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John Leonard Harris

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The Washington-DuBois conflict opened the debate as to the proper course for Blacks to take as they sought full citizenship in American society. Moreover, their conflict became a problem for the larger Black community. The status distinctions, disorganization of the Black family and formation of social classes in the slave community had been the slaveholders way of defining Black racial identity. Now, with "freedom" came the opportunity for Blacks to make their own definition, but there was one key problem. The key manipulative strategies of slavery (i.e., brainwashing with inferiority, break up of the African (slave) family, use of religion as a control technique, the creation of infighting in the slave community and the developing plantation stereotypes) had taught the Africans how to be slaves. However, when slavery ended, they were never taught how not to be slaves. Thus, the psychological chains were never unlinked and slavery, with all of its nuances could be passed from generation to generation through the families of former slaves and former slaveholders.

With emancipation came mobility and the opportunity to move away from poverty and hopelessness and into wealth and success. For many Blacks this would mean moving away from their Blackness and toward the White mainstream culture. As more Blacks did indeed move away from their own, certain problems arose. One of these problems, a source of ingroup conflict, is internal stereotyping. As is the case when Blacks are stereotyped by other racial groups, internal stereotyping is equally, if not more destructive.

The reality of internal stereotyping is that its basis is in the Black experience in America. This phenomena, which has its roots in White racism and slavery, has possibly had as much of a negative impact on the Black experience as any other factor. Why? Because the reality of the denigration is internal and as such debilitating.

Currently, several stereotypes exist and are attributed to Blacks who have not been socialized exclusively in a predominantly Black environment, or who choose to assimilate into other racial groups. These stereotypes, as is the case with most, are derogatory in nature and serve only to foster disorganization and conflict. These stereotypes are: "Oreo," "Uncle Tom," "Sell Out" and "The H.N.I.C." (Head Negro In Charge). All of these terms make reference to a perception of a person who seemingly has no real connection or has chosen to withdraw from the reality of Black people in

America. The problem with the usage of these terms is that those who use them, often use them interchangeably which is a mistake. Each label, just like each Black, has a certain uniqueness.

As Blacks utilize the aforementioned stereotypes, they continue to perform just as the slaveholder had intended. They pit African against African in a confused and unstable condition. Interestingly, some Blacks would even argue that it is necessary to know who is an "Oreo," "Uncle Tom," "Sell Out" or "The H.N.I.C." in a given environment. To know this allows Blacks to identify those with whom they should be suspect or cautious. Others would argue however, that to stereotype those of one's own race is only to do what has been done to Africans since they were brought to the United States as slaves. Further, the problems which arise only serves to recreate the very system of division and conflict which the slaveholder so ably devised.

PRESENTER

John Leonard Harris, is a native of St. Louis, Missouri. He attended the University of Missouri-Columbia, where he graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Speech and Dramatic Arts with an emphasis in Radio-TV-Film Production. He currently serves as Special Assistant to the Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln and also is pursuing a Master of Arts degree in Sociology.

Harris is an active and financial member of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity, Incorporated (Eta Gamma Chapter, University of Missouri-Columbia, 1981) and is one of the founding members of the Black Greek Federation of Lincoln. He has held several positions of leadership for his fraternity (Past President, Omaha Alumni Chapter, Nebraska Area Director, Southwestern Regional Secretary) and for the National Pan-Hellenic Council (Past President, Omaha Alumni Chapter, Nebraska State Representative). Mr. Harris was also an original steering committee member of the Black Greek Federation of Lincoln.

Mr. Harris is a talented speaker and workshop facilitator who regularly speaks on topics relative to the Black experience. He has authored several important papers including: "The Lasting Effects of Slavery," "Black Women and the Continuing Struggle Against Racism and Sexism," "The Right to be Nasty: Examining the 2 Live Crew Controversy" and "The Search for Self." In 1993, Mr. Harris was honored by the National Association of Human Rights Workers with their first ever, Article of the Year award for his paper, "The Portrayal of the Black Family on Prime-Time Network Television: A Look at Stereotypic Images and Disorganization of Family Structure." His paper was published in the Spring 1993 issue of the Journal of Intergroup Relations.