

Chapter 4

ENCOUNTERING NIGRESCENCE

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LET'S SEE, "how did I discover Nigrescence?" The truth of the matter is, it was the other way around. Nigrescence first discovered and transformed me, and then, upon reflection, I found the words to describe the boundaries or stages for my racial epiphany. For a while, I kept my encounter a "secret," thinking it peculiar to my personal history and psychological development. Even after realizing I was hardly unique or alone in my transformative sojourn, it became a struggle to put pen to paper, for I was very insecure as a writer. At the time of my social identity change, I had never published anything! A curious combination of being pushed and hassled by my friends and the unlikely consequences of a wonderful romantic interlude finally led to the writing of my 1971 essay on black identity change. Here is my story.

It was the beginning of my sophomore year at Denver University, and, as I moved from one course registration line to another, I noticed a young man whose physical features suggested he might be part Negro (this was Fall 1960, and "black" was hardly a term we applied to each other). As the recently elected president of the Alpha Chapter of Pi Lambda Phi Fraternity, I was keen to spot new pledges. Pi Lam is a traditionally Jewish fraternity and the Alpha Chapter had been defunct for years. During my freshmen year, Graham Susman, an elderly Jewish progressive and Pi Lam alumnus, approached a group of Negro, white-Protestant, and Jewish DU students, including myself, concerning our interest in reactivating the Alpha Chapter as an "integrated" rather than predominantly Jewish House. We agreed, and I was elected president. I'm not certain what the group saw in me, but they certainly had fun with my sexual naïveté and especially my enthusiasm for "snipes." When they realized I had never been a Boy Scout and "truly" did not know about snipes, they immediately planned a grand snipe hunt. Once captured, we would sell each pelt for \$25 and use the money to enhance the chapter treasury. One evening, we set off for the

foothills of the Rockies, where I led the charge down a hillside, thought to be ideal for chasing snipes toward the river's edge (snipes cannot swim) and easy capture. Of course, I was equipped with a whistle, a potato sack, and a flashlight. One by one the brothers peeled off into the hinterland until I was the lone snipe enthusiast. Yes, right up to the last second I remained naïve to the snipe's mythology. To this day I cannot recall how I made my way back to campus, but, when I did, we must have laughed for a year. Actually, I was a bit disappointed, for I had given much thought to the sale of the pelts.

I made my way toward the tall, brown-skinned young man and extended my hand. When he said his name, I surmised that I was in error about his being Negro, for with a noticeable accent he introduced himself as Badi Foster. He repeated his first name several times, as if to anticipate my need to rehearse it. To further help me through my embarrassment, he stated he was a Bahai, and his first name in Arabic means "wonderfulness," one of the 99 qualities of God. His parents named him after one of the martyrs of the Bahai faith. Upon recovering from the intrigue of his name and religion, I launched into my Pi Lam appeal, but this all fell to the wayside when we started to go through that perfunctory aspect of new introductions: "Hey, where are you from?" Bill Foster, Badi's father, who was Negro, met Ruth Alexander, a self-described Bohemian white woman from Ohio, in the context of radical activities during the Depression. As often happens with disenchanting radicals, they turned to religion, and in this case to a faith that not only tolerated their interracial relationship but advocated racial intermarriage. They became profound adherents, some would say zealots, and moved their family from Chicago's South Side to Northern Africa, where they worked to spread and solidify the Bahai movement and faith. Badi, although an American Negro by birth, spent his adolescence in Morocco and now spoke Arabic, French, and English. In light of my provincial, midwestern upbringing, meeting Badi was like encountering a Negro from Mars. Most amazing of all, however, was our next discovery.

Before moving to North Africa, Badi's family lived at 738 East 69th Street and he attended McCosh Elementary School. Jesus! We were born within a few blocks of each other, because, although my family now lived in Evanston, a suburb just north of Chicago, our former Chicago address was 6601 South St. Lawrence, a short walk to Badi's address. And, I also attended McCosh Elementary. Except for my sister Judy, who was born in Virginia, all the Cross offspring marked the St. Lawrence address as our birthplace residence. Badi and I chuckled at the thought of having unknowingly passed each other in the hallways of McCosh or on a neighborhood street or playground. Years later, my father, a Pullman porter, recalled his association with several of Badi's older relatives, who were, themselves, dining car stewards and Pullman porters. Otherwise, no one from either family clan recalls encountering the other. Yet now, a thousand miles from Chicago, two Negro strangers from the same neighborhood stood face to face, grinning as if each had just discovered a pot of gold. Thus began a life-long

friendship with a person who would eventually be the best man at my wedding, my mentor when I first became active as a consultant to industry on organizational development and diversity issues, and more to the point of this chapter, the person who recruited me to Princeton University, where, in 1971, I penned an essay on the Negro identity development. Badi even came to play a pivotal role in the actual production of the essay.

In 1963, after receiving a BA in psychology from Denver University, I entered the master's program in clinical psychology at Roosevelt University in Chicago. As I have noted elsewhere (Cross, 1991), almost all Nigrescence theorists were trained in applied psychology, and our "process perspective and training" helped us "see" stages in the stream of consciousness exhibited by African Americans when they experienced identity change. I was initiated into a process perspective at Roosevelt, where, as part of my clinical training, I became familiar with the stages of therapy. We saw that clients progressed through a series of steps in the deconstruction and analysis of their "old" and troublesome sense of self, and worked toward the construction of a new self-concept that typically reconfigured elements of the old self with fresh insights and a modest infusion of new elements. This therapy-process perspective became embedded in my subconscious and, along with another model of identity change that I will discuss shortly, was reactivated a few years later when I tried to decipher the psychological dynamics of the Black Movement. At the time I wrote the model, I was not consciously aware of the role my previous training played in framing my conception of the "stages," although in hindsight, it clearly was operating at the subconscious level.

The other "frame" that eventually guided my observations on change was a religious de-conversion I experienced in college. Entering DU, I was profoundly, if not obsessively, religious, but in trying to make sense of American slavery and the "meaning" of the destruction of the Jews during World War II, I intellectually concluded, in accord with existential philosophy, that there was no god, religion was an illusion, and all belief systems were social inventions. Having begun each day of my youth conversing with the Lord, the discovery that god was dead caused a hailstorm in my soul. I briefly became suicidal in the face of life's meaninglessness, and in pulling myself together, I systematically crushed any inclination toward "belief" and religion. Having prayed every night of my life, it first became surreal not to pray, and my whole body would shake, as I fought the urge to fall to my knees. My memory of this emotional "unlearning" or religious de-conversion was also operating, subconsciously, when I eventually tried to outline the shifts, pulls, and conflicts of the Negro-to-Black conversion experience, especially with regard to the Immersion-Emersion, or transition, stage.

With these two analytic and process-oriented guides packed away in my mind, I had only to be "exposed" to the Black Movement itself, which, in turn, triggered these interpretive frames, resulting in the codification of

the stages. My exposure took place in Chicago and Evanston, Illinois, and, although my involvement in the movement would last for years, the experiences that proved crucial to the writing of the model occurred between 1965 and early Fall 1969.

The Vietnam War was in full swing, and I had used a string of deferments to avoid the draft. My only brother, Charles Frank Cross, was in the armed services, stationed in Europe, and I began to feel cowardly and guilty about my status. I was in Jacksonville, Illinois, at Jacksonville State Mental Hospital, where I first completed a one-year clinical internship followed by a one-year staff assignment. My Illinois State educational grant required a time-payback in that for every year of graduate study support I had to work at a state psychiatric institution an equal length of time, and I owed the State two years, inclusive of the internship. The rural city of Jacksonville was in the southern part of the state, and its atmosphere was akin to a small Mississippi hamlet. I hit the mental health system as it was shifting from the warehouse model to the dispersal model, which involved releasing as many clients as possible back into the community. Watching patients, doctors, nurses, and attendants react to the radical shift in patient care eventually added to my ability to understand the identity change processes, only in this case, from a system-change perspective.

I decided that, while it was out of the question to volunteer for the armed services and fight in America's dirty war, I also would no longer seek a deferment. In addition, I felt isolated and estranged from the war protest and Black Power movements, both of which were accorded only limited authentication in southern, rural Illinois. Back up "north" the riots ushered in a sense of urgency for many white corporations, and a large Chicago-based insurance company recruited and hired me at twice my state salary. It sounds somewhat corny now, but at the time I felt I was making history, given the miniscule number of blacks in corporate America. I took the position, and that became my ticket back to Evanston and Chicago. I was employed as a Human Resources management trainee and given the assignment to research, design, and implement an after-school community project as part of the company's response to the recent riots. In researching the topic, I conducted interviews with numerous community leaders, who provided a panoramic view of the history, culture, and problems facing blacks in Chicago and America. I brushed shoulders with some of the best informed observers from the black community, such as the late Clotee Best of the Chicago Urban League, and each interview was like an intense seminar on either black culture or white racism. At the end of most interviews, I was directed to certain articles or books, which I subsequently devoured in short order. In a manner of speaking, I completed a self-directed master's degree in black studies within 12 months. I did not know it at the time, but my conversion to Blackness was in full swing. The death of Martin Luther King, Jr. was my trigger, my encounter. My rage and anger made it impossible to be functional in the all-white world of the insurance company, and

after one too many eruptions, I was terminated. By now, I was obsessed with finding ways to "rejoin and pay back my community." On a personal level, I was rolling out of Encounter and dropping head first—body twisting, arms flailing, both fists clinched, Afro growing an inch a day—into Immersion-Emersion.

As fate would have it, I became Director of West Side Service Center (WSSC) of Evanston, a community-action center created by the city of Evanston in conjunction with a cluster of "responsible" black community leaders. The Black Power Movement was omnipresent, and leaders from cities, corporations, and the federal and state governments were beside themselves to find ways to channel black rage into constructive actions. WSSC was charged with creating proactive programs that would engage the youth of Evanston. By now, I was totally consumed by Blackness and relished the thought of leading the group to a higher plane. My presentation to the WSSC board members was grandiose but convincing. I asked them to stop thinking about stopgap or "cooling-off" projects and support, instead, projects designed to increase the involvement of multiple segments of the community (youths, black businessmen, teachers, and black professionals). My "vision" was to engage people "where they were at" and then gently move them to a higher level of consciousness. In addition to organizing different segments of the community, we opened "The House of Blackness," just across the street from the high school, where books on black culture and artwork from Africa could be purchased. On paper, at least, each activity, organization, and sponsored event would overlap with the other, pressing forward the evolution of black consciousness, resulting in a crescendo of unity, and thus, power—or so we, the WSSC board of directors and I, believed.

If during the workweek I was a community leader, the weekends saw me rushing down to Chicago's South Side to attend an OBAC meeting to "confess" and gain new insights that would keep me a few steps "ahead" of the very folks I was "leading." Black artists and cultural nationalists organized the Organization of Black American Culture (OBAC) as an artistic forum, but on Sundays, open meetings were held in which people, ordinary people, stepped forward to confess to their previous cultural backwardness, miseducation, and self-hatred and proclaim the healing power and rejuvenation of their new-found Blackness. In a typical session, Phil Cohran's nimble fingers produced mesmerizing chords from an African thumb piano, as Jeff Donaldson, who would later go on to a distinguished career in the Department of Art at Howard University, held us in utter rapture. Donaldson stood 6-foot 3 or 4 inches, had chiseled features and piercing but warm eyes, a voice that was inherited from Moses, and a general physical and spiritual "presence" that made him ethereal. Part of the meeting was always devoted to a reconnection to our bodies, our hair, our lips, and our total physical images. We, or rather Jeff or an invited speaker, addressed our

souls, our music, our art, and our communities. In a manner of speaking, we were being urged to be openly "cultural" as well as "racial."

To this day, I do not consider my model to be one of "race consciousness" but, rather, one of race and culture consciousness because people like Jeff, author Lerone Bennett, editor of *Negro Digest* Hoyt Fuller, and poet Don L. Lee pounded into our heads that "race" was only part of the issue. More important was a black person's consciousness of black culture. Whether light-skinned or ebony, we were charged to go "deep" into our blackness to find meaning and value in our thoughts, actions, values, and deeds. From my vantage point, I "heard" the OBAC spokespersons saying that race was as much an existential as a physical reality and that being identifiably black was both a racial predicament and a cultural opportunity: a predicament in that "others" view our black features as a mark of inferiority, and we are forced to learn how to negotiate this imposed race identity; and an opportunity in that African American history and culture is pregnant with traditions, values, and aesthetic frames, along with rich examples on how to live the good life, *given* one takes advantage of the opportunity to engage, embrace, and help sustain this "cultural identity." The model I eventually produced would not be a race identity analysis, it would be a race and ethnicity or race and cultural identity conception, which simultaneously combined elements of "how one can learn to live and negotiate imposed notions of race" and "how one can learn to embrace blackness as ethnicity or culture." Because I believe so strongly that blackness is far more ethnic-cultural and existential than "racial," it may come as a surprise to the reader that I experience a certain degree of discomfort when one refers to my work solely as "racial." Given my physiognomy (I am very light and have white facial features), the OBAC exchanges freed me from guilt about being too "white-looking," and shifted the focus to my own, and every black person's, adventuresome struggle to become existentially black (e.g., the stages of "black" identity development). From that period forward, the expression *shades of black* had a double meaning for me: We, black people, reflect a wide range of skin colors; and we, black people, express an equally wide range of opinions on what it means, existentially speaking, to be black.

At the end of each OBAC meeting, I rushed back to Evanston with a renewed vision and greater confidence that somehow I had become connected to the right cause, the right philosophy of life, and the answer to my personal as well as my group's social problems and cultural challenges. I was totally immersed in the romance and positivity of blackness. Romantic as it might be, my exposure to this emergent new blackness was quite multidimensional. OBAC sessions on Sunday, Peace and Freedom meetings on Tuesday (the integrated political wing of the Black Panther Movement), and Jimmy Reid and his gang for the remainder of the week. Jimmy who? Jimmy Reid was a small-town street hustler, who, in response to the

Movement, organized a group of marginal young men into a wanna-be Black Panther organization. For reasons never completely clear, Jimmy was unable to obtain sanctioning by the real Black Panther Party, whose main office for the region was in Chicago, headed up by a dynamic young man named Mark Hampton. Jimmy's group literally "shared office space" with me and the WSSC staff, and there were times when it was unclear whether Jimmy or I was the "real" director.

I learned so much about the conversion process by observing Jimmy and his crew. At the OBAC meetings and on the campus of nearby Northwestern University, I had already made note of the conversion thrust among the black middle class and upwardly mobile black working class. Now, with Jimmy and company, I watched men of the street, who, seemingly destined for prison, found themselves being transformed by their blackness, if only for a fleeting moment, into focused, dedicated, and totally committed persons. Through their actions I saw that black identity conversion transcended social class. Here were scores of Malcolm Littles, who only yesterday were caught up in hustles and crimes that victimized other blacks, finding rejuvenation through blackness. Yes, much of their paramilitary routine had an unintended Keystone Cops quality to it, in that how on earth could a rag-tag group of men, untrained in warfare, "protect" the black community? WSSC was situated on Church Street, and it would probably take the police two seconds to blow us all away. But it was deeply moving to see these young men in their finest hour, positioned at different points in and around the building, guns loaded and drawn, stationed at windows and a few perched on the roof, waiting in silence to die. The infamous raid on the Chicago headquarters of the Panther Party was in progress, and as soon as the news hit the street, Jimmy and his men became convinced that they would soon be target practice for the Evanston police. It never happened, and within months, Jimmy's group disbanded and all returned to their old ways. For me, it was another lesson learned. Identity must be complemented by material change or else one is forced to fall back on a survival mode. Jimmy himself was found shot to death, assassination style, near the railroad tracks in Evanston. There were so many rumors floating around about his identity, including one that said he was an informant. Be that as it may, I don't think I was totally fooled by Jimmy, for I saw him when he was authentic and had meaning.

My stint as Director of West Side Service Center paralleled my Immersion-Emersion experience. It became clear that I did not have the competencies to become a long-term, street-level community activist and organizer. Although I was a misfit as a community leader, everyone, including Jimmy Reid and a cluster of black college students from Northwestern University, encouraged me to find my calling and stay connected to the Movement. Everyone said I seemed to have a handle on community planning and that drew me to a program in urban planning at an upstate university near Albany, New York. I was admitted and ready to go when I got a call

from Badi. By now he was a Fulbright Scholar at Princeton University, and Princeton was about to launch a program in Afro-American Studies. A new program Chair was soon to arrive on campus, but there was also need for an assistant to the Chair, and Badi practically demanded that I accept the position. I left for Princeton in late Summer 1969.

By now the media were constantly presenting negative and grotesque images of black militants that suggested they were angry to the point of mental illness. There was the frequent juxtaposition of "good and responsible" Negroes with "angry and irrational" militants. I began to play back my Nigrescence interpretation of conversion to Badi and my new Princeton associates and countered that the media and community were getting it all wrong. We, black people, were going through a process, and it involved stages, and yes, anger was an important part of it all, but militancy was but a passing stage, not an identity unto itself. This rites-of-passage process seemed to apply to black women as well as black men. It was inevitable that Badi and the folks at Princeton would both encourage and challenge me to write about my ideas, and in the face of such a charge, I was petrified. The thought of actually writing something, for public consumption, was intimidating. True, Hoyt Fuller at *Negro Digest* had encouraged me to think of his journal should I find written expression for my ideas, but no one in my family and none of my close kin or friends had ever published anything! And then something happened to make it all possible.

Joe and Daphne Moore said there was someone I had to meet because we would make a perfect match. I would eventually marry the person they had in mind, but perfect match is not how we would describe ourselves. In fact, for the first 15 years, our stormy marriage was often dysfunctional, and we nearly destroyed ourselves and the spirit of our only child. We separated for 5 years, and at the point of filing for a divorce we reversed course and began to court each other. We remain husband and wife (28 years of marriage), but it seems like a new relationship, a second marriage. We feel most fortunate, because in the best turn of events we have also been reunited with our daughter. Most of this family chaos and reintegration took place long after my partner and I achieved what could only be called advanced states of black consciousness. The difficulties in reaching marital bliss, like the suicide of my dear friend Phillip White, or the drug addiction of a former Movement associate, brought me face to face with the reality that, as important as black consciousness is, it does not address or predict all that must be accomplished by blacks or, for that matter, any group of human beings over the course of a lifetime. At another point in my career, I would parlay such insights into the distinction between "PI" and "RGO," or the personal identity domain of the self-concept as differentiated from the social identity, group identity, or reference group orientation domain. There were many positive human encounters that drove home the same understanding, but, as is often the case, it remains for the horrific and tragic to finally capture one's attention.

Joe and Daphne arranged for me to meet one Dawn Monique Jackson, Princeton's new Assistant Director of Admissions, during a lunch period on the Princeton campus. Joe spotted her from across the room, giving me a full 45 seconds to watch Dawn wind her way toward our table. She was the Second Coming of Angela Davis, only four times as beautiful. Her gigantic Afro slightly bounced as she walked, and her long, unblemished brown neck supported a picturesque face formed by both her Potawatomi and African roots. It was the early 1970s and short dresses were the rage, and this nearly 6-foot-tall creature wore a green-turquoise, polished cotton dress from which glided the most heavenly legs. This was not going to be easy, for I was a virgin until my mid-20s, and though I often could think about nothing else but women and sex, the Movement and blackness improved none of my awkward social skills. Much to my relief, we somehow talked and talked and talked, and I do not recall when the lunch date came to an end.

Soon thereafter, Dawn was with me on another occasion when Badi and his friends challenged me to "put in writing" my stages concept. Dawn could sense my insecurity and, whispering in my ear, offered to help. On our next date, we went to her office in the basement of Nassau Hall, and she typed as I talked through my ideas. The image of people "confessing" at OBAC helped shape the Pre-Encounter Stage, the rage and activism of Jimmy Reid and the students at Northwestern informed the dynamics of the Immersion-Emersion Stage, the rock steadiness, relaxed confidence, and insightfulness of Hoyt Fuller's image (recall, he was the editor of *Negro Digest*) gave hint of the Internalization Stage, and the men and women who authored the books I was, by now, devouring at an amazing pace, such as Carter G. Woodson, W. E. B. Dubois, and Margaret Just Butcher, shed light on the meaning of sustained identity commitment (Internalization-Commitment Stage). My experiences as a clinical psychologist, my observation of the system changes that rocked the hospital where I completed my internship, my struggle with religious de-conversion, and, of course, the mapping of my own personal conversion into blackness all came together to help frame a little essay that has brought me countless blessings and a certain degree of fame. On paper, it was no longer just an autobiographical commentary, it was an attempt to summarize my mental notes on all the women and men I had observed, the actions I had witnessed, and the commentaries I had absorbed from the media, articles, and countless books on the black experience.

Around this time, Badi Foster and fellow Princeton graduate student Vernon Dixon landed a contract with Little, Brown for a book titled *Beyond Black or White*. As the book was in process, I began to interact with William S. Hall. Hall, who is one of America's most accomplished black psychologists, was in the early stages of his career. When I discussed my ideas with him, Hall immediately brainstormed about empirical strategies for testing the model. It is not necessary to go into all the details, but we created a list of short statements that captured various aspects of each stage, for use in a

Q-sort experiment. The items for this Q-sort would eventually be used by Thomas Parham and Janet Helms to fashion the early version of the RIAS (Racial Identity Attitude Scale), the most important and heavily used scale in the study of Nigrescence. As Bill was working on his experiments, I became fearful that somehow my contribution would be lost, even though the plans called for me to be the second author for one publication and the third author for another. Consequently, I wrote a second version of the model and submitted it to my acquaintance, Hoyt Fuller. His journal had recently gone through an identity change of sorts and was now called *Black World* rather than *Negro Digest*. Fuller is one of the unsung heroic figures from the 1960s. He was an exemplar of Stage 4 and 5 behavior, and he worked tirelessly to publish new black poets, essayists, and visionaries. Any number of future giants in the emerging field of black studies found their initial acceptance in Fuller's journal. John Johnson, the owner and publisher of *Ebony*, *Tan* and *Black World*, wanted the journal to remain a sorry imitation of *Reader's Digest*, but Hoyt pushed for a more aggressive, timely publication that gave voice to the new black radicals. As the heat of the Black Movement intensified, Johnson came under increasing pressure to shut *Black World* down, and eventually he did. Hoyt tried to resurrect the journal from his new base in Atlanta, but due to undercapitalization only a few issues of *First World* were produced. Then, suddenly, at the relatively tender age of 55, Fuller died of a massive stroke. At the memorial held for him in Atlanta on May 16, 1981, the witnesses included James Baldwin, Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Howard Dodson, Jeff Donaldson, Mari Evans, George Kent, Richard Long, Haki Madhubuti, Sonia Sanchez, James Turner, and others.

Fuller accepted the piece, and it was published in the July 1971 issue of *Black World*. When I received my copy, I went into a room, closed the door, and sat down. It was a little journal, measuring only 5½ by 7½ inches. At the top of the cover were 2-inch-high bold letters hawking the journal's name. In small print just below the title was the date (July 1971), signification that it was a Johnson Publication, and the price (50 cents). The cover showed the drawing of a baritone saxophone with a huge, translucent red "x" drawn across it, symbolic of the title of the lead article, "The Ban on Black Music," by Imamau Amiri Baraka. Small print in the right lower quadrant called attention to three additional bylines, the first of which stated "Perspective on History," followed by the title of my article. Baraka's article began on page 4, and then as I flipped the pages I came to the opening page of my work. It read "The Negro-to-Black Conversion Experience: Toward a Psychology of Black Liberation," followed by my name. The article ended with my preferred salutation: Harambee and Love. At the very bottom of the last page, my status as a Princeton graduate student was recorded along with this note: "This is Mr. Cross' first published work." In my mind's eye, I read this note differently: "Mr. Cross is the only child of Bill and Margaret Cross to attend college, and this is the first work ever published by any member of

their family." I celebrated the moment as much from a family perspective as from a personal one.

What should have been my first publication, the version for the Dixon-Foster text, appeared in late December 1971, but it is seldom referenced. Dr. Hall's empirical study involving the administration of his Q-sort items was published in 1972, and sure enough, a few publications referencing this work refer to the model as the Hall-Cross Model. As the *Black World* version took hold, I ceased to worry about intellectual ownership of the model, with one exception. I was once accused by a key figure in the Black Psychology Movement of having stolen his ideas, but nothing ever came of his ramblings. Had we gone to court, I still had the crude typed version that Dawn had produced years ago in the basement of Nassau Hall; I originally cherished it for romantic reasons, but after the accusation, I filed it for historical and possible litigious purposes.

The original 1971 essay was akin to a report from the field on the black identity dynamics associated with the black power phase of the overall black movement, as gleaned from the perspective of a participant observer. No references were listed because there were none, although I do mention Joseph White's name in the first paragraph and that of Frantz Fanon in the second. I wrote the model before the end of my first term at Princeton and had not undertaken a literature search to discover the connectedness of my ideas with those to be found in the extant literature. This soon changed as Bill Hall asked that I complete the literature review section for his Q-sort study, which we published jointly in 1972. My report to Dr. Hall was almost 50 pages, and he used but a fraction of the material. This was just as well, for I was then free to incorporate the greater portion of the review in the first section of my dissertation. Thereafter, all my publications have been heavily referenced.

THE AFRICANA EXPERIENCE AND *SHADES OF BLACK*

While employed as Director of West Side Service Center, the period of my Immersion-Emersion phase, I was befriended by a number of people, including a handful of black graduate students from Northwestern University. Eric Perkins has since become an accomplished administrator in education, John Higginson is a Professor of African History at U Mass, and the person who took the most interest in my development, James Turner, became one of the pioneers of the Black Studies Movement. Turner's vision led to the establishment of the Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University in upstate New York (Ithaca). Turner kept track of my progress at Princeton and hired me on a part-time basis to see how I might fit in the Center. Portions of the data for both my master's and dissertation research were collected at Cornell, and in Summer 1973, I joined the faculty on a full-time basis as an Assistant Professor. So motivated was I to

participate in the Black Studies Movement that I never interviewed at another institution. Besides Turner and my newfound colleagues at the Center, Cornell was also home to A. Wade Boykin, who, at the time of this writing, is Chair of the Department of Psychology at Howard University. Over the long haul, the Center provided a place to grow conceptually and theoretically, while my emergent close relationship with Boykin linked me to the empirical wing of the Association of Black Psychologists. In point of fact, I have produced few empirical studies, but my theoretical and interpretive works have been the basis of countless experiments. I have always presented my ideas in conceptual terms that are readily subject to experimental operationalization. This quality of my writing began at Princeton, but it was reinforced through my association with Boykin and the cluster of black scholars who established and ran a series of conferences known as "The Empirical Conference on Black Psychology." The scholars linked to the Conference read like a list of who's who in Black Psychology: Harriette and John McAdoo, A. J. Franklin, James Jackson, Leahcim Semaj, Reginal Jones, Charles Thomas, Hector Jones, Philip Bowman, Katherine Berlew, Vonnie McLoyd, Robert Guthrie, and many others.

I began the Cornell experience as a "social experimental psychologist" and left the Africana Center, some 21 years later, having been transformed into a cultural psychologist. As a cultural psychologist, my work examines the cultural, historical, and economic forces shaping human development and everyday psychological functioning in general, and black identity development and functioning in particular. This shift from traditional to cultural was traversed by nearly anyone with a long-term association at the Africana Center. At Cornell, James Turner gathered together two cohorts of scholars. The first included young Turks, fresh out of graduate school, who, while trained in a particular discipline, showed promise, at least in Turner's eyes, for becoming more interdisciplinary inclined. To nudge us along, Turner also hired established role models such as dramatist Bill Branch, literary scholar Eleanor Traylor, John H. Clark, and "Dr. Ben" (e.g., Y. Ben-Jochannan). The combinations were explosive, and life at the Center was not always easy, but in the long run, the Center's climate pressed each of us to transcend our narrow disciplinary perspectives and grasp the bigger picture. For example, as a psychologist, I was expected not simply to expose students to the traditional psychological literature but to show the links between black psychological functioning and economic trends, historical dynamics, and cultural patterns. As a faculty, we shared each other's papers and challenged our respective disciplinary assumptions. It was not enough for me to explicate black performance on such-and-such psychological measures, I also had to address how, in the aftermath of the Civil War, former slaves moved quickly to establish schools, churches, and a broader, organized community. What psychological forces, in part, made such actions and achievements possible for a people only recently jettisoned from the ravages of slavery?

Shades of Black is, in many ways, a tribute to my experiences at the Center, for it is as much a sociological, historical, and cultural treatise on black identity development and change as it is a psychological one. After 15 years at the Center, I was prepared to argue a radical reinterpretation of black identity. While playing pool with Henry Louis Gates, Jr., I reviewed some of my ideas and he startled me by saying "Well, why don't you write a book?" I glibly stated that was my plan, but Gates sensed both my passion for my ideas and my insecurity about writing a text. He told me he had access to a publisher and that if I was "really" serious he could help make it happen. With that, I no longer had an excuse because in short order Gates produced a book contract. Gates was at Cornell and the Africana Center for only a brief period, but he was like a firestorm, and everywhere he went, he made things happen. By the time I nearly completed the work, my confidence had expanded considerably, and through the assistance of Robert L. Harris, a historian at the Center, I was introduced to a senior editor, Janet M. Francendese, at Temple University Press (TUP). Gates was very gracious and helped cancel the other contract, clearing the way for my work to be published by TUP in 1991.

Shades of Black was my attempt to recenter the discourse on black psychological functioning from that of negativity, self-hatred, and pathology onto a new nexus of identity variability and transformation. In the new scheme, self-hatred would be given its due, but primarily as a fractional component. I wanted to demonstrate a more "normative and positive" black psychology through logical, rational, and well-documented arguments, readily subject to empirical exploration. This meant showing that, aside from the unique psychology of the so-called underclass (working-age blacks out of the workforce for a protracted period of time), blacks have more often than not been able to achieve adequate levels of psychological functioning and identity development. As an important corollary of the first point, it was also necessary to show that only a fraction of black people has ever succumbed to outright self-hatred, despite segregation, racism, and oppression. That is to say, with the exception of underclass dynamics, self-hatred is a minor, not central, theme in the everyday life of most black people. I argued that personality and self-concept variability is easily found in the black community, as are ideological differences; consequently, it is impossible to discuss black identity "as if" it represented but one profile, one identity "type," or a singular personality configuration. I further reasoned that black variability on self-concept and personality measures reflect the multiple pathways blacks have come to chart in the achievement of personal psychological happiness and well-being. From this perspective, ideological and identity variability shows that blacks do not share a single definition of what it means to be black, nor are they in agreement on what it means to live the good black life. I even suggested that for some blacks, having a racial-cultural identity is not important to their everyday existence, despite its significance for the vast majority of blacks. In grafting this new

perspective, I discovered major shortcomings in my original Nigrescence Model; consequently, the second part of *Shades of Black* presents a revision of my original 1971 Negro-to-Black Conversion Model.

A FINAL NOTE OF THANKS

By the time this volume comes to print, I will have celebrated my 61st birthday, and the end of my career is just above the horizon. It has been 29 years since the publication of the Negro-to-Black Model, yet scholars and students continue to find value and interest in the Nigrescence concept. If every person has 15 seconds of fame, I am very grateful for what has extended to perhaps a minute or two. It is little known that by the mid-1970s I felt pressure from some peers to "move" on to fresher intellectual terrain. In my moment of doubt, others stepped in to show that Nigrescence is an omnipresent theme in everyday black life. Today, it is a daunting task to conduct a thorough literature review of the Nigrescence literature, as so many have made it the focus of their work. As others extend the concept beyond the reach of my competencies, I nevertheless have benefited by being prominently referenced in their work. For good or bad, the academic world rewards persons who are repeatedly referenced by other scholars; thus, many of you may not be aware of the number of good things your work has helped put on my plate. I, however, am keenly aware and I feel the need to say thank-you. I want to thank the following people for taking Nigrescence Theory seriously—for critiquing it, embracing it, testing it, and in more instances than not, expanding it beyond my expectations and capabilities: Beverly Vandiver, Frank Worrell, Thomas Parham, Janet Helms, Jerome Taylor, the late Jake Milliones, Margaret Spencer, Robert Carter, Janet Swim, Joseph Ponterotto, Allen Ivey, Beverly Tatum, Gerald Jackson, Lee Stokes, Bailey Jackson, Rita Hardiman, Urie Bronfenbrenner, Mon Cochran, James Turner, Emily Smith, Robert Sellers, Linda Clark-Strauss, Peony Phagen-Smith, Leon Caldwell, Paul Pedersen, Donald B. Pope-Davis, William S. Hall, Milton and Janet Bennett, Lee Knepfelkamp, Bobbi Schaetti, Lauri Hyers, James Jones, Robert Sellers, Tuere Binta Cross, Terrell Jones, Randy Weston, Maurianne Adams, Leon Caldwell, James A. Banks, Joe White, A. J. Franklin & Nancy Boyd-Franklin, Allyson Pimentel, Kevin Cokley, and Howard Stevenson. This list is incomplete, and it seems to grow a little each month.

Harambee and Love.

RELEVANT PUBLICATIONS

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