



# Black American Communities: From Pathology to Intersectionality

**Mocombe PC\***

West Virginia State University, The Mocombeian Foundation, Inc, USA

**\*Corresponding author:** Paul C Mocombe, West Virginia State University, The Mocombeian Foundation, Inc, USA, Email: pmocombe@mocombeian.com

**Review Article**

**Volume 6 Issue 3**

**Received Date:** August 22, 2023

**Published Date:** December 26, 2023

**DOI:** 10.23880/phij-16000313

## Abstract

This article, using Mocombeian phenomenological structural theory, phenomenological structuralism, highlights black American community transition from a pathological-pathogenic community to an intersectional one, which dominates the contemporary global order. The work posits that the constitution of black American communities and their identities have been the product of their relations to the means and mode of production within the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. As such, black Americans have never been agents in the constitution of their own identities. They have always been and remain (reactionary) pawns of capital seeking, dialectically or negative dialectically, to integrate the American social structure. Contemporarily, their integration in post-industrial America is marked by their transition from a pathological-pathogenic community to a neoliberal intersectional one dominated by their youth, women, and queers.

**Keywords:** African-Americanization; Racial Identity; Religiosity; Black Diaspora; Spiritualism

## Introduction

This article, using Mocombeian phenomenological structural theory, phenomenological structuralism, highlights black American community transition from a pathological-pathogenic community to an intersectional one, which dominates the contemporary global order. The work posits that the constitution of black American communities and their identities have been the product of their relations to the means and mode of production within the Protestant Ethic and the spirit of capitalism. As such, black Americans have never been agents in the constitution of their own identities. They have always been and remain (reactionary) pawns of capital seeking, dialectically or negative dialectically, to integrate the American social structure. Contemporarily, their integration is marked by their transition from a pathological-pathogenic community to a neoliberal intersectional one

dominated by their youth, athletes, women, and queers under finance neoliberal (rentier) capital.

## Background of the Problem

Since the 1960s, there have been two dominant schools of thought on understanding the origins and nature of black American practical consciousnesses, the ideas, ideals, and values black Americans recursively reorganize and reproduce in their material practices in the United States (US): the pathological-pathogenic and adaptive-vitality schools. The pathological-pathogenic position suggests that in its divergences from white American norms and values black American community life and practical consciousness are nothing more than a pathological form of, and reaction to, American consciousness rather than a dual (both African and American) hegemonic opposing “identity-in-differential”

(the term is Gayatri Spivak's) to the American one [1-10]. Afrocentric Proponents of the adaptive-vitality school suggest that the divergences are not pathologies but African "institutional transformations" preserved on the American landscape [11-29].

Contemporarily, both positions have been criticized for either their structural determinism as in the case of the pathological-pathogenic approach, or racial/cultural determinism as in the case of the adaptive-vitality [21]. In directly or indirectly refuting these two positions for their structural and racial/cultural determinism, contemporary post-sixties and post-segregation era black scholars (Critical Race Theorists) in the United States (US) attempt to understand black consciousnesses and communities by using post-structural and post-modern theories to either reinterpret W.E.B. Du Bois's double consciousness construct as an epistemological mode of critical inquiry that characterizes the nature or essence of black consciousness, a la Cornel West and Paul Gilroy, or, building on the social constructivist work of Frantz Fanon, offer an intersectional approach to the constitution of black consciousnesses and communities, which emphasizes the diverse and different levels of alienation, marginalization, and domination, class, race, gender, global location, age, and sexual identity, by which black consciousnesses and communities get constituted, a la bell hooks and Patricia Hill Collins [18,27,30-33]. The former, under the umbrella of critical race theory attempts to portray Du Boisian double consciousness as negative dialectic in order to convict the West for not identifying with their ideas, ideals, and values when they continuously discriminate (individually and institutionally) against black folks who recursively organize and reproduce these ideas, ideals, and values as their practical consciousness, i.e., the modernity of the black Atlantic. In the latter position, Afropessimists take it to the extreme to suggest that blackness is an ontological paradigm of death with no political subjectivity, created by white structural violence, wherein the so-called black body is instrumentalized for intersectional (postcolonial, gay, etc.,) agendas [34].

In spite of their efforts, these two dominant contemporary responses (the epistemological and intersectional or critical race theory and afropessimism) to the pathological-pathogenic and adaptive-vitality positions inadequately resolve the structural and racial determinism of the aforementioned approaches by neglecting the fact that their theories and they themselves, like the positions of the pathological-pathogenic and adaptive-vitality schools, derive from the racial-class division and social relations of production of global (finance) capitalism or the contemporary Protestant capitalist world-system, which seeks to assimilate black America in particular and the black diaspora in general into the neoliberal (postindustrial) social

order post-1960s via intersectionality and identity politics. Afropessimists view the latter process as a lack of "black" political subjectivity, while critical race theorists view it as the political agential initiative of the so-called "black modernity" of the Atlantic [18]. This work, building on the assimilative discourse of Mocombe, views these latter two processes as both the product of black relations and differentiations to the postindustrial mode of production, and, in agreement with the afropessimists, the basis upon which blacks are integrated into the contemporary neoliberal order [35].

### Theory and Method

Mocombeian phenomenological structuralism, which is a structurationist theory that understands the constitution of society, human identity, and social agency as a duality and dualism, views the contemporary postindustrial social structure in the West and America as paradoxically constituted via Protestant neoliberalism and identity politics, the latter sociopolitical economic structures would give rise to the postmodern and post-structural positions afropessimism and critical race theory on the constitution of black community life and practical consciousness, and the basis upon which they are integrated or assimilated in the society [35-37]. Just the same, the former two positions, the adaptive-vitality and pathological-pathogenic, were also the by-product of black relations and differentiations to the agricultural and industrial modes of production, respectively.

Mocombeian phenomenological structuralism posits that societal and agential constitution are a result of power relations, interpellation, and socialization or embourgeoisement via five systems, i.e., mode of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse, which are reified as a social structure or what Mocombe calls a "social class language game" by persons, power elites, who control the means and modes of production in a material resource framework [35]. Once interpellated and embourgeoisied by these five systems, which are reified as a social structure and society social class language game, social actors, for their ontological security, recursively organize, reproduce, and are differentiated by the rules of conduct of the social structure, which are sanctioned by the power elites who control the means and modes of production, language, ideology, ideological apparatuses, and communicative discourse in a material resource framework. Hence, societal and agential constitution are both a duality and dualism: a dualism given the reification of the social structure social class language games via the five systems; and a duality given the internalization of the rules of the five systems, which become the agential initiatives or praxes of social actors differentiated by the rules of conduct that are sanctioned based on the economic mode of production. Difference, or alternative social praxis, in Mocombe's

structuration theory, phenomenological structuralism, is not structural differentiation as articulated by traditional structurationists such as Bourdieu, Sahlins, Habermas, and Giddens; instead, it is a result of actions arising from the deferment of meaning and ego-centered communication given the interaction of two other structuring structures physiological drives of the body and brain; and phenomenal properties of subatomic particles that constitute the human subject vis-à-vis the mental stance of the ego during the interpellation and socialization or embourgeoisement of social actors throughout their life span or cycle in the dominant social class language game or social structure, which produces alternative praxis that is exercised at the expense of the threat these practices may pose to the ontological security of social actors in the social structure or society.

### Discussion and Conclusion

Within Mocombe's phenomenological structuralism, the understanding is that the ideologies and rhetoric of pathological-pathogenic, adaptive-vitality, Afropessimism, and critical race theory should be understood within and as being constituted by the dialectical structure of a global Protestant capitalist social structure of class inequality and differentiation put in place, through bodies, mode of production, language, ideology, and ideological state and transnational apparatuses, in order to limit, direct, and integrate the meaning and discursive practices of subjective identities, which may arise as a result of the decentered subject and the indeterminacy of meaning in ego-centered communicative discourse. That is to say, the theories capture the nature of black practical consciousnesses as determined not by their own agential initiatives, but by their relations and differentiations to different modes of production in the capitalist world-system. The adaptive-vitality and pathological-pathogenic positions emerged (1619-1970) between the aporias of agricultural and industrial modes of production, respectively; and the postmodern and post-structural positions of critical race theory and afropessimism emerging (1980-2023) between the aporias of industrial and postindustrial productions.

In other words, all four theories, regarding the constitution of black practical consciousness, are ideologies of different modes of production within which black American practical consciousnesses were interpellated, constituted, and embourgeoised. The pathological-pathogenic and adaptive-vitality positions emerged between the aporia of a declining agricultural mode of production and an emerging industrial production. In the case of the former, adaptive-vitality position, black communalism, single female-headed households, improvisation, language, musical inclinations, and food choices witnessed in slavery

were viewed as Africanisms, i.e., adaptive African behaviors to the processes and vagaries of agricultural slavery [20,38]. The former, pathological-pathogenic position, viewed, given the assumption that the total institution of slavery deculturalized the African, these latter adaptations as pathological-pathogenic practices adopted from poor white culture—which emerged out of agricultural slavery and were perpetuated in the urban ghettos as blacks adapted to the industrial mode of production—which stood in contradistinction to the nuclear family traditions of the white and black bourgeoisies [1,2,39]. Contemporarily, in post-industrial America, black American practical consciousness is associated, as highlighted by the postmodern and poststructural positions, with the glorification and commodification of black underclass practices of the ghettos, narcissism, and improvisation highlighted by their musical styles, and identity politics as it stands against the nuclear and bourgeois rhetoric of the pathological-pathogenic position emerging out of the industrialism of the 1960s.

In other words, the majority of black wealth in America, contemporarily, is contingent upon rent with no true productivity value, just consumptive value. White rentier oligarchs ascertain wealth via finance, insurance, and real estate, which they in turn invest in sports and other entertainment industries where black millionaires, “the my niggas,” become millionaires and billionaires who drive the consumptive taste of the black poor through the commodification and celebration of their underclass hip-hop, gender, sexual, athletic, and youthful identities, which emerged from their integration in the social structure of postindustrial capitalism, which both transmogrified and constituted their communities, families, and identities as the by-product of intersectional age, sex, sexual orientation, class, and race standpoints within capitalist relations of production as opposed to nuclear family ideologies of the pathological-pathogenic position.

In the agricultural, and the beginning of the industrial, age, between 1880-1960, married households, traditional nuclear families raising children, dominated the black American family structure against the adaptive-vitality of the agricultural mode of production (1619-1880s). Post the 1960s, and the advent of deindustrialization, criminalization, mass incarceration, and post-industrialization of American inner-cities, the out-of-wedlock birth rate began emerging as the dominant black family structural form, which was 25% among black people [5]. Post the Moynihan report, which examined the link between black poverty and family structure, that number rose to 70% as of 2018. The result in postindustrial American capitalism where identity politics and the glorification of the self and its standpoints are commodified by finance capital for capital accumulation by the white power elites, rentier oligarchs,

the celebration of single-female headed households and same-sex couple family structures would emerge, via the ideology of identity politics, as the dominant family forms in black America post the 1960s. Given the criminalization, mass incarceration of black males, and their absence in the homes as a result of legislation associated with the processes of deindustrialization, postindustrial inner-cities would be dominated by black single-female headed households, and gay male and female family structures (the latter one can surmise emerging from homosexual behaviors, which occurred in prison and post-incarceration amongst black males; and the rise of lesbianism due to the lack of men in the communities). Amidst the 70% single-female headed households, as of 2010, 32.9% of children in the US were raised by same-sex black male couples compared to 6.2% raised by white male same-sex couples; 46.7% were raised by black female same-sex couples compared to 23.1% for white female same-sex couples; and as of 2015, 24% of all black men married outside of their race compared with 12% of black female newlyweds, which is on the rise [40]. Hence, blackness, due to its social relations and differentiations within industrialization and post-industrialization, lacked any subjectivity as posited by afropessimists; instead, it (their practical consciousnesses that emerged from their social relations and differentiations vis-à-vis the industrial and post-industrial modes of production) was instrumentalized for neoliberal identity politics and intersectional jargon, becoming a model community of, and for, the latter (intersectional) by negative dialectically convicting Western society for its (individual and institutional) discriminatory affects against the serial, reified, and commodified identities utilized by finance capital for capital accumulation[41-44]. This latter position represents the theorization of critical race theory, which highlights the continual effects of institutional racism, sexism, transgenderism, etc., on preventing black folks from achieving equality of opportunity, recognition, and distribution with their white counterparts.

## References

1. Klais DS (1940) The Negro Family in the United States. *Social Forces* 18(4): 604-605.
2. Frazier FE (1957) *Black Bourgeoisie: The Rise of a New Middle Class in the United States*. The Free Press, New York.
3. Genovese ED (1974) *Roll, Jordan, roll: the world the slaves made*. Pantheon Books, New York, pp: 823.
4. Murray C (1984) *Losing Ground: American Social Policy 1950-1980*. Basic Books, New York, pp: 323.
5. Moynihan DP (1965) *The Negro Family*. Office of Planning and Research, US Department of Labor, Washington DC.
6. Myrdal G (1962) *An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy*. Harper & Row Publishers, New York, pp: 1483.
7. Wilson WJ (1978) *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions*. 3<sup>rd</sup>(Edn.), The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London.
8. Wilson WJ (1987) *The Truly Disadvantaged*. 2<sup>nd</sup> (Edn.), University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, pp: 437.
9. Sowell T (1975) *Race and Economics*. Wesleyan University, New York.
10. Sowell T, Sutton JH, Carvajal SL (1981) *Ethnic America: A History*. Basic Books, New York, pp: 353.
11. Allen RL (2001) *The Concept of Self: A Study of Black Identity and Self Esteem*. Wayne State University Press, Detroit, pp: 222.
12. Asante MK (1988) *Afrocentricity*. Africa World, New Jersey.
13. Asante MK (1990a) *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Africa World, New Jersey, pp: 214.
14. Billingsley A (1968) *Black Families in White America*. Prentice Hall, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, pp: 218.
15. Billingsley A (1970) *Black Families and White Social Science*. *Journal of Social Issues* 26(3): 127-142.
16. Billingsley A (1993) *Climbing Jacob's Ladder: The Enduring Legacy of African American Families*. *History: Reviews of New Books* 22(3): 106-107.
17. Blassingame JW (1972) *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South*. Oxford University Press, New York, pp: 262.
18. Gilroy P (1993) *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, pp: 261.
19. Gutman H, Sims SA (1978) *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925*. *Journal of Black Psychology* 4(1-2).
20. Holloway JE (1990a) *Africanisms in American Culture*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, pp: 249.
21. Karenga M (1993) *Introduction to Black Studies*. 2<sup>nd</sup>(Edn.), University of Sankore Press, Los Angeles, pp: 531.
22. Levine LW (1977) *Black Culture and Black Consciousness*.

- Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom. Oxford University Press, New York, pp: 522.
23. Lincoln EC, Mamiya LH (1990) *The Black Church in the African American Experience*. Duke University Press, Durham, pp: 519.
  24. Nobles W (1987) *African American Families: Issues, Ideas, and Insights*. Black Family Institute, Oakland.
  25. Staples R (1993) *The Black Family: Essays and Studies*. Wadsworth Publisher, Belmont, California, USA.
  26. Stack CB (1974) *All Our Kin: Strategies for Survival in a Black Community*. Harper & Row Publishers, New York.
  27. West C (1993) *Race Matters*. Beacon Press, Boston, pp: 105.
  28. Sudarkasa N (1980) African and Afro-American Family Structure: A Comparison. *The Black Scholar* 11(8): 37-60.
  29. Sudarkasa N (1981) Interpreting the African Heritage in Afro-American Family Organization. In: McAdoo HP (Ed.), *Black Families*. Sage Publications, California, pp: 27-43.
  30. Du Bois W (1903) *The Souls of Black Folk*. Penguin Putnam Inc, New York.
  31. Fanon F (1967) *Black Skin, White Masks*. Grove Press, New York.
  32. Fanon F (1963) *The Wretched of the Earth*. Grove Press, New York.
  33. Reed AL (1997) *WEB Du Bois and American Political Thought: Fabianism and the Color Line*. Oxford University Press, New York.
  34. Wilderson III FB (2017) Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption, *Humanities Futures*.
  35. Mocombe PC (2019) *The Theory of phenomenological structuralism*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
  36. Mocombe PC (2021a) Consciousness Field Theory. *Archives in Neurology & Neuroscience* 9(4): 1-6.
  37. Mocombe PC (2021b) The Consciousness field. *Advances in Bioengineering & Biomedical Science Research* 4(1): 1-6.
  38. Holloway JE (1990b) The Origins of African-American Culture. In Holloway JE (Ed.), *Africanisms in American Culture* (19-33). Bloomington and Indianapolis, Indiana University Press.
  39. Frazier FE (1968) *The Free Negro Family*. Arno Press and The New York Times, New York.
  40. Movement Advancement Project, Family Equality Council and Center for American Progress (2012) *All Children Matter: How Legal and Social Inequalities Hurt LGBT Families*.
  41. Horne G (1986) *Black and Red: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Afro-American Response to the Cold War, 1944-1963*. State University of New York Press, Albany, New York.
  42. Hudson K, Andrea C (2005) The Dark Side of the Protestant Ethic: A Comparative Analysis of Welfare Reform. *Sociological Theory* 23(1): 1-24.
  43. Kardiner Abram, Ovesey L (1962) *The Mark of Oppression: Explorations in the Personality of the American Negro*. World Publishing, Meridian.
  44. Patterson O (1982) *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts.

