

Awakening the Natural Genius in Black Children Workshop

by

Kamm Howard
Amos N. Wilson Institute

Kamm Howard is a leading figure with the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (NCOBRA). Howard is one of the founders of the Amos N. Wilson Institute in Chicago that operates as a Black think tank and means for testing the power theories of Dr. Amos N. Wilson. In 2011, Howard co-convened, with Pat Hill, the International Year of People of African Descent Coalition for African Descendants of Chicago also known as IYPAD-Chicago. This coalition supported a year of events throughout Chicago with the mission “to educate, mobilize, and organize people of African descent in Chicago around the IYPAD banner to promote the right for self-determination.”

Abstract

In this paper we describe a workshop setting with young Black children that utilizes Dr. Amos N. Wilson’s premise that there are natural talents residing in our children from birth. By connecting this innate genius to the profound purpose of Black survival and empowerment, we can bring these children to a point where they will desire to awaken and develop their own genius potential. We reveal to them their intellectual heritage and genetic proclivities to bring about a liberated Afrikan existence relying heavily on Dr. Wilson’s works and specifically with his assertion that there is genius potential in all of our children from birth.

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In the *Developmental Psychology of Black Child* (1987) and again in the *Awakening the Natural Genius of Black Children* (1991), Dr. Amos Wilson provides powerful empirical evidence of intellectual abilities unique to African/Black children that are present at birth but occur in other children much later in their development. He calls this native proclivity a natural genius, a natural “head start.”

Afrikan children’s intellectual potential is second to none. In fact, neonatal and early childhood research not only definitely indicate that the Afrikan child’s intellectual and behavioral capacities are the equal of the child from any other ethnic group but they may be significantly more advanced. That is, Black children seem to have been given a “natural head start” in intellectual and behavioral abilities. (Wilson, 1991, p.28)

If this is so how do we develop this genius? What happens to this natural head start? Why is it not revealed in our children and in our communities now? The answers to these questions are contained in Wilson's books identified earlier. Given the current state of educational (un)-achievement, there are some who think that our children's genius potential has been destroyed and that we must write off yet another generation of Black children. In this paper we describe a workshop setting with young Black children that utilizes Dr. Amos N. Wilson's premise that there is a natural genius residing in our children from birth. By connecting this innate genius to the profound purpose of Black survival and empowerment, we can bring these children to a point where they will desire to awaken and develop their own genius potential.

Black Education in America

The current state of Black education is dismal. When we witness the failure of the public school system nationally to educate our children, it becomes clear that measures outside of the school must be taken because too many of our children drop out before completing high school. Debates about the dropout rate for Black youth are ongoing. What is clear is that the educational system is failing Black children. Those that finish are often unprepared to enter college.

In *Awakening the Natural Genius in Black Children* (1991), Dr. Wilson asserts that the natural head start in Black children can be squandered if appropriate activities are not brought into the child's life to assist him or her in actualizing their genius. Thus, it is undoubtedly clear that the Afrikan child, whether in Afrika, the Americas, the Caribbean or elsewhere, is very amply prepared by nature to respond adaptively to the intellectual, socio-psychological, physical, and behavioral demands of his environment. Obviously, if he or she is appropriately stimulated, motivated, guided, and supported, he or she is perfectly capable of attaining the intellectual heights equal or superior to the children of any other ethnic group. It is with the appropriate stimulation, motivation, guidance and support where the promise or the problem of intellectual, behavioral, social and general personality development of the Black child lies. The "natural head start" of Afrikan children, is too often thwarted, stagnated, negated, or reversed by inappropriateness or inadequateness of these seminal factors. That is, the "natural head start" of many, if not most, Black children is not continued beyond early childhood (Wilson, 1991).

An examination of the educational realities faced by Black children only serves to verify Dr. Wilson's conclusion for the majority of Black children. By understanding and tapping into these "seminal factors," we believe that appropriate interventions – such as those described later, can provide the stimulation, motivation and guidance needed for the Black child, at any age, to reach his/her own genius.

Black Genius

There are many examples of giants amongst us whose natural intellectual abilities went unrecognized early in their education or whose intellectual proclivities simply were not nurtured. In fact, in some cases their lights were extinguished by a racist society, school system, and/or teachers who believed them to be inferior or unfit. Many of these individuals, only later, through some incident or chance encounter with the right motivation or stimulation, tapped into their genius. In our workshop setting, we call this having their genius switch “clicked on.” Malcolm X is probably the best example of one whose intellectual light was not developed until much later in life while he was in prison. Early as a child he was discouraged from being a lawyer and told that he was better suited for working with his hands. He began to actualize his genius when he was 22 after coming under the *guidance* of the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad. Similarly, famed neurosurgeon, Dr. Ben Carson, came into his genius tract after an emotional incident where he nearly killed another child. Prior to this incident and getting glasses, he was the worst performing student in his class. Dr. John Henrik Clarke, one of Black America’s greatest Sheps (Revered Ancestor) is another example. He often told the story of how he was considered the class clown until, at age 11 (the age where our young men are already being labeled prison bound), he was taken into the coat-room by his teacher and told how brilliant he could become if he would just “stop playing the fool.” It was the first time someone told him that he really had a mind that could lead to great things. From that point on, he sought to realize that greatness. Although we site these few examples, we could easily find hundreds of similar examples among many of our greatest heroes and heroines.

The Amos N. Wilson Institute

At the Amos N. Wilson Institute we contend that the late awakening of Black youth can be more the rule than the exception. If we begin with the premise that the genius within many of our children is not completely squandered, but dormant. Once it is brought into the child’s awareness and joined to a purpose of liberation, it can be awakened in many of our children today. We hold that “purpose” is the one major component of the educational process that is missing and is just as much a contributor to the lack of achievement in our children as the absence of the *seminal factors* such as adequate and appropriate motivation, stimulation, guidance and support, identified earlier by Dr. Wilson. It is vital that we understand that the major function of education is to help secure the survival of a people. When we talk about maximizing the intelligence of Black children we are speaking not just in terms of their ability to complete school, to get better reading and writing grades, and to go to the right colleges. We are concerned about enhancing their intelligence so that it can serve as a means for maintaining the actual physical survival of Black people. We are now at the crossroads. We are in a pathetic situation as far as the world is concerned. We are in a situation that is exceedingly dangerous and where we are questioning whether Afrikan peoples will survive into the next century.

And consequently, it's going to take a different kind of thinking style, a different system of values, and a different approach to human relations to get us out of the quandary that we are in today--the quandary the European has put us in. And it going to require a different kind of education than what is available today. According to Wilson:

...We must evaluate an education that has us at the point today of not knowing when we are going to be blown up; when this world is going to be brought to an end. What kind of civilization is it that as it supposedly becomes more and more civilized becomes more and more deadly? It becomes more suicidal! It develops weapons and systems that can kill and destroy each man seven hundred times over....Yet we continue to pay taxes to support this system, we continue to admire the people that made this system, continue to want to be "equal" with them, and continue to want to be like them – these people who are threatening to end our lives and our very survival here on earth. They are unworthy of any further leadership on this earth. *They must be replaced for our survival, for the survival of our children, and for the survival of this earth!* (Wilson 1991, pp. 1-2) [Emphasis added]

It is our education and our children's education process that must bring us to this point.

For many of our youth we are told that they believe that to be educated is to "act white." They describe 'acting white' as speaking properly, being smart or too smart, doing well in school, taking advanced courses, being stuck up and not acting your race. Terms they used to describe 'acting Black' include a 'don't care attitude,' being laid back, being dumb or uneducated and pretending not to be smart (Fordham and Ogbu, 1986). Most adults who repeat this do so in a way to put down the children and to declare that something is wrong with *the children*. At the Amos Wilson Institute, we suggest it is the other way around. The children's belief and action in this regard is to put down the ways of the adults that they see with "education." What have they witnessed over the last 40 or more years of the "educated Black," but a "class" of Blacks who attempt to gain the material-laden lifestyle of the white middle-class with their accompanying views and values? Have they accurately deduced and articulated that according to the educated adults that they see, the purpose of education is to become white? Is to assimilate? To accept enculturation, i.e., imposed whiteness? And perhaps, even serve whites? We think so. In *Afrikan-Centered Consciousness vs. the New World Order: Garveyism in the age of globalism* (1999), Dr. Wilson asserts that the current educational process must produce confused, self-alienated and servile Black people. In fact, in the section entitled, "The Irony of Education," he calls the "process" our children experience a 'beast' and declares it must be boldly confronted. Wilson asserts:

...You must confront the nature of this *beast* called education, of which you are a part, and how it is going to transform you into a beast; how you then must become conscious of what it is doing to you, and against you, so that you may escape its planned destiny for you. And each day they sit in my class, Asians, whites, Afrikans, Hispanics, and oftentimes it's an exercise in twisting, turning, and squirming because I dare talk about slavery, colonialism, the sickness of Europeans; the lying, deceptive and devilish nature of the pathology of the people who now rule the world; because I dare talk about the irony of where white men sit down and determine the destiny of a world that's over 90% colored; when I dare tell them that they sit in these classes and let these whites and their education brainwash and propagandize them into servitude, and how their education is an education into ignorance. But if we are to rescue our children, students and our people, these unpleasant issues must be dealt with forthrightly (Wilson, 1999, pp. 58-59).

Perhaps those of our children who dropout see this process early on and want no parts of it. Maybe they do not see enough "educated" Blacks who offer an alternative to this reality. In any event, our children can also see that it doesn't take an education to obtain the possessions of the white middle-class. They can get the same or better "things" from dropping out, selling out, selling drugs, dancing at the strip clubs and all the other street hustles that get them paid. Our children can see the "net result" of a "good education" and hold that they can acquire the same without the "bourgie attitudes" and giving up their Blackness (even though they have erroneously defined what Blackness is.)

Finally, in addition to this rush to "admire" and "be like" whites that our children accurately see in a majority of the adults that have attained an education, they also see a Black community where the people are powerless, apathetic, fearful, delusional, alienated, self-hating, angry, confused, absurdly materialistic, dependent, unhealthy, and unashamed at even the grossest misbehaviors that cross all socio-economic lines, and even appear to be *normal*. Dr. Wilson would agree:

...*pathological normalcy* in Blacks, i.e., those disturbances of thought, emotions, motivations, and values which in Blacks are instigated and maintained by the White supremacist establishment in order to sustain its "normal" social order and relations. If exhibited by Whites themselves these symptoms would be immediately adjudged "mental disorders" by the White mental health establishment. Recall that "pathological normalcy" in Blacks refers to those disturbances in Black consciousness and behavior which are beneficial to the needs of Whites and to the perpetuation of White supremacy while being ultimately inimical to their own needs and liberation. (Wilson, 1993, p.120)

Our children do not see where our educated Blacks have the slightest answer to these ills. Again, Dr. Wilson teaches that the main purpose of education is to secure the survival and prosperity of the race (Wilson, 1991, 1999). Agreeing with Dr. Wilson, the great Nigerian scholar, Professor Chenweizu adds:

We must also consciously fashion an Afrocentric education system, formal and informal, that will repair the colossal damage that centuries of defeats and enslavement and a century or more of Eurocentric education has done to the Black African psyche. In summary, what is needed is an Afrocentric education that grooms the young to be loyal to the Black race, to feel responsible for ending the humiliation of the race and psychologically prepares them to take full control of our societies and our destiny, and grooms them not to tolerate dishonor to the race, and makes them psychologically driven to independently define Black Africa's interests and go forth, boldly and skillfully, to defend and advance them. (Chenweizu, 2010, p.16)

Prior to Brown vs. the Board of Education, for 100 years, we believed that what Chenweizu (2010) articulated was the unstated purpose of Black education in America. "Race" improvement, "race" advancement, "race" men, "race" women, "race" first, even "African" this, or "African" that, were abound in much of what we did as a people. And in spite of living under daily terror, with the above spirit and consciousness, our ancestors lifted themselves collectively from the nothingness of a subjugated people. Although things were far from great during that time, and in many instances, not even good, we produced from that a lot to be proud of that today we no longer have. We no longer have a Black sports industry, a Black music industry, a Black hair care industry, a Black film industry, a personal-care products industry, travel and hospitality industry or any industry for that matter that we can identify as ours that we own, control, and operate as we desire. Since Brown, we have been educating our children to be other than race conscious and we wonder why our condition is as it is?

Overview of The Awakening the Natural Genius in Black Children Workshop

In The Awakening the Natural Genius in Black Children Workshop we seek to revitalize race empowerment education. We do this by first allowing the children to break down each word in the title of the workshop. Letting the children define what the words means to them individually and then collectively. We especially point out the etymology of natural, coming from "nature" which the Greeks got from our ancestors in Kemet. In Kemet the deities, which are the personification of the laws of creation, were called the Neteru (or neter, for singular) with the Highest Law simply being NTR.

Next, we continue by placing our children correctly in the proper time, proper context, and in the proper historical setting. We utilize the Get Back 2 Black™ color-coded time-line to detail the long period of Afrikan civilization. This history is divided into periods of Afrikan High Culture leading the world, color-coded green; Afrikan high culture localized, coded black; and periods of break-down of Afrikan culture and/or domination of Afrikan people, coded red. This visual allows our children to immediately see that this current period as a short time in our total history of high-culture and civilization. In addition, it demonstrates that we have had to defeat both Afrikan cultural breakdown and European domination in the past. And following Marcus Garvey's adage, "What man has done, man can do," we assert therefore, what we have done in the past repeatedly, we can do today.

The War You Were Born Into

The next two sections are the workshops proper. The first is entitled, "The War You Were Born Into." Here we begin with the fact that all children of Afrikan ancestry, since 1492 in general and 1619, in particular, here in America, were born *into* a war. This was not a war we waged but one we must engage. This is vastly different from saying "we are at war." We look at this entire period from 1619- present from a vantage point of our acts of resistance, rebellion and warfare. We give examples of individual resistance, small and large scale rebellions. We discuss the two major wars during that period. The Gullah Geechie War, also known as the Seminole Wars, and the Civil War. We emphasize that it is the 200,000 Black soldiers, 40,000 Black women, and 20,000 Black children that aided the troops that we owe for the liberation of our people from physical bondage. We continue with the terror of the Ku Klux Klan and our response. We further engage them with the Black Power Movement and then our current struggle to free ourselves from the havoc of the drug/chemical war waged against us, mass incarceration and the degeneration of our music/culture.

You Are More Than Equipped To Win

We next seek to empower them to participate. We do this with our next workshop portion entitled, "You Are More Than Equipped to Win." One of the failures of most of our well-meaning activists who share our abusive history with our children is that they leave it at that. The children are left feeling sad and more powerless. In all of our efforts of detailing the past, which we must do to counter the cultural amnesia, we have to indicate how none of it has led to our total defeat. We had some victories. In addition, we must demonstrate ways in which we battled and lessons learned for the continuation of struggle. Therefore, it is in this section that we reveal to them their intellectual heritage and genetic proclivities to bring about a liberated Afrikan existence relying heavily on Dr. Wilson's works and specifically with his assertion that there is genius potential in all of our children from birth.

Going back to the time-line, we begin 6000 years ago detailing the genius of Afrikan people. For some, 6000 years may be too long ago to be relevant. In that case we bring them to 600 years (specifically about 800 years ago, but staying with the number 6). Here we speak to the high intellectual leadership of the scholars at the University of Sankore in Timbuktu. For some, 600 years ago may still be too long ago, so we apprise them of the studies quoted in *Awakening the Natural Genius in Black Children* (1991) that were done approximately sixty (60) years ago detailing Black children's genius potential. For some, we will even have to be more current. Therefore, we examine the story of Paula and Peter Imafidon, the *nine year-old twins* who were allowed entry into Oxford University, the youngest of any children ever (Manuel-Logan, May 2011). In addition, there is the story of the *five year-old* New York child, Mabou Loiseau, who speaks seven languages and plays six instruments, both recent occurrences (Pearson, 2011). Recently, there was a story that Afrikan students out-perform Whites, Asians, and Indians on America's college campuses (Jordan, 2009). And six days ago, we can find various stories of Afrikan intellectual greatness here in America if we look for it.

Concluding, we talk a little about discipline, self-reality, and an Afrikan self- identity. These three areas were most cogently seen in Marcus Garvey, the father of race first consciousness, as revealed in Dr. Wilson's (1999) *African Centered Consciousness Vs. New World Order: Garveyism in the Age of Globalism*. In relation to discipline, Dr. Wilson notes that, 'In psychology, we also recognize that at the center of pathology is the individual's inability to control the self' (Wilson, 1999, p.49). Therefore, with our students, to negate some of the learned pathologies, we introduce the Amos N. Wilson Institute Student Code of Discipline. ©

1. **Go to bed on time.** The student is aware that he/she must go to bed on time to get at least 9 hours of sleep. (We believe that with this one addition, a student can automatically go from an F student to a D student.)
2. **Get up on time.** Starting a day rushed increases stress states and may lead to bad choices later in the day.
3. **Eat a nutritional breakfast.** This must not include white flour and sugar. This can be the student's first real introduction to nutrition regardless of age.
4. **Take a multi-vitamin.** We know that our children do not get the necessary vitamins for healthy brain growth and functions through an American diet.
5. **Pay attention in class.** We know that we can learn even by the lies being told.

6. **Know that the teacher's goals and the student's goals are not always the same.** For young men or women in classes where they are not the racial majority, they may not get the positive attention that other children receive and may get more negative attention than they deserve. By knowing that all teachers do not support the goal of educating them to their fullest potential, we can keep our children from being turned-off from the education process.
7. **Do your homework immediately when coming home, or at the first possible chance.** Homework must be done when it is most likely to be done right. And while the student is still in a learning mode.
8. **Review your homework before going to bed.** Ten minutes for every hour of homework. This will allow the brain to remember and connect the information to previous learned information without the child's attention and awareness. Recall and creativity is greatly enhanced through this process.

From night to night, this process is repeated.

At the base of most of our successful challenges to our problems will be the acquisition of an Afrikan-centered consciousness. Anything other, in particular, a Eurocentric consciousness or its offspring, negro/ghetto consciousness, is death.

Much of the pathology of Afrikan people today is this vain hope that somehow we will be able to escape our Afrikan heritage, that somehow the white man will become color blind and will not see us for whom and what we are, that somehow we will be looked upon as some kind of abstraction – as just a man. Not as an Afrikan man, not as a Black man, but as a man, a human being *only* – without a culture, without recognition, without identity. Too many of us want to shed our Afrikanicity for this kind of bogus, abstract existence, which is not existence at all, and, which is the ultimate acceptance of invisibility. We must recognize that we are an Afrikan people and we will be Afrikan people to the end of time. We must accept the good, the bad, and all of the possibilities that go with being Afrikan...One of the things we must recognize is that our oppressor represents death; our oppressor is deadly. (Wilson, 1999, pp. 50-53)

Our children must accurately know what it means to be Afrikan and be told that they are right in rejecting “acting white.”

What we desire and intend to inspire in our children in a 4-6 hour setting is to inform them of their natural genius in such a way that they will determine for themselves a desire to know themselves. We want them to do what it takes to actualize their genius, a genius that perhaps may have been squandered but only temporarily, for the purpose of being Afrikan and “all of the possibilities that come with it.” Our children are still our saviors. And in them is still our future.

I love the challenge of being Afrikan in today’s world; it’s wonderful! I love digging in my heels against the impossible odds of being Black in America! What greater challenge could we have in life today than to be Afrikan? What greater testament to our heroism than to overcome the problems that face us today? What greater opportunity can we have to transform ourselves and transform the world in the process? Why would we wish to escape this kind of challenge? It’s too wonderful, too magnificent. We should eat this kind of challenge for breakfast! (Wilson, 1999, pp. 40-41)

Therefore, in the tradition of Amos Wilson, we must direct our children to get their grub on!

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