

A Concept of Face in African-American Culture

Tyrone Yarbrough

Your face,...., is as a book where
men
May read strange matters.
- Macbeth, Act I, scene v

One of the more frustrating aspects of social science research is the general dismissal of personal experience as a basis of proof. Given a choice between etymological derivation, life history reconstruction, statistical comparison or participant observation, the private recollections of a researcher is seen as lacking; self-knowledge is seen as no knowledge at all. For example, when I was growing up, one of my passions was basketball, a passion seemingly shared with just about every other Black male in the community. Whether you were young or old, basketball maintained a privileged position among us. Even more admired than the game itself were the best players. And although basketball is a team sport, the best moments of the game were one on one. When a good offensive player faced a good defensive one, the other players on the court became spectators. They would watch the man with the ball take it to the top of the key, only to be cut off in mid-drive. The defender would shadow his man's every step, allowing him no room to maneuver, pushing him further away from the goal. Until the offensive player pulled up with the defender's hand in his face and, swish, hit nothing but the bottom of the net.



At this moment, the player who scored would look at his opponent and say "In your face". Sometimes the phrase would be truncated merely to the word "face". At other times the phrase would become "in your eye," or "eye", further reduced symbolically in the locus of the face. The other players would now come back into the game, very often exclaiming "Face! Face!" themselves. The ball would be taken out, and the "faced" player would bring it up the court himself, because now it was his turn.

This type of boasting and taunting has been well documented in other forms of African American expressive and competitive behavior (Smitherman, 1986; Kochman, 1981; Hurston, 1935). It is evident in sports, music, and dance. It manifests itself in a variety of specific behaviors. At one time, Black football players celebrated touchdowns with choreographed endzone dances. Muhammad Ali was famous for his verbal taunting of opponents. Bluesmen such as Muddy Waters, Willie Dixon and blueswomen like Rosetta Howard or Bessie Smith boasted throughout their songs. A similar motive is the foundation of cutting contests in jazz, dance and the genres of urban hip-hop culture from rap to breaking and graffiti writing. All of these examples illustrate the

accuracy of Village Voice writer Greg Tate's observation on Black cultural style: "Hip-hop is the most modern example, after capoeira and basketball, of African culture's bent towards aesthetic combat - what the graffiti movement itself long ago defined as 'style wars' "(Tate 1988:21).



There was one other important area in which the term face was encountered; the Black rhetorical traditions. Much like basketball, the best examples of this are one on one, in front of an audience. Two players, usually friends, would be engaged in some form of verbal dueling. As in basketball, the best players were admired for their skill, their manipulation of the rules of the game, their cool in the face of the most heated repartee. On the sidelines, the audience would add the response to the call of each player, an "ooooh" to one cap, an "aaah" for a retort or an "I wouldn't take that," to a particularly stunning, obscene comeback.

Sometimes, during a session of verbal dueling, whether players were signifying, woofing, loud talking, doing the dozens, sounding, capping or just plain arguing, there were times when one of the players could not take it. His countenance, once easy, relaxed and joking, would stiffen like quick setting cement. His jaw would tighten, and the words would come forced out of his mouth "I don't play that shit. Don't be getting up in my face."

Immediately, the tone of the game changed. Most in the audience knew enough to end its instigating. The offended player was quiet, waiting for his opponent to make up his mind; apologize or keep on talking. And there was a price to pay for getting in some one's face.



The overall meaning of both uses of this phrase is obvious to anyone. In sports, the accomplishment of one player translates into as a loss for the opponent; in essence it is a zero sum game. To meet a challenge face to face is symbolic of confrontation and of victory. Part of the successful player's due is the recognition of his accomplishment by others, and by himself. The confines of the game allow for the exhibition of skill and the opportunity for release in the form of socially sanctioned personal affront. Rather than

repress, Black cultural style allows for the catharsis found in expression.

Observing this, it occurred to me that this use of the term face, rather than being merely a transparently obvious colloquialism, might be the expression of a more subtle and much more important social construct. What led me to such a suspicion was an article published in the *American Anthropologist* in 1944; "The Chinese Concepts of 'Face'", by Hsien Chin Hu.

In the article, Hu examines the various meanings of a cultural concept that is widespread and especially notable among East Asian peoples. While delineating a concept of Chinese origin, she distinguishes the terms *lien* and *mien-tzu*, "...two sets of criteria by which prestige is gained and status secured or improved, and also how different attitudes can be reconciled within the framework of the same culture" (1944:45). *Mien*, the older term, refers to the relation between ego and society; it denotes the stature that is gained through personal success and achievement. It is a more secular,

profane concept in that it is totally dependent on the external, worldly environment. Mien/face is closer to status currency rather than status itself.

Lien is the respect and worth that society conveys upon every member:

It is the respect of a group for a man with a good moral reputation: the man who will fulfill his obligations regardless of the hardships involved, who under all circumstances will show himself a decent human being. In this case, lien/face is a more sacred formulation in that it places the individual in the context of his society. It marks his position more formally; without it, he cannot function within the community because this face is both a social, external sanction and an internalized one (1944:45).

Loss of lien is therefore more serious and crippling than loss of mien. Lien is prized by all in a society; individuals have different standards regarding mien. Everyone has lien, whereas mien is gained and earned. As a result, there are a myriad number of methods of losing face for one's self or of losing face for others; different states of facelessness; and varying ways to gaining or maintain face.

Hu's work influenced others, including the American sociologist Erving Goffman, to contribute to the literature on face. In his articles "On Face-Work", and "Embarrassment and Social Organization", Goffman presents a more Eurocentric conception of subject. Face-work, as Goffman defines it, is a style of interpersonal encounter, found in all societies calculated to avoid personal embarrassment or loss of poise, and to maintain for others an impression of self-respect (Goffman 1955: 216). For Goffman face is "the positive social value one effectively claims for himself by the line others assume that he has taken during a particular contact. Face is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes" (1955:213).

Goffman's contributions to the literature on face revolve around his recognition of the ritual elements underlying the concept as well as his formulation of line. Line is the pattern of verbal and nonverbal acts by which [one] expresses his view of the situation and through his evaluation of the participants, especially himself (1955:213): "... a person will have two points of view - a defensive orientation toward saving his own face and a protective orientation toward saving the others' face" (1955:217).

The ritual elements function to maintain the lines established by the social order:

"Whatever his position in society, the person insulates himself by blindnesses, half-truths, illusions, and rationalizations. He makes an 'adjustment' by convincing himself, with the tactful support of his intimate circle, that he is what he wants to be and that he is what others have done to gain theirs. And as for society, if the person is willing to be subject to informal social control- if he is willing to find out from hints and glances and tactful cues his place is, and keep it- then there will be no objection to his furnishing this place at his own discretion, with all the comfort, elegance, and nobility that his wit can muster for him" (1955:230).

The emphasis that Goffman puts on the individual's placement makes this description remarkably similar to Arnold van Gennep's postliminal rites (van Gennep 1960:10). As in these rituals, the purpose is to bring one into the social order and to establish his status within the community. The more fixed lien/face, as opposed to the fluid mien/face, is probably an aspect of the incorporation of the societal members.

Goffman, despite his citation of Hu's article, omits her distinctions between *lien* and *mien*, and despite his implicit dual definition of self, combines the two terms. This has been noted by David Y.F. Ho in his article "On the Concept of Face". Ho differs with both Hu and Goffman. Although he accepts Hu's distinction of the criteria for *lien* and *mien*, he disputes the linguistic distinction she rests her contention upon. In some contexts, he sees the terms as interchangeable.

Goffman, on the other hand, is criticized for treating face as "... situationally defined, meant to refer only to the immediate respect a person expects others to show in each specific instance of a social encounter" (Ho 1976:868).

Ho's attempts to clarify the concept of face as an universal sociological concept is the source of these criticisms. He sees face as being closely related to certain social constructs such as behavioral standards, status, dignity, honor or prestige that have led to its vague application and its neglect in sociological literature. Also, he raises the question as to the scientific applicability of the term. "... to what extent is the concept of face useful in the analysis of social behavior outside of the context of Chinese culture?" (1976:869).

For Ho, face is not a standard of behavior, nor a personality variable, nor status, nor honor, nor dignity, nor prestige. Face is not located within individuals. It is an invariant concern of adequate social functioning, and as such, it is a key concept that ties together the separate social concerns.

Ultimately, Ho defines face as:

... the respectability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately in that position as well as acceptably in his general conduct; the face extended to a person by others is a function of the degree of congruence between judgements of his total condition in life, including his actions as well as those of people closely associated with him, and the social expectations that others have placed upon him" (1976:883).

Face is reciprocated compliance, respect, and/or deference that each person expects from, and extends to another. The distinction that Ho makes between face and prestige and personality is reflective of two different value orientations of human behavior. In Western societies, the concern is with the individual. In East Asian cultures, the concern is with the "reciprocity of obligations, dependence and esteem protection" (1976:883).

Defining his terms in this way leads Ho to propose two types of comparative studies of face interculturally:

- a. charting the changes in the criteria for judging face through time within a given culture... and hence the corresponding changes in value orientations;...
- b. highlighting the prevailing modes in which people maintain, lose and gain face in different cultures, to reveal the underlying cross-cultural differences in social relationships and values (1976:875).

Which, finally, brings us back to the specific subject of this paper - a concept of face for African American culture.

The question that should arise is whether or not the two concepts I've talked about are related in any way. Is the African American use of face merely the universal sociological concept that Ho outlines? At this point, the problems

underlying the subject of this paper should be apparent. We have an item of folk speech; how do we prove that such a minuscule expression is anything more than slang? How do we prove that it is particularly a Black phenomenon? How is it related to the well-known concept of face? And once that is accomplished, what does it reveal about African American culture?

In numerous articles such as "Folk Ideas as Units of Worldview", "Thinking Ahead", "Seeing is Believing", "Wet and Dry, the Evil Eye" and "The Number Three in American Culture", Alan Dundes has suggested that folklore can be used as source material for the examination of the worldviews of different cultures. Worldview is the patterned cognitive sets by "which people perceive, consciously or unconsciously, relationships between self, others, cosmos, and the day-to-day living of life" (from Dundes, 1980:69). Such genres as myths, legends, folk tales, folk belief, proverbial expressions or even items of folk speech are reflective of these unconscious, unstated values that cultures make as matters of course.

In keeping with Ho's suggestion for comparative studies for the concept of face and the Afrocentric assumptions of the subject, I am presenting two arguments:

- a. rather than being a universal, (as Ho has said) face is the symbolic representation of specific social concerns and
- b. the item of folk speech I've focused on may be representative of the worldview underlying the issues that the concept of face raises: manners/etiquette, competition, conflict, moral character, poise, status, worth, integrity, honor, masculinity, femininity, decency, adequacy, or prestige.

The logical place to start is with simple etymological derivations: looking it up in the dictionary. Once this is done, many problems are encountered; The Oxford English Dictionary, which has two separate entries under face and a total of 43 distinct definitions of the word, doesn't include the term as I've described. Other standard sources such as The Dictionary of American Slang or The Dictionary of Americanisms on Historical Principles are similarly lacking. Of course, these works suffer from a Eurocentric bias that automatically assume that any word in English is derived from European sources, disregarding the cultural contexts in which it was found.

Much work has been done on Black speech. J.L. Dillard has found that the first references to Black English dates back to 1734; so the next place to go then would be works on Black English. Despite the interest of scholars such as Dillard, Geneva Smitherman, Thomas Kochman, William Labov, Edith Folb, Roger Abrahams or David Dalby, we come up against a dead end. In none of their works is the African American application of the term face mentioned. Even Clarence Major's Dictionary of Afro-American Slang omits it.

In fact, the only remote evidence that such a usage may be African derived comes not from Afro-American, but from Afro-Caribbean language studies. The Dictionary of Jamaican English edited by Frederic G. Cassidy and Robert B. LePage contains the expression *facety*: "Impudent, bold, rude, overbearing,"; it also includes the variant, *facey*: "Impudence, effrontery, 'cheek'. Typically, European provenance is assumed, rather than African equivalent usage. Given these circumstances, we are confronted once again with the question of how we prove that this is a Black expression. There is evidence that the expression is known and used among whites. In my experience, when I was bussed into a previously all white junior high school, I noticed that whites and Chicanos picked up the term, usually after playing basketball with Blacks for some time.

This use of face also occurs frequently in Popular Culture. Many police dramas in attempts to be authentic usually includes accurate slang; I can remember specific episodes of such shows as "Hill Street Blues", "Miami Vice" or "Hooperman" that have used the term face as I've described it. The continuous popularity of Black music has been a rich reference source of Black cultural style. Since, as Walter Brasch has illustrated in Black English and the Mass Media, popular culture is one of the major conduits of Black culture to white, it is safe to assume that the direction of transmission is Black to white rather than vice versa.

Finally, we are met with the possibility that the phrase is so minimal that it may be unimportant. If someone is angry with you, and they tell you to get out of their face, you don't need to run to a scholarly study of Confrontational Language among African Americans to understand what is meant. This is why despite the wide assortment of studies on Black English, this particular item of folk speech has been overlooked.

One of the basic problems with studies of folk speech is tendency to forget the nonverbal components that accompany verbal speech acts. Nonverbal behavior supplements, complements and overrides verbal communication. For example, illustrators are kinesic gestures tied directly to speech which illustrate what is being said (Knapp 1978:14). We use our hands to describe how big, small, short, tall or fast something is. Emblems are body movements that have a direct verbal translation. Without uttering a word the hands or head can say o.k, no, yes, come, stay or go (Knapp 1978:13-15). Paralinguistics are those aspects of vocal speech such as speed, pitch, rate, tone, volume, rhythm. A laugh or a belch, a moan or a yawn, marked inhalation or exhalation help to characterize vocalizations. Silent pauses, speech errors or segregates like "uh-huh" all deal with how, rather than what is said (Knapp 1978: 18-19). Not surprisingly, there are racial and cultural differences in nonverbal behavior. What an emblem means in one culture differs in another. The thumb and forefinger cinched together signifies o.k. in the United States; in Brazil it is obscene. A thumb raised alongside the road in the states asks for a ride; the same gesture in parts of Italy is an insult.

The face is of central importance in nonverbal communication because it displays affective states. It is the thing we watch for expression of emotion, for truthfulness, or for lies. It is also the thing we control when we wish to conceal and convey certain emotions or when we wish to deceive someone (Knapp 1978:263; Ekman and Friesen 1975:1-9; Ekman 1985:82).

The face, then, becomes of central importance in symbolic representations also. "The face receives attention partly because it is the mark and symbol of the self. It is the chief way we distinguish one person from another. Faces are icons, celebrated in photographs hung on walls, placed on desks, and carried in wallets and purses. Recent research has found that one part of the brain is specialized for recognizing faces. Ekman 1985). The extent of this assertion is easily demonstrated by the fact that the word person is derived from the Greek term persona, meaning mask. It originally referred to the characters of a play who were represented by masks.

This, in a roundabout way, gives us the connection between the concepts of face under discussion here as well as an entrance into the worldview underlying what I feel is a uniquely African American construction. Language is symbolic in nature, as is nonverbal communication. In order to understand what face has come to mean in African American culture we need a holistic view that takes both the verbal and nonverbal into account. Symbols, by their nature, produce ambiguous responses in the people. They can be interpreted in more ways than one; there is a flexibility in them that diminishes the predictability of response. Symbols are learned and the

context in which a symbol is presented is crucial to its interpretation (Faules and Alexander 1978:29). Symbols operate on many levels: syntactically - which are the ways in which signs are combined (sign to sign); semantically- the signification of signs (sign to signified); and pragmatically- the study of the origins, uses and effects of the signs within the total behavior of the interpreters of signs (sign to sign user) (Faules and Alexander 1975:30-36).

The symbols I am referring to here are African, specifically Yoruba and BaKongo, antecedents, ; the context I'm using is the historical experience of Black people in America; and the symbolic level I'm focusing on is the pragmatic.

Writers who have studied the transatlantic slave trade and the transformation of African into African American culture have estimated that the majority of Black people in the U.S. come from the Congo-Angola area. Phillip Curtin and George Rawley have calculated that 25 - 30% of the enslaved populace are of BaKongo descent. A comparable percentage come from specifically Yoruba cultures. This is important because, like Greece or Rome in European cultures, these civilizations were central to the development of the world they occupied. Yoruba religion, art and culture had profound affects West Africa, as did BaKongo art and culture in Central Africa.

Consequently, in the search for African antecedents, it is always amazing to find survivals of both these societies in this culture. Scholars such as Melville Herskovits, Lorenzo Dow Turner, and Robert Farris Thompson have documented many instances. Thompson mentions that the Motown recording artists, the Supremes often made a particular gesture during performances of the song, "Stop in the Name of Love": "left hand on hip, right hand or palm before the body" (Thompson and Cornet 1981:175). The person responsible for this gesture, directly and indirectly, was Cholly Atkins. Atkins was a partner of James 'Honi' Coles and both were great Black dancers in the African American vaudevillian tradition. Atkins taught choreography to groups such as Gladys Knight and the Pips and the Moonglows while managing the Apollo Theatre in Harlem. He was hired to head the Artist Development Department for Motown where he choreographed for the Temptations, Four Tops and the Jackson Five as well as the Supremes:

Atkins gave the Supremes their sideways head-over-the -shoulder stance, the stylized hand gestures; Hip sliding was not in the Supremes' repertoire of stage moves. In fact, they hardly moved at all, except for the celebrated hand gestures taught them by Cholly Atkins...the famous traffic cop gesture that signaled the chorus of "Stop in the Name of Love"...Berry Gordy and Temptations Paul Williams and Melvin Franklin helped them invent it on the spot (Hirshey 1984:166,179).

A similar pose is described by folklorist Elizabeth Fine in her study "Aesthetic Patterning of Verbal Art and the Performance Centered Text." In a performance of the toast Staggerlee, Fine writes of the nonverbal gestures accompanying the performance of James Hutchinson: "... left hand on his hip and his weight on his left foot, either with his right hand held up about shoulder level to emphasize points, or with his right arm held across his chest, with his right hand closed." Such variations appear throughout African derived cultures. Kenneth R. Johnson describes "the pimp walk", "the pimp walk stance" and "the rapping stance" similarly (Johnson 1975:301-30). Many Black ball players use a raise hand strut to celebrate a home run or a touchdown. In Haitian vodun street parades known as rara, participants strike what is known as the pose Kongo (Thompson and Cornet 1981:173-174). This same pose, obviously related to those previously accounted also

appears throughout American culture in a source not usually acknowledged as Black - the drum majorette pose from baton twirling.

The connection between these gestures is that they are all variation of what is called the telama gesture from Kongo society: "... in Kongo it is believed that placing the left hand on hip presses down all evil, while the extended right hand acts to `vibrate' the future in a positive manner. Important women used this pose at dawn to `vibrate positively' the future of town warriors. Advocates used its power to block or end a lawsuit" (Thompson and Cornet 1981:172). ([continue](#))

[Newfolk](#) :: [NDiF](#) :: [Archive](#) :: [Issue 1 July 1997](#) :: Page 1 :: [Page 2](#)

Face Value (PageTwo)

Tyrone Yarbrough, Ph.D.

As we have seen, nonverbal behavior is a form of communication. Thompson has pointed out that "from urging warriors on to victory in Kongo, to urging sports players on to victory in Mississippi, the function of this gesture has changed very little". Thompson further underlines the meaning of this gesture by stating that the Supremes were "... striking the very pose Kongo elders used to stop misbehavior at a traditional dance" (1981:175).

There are an abundance of Kongo gestures that reappear in the Black Atlantic Visual and Performance traditions. One that is of importance for this paper is the nunsu pose represented in Kong ivory sculpture. A figure is standing or kneeling, with hands on thighs. "This is an ancient pose of assuagement, asking for forgiveness. yet she ontradicts this grace with a resolutely rendered sign; with head averted, she signals denial and negation" (Thompson and Cornet:168). This head averted pose has been recorded among Afro-Cubans during spirit possession; among Afro-Americans such as the Gullah and other African peoples in general. Johnson in documenting Black kinesic behavior notes that "To look another person in the eye (in the context of a dominant culture) is a nonverbal way of communicating trustworthiness, forthrightness, masculinity, truthfulness, sincerity, etc."(Johnson 1975:300).

Conversely, this can also indicate lack of respect. Annette Powell Williams in "Dynamics of a Black Audience," writes of how it is "an indication of total rejection is shown by turning one's head away from the speaker with eyes closed (Williams 1972:103). Further evidence is provided by John and Angela Rickford in their article, "Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth". The cut-eye gesture, also known as rolling the eyes, is established as as nonverbal African survival:

The basic cut-eye gesture is initiated by directing a hostile look or glare in the other person's direction. This may be delivered with the person directly facing, or slightly to one side. In the latter position, the person is seen out of the corners of the eyes, and some people deliberately turn their bodies sideways to achieve this effect. After the initial glare, the eyeballs are moved in a highly coordinated and controlled movement down or diagonally across the line of the person's body. This 'cut' with the eyes is the heart of the gesture, and may involve the single downward movement described above, or several sharp up-and-down movements. Both are generally completed by a final glare, and then the entire head may be turned away contemptuously from the person, to the accompaniment of a loud suck-teeth (Rickford and Rickford 1976:296).

The gesture is then documented to exit not only in West Africa, but found in African Carribean as well as the African American culture today: "... cut-eye is a visual gesture which communicates hostility, displeasure, disapproval, or a general rejection of the person at whom it was directed" (1976:296).

All of these gestures have something in common; they are emblematic of

power, whether it is the exercising of it, or acquiescence to it: "It is as if the recipient has no power to prevent this visual assault, the very fact that someone else's eyes can run right over him like this proclaiming his worthlessness" (1976:296).

Through these nonverbal gestures a glimmer of the ways in which African kinesics have survived in the New World is gained. In Kongo culture, the face averted connotes respect or disrespect dependent upon the intent of the symbol user. In West Africa, the averting the eyes connotes respect or contempt. Once the two cultures were brought together in the United States, the continental similarities blended with contrasting national characters and the range of symbolic behavior broadened.

Face is central to Yoruba aesthetics, also. In order to understand this, the concept of coolness has to be introduced here:

Cool philosophy is a strong intellectual attitude, affecting incredibly diverse provinces of artistic happening, yet leavened with humor and a sense of play. It is an all important mediating process, accounting for similarities in art and vision in many tropical African societies. It is a matrix from which stem ideas about being generous, clear, percussively patterned, harmonized with others, balanced, finished, socially perfected, worthy of destiny. In other words, the criterion of coolness seems to unite and animate all the other canons (Thompson 1974:43).

Coolness is a metaphor for proper living; it symbolizes moral aesthetic accomplishment. It requires an attention to balance and harmony. It shades into behavior as well as art: "Coolness is the proper way you represent yourself to a human being" (Thompson 1983:13).

In Yoruba art, the face is a focal point of this concept. Babatunde Lawal a Yoruba art historian calls attention to the connection between face and coolness when he says that to " ... tame or pacify is to 'cool the face'" (cited in Thompson 1983:12). Lawal further notes that the head in sculpture is emphasized:

... the head (ori) is the biggest part of the sculpture because in real life it is the most vital part of the body... So important is the head in Yoruba culture that it has become the object of a cult, representing human destiny. A good ori ensures a happy and prosperous life, while a bad one condemns the individual to a life of failure (Lawal 1974:244).

In Yoruba philosophy, what is beautiful possesses ewa, the manifestation of the well-made or well-done. There is inner ewa and outer ewa. The outer concerns the surface quality of things or outer appearances in general. Inner ewa is the intrinsic worth of things. What possesses ewa is good; what lacks ewa is bad. In men and women, inner ewa is equivalent to iwa (character). The most important element in human beauty is not outer ewa, but inner character; "character is beauty" (1974:239-240).

As a result, the Yoruba recognize that while ugliness may repel, surface beauty is worthless without inner character. There is a great deal of emphasis placed on the acquisition of ashe (spiritual command, the power to make things happen) and also on itutu (mystic coolness). The supreme deity of the Yoruba, praised as the Lord of character, dispenses ashe and iwa in essence, as outward signs of inward grace. The ability to render things artistically becomes central and in Black cultures throughout the world, artistic ability becomes representative of beauty and character. "Iwa also means custom, the traditional ways of life" (Thompson 1983:11).

The Yoruba term *ashe* bears a striking resemblance to the Latin derived term *art* in its broadest sense; skill in making or doing. In African derived cultures this can be manifested customarily in music, art, verbal performance, manner of dress or sports. It is the Kongo and Yoruba legacies that lend further credence to Tate's observation of Black cultural style.

Thompson has tracked the Yoruba manifestations of coolness in the composure of the face to the United States. "Mystical coolness in Africa has changed in urban African American assertions of independent power. But the functions, to heal and gather strength partially remain. And the name, cool, remains" (Thompson 1974:45).

Once Africans were enslaved and brought to the New World, the issues of power and the importance of the ambiguity underlying symbolic behavior became primary. Once enslaved, the Africans were now at the mercy of the definitions imposed upon them by people who sought to exploit them at best and to destroy them if they could not. The results of this was to the creation of a relationship based on conflict, "... an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties, who perceive incompatible goals, scarce rewards, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals. They are in a position of opposition in conjunction with cooperation" (Frost and Wilmot 1978:9).

This conflict could not be openly acknowledged by either group. To do so for Blacks invited destruction; to do so for whites meant the destruction of a convenient way of life. In the transition from an independent to a subjugated people, standards that once informed the moral outlook were now labeled pathological, savage, primitive. Under slavery, and the legal oppression of segregation, what once were considered good manners and proper behavior became identified with servile behavior. "In the South Black males were taught - either overtly or covertly - not to look a white man in the eye because this communicated equality. Thus, not to look white males in the eye was really a survival pattern in the South" (Johnson 1974: 300). Nonverbal survivals such as rolling eyes, averting the head and deference to authority took on similar connotations.

A question presents itself. How do people beings with central ideas and beliefs about self worth and dignity react? Part of the solution may have been in the manipulation of symbolic behavior to one's own advantage:

There is an additional significance of loan-translations and convergences...., they must have been invaluable in the creation and maintenance of a subtle code by means of which slaves could communicate without fear of detection or punishment by Whites. ..., it is clear that the code was not restricted to linguistic material (Rickford and Rickford 1976:308).

Thus a command by a white could be rendered a greeting; an insult could be delivered as a polite response, as the well known tactic of 'putting on old master' illustrates.

Another tactic utilized was the investment of communal values in the creation of institutions in the New World, and van Gennep's previously mentioned liminal distinctions of ritual asserts itself here. When Africans controlled their own cultures, rituals allowed for the incorporation of individuals on their own terms. The slave holders' attempts to subjugate Africans sought not only to limit their identities to that of slaves; it threatened to make them liminal in every way. This state of being, in Victor Turners's well known phrase, "betwixt and between", can dislocate an individual, and the resulting isolation can destroy a human being as easily and more completely than physical violence.

In this way, the value placed on sports, verbal arts, music or dance, rather than being a submissive response was in fact a continuation of the pursuit of ashe and allows for the incorporation of members into a society. In doing this, the lien style face (social, sacred) which whites attempted to limit and destroy was maintained. The mien face, which whites tried to limit the definition to that of slaves only, was clearly distinguished. So, Black culture invested its members with the self worth that white culture sought to deny. In this way, the slave could maintain a variety of identities; social and individual, sacred and secular. Just as coolness in Africa was sought to reach a transcendent balance, coolness residing in the iwa/ character/ custom/ traditions symbolized by the face became an avenue for power. "Power is a relational concept; it does not reside in the individual but rather in the relationship of the person to his environment. Thus, the power of an agent in a given situation is determined by the characteristics of the situation" (Morton Deutsch quoted in Frost and Wilmot:52).

The transition from African communal societies to a European individualistic one, other conflicts result. Individuality is an idealized aspect of the social existence of people - it ignores the fact that much of the time a human being is "subject to the impact of social actions beyond his control and responsibility and that his subjective volitions are constrained by the necessity of having to meet the social expectations of others..." (Ho 1976:882). By focusing solely on the individual, the reciprocity between individuals and societies is lost in Western formulations of face, and variations in face behavior are missed. In a communal society, social cohesiveness, dependence networks, and societal values of interpersonal harmony are of prime importance. In an individualistic one, there is an emphasis on social mobility, expressive neutrality and personal achievement. (Redding and Ng 1982). The resulting collision of these conflicting models on Black culture is exemplified in the original examples with which I began this paper; basketball and verbal dueling. Individualistic face, the positive value one effectively claims for himself by the line others assume that he has taken during a particular contact, merges with communal face, the respect ability and/or deference which a person can claim for himself from others, by virtue of the relative position he occupies in his social network and the degree to which he is judged to have functioned adequately.

Black culture, given control of its own institutions allows for a tremendous range of expression within those institutions. The taunting and boasting in games, often considered bad sportsmanship by white culture is acceptable because one of the purposes the game fulfills is to provide a setting for personal expression. The game it breaks down when the line is not recognized and the required reciprocity is excluded from consideration. This has some very problematic effects. The price that is paid for getting in someone's face is often violence, because the social face that exists outside the rules of the games is a more stable and sacred construct than the impermanent, secular mien that is often at stake within games. If the opportunities to define oneself are limited, the rules break down more easily. The appreciation that is given to a good musician, artist, dancer, or speaker is only one aspect of the self, it is not the entire persona. Without access to the opportunities that mien can provide, protection of lien becomes all encompassing:

"Losing face" is an expression which...refers only to public, discrete events...; At stake is nothing less than the effective maintenance of one's standing in society... Face behavior takes on a defensive quality when the individual appears to be excessively concerned with protecting his face -relative to the objective requirements of the situation in his cultural context. This is more likely to occur when at some level he senses danger signals ... that his face is being

threatened and that he does not have the resources to protect its integrity. In any event, the more defensive an individual is, the more awkward and ineffective he is likely to be in his face-protection maneuvers (Ho:871-872).

Ultimately, face in African American culture serves as a buffer to such breakdowns which have historically threatened the harmony and the existence of the community. The transformation of Kongo and Yoruba moral aesthetics in the New World is the result of the reciprocal exchange between community and individual; the bestowal of self worth on the member in return for the social cohesion needed to maintain the culture from the external oppression. In the end it diminishes the effect of a zero sum society in which the benefit for one translates into a loss for another. In an individualistic society, where acquisition is highly valued, mien is valued over lien, because status is sought rather communal incorporation. When Black people have control of their own institutions, these two conflicts can be mediated; when there is no institutional appeal, the results can be the devastating Black on Black violence that occurs all too often among those labeled the 'underclass'. Lacking access to jobs or t he life affirming self definition that Black culture attempts to provide, face becomes expressed in terms of territorial imperative : "get out of my face". In such instances, face is reduced to position rather than possession. And in the end, when nothing else is available, face is all one has left.

References

Brasch, Walter M. *Black English and the Mass Media*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts, 1981.

Dillard, J.L. *Black English*. New York: Vintage Books, 1973.

Dundes, Alan. "Thinking Ahead: A Folkloristic Reflection of the Future in American Worldview." In *Analytic Essays in Folklore*, pp. 226-238. Edited by Alan Dundes. The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton and Co., 1975.

Ekman, Paul. *Telling Lies*. New York: Berkeley Books, 1985.

----- and Friesen, Wallace V. *Unmasking the Face*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1975

Faules, Don F. and Alexander, Dennis C. *Communication and Social Behavior: A Symbolic Interaction Perspective*. Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1978.

Folb, Edith. *Runnin' Down Some Lines*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1980.

Frost, Joyce Hocker and Wilmot, William. *Interpersonal Conflict*. Dubuque, Iowa: William C. Brown Company, 1978.

Goffman, Erving. "On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction." *Psychiatry* 81 (1955): 213-231.

----- . "Embarassment and Social Organization." *American Journal of Sociology* 62 (1956): 264-271.

Herskovits, Melville J. *The Myth of the Negro Past*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1941.

----- . *The New World Negro*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1966.

Hirshey, Gerri. *Nowhere to Run*. New York: New York Times Book Co.,

1984.

Ho, David Y.F. "On the Concept of Face." *American Journal of Sociology* 81 (1976): 867-884.

Hurston, Zora Neale. *Mules and Men*. Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1942.

Johnson, Kenneth R. "Black Kinesics- Some Non-Verbal Communication Patterns in the Black Culture," In *Perspectives on Black English*, pp.296-306. Edited by J.L. Dillard. The Hague, The Netherlands: Mouton and Co., 1975.

Knapp, Mark L. *Nonverbal Communication in Human Interaction*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978.

Kochman, Thomas. "Toward an Ethnography of Black American Speech Behavior." In *Rappin' and Stylin' Out: Communication in Urban Black America*, pp. 241-264. Edited by Thomas Kochman. Urbana: University Of Illinois Press, 1972.

----- . *Black and White Styles in Conflict*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1981.

Lawal, Babatunde. "Some Aspects of Yoruba Aesthetics." *British Journal of Aesthetics* 14 (1974): 239-249.

Redding, Gordon S. and Ng, Michael. "The Role of 'Face' in the Organizational Perceptions of Chinese Managers." *Organization Studies* 3 (1982): 201-219.

Rickford, John R. and Rickford, Angela E. "Cut-Eye and Suck-Teeth." *Journal of American Folklore* 89 (1976): 294-309.

Smitherman, Geneva. *Talkin and Testifyin*. Detroit, Mi.: Wayne State University Press, 1986.

Tate, Greg. "Hiphop Nation," *Village Voice* 33 (January 19, 1988):21-22.

Thompson, Robert Farris. "An Aesthetic of the Cool." *African Arts* 7 (1973): 40-43, 64-67, 84-91.

----- *African Art in Motion*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974.

----- and Cornet, Joseph. *The Four Moments of the Sun*. Washington: National Gallery of Art, 1981.

----- *Flash of the Spirit*. New York: Vintage Books, 1983.