The Blessing of a Helms Legacy

• Blessed – to have her as a mentor (Jegna)
• Grateful – to have learned much from her academic, research, and clinical instruction.
• Humbled – to have sat and stood at her feet and absorbed many insights and pearls of wisdom.
Existence has a face on every side, and every face teaches a lesson. Those who truly understand existence do not separate the faces from the lessons, say the knowledge holders.
WHAT LESSONS DOES SHE TEACH US?

• Identity Formation
• Coping with Oppression
• Universality of Racial Identity Development
• Counseling Applications
• Managing Critique and Feedback
Lessons in Identity Formation
Identity Formation

Definition:
• A component of an individual’s overall self-concept
• The adoption of certain personal attitudes, feelings, characteristics and behaviors
• Identification with a larger group of people who share those characteristics
• A search for self understanding and awareness where individuals begin to adopt certain characteristics that conform or align with self perceptions of who they are and want to be
The Functional Nature of Identity

Identity Serves Three Functions:

• It provides a social anchor and meaning to one’s existence
• It serves as a connection to the broader African community across the globe
• It serves as a protection or buffer against the social forces that continually bombard the psyche with non-affirming and, in some cases, dehumanizing messages.
WHAT LESSONS DOES SHE TEACH?

• There are lessons in coping with oppression
Models of Nigrescence

- Charles Thomas (1970):
  - Concept of Negromachy
  - Confusion of self-worth where person shows inappropriate dependence on White society for self-definition

- Stages
  - Withdrawal
  - Testifying
  - Information Processing
  - Activity
  - Transcendental
Models of Nigrescence

- Bailey Jackson (1972)
  - Four State Model
  - Passive Acceptance
  - Active Resistance
  - Redirection
  - Internalization
Models of Nigrescence

• William E. Cross (1971, 1978)
• Assumption: African Americans proceed through a series of four distinct Psychological stages as they move from self-degradation to self-pride
• Stages are linear and sequential
• Occur over time
# Cross Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage</th>
<th>Attitude</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-Encounter</td>
<td>Pro-White/Anti-Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Encounter</td>
<td>Confusion</td>
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<td>- Realization</td>
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<td>- Decision</td>
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<tr>
<td>Immersion / Emerson</td>
<td>Pro-Black/Anti-White</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internalization</td>
<td>Pro-Black</td>
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The Origins of Nigrescence

• Nigrescence is not a contemporary phenomenon, but rather extends back to historical spaces where victimization by racism and White supremacy instigated psychological adaptations in identity formation, for persons of African descent.
The Nigrescence Construct

• Nigrescence
  – Coined by Frantz Fanon
  – Defined – To become Black
  – Meaning: a process of developing a Black identity under conditions of oppression
  – Not a contemporary phenomenon.
Fanon’s Three Critical Questions

• Who am I?
• Am I who I say I am?
• Am I all I ought to be?
Psychological Nigrescence

- Illustrate the difference between:
  - Between Group Comparison
    - African American
    - Asian American
    - Caucasian
    - Chicano-Latino
    - American Indian
  - Within Group Variability
    How Do African-Americans differ?
The Nigrescence Construct

- DuBois (1903) – Souls of Black Folks
  - Two warring idols in one body
  - One ever feels the two-ness, one African, one American

- Ames (1950) – Protest & Irony in Negro Reform
  - Got one mind for White folks to see; another for what I know is me.
Du Bois’ Analysis

• The need to balance two competing worldviews

• Recognition that the American experience for African Americans was harsh, destructively discriminatory, and brutally oppressive

• Predicted that the issue of the 20th Century (and now the 21st) would be race and the color line.
Carter G. Woodson

- In 1933, wrote *The Mis-education of the Negro*
- Those interested in understanding the psyche of African descent people should consider Woodson’s work as must reading.
He writes:
If you allow a people to control the way you think, you do not have to assign them to an inferior status. If necessary, they will seek it for themselves.
The biggest problem confronting African-American communities throughout this nation in the new millennium is not gang violence, drug abuse, poverty, or even racism and white supremacy. The biggest problem confronting our people is the need for mental liberation.  

(Parham, 2000).
The Future of Nigrescence Research

Synthesizing African centered constructs of normal identity development with a recognition that oppression and racism continue to exert a profound influence on the psychological adaptation of persons of African descent.
Diagram 1

(Parham, 1992)
Cornel West:

- Black strivings in a twilight civilization
- Describes America as a chamber of horrors
- Vicious attacks on Black peoples’ beauty, moral character, intelligence, behavior, capability, and life itself.
How do I maintain a sense of cultural integrity in a world that doesn’t support or affirm my humanity as a person of African descent?
What lessons does she teach?

Universality of Racial Identity Development
Helms believes:

- All racial and ethnic groups experience some development of their racial identity.

- Differential socialization has individuals from different racial groups arriving at different places in the developmental spectrum of racial attitudes.
Universality of Racial Identity Development

Differential Socialization:

- Society anoints brothers and sisters in the White community as being entitled and privileged.
- Society anoints brothers and sisters in the Black community as occupying a status of deprivation.
Universality of Racial Identity Development

Whites:
• Maturation process toward a more foreclosed identity recognizes the need to abandon their White privilege and entitled status.

African Americans:
• Developmental challenges are related to the need to overcome internalized racism.
What lessons does she teach?

There are lessons in Counseling Applications
Lessons in Counseling Applications

Helms:

• Committed to a broader application of identity issues

• Believed that racial identity could be applied to the domain of counseling and psychotherapy.
What lessons does she teach?

There are lessons in how to manage critique, even from one’s own group.
Critique has come from two primary sources:

• The African American community

• The White community
Managing Critique and Feedback

Regarding Nigrescence Models:

• Lack grounding in the cosmology of African centeredness

• Represent a sophisticated regression to a deracinated psychological mis-orientation

• The construct anchored in the European reality
Re: White Identity Model

• Initially deny that Whites possess a racial identity

• Now argue that the model does not accurately characterize their experience
Managing Critique and Feedback

In all instances, critique and feedback have been managed with:

- Professionalism
- Receptivity
- Sensitivity
- Humor
- Integrity
What makes Janet Helms’ work so profound is:

• Captured the essence of psychological adaptation for African descent people and white people

• Analysis speaks to the emotional tone of a people (ethos), who construct for themselves affective and cognitive spaces from which to pull on energies used to cope with life.
Indeed, if existence has a face on every side, and every face teaches a lesson, aren’t we glad that through conference like the Diversity Challenge and Race Institute, we will no longer separate her face from the profound lessons she has taught and continues to teach us all.
“EACH OF US IS A SEED OF DIVINELY INSPIRED POSSIBILITY, 
Which when nurtured in its proper context can and will grow into the fullest expression of all we are supposed to become”
(African proverb)
“POWER IS THE ABILITY TO DEFINE REALITY, AND MAKE OTHER PEOPLE RESPOND TO YOUR DEFINITION AS IF IT WERE THEIR OWN” (NOBLES, 1986)
“LIFE AT ITS BEST IS A CREATIVE SYNTHESIS OF OPPOSITES IN FRUITFUL HARMONY” (PARHAM).
What is the Challenge of Blackness

• Pugh (1972)
  – Certain anxiety conditioned to blackness because of what being Black in America has meant.

• Parham (1990, 1999)
Models of Nigrescence

- Bailey Jackson (1972)
  - Four State Model
  - Passive Acceptance
  - Active Resistance
  - Redirection
  - Internalization
Models of Nigrescence

Parham’s Modifications include “Cycles of Psychological Nigrescence”
Fanon’s Three Critical Questions

• Who am I?
• Am I who I say I am?
• Am I all I ought to be?
THREE CRITICAL QUESTIONS

Who am I?
• Question of Identity

Am I who I say I am?
• Question of congruence

Am I all I ought to be?
• Question of actualizing potential
Central Issues:

• How do I maintain a sense of Cultural Integrity in a world that does not support and affirm my humanity?

• Balancing two competing worldviews
Identity cannot be reduced to a simplistic yardstick of behavioral manifestations.