

SEVEN PSYCHOLOGICAL STRENGTHS OF AFRICAN AMERICANS

Dr. Joseph L. White

1. Improvisation. The ability to be resourceful, imaginative, creative and innovative as we meet life challenges. From a child forward, we internalized a way of being that facilitated our ability to seek out opportunities, find opportunities, create opportunities and seize opportunities. Opportunity does not come directly to Black folks in many cases. We have to go out, find it and seize it.
2. Resilience. The capacity to rebound from a setback and become stronger in the broken places. In the Black experience, psychological maturity cannot be achieved until one has paid their dues and come through the storm. No way a Black person can get through 75 years of living in America without a few disappointments, setbacks, loss and disillusionment.
3. Connectedness to others. The deepest of all human needs. I differ with Freud on this one because I think human closeness is a deeper need than sex. From the cradle to the grave. It has operated in our life in four ways: family and extended family, strong peer relationships, romantic relationships and periodically mentors entering our life. Through connectedness to others across the life span, we learn how to build successful mutual relationships.
4. Spirituality. More important than the Church or established religions, there is a spiritual theme that runs through the Black experience. There is a soul force, a life affirming force which is responsible for strength in the face of adversity, inspiration, vitality and hope for a brighter tomorrow.
5. Emotional vitality. Emotional vitality in the Black community and in our life is characterized by a zest for life, high energy, exuberance & a life style that fully embraces life. This exuberance and high energy can be found in Black music both secular & Church.
6. Gallows humor. The ability to laugh and cry as we move through a storm. Crying about the tragedy and the ability to see some comedy in the midst of human dilemmas. Check out Langston Hughes & a character he used to write about that he called "Jesse B. Simple."
7. Healthy suspicion of you know who. I'm not talking about Black paranoia, but a healthy suspicion of people who have made broken promises since 1619. We have to be careful when we trust these folks since they've made some promises they didn't keep.