sanctioning of these killings by the church, suggests Sale (1991), was related to the fear of women because of their practice of other forms of worship such as animism, goddess worship, and paganism (p. 249). In other words, the consolidation of Christianity in Europe may well have been a concerted attempt to wipe out matriarchal spiritual influences on European women.

Contemporaneously with the witch burnings, to facilitate the banishment of African people and their influence, the Inquisition was designed by the Catholic Church to purge the land of non-Christians by burning so-called heretics. It is logical to suppose that heretics were mainly African women and men and their associates. Sale's (1991) research suggests that there was a relationship between the burning of heretics and the burning of witches. If this is the case, then who were the women murdered? In any case, we know that they were not Christian. Most likely, they were not all European, as Mies (1986) and Sale (1991) imply. If what Mies (1986) postulates—that the killing of witches was about the control of women's sexual reproduction—is true, then given the xenophobic nature of Europeans and their apparent fear of Blackness, we may surmise that many of these women may well have been Black.

Any serious analysis of the cultural and racialized features underpinning the Christianization of Europe must include the development of capitalism through European expansionism and the construction of White supremacy as a basis for the wholesale slaughter of African women, men, and children; First Nations women, men, and children; and White women who practiced matriarchal values. It seems clear that the cultural forces that sprang from northern patriarchy resulted in the deaths of millions of women whose cultural and possibly racial allegiances were put to the test.

RESISTANCE TO EUROPEAN DOMINATION
AS SOCIAL CHANGE

Although it is important to define the oppressions that affect the lives of African women, men, and children, for the purpose of developing liberationist theories and strategies, it is also necessary to understand that African people have a history/herstory rich in resistance to European forms of oppression. Acts of resistance must be placed within liberationist theory because they have laid the foundation for future strategies concerning the institutional development for self-determination. There has always been a belief within the cultural memory of another way of existing and being and the retention of values that have sustained and maintained the lives of African people throughout the protracted holocaust (Hilliard, 1995; Nobles, 1985). Thus, the struggle for survival—the resistance of African people to the inhumanity involved in the capturing, enslavement, and colonization process—has not only facilitated the humanization and democratization of Western society but has provided the backbone of social change. The struggle for control over spirituality, psychology, minds, beliefs, values, integrity, dignity, herstory, history, knowledge, rights, lands, and resources, has been long and bloody, and countless of numbers have been lost on the way (Ani, 1994; ben-Jochannan, 1972; Chinweizu, 1975; Fryer, 1984, 1988; Rodney, 1972; Williams, 1987).

From antiquity, as spiritual, military, and political leaders, women's roles have been critical in the effort to take control of lands, resources, and energies from alien occupation. Not surprisingly, few scholars have brought this to light. Early evidence of the role of women in defense of Africa comes out of the Cushite story of the Candaces, who were women rulers. Following the Greek conquest of Kemet, the Romans had taken over control by 30 B.C.E. Their attempt to dominate Cush (Ethiopia) failed as a result of the Candaces' (possibly Amanirenas) military and political skills. In fact, neither the Greeks nor the Romans succeeded in conquering Cush (Finch, 1990). This warriorship rose continuously from preenslavement to postenslavement for centuries, up until today, on the continent, in the Caribbean, and in North and South America.

Forms of resistance varied from individual heroism to mass uprisings. Hilliard (1995) speaks of the need to rediscover and become inspired by the countless acts of bravery that should be resurrected from our cultural memory. The accumulation of these acts can be traced herstorically within the Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist movements, which can be viewed as having evolved from early violent European encounters with African people. In particular, Maroon women and men have been attributed the greatest respect for their accomplishments in bravery and their success in gaining self-determination for their peoples during the enslavement period. Their origins in Jamaica have been traced to West Africa, in particular, Ghana (Hart, 1985). Maroons set up their societies in the Caribbean and South America. In Brazil, they built the first African republic, Palmares, in 1600, after escaping captivity from the Portuguese and the Dutch (Do Nascimento, 1992). Their story is rich in successful wars waged against Europeans.

From Jamaica in the early 1700s, rose Nanny, the great Maroon military leader and tactician (Hart, 1985, p. 44). From Africa came queen Nzinga (1581-1663) of Angola, Dona Beatrice (1682-1706) from the Kongo, and Yaa Asantewa (1840/60-1920) from Ghana (Sweetman, 1984). From the United States rose Harriet Tubman (James, 1985, p. 23). There are countless stories of the bravery of African women, and most have never been told. The reconstruction of herstory is important for understanding and defining African cultural identity outside the European paradigms constructed by White men and women.

The bravery of these women has fed into the genesis of the Pan-Africanist and Black Nationalist movements, whether recognized or not. In the contemporary situation, African women writers such as Ifi Amadiume (1987), Filomina Chioma Steady (1987), Niara Sudarkasa (1987), Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (1987), Hazel Carby (1982), and others highlight the critical roles that women across Africa from Mozambique, Angola, Namibia, South Africa, Nigeria, and Kenya, for instance, have played in the struggles for independence from European domination. However, as a result of Western patriarchy, men have been viewed and promoted as the major figureheads, whereas women have been given less recogni-

tion or credit. The works of Paula Giddings (1988) and Stella Dadzie (1990) provide herstories of prominent women who have been ignored in the annals of the African story.

Important, on all fronts, women as mothers have played the most critical role in the resistance movements. The love of the mother for her child, of necessity, challenges the European construction of her child's debased humanity. This love is in itself the seed of revolution because it is antithetical to the dominant belief in White superiority. How can the African mother believe that her child is inferior to the child of her oppressor? In reality, she does not. Mothers must be placed in the story of resistance so that girls and boys will learn of their potential roles as warriors in the African struggle and of the centrality of family and parents to social change.

Although it is on the agenda of African-centered and/or Afrocentric thinkers and activists to re-Africanize, the effects of male-centered culture on the minds and behaviors of African women and men cannot be taken lightly. The ramifications of accepting a European determination of humanity, which involves male and female power relations, are evident. From an Afrocentric perspective, there is less herstorical evidence to show that the Europeanization of African people leads to improvement in the quality of life on a global scale than there is to show the opposite. Unfortunately, there are some who continue to assist in the process of deculturalization as agents of oppression, either willingly or unknowingly. In light of this agenda of subjugation, Hilliard (1995) states, "The greatest fear of our oppressors is that we will become conscious, independent, and unified" (p. 8).

Until this time comes, it is apparent that the physical and mental abuse of African women is condoned not only by European women and men but also by African women and men. Some Black women writers such as Alice Walker, Masani Alexis De Veaux, bell hooks, Toni Morrison, and others highlight the complicity of African men and women in our own demise. My study of African mothers shows that the suffering of women in this context must be included in serious analyses of the forms of oppression that African people withstand so that it is understood that the struggle against the debasement of African women is both internal and external. In this

way, the social reality of her oppression and her resistance to it will become a central part of developing theory concerned with the liberation of African people from Eurocentric forms of oppression (Dove, 1996, in press).

The "just family paradigm" that T'Shaka (1995) develops, speaks to the need to define terms that are grounded in the African experience. *Twinleal* "is the notion that just societies exist 'where all the just males and females are equally empowered to govern every phase of society' " (p. 184). His research, like Diop's, provides evidence of past and existing twinleal rulerships that are models that exhibit the balanced principles that all African peoples may aspire to return to, beginning with the family as the first institution of societal development. As Diop (1990) said, "The degree of a civilization is measured by the relations between the man and the woman" (p. 175). Thus, any future and continuing African liberationist theory and activism begins with the effort to recover, herstorically and culturally, the complementary relationship of the woman and the man as the basis for "ourstory" and self-determination. In this light, therefore, African womanism as Afrocentric theory takes on a central and critical role in that effort.

NOTES

1. African womanism is a concept that has been shaped by the work of women such as Clenora Hudson-Weems, Ifi Amadiume, Mary E. Modupe Kolawole, and others. African womanism may be viewed as fundamental to the continuing development of Afrocentric theory. African womanism brings to the forefront the role of African mothers as leaders in the struggle to regain, reconstruct, and create a cultural integrity that espouses the ancient Maatic principles of reciprocity, balance, harmony, justice, truth, righteousness, order, and so forth. In that sense, I believe that *voicing Maat* may be a term that will further develop Afrocentric theory.

2. Hazel Carby's (1982) concept of herstory is used to recognize a female-centered perspective for African women that can be extricated from that of European women. She elucidates that

> *his*tory has constructed our sexuality and our femininity as deviating from those qualities with which white women, as the prize objects of the Western world, have been endowed. . . . Our continuing struggle with history began with its 'discovery' of us. . . . We cannot hope to reconstitute ourselves in all our

> absences, or to rectify the ill-conceived presences that invade *her*story from *his*tory, but we do wish to bear witness to our own *her*stories. (p. 212)

She further argues that the African story of resistance to European oppression includes the struggles waged by African women. It follows that one must be cognizant of the reciprocity of African female and male power relations prior to invasion. In this way, the construction of herstory moves toward an authentic representation of the African story.

3. *Re-Africanization* is a term used by Amilcar Cabral (1973) in a speech called "National Liberation and Culture" delivered in 1970, which is defined as a process of reclamation that African people colonized by Europeans (Portuguese, in this case) of necessity must undergo to appreciate their cultural heritage. This process provides a basis for challenging the imposition of European cultural values that serve to debase Africa as an integral part of domination and conquest.

4. *African* is used to describe those women, men, and children who are continental African people or members of the diaspora living in European or Europeanized societies outside the continent. This term recognizes the cultural and experiential specificity of a diverse people. Because of a need by European "intelligentsia" to distinguish human types as races, African people have been categorized as a Black race that may vary from black to brown. Psychological dimensions, cultural distinctions, and physical and mental attributes have been ascribed to the so-called races to differentiate them on a hierarchical scale. In the case of this work, African has a genetic value that links those who bear the physical features but, more important, offers the potential to connect such characteristics to a cultural value system that venerates African humanity.

5. See Browder (1992) for a comprehensive list of scientists involved in research and studies on Kemet.

6. Africanism is a concept developed by Herskovits (1958/1990) that refers to the cultural similitude that exists among African people wherever they exist.

7. Xenophobia is the fear of foreigners.

8. Xenophilia is the practice of making strangers welcome.

9. Caucasian is a racial category created by Blumenbach in the 1700s at the University of Gottingham in Germany to refer to White women and men. He placed this White race at the top of a hierarchy of the supposed races of humankind (Fryer, 1984, pp. 27-28).

10. Ani (1994) challenges King's (1990) notion of European Africans—the idea that Europeans are Africans—by suggesting that their process of genetic mutation over time may no longer allow them to be associated with their original African humanity.

11. Deculturalization is an integral part of the European colonization process. It includes any or all of these things: the removal of people from their lands, the forbiddance of people to speak their languages and/or practice their cultural forms, and the inculcation of alien values and practices either through forced or subtle means. It is, in this context, a dehumanizing, violent, and brutal process that includes denying people their humanity; taking control of or destroying traditional institutions; violently removing real leadership; using torture and abuse on children, women, and men physically, mentally, economically, and spiritually to achieve control; and withdrawing access to cultural knowledge and imposing ideas that are hostile to the cultural continuity of a people. These aspects of deculturalization are supported by a belief in the morality and righteousness of this process.

12. Inferiorization, to make inferior, is a concept used by Welsing (1991) in *The Isis Papers*.

13. See Barbara Walker (1983), *The Women's Encyclopedia of Myths and Secrets,* for information on Diana. She was considered the Queen of Heaven, the Mother of Creatures, and the Huntress.

> Diana's cult was so widespread in the pagan world that early Christians viewed her as their major rival, which is why she later became the "Queen of Witches." The Gospels commanded total destruction of all temples of Diana, the Great Goddess worshipped by "Asia and all the world" (Acts 19:27). (p. 233)

REFERENCES

Amadiume, I. (1987). *Male daughters, female husbands*. London: Zed Books.

Ani, M. (1994). *Yurugu*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Asante, M. K. (1980). *Afrocentricity*. Buffalo, NY: Amulefi.

Asante, M. K., & Welsh Asante, K. (1990). *African culture: The rhythms of unity*. Trenton, NJ: African World Press.

ben-Jochannan, Y. (1972). *Cultural genocide*. Chesapeake, VA: ECA Associates.

Bernal, M. (1987). *Black Athena*. London: Free Association Books.

Bradley, M. (1978). *The iceman inheritance*. New York: Kayode.

Browder, A. (1992). *Nile Valley contributions to civilization*. Washington, DC: Institute of Karmic Guidance.

Cabral, A. (1973). *Return to the source* (M. Webster, Trans.). New York: Monthly Review Press.

Carby, H. (1982). Black feminism and the boundaries of sisterhood. In Center for Contemporary Cultural Studies (Eds.), *The empire strikes back*. London: Hutchinson.

Chinweizu. (1975). *The West and the rest of us*. New York: Vintage.

Dadzie, S. (1990). Searching for the invisible woman: Slavery and resistance in Jamaica. *Race and Class*, *32*(2), 21-38.

Diop, C. A. (1974). *The African origin of civilization: Myth or reality?* (M. Cook, Trans.). New York: Lawrence Hill. (Original work published 1955)

Diop, C. A. (1990). *The cultural unity of Black Africa*. Chicago: Third World Press. (Original work published 1959)

Diop, C. A. (1991a). *Civilization or barbarism* (Y.-L. M. Ngemi, Trans.). New York: Lawrence Hill Books. (Original work published 1981)

Diop, C. A. (1991b). Origins of the ancient Egyptians. In I. Van Sertima (Ed.), *Egypt revisited*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing.

Do Nascimento, A. (1992). *Africans in Brazil*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press.

Dove, N. (1990). *Racism and its affect on the quality of education and the educational performance of the Black child*. Unpublished master's thesis, Institute of Education, University of London.

Dove, N. (1993). *Racism and resistance in the schooling of Africans*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York, Buffalo.

Dove, N. (1995). An African-centered critique of Marx's logic. *Western Journal of Black Studies*, *19*(4), 260-271.

Dove, N. (1996). Understanding education for cultural affirmation. In E. K. Addae (Ed.), *To heal a people*. Baltimore: Kujichagulia Press.

Dove, N. (in press). *Afrikan mothers: Bearers of culture, makers of social change*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Fanon, F. (1983). *Wretched of the earth*. Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican.

Finch, C. (1990). *The African background to medical science*. London: Karnak House.

Fryer, P. (1984). *Staying power*. London: Pluto Press.

Fryer, P. (1988). *Black people in the British Empire*. London: Pluto Press.

Giddings, P. (1988). *When and where I enter*. New York: Bantam.

Gould, S. J. (1984). *The mismeasure of man*. Harmondsworth, UK: Pelican.

Gyekye, K. (1995). *African philosophical thought*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Hart, R. (1985). *Slaves who abolished slavery: Vol. 2. Blacks in rebellion*. Jamaica: Institute of Social & Economic Research, University of the West Indies.

Herskovits, M. J. (1990). *The myth of the Negro past*. Boston: Beacon. (Original work published 1958)

Hilliard, A. (1987). *Free your mind: Return to the source* [Videograph]. East Point, GA: Waset Educational Productions.

Hilliard, A. (1995). *The Maroon within us*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press.

Holloway, J. E. (1990). *Africanisms in American culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Houston, P. D. (1985). *Wonderful Ethiopians of the ancient Cushite Empire*. Baltimore: Black Classic Press. (Original work published 1926)

Hudson-Weems, C. (1993). *Africana womanist: Reclaiming ourselves*. Troy, MI: Bedford.

Jackson, J. (1992). The empire of the Moors. In I. Van Sertima (Ed.), *Golden age of the Moor*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Books.

James, C.L.R. (1985). *A history of Negro revolt*. London: Race Today.

James, G. (1989). *Stolen legacy*. New York: United Brothers Communications Systems. (Original work published 1954)

King, R. (1990). *African origin of biological psychiatry*. Hampton, VA: U.B. & U.S. Communications Systems.

Lesko, B. (1977). *The remarkable women of ancient Egypt*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Mies, M. (1986). *Patriarchy and accumulation on a world scale*. London: Zed Books.

Nobles, W. (1985). *Africanity and the Black family*. Oakland, CA: Black Family Institute.

Rajshekar, V. T. (1987). *Dalit: The Black untouchables of India*. Atlanta, GA: Clarity Press.

Rashidi, R. (1988). Africans in early Asian civilizations. In I. Van Sertima & R. Rashidi (Eds.), *African presence in early Asia*. New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing.

Rashidi, R. (1992). *Introduction to the study of classical African civilizations*. London: Karnak House.

Reynolds, D. (1992). The African heritage and ethnohistory of the Moors: Background to the emergence of early Berber and Arab peoples, from prehistory to the Islamic dynasties. In I. Van Sertima (Ed.), *Golden age of the Moor*. New Brunswick, NJ, and Oxford, UK: Transaction Publishing.

Rodney, W. (1972). *How Europe underdeveloped Africa*. London: Bogle L'Overture.

Sale, K. (1991). *The conquest of paradise*. New York: Knopf.

Shujaa, M. (1996). Afrocentric education. *African Peoples Review, 5*(2), 17-18.

Steady, F. C. (1987). African feminism: A worldwide perspective. In R. Terborg-Penn (Ed.), *Women in Africa and the African diaspora*. Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

Stepan, N. (1982). *The idea of race in science*. New York: Macmillan.

Stocking, G. (1982). *Race, culture and evolution*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Stone, M. (1976). *When God was a woman.* San Diego, CA: Harvest.

Sudarkasa, N. (1987). "The status of women" in indigenous African societies. In R. Terborg-Penn (Ed.), *Women in Africa and the African diaspora.* Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

Sweetman, D. (1984). *Women leaders in African history.* London: Heinemann.

Tedla, E. (1995). *Sankofa: African thought and education.* Washington, DC: Peter Lang.

Terborg-Penn, R. (1987). *Women in Africa and the African diaspora.* Washington, DC: Howard University Press.

T'Shaka, O. (1995). *Return to the African Mother principle of male and female equality.* Oakland, CA: Pan Afrikan.

Van Sertima, I. (1988). *African presence in early Europe.* New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishing.

Walker, B. G. (1983). *The woman's encyclopedia of myths and secrets.* New York: Harper-Collins.

Welsing, F. C. (1991). *The Isis papers.* Chicago: Third World Press.

Williams, C. (1987). *The destruction of Black civilization.* Chicago: Third World Press.

Wright, B. (1994). *The psychopathic racial personality.* Chicago: Third World Press. (Original work published 1984)

Yellen, J. E., Brooks, A. S., Cornelissen, E., Mehlman, M. J., & Stewart, K. (1995). A middle Stone Age worked bone industry from Katanda, Upper Semliki Valley, Zaire. *Science, 268,* 553-556.

Nah (Dorothy) Dove, Ph.D., has recently moved from Temple University, where she was a visiting assistant professor, to join the faculty in the Department of African American Studies at the State University of New York at Buffalo. She holds a master's degree in sociology from the University of London and a doctorate in American studies from the State University of New York at Buffalo. Her research interest is in African resistance to European cultural domination. Her focus is on defining African womanist (voicing Maat) theory as a critical component in the development of the Afrocentric paradigm.