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Spirituality and Culture in Higher Education

L. C. Menyweather-Woods

Instructor, Black Studies Department, University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Spirituality and Culture in Higher Education

Abstract

The fifth year of the New Millennium demands the Community of Faith to continue the dialogue of Richard Niebhuhr's Christ and Culture, challenging the traditional belief "faith" cannot mutually coexist with culture, i.e., the true believer must always be choosing between the secular or sacred.

L.C. Menyweather-Woods

Instructor, Black Studies Department, University of Nebraska at Omaha

E. Lincoln (1999) wrote "Perhaps the place to look for the critical effects of the Brown case on the Black Community is in education, for that was the fundamental issue of the suit. The consequent question is whether the education of Black Children has been significantly improved by classroom desegregation." This statement by the late Sociologist of Religion focuses on the dilemma raised in Richard Niebuhr's *Christ and Culture*, the relationship between "faith and culture" as opposed to the traditional belief "faith or culture."

The role of spirituality and culture in Higher Education as it relates to students of color in predominantly Eurocentric educational environments is significant, and as discussed in *Race, Religion, and the Continuing American Dilemma*, most challenging to Black American students. This challenge is the result of ". . . a flight, and that is inevitable, of Black people of privilege and opportunity from among the real masses of Black people. . . They have gone to greener pastures, in the suburbs. . . These things have to happen, but they have in some senses weakened our Black communities" (Sanders, 2005, p 52-53).

"Traditional interpretations" without conscientiousness of "cultural understandings" attributes to confusion, a misperception of reality, and lost or total abandonment of spiritual and cultural values. The challenges confronting students of color at predominately Eurocentric institutions has been heightening due to the upward mobility of Black Americans since the Reagan presidency. This mobility is referenced by Gardner C. Taylor in Sanders' (2005) article. Taylor states the lack of allegiance to the "Black Church tradition" is emblematic of a loss of solidarity, and it is this loss of solidarity which has resulted in "spiritual draught" in students who attend predominantly Eurocentric institutions.

There is need for redefining of terminology by not only students of color in attendance of predominantly Eurocentric institutions, but students who are of European descent as well. Niebuhr (1952) stress "faith and culture" are mutually exclusive, even complimentary of one another. Each have a significant role in the development and unifying of people, and forges the union which enables, empowers, and create the energy to uniquely contribute to the sanity of the meaning of humanity in these times. The reinvestment of reexamining of definitions proves healthy and meaningful to a generation which has lost fellowship and symbolic bond of singleness of purpose.

This presentation will examine the writings of two contrasting theological thoughts, one Afrocentric, the other, somewhat Eurocentric. The two thoughts reveal how differences sometimes speak to the issue of oneness or unity based on proper understanding of “faith and culture.” A further look at Taylor’s comments relative to the “lack of allegiance” to the “Black Christian tradition” is quite an acknowledgement standing in need of correct interpretation. Affirmation of the celebration of Kwanzaa by more Black churches is confirmation “faith and culture” can act in concerted effort with one another. This is the beginning of a healthy dialogue between the “secular and sacred.

Presenter

L.C. Menyweather-Woods is a native of Muskogee, Oklahoma, the father of two grown daughters, four (4) grandchildren, and married for 27-years to the former Gloria Wesson of Lawrenceville, Virginia. A full-time Instructor in the Black Studies Department of the University of Nebraska at Omaha (UNO), the presenter is also a second-year Special Faculty Development (SFD) Candidate in the Ph.D. program in Human Sciences with an emphasis in Gerontology. He took a medical retirement after serving 15-years as Senior Pastor of a North Omaha Black Baptist Church. He formed two Community-based organizations (CBO) which purchased an existing, Independent Senior Living facility in Downtown Omaha, and built 202 Housing and Urban Development (HUD) Housing on 20th and Hamilton Streets, Concord Square Apartments.