

ment were found, in certain respects, even to have been transmitted to the whites, thus making the result of contact an exchange of culture—as it was in the case of other groups—rather than the endowment of an inferior people with habits of a superior group? Let us suppose, in short, it could be shown that the Negro is a man with a past and a reputable past; that in time the concept could be spread that the civilizations of Africa, like those of Europe, have contributed to American culture as we know it today; and that this idea might eventually be taken over into the canons of general thought. Would this not, as a practical measure, tend to undermine the assumptions that bolster racial prejudice?

There are other, more immediate, ways in which truer perspective concerning Africanisms might be helpful from a practical point of view:

Granting that current social and economic forces are predominant in shaping race relations, it must never be forgotten that psychological imponderables are also of first importance in sanctioning action on any level. And it is such imponderables . . . that . . . are now being strengthened by the findings of studies that ignore the only valid point of departure in social investigation—the historical background of the phenomenon being studied and those factors which make for its existence and perpetuation. When, for instance, one sees vast programs of Negro education undertaken without the slightest consideration being given to even the possibility of some retention of African habits of thought and speech that might influence the Negroes' reception of the instruction thus offered, one cannot but ask how we hope to reach the desired objectives. When we are confronted with psychological studies of race relations made in utter ignorance of characteristic African patterns of motivation and behavior, or with sociological analyses of Negro family life which make not the slightest attempt to take into account even the chance that the phenomenon being studied might in some way have been influenced by the carry-over of certain African traditions; when we contemplate accounts of the history of slavery which make of plantation life a kind of paradise by ignoring or distorting the essential fact that the institution persisted only through constant precautions taken against slave uprisings, we can but wonder about the value of such work.⁵⁹

Yet such studies are being undertaken, and in them the ordinary procedure of the scientist, whereby he attempts to take into account all possible factors, is invariably neglected in favor of uncritical repetition of statements touching the aboriginal Negro past. And this, it is submitted, achieves one result with a sureness that would shock those who are the cause of this distortion of scholarship. For though it has often been pointed out that the skin-color of the Negro