

“Our Expressions”

A key component of a long-term strategic plan (LTSP) for Black (African) Americans is language, culture, and religion. How do we transmit the meaning of our lives? What is the meaning of our lives? How do we express joy for our living? These three elements define our expression and inform the world, in large measure, concerning who and what we are. As we develop a LTSP for Black Americans we must be careful to include in that plan clear guidance and a strong *modus operandi* for preserving, extending, and expanding our cultural expression.

Today, there is a notion that many Black Americans continue to speak a dialect of the American English **language**. We must ask and answer the following questions concerning this phenomenon: (1) Should Blacks make every effort to converge on American English? (2) Should we continue the status quo, with many Blacks speaking standard American English, while others speak some variant thereof? (3) Should Blacks promote the development of a new Black American language that we reserve for speaking in our homes and in our communities? The latter idea may seem far fetched, but language, as you know, is a key tool for preserving, extending, and expanding culture. Moreover, language can set the tone for the mentality and personality of a people. Can we use our genius to develop a language based on scientific and cultural principles that can ultimately transform us back into the powerful people that we were and are?

By **culture** we mean all of the ingredients that constitute the flavor that characterizes what we do—how we live our lives:

- The way we carry our selves physically, including the way that we dress.
- The music that sets the tempo of our living—melody and lyrics.
- The way we dance to the music of our lives.
- The way we capture and reflect the essence of our lives in the visual and literary arts.

Culture, because it breathes through generations, morphs through time. What parameters do we establish for identifying our culture? What is essentially Black Americanness? Do we “futures invent” the evolution of our culture or do we allow it to evolve naturally in a chaotic and unconstrained pattern over time? How much of non-Black Americanness should be allowed to filter into our culture? Do we give up our culture and adopt “lock, stock, and barrel” American culture? In that context, we must ask, is American culture essentially Black culture? These are important questions that must be answered when developing a LTSP for Black Americans.

Black Americans have been at the forefront of American **religion** formation. However, in most cases, Black American religion formation has been undeniably and strongly informed by Christian or Islamic faiths. Should Black Americans continue to worship in a diverse religion tradition: Some Christian and some Islamic? Should Black

Americans seek homogeneity in worship by adopting one or the other (Christian or Islamic) traditions? Should Black Americans metamorphosize and adopt a unique religious tradition based on Christianity, Islam, or some other religious tradition? Should Black Americans create and adopt a totally new religious tradition for themselves. Should our liturgies be orderly or should they benefit from the beauty that can come out of chaos?

Culture characterizes a people. To the extent that Black Americans seek to maintain a separate identity, then it is critical that we define and promote our separate culture. We may or may not choose to treat language, culture, and religion separately in our LTSP; however; a good LTSP must include these elements. Whatever we decide about Black American language, culture, and religion, it would seem a waste to have the richness that is Black American culture disappear from the landscape.

DRAFT