

# Kemetic Principles in African American Public Address: An Interrogation of the Rhetoric of Joseph C. Price and the Kemetic Tradition

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## Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to promote the utilization of Kemetic principles in approaching African American public address. Although there have been recent studies on African American public address, the employment of the Kemetic philosophy is limited. Using the four overarching ethical principles of Kemetic rhetorical tradition as outlined by Karenga, this essay interrogates Joseph C. Price's 1890 speech at the National Education Association national convention. A Kemetic analysis of Price's speech reveals that African American public address endorses the dignity and rights of the human person, the well-being of family and community, the integrity and value of the environment, and the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for the mutual benefit of humanity. This suggests that a Kemetic understanding of African American public address can (a) civically benefit the broader community because of its ethical foundation, (b) facilitate the recognition of contemporary ethical appeals in any given

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discourse, and (c) serve as an impetus for collective advancement toward a social justice-oriented world.

### Keywords

African American public address, African American rhetoric, Joseph C. Price, Kemetic rhetoric

### Introduction

Maulana Karenga (2003), when discussing the significance of speech or *nommo* in the African American rhetorical tradition, once stated that “For we understood the power of the word (*nommo*), written as well as spoken, and its key role as knowledge in enhancing our capacity to control our destiny and daily lives and live truly free, full and meaningful lives” (p. 20). Using this excerpt as a foundation for this article, the purpose of this essay is to demonstrate how the Kemetic principles can produce a just and mutualist world. Asante (2002) once uttered,

... Kemet must be the foundation of any rewriting of African history, any true understanding of the African personality, and any spark for creating a new fire of civilization is to avoid the default position of seeking Europe or remaining indebted to Europe as a junior partner. (p. 104)

Thus, examining African American public address through a Kemetic lens would avoid this default position of second-class (or less significant) status. In principle, African American public address is critical to our society’s civic and moral development. For instance, African Americans have historically utilized public address to advance their citizenship despite the constant struggles against oppression and subjugation. In this way, African American public address is defined as a set of rhetorical practices and values rooted in the Afrocentric experience which calls forth *nommo*, frequently performed in ceremonial settings (Asante, 1987; P. S. Foner & Branham, 1998). Concepts such as *nommo* or other forms of the Kemetic traditions involved in contemporary African American practices, speak to the existence of African cultural continuity.

African cultural continuity refers to the notion that many of the current practices and traditions in African American culture can be traced back to ancient Africa. Historically, African Americans through various methods have been taught to relinquish their African identity (Richards, 1985; Schlesinger, 1991). Despite these constant efforts, numerous African traditions still exist in

the African American community such as the notion of community, spirituality, rhythm, and orality among others (Boykin & Tom, 1985). As Ladson-Billings (1992) suggests, “true that we [African Americans] carry multiple heritages, many having Euro-American origins; but there are some enduring aspects of our Africanness that make the concept of an African consciousness plausible and deeply felt” (p. 379). Given this phenomenon, Africanness remains a cultural basis for African American identity and expression, thus expanding cultural continuity of African heritage.

Recent scholarly attention to African American public address is evidenced in the scholarship on Deval Patrick (Townsend, 2019), Frederick Douglass, and Barack Obama (Husband, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Leeman, 2018; McKivigan, 2018; Perry, 2017). For instance, Johnson (2017) examines two of Obama’s speeches, after the Zimmerman verdict, toward African American audiences. Specifically, he examines Obama’s commemoration speech at the 50th anniversary of Selma and the eulogy for the Emanuel Nine. Johnson concludes by arguing that despite Obama’s rhetoric typically avoiding race, Obama’s rhetoric shifts to being more open about race and the issues that impact African Americans. What we learn from Johnson’s case study is how African American public address, in this case, may be affected by the exigencies of the rhetorical situation.

Despite this (and others listed above) contribution, the Kemetic philosophy is not explicitly engaged as a rhetorical lens to analyze Obama’s discourse, signaling a disengagement of African cultural continuity. The omission of an inherently African concept (the Kemetic philosophy) in the study of African American public address limits our understanding of the rhetorical power of African American oratory. That is, utilizing a Kemetic philosophy as a lens can permit us to gain further insights into the power of ethical appeals in African American public address, an important rhetorical act in the African American rhetorical tradition.

Citing a piece by Carruthers (1995), McDougal (2014) reminds us that the “Kemetic philosophy suggests that humans acquire knowledge by learning good speech (p. 238),” thus underscoring the significance of public address in African American culture. A critical perspective grounded in Kemetic principles can yield significant insight into the force and power of African American public address and demonstrates how this marginalized form of discourse can (a) civically benefit the broader community because of its ethical foundation, (b) facilitate the recognition of contemporary ethical appeals in any given discourse, and (c) serve as an impetus for collective advancement toward a social justice-oriented world. To accomplish this task, this essay interrogates Joseph C. Price’s public address at the National Education Association (NEA) national convention in 1890. The intention is to

demonstrate how Price was able to effectively make ethical appeals to his audience by focusing the issues of intellect, morality, and material conditions as a communal issue and not just a Black issue. However, before delving into the analysis, providing some background about Price is imperative to establish his importance to African American history and public address.

### *Joseph C. Price: The World's Orator*

Born on February 10, 1854, Joseph C. Price was one of the cofounders and the first president of Livingstone College, a private historically Black college that has close ties to the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Zion church. Price was well known and highly sought after for his public speaking ability, for which he received several honors (Chesnutt, 2001; Walls, 1943). Some have even speculated that, had it not been for his early death in 1893 (died at 39) of Bright's disease, Price would have been on the level of someone like Frederick Douglass and Booker T. Washington regarding popularity and influence (Davis, 1980a, 1980b; Powell, 2000; Yandle, 1993). Furthermore, Price was an ordained minister of the AME Zion church who preached around the world and was very involved in local and state politics (W. J. Simmons & Turner, 1887).

Contemporarily, Price is often forgotten in the mainstream historical accounts of African American leadership during the Gilded Age (Davis, 1980b). The Gilded Age was a period between 1870 and 1900 and is often described as a period that was racially violent, witnessed fierce labor strikes, corrupt politics, inferior education, and an increasing wealth gap between rich and poor communities, particularly for Blacks (Beatty, 2008; Cashman, 1993; Trachtenberg, 2007). This period is also noted as a time in which interest in expanding big businesses such as the railroad industry and state's rights dwarfed the country's concern of civil rights for African Americans (Sheridan, 1996). Moreover, the Gilded Age also ushered in many of the South's Jim Crow laws that segregated many public institutions and sabotages to end the Black vote (Howard-Pitney, 2009).

Despite living during this time period, Price's philosophy, influenced by his educational training in theology at both Shaw and Lincoln Universities, followed Christian principles whereby there was a fundamental belief that God controlled the universe under "moral order." Given the time period in which Price lived, he believed Blacks could achieve equal citizenship through intellectual and moral training. This claim was contrary to other epistemes being imparted to Blacks elsewhere, such as at the Hampton Institute (now Hampton University) where education was a tool for gaining access in the industrial industry (W. J. Simmons & Turner, 1887; Spivey, 1978). He also

believed that possessing cerebral superiority only would eventually lead to cataclysm (W. J. Simmons & Turner, 1887). Price's stature as a rhetor during this time period in history is significant for public address scholars.

Price's background and public speaking ability offers a unique opportunity for rhetorical scholars to engage a significant African American orator and explore the Kemetic rhetorical tradition within his speech. Exploring the Kemetic principles as a major area of the rhetorical tradition in African American public address is vital for a more comprehensive and culturally appropriate understanding of this particular marginalized form of discourse.

### *The Kemetic Rhetorical Tradition*

Interest in the Kemetic tradition in general has been studied by several scholars from differing perspectives. Adisa Alkebulan (2002, 2003, 2013) has advanced the Kemetic philosophy in African American rhetoric; however, his interests lie in the connection between rhetoric and spirituality for African people, seeking to illuminate the cultural connection among Africans throughout the diaspora. Alkebulan's contribution to understanding African American rhetoric through a Kemetic lens is essential because he draws attention to the role of spirituality in African American rhetoric (e.g., public address), contending that the life goal of the African is to find balance and harmony in oneself. For Alkebulan (2002, 2003, 2013), the journey of finding balance and harmony is in fact representative of African spirituality, maintaining that the concept of *nommo* is essential to comprehending the spiritual nature of African language(s).

Bates et al. (2008) explore some of the manifestations of visual *nommo* in George H. Ben Johnson's editorial cartoons in the *Richmond Planet*, a local newspaper in Richmond, Virginia, founded by former slaves in 1884. More specifically, these scholars note that "Johnson's cartoons reflect this commitment to the recovery of ancient Kemet as grounds for argument to advance and restore the African American community" (p. 280). Cecil Blake in 2010 contributes to this discussion in his book titled, *The African Origins of Rhetoric*, in which he critically examines ancient African texts illuminating rhetorical theory that predates the Greco-Roman tradition. More specifically, Blake (2010) advances the rhetorical construction of the "darkness metaphor" often employed by non-Africans to situate Africa and its descendants in marginalized positions throughout the world. In addition, Blake (2010) examines the *Maatian* work of Ptah-Hotep, examining his rhetorical instructions on the ethical and moral foundation of governance. Christel Temple (2012) advances Afrocentric literary criticism, highlighting the creativity and ground-breaking literary and cultural movements that African Americans

have produced since the 19th century. Temple's central thesis offers a corrective to the literary tradition by positing a Kemetic frame to literature, underscoring the African cultural continuity. Given the myriad of scholarship on the Kemetic tradition, it is apparent that this particular philosophical orientation is useful in regard to interrogating African American discourse.

Furthermore, Smith (1971) advises that "any interpretation of African rhetoric must begin at once to dispense with the notion that in all things Europe is teacher and Africa is pupil" (p. 13). That is to say that the ancient Africans have a rightful place in the history of rhetoric (Finnegan et al., 1970; Fox, 1983). Thus, it is imperative that a critic interrogating any African discourse begin with the Kemetic tradition as a foundation for understanding phenomena. To that end, many African/African American scholars have explored this concept when approaching African American discourse (Asante, 1990; Karenga & Carruthers, 1986; Lehman, 2001). Due to space limitations, this essay is unable to provide a comprehensive overview of the Kemetic canons of rhetorical theory. However, this essay will explicitly employ Karenga's conception of the Kemetic rhetorical tradition due to his emphasis on the ethics of speech.

In a translation by Karenga of the text, *Sebait of Ptahhotep*, which is one of the most ancient rhetorical treatises in the world, he articulates for readers the prevailing philosophy of the Kemetic rhetorical tradition. Karenga (2003) contends that "for the [Kemetic rhetorical] practice is above all a communal and deliberative practice directed toward the good of the community, and this requires respect for all people, regardless of knowledge level, class, or gender" (pp. 14–15). This position suggests that deference for all human beings, regardless of their social status, is crucial to the understanding of the Kemetic rhetorical tradition since this tradition views the audience as ". . . fellow participants in the collaborative quest for the common good" (Karenga, 2003, p. 15), thus de-emphasizing and decentering intelligence, class, or gender. Such a rhetorical strategy is antithetical to Greek approaches to public discourse.

The ancient Egyptians regarded public address as an ethical activity; therefore, when employing the Kemetic tradition as a rhetorical lens, a concern for ethics is necessary (Karenga, 2003; Lichtheim, 1980, 1988). Karenga lays out a useful framework that is essential to the critique being advanced in this essay. For Karenga (2003), the four overarching ethical concerns of Kemetic rhetoric are as follows: (a) the dignity and rights of the human person, (b) the well-being of family and community, (c) the integrity and value of the environment, and (d) the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for mutual benefit of humanity.

The emphasis on *the dignity and rights of the human person* within the Kemetic rhetorical tradition claims that "good speech" must condemn

“arrogance in the possession and use of knowledge” (Karenga, 2003, p. 14). This overarching ethical concern views rhetoric as a purposeful practice focused on the common good by viewing the audience as a participant in the rhetorical situation. As a collective, the audience is expected to bring good into the community through participation in public discourse. In turn, it is imperative that the critic, when analyzing public discourse, recognize the rhetor’s audience, regardless of class, and determine whether he or she is operating out of the Kemetetic rhetorical tradition.

Similarly, *the well-being of family and community* is also an ethical concern for the Kemetetic communicative practice. This precept primarily focuses on a rhetor’s ability to communicate his or her concern for others beyond oneself (Karenga, 2003; Lichtheim, 1988; Schrag, 1986). In so doing, the rhetor understands he or she is nothing without the community. As Karenga (2003) explains,

it is not simply *I think, therefore I am*, but rather that *I am related and relate to others; therefore I am*. It is in my being with, being of, and being-for-others that I discover and constitute myself . . . through communicative practice . . . (p. 17)

The articulation of this ethical concern is different from the others in that it views the community as a constitutive function of any rhetorical transaction and discourse that ultimately leads all toward communal freedom and liberation.

The third concept is plainly stated as *the integrity and value of the environment* address. It is also referred to as *serudj ta*, which refers to the notion of human action being conscientious toward restoring and repairing the world to be more robust (Karenga, 2003). The main idea is that the communicative practice rhetoric is focused on improving the world, a world that is damaged in all areas of life as a direct result of human failure. This can be best understood when the rhetor chooses to speak against racism, discrimination, and injustices, as they are addressing critical social issues in an effort to repair the world through public discourse. It is with full acknowledgment and expectation that the rhetor is actively seeking ways through which to improve broken relationships and other destructive dialogues, thus embodying this key element of the Kemetetic rhetorical tradition.

The final precept, *the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for the mutual benefit of humanity*, deals with the notion of rhetoric being responsive and responsible for others as well as an intense focus on justice for all. For Karenga (2003), this ethical concern pointedly speaks against “artificial eloquence, deceptive discourse and instrumental reasoning against the greater

interest of humanity” (p. 18). Intrinsically, this ethical concern differentiates discourse that is not focused on mutual solidarity within the community. In other words, does the rhetor focus his or her discourse on building solidarity among all the people for the benefit of the community? In sum, drawing from Karenga’s and others work, this article will explore these concepts in Price’s public address to support my argument.

As previously noted, some scholars (Husband, 2018; Johnson, 2017; Leeman, 2018; McKivigan, 2018; Perry, 2017; Townsend, 2019) have explored African American public address employing various analytical tools; however, research has demonstrated that many have failed to use Kemetetic rhetoric as a theoretical framework designed to enlighten many about a neglected area of communication scholarship. It is through the current critique that this essay will illustrate how other scholars can effectively and critically engage with a culturally appropriate African-rooted conceptual framework. In addition, this article will demonstrate how the Kemetetic principles, rhetorically, are rooted in African American public address. Exploration of this topic will serve as an impetus for further scholarship on Kemetetic rhetoric within African American public address to demonstrate its importance to the public sphere. Furthermore, this essay wishes to provide analysis that displays how a Kemetetic understanding of African American public address helps us recognize the contemporary moment and can serve as an impetus for pathways toward a just world.

### *Education and the Problem*

In 1890 at the NEA annual convention, Price delivered one of his most infamous speeches in Minneapolis, Minnesota (M. Simmons & Thomas, 2010). As previously mentioned, much of Price’s discourse throughout his life followed his understanding of the Christian doctrine, explicitly drawing attention to the intellectual and moral order. In this historical moment, Price is primarily responding to those who wanted to segregate the NEA (M. Simmons & Thomas, 2010). In this transaction, Price takes this moment to discuss how education might solve the “race problem,” not only for the present moment but for the future of the country.

Price opens his speech by posing the question: “Will education solve the race problem?” Using this inquiry as a frame to guide his discourse, Price uses the symptomatic nature of the human body as a rhetorical trope to describe the racial problem. He says, “. . . it is evident that all remedies, whether for the removal of disorders in the body or the social state—whether in physianthropy or sociology—must be in proportion to their affected parts or abnormal conditions.” Price continues this thought by assuring his audience no disease that affects the body can be cured with one remedy,



emphasizing the importance of *time* as one of the treatments required. Price argues,

. . . in such cases, we have to proceed step by step and take only one phase of the complaint at a time, and the remedies that are efficient in one stage are inadequate to the other. Each stage has its peculiar prescription . . .

Thus, Price frames his address through the trope of the human body. From this point, Price recalls the origins of the “race problem” explaining how the “intellectual, moral, and material conditions of the negro race” are the three major components that need to be addressed and would solve the “race problem.” Price adds the phenomenon of slavery (i.e., material conditions) has altered the intellectual and moral character of Blacks. Price notes this lack of intellectual and moral character in Blacks has caused Southern Whites to resent Blacks and view them as inferior. Price further adds, the end of slavery as a legal institution did not necessarily solve the material conditions for Blacks regarding the “race problem” citing morality and poverty as examples of material conditions that were not improved.

Morally, for Price, the only mechanism for solving this hindrance is to alter the racially hostile environment and by bestowing humanity and justice to Blacks, particularly in education. Price argues, without education, man cannot be moral, so if one of the criticisms of Blacks by Whites is based on a sense of immorality, then Price argues that education will be the most potent means to alter this phenomenon. He further contends, “. . . we are told, directly and indirectly, that while there are rare and commendable exceptions, the race . . . is ignorant, poverty-stricken, and degraded.” This sentiment, for Price, is representative of the “race problem,” that is, humanity and justice in a moral sense have yet to be afforded to Blacks.

Price further adds to his point about materiality, arguing poverty is another significant component of the “race problem.” Price claims with efforts to increase the intellect of Blacks, poverty will be less of a factor, and thus the material conditions would improve not only for Blacks but also for the country. He says,

I believe that education, in the full sense of the term, is the most effective comprehensive means to this end, because in its results an answer is to be found to all the leading objections against the negro which enter into the make-up of the so-called race problem.

Thus, Price’s emphasis on the intellectual, moral, and material conditions of Blacks leads him to address possible concerns of Whites about Blacks’ social progress.

Price acknowledges how many Whites in the South fear Black supremacy that would come about if the intellectual, moral, and material conditions for Blacks were improved. Price contests this notion by reverting to his hypothesis that increased intelligence of Blacks would only benefit society. Price states,

If the voter is unprepared to exercise his franchise aright, then prepare him for its intelligent use . . . by doing so we will save the negro from unlawful oppression . . . Intelligence is universally admitted to be the prime requisite for good citizenship.

Price uses the notion of “good citizenship” to explore how Whites themselves need to be educated on the “race problem” as well. Price articulates,

To educate one race and neglect the other, is to leave the problem half solved, for there is a class of whites in the South, to some extent, more and hopeless in their mental and moral condition than the Negro.

With this remark, Price explains part of the “race problem” is the education of Whites as well as Blacks. For Price, a common approach to the education of both sides of the issue of race relations is indispensable. At this point, Price moves to discuss how the unifying religion in the country, Christianity, can also assist in solving the “race problem.”

Price extends the importance of education also to include Christian philosophy, arguing it is the common denominator between the races in the South. Price maintains,

If Christian education or a full knowledge of the principles of Christianity will not solve our relations with men, we are seriously at fault in our professed religion, and deplorable in our spiritual condition. For a people imbued with the spirit of the Christ idea cannot defraud a brother nor rob him of his labor, nor deny him the rights which he has with other men . . .

Given this remark, Price explains how the understanding of the Christian doctrine would also lead to improved race relations because of the focus on morality.

In sum, Price’s message engaged the topics of intellect, morality, and material conditions of Blacks with a recurring theme of the need for ethical behavior for the common good. For Price, the material condition of Blacks is closely tied to their educational advancement, which will, in effect, increase their morality. However, Price also includes the obligations that Whites have to Blacks by arguing that they too need to be educated about the Black plight and thus must move to assist Blacks in their upward mobility *if* they want the

country to improve overall for the common good. Based on the ethical characteristics of Price's address, this case will apply the Kemetetic rhetorical tradition as a lens for analysis. Doing so provides a nuanced understanding of precisely how Kemetetic principles are rooted in African American public address.

## **Kemetetic Rhetoric in Price's Speech**

In Price's speech, he consistently challenges his mostly White audience to recognize the humanity of Black people not merely for their own good, but for the good of the community. As noted, he opens his speech by posing the following question: "Will education solve the race problem?" This inquiry is an attempt to, in a collaborative sense, find a possible solution to alter the inhumane treatment of Blacks for the betterment of the country. Because Price poses this inquiry, one can conclude Price was in search for the common good of the community by asking if education would solve the "race problem." That is, Price's questioning demonstrates his desire to find a solution for discontent in the country.

In the address, Price calls for Whites to revisit the past to understand Blacks deserve dignity and respect because war broke out as a result of Blacks not receiving this ethical treatment. Price utters,

The "peculiar institution" (i.e., slavery) continued to grow, with all its attendant evils, until it threatened the very life of the republic; so much so, until it was declared by one of the wisest men the country ever produced, that nation could not live a half free and half slave. Every means possible was called into requisition to solve this phase of the negro question in America, and it was only solved permanently and effectively by the bloody arbitrament of arms. Slavery is no more, and can never exist again in this country, simply because it was settled right. But this does not argue that every phase of the question must be settled in the same manner, or by the same means.

In this excerpt, Price's re-visitation of the Civil War demonstrates how the neglect of fundamental human rights of Blacks (i.e., slavery) resulted in near eradication of the country. Although, indeed, others have argued politically the Civil War was not about "freeing" the slaves (E. Foner, 1980, 2011; McPherson, 1997; Staples, 1973), however, for Price, the lack of recognition of Blacks' dignity and rights by Whites led to the disruption of the common good of the country. In short, Price's discourse validates a genuine concern for the common good and displays his competence of the role of his audience as co-participants in improving the social conditions in terms of solving the "race problem."

Price continues this call for respect for Black bodies regardless of their condition (intellect, morality, class, etc.) in later portions of the speech. He claims,

The solution of the race problem means the satisfactory and harmonious adjustment of the racial relation in the South and in the country as well, on the principles of humanity and justice . . . it is the concession to the negro of all the inalienable rights that belong to him as a man and as a member of that family of which God is the common Father; and the granting to him all the civil immunities and political privileges guaranteed to every other citizen by the authority and power of the Constitution of the America Government. To do this solves the problem; not to do it is to leave it unsolved; and to leave it unsolved, in the face of the growing numbers and increasing intelligence of the negro, is to intensify the bitterness between the races, and to involve both in a conflict more destructive and widespread than the country has hitherto witnessed.

Very clearly, one can see for Price, not to solve the “race problem” would ultimately lead the nation down a path of destruction, which in this case would not be in the best interest of the community. Thus, we can see in these specific excerpts, Price is conveying to his White audience in the Kemetic rhetorical tradition that suggests communalism and collaborative efforts can only be achieved through recognition of the dignity and rights of every human, as Karenga posits.

In addition to Price’s call for the recognition of Black’s humanity, he also requests his audience to let education be a mechanism for improving Blacks’ intellectual and moral character. As noted above, another component of the Kemetic rhetorical tradition is the promotion of the well-being and flourishing of the community (Karenga, 2003). To further explain, Karenga (2003) posits, “[the rhetor is] concerned with the good of family and community, and their moral self-presentation . . . [that] model[s] . . . commitment and behavior worthy of a self-conscious member of family and community (p. 17).” Karenga (2003) further adds,

. . . the role of [Kemetic] communicative practice [is]. . . its eliciting and reaffirming a shared investment in creating and sustaining the just and good world. . . [and] how self is called into being and constituted in community and through the communicative practice [that] it elicits and sustains, that is, a practice of discourse and action within a community. (p. 17)

This commentary indicates the Kemetic rhetorical tradition observes how a rhetor presents an argument or discourse rooted in community action to

demonstrate he or she is self-conscious about their efforts as it relates to the benefit of the community. In this speech, Price calls for his audience to be conscious of their actions as it relates to their contributions to the well-being and burgeoning of Black people. Although he demonstrates this effort in several instances, he first does this by discussing a call-to-action to his audience about educating Black voters to exercise their vote intelligently for the common good. Price appears to do this as a response to several concerns of White fear about the Black voter in which Blacks could gain supremacy.

When discussing Whites' fear of Blacks' ability to exercise their right to vote, Price notes a part of White people's concern is Blacks will not vote intelligently. Price explains Whites would not need to fear the Black vote *if* they were to educate them. He explains,

. . . it is concluded that the majority of [Black] voters being ignorant, they would put ignorant or illiterate men in charge of the affairs of the county, State, or section and this would work to the bankruptcy or destruction of the county, or section thus governed or controlled.

Price quickly dismisses this notion by arguing, "if the [Black] voter is unprepared to exercise his franchise aright, then prepare him for its intelligent use . . ." According to Price, this action would ". . . save the nation from the disgrace and burning shame . . ." In this example, one can accurately appreciate how Price presents a call-to-action to his audience that would be of benefit for the entire community.

Moreover, Price also draws attention to Whites' need for education as well to solve the "race problem." Price contends,

It must be remembered, however, that there is more to be done than the education of the blacks, as a solution to the race problem; for much of the stubbornness of the question is involved in the ignorant, lawless and vicious whites of the South, who need education worse than many of the blacks. To educate one race and neglect the other, is to leave the problem half solved, for there is a class of whites in the South, to some extent, more and hopeless in their mental and moral condition than the Negro.

Price's critiques Whites regarding their counterproductive conduct toward the public and the need for them to also be educated for the benefit of the community. This also validates, not only his concern civically but his push for the community itself to be self-conscious about their own actions regarding the well-being of the people; this is representative of the Kemetic rhetorical tradition. In sum, this discourse resembles the Kemetic notion that a rhetor is not being ethical without the emphasis of the community in mind as

part of any communicative action. Price's address also expresses a genuine concern for the integrity and value of the environment.

As mentioned earlier, according to Karenga (2003), "the Kemetic concept of *serudj ta* . . . refers to the ethical obligation of humans to restore and repair the world with the extended meaning of making it more beautiful than it was when we inherited it" (p. 17). This excerpt refers to the material conditions and examines precisely how a rhetor might convey to an audience regarding *how* to improve the material conditions for the world. This philosophy recognizes the significance of human agency in either rescinding the progress or advancing the development of the world. Price in this speech attempts to discern how the material conditions of Blacks should be a significant concern for the South because if the South continues to oppress Blacks, they will remain in a poor state. Price articulates,

It is a matter of observation and history that a section or country that seeks to keep its labor-producing class ignorant, keeps itself poor; and the nation or state that fails to provide for the education of its whole people, especially its industrial forces, is considered woefully lacking in statesmanship and devoid of the essential elements in material progress and prosperity.

Given this idea, Price manifests the centrality of collective action regarding transforming the material conditions of the world, in this case, the South. In addition, through this speech, Price exhibits the Kemetic rhetorical tradition when he explains how the education of Blacks will improve the South as a community. He states,

It is the object[ive] of all education to aid man in becoming a producer as well as a consumer. To enable men and women to make their way in life and contribute to the material wealth of their community or country, to develop the resources of their land, is the mainspring in the work of all our schools and public or private systems of training.

At this moment, Price attempts to demonstrate to his audience that educating Blacks could be a viable asset for the South and the country as a whole. This excerpt indicates the Kemetic rhetorical tradition in that Price attempts to show his audience to improve the material conditions of the South; Whites will need to appreciate the ability of Blacks to contribute to economic growth as a collective. Price concludes,

. . . even in his present condition of illiteracy, the Negro is evidently the backbone of the labor element of the South. He is, therefore, a wealth producer

now. Whether he reaps any benefit of his labor or not, it is clear that he is the prime element in its growing and boasted prosperity.

Thus, Price articulates Blacks' genuine concern for the reconstruction of the South despite the hostile treatment Blacks were receiving. This notion is in alignment with the Kemetic idea of rhetoric that communicates integrity and value of the environment.

In addition to Price's articulation of Blacks' integrity and professed value of the rehabilitation of the South, Price focuses on the unifying religious doctrine, Christianity, to serve as a discourse that could provide justice for all. In the *Book of Khunanup*, it explains solidarity as a rhetorical concept that includes action and understanding which Karenga (2003) calls ". . . *communicative solidarity*, which is based on the art of hearing (*Kunst Hörens*), a profound and ongoing mutual responsiveness and responsibility to one another" (p. 19). As a result, this denotes the Kemetic rhetorical tradition is a communicative practice that is purposeful in doing what is right and just in the world. This phenomenon is on display in Price's speech, particularly toward the end of his speech when he addresses the power in which the Christian doctrine can do for humanity in terms of providing justice for all.

Price concludes his speech addressing the ability of the Christian doctrine as a mechanism to solve the race problem. He says, ". . . it is reasonable to conclude that white or black men, under the influence of Christian intelligence; are prepared to solve all the problems peculiar to our earthly state, for Christianity levels all the distinctions of race." In this excerpt, Price is demonstrating his belief that through the ethics of Christianity, the "race problem" can be solved. This notion relates to the Kemetic idea in that Christianity as a religion promotes the ideas of life, freedom, justice, family, friendship, and love (Long, 2010; Woodhead, 2004). Karenga (1988) argues that much of the Judeo-Christian ethics are based on African principles, signifying that Price is still operating out of the Kemetic tradition.

Furthermore, as noted above, Price continues this notion of the power of the Christian doctrine to save humanity when he utters,

If Christian education or a full knowledge of the principles of Christianity will not solve our relations with men, we are seriously at fault in our professed religion, and deplorable in our spiritual condition. For a people imbued with the spirit of the Christ idea cannot defraud a brother nor rob him of his labor, nor deny him the rights which he has with other men . . .

In this passage, Price supports his thesis that Christianity brings good into the country and can alter the moral condition of humanity, so Whites and Blacks

can live together peacefully. He continues this idea with his final note stating,

... for the principles of this grand system, both in the hearts and in the dominion of men are all-conquering, either sooner or later, in their onward sweep around the world. No error can forever withstand their power. It may be stubborn, even violent for a while, but it must eventually give way to truth, for it is unalterable . . .

Consequently, although Price on the surface is giving credit to his Christian faith, Price's discourse resembles much of the ancient Kemetic tradition, a doctrine in which many of its ethical principles align with the Kemetic tradition (James, 1976; Karenga, 1988). Moreover, both Christianity and the Kemetic tradition focus is on bringing about reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for the mutual benefit of humanity.

As demonstrated, Price speech draws on ancient Kemetic rhetorical tradition that commits to observing rhetoric as an ethical communicative practice with the primary objective to do what is right and just in the interest of the entire community. This form of rhetoric concerns itself with the dignity and rights of the human person, the well-being of family and community, the integrity and value of the environment, and the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for mutual benefit of humanity. Given the connection between Price's discourse and the ancient Kemetic rhetorical tradition, I wish to turn attention to the implications of this study.

## **Understanding the Kemetic Rhetorical Tradition in Public Address**

Throughout the speech, Price's discourse resembles the four ethical concerns of the ancient Kemetic rhetorical tradition as Karenga and others posit. As mentioned above, Price draws on the Kemetic rhetorical tradition, arguing for Whites to treat Blacks with dignity and respect for the betterment of the country. This idea suggests public address, at least in the African American tradition, argues for the dignity and respect not merely for the benefits of African Americans but also for the overall good of the community. Livingston (2014), when employing the Kemetic tradition to Hip-Hop artistry and culture, also came to a similar conclusion arguing the Kemetic tradition "traditionally has a great concern for social justice" (p. 47). He further adds, "one of the defining characteristics of [the Kemetic tradition] [is] its communal orientation [and its] employment of personas that demonstrate a bottom-up perspective toward society" (Livingston, 2014, p. 48). Given this sentiment, Kemetic rhetoric in African American public address focuses on community building



by giving each member within the community dignity and respect regardless of their social status. Not only does Price argue for every human being to be given dignity and respect, but he also demonstrates a genuine concern for the well-being and flourishing of the community.

As noted, Price explains education can be a mechanism for improving Blacks' intellectual and moral character (i.e., the well-being) for the continued growth of the community. This notion demonstrates African American public address seeks to enhance the lives of all within the community, recognizing each member as co-participants in "creating and sustaining the just society and good world that point toward and make possible maximum human freedom and human flourishing" (Karenga, 2003, p. 17). This natural concern for the well-being and flourishing of the community Price displays also relates to how Karenga and Tembo (2012) conceive Kawaida womanism.

Operating out of the Kemetic tradition, they define Kawaida womanism as a

culturally grounded thought and practice directed toward the liberation of African women as an integral and indispensable part of the liberation of African people . . . which includes . . . the creation of those conditions necessary for the well-being, development and flourishing of . . . [the] . . . community . . . and the world. (Karenga & Tembo, 2012, p. 34)

Although their study primarily focused on advancing the understanding of Kawaida womanism, their study relies on African concepts of ancient Kemet and demonstrates the philosophical orientation Africans possess throughout the diaspora. This belief suggests the Kemetic tradition is deeply rooted in many African thought and practices and expresses a genuine concern for the well-being and flourishing of all.

Furthermore, as mentioned above, Price articulates a message that is rooted in the Kemetic rhetorical tradition when he discusses the hostile material conditions for African Americans in the South. This idea recognizes how African American public address demonstrates a sincere concern for the environment in which the people inhabit. Although many may have fled to the South to escape tyranny, some Blacks remained to make the best of an adverse situation in post-Civil War era in the South. The creation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), local schools, churches, and other sites in which Black culture is expressed is evidence in a concern and value of the environment. Moreover, this formation and maintenance of Black spaces exhibit African American agency and illustrates Blacks' integrity and value toward the environment. This emphasis on the humanism is central to the Afrocentric/Kemetic intellectual project.

Harvell (2010) notes, “Afrocentric scholars have consistently emphasized the thematic importance of the humanistic viewpoint to the overall liberation struggles of African Americans” (p. 1052). For Harvell (2010), African American women have accurately implemented the major tenets of the Kemetic principles with their activism in the Black community. Addressing how African American women used their labor to educate, nurture, and empower the community despite limited resources, Harvell (2010) further contends, “Black women activists represent the best instructional models for discourse and analysis on the humanistic vision of liberation” (p. 1052). Harvell’s study demonstrates Africans, particularly women, have shown the integrity and value of the environment for the betterment of the community despite having limited resources. Coupled with Price’s speech, this suggests African American discourse communicates people must leave the world in better shape than it was when inherited.

Finally, as interrogated earlier in Price’s speech, African American public address seeks solidarity that is reciprocal and looks for cooperation from all for the mutual benefit of humanity. What this means is even in times of peril, African American public address continues to press for unity and harmony with those who have oppressed African people. As Price articulated, Blacks desired to be a part of the community despite the atrocious mistreatment by Whites. Price conveys a Kemetic style message of solidarity and cooperation among all, through communicating ideas of cohesion and the promotion of peace. This notion is similar to Cummings and Roy’s (2002) examination of Afrocentricity and its manifestations in rap music.

Looking at an array of rap lyrics from African Americans, Cummings and Roy (2002) demonstrated that rap music displays centeredness in Afrocentric principles while acknowledging their direct experiences. Cummings and Roy (2002) conclude with highlighting the rapper’s ultimate goal is to achieve “balance, harmony, and transcendence in the community” (p. 74), which is representative of traditional African principles. Although rapping is not necessarily public speaking in the normative sense, its ability to affect audiences on an enormous scale makes it an essential form of African American rhetoric. This notion proposes that African American oratory (in all forms, including rap) in the Kemetic tradition concentrates on achieving peace and harmony through reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for the mutual benefit of humanity.

## **Conclusion**

This article has argued that increased utilization of the Kemetic philosophy as a rhetorical lens in African American public address will advance our

understanding into how African American public address can (a) civically benefit the broader community because of its ethical foundation, (b) facilitate the recognition of contemporary ethical appeals in any given discourse, and (c) serve as an impetus for collective advancement toward a social justice-oriented world. This essay specifically focused on the four overarching ethical concerns of the Kemetic tradition as outlined by Karenga (2003) which were “the dignity and rights of the human person, the well-being of family and community, the integrity and value of the environment, and the reciprocal solidarity and cooperation for mutual benefit of humanity” (p. 14). Through this case study, we can understand how a Kemetic understanding of African American public address is vital to a well-functioning democratic society because of its ethical foundation.

First, a Kemetic understanding of African American public address is civically beneficial because it is an ethical communicative practice primarily. As Price demonstrates throughout his speech, public oratory is not just about eloquence and technique. Instead, rhetoric in the Kemetic sense is a communicative practice that seeks to build community. In this speech, Price made several ethical appeals to the idea of community to a mostly White audience about how Blacks could effectively participate in the community in a post-Civil War era. Therefore, a Kemetic understanding of African American public address can grant us the opportunity to observe how ethics play a significant role in African American oratory and the broader community. In addition, Kemetic understanding of African American public address can help move us toward restoring the ethical principles of ancient Kemet.

Second, a Kemetic understanding of African American public address helps us to recognize ethical appeals employed in the contemporary moment. Regardless of rhetor, understanding the ethics behind any communicative act helps us become more aware of any given rhetor’s motives. That is, as a Kemetically competent audience, we should be genuinely concerned about the moral ethics of any rhetor. Although the Kemetic rhetorical tradition is deeply rooted in African culture, its ethical principles are not exclusionary to just African people. Consequently, understanding how the Kemetic tradition rhetorically functions in public address assists our ability to diagnose the current social and political context and can potentially help us rectify any unethical discourses, policies, or practices.

Finally, a Kemetic understanding of African American public address serves as an impetus for us collectively, to move toward a social justice-oriented world. As Price does in several instances of his speech, we must move toward a world that is just and better for all people. The Kemetic rhetorical tradition can help us interrogate discourses more robustly and uncover the ethical standards a rhetor communicates. Thus, as a collective,

we can begin to make the necessary changes in our society that is rooted in fair and ethical standards. Accordingly, if we are serious about improving the lives of all our citizens, we must look to the ancient Egyptians, one of the oldest civilizations, who provided us with the Kemetic philosophy, which emphasizes a code of ethics that is deeply rooted in a genuine concern for humanity. Not employing this ethical system of ancient Kemet will continuously promote an unethical system and only widen the gap between social classes.

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