

## CHAPTER SEVEN: ORDER OUT OF CHAOS

### *Where there is no vision, the people perish. Proverbs 29:18*

The most Fascinating aspects of the entire history of humans have been the strides toward progress, including of its many ebbs and flows from prehistory through modern civilization. “Civilization is,” suggests John G. Jackson, in his book *Man, God, and Civilization*, “a form of culture.” And culture, he continues, “is patterned behavior, and may be described as the organized behavior which the individual person learns either through training or imitation from other members of his or her social group.” The forms of behavior that are referred to that characterized human culture are those that are unique among human beings and include such things as “the growing of crops, the domestication of animals and plants, the art of cooking, the wearing of clothes, and the use of language (which may be defined as the expression of definite ideas by means of the larynx, lips and tongue) for the purpose of mutual communication.” (Jackson, pp. 170-171)

Jackson concludes (p. 171) that “civilization is nothing more or less than literate culture.” Jackson quotes (p. 171) anthropologist A.C. Haddon, from the book *Magic and Fetishism* (pp. 3-4) to illuminate his conclusion still further:

A society is civilized only if it contains scholars and scientists. The scholar consolidates and clarifies knowledge which has already been acquired and hands it to the scientist, who, thus provided, proceeds to experiment and thus to the increase of knowledge. Without the torch of learning, the scientist is reduced to groping in the dark, and without the scientist to use and test the results of his learning, the scholar sinks into a barren pedantry. Thus scholarship and science, in the widest sense of these terms are the warp and woof of civilization. And the scientist, no less that the scholar, is dependent upon the written word;

...

Primary or first hand knowledge is gained from experience or experimentation. When experiments are performed, results occur that are to be studied and analyzed with regard to the success of the experiment or as to what improvements can be made, as well as to explain the failures and unexpected occurrences. In other works you study your work, and you work in order to get things done and to validate the results of your study. As a

consequence of your work, and the study of the results of your work, suggestions manifest themselves as to how to improve things or make corrections for failures, whereupon, new theory is derived to be tested by way of more experimentation. And new results accrue that are to be studied. Etc., etc., and etc.

In the broad sense, the essence of what is being discussed here is the, by now familiar, dyad of Kwame Nkruma, the practice and theory as advanced by doers and thinkers. Our doers and practitioners are our technicians and experimental scientists, whereas our theoreticians and thinkers are our scholars, intellectuals and theoretical scientist. Whenever they work in tandem with each other, progress, meaning the “increase of knowledge” can, and often does, ensue; when they do not, retrogression or “loss of knowledge” invariably follows. “The outstanding feature of culture is dynamism. So civilization, being a form of culture, cannot remain static; it must change by either going forward or slipping backward, for it cannot remain still.” (Jackson, p. 171)

Since culture is dynamic, that is, it is in motion, that suggests that there is some kind of equilibrium state for human society. Jackson cites (p. 174), Lord Ragland from page 38 of his work, *How Came Civilization* as to what this equilibrium state probably is:

What the facts suggest is that the natural state of man is a state of low savagery, and that towards that state he always tends to revert whenever he is not checked, or forced in the opposite direction, by that unexplained, but highly artificial, localized and spasmodic process which we know as the progress of civilization.

If civilization can be regarded as a form of culture, as John G. Jackson suggests, then the above arguments apply to various societies and social groups in general, and for our discussion, African Americans in particular. Accepting Lord Ragland’s hypothesis that “the natural state of man is a state of low savagery,” then given the well documented horrors that African Americans have been subjected to, including slavery, “black codes,” “Jim Crow,” lynchings, bombings, apartheid and “Bantu” education, etc., it is a miracle of miracles that every last one of us African Americans are not in a state far below that of low savagery. The fact that a substantial number of African Americans are in a state much higher than low savagery is a testament not only to our survivability but to our thrive-ability as well.

Furthermore, if, in fact, it is true that in order to keep from slipping backward people have to be “checked,” “forced forward” and “pushed,” then from whence come these surges? To answer this question we need to see how order emerges from chaos.

Chaos is defined as disorder. When things or individuals are in a chaotic state they behave randomly. In any system there is a level of equilibrium of this randomness. That is, a state where randomness fluctuates around a particular level. In most systems of interest there exists a minimum complexity that is necessary for order to emerge from chaos, even from the equilibrium level. (See *Order Our of Chaos* by Ilya Prigogine, P. 298).

Life is characterized by motion. For instance, a volcano is said to be “live” when it is in motion; a party is said to be “live” when there is a lot of activity going on. Under the most random, disordered conditions or at the highest degree of equilibrium or randomness of life, there is some motion. Even under minimum motion conditions, there is spontaneous aggregation of some sort of self-ordering manner that occurs. For example Ilya Prigogine discusses how termite nests are constructed. (The termite and ant have a special significance in the West African cosmogony of the Dogon—a people who the slave traders were never able to capture. See *Conversations With Ogotemmel* by Marcel Griaule, pp. 17, 25. For even more information see *The Pale Fox* by M. Griaule and G. Dieterlen.) Prigogine writes (pp. 186-187):

The first stage in this activity, the construction of the base, has been shown by Grasse, to be the result of what happens to be disordered behavior among termites. At this stage, they transport and drop lumps of earth in a random fashion, but in doing so they impregnate the lumps with a hormone that attracts other termites. The situation could thus be represented as follows: the initial “fluctuation” would be the slightly higher concentration of lumps of earth, which inevitably occurs at one time or another at some point in the area. The amplification of this event is produced by the increased density of termites in the region, attracted by the slightly higher hormone concentration. As termites become more numerous in a region, the probability of their dropping lumps of earth there increases, leading in turn to a still higher concentration of the hormones. In this way

“pillars’ are formed, separated by a distance related to the range over which the hormone spreads.

In human affairs, there is motion at every level—fluctuation and complexities. And here too we see apparent spontaneous self-organization around common interest. Throughout the centuries mankind has, in an overall sense, progressively marched toward civilization as we now know it; first organizing around families and progressing all the way to the various people groupings, societies and organizations in existence today. Undoubtedly, this march will continue. If in fact, the “equilibrium” state for man is that of low savagery, then this civilization as it exists in our own time is far from equilibrium. It has been an arduous and uphill climb, punctuated with periods of stability that would last until another eruptive or expansive “moment” (Prigogine, speaking in terms of natural science, uses such expression as singular points and bifurcation points) would usher in more reordering and/or higher forms of order and progress. This overall accumulation of knowledge, evolution of progress and civilization, and order is irreversible. And according to Prigogine (p. 292) it is this irreversibility that “... is a source of order at all levels. Irreversibility is the mechanism that brings order out of chaos.” Nothing is more illustrative of this concept than “communication,” which, writes Prigogine (p. 295), “is at the base of what probably is the most irreversible process accessible to the human mind, the progressive increase of knowledge.”

Civilization as it now exist is highly conducive (or as Prigogine would say, “far from equilibrium”) for eruptive and expansive “moments” that lead to higher forms of order in its varied forms and ramifications. During the periods of “stability” things seem to run its course, flow along “predictable,” acculturated or even deterministic or “necessary” lines. But in the “moments” of eruptions and expansion, chance often plays a significant role. For this reason the individual or a few individuals can have a profound, even decisive, effect on the direction things take or the overall outcome of affairs. As was stated earlier, “chance favors the prepared mind.” And the preparation that these few individuals have at the “magic moment” figures decisively into the thoughts and actions that have a primal influence on how events turn. When the “moment is right, things seem to be in the air” causing energy and thought to converge enabling those persons with the proper preparation who have passionately and persistently pondered over such matters to have a flash, or flashes of insight that conceive thoughts,

ideas and concepts that contain keen insight into problems and situations that they have been concentration on.

Philosophers hold that all great ideas come from an act of transcendence rather than from logic, which infers that the conceiver takes on the characteristics of the artist. (Speaking of artists: According to Joseph Campbell, it is those certain special artists who have the insights from acts of transcendence in such a way that they become the ones who update our rituals, traditions and mythologies; who interpret the current realities. See *The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell with Bill Moyers, 99-100). The flash of insight is more of an experience than a result of reasoning. It comes through the conceiver more so than from the conceiver. The prior preparation of the conceiver is key. Without the right kind prior preparation one does not know what to even look for; one would not be able to recognize or even perceive a flash of insight; the stimuli for the flash of insight would be like the proverbial pearls cast amongst swine.

It has been said that before many can know something, one or a few must know it. Recalling something discussed earlier: In order to get a good idea, you must have a lot of ideas and you throw out the bad ones. Likewise, it is incumbent upon us to prepare a great many persons (young lions) to be in a position to perceive these insights. For they come to people in all walks of life and in all levels of society. However, those who have state-of-the-art knowledge and who are functioning on the cutting-edge of their respective fields stand the best chance of making the most profound impact.

So, to answer the question as to whence come the surges that “check,” “force forward” and “push” humanity toward progress and advancing civilization: they come from the evolving culture, the flow of events and the insights of the people within them and their determined, persistent efforts. All of this alludes to the charge and challenge that led to the founding of the W.E.B. DuBois Learning Center: to help prepare as many of our lions cubs as possible to enable them to fulfill their potentials when the time comes for them to enter the world stage as young lions; to motivate them to strive for enough self-determination and self-affirmation that will enable them to make the world a better place for themselves, their families, their communities and their world.

In the process of addressing this charge and challenge the Learning Center demonstrated, in a sense, an example of bringing order out of chaos. Our

urban cities contain most of our skilled, talented and educated people who live, somewhat comfortably, above subsistence level. They are, for the most part, working in the corporations. They are also the members of our communities who have the most leisure time. However, this leisure time is randomly used (sometimes wasted) and even those who actually do some tutoring are doing so, by and large, on a random basis (most often when asked by someone). This Randomness can be regarded as a form of chaos. By setting up a process by which these persons, with their expertise, could come together and tutor our young people in an organized manner, some order emerges. The succeeding Chapters will be devoted to elaborating on how this was done and on the workings of the Learning Center.

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Organization is a word that has as its root the word “organ,” which means “a part adapted to the performance of a specific function or functions and forming an integral part of a whole.” It is combined with the verb forming suffix “-ize,” which means “to make like (what it is combined with).” In this case, to make like an organ. Finally, it has added to it the noun forming suffix “-ation,” which means “something that is like (what it is combined with.” Hence, an organization is something that is made to be like an organ. In particular the emphasis here is on the realization that is a part of a whole. So for us, the role of the Learning Center is to function as a part of a whole body, composed among other things, of organs (organizations) working on behalf of our community. Any organization cut off from the whole, whether intellectually, or emotionally or spiritually is as meaningless as one of those organs in a bottle of formaldehyde stuck off in some biology laboratory, which only has value for demonstration purposes as it is no longer useful to do its part to sustain life.

What is meant here is that we have to avoid thinking along fragmented lines or along any line that fragments us from the other vital organizations in our community. The body has to function as a whole. This often happens in communities when organizations become self-righteous, narrow minded and sometimes condescending in their views. We have to operate with the understanding that with regard to our insights, analysis, knowledge and understanding of our reality “that wholeness is what is real, and that fragmentation is a response to the whole of man’s actions, guided by illusory

perceptions, which are shaped by fragmentary thought.” (David Bohm, *Wholeness and the Implicate Order*, p. 7)

All too frequently our organizations get caught up in thinking that they have the “correct” analysis to the approach of particular problems or situations, or that all major decisions and/or actions should flow through them, or at least not without their consultation. These are aspects of fragmentary thinking whenever they occur. The danger is, that whenever organizations fragment the resulting tendency is to thwart forward momentum and if inter-cooperation does not resume, decay will invariably set-in causing a drift backwards. However, there are times when decay sets in and sufficient randomness occurs that the stage is set for some of those abrupt and expansive “moments’ that makes self-organization possible. If enough people are ready and prepared, order can emerge from this chaos.