

# **African American Culture Workshop/Dialogue**

*Referencing the Past, Understanding the Present, and  
Preparing for the Future*

*September 20, 2017*

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## ***Referencing the Past, Understanding the Present, and Preparing for the Future***

This workshop will inform participants on the history, culture and values of people in the African America Community.

The following questions will guide the dialogue during the workshop:

How did we get to this situation we find ourselves in today?

How do we move beyond our present situation?

How do we see ourselves?

How do others see us?

How do we prepare for the future?

Where does help come from and how is it administered?

How does the notion of hierarchy of human value fit into this conversation?

What do you know about your own culture; history and beliefs?

What have you been taught by your people?

What have you learned from your people?

What brings you joy in your personal life?

What brings you joy in your work life?

## Referencing the Past

Africans sold into slavery were taken from their land, languages, customs, families, communities/villages. Thus, began the adverse generational experiences (AGES).

The concept of race has been traced to the European conquest of the Americas, including the development of the first labor system...slavery, where all the people shared a physical trait...dark skin.

When slavery was challenged on moral grounds in a nation that professed a deep belief in freedom, the full-blown ideology of white supremacy emerged. (note the hypocrisy which still exist today, e.g. “and justice for all,” or “all men are created equal.”)

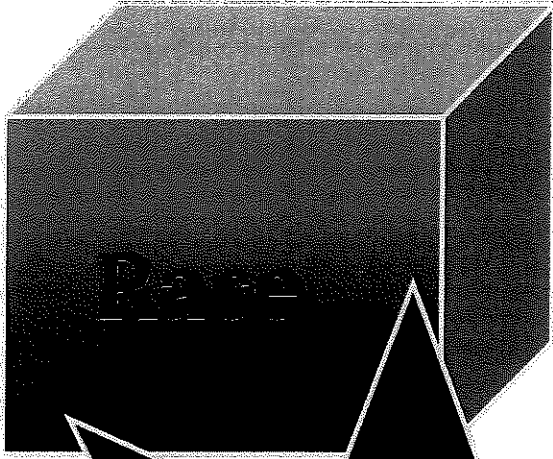
By the 19th century race was white America’s mantra used to explain everything from individual behavior to leading societies and contriving explanations for their fate; thus, social inequalities became the norm as in laws of the land, behaviors and practices.

- \* African slavery began to replace European indentured servitude.
- \* Europeans who considered themselves supreme over Blacks also viewed Indians as uncivilized and enacted policies to take over their land.
- \* Thomas Jefferson was the first to suggest the theory of **race** and suggested Blacks were naturally inferior to whites and prevailed upon science to come up with an explanation.

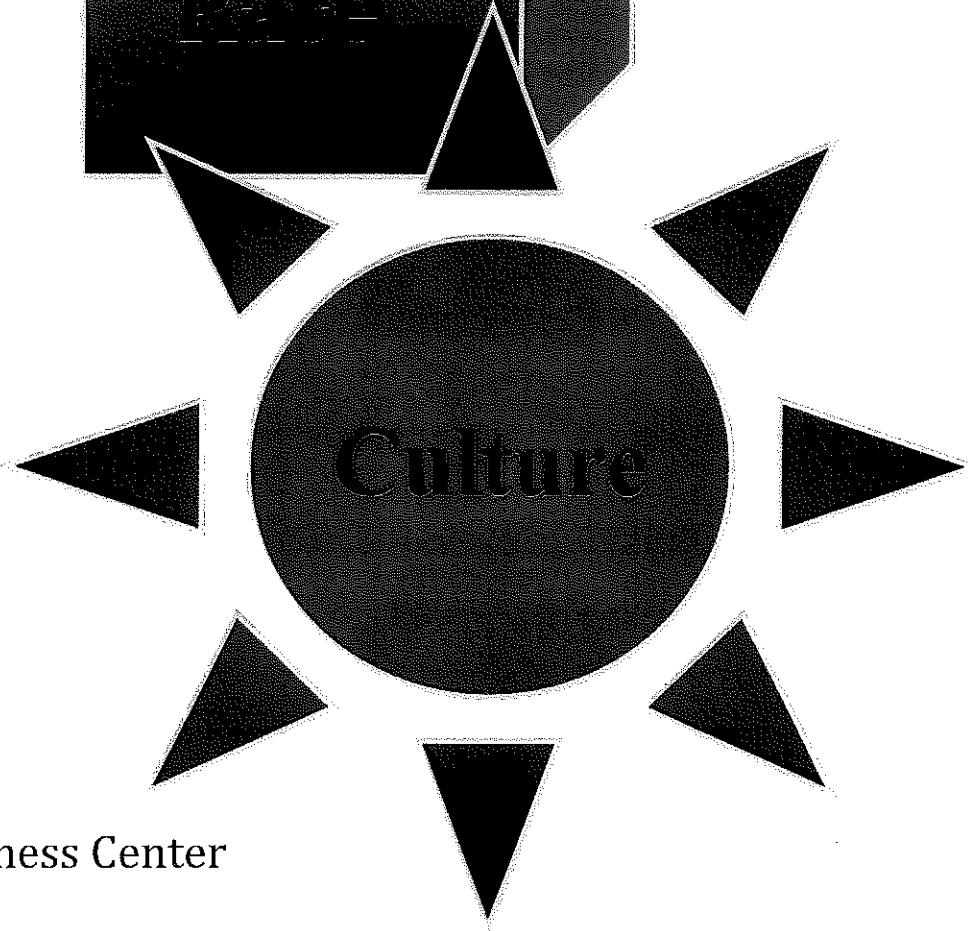
- \* Pro slavery advocates used science to justify slavery by advancing the idea that Blacks brains were smaller or head size difference, etc.
- \* By the time slavery ends the hierarchy of human value idea of white supremacy is deeply entrenched. These ideas were promoted widely throughout society and overseas.
- \* The 1904 World's Fair celebrated the triumph of American imperialism (power through diplomacy or military force) and popularized a racial hierarchy via displays of the dark skin people as objects.
- \* Institutions continued to give race meaning and power by allowing privileges, advantages and benefits to white people.
- \* After WWII the federal government helped white veterans to buy homes and to go to school, but red-lined and denied Black veterans the same opportunities which advanced the racial divide, inequality and strengthened the hierarchy of human value.
- \* Past discrimination created a racial wealth gap which continues to affect Black lives to this day.
- \* Color blind policies only perpetuate economic and social disparities.

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From



To



Cultural Wellness Center

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# What is Culture?

Culture is the symbols that people create to give themselves cohesion and continuity across generations.

- . Language
- . Customs
- . Traditions
- . Values
- . Ceremonies
- . Rituals
- . Knowledge for living an elevated life

# Benefits of Cultural Frame

Produces appreciation for richness of culture, i.e. values, behaviors and decision making vs. superficial understanding of cultural difference based on skin color

Shifts interactions dynamics in cross-cultural interfacing

Addresses cultural void (which affects performance, wellbeing and health)

Reveals faulty assumptions and definitions in engaging with others

# Power of a Cultural Frame

## Race

- Makes people feel defensive and/or guilty
- Tells people what we *don't* want – “racism” – but doesn't provide a vision of what we *do* want
- Does not give people an identity they can be proud of, does not connect people to their history nor give a sense of people-hood

## Culture

- Creates curiosity, inquiry, dialogue, self-study
- Provides a positive focus, and helps create a vision for the future
- Gives people a healthy identity, one that builds community and other connections necessary for resiliency.

# Challenges for the Dominant Culture

*“We Don’t have a culture. We are individuals.”*

*“We’re culturally neutral as scientists,  
physicians, or academics because our  
knowledge transcends culture.”*

- . Because we created and are identified with the dominant culture, we don’t see our culture, or understand its dynamics.
- . This gives us a different perspective than other cultural groups and makes it difficult to dialogue with them about their cultural resources and challenges.

# Challenges for Other Cultural Groups

What do you see are the challenges for your cultural group?

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# Unproductive Dominate Culture Attitudes

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## Problems

## Ramifications

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We do not see ourselves as cultural beings, but primarily as individuals.

Systems emphasis services for individualistic cultures (e.g. confidentiality laws)

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We think the way we do things is “normal” or more “advanced.”

Perception of health disparities perpetuates European Americans as the gold standard

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We create the table and invite everyone else to come to it. We control the agenda.

Community engagement means we invite a person of color to attend a committee

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Because we see ourselves as individuals, we get defensive and take things personally.

We have difficulty in engaging in productive dialogue with people of other cultures. We are afraid.

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We do not support other European Americans when they make mistakes. We expect others to do the teaching.

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We don't build community.

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## **Self-Study Process**

As you study your culture and root cultures, ask the following questions:

- . What do you want to keep or reclaim? What do you want to pass on to the next generation?
- . What is unhealthy? What needs to be transformed?
- . What gaps do you sense in your culture? What do you need that you are having difficulty finding?

## **“Cultural Competence”**

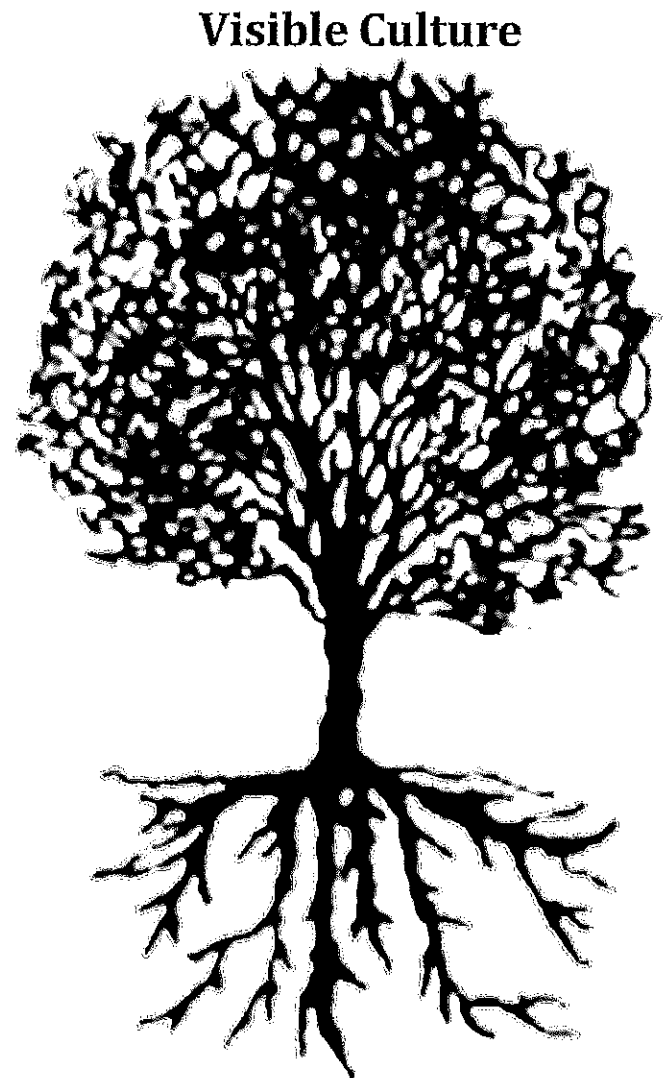
Too often this means learning some general characteristic about other people's cultures.

- . Promotes an “expert”, technocratic model that professionals have superior knowledge and just need to deliver it in a culturally appropriate form
- . Continues to uphold the normalization of whiteness
- . Does not teach people to be in relationship, to learn from others, to support the agency and assets of people of all cultures

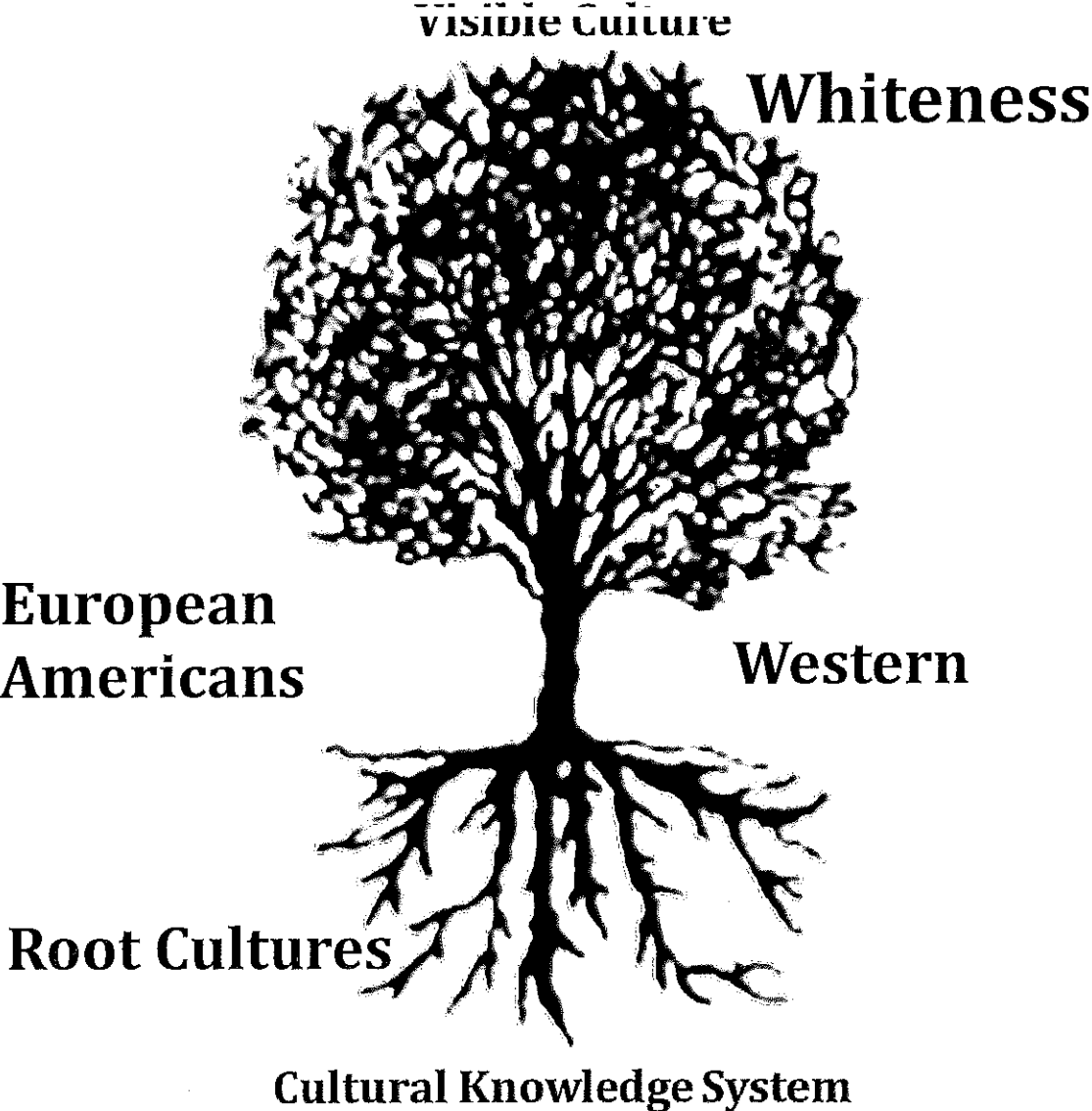


# Culture is Like a Tree

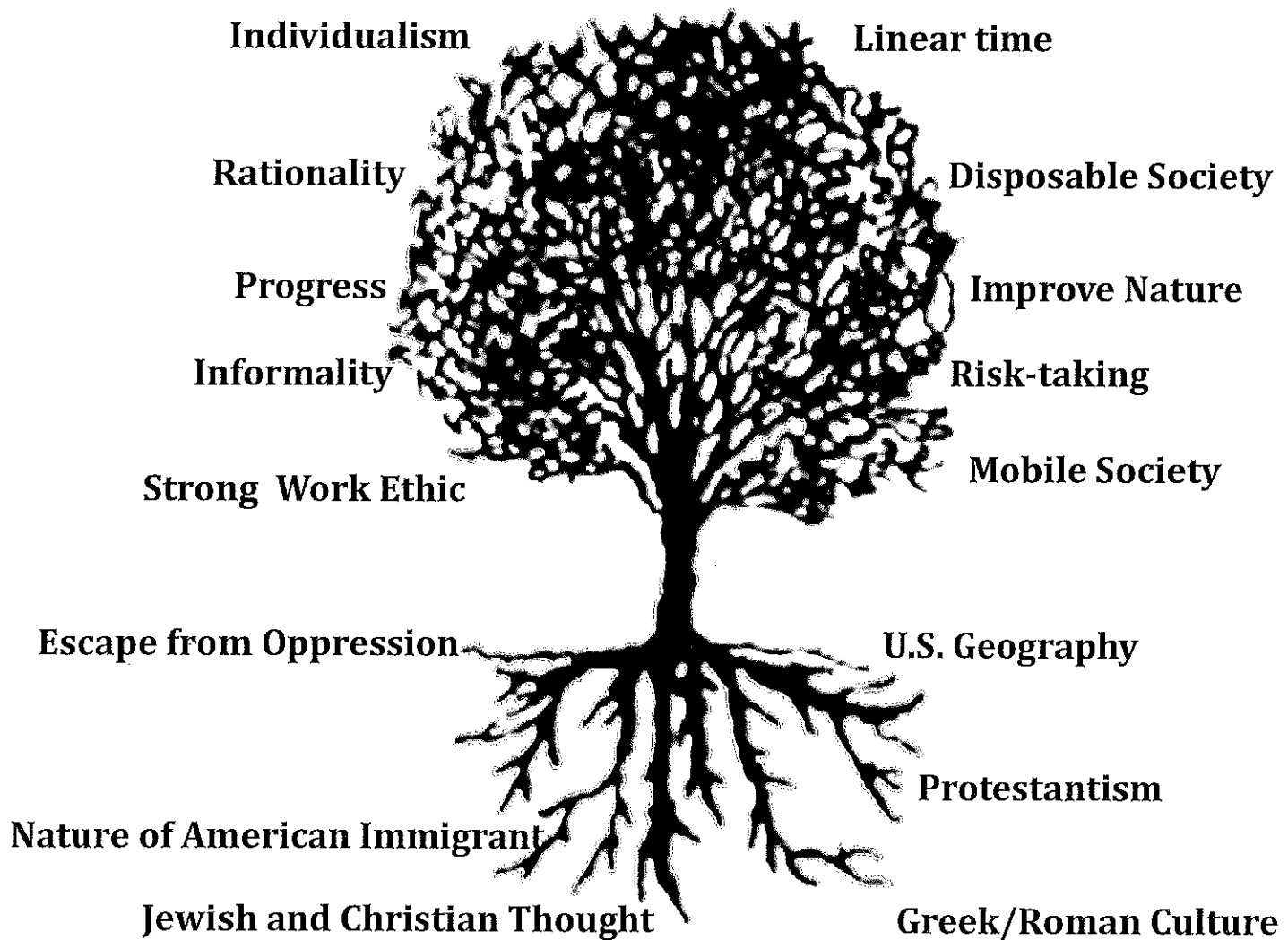
- . The roots of the tree nurture all the parts of the tree that are above ground
- . Continuity of Culture: The **cultural knowledge system** determines the characteristics of everything visible in a culture



# Tree of European American Identity



# Tree of European American Identity



## **Questions for Small Group Discussion**

Choose either the cultural values of individualism or progress.

1. How does this value impact your perspectives and practices in economic development/urban planning?

## **Questions for Reflection**

1. How does your cultural identity affect your relationships across culture?
2. How does framing culture as a resource affect community development work?

# **European American Culture**

## **Two Characteristics to Study Among Many *Progress***

Our lives can always be improved upon. There is a solution to every problem.

Highly valued:

- \* Change
- \* The New
- \* Technology

## ***Individualism***

One's identity is as an individual. The person is the primary unit of measurement.

Highly valued:

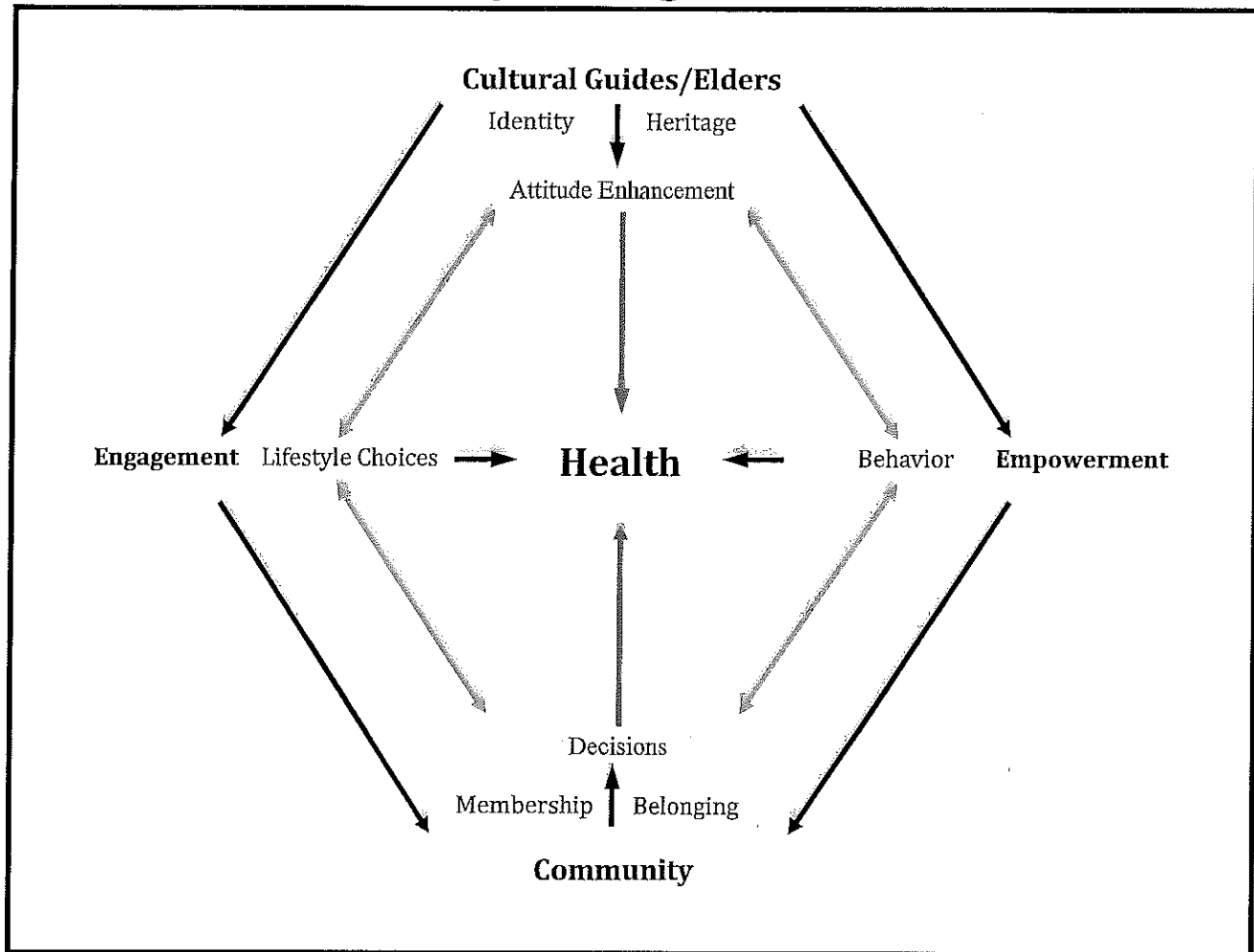
- \* Personal Fulfillment
- \* Independence
- \* Self-reliance
- \* Individual Achievement
- \* Individual Privacy

# Cultural Wellness Center

## Questionnaire on Cultural Identity and Cultural Heritage

How do you name the cultural group to which you belong?	
Do any of your names have connections to a cultural group? Explain.	
Where are the places you know that your ancestors came from? Include genealogical ancestors as well as ancestors who may have adopted you or your ancestors.	
Growing up, did your family have things around the house that have cultural meaning, such as cultural symbols, textiles, art objects/folk art, sayings on plaques, family heirlooms?	
Growing up, from what cultural tradition were the children's stories you were told? Sayings, rhymes, or music?	
Do you celebrate during the holidays with cultural foods? What are they?	
What cultural traditions do you practice? Which celebrations/holidays? From what culture do they originate?	
What would you say are the primary values of your culture? What is most important to have a good life, to be a good person? Think about both what people in your family say are their values (explicit) and what values they act from (implicit).	
If you were in a foreign country, and someone asked you to describe some of the outstanding characteristics of your culture, what would you say?	
Do you take pride in your cultural identity?	

# Community Caring Infrastructure



## 21 Standards for Community Function:

1. Parents, grandparents, children, friends neighbors take responsibility for each other.
2. If you see someone in trouble, help immediately.
3. Help, guide, support, acknowledge, correct every child.
4. Greet every member of community with love and respect.
5. Ask for help before there is a serious crisis.
6. Provide help/support before being asked.
7. Share what you know and what you've learned - that which helped you.
8. Acknowledge the help you have received.
9. Celebrate each other's success.
10. Remain connected to family/community even when it hurts.
11. Work through problems together.
12. Hold each other accountable to what is right and good.
13. Inspire each other, especially children and elders.
14. When success comes, share it - help others succeed.
15. When failure comes, be willing to receive support and accept responsibility.
16. Be good to one's self in order to inspire others.
17. Get up, shop up and take part in building/maintaining community.
18. Respect elders, family, community as core to having a good life.
19. Get education, training, personal development.
20. Acknowledge spirit as essential to community life and cultural heritage.
21. Never give our children up.

