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Assimilation: What Is It?

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According to Willie E. Hopkins, in *Ethical Dimensions of Diversity*, assimilation occurs when members of ethnic cultures adapt behavioral patterns and norms of the dominant culture. Assimilation, therefore, causes some members of ethnic groups to suppress aspects of their culture, and some even modify God given traits. Hopkins also refers to the term "deculturation," which is the opposite of assimilation. Thus, when members of ethnic groups practice deculturation, they retain and reinforce their cultural heritage and God given traits.

Members of the Diaspora that assimilate adhere to the belief that their best economic option is to shed their culture. In addition, some foolishly modify their ethnic traits to acquire physical features that reflect the dominant society. Thus, they unwittingly assign greater values to attributes of the dominant society than to the Diaspora and seldom link themselves with the Diaspora. Consequently, they often have little or no understanding of African civilizations and history. Moreover, frequently their context of self and collective struggle is empty and psychologically damaged.

If we do not understand our heritage, we seldom understand who we are or the mechanics to achieve "self-reparation," from past and present exclusions. Understanding who we are does not mean that we reject others or advocate separatism; rather it brings us closer to embracing the uniqueness of humanity. Likewise, embracing the uniqueness of others does not mean capitulation.

Hopkins points to the Chinatowns in metropolitan cities as an example of deculturation. More importantly, the Chinatowns are examples of economic unity and ethnic solidarity. They are robust models of economic trading markets that provide significant benefits to Asians in the United States of America. Without these markets, many Asians would not find an employment ladder. Thus, the Chinatowns are societal benefits, trading places for a diverse community.

The African Diaspora should examine its history and contemporary environment and begin the process of "self-reparation" and unity of purpose, in America and Africa. Furthermore, we must ask ourselves, what path is more beneficial: assimilation or deculturation?

Clearly, there are economic rewards to assimilation. However, assimilation creates the illusion of inclusion and reinforces the status of the dominant group. On the other hand, without the benefit of an economic infrastructure, such as the Chinatowns, the economic benefits of deculturation are elusive. Thus, for deculturation to be economically viable, it requires an infrastructure that accommodates trading, saving and investment within the Diaspora.

Nevertheless, it is in deculturation that the Diaspora will enlarge its opportunities. Our opportunities are often contingent on societal rules, our values, and our propensity to save and invest. Today, the dominant culture controls the rule making process and, more often than not, they use the rules to enhance their opportunities and to create the illusion of inclusion mirage. Yet, in spite of such gamesmanship, there are outcomes that ethnic groups can control. For instance, they can control community outlays and hence their rate of savings and investment. Furthermore, Blacks and Hispanics can influence the rule making process at the local level, in their neighborhoods and central cities. Moreover, they can build their own economic infrastructure in central cities and provide an employment ladder for city residents.

Therefore, it is paramount that we acquire a collectivist view of our status in the dominant culture, and become more focused, frugal and efficient. Similarly, we should collectively consider behavioral processes that increase opportunities and lead to improved rate of savings, and hence more community investments. Moreover, we should target our savings towards Diaspora-friendly financial institutions or financial institutions owned by members of the Diaspora. Additionally, we should seek to create, and support, more deculturalized institutions, businesses, and markets, in America and abroad.

To achieve an expansionist vision, we must maximize and synchronize, where possible, individual and collective actions. Moreover, we must think outside the current norms. For instance, we should examine the feasibility of establishing sustainable African markets, akin to the Chinatowns, in our central cities.

Would Diaspora members profit from African markets? How would we fund them? Are they more sustainable than civil protest? How would African markets affect surrounding property values?

The recreation of a unitary African culture that embraces our heritage, under a core set of fundamental moral values, will enhance and accelerate the process of "self-reparation" and, it will reverse the psychological damage of assimilation.

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