



**BEYOND POLLS AND PATHOLOGICAL DISCOURSE:
TRANSFORMING OURSELVES AND THE WORLD**

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The recent release of a poll by the Pew Research Center on Black people's attitudes has the dubious distinction of being about a community it suggests no longer exists or at least it makes no sense to talk about as a "collectivity". However, what makes no sense is to talk about, conduct a poll on and pretend concern for Black people, even though we're told, they don't exist as a people. Here's where Don King's "only in America" seems appropriate with its surface irony and subtle indictment. The director of survey research at Pew says that 37% of those Blacks interviewed responded that we cannot "still be thought of as a single race". From this poll-and-paper thin, scanty and skewed evidence, he concludes "diversity means that it doesn't necessarily make sense to think of Blacks as a collectivity". Now, the problematic character of such an unwarranted conclusion is apparent when a similar diversity of class and social consciousness doesn't qualify other U.S. ethnic groups for official decertification as a community.

Furthermore, we are told we are divided by class in such a way that our views and values are radically different, offering more "evidence" of our eroded or "senseless" identity as African Americans. Also we are told that especially our youth see Black failures as self-inflicted rather than socially-generated or (though not measured) both. However, they concede that Blacks (over 60%) feel that they face continuing discrimination in jobs and housing and to a lesser degree, in other areas of life. They also tell us 45% of middle class Blacks will not surpass the wealth of their parents. And after all this, they tell us "Blacks (are) less upbeat about the state of Black progress than at any time since 1983

(and) fewer than half of all Blacks (44 percent) say they think life for Blacks will get better in the future." It is a contradictory combination of witches' and warlocks' brew with a threatened middle class propped up shakily as a disappearing model; pessimism about our future in a free and unblameable society defined by felt and lived oppressive discrimination; and a Black middle class sharing values with a White middle class with the median Black income remaining 60% of that of Whites.

This poll, like others, peddles pathetic portraits of a people, Africans, they say don't exist and yet have enough presence to receive the regular indictments, i.e., divided, pathological, pathogenic and self-wounded in ways too numerous to name and too severe to cure. Moreover, it creates a ground for conceptual imprisonment difficult to exit once you embrace it as a framework for dialog and discourse. It is a conceptual imprisonment informed by a dual ideologically-driven purpose: (1) to indict the oppressed and make them accept the indictment and the pathological language in which it is framed, and (2) to pardon or dismiss the case against the oppressor so that the remedy of resistance is rendered senseless and the liberational strategy of struggle is reduced to personal self-management.

As we have often stated, one of the greatest powers in the world is the ability to define reality and make others accept it, even when it's to their disadvantage. Thus, if we find ourselves discussing the challenges before us by externally driven and designed polls, we, of necessity, begin at a disadvantage. For both the questions and the answers they are designed to deliver have a motivation and meaning not really

ours or favorable to us. Moreover, if we understand this and related constructions of reality processes, we can break thru the conceptual imprisonment of the project and reinterpret the findings in new ways.

Frantz Fanon informed us that under the weight of oppression many oppressed persons go through four stages of psychological disorders: self-doubt, self-denial, self-condemnation and self-mutilation. Thus, the statistics which show many Black people doubting their future and themselves, denying their communal identity, condemning themselves for their failures—real and imagined, mutilating themselves psychically and physically, reveal not only their vulnerabilities and weaknesses, but also the savage nature of the oppression which drives them to these conclusions and acts. Thus, we must ask ourselves what kind of society would destroy its youth's hope for the future, disable parents in such a way they cannot leave wealth to their children and teach its oppressed young people to deny the destructive effect of racist discrimination while describing it as a concrete lived reality?

There are two kinds of responsibility in society which we must understand and act on. The oppressor is responsible for our oppression and we are responsible for our liberation. Indeed, part of our responsibility is to hold our oppressor responsible for his oppression of us—the gross injustice, systemic police and “peaceful” violence, ideological and institutional racism, and the diminishing life-conditions and life-chances these and related factors create. Also important is to hold responsible those among

us who collaborate in their own oppression, engaging in behavior that cannot be justified even if explained, and cannot stand if we are to rise up and move forward with strength, dignity and determination.

Furthermore, we cannot let the dominant society claim all life-affirming and life-enhancing values are middle class or White values. The working class and masses of our people also speak truth, do justice, work hard, save when they can, value education, would like to leave a legacy for their children, go to church, mosque and temple, and struggle to live lives of dignity and decency in spite of the multi-form and savage oppression they suffer. What is necessary is to stress and uphold these values as the best of what it means to be African and to reassure our people that these values are their own and key to building the good life and community they want and deserve.

And then, as always, we must rebuild the liberation movement and evolve a collective vocation and agenda that address the multiplicity of challenges we face. In this model and movement our people understand and assert themselves as injured physicians who must and will heal, repair and transform themselves in the process and practice of healing, repairing and transforming the world. As Fanon states, this means teaching “the masses that everything depends on them; that if we stagnate, it is their responsibility and that if we go forward, it is due to them too.” In a word, both magic and miracles lie in their hand and heads, in the way they think and act in their daily lives and on the larger stage of African and human history.