

that blacks constantly interpret their ethnic experiences which flow from the stressed values, from which it follows that members of the black community have constantly to reinterpret the names by which they wish to answer in response to that cosmic roll-call.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>In this paper I employ "Black" and African American" interchangeably.

<sup>2</sup>Alain Locke, "The Concept of Race as Applied to Social Culture," *Howard Review* 1 (June 1924): 290-299.

<sup>3</sup>Alain Locke and Bernhard J. Stern, eds., *When People Meet: A Study of Race and Culture Contacts* (New York: Committee on Workshops, progressive Education Association, 1942), 3-11.

<sup>4</sup>C. I. Lewis, *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing, 1946); also cited in Barbara MacKinnon, ed., *American Philosophy: A Historical Anthology* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1985), 536-540.

<sup>5</sup>John K. Roth, ed., *The Philosophy of Josiah Royce* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1971), 388-402.

<sup>6</sup>Although I have been suggesting that sense meaning will enable us to get a handle on the name controversy, Henri Bergson has brought to our attention the inadequacy of intellectual knowledge which hinges on sense meaning whose foundation involves concepts and analysis. The problem with concepts, in Bergson's view, is that it falsifies reality by denying the dynamic, progressive unfolding of reality. If Bergson's position is applied to the above discussion, and if Bergson is right, and I think that he is, then we are forced to admit that sense meaning of which Lewis speaks, harbors certain difficulties and limitations, the ramifications of which are beyond the scope of this paper.

## Critique

Aside from examining the ways people ascribe meaning to the terms "Black" and "African-American" and possible

"underlying social dynamics" impeding or precipitating ethnic label changes, Washington concludes that these above mentioned "sign-posts" may be justifiable periodic changes which an ethnic group should constantly re-interpret on its ever evolving "cosmic" journey. Washington presents an interesting case from a philosophical/metaphysical standpoint. From a social scientific perspective, however, there is much to be determined.

First, this reviewer has no problem with Alain Locke's "paradoxical position." In social psychology, for example, it has been acknowledged for quite some time that certain factors can become "functionally autonomous." Thus, race or ethnicity (and especially "the sense of race") can in turn become both cause and effect.

The evolution of an ethnic label or name, for some, depicts the social history of a people in reference to a homeland as well as their psychological development. It has been suggested elsewhere that the issue has come full circle, from "African" through "Negro" (and the Spanish term for "black"), "Colored," Afro-American," "Black," back to "African" (i.e., "African American"), the term originally used by blacks in America to define themselves.<sup>1</sup>

It should also be noted, this ethnic labeling phenomenon can be examined among a number of different ethnic groups which may reveal similar evolutionary progression (being labeled by others vs. self labeling). The resultant investigation may lead to the same basic questions asked.<sup>2</sup>

One of the more interesting psycho-social phenomenon has been the Rev. Jesse Jackson's statement, "To be called black is baseless . . . to be called African American has cultural integrity."<sup>3</sup> He and many other black leaders see the linkage to Africa as having an utilitarian importance.<sup>4</sup> As Fairchild elaborates, the term "African" denotes the continent of one's ancestors (Africa), and the term "American" denotes the continent in which one now resides or was born and/or raised (America).<sup>5</sup> Whether Washington calls it a "Khun Paradigm Shift" or a cultural "stress value," or "Sign Post" is rather pedantic. It's obvious there is a combination of factors (cultural, situational, historical, psychological, etc.) causing and resulting in a "label identification" shift phenomenon.

In addition, Washington questions why W. E. B. DuBois (co-founder of NAACP), Marcus Garvey (founder of the United Negro

Improvement Association, UNIA)<sup>6</sup>, and Alain Locke did not reject the term "Negro" or "New Negro" and replace it with either "Black" or "African American." The author then answers his line of questioning by suggesting that the "sense meaning" of the term "African-American" was not established by the culture back then.

The present reviewer could just as well add: why have the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) or the United Negro College Fund (UNCF) not changed their names to go along with the new times? If this reviewer may be as bold as Washington, the answer may be the long suggested rumor that during the 1960s executive members of the NAACP did discuss changing their name and decided the label should remain the same. It's rather obvious as far as this reviewer is concerned that the labels NAACP and UNCF have evolved into anachronistic historical symbols or icons, having a "sense meaning" in and of themselves.

Another issue which can lead to differing interpretations centers on Washington's belief that blacks and whites ascribe different sense meanings to the terms "Black" and "African-American." If he implies that there is a greater emotional importance/value ascribed to these labels by blacks than non-blacks than perhaps there is a *minor* schism between the two groups. But this schism does not necessarily lead to or should be equated with major conflict. Though a number may express indifference, many from the "larger society" are simply ambivalent, not unlike a portion of the black community.<sup>7</sup> Contrary to traditional psychological thought, cognitive dissonance (or as Washington believes, "self-contradictory attitudes") does not necessarily mean weakness. Even Washington, himself professes using both labels *interchangeably*.

True, many non-white and oppressed groups may reject forced labeling, but as Washington mentioned earlier, it appears natural for each generation to experiment and possibly adopt or reject whatever enhances their image of themselves. In turn, any other group will be unsure of how to address or label that group. In general, however, this reviewer agrees that the phenomenon in question appears a natural evolutionary change with periodic labeling displacement a natural human outgrowth.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Joseph E. Holloway. *Africanisms in American Culture*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), xviii-xx.

<sup>2</sup>Halford H. Fairchild. "Black, Negro, or Afro-American? The Differences are Crucial!", *Journal of Black Studies* 16 (Sept. 1985): 47-55; K. Sue Jewell. "Will the Real Black, Afro-American, Mixed, Colored, Negro Please Stand Up? Impact of the Black Social Movement, Twenty Years Later," *Journal of Black Studies* 16 (Sept. 1985): 57-75; Also see Alfred Yankauer. "Hispanic/Latino--What's in a Name?", *American Journal of Public Health* 77, No. 1 (January 1987): 15-17; Aida Hurtado and Carlos H. Arce. "Mexicans, Chicanos, Mexican Americans, or Pochos . . . que somos? The Impact of Language and Nativity on Ethnic Labeling," *Aztlan* 17, 1 (Spring 1986): 103-130; Halford H. Fairchild and Joy Asamen Cozens. "Chicano, Hispanic, or Mexican American: What's in a Name?", *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 3, 2 (1981): 191-198 for a similar perspective of another ethnic group's label identification change movement.

<sup>3</sup>"African-American or Black: What's in a Name? Prominent Blacks and/or African-Americans Express their Views," *Ebony* 44, 9 (July 1989): 76.

<sup>4</sup>*Ebony*, 76, 78, 80.

<sup>5</sup>Fairchild, (Sept. 1985) 54.

<sup>6</sup>Fairchild, 53, stated Garvey campaigned for the adoption of the term "negro" rather than "black" for he felt it connoted more dignity and respect.

<sup>7</sup>In fact, one can see in *Ebony* (July 1989) the ambivalence of various black leaders on whether to acknowledge the use of the terms "Black" or "African American," others as well have questioned usage, e.g., U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, *New York Times* (Oct. 16, 1989); Martin Kilson. "What is Africa to Me" Dilemmas of Transnational Ethnicity," *Dissent* 31 (Fall 1984): 433-440.

## Critique

In "'Black' or 'African American': What's in a Name?" Johnny Washington reminds us that the debate on the