

**Making the Dish Runaway with the Spoon:  
Using Education for Social Transformation in the Post-Colonial Caribbean Society.**

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“But can you expect teachers to revolutionise the social order for the good of the community? Indeed we must expect this very thing. The educational system of a country is worthless unless it accomplishes this task.”

Carter G. Woodson

The word education comes from the Latin verb *educare* which means “to bring forth or to bring up”.

At birth each individual arrives on this physical plane fully equipped with the capacity to engage this environment. There is an inborn curiosity to know and understand where one is and to find meaning and purpose in one’s existence. Through the various senses the brain establishes instant communication and interaction between the child and the environment. The environment forces the child to respond; to make sense and give meaning to everything within and around. There is therefore a natural connection between the environment and the education of the child.

The first environment impacting the educational development of the child is the home where its first teacher, the mother, interacts with the child to assist in its transition to this physical plane. Throughout this process the father nurtures and supports the mother, thereby establishing the social and cultural environment for the holistic development of the child. True education therefore must have a valid social and cultural base if it is to assist in preparing the child in fulfilling its purpose.

One may therefore suggest that education should be used to enhance the individual’s and group’s identity and self-definition. First it provides identity as according to Akbar, every society values education because this transmission process serves several critical functions. Akbar further emphasized that at birth, our potential to be human is not fully realized and that it is critical that this potential be respected from the beginning of life. Similarly, the community should therefore be committed to helping the person achieve his or her full humanity. He also believed that in order to become really human our humanity must be educed, brought forth or brought out and that identity is the consciousness of our true nature (1998:2).

Caribbean education is anchored and established in the world-views, philosophies, customs and practices of the dominant European Cultures. The European self-concept and attitude towards non-Europeans are motivated and acted out according to their binary world-view. Against this background all the institutions of these cultures validated and defended the established order.

The European world-view and attitude, particularly the British attitude towards life has its greatest impact on Caribbean education through the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes. He argued

in the *Leviathan* that existence is characterized by a state of war and that human life is “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.” This philosophical disposition could give rise to attitudes of selfishness, greed, reckless individualism and a wild, ungovernable spirit. The effects of these attitudes were manifested in all areas of human activity. This disposition was taken across the globe thereby making it appear universal. However, it is not a valid description of the traditional African conception of reality.

In comparing and contrasting the difference between the European and African social systems, Yeboah, noted in his book *The Ideology of Racism* that:

The African social system is based on communalism. The extended family, the community and the clan are significant and powerful institutions. He was part of, and depended on, the community; every social practice had meaning only in the context of the community to which he belonged. His identity or role was defined by the community and all worked to protect and maintain the integrity of that community or extended family (1997: 41).

To be truly relevant education must cater to the specific needs, self-concepts, world-views and mission of all peoples. Okrah, argued that “it is recognized that any system of education should aim at serving the needs of the individual, the society in which he lives and the country as a whole.” (2003:9). In this paper, it is therefore suggested that the philosophies, religions, social, economic and political systems and organizations of traditional Africa must be respected and allowed to boldly impact the lived experiences of African-Caribbean people.

If there is to be a reversal of the galloping social disintegration of Caribbean society, especially that of the African Diaspora, Caribbean educators must conceptualise a system of education to meet the specific needs and mission of that people. It must be dictated by what is good for the total community and not the gratification of the demands of Western capitalism. The African-Caribbean youth must see the link between a culturally relevant education and their social, moral, spiritual, emotional and intellectual development. They must also see the link between education, community development and nationhood. Yes, between education and authentic existence. Hence, education must empower them to answer the questions: Who am I? Where did I come from? What am I doing here? And, where am I going from here? In other words; Caribbean education must guide the individual in answering the fundamental questions of human existence.

Western education has not encouraged, facilitated, promoted or inculcated a legacy of competence in African-Caribbean people as it has among other races. Whereas African-Caribbean people have been trained to serve the interest of their masters, especially evident in the service industry, they have not been given the competencies necessary for their authentic existence, survival and holistic development. According to Akbar a culturally relevant education has the responsibility to transmit the legacy of competence (1998:7). Akbar noted:

all people have accomplished tremendous feats in the advancement of knowledge  
...these breakthroughs are crucial because they teach each new generation not  
only what had already been mastered and understood so that they begin at the top

of the accumulated knowledge, but even more importantly it teaches them that they are specific recipients of this legacy of learning (1998: 7).

He continued to observe that:

the young must be taught that they have a legacy of greatness and accomplishment that they are required to continue. It is the image of greatness, which resembles them which serve to inspire young people to become the scientist, scholars and artists who continue to fearlessly explore the world and developed new ideas and concepts which advance themselves and the rest of humanity.

All young people are similarly competent and capable but such competence will never be expressed until they are shown that they have a legacy of competence. As they learn of their great legacy, they will join the great achievers from other cultures because of their understanding of the lineage that they share. The young people who are taught this lesson join the community of “great achievers” and are able to advance humanity and their people to ever-greater heights of human excellence” (1998: 7).

Akbar also argued that “those who fail to achieve very much continue to accomplish little because they don’t know their potential because they have only been exposed to the legacy of others. As a consequence of such exposure is the painful realization that the miseducated person, who achieves, credits the legacy of others for their accomplishment” (1998: 8).

The transmission of such legacy requires the identification of a peoples’ particular greatness that may be identified. Therefore to maintain competence, it is necessary that each generation knows about its history of competence that assures them that they do have the capability to achieve. Without this self-affirming information young people do not manifest their power for accomplishment (1998: 9).

This paper therefore concurs that the promotion of a people’s legacy of greatness is critical to their self concept, self-esteem, self-respect and holistic development. This is especially significant in the light of Akbar’s conclusion that an “uncritical imitation of the greatness of other communities rob a people of the special contribution that comes from the uniqueness of their particular legacy. Akbar (1998: 9).

### **Inculcating a Vision of the Future**

Secondly, another key concept in a culturally relevant education is the realization of a vision of the future. Education is useless if it does not give birth to and inculcate an unambiguous vision of the future in the youth.

Akbar noted that having a vision requires that:

a group with a common social destiny and common historical connection must see themselves as rising above any limitations and achieving the ascendancy of their group consistent with the highest aspirations of the rest of humanity. It must insure that all members share a commitment, first of all to their survival and

secondly to their progress. This vision lifts up the highest possible human goals for the community of excellence. The vision shows the dignity and uniqueness of the individual while recognising that no individual can rise above the collective dignity of their community. The community, on the other hand, has no higher significance than that achieved by respecting the individual contributions of its consistency. This vision would have to be one that offered an environment of moral and spiritual refinement of the human being consistent with the highest values of African people over the ages. (Akbar, 1998: 13).

Such a shared vision is lacking throughout the African Diaspora. This unfortunate circumstance is absent among the other ethnic groups of the human family. For example Williams noted that the whites have very commendable attributes such as tactful persistence when overt, aggressive action is for the moment inexpedient, and careful planning for their future generations with what appears to be more interest in the future welfare of their descendants than they are in the living. (1987:99). Williams further emphasized that in contradistinction:

Blacks as a race, on the other hand, have been so split up and preoccupied with current problems that they seem to have lost this deep concern about the future of their descendants (1987: 145).

This lack of vision is clearly demonstrated through the attitude of political leaders to the ownership and control of land in Barbados. The seemingly uncontrollable influx of foreign nationals who are given equal status with Barbadians consolidates this careless, visionless attitude. Some may argue that this is as a result of centuries of conquest and subjugation. Despite the history of African-Caribbean people their capacity to rise above conquest, oppression, slavery and colonialism to achieve world ascendancy in all areas of people activities must be demonstrated.

This requires an education strategy and policy anchored in a critical, philosophically sound analysis of European contact and behaviour towards Africans. These policies must inculcate a vision which insures that the youth commit themselves to the empowerment, survival and holistic advancement of the race.

Concomitantly, this vision must nurture the youth such that they unhesitatingly accept total responsibility for the protection and control of all the nations' resources, particularly land. Critical to this vision is the need to fearlessly defend their race against the 'enemy', given the predatory nature of western civilization and eastern aggression. As quoted in Bradley, John Henrik Clarke noted that Father De las Casas described the indigenous people of the Caribbean in a very positive way. According to him, those people were humble, patient, peaceable, held no grudges, free from embroilments and neither excitable nor quarrelsome. Father De las Casas emphasized that they were the most devoid of rancour, hatreds or desire for vengeance of any people in the world (1991:XVI). Additionally, they were described as very clean in their persons, with alert, intelligent minds... (1991:XVI).

Father De las Casas further noted:

yet into this sheepfold, into this land of weak outcasts they came Spaniards who immediately behaved like ravening wild beasts, wolves, tigers or lions that had been starved for many days. And Spaniards have behaved in no other way during the past forty years, down to the present time, for they are still acting like ravening beasts, killing, terrorizing afflicting, torturing and destroying the native peoples doing all this with the strangest and most varied new methods of cruelty, never seen or heard of before, and to such a degree that this island of Hispaniola, once so populous (having a population that I estimated to be more than three million), has now a population of barely two hundred persons (1991: xvii).

Education must also inculcate the courage and responsibility to reject racial stereotyping, disrespect, subjugation and multiculturalism.

### **Time To Act**

This is not a call for hatred of others. Rather, it's a plea for people of African descent to value and respect themselves. It is a plea for men and women throughout the African Diaspora to unite, stand up as people with dignity and divinity, assume the right to take their place at the level of the conceptual universe where they can conceptualize, ideas and principles for their guidance, system of management and the control of the national resources. This process would be incomplete with the assumption of the leadership of the physical universe. It is a call for an education system which will challenge and inspire the African youth to ponder the legacy of the ancestors. Such educational strategy would inject the immunity against the debilitating social, moral, spiritual and intellectual diseases of western education and lifestyles.

For example, in 2007 an article appeared in one of the daily papers about the publication of a Jamaican textbook on Home Economics which contained a section on same-sex union. Is the debate of this so-called alternative lifestyle worthy of inclusion into the national or regional curriculum? How will the promotion of same-sex union contribute to the spiritual, moral, emotional and psychiatric well being of African-Caribbean youth? What about the broader political implications of such policy?

Clearly, the time has come when Caribbean people of African descent must look themselves in the eye and ask by whose philosophy are we guided? Whose God are we worshipping? Whose interest are we defending and to what end. Clearly, African-Caribbean educators must conceptualize, develop and vigorously implement an educational curriculum to meet the specific needs, self-concept and mission of African-Caribbean people. Clearly the time has come when African-Caribbean parents and teachers must not only intercept the cow on his way over the moon; they must ensure that the dog not only laughs at this nonsense, that he fully understands the stupidity of the saying, but that the dish in its flight with the spoon is driven forever from among us and that memory be scorched from the psyche of our people.

Particular interest must be paid to the subtleties of the religious and moral education given to our children. Earlier I alluded to the point that we can eliminate and control the social and ethical problems characteristic of western society by returning to Ancient Kemet. Bear in mind that Kemet and the entire Nile valley civilizations are rooted in the heart of African. Kemet and other African civilization were nurtured by Maatian anthropological concept of humanity whom

they believed was the bearer of dignity and divinity. They also believed in the concept of human perfectibility (2004:230).

This is not in the sense of finished moral product, but in the sense of progressive development, perpetual becoming and the possibility of assimilation with God as expressed in *The Book of Coming Forth by Day* and other ethico-religious texts which project blameless and faultless character.

Gunn (1916: 11) as quoted in Karenga observed that “the Egyptian as reflected in these texts, was little disposed to humble himself before the deity” ”the attitude of the miserable sinner so characteristic of the Christian and other Semitic religions is unknown in these writings.” (2004:230).

Karenga noted that in the Declarations of Innocence, the deceased seeking vindication and eternal life declared himself innocent of the offences against God, humans and nature. He further emphasized that all the candidates seeking immortality proclaimed (their) freedom from every human frailty, identified themselves with various divine powers and described themselves as miracles of human perfection” (2004:230).

It is also interesting to note that “the Ancient Egyptians were indeed proud, self-confident and believed deeply in the power of the word as both Hu (authoritative utterance) and Heka (words of power) which along with Sia (exceptional insight) Ra created the world” (2004: 230). Thus, “both can be seen as an emulation of Ra or the aspiration to be like Ra” (2004: 230). Additionally Lichtheim and Daumas (1962) as quoted in Karenga, suggested that perfectibility was a clear goal and conception of the human person in ancient Egypt. Lichtheim (AEL 1:6) noted that central to the anthropology expressed in the Sebait was “the optimistic belief in the teachability and perfectibility of man” (2004:230).

Thus Ptah-Hotep advised:

If you are a leader who commands the affairs of the many seek out very excellent things so that there is no fault in your conduct. If you wish your conduct to be perfect and free from all evil, guard against the vice of greed (2004:2 30-231).

### **The Solution**

Today, the Caribbean region is grappling with escalating criminal activity. In Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, Jamaica and Barbados violent crimes, particularly murder, are now a serious threat to the region’s stability and good governance. How can peaceful, law-abiding citizens eliminate this scourge from the community? More importantly, can Caribbean civilization be pulled back from the brink of social and economic collapse arising from the ethical and moral decline so prevalent across the region?

Most definitely! African-Caribbean leaders must recognise that the current system has failed to address the debilitating human issues destroying the lives of the people. The people must also accept that there is an urgent need for a new paradigm, a deliberate, decisive approach to the

region's survival and total development. This paradigm shift is encapsulated in the vision, competencies and ethico-religious principles of ancient Nile Valley civilizations.

It behoves African-Caribbean leaders therefore to accept Diop's injunction to return to Ancient Egypt (Kemet) for the answers to the region's social and educational problems. Diop underscored the significance of this move thus.

A European specialist, in any domain of the humanities, would be ill advised to conduct any scientific work if he cut himself off from the Greco-Latin past. Similarly, the African cultural facts will only find their meaning and their coherence in reference to Egypt. We can build a body of discipline in the humanities only by legitimizing and by systematizing the return to Egypt: in the course of this account, we will see that only Egyptian facts allow us to find, here and there the common dominator of the remains of thought, a connection between African cosmogonies in the process of fossilization (1991: 309).

The return to ancient Kemet is to rediscover the philosophy and values of that ancient high culture. This paper therefore presents the argument that African-Caribbean peoples can build a new body of disciplines in the humanities and social sciences through a decisive, deliberate return to Kemet, the pinnacle of Nile Valley civilisation. This paper further suggests that the Maat is the conduit through which this body of disciplines will be realised.

Karenga suggested that the etymology of the Maat indicates an evolution from a physical concept of straightness, evenness, levelness and correctness as suggested by the wedge – shape glyph, to a general concept of rightness, including the ontological and ethical sense of truth, justice, righteousness and order. That is, the rightness of things. Accordingly Maat has many interrelated meanings and may therefore be defined according to the intended emphasis of the individual (2004:6).

Karenga also argued that given the Maat's central and comprehensive role in the Kemetic world view, he concurred with Helck (1980, 1110ff) who held the Maat as the foundation (Grundlage) of human life and the world and a system of rules whose goal and nature as order is defense against chaos in nature and society (2004:6).

Among the varied meanings of Maat Obenga's analysis appeared to be the most interesting. Karenga suggested that Obenga affirmed the wide range of the interrelated meanings of the Maatan ideal and noted that the nation of the Maat is complex and rich. He further argued that the Maat expresses itself in four basic arrears.

First, the universal domain in which Maat is le Tout Ordonne, the totality of ordered existence, and represents things in harmony and in place. Secondly the political domain where Maat stands for justice and also opposes injustice. Thirdly, in the social domain Maat's focus is on right relations and duty in the community. And fourthly, the personal domain here the rules and principles of Maat helps the individual realize correctly the universal order in him or herself, and to live in harmony with the ordered whole (2004:7).

Ashby argued the Maat was the spiritual and philosophical foundation of Kemetic society and government. As a goddess, cosmic force and living social doctrine it promoted social harmony and paved the way for spiritual evolution in all levels of society (1998:7).

Ashby also noted that Maat is the principle of order, harmony, regularity, consistency, peace and truth which holds the universe together in an orderly fashion. Hence “those who adopt the Maatan lifestyle would enter into harmony with the universe (God). Alternatively those who deviate would meet with frustration, anxiety, pain and sorrow (1998:7).

Ashby further suggested that action is an inescapable fact of life and that action based on ignorance and egoism leads to unnecessary pain and suffering. He argued that the sages of Ancient Egypt (Kemet) developed the Maatan philosophy to assist individuals in acting correctly and to discover the inner reaches of their higher self.

This return is crucial if the Caribbean is to free itself from the debilitating, stultifying effects of criminal activity. It will also assist African-Caribbean people bringing healing, renewal and a sense of spiritual, emotional and psychological well-being. Similarly, the spiritual, mental and emotional liberation of African-Caribbean youth from the racist, guilt-laden Judeo-Christian tradition would predispose them towards a healthy self-regard, self-respect, self-concept and respect for others. It also creates an opportunity to pre-empt the spiritual, moral and ethical crises affecting the society. Crises such as broken relationships, divorce, prostitution, drug-trafficking and drug abuse would not be regarded as alternative options. Concomitantly, an educational system rooted in the Maat and traditional African moral philosophy would consolidate this liberation process and avert the pervasive nihilism inundating Caribbean society. This paper argues that this the nihilistic behaviour emanates from a poor self-concept and “the profound sense of psychological depression, personal worthlessness and social despair.” (West 1993: 22).

West also noted that:

Nihilism is to be understood here not as a philosophical doctrine that there are no rational grounds for legitimate standards or authority; it is, far more, the lived experience of coping with a life of horrifying meaninglessness, hopelessness, and (most importantly) loveless ness.

West’s Conclusion on the effects of nihilism is quite instructive. He observed:

The frightening result is a numbing detachment from others and a self-destructive disposition towards the world. Life without meaning, hope, and love breeds a cold-hearted, mean-spirited outlook that destroys both the individual and others (1993: 23).

While West’s analysis vividly describes the social reality in the ghettos of America, one cannot deny that throughout the African Diaspora the existence of all Africans is gravely threatened by their nihilistic attitudes and behaviour. A culturally relevant education cannot ignore this phenomenon, continue pandering to the demands of Western capitalism or capitulate to the greed

of the Asian dragon. Caribbean educators must conceptualise and develop an educational policy and praxis which confronts all threats to the authentic existence African-Caribbean people. This however, requires firm, decisive and sagacious leadership – leadership rooted in profound positive racial self-regard, self-respect and a fearless, uncompromising spirit.

These characteristics are urgently needed given the global forces arrayed against indigenous cultures and their distinctive forms of social organization and governance. It is also critical that African-Caribbean peoples recognize the catastrophic consequences of globalization and its inherent cultural penetration – penetration through a purely Western-oriented education system.

In noting the significance of his study of Akan methods of educating the young Okrah argued that his “project will help arrest the purely Western education that alienates students from their own cultures and move them towards a different life style. He suggested “that that life style led to social disintegration of ethnic communities, the dysfunction of traditional family life and a total refusal by the youth to return to the land and consequently, a rise in delinquency and crime” (2003:7).

Thus Caribbean education must therefore permanently neutralise and dislodge the facile Western educated administrative class whose chief characteristic is to ‘please Massa’. Without this, Caribbean people would not survive the challenges of globalization and neo-colonialism. The entire system must therefore be deconstructed and replaced by a civic and social reality appropriate for authentic human existence.

### **Summary**

At birth every individual arrives on this physical plane fully equipped to fulfil a specific purpose. However, in the interlude of life, several factors frustrate or avert the accomplishment of that purpose. Throughout the Caribbean the incidence of crime and violence, prostitution, drug trafficking, drug abuse and poverty poses a serious threat to the capacity and ability of African-Caribbean people to achieve their personal and culturally specific goals. It is therefore critical that strategies be implemented to ensure their attainment.

This paper purposes that a culturally relevant education policy and praxis is a safe vehicle to assist African-Caribbean people in this venture. It is further proposed that the Maat which encompasses a study in the moral philosophy of Ancient Africa provides the principles and values which will assist African-Caribbean educators in conceptualising and implementing an educational system conducive to the social transformation of post-colonial Caribbean society.

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