

# Empowering African Americans Through Social Work Practice: Integrating an Afrocentric Perspective, Ego Psychology, and Spirituality

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## ABSTRACT

This article discusses the important implications for using an integrated social work practice approach that includes concept from an Afrocentric perspective, ego psychology, spirituality, and empowerment, when working with African Americans. Because of African Americans' unique history and value system, social workers may require specialized training in practice approaches that are sensitive to African America culture. By integrating core concepts from an Afrocentric perspective, ego psychology, empowerment, and spirituality, the authors provide a culturally competent, practical social work approach that facilitates and furthers the well-being of African Americans.

**D**espite African Americans' social and economic progress, they continue to lag behind White America in the areas of income, education, and health (McKinnon, 2003). During the 1980s and 1990s, several conceptual articles have addressed the lack of progress made by African Americans and the theoretical knowledge needed for culturally appropriate treatment (Bellman, 1985; Gutierrez, 1990; Jenkins, 1985, 1996; Jones, 1985; Mays, 1985; Pinderhughes, 1982; Schiele, 1996; Weaver, 1982). This article builds on that knowledge base by emphasizing the relevance of emerging social work theories. Most important, this article draws on the notion that integrating three important theoretical constructs—Afrocentric theory, ego psychology, and spirituality—leads to social work practice that empowers African Americans across their life span and within their environment.

In previous articles, African Americans' lack of progress has been attributed to several reoccurring themes: racism, oppression, stress, mental health and general health issues, and spirituality (Bellman, 1985; Densby & Thomas, 1985; Gutierrez, 1990; Jackson, 1983a, 1987b; Jenkins, 1985, 1996; Jones, 1985; Mays, 1985; Pinderhughes, 1982; Schiele, 1996; Weaver, 1982). For the most part, these articles identified these problems among African Americans without blaming them for their plight. This theoretical perspective is consistent with general social work theory and practice, which stress the strengths of the client and recognizes the deficits in the environment (Goldstein, 1996; Johnson, 1998; Turner, 1996). This article focused on integrating three theoretical constructs of Afrocentric theory, ego psychology, and spirituality and the reoccurring themes of racism, oppression, stress, mental health and general health issues, and spirituality.

# The Heart Of Soul An Afrocentric Perspective Of Psychology

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