

# Philosophy and the Black Experience



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## FROM THE EDITORS

George Yancy and John H. McClendon III

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Gail M. Presbey, Sandra Ochieng'-Springer, and Kunbi Adefule

*Report on the International Colloquium "Toward a New Pan-Africanism: Deploying Anthropology, Archaeology, History, and Philosophy in the Service of Africa and the Diaspora," University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Kingston, Jamaica, April 24-25, 2014*

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APA NEWSLETTER ON

# Philosophy and the Black Experience

GEORGE YANCY AND JOHN H. MCCLENDON III, CO-EDITORS

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## FROM THE EDITORS

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In this issue of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*, we are happy to include the valuable report from Gail M. Presbey, Sandra Ochieng'-Springer, and Kunbi Adefule on the International Colloquium "Toward a New Pan-Africanism: Deploying Anthropology, Archaeology, History, and Philosophy in the Service of Africa and the Diaspora," which was held at the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus, Kingston, Jamaica, on April 24-25, 2014. This report is a welcomed contribution highlighting recent scholarship on Africana philosophy. The international dimension and global import of our philosophical inquiry comes to the fore in their report.

Additionally, we have Ralph Dumain's incisive article, "On the Contributions of John McClendon and Stephen Ferguson to the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*." Dumain undertakes a critical overview of McClendon's and Ferguson's work as it has appeared within the pages of this newsletter. We greatly appreciate Ralph Dumain's candid and penetrating insights. Dumain's contribution offers our readers a keen perspective on the content and scope of our newsletter over a period of several years.

We are also delighted to publish philosopher François Kodena's article entitled "'I Can't Breathe!': Eric Garner's Salutary Verdict to the Racist Euro-American World and Its Implications for the African Worldwide." Kodena's article explores how Eric Garner's legacy, namely, the iterative cry, "I can't breathe," constitutes a philosophical and political moment with far-reaching consequences for both the Euro-American dyad and Africans worldwide. The article critically appraises the unsympathetic police impassivity vis-à-vis Eric Garner's dying-talking-Black-body which sharply echoes the choked confession of an exclusivist Western subjectivity: "I can't breathe." This is a timely avowal of a painful death, and Africans worldwide must unite and rebuild a fraternal breathing space and a new civilization.

Last, but not least, we are also delighted to publish a short poem by philosopher Todd Franklin. The poem is a powerful expression that grew out of a nationally shared emotional context when a grand jury decided not to indict

white police officer Daniel Pantaleo in the death of Eric Garner on July 17, 2014, in Staten Island, New York.

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## ARTICLES

*Report on the International Colloquium  
"Toward a New Pan-Africanism:  
Deploying Anthropology, Archaeology,  
History, and Philosophy in the Service of  
Africa and the Diaspora," University of  
the West Indies, Mona Campus, Kingston,  
Jamaica, April 24-25, 2014*

Gail M. Presbey  
UNIVERSITY OF DETROIT MERCY

Sandra Ochieng'-Springer  
UNIVERSITY OF WEST INDIES AT CAVE HILL CAMPUS, BARBADOS

Kunbi Adefule  
CORNELL UNIVERSITY

This well-attended international colloquia brought together scholars and Pan-Africanist community activists from the Caribbean, Africa, and North and South America to exchange ideas and ponder together the way forward for people of African descent in Africa and the Americas. It was also an occasion to enjoy the arts, including film, poetry, and musical performance. The setting was the beautiful University of West Indies Mona campus, with its palm trees, lush foliage, and views of the Blue Mountains.

Sponsorship from the Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC), Federal Republic of Nigeria, the Pan African Strategic and Policy Research Group (PANAFSTRAG), the University of West Indies Mona (UNI Mona) campus, and other co-sponsors made this gathering possible, as it is always expensive to bring together so many people from such different parts of Africa and the diaspora. Conference organizers Professor Tunde Bewaji of UWI Mona's department of philosophy, and Ibraheem Muheeb of CBAAC, organized this conference inter-continently, until it became a reality. The program was excellent, and while it was packed from morning to night, and seemed all too short, it provided a wonderful opportunity to meet others and exchange ideas.

Dignitaries and official sponsors opened the colloquium with a gathering on the evening of April 23. A Rastafari group (Mystic Revelation) entertained the audience before the ceremony officially started. A visually impaired senior Rastafari man led this group to an amazing performance that left the audience speechless and fascinated.

The opening ceremony began around 6 p.m. with the singing of the National Anthem of both countries—Nigeria and Jamaica. Professor Tunde Babawale, the Director General of CBAAC, gave the welcome speech and introduced some of the dignitaries in attendance. The dignitaries included the Nigerian High commissioner to Jamaica (Ambassador Olatokunboh Kamson), two senators from Nigeria (Senator Brimmo Yusuf and Senator Ahmed Barata), the Nigerian minister of tourism, culture, and national orientation (High Chief Edem Duke), the vice-chancellor of the University West Indies University (Professor E. Nigel Harris), and the pro chancellor and principal of the University of the West Indies, Mona Campus (Professor Archibald McDonald). The South African high commissioner to Jamaica was represented by Phillip Riley.

After Professor Tunde Babawale's speech, each of the dignitaries mentioned above gave a short speech. All of them congratulated the organizers for connecting people from the African continent, the diaspora, and the allies in the effort to brainstorm solutions to problems facing our respective communities. The Nigerian minister of tourism, culture, and national orientation—High Chief Edem Duke—went further by pointing out specific similarities between the Nigerian culture and that of Jamaica.

A cultural performance by Etu Group followed the speeches. This performance was particularly remarkable because it confirmed a few of the similarities between the Nigerian and Jamaican cultures mentioned by High Chief Edem Duke. Some of the lyrics of the Etu Group's song were in the Yoruba language, which is still spoken in Nigeria today. Some of the Etu Group's dance routine is identical to that of the Yoruba and Niger Delta ethnic group of Nigeria. Lastly, the females of the Etu Group each used a white handkerchief as a part of the dance performance; this is very similar to the Igbo culture of Nigeria. The crowd was all smiles when High Chief Edem Duke and Professor Tunde Babawale joined the dance performance by the Etu Group on stage.

Professor Augustin Holl of Université Paris-Ouest Nanterre La Défense, France, took the stage at about 7:30 p.m. to give the keynote speech titled "Global Africa: Moving Forward." His presentation highlighted the first humans coming out of Africa before the enslavement era and their progress over the last hundreds of thousands of years. The audience was impressed by his speech, which he supplemented with anthropological and archaeological evidence.

Professor Tunde Babawale came back to the podium to deliver the vote of thanks and officially wrap up the opening ceremony. The University of West Indies Pop Group entertained the audience with their soulful and passionate voices while refreshments were served. The audience left the opening ceremony impressed, curious, and eager for the remaining days of the conference.

The next morning, the program began with Professor Verene Shepherd, prolific social historian from UWI Mona, who is also chairperson of the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent at the United Nations. She began with her challenge that we need a decade for people of African descent. Her rallying cry was "Pan-Africanism or Perish!" Professor Shepherd's introduction was followed by a paper by Professor Sheilah F. Clarke-Ekong of the University of Missouri. She noted that 98 percent of the human gene pool shows African descent. And yet, students today often misunderstand indigenous African cultures (due to misrepresentation by anthropologists), and while they look to Google for all of their answers, they have not stopped to ponder what questions we should be asking. Professor Clarke-Ekong asks, who defines or redefines beauty and success? Which aspects of our current culture are old, new, or borrowed? We need to nurture knowledge of and respect for African heritage. She noted how appropriate it was to have a Pan-Africanism conference in the Caribbean, since when she was taught about the history of Pan-Africanism, the region was given little attention, and yet its contribution to the history was so great. Femi Taiwo, in his role as discussant, added to this point, explaining that Pan-Africanism in its modern inflection came from the Caribbean.

Other morning papers included Dr. Kimani S. K. Nehusi, who drew upon his knowledge of ancient Egypt to engage in a gender analysis, noting that children were considered androgynous until circumcision (a rite that produced men and women). He explored the meaning of fatherhood, which is not a mere biological role, but one of great social importance, and Nehusi hopes that the ancient values are revived today. He advocates the teaching of African history and culture. Dr. Uyilawa Usuanlele of SUNY Oswego bemoaned the fact that throughout colonial history, "obeah" (translated as diviner, sorcerer, or doctor) was outlawed because resistance from enslaved Africans was led by medicine men. He went into the details of debates over the origin of the word. Professor Taiwo in his comments regretted the fact that ancient Egyptian/Kemet philosophy and values are so little taught in African universities these days. The University of Ibadan used to study these topics in its classics department, but with the passing of Chiekh Anta Diop of Senegal and Theophile Obenga of Congo, these academic areas have lost needed resources and attention.

The next panel began with a passionate speech by Anita Diop of the African Roots and Heritage Foundation in Ohio. She proclaimed "I am an African," and preferred such a way of stating her self-identity over "African American," because it showed that she glorified Africa. She dared people to realize and admit that Africa is not poor; it's rich. She challenged Africans living abroad to go back to Africa and build and staff hospitals there. During a question and answer session, some participants defended Christianity in Africa by saying that it has been Africanized, but Diop challenged such comments, asking people to ponder, why is there not an African god that garners respect, when world religionists are paying homage to Jesus, Buddha, and other religious figures? She was followed by Kunbi Adefule, a Fellow at Cornell University, who is studying the plight of Afro-Colombians. She admits that the term "Afro-

Colombians” was created by the educated elite. Most of the black population of Colombia, comprising about 25 percent of the population, lives along the Pacific and Caribbean coast. Since the 1991 constitution, they have received land rights, but in practice those rights are always threatened by displacement, death threats, and assassination. Discussion after the session raised issues of who is an African? Who is demonstrating solidarity with Africans?

A presentation by Cecile Johnson, raised in Jamaica but now heading the African Development Plan in Chicago, gave voice to her concern that Africans are marginalized and are not considered producers of great thoughts. The U.N.’s Human Development Index shows few African countries have reached high development, as poverty, disease, and authoritarian regimes wreak havoc on the continent. Africans must use education to create wholeness, and emancipate ourselves “from mental slavery,” as Marcus Garvey advocated. Oscar Braithwaite of the Canadian Alliance of Black Educators was concerned that black students in predominantly white countries have very low records of finishing school or attending college.

Discussion after this session focused on the challenges of whether the Caribbean region could help Africa’s poverty problem, since there is so much poverty in the Caribbean itself. Also, while black students may excel if they could consider education to be part of their African heritage, where can one go in Canada to earn, for example, a degree in African traditional religions? One Jamaican participant explained that when she was raised, her family did not educate her about her African heritage. Some noted that the Prime Minister of Jamaica disassociates herself from Africa, and that too many Jamaicans have as their preoccupation going to the United States, Canada, or Great Britain. Too few have had the desire or opportunity to go to Africa. Even those Jamaicans who try to go to Africa have trouble with visas since they would have to first go to the United States in order to get an African visa. These are practical challenges to creating a robust Pan-Africanism.

The next session focused on Jamaican culture. Dr. Jahlani Niaah of UWI Mona shared his studies of reggae. Current “dancehall” reggae songs are influenced by hip-hop. Their mention of guns is “not intended to be taken literally.” He mentioned tensions between Jamaica and Zimbabwe, since Zimbabwean President Robert Mugabe has been reinforcing negative stereotypes of Jamaica and in 2012 told Zimbabweans not to go there. This is experienced as a harsh betrayal given Bob Marley’s early support to Zimbabwe and the awarding of the Order of Jamaica award to Mugabe in 1996. However, Professor Niaah is particularly worried that dancehall music such as the song “Boom Bye Bye” by Buju Banton is pejorative to homosexuals.

One of the talks that garnered the most enthusiasm from the audience was Dr. Karen Wilson-Ama’Echefu’s talk on Anansi the spider, read in her absence. It seems that many participants wanted to engage in the author’s challenge that this “godlike” spider of African folk tales should be cherished. A talk by Dr. Yasu’o Mizobe of Meiji University, Japan, told the audience about a little-known chapter of Africa-Japanese relations. A philosopher, Takahiko Kojima

went to Africa in 1936 to study Nationalist movements there. Having met with Martin Heidegger, Kojima had as his goal the dismantling of the Anglo-Saxon world order. He made it to the Cape of Good Hope, and he was shocked by the racial discrimination against Asians in South Africa.

On the same panel, Dr. Franca Attah shared his research on human trafficking in the Edo and Delta states of Nigeria. Almost half of current trafficking victims are forced into trafficking by their parents, so that they will send money back home. This kind of trafficking is hard to combat because the whole family is involved in the decision, and they may even take an oath at a shrine that they can’t reveal who trafficked them, and they can’t betray a Madam. In a feminist analysis, Professor Attah noted that families are patriarchal and it is often the male family head who decides what the children will do. While families pin their fortunes on a girl child who is trafficked, they neglect the traditional values that say that the girl should be married with children. Since Dr. Attah notes that the majority of women trafficked received secondary school education, but were then not able to gain employment, he thinks that a possible solution is to find a place in the formal economy for such graduates. A challenger from the audience wondered why Dr. Attah decided to blame patriarchy for these problems rather than white supremacy.

Matlotleng Matlou made the argument that as intellectuals we must not only critique the present global system, we must seek to transform it, while also utilizing it to the advantage of Africa and its diaspora. He mentioned engagement in business ventures and other opportunities that will be beneficial to Africa and its diaspora. He discussed specifically the possibility of a charter airline between Jamaica in particular and CARICOM in general and Africa, linked through Nigeria. Winston LaRose critically analyzed the effect of identity erasure and the progressively vanishing African physical persona on the philosophy and practice of Pan-Africanism. This erasure has been caused over time through historical transmigration of human populations, conquests, and subjugation of local indigenous populations, the destruction of established civilizations, the denigration of traditional cultures, and the re-location and re-creation of new human identities in the global environment. He examined this constantly evolving nature of the indigenous African populations and its identity on the continent and in the diaspora and asked the question “What will be the effect of this evolution on the Pan-African movement of the twenty-first century?”

A famous Nollywood actor and teacher of acting at the University of Port Harcourt, Sam Dede, talked of the importance of the Nollywood film industry in challenging the Eurocentric film market. Audience members loved Nollywood films; some even said they were addicted to them. But this did not stop critical comments. Some said that Nollywood films assert Euro-Christian values. They show African spirituality in stereotype, and also stereotype women as gossips preoccupied with catching men. One audience member suggested that the depictions of women are accurate, and that some women even want to find men who will beat them. Another noted that when passing a homestead in Nigeria, if one asks “is anybody

home?" one might hear a woman reply, "no, only women are here." Sam Dede defended Nollywood films against criticism. He notes, don't we see shooting and buildings collapsing in films made in New York City? And yet people don't complain about that. And, in Nollywood films the bad man gets punished, and so, the stories are moral. Later in the conference, attendees were treated to two Nollywood films, one in which Sam Dede played the main character, and another called "Mami," by Tunde Kalani, about a mother's love for her son.

On the last day of the conference, Professor Lewis Gordon gave his plenary address. He asked, Why do we feel anxiety when we hear the words African, black, and knowledge together? When young black men were asked, "Do people make fun of you for pursuing your education?," one hundred percent of them replied "yes." He noted that there was a prevalent racial division in academia, which said that the African diaspora was good at experience, but looked to the white world for theory. But using a theoretical framework that is white is part of colonization. He notes disappointedly that this current fashion of "theorizing from the global South" means how to get white people to theorize about the global South. He asserts, don't make the people who challenge your humanity your standard. He notes that philosophy as a discipline is involved in "decadence" because it acts as if it has the answers to everything. He cautioned people not to use a theoretical framework that is white, because that would be "epistemological colonization." For example, John Stuart Mill was a capitalist who thought that individuals were privately powerful, but by emphasizing the individual, he neglected slavery as a system. He shared that Frederick Douglass's mother, who was a slave, would walk twelve miles through the woods to spend time with her child after working in the fields. After one year, she died. This is an example of the value of love, which is beyond the value of commodification. We need to engage in political action to build a world of human flourishing.

Speakers during the late morning and afternoon of the second day included Olufolajimi Adeojokun, who wanted Africans to learn to use technology. He noted that Africans are digi-privileged and need to be digi-abled. Sandra Ochieng'-Springer of the UWI Cave Hill Barbados campus said there needed to be a deeper integration of nations within the African Union and CARICOM with a greater view of south-south collaboration using development discourse for further collective action. With West Indies being so splintered, there is disillusion with small gains from independence. CARICOM does not reach its full potential because each small nation is preoccupied with its national sovereignty. She wants states to get over their phobia of regionalism and embrace it, since globalized economies make strict nationalism impractical. She notes a discrepancy—why are nations willing to sign away their sovereignty in free trade agreements, but not for regional efforts? Andre Siamundele raised issues of Creole identity in contrast to African identity in relation to Pan-Africanism in the twenty-first century. Using the works of Frantz Fanon, Maryse Condé, Aimé Césaire, and Edouard Glissant, he made the point that the role Creoleness plays in Pan-Africanism extends well beyond the idea of identity, especially since many folk

in the diaspora sought root through a mixture of memory and nationalism. He raised an important question on the effect of the globalizing tendencies of the African diaspora on Pan-Africanism. Dr. Gail Presbey shared a historical account of how Afro-Trinidadian Pan-African movement leaders George Padmore and C. L. R. James studied the oil workers' strike in Trinidad in 1937, and the dockworkers' strike in Jamaica in 1938, for the development of strategies to win Africa's liberation. Discussant Dr. Dona McFarlane noted that once Haiti was called a country of blacks, it was vilified. Discussion surrounded the Jamaican slogan, "Out of one, many people." How is it understood? Ninety-nine percent of Jamaicans are of African descent, yet some feel this heritage is downplayed in Jamaica. A member of the audience explained that Rastafarians don't consider themselves Jamaicans. "We are Africans," he asserted.

Baba Amani Olubanjo Buntu is a Ph.D. student at UNISA in South Africa, and founder of Ebukhosini (Royalty) Solutions. If we accepted colonial understandings of knowledge, that would be "epistemicide," he asserts. He wants to encourage epistemological disobedience by promoting "Afrikology," that is, African consciousness. His philosophy of education involves focus on location, agency, and validation and is intended to encourage enthusiasm for education among African youth. His presentation was followed by Joy Prime, who discussed the fashion industry in Barbados. It is unfortunate, she noted, that much of what we see as "our" style (from Barbados) is actually designed abroad, packaged, and sold back to us. In Barbados people wear cheap imports, and most talented designers from Barbados go abroad, and so it's a challenge to have a successful fashion industry in the country.

Wendy Brathwaite's paper, which was read by Oscar Brathwaite in her absence, "From Griots to Emcees: Connecting Youth By Beats and Blood," made a case for using the hip hop art form in the building of a global Pan-African consciousness for a new generation of youth throughout the diaspora. She traced similarities of the hip hop art form to griots of West Africa and stated that they are both vital channels of communication and expression that can be used to educate, inspire, and mobilize. She placed emphasis on the power of hip hop as a form of expression that can be used to influence, reinterpret, re-examine, and disseminate historical knowledge, especially for a new generation.

Professor Verene Shepherd presented a paper on reparations in which she summed up the position of CARICOM's Reparations Commission. She stated that only a reparatory justice approach to truth and educational exposure can begin the process of healing and repair for the massive psychological trauma that was inflicted upon African descendant populations. European colonizers have disfigured the Caribbean committing grave crimes against humanity with negative effects still visible and should repair the damage that was made. CARICOM countries plan to engage European nations and demand justice. She explained a ten-point plan that has been accepted by CARICOM countries to be negotiated with European nations. These include a full formal apology, a repatriation program to help resettle persons in Africa, an indigenous

peoples development program, greater development aid for cultural institutions, public health crisis and illiteracy eradication, an African knowledge program to help build “bridges of belonging,” psychological rehabilitation, technology transfer, and debt cancellation.

Femi Taiwo gave his plenary speech on Friday afternoon. Beginning by focusing on the Sankofa bird, Professor Taiwo explained that we have to look back and go forward at the same time. We can’t forget slavery. New World slavery involved chattelization; that is, treating Africans like possessions, tools, farm implements. So, unlike the Asians who were considered backward but never had their humanity questioned, Africans had to first struggle to be considered human, then become modern. Jewish people suffered a long train of abuse that culminated in the Holocaust, but unlike Africans, Jewish people own their pain, and own their story, to the point that the word “holocaust” can be used only to refer to Jewish suffering. In contrast, New World slavery is considered not special; it is just an example of global slavery. African philosophers have not been writing about slavery. Why, he asks, did our people trade people for beads, rum, and similar kitsch? And why do Africans today sell natural resources for China’s kitsch? Taiwo criticized a common “ledger book” approach to colonialism in Africa, which suggests that there were both good and bad effects of the slave trade. How could anything good come out of reducing a human being to a thing, to a commodity? Today, African culture is fossilized for Euro-American tourists, and history is put into artificial and misleading slots such as pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial. Professor Taiwo announced that he is currently writing a sequel to his earlier book, this one entitled *Africa Must Be Modern*. Intelligent retrogression (turning to the past) is an important part of progression. When challenged to explain what he meant when he said Africans must be modern, he explained that the self should be the author of his/her own life script.

At the business meeting, a Working Group consisting of various conference participants presented a draft of a “Communique” from the conference. It included taking stock of the strengths and weaknesses of the conference, and suggested practical resolutions for the movement. Their draft said that Pan-Africanism was useful as an ideological framework to guide and direct decolonization. They took stock of the lack of youth involvement in the conference, as a larger presence of UWI students was missed. Some in the audience explained that the conference timing was in conflict with exams on campus. The communique expressed a desire for more Caribbean scholars and public intellectual presence at the conference. They were concerned that educational systems still had Eurocentric curriculum and methodologies. They recommended the deconstruction of Eurocentrism, African-Caribbean exchanges, and the production of movies that dramatize the lives of African heroes. They were critical of elitism within academia and supportive of the grassroots community. They want to promote partnerships with Historically Black Colleges and Universities. They want to observe the centenary of the United Negro Improvement Association, and May 25 as African Liberation Day (plans for this day are already in place at the University of Chicago). One participant

questioned the rallying around the term “Pan-Africanism” because neither “Pan” nor “African” were African words. That comment brought about acknowledgment that currently the African Union uses five languages, and only one is an African language (Swahili). By 9 p.m. of the last day of the conference, this communiqué was sent to all attendees.

In addition, there were cultural performances. Princess Love (Donna McLarty) rapped her poetry to music on both days of the conference. Her songs denounced injustice and oppression and attempted to guide the youth in constructive paths. Sam Dede recited poetry. The Charles Town Maroon Drummers sang, drummed and danced.

The last panel had documentary filmmakers Saki and Karen Mafundikwa present their film, *Shungu: The Resilience of a People* (2009), about Zimbabwe’s social, political, and economic crisis. Saki Mafundikwa described the difficult circumstances under which the film was shot, given the upheaval in Zimbabwe at the time. The documentary explains that for the first ten years of Zimbabwe’s independence (the 1980s) there was free health care and education. The British had agreed to compensate white farmers for their land in a distribution plan, but realistically little land was transferred. This led to takeovers of land. Mugabe resettled farmers but could not supply them with the seed and fertilizer they needed. Rampant inflation decimated salaries and life savings. The 1990s brought World Bank/IMF structural adjustment. Foreign investments stopped. Hospitals could no longer provide services and epidemics arose. The documentary shows desperate people living on wild fruit, as they suffer unemployment and are vandalized. In the end, Zimbabweans adopted the U.S. dollar and South African rand as their currency. While the film conveyed a harsh reality, the filmmakers shared some small victory in being able to make the film so that the situation can be better known.

The colloquium ended with a reception, and participants were eager to exchange contacts, and hope to work with each other again. The only regret expressed by many was that they did not have more time to explore Kingston and Jamaica. Future conferences in Jamaica could include visits to many important historic sites.

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## *On the Contributions of John McClendon and Stephen Ferguson to the APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*

Ralph Dumain  
INDEPENDENT SCHOLAR

### INTRODUCTION

First, on scope and definition, I am here reviewing the output of this one newsletter, which covers a limited number of authors and works on Black or African-American related philosophy. Note also that while *African American*

*Philosophy* is a category of relatively recent invention, sometimes it is lumped in with the even newer category of *Afro-Caribbean Philosophy* or the older category of *African Philosophy* as a disciplinary phenomenon (1945- ) into the larger category of *Africana Philosophy*. One might question what these categories mean and the extent to which there is a real continuity and historical cross-referencing of the authors concerned, rather than an arbitrary lumping together of authors and writings, even of a variety of genres. There is also the question of whether these categories are merely descriptive of a region or demographic group or intellectual network, or meant to indicate something unique or intrinsic to the philosophizing so subsumed.

At some point, however, once a tradition is compiled and named, even if entirely arbitrarily and opportunistically, once it finds an academic niche with a developed citation pattern, it becomes a socially instituted category. The title of the newsletter is fairly innocent and probably preferable to the most likely alternatives. First, it is not limited to Black *philosophers* as contributors to the field. Secondly, it does not presume the existence of a *Black philosophy*. While there are all types of Black experiences and experiences of Black people, from a historical, social standpoint, the title is legitimate: whatever philosophy *is*, a certain notion regarding philosophical perspective finds application to the Black experience, or the Black experience is interrogating the philosophical tradition.

All this is not mere word-juggling on my part. There are radically different agendas in play in the philosophical conceptions behind the terminology. One of the newsletter's co-editors, John H. McClendon III, is a Marxist-Leninist, as is his colleague Stephen C. Ferguson II. While there are worthy articles here and there by other authors, these two particularly provide a broadly methodical, consistently anti-obscurantist, and non-ethnocentric approach to the subject matter. Note that, aside from Ferguson's articles and a book review by Floyd W. Hayes III on McClendon and Ferguson on sports, serious engagement with their ideas is not to be found.

### MCCLENDON'S APPROACH TO AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES AND PHILOSOPHY

In "Black and White contra Left and Right? The Dialectics of Ideological Critique in African American Studies" McClendon states his dialectical materialist approach to Black Studies in opposition to both social constructivist/conventionalist and racialist approaches to race, both of which he deems idealist and bourgeois. The German lineage of dialectics, while not popular in the United States, is nonetheless no stranger within the lineage of Black thought, from Charles Leander Hill to C. L. R. James to Eugene Holmes to Abram Harris to Franz Fanon to Martin Luther King Jr. to Angela Davis. (James's scorn for linguistic philosophy is quoted.) McClendon favorably cites African scholars claiming that dialectical logic originates in Africa. (What does this mean? And are the rudimentary dialectical conceptions of ancient civilizations such as Greece and China even relevant to the modern world?) Several other thinkers are cited, with the suggestion of a rich history of dialectical thought. Yet given the ideological variety within McClendon's list, can this be

said to constitute a real lineage or tradition of dialectical thought? His larger point, though, is that contemporary Black thought in America is impoverished by comparison when it comes to the utilization of dialectical conceptions.

Cornel West comes in for some sharp criticism. Quoting West and Sartre, McClendon states: "West adopts the dialectical method in an ostensibly subjectivist manner. West, following in the Sartrean tradition, denies any ontological status to dialectics." Both see Marxian dialectics as heuristic. This presumably abets West's conventionalism. West identifies Du Bois with pragmatism, rather than dialectics. Pragmatism, however, in the Deweyan vein, was founded on the rejection of dialectics. Hence, West's outlook is eclectic and incoherent.

The vacuous rhetoric and intellectual charlatanism of prophetic pragmatism (embodied in the very term!) really do stand in need of a sound thrashing, but this seems to me an odd way to go about it.<sup>1</sup> Aside from the lack of delineation of what is meant by dialectics, those who hold to dialectics, and even those who would lay claim to some form of "dialectical materialism" are by no means unanimous on the nature of dialectics, the relation of subjective to objective dialectics, the existence of a dialectical logic, or the dialectics of nature.

McClendon next explains the difference between internal and external criticism in ideological critique. William R. Jones, for example, engaged in internal criticism to explode Black liberation theology from within. The Idea of External criticism—or ideological critique—issues from a fundamentally different conceptual basis from the object of criticism. McClendon delves into the question of critique in greater detail. It seems that "ideological critique" is not quite the same as what I think of as "ideology critique," in which the concept of ideology is negative only (i.e., ideology = mystified consciousness). Rather, ideology seems to take both positive and negative meanings; that is, with the correct ideological perspective one criticizes an incorrect ideology. In any case, McClendon's objective is the critique of bourgeois ideology, even when bourgeois ideology assumes the guise of an anti-racist critique.

One form of bourgeois critique is Afrocentricity. "The racial/ racialist critique is constituted in a kind of dichotomized theoretical modus operandi, wherein Black intellectual/ cultural paradigms stand contra white intellectual/ cultural paradigms . . ." Charles W. Mills offers another approach in *The Racial Contract*, in which he criticizes contractarianism as white rather than bourgeois.<sup>2</sup> Cedric Robinson attacks Marxism as white from the allegedly external position of blackness. McClendon argues against the equation of Western thought with capitalism and white supremacy and against the notion that Marxism is external and alien to Black peoples. The real division, within and not between civilizations, is left and right, not black and white. A dialectical, objective, scientific, materialist basis is necessary for the critique of white supremacy.

Next we find detailed case studies, the first, of Patricia Hill Collins, an exemplar of conventionalist epistemology in the service of social constructionism. Collins's notion

of knowledge is shown to be both subjectivist and contextualist, the context being the immediate context of a specific social position rather than the context of the structure and functioning of society as a whole, scientifically analyzed.<sup>3</sup> The failure to distinguish between religious and scientific knowledge claims is conspicuous. Collins fingers positivism as “Eurocentric masculinist epistemology.” She does not reject positivism *in toto*, and she also fails to identify it as bourgeois. She also conflates Marxism with positivism for its claim to objective truth.

Another issue that surfaces is the notion of race as a social construct, understandably opposing the notion of race as a natural category. But recognizing race as a social category would avoid simply dismissing it as a convention and occluding its reality in the organization of social production. The constructionist approach is favored in the leftish academy because it seems to foster an orientation towards active transformation, framed within a voluntarist perspective. However, such voluntarism amounts to a vague notion without substantive content.

McClendon links race to Marxian value theory and emphasizes the material societal organization underlying racialism. “Recognition of white supremacy and racism as bourgeois ideology, in all of its theoretical complexities, presupposes comprehending the nature of bourgeois society in all of its material complexities.”

McClendon next tackles Black ideology and the notion of a Black social science. From the beginning of the movement for Black Studies in the '60s, Black nationalists criticized the established academy and its purported value-neutrality as essentially white and thus were bent on the manufacture of a Black ideology. This was quite different from Black critiques of the social sciences in the 1930s that focused on their basis in bourgeois ideology rather than in supposed Whiteness. Even worse, former Marxists have since joined the ranks of the racialists.

“In conclusion, the philosophical task we face today in AAS is to uproot this dangerous ideological weed of racialism. How can we do this? We must use as our theoretical instrument the philosophy of dialectical materialism.”

I do not find a clear indication of what constitutes dialectical materialism and how it is used as an instrument rather than just a declared philosophical position. (“Dialectical materialism” and “Marxism-Leninism” in McClendon’s work are apparently derived from Soviet Marxism, which has diffused throughout the world and shows up also in tendencies not tied to the pro-Soviet Communist parties.) Dialectics is not substantively explained, a task essential to understanding the dialectics of race, class, gender, and whatever social factors and identities come into play. This is an essential task, as the dominant trend in left bourgeois thought today, especially as purveyed by the Collins brand of feminism, is the debased concept of “intersectionality,” which merely serves the subject position of intellectual representatives of a demographic who don’t really represent anybody.<sup>4</sup>

However, though my route is somewhat different from McClendon’s, my conclusions are substantially the same. As Marxism is wiped from the intellectual scene, we are served the pauper’s broth of left bourgeois thought, of West, Mills, Robinson, Collins, of prophetic pragmatism, intersectionality, womanism, whiteness, and privilege politics.

In “The African American Philosopher and Academic Philosophy: On the Problem of Historical Interpretation” McClendon states that there is no published comprehensive history of African American philosophy. McClendon poses sets of empirical and conceptual questions that need to be addressed. The first set involves identifying the individuals, their education, the academic or nonacademic settings in which they worked, emphasis on teaching or research, their audience, their philosophical interests. The second set of questions involves the atemporality or historicity of philosophical questions and the relationship of philosophical work (defined how?) to broader intellectual history. Preconceived notions of African American philosophy skew anthologies and textbooks in particular directions and may even be taken by the unwary as canonical. In confronting these issues we are inevitably led to metaphilosophy.

What is the relationship between the conceptual and empirical in philosophy? Ontological questions are generally considered to be conceptual, not strictly tied to specific empirical knowledge and given scientific theories, but which must take them into account and thus progress, or otherwise regress into idealist arbitrariness. The history of philosophy is inherently empirical as well as conceptual. Without more scrupulous attention given to the empirical dimension of African American philosophy, its conceptual formulation will suffer. Exploration of a specific philosophical question (here, “whiteness” is given as an example, oddly), like that of a scientific question, need not take into account past theoretical formulations, which can be left to the historians. But a general conception of African American philosophy cannot be legitimately established without first establishing its empirical history. Also, the progress of African American philosophy might be inhibited by repetition of the mistakes of the past.

McClendon offers a curious example. Marimba Ani’s *Yurugu*, which posits a metaphysical opposition between African and European philosophy, is a prime example of Afrocentricity. George G. M. James’s *Stolen Legacy* claims that Greek philosophy is just Egyptian philosophy plagiarized. But Ani, unlike other Black intellectuals, took little note of his fellow Afrocentric James’s work, which in fact contradicts his own. (African versus European philosophy contradicts the notion that European = African philosophy.) Certain critics of Afrocentricity ignore Ani and concentrate on James, as James’s view is at least consistent with the notion of the autonomy of Greek philosophy. If James turned out to be correct, then Ani’s viewpoint would be as false as that of the opponents of Afrocentricity, but would have also been part of the larger debate had Ani taken James into account.



This is not an argument one sees every day! I would classify it as an internal critique, as the appropriate external criticism would dismiss both of these obscurantist and all Afrocentric thought as crackpot metaphysics and mysticism. But McClendon's exposition does demonstrate implications of positing a philosophical tradition, and in a fashion that would not have occurred to me.

When examining the deficient empirical basis of purported canons of African American philosophy, one notes the preponderance of nonacademic over academic philosophers. Examining certain anthologies, McClendon finds an absence of African American philosophers active prior to 1965. This absence is noticeable in James Montmarquet's and William Hardy's *Reflections: An Anthology of African-American Philosophy* and Tommy Lott's *African-American Philosophy: Selected Readings*. (Lott's anthology is comprised entirely of social and political thought, which should have been in the title rather than "philosophy," as this is really a non-philosophical compilation.) Even in the section on Marxism in Lott's book, the academic Black Marxist philosopher Eugene C. Holmes is absent. Given the exclusions imposed on Black professionals, the history of Black institutions of higher learning must also be taken into account. Historiography of philosophy done by Black philosophers also has a history, going back to 1889, when Rufus Lewis Perry published *Sketch of Philosophical Systems*. With the exception of Alain Locke, academic Black philosophers have been consigned to historical oblivion. Other philosophers at Howard University alone include Lewis Baxter Moore, Forest Oran Wiggins, Eugene C. Holmes, Winston K. McAlister, Joyce Mitchell Cooke, William R. Jones, and William Banner. McClendon elaborates on the bigger historical picture, which includes the institutional as well as the individual history. (Note the impact of Martin Luther King Jr.'s mentors at Morehouse on King's perspective.) Then there is the roster of Black intellectuals who studied outside of the United States. I cannot reproduce McClendon's detailed historical account here.

The balance of McClendon's contributions to this newsletter involves both detailed empirical history and conceptual analysis. His essays on Anton Wilhelm Amo and Charles Leander Hill, Francis A. Thomas, and his two tributes to William R. Jones are primarily historical and biographical. (The article on Jones co-authored with Brittany L. O'Neal is also analytical.) McClendon's essay on the television program *White Shadow* and comparable portrayals of Black athletes is both historical and analytical. His review of Mark David Wood's book on Cornel West is a critical analysis of Wood as well as of West.

### MCCLENDON ON ANGELA DAVIS

Note that "Angela Davis: Marxist Philosophy, Patricia Hill Collins, and the Matter of Black Feminist Thought" is the one essay in which McClendon clarifies what he means by dialectics. McClendon wonders what happened to Davis's Marxism: "By the time Davis offers her book review of Patricia Hill Collins in 1993, we discover her critical insights from Marx are glaringly absent." First, expanding on the already mentioned critique of Collins, McClendon effectively eviscerates the subjective idealist

foundations of her Black feminist epistemology. Radicalism disappears into identity-based liberalism. There is no way of demarcating a scientific materialist versus a religious fideist approach to epistemology. But Davis praises Collins to the skies, lauding her Afrocentric feminist (standpoint) epistemology, anti-positivism, and eclecticism. Davis, like Collins, fails to qualitatively differentiate Black women intellectuals, effectively eliminating the central Marxist concern with class.

McClendon proceeds to a critique of other critiques of Davis. He targets the essay "Notorious Philosopher: The Transformative Life and Work of Angela Davis" by Judith Mary Green and Blanch Radford Curry for use of loaded language like "homogenizing universalisms" and "essentialism" in postmodernist and pragmatist terms to discredit Davis's Marxism. McClendon does not approve of their criticism of Davis's political loyalties involving the USSR and Cuba along with their coded objections to her Marxism-Leninism. Here is where I part company with McClendon, but otherwise I agree with McClendon's exposure of Green's and Curry's legerdemain.

Note that McClendon objects to these two affirmatively linking Davis's politics to pragmatism, thus misidentifying the Marxist concept of practice. I will return to this question of theory and practice momentarily.

McClendon also finds Joy James's critique of Davis wanting in labeling Davis as an elite intellectual but failing to examine her commitment to Marxism. McClendon's critique is perceptive as far as it goes, but there are further questions to be raised about Angela Davis. Not discounting her political commitments and travails, or her work on race, class, and gender, I find only one work of hers that is strictly philosophical, and exemplary as well. The initial installment of her *Lectures on Liberation*, delivered in 1969, later published when she was on trial for her life, was absolutely pioneering in its linkage of Marx and Frederick Douglass.<sup>5</sup> She never had the opportunity to continue, subsequently fired by Reagan and company and proceeding down the hazardous road we all know. Philosophy as such seems to drop out of her purview. Was this merely circumstantial, a result of preoccupation with prison reform, persecution by the police/legal state apparatus, etc.? How did Davis reconcile in her own mind what she learned from Adorno and Marcuse while embracing not only the Communist Party, but its concomitant linkage with the Soviet bloc? Is it possible that decades of membership in the CPUSA blunted her philosophical development, that theory was occluded by practice in an anti-intellectual country and in a theoretically deficient political party, thus leaving her vulnerable in a post-Soviet world to what "activism" has been reduced to today? This is not to cast aspersions on the seriousness of her political engagements, but if we concern ourselves with her theoretical interventions, there is more to think about than the simple abandonment of Marxism-Leninism, which itself has always been infected by vulgar pragmatism under a theoretical guise.

### MCCLENDON ON KWAME NKURUMAH

Finally we come to McClendon's two articles on Nkrumah. "On Assessing the Ideological Impact of

Garveyism on Nkrumahism: Political Symbolism Contra Theoretical Substance” is both historical and analytical. McClendon reviews Nkrumah’s educational trajectory and the motivations behind Nkrumah’s formulation of Consciencism. The point of departure is a critique of the misuse of a seemingly favorable quote by Nkrumah about Garvey to demonstrate an affinity between two political philosophies that are in actuality antithetical.

“Kwame Nkrumah’s Materialism contra Representative Realism” is a response to an article by Parker English, arguing contra English that Nkrumah’s dialectical materialism is incompatible with Senghor’s idealist Negritude (even with modifications), which in its positing of European and African essences, essentially correlates with collaboration with imperialism.

Parker proposed that Consciencism be aligned with representative rather than direct realism. McClendon argues that Nkrumah’s philosophy is that of dialectical materialism and does not come out of empiricism in any of its varieties, and that Nkrumah’s materialism can no way be reconciled with Senghor’s idealist Negritude. English deploys Whewell’s concept of consilience to promote if not to conclude that the notion that Nkrumah and Senghor can be reconciled and subsumed into a common philosophy on the basis of representative realism. McClendon argues that such consilience would have to operate ontologically, and that the philosophies of Nkrumah and Senghor are mutually exclusive, as are their politics. The only commonality between the two is that they both err with respect to physics. Lenin’s perspective on materialism is part of this discussion.

So far so good, but with McClendon’s treatment of Paulin Hountondji, whom English had introduced into his argument, something goes awry. McClendon is perplexed by Hountondji’s failure to find scientific socialism intrinsically connected to materialism. This failure is alleged to be a corollary of Althusser’s idealism. Note though that the original quote in English translation is

[it] is just as arbitrary to found socialism on materialism as on idealism, as arbitrary to found oligarchy on idealism as on materialism (or on any other metaphysical system for that matter). Our political choices stand on their own feet...if they need justification, it must be political justification, belonging to the same level of discourse and not to what is the completely different (ex hypothesis) level of metaphysical speculation.

The notion that any social formation or doctrine can be *founded* on a metaphysical system is itself an incorrect formulation. Could Hountondji have in mind Stalin’s nonsense about historical materialism as an application of dialectical materialism? McClendon is concerned that Althusserian “reasoning about ideology and science makes rendering the notion of a scientific ideology as problematic at best.”

McClendon states: “The critical link here is precisely that materialism founds *scientific* socialism.” The notion

of *founding* I find nonsensical. No philosophy founds anything of an empirical nature, but a system of thought with empirical content can be philosophically criticized as to its structure, ontological commitments, and epistemic justification. The political correlate is the question of comprehension versus obscurantism, but even so, even the fight against obscurantism does not provide *per se* a “theoretical guide to practical struggle.” It contributes to an orientation in social theory that clarifies the nature of the struggle. Materialism is useful as an orientation in the service of critique, not the propagation of a doctrine. The entire history of Soviet Marxism-Leninism as a doctrine is an unmitigated disaster.

While McClendon finds Nkrumah consistent with Marx/Engels’s *The German Ideology* and Lenin’s notion of scientific ideology, I must point out that nowhere does Marx endorse a positive notion of ideology, nor does Engels anywhere that I recall; for them the notion of a “scientific ideology” would be an absurdity. Because Nkrumah states that philosophy is an instrument of ideology, Hountondji (an Althusserian) alleges that Nkrumah illegitimately instrumentalizes philosophy. Based on this objection, Hountondji would thus sequester philosophy from a role as “theoretical guide to practical struggle.” I find McClendon’s argument quite muddled, as opposed to the clarity with which he otherwise rebuts English and explicates the irreconcilable differences between Nkrumah and Senghor.

The very notion of a “scientific ideology” is misguided. This horrid concoction of Soviet Marxism guts the only conception of ideology worth considering—i.e., ideology as mystified consciousness. Marxism intellectually is essentially an approach to analysis and critique, and not about the propagation of a doctrine. Doctrine of any kind, however rationalistic in its tenets, can and does function ideologically, that is, in a mystifying fashion.

McClendon does have a sophisticated argument as to why philosophy matters politically. Whatever initial motives and ideologies have motivated the masses to embark on revolutionary transformation, we discover, “their resolute and persistent engagement in socialist revolution mandates they obtain proletarian class-consciousness as the enduring substance behind their commitment. This elevation of theory, ideology, and consciousness is, in fact, founded on a greater comprehension of reality (i.e., the Marxist materialist ontology is the basis for scientific understanding). Affective commitments must be founded on cognitive awareness (scientific comprehension) of objective problems/conditions and their associated tasks.”

This greater comprehension of reality has never been achieved among the masses anywhere in the world. All that has been propagated is doctrine, which its proponents themselves never fully understood, and which has functioned, in a formulaic, ideological fashion in the pejorative sense.

Had Nkrumah written a book entitled something like *Introduction to Dialectical Materialism*, limiting its scope to the exegesis of materialist philosophy, his work would have been unobjectionable. But for Nkrumah to take on the

role of a charismatic savior figure—Nkrumah as Osagyefo—and to cement a charismatic dictatorship via branding the superfluous pseudo-concept of Consciencism, which adds nothing of value to a materialist philosophy, however sound otherwise, is to engage in the propagation of ideology at its worst. This is the essence of what bothers Hountondji about Nkrumah. And if the artifice of a fake philosophical doctrine like Consciencism is held to be indispensable, there is further proof that the establishment of socialism in a backward third-world country is an impossibility.

The balance of McClendon's essay is devoted to the questions of direct realism, representative realism, and categorial conversion, which are in contention. McClendon dissects English's mistaken attribution of direct realism to Nkrumah. I will not reproduce the details of the analysis here. Interestingly, Nkrumah links the categorial conversion of body to mind to Frege and logical grammar. McClendon refutes English's charge that Nkrumah fails to distinguish between what is true of science and what is true of language. Nkrumah's errors lie elsewhere. Finally, McClendon counters English's straddling of the fence between materialism and idealism.

To sum up: McClendon has effectively provided rich historical information on the history of African American philosophy and the nature of its institutionalization. He has effectively confronted the barrage of obscurantism in this field, often coupling his analyses with concern whether or how something fits within the tradition of Marxism-Leninism.

### FERGUSON'S APPROACH TO AFRICAN AMERICAN PHILOSOPHY

Given the centrality of C. L. R. James as a twentieth-century intellectual and the range of his work, I will have to defer discussion of James and Ferguson's two pieces in the *Newsletter* for another occasion.

Ferguson provides an example of his methodology in his article on teaching Hurricane Katrina, relating this catastrophe to race, class, theodicy, and atheism. Ferguson outlines how he teaches his students a Marxist-Leninist perspective on religion, combined with the fundamental issue of theodicy inspired by Black religious humanist William R. Jones, Jr., author of *Is God a White Racist?* Not only does Ferguson cite Marx and Lenin but he adduces a neglected secular humanist strain in Black thought that can be counterpoised to religious idealism. This strain includes such figures as Richard B. Moore, Hubert Harrison, J. A. Rogers, George S. Schuyler, Walter Everette Hawkins, A. Philip Randolph, Chandler Owen, Eugene C. Holmes, C. L. R. James, and Kwame Nkrumah. Given the paucity of public expression of Black atheism (although Black atheist activism is increasingly visible in recent years on blogs, in social networking, and even in some news media) and the noxious saturation of Black public intellectual life by religiosity, it is refreshing to see the nonbeliever's perspective expressed.

William R. Jones's overall philosophical methodology is extensively elaborated in the newsletter. George Yancy's

interview with Jones is most revealing. The reasoning behind Jones's rejection of Afrocentrism is most interesting. While Jones's motive and angle of attack for injecting the Black experience into professional philosophy is understandable and laudable, I draw back on the notion of a Black philosophy. I find Jones's conception of philosophy rather narrowly focused.

The tribute to Jones by McClendon and Brittany L. O'Neal is one of the two richest of the newsletter's homages. From their detailed exposition I gained an appreciation I would not have had otherwise for the strategic importance of exploding Black theology from within.

Otherwise, among the many tributes to Jones the big payoff for me is Ferguson's article. Linking Jones to Ludwig Feuerbach nails Jones's philosophical perspective.<sup>6</sup> In addition to highlighting the limitations or transitional nature of Jones, Ferguson highlights Jones's wider applicability. Ferguson places Jones in the top rank of his influences, but he also reminds us that Jones can be deployed across the board to combat liberation theology wherever it surfaces.

Ferguson's review of Lewis Gordon's anthology *An Introduction to Africana Philosophy* is a breath of fresh air in several respects. Ferguson criticizes the selectivity of Gordon's anthology and the tendentious view of Africana philosophy it supports. Given Gordon's stated views, Ferguson responds: "Africana philosophy would appear to be nothing more than critical race theory." He notes that Black philosophers need not and have not confined themselves to the subject matter of the Africana experience. Furthermore: "Gordon fails to recognize the categorial difference between intellectual history and the history of philosophy." (This failure is ubiquitous.) Philosophy "to some degree possesses its own internal history which is not to be submerged in general *intellectual history*." Gordon's failure to make the distinction skews his selection process, favoring non-philosophers over professional philosophers in the service of racial vindicationism. Another conspicuous failure is the omission of Black philosophers' engagement with the natural sciences. Gordon's bias is also manifest in his omission of Marxism, save for Cedric Robinson's ethnocentric falsification of Marxism, Gordon's mention of Angela Davis, and Gordon's false labeling of C. L. R. James under the pseudo-category (my designation) of Afro-Caribbean thought.<sup>7</sup> Ferguson finds valuable material in Gordon's anthology but condemns the omission of Paulin Hountondji. There are minor quibbles to be had with Ferguson's review, but Ferguson supplements Gordon's offerings with a number of valuable references.

### CONCLUSION

In addition to offering the most sustained and elaborated metaphilosophical approach to the subject matter, McClendon and Ferguson as contributors to this newsletter have assiduously exposed the obscurantism rampant in Black or Africana Studies. What then might one hope for in supplementing or diverging from a classic Marxist-Leninist approach to philosophy incorporating the "Black experience"?

From time to time I have seen engagements on the part of Black philosophers with figures of the Frankfurt School, though some have apparently moved on to greener pastures. I recall references to Marcuse and Habermas. I cannot recall an in-depth engagement with Adorno, the most profound philosopher within that orbit of the most profound philosophers of the twentieth century, and whose concept of the “culture industry” is more applicable today than ever. It is important not only to counter the academic infatuation with pop culture garbage (which now extends to professional philosophers!) but to grapple with the radical change in cultural content and the experience of group identity in an era in which generations are raised from birth in a social environment saturated with media culture and electronic interactivity. Also, given the partial or complete assimilation of a small subset of Black Americans into mainstream society, or, more accurately, socialization in a multiracial, multiethnic, media-saturated environment in which their cultural orientation and interests, if not identity, can no longer be recognized as identifiably “Black,” there are questions to be posed which could at most only have been vaguely dreamed of by generations brought up in the United States in the era of segregation. There is even one prominent intellectual figure who, though he has spoken and written about racism, has taken on a public role not defined in any way by race: Neil de Grasse Tyson, who by now may have become the world’s most famous scientist. What are the future of identity, and the future of philosophy, given the current state of American society and the crises it faces?

**NOTES**

1. See my two critiques of Cornel West.
2. Contrast Mills’s recent work with his excellent article on Marx’s conception of ideology.
3. There is no end to the proliferation and compounding of identities, each in turn engendering complaints of marginalization by the others. See the essays of Karl Maton.
4. Ditto for the infantilism of “privilege” politics, based on the empty accusatory and confessional posturing of middle class professionals. When Marxism was a going concern and there was such a thing as labor politics, the conceptual content and political purpose of the notion of privilege was more substantial. For contrast with the increasingly cartoonish posture of privilege politics and Whiteness Studies, see the pioneering Marxist work of Theodore W. Allen.
5. This work has been anthologized more than once, most recently in a new critical edition of the *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*.
6. I have compared Jones to the Young Hegelians, but see all my blog posts on Jones at <http://reasonsociety.blogspot.com/search/label/William%20R.%20Jones>.
7. The direction taken by *The C. L. R. James Journal*, subsuming James under the fictitious category of Afro-Caribbean Philosophy, an entity that James would surely have rejected is a particularly noxious distortion of his legacy. It should also be noted that, while James was indeed a Marxist and a highly heterodox devotee of Lenin, for the duration of his adult life James detested Soviet Marxism-Leninism and all its incarnations in the Communist parties of the world.

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## *"I Can't Breathe!": Eric Garner's Salutary Verdict to the Racist Euro-American World and Its Implications for the African Worldwide*

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*"Bine bebegnan, wo ai ma"  
"We are brothers, you and I"*

– Hugh M. Gloster

As we move steadily toward April 4, 2015, a day dedicated thirty years ago to the "Pharaoh of African studies," Cheikh Anta Diop, by the then mayor of the city of Atlanta, Andrew Young,<sup>1</sup> the following warm words deeply resonate in my heart: "We are brothers, you and I."<sup>2</sup> Hugh M. Gloster's words are of utmost importance when understood within the context of the contemporary racial and colonist Euro-American world. They wonderfully offer an intersubjective anthropology that swings ceaselessly between the "you" and the "I," with an astounding emphasis on the other, the "you." It is still more dazzling to see how the unitive and community-oriented "we" precedes and shelters otherness and sameness, the "you" and the "I," alterity and identity under the same large roof. We have here a familiar African perception of the human being, who is but a Pharaoh, that is, a "Great House";<sup>3</sup> a House characterized by a common monogenetic origin and a shared destiny of those it shelters; a house also singled out by its warmth, its hospitality, and a necessary knowledge-love of oneself coupled with that of the other.

But it must be bluntly observed that even if all humans remain willy-nilly irrigated by the primordial muddy and black water, the *Noun*,<sup>4</sup> and are therefore necessarily interconnected by virtue of their blackness "under the skin,"<sup>5</sup> the exodus of the first *mfefeg*<sup>6</sup> (bag of wisdom), the initial Negroid *homo sapiens sapiens* from the sunny equatorial Africa some 20,000 years ago<sup>7</sup> generally and factually corresponded to his exit from humanity. Once in Europe, the Cro-Magnon, as Vulindlela I. Wobogo shows in *Cold Wind from the North*, adopted a progressive

dehumanization through racism as his basic law.<sup>8</sup> Here we are in the nihilistic West, proclaiming long before Nietzsche the "death of God" who represents, according to Hiedegger, the figure of Otherness, transcendence, and ideals<sup>9</sup> such as universal fraternity, equality or liberty, and abhorring, contradictorily, the love of every-body, namely, the Black body. In such totalizing "body-logy," where the African is wholly negated, E. Garner's verdict is without appeal: the West is doomed to a "painful demise," and Africans worldwide must, by implication, unite and rebuild the fraternal civilization which has become the footstool of our "lost, younger brothers," the Caucasians.<sup>10</sup>

### THE WAY TO ERIC GARNER'S SALUTARY VERDICT: AWAKENING THE HUMAN IN US

If someday a virtuous and intelligent African or any other citizen of this world is interested in the biography of the son of Ngoa that I am, the person will inescapably come across the fact that I am an African who lived in the United States of America for some years. The person might be curious to know what I was doing in America. Western philosophy will then appear as one of the things that kept me busy in the "country" of Rosa Parks, Malcolm X, Molefi Kete Asante, George Yancy, and others. History will reveal that I was in America when Trayvon Martin, Michael Brown, Eric Garner, and countless other Africans in America and beyond were executed by Caucasian policemen, policies, and politics.

This script anticipates the key question that would follow: What was my take about all that? I invite the reader to embark with me upon a short historical tour in Africa and to experience with me a sense of my juvenile self, my encounter with Western racial ferocity. I write this text with the hope that every-body (green body, pink body, copper body, etc.) who may stumble upon it will question him/herself and willfully opt to lead a fraternal life, the kind of life proper to humankind. Will the reader have the courage to bracket obscurantist epistemologies and embrace an inquiring attitude, thus appropriating F. Fanon's prayer: "*O mon corps, fais de moi toujours un homme qui interroge!*" ("O my body, make of me always a man who questions!")?<sup>11</sup>

Questions are contextual and perspectival. They emerge from our daily experience of the world, and they confront our common sense vis-à-vis lived realities. Questions mobilize an unquenchable thirst for meaningful answers in us. They maintain within us the zeal to examine human cultural productions and put them into crisis, thus judging what we hear and what we see around us in the light of certain values. These values are the spectacles brightening the dictum: "If you see something, say something." First, then, let us put on, retrospectively, my juvenile eyes and see for ourselves the Western world as it unfolds before us. That detour will help us perceive, from afar, the indubitable coming of Eric Garner's verdict. We will then be equipped to say something about it, for the sake of awakening Africans worldwide to organize and defend ourselves, and to awaken Euro-Americans to self-love and human solidarity.

Here we go! Richard Wright's famous book *Black Boy*,<sup>12</sup> "*Moan Afiri kara*" (Afiri Kara's son), as we translated it in my Beti<sup>13</sup> language, remains vivid in my mind. We read

*Black Boy* in college in Africa<sup>14</sup> and I could feel, carried by a narrative backed up by my then little knowledge of European trans-Atlantic slavery, how life was existentially burdensome for our people who were forcibly deported to America. Besides *Black Boy*, I still have fresh, bitter, and outrageous memories of the television series on racism in the Americas that we watched from 1986 onward: *Escrava Isaura* (1976) and *Roots* (1977). The latter movie had a huge impact on me because of the way the boy Kunta Kinte was mercilessly flogged on his arrival in America. His crime consisted in his obstinacy to keep his African name, Kunta Kinte, instead of accepting that of Toby imposed on him. I felt this was an ostentatious act of cultural robbery in broad daylight. What type of country was America, I wondered, if even an African name had no *breathing space* and no chance to survive there?

I can still hear my little sister's indignant remark on the spot: "*He akia ezilgan nnan<sup>15</sup> a dil!*" (what a cruel albino!), referring to the Caucasian man supervising Kunta Kinte's beating for rejecting the slave name Toby. Though she was barely six years old at the time, she saw clearly that the *ntanan* in question was fundamentally wrong and inhuman in his behavior. He had a serious ethical problem, since no reasonable human being would treat a child that way, simply because he rejects a foreign and meaningless name. The white man was obviously mad, that is, unrestrained by reason, and driven by some serious mental and ethical dysfunction in him. I immediately and wholeheartedly supported my sister's spontaneous disapproval. Growing up in a culture where every adult is every child's *esia/nya* (father/mother), and is consequently addressed as "papa so" or "mama so," signifying implicitly the communal responsibility in all respects of every adult vis-à-vis any child, the *ntanan* in *Roots* was disqualified and seen as outside the communal socio-ethical categories that shaped the life of my sister and myself. He showed that there was an unbridgeable gap between him and Kunta Kinte, the gap between a brainwashed racist mind and that of a boy grounded in his African culture.

That is the riddle that my sister and I could barely decode at the time. Yet, it seemed ridiculous to both of us that a simple name, hers, for example, Ediñ (Love) or that of the boy, Kunta Kinte, so much discomfited the *ntanan* and therefore provoked so much anguish, anger, and hatred, and turned him into an *ezilgan*, so heartless, so inhuman toward Kunta Kinte. We were revolted, and rightly so.

In the Beti educational system, the *Mebara*, what is stressed is the basic process of teaching a child to learn her/his name. As a matter of fact, every child is trained to be memorial and to remember that true knowledge begins at home, that is, with one's self. The name thus constitutes the first step toward self-knowledge; it is part and parcel of the *yem women's* (know by yourself/your self) imperative. What is stressed is direct knowledge or the perception of the world through one's personal lens and not through a foreign cultural belief system. This is what is at stake here. Put otherwise, the name is a transgenerational key/password conveying and imprinting a specific worldview in its bearer's consciousness.

In this vein, if one's credentials (identity card, passport, driver's license, etc.) are lost, misplaced, forgotten somewhere, falsified, or usurped, the *Mebara* is engraved in the individual's memory. The name is like a tree in the thick equatorial forest that humanity should imitate. The name makes a person stand side by side with the entire community and its founders. It inscribes the person within an interdependent onomastic biotope, joining together individual, community, and history. The name, then, introduces a child into the *nda bot*,<sup>16</sup> that is, the genealogical tree, which is the true experiential store of the life, achievements, and failures of past generations. *Nda bot* is the memorial house and the common well in which present and future generations can refresh and energize themselves when confronted with life-threatening situations. For these reasons, the Beti consider that a human being (*mod*) is not only a "*mfefeg ekomga ekôbô, itua nyol, itua nsisim, itua tetele, ebele nbembe nnem, etc.*"<sup>17</sup> What defines the human being is first and foremost her/his name.

The communitarian<sup>18</sup> importance of onomastics among the Beti deeply impressed the French anthropologist Laburthe-Tolra. He rightly reported that in the Beti Land, a series of questions must be answered about one's kindred to define an individual. A few of them are *Esoa/nyo ane dzoe ya?* (What is your father's/mother's name?); *One man dze?* (What is your ancestry?); *One ayon afe?* (What lineage do you belong to?).<sup>19</sup> The *Mebara* (Beti education system) highly cherishes the exact knowledge of one's roots, so as to know how to relate with other individuals, living or dead. On that score, the missionary priest Trilles observes

*À peine sorti de la première enfance, le jeune fang, dès l'âge de 7 ou 8 ans, apprend son mebara, premier enseignement, c'est-à-dire les noms des aïeux don't il est issu et c'est là en même temps la marque de sa filiation et de la noblesse de son origine. Interrogez n'importe quel bambin et vous le verrez répondre: je suis fils d'un tel, fils d'un tel, jusqu'au premier ancêtre de la tribu; où il s'arrête pour dire: Et celui-là était fils de Nzame, c'est-à-dire de Dieu, et avant, je n'y étais pas, ni personne!*<sup>20</sup>

From the above, my sister understood quite intuitively, at a very precocious age, that an African name was something quite precious. From that time on, she valued more and more her own name, Ediñ, which means Love. She gradually understood that her name had embedded within it a deeper sense of meaning and purpose, challenging her to become a bridging force in a torn humanity. I suspect that it is a similar onomastic turn that plastic pillars of our African heritage such as Malcolm X, Ama Mazama, Molefi Kete Asante, and many others operated in their own lives. Coming back to the African continent still, the classics we studied dealing with colonialism have been my literary ancestors: *Ville Cruelle*<sup>21</sup> by Eza Boto, *Le Mandat*<sup>22</sup> by Sembène Ousmane, *Discours sur le colonialisme*<sup>23</sup> by Aimé Césaire, etc. When I discovered the work of Anténor Firmin, *De l'Égalité des Races humaines*,<sup>24</sup> and Cheikh Anta Diop's *Nations nègres et culture*,<sup>25</sup> it became clearer to me that humanity, under the past and current ideological power of Euro-American colonialism, lived with the deadliest virus in

human history: racism. Until then, I thought racism was just about Caucasian Euro-Americans liking chocolate made out of our cocoa, and disliking Chocoderm Africans who produced the cocoa. Through the works of A. Firmin and C. A. Diop, I discovered that there was an epistemological-ethical-spiritual-political-economical-cultural-physical war enacted by our Caucasian brothers against us. Racism functions as a powerful component of the fatal apparatus to neutralize and steal our historical competence. Ironically, it is this very same colonialist-racism that, by a boomerang effect, inevitably leads the Caucasian to his "painful demise." Hitler, the so-called Führer, is an outstanding example of this truth. I believe that is the verdict of the dying Eric Garner: "I' can't breathe."

**BEBELA ANE MELO<sup>26</sup> (TRUTH IS EARS): FOR YOU CAUCASIAN SISTER/BROTHER**

The Beti expression "bebela ane melo," literally translated "truth is ears" instead of "truth is stubborn," offers us a key insight into how the truth can be apprehended. Truth, within this context, has to do with our embodiment in the sensible world. Each human body is endowed with ears through which hearing is possible. Hearing, as a corporeal sense, connects the individual in a more effective manner to the outer world. Thus, one's spoken language is heard and easily decoded, the field of receptivity opens up, and the horizon of interpretation unfolds in the human mind.

In a concrete manner, when I hear Eric Garner hammering the same message, "I can't breathe!" over and over again, his words have a special overtone in my Beti audible, receptive space. He strongly emphasizes an impossibility for the "I" to breathe: "I' can't breathe," Garner says sharply. By this verdict, I understand E. Garner to be lending his voice to the totalizing Euro-American-racial-imperialist "I."

Now, where does such a reductionist subjectivity come from? Here, again, in my Beti language, we say, "meke mene, meso mene," meaning, if you do not know your whereabouts, look at where you are coming from. Let us then look at the Western declared root of civilization, the Greeks, focusing particularly on Plato's Socrates and the latter's understanding of individuality.

There is indeed a certain Socratic philosophical tradition in the West, which infects the subject as an indivisible entity, and an autonomous monad. Such is the case with Plato's guardian in the *Republic*, who is allegedly the "most self-sufficient" person (387e). With Plato's Socrates, we witness the inception of some sort of "egology," where the guardian's "I" is inexorably exposed to the risk of erecting itself as the condition for the existence of the other. This view of the subject is certainly in connection with the theory that the Forms are perfect and changeless (*Republic* 380d). It ensues a subsequent sclerotic anthropology critiqued, for example, by Emmanuel Levinas for its reduction "of the other to the same,"<sup>27</sup> and by James Baldwin, who concludes poignantly: "Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations."<sup>28</sup>

The free motion of the African is indeed a terrifying earthquake for the "white man's world." This free motion corresponds to the distressing demise of the "white man's world." That is what E. Garner's verdict is all about. As he insists on breathing, my Beti ears hear the force of his utterance, his cry hitting my consciousness. That is the advantage of having a linguistic stage, an epistemic mother language, which can host all other *parlers*, all other languages, and help me dissect the polysemy of a word. Georges Canguilhem understands such a conceptual process as an activity that takes place "on" a concept. He surmises:

To work on a concept is to explore the variations in its extension and its intelligibility. It is to generalize it by including in it the traits of its exceptions. It is to export it outside its own domain, to use it as a model or conversely to look for a model for it, in short, it is to give to it, bit by bit, through ordered transformations, the function of a form.<sup>29</sup>

In effect, the Beti verb "hebe" means at once to breathe, to awaken, and to resurrect. Every language being epistemic,<sup>30</sup> Beti equips me to dissect the symphonic expressiveness of a concept. To "dissect" here means to tame the offspring of a concept and, in the words of Canguilhem, to "explore the variations in its extension and its intelligibility." Our rejuvenation as Africans begins with the discovery, recognition, and vulgarization of the basic truth that we are by far a precolonial people. Even Plato insists in *The Laws* (656d-e) that the civilization of Black people<sup>31</sup> is at least 10,000 years old. Therefore, we cannot be congealed or mortified in the recent colonial categories of our Caucasian "younger brothers," invented for the sake of surviving hunger in an austere environment, hence the love of war around the world, which is consistent with the looting and depleting of natural resources and the annihilation of human lives. Fortunately, as the political, the intellectual, the moral, the historical, the linguistic, the economic, the genetic, in short, the cultural consciousness of the African worldwide awakens, the "white world" is doomed to shrink and ruin someday.

The diagnosis is quite simple: as we consider the Socratic-chauvinistic character of Western subjectivity unfolding, for example, in Peter Abelard,<sup>32</sup> Hildegard of Bingen,<sup>33</sup> Gobineau,<sup>34</sup> and subsequent philosophers,<sup>35</sup> we can logically predict its shameful downfall. Quite frankly, what can one expect, if not an ignoble epistemological death, when Immanuel Kant, the anthropologist<sup>36</sup> who never left Königsberg, racially constructs the African where he writes,

The race of the Negroes, one could say, is completely the opposite of the Americans; they are full of affect and passion, very lively, talkative and vain. They can be educated but only as servants (slaves), that is they allow themselves to be trained. They have many motivating forces, are also sensitive, are afraid of blows and do much out of a sense of honor.<sup>37</sup>

The Eric Garner's Moment still reminds the world that the narcissistic arrogance characteristic of the Caucasian culture

has the reverse effect of chokeholding itself. In other words, the blind imitation of Socrates, who in Levinas's acerbic remark, welcomes "nothing of the Other,"<sup>38</sup> ruins the West. The West is eager to say farewell to the cultural Otherness of Africans while cherishing their free competent bodies in all fields of knowledge, their free labor, and their free natural resources stolen at gunpoint.

Yet, despite the power of the gun, the West is increasingly frightened as Africans reinvigorate their agential and Kemetite genius. Our Caucasian brothers dread the "eye for an eye" dictum. Like trapped beasts, they furiously realize the failure of their "clean-out" African Project.<sup>39</sup> Africans are not yet all wiped out from the surface of the earth, and this fact infuriates the West, which becomes all the more ferocious before breathing its last breath. But neither slavery<sup>40</sup> nor colonialism,<sup>41</sup> neither Black Codes, Jim Crow laws, nor "academic racism,"<sup>42</sup> neither the current imposture of Euro-American military recolonization of Africa<sup>43</sup> nor the "monetary Nazism"<sup>44</sup> carried out by France in French-speaking African countries stopped/can stop/will stop the plastic liberation march of Africans worldwide.

### ERIC GARNER: A CALL TO AFRICAN UNITY AND SELF-PROTECTION

Since July 17, 2014, I have watched, a number of times, the execution of Eric Garner by a horde of New York police officers. As I have already pointed out, before he passed away, Garner repeatedly expressed his dreadful condition: "I can't breathe!" The cold truth is that there seemed to be not a single human being around him. None of the police elements seemed to be dealing with a human being and still less with a brother. From the videos on YouTube, I got the impression of seeing a deer torn apart by hunting dogs.

None of the police officers surrounding Eric Garner seemed to understand English. English, in this case, strangely looked like a petrified bluff, an exotic "bla-bla-bla" spoken by a "convicted" stranger to impassible executioners. The apparent inaccessible communication went its course, the police officers were absolutely indifferent to Garner's dismantled talking body. Eric Garner died, with his hands handcuffed in the back. He could not breathe because of the screwing activity of a guillotine on his neck: a police officer, a *White* police officer, to be precise. In the face of such indifference to human suffering and death, the worrying questions to Africans worldwide is, What is the Euro-American world to us? How many billions of us will be killed before we truly awaken to the fact that we are wanted for our organs, melanin, historical achievements, natural resources, etc.? When shall we hear Marcus Garvey's call for the United States of Africa and her diaspora? When shall we go beyond August 28, 1963, and subsequent marches on Washington? When shall we put aside the illusion of our Caucasian brother responding to our legitimate call for jobs, freedom, justice, and equality? When shall we take time to read and meditate on Aimé Césaire's *Discourse on Colonialism*? Can we justify why we study the son and not the father, meaning, why we are so fond of Frantz Fanon<sup>45</sup> and neglect his mentor Aimé Césaire? Could it be because Césaire is the "inconvenient" voice and Fanon the more "accommodating" one to the colonial system? Can we

understand once and for all that the big mess we are in will not end this evening?

Before he was brought down, Eric Garner made it clear to the police that they should leave him alone. He was fed up with their harassment. He just wanted to mind his own business. Minding our business today comes down to taking care of ourselves by working together to become a stronger political, economical, and spiritual force. We know the nightmare that we experience with the police in the United States. We are certainly all like Eric Garner, or Robert Edward Lee, tired of the violent and pervasive racism and the constantly dehumanizing encounters with police. Lee was so disappointed with the police in the United States that he decided to relocate in West Africa. Once in Ghana, he narrated:

I just got tired of being on the highways. Every time you hear a police car your heart goes boom, boom, boom. He stops the car, he gets out. So damn rude. So insulting. He's got all these weapons. And you can see that this is a stupid man. And if you say the wrong thing, this man will hurt you. You're always like this, waiting for what's going to happen. You just get tired of it.<sup>46</sup>

Lee's testimony must be for us a supplement of motivation to mobilize our entire being—just like Queen Nzingha of Angola, Menelik II of Ethiopia, Nzenga Maremba of Kongo, Agadja of Dahomey, Toussaint Louverture, Harriet Tubman, Patrice Lumumba, Félix Moumié, Steve Biko, Um Nyobé, Martin Luther King Jr., Thomas Sankara, Muammar Gaddafi, Laurent Gbagbo, and others—to raise ourselves once more, through hard work, to the heights of a new fraternal civilization. Our lives must become building sites of hope in the midst of despairing and perilous racism.

### CONCLUDING MESSAGE

I wrote this reflection out my deep concern for you, my Caucasian younger siblings. If you are still a zealous and dogmatic militant of the dominant system of racism and oppression, know that you are recreating Hitler within and around you, and the Führer will surely destroy you before the African. Put aside the dread of your ugly historical image, and meditate on this dissident voice of your own folk, the voice of Volney, who awoke from his intellectual slumber and wrote convincingly

Coming back to Egypt . . . when we reflect that to the race of negroes, at present our slaves, and the objects of our extreme contempt, we owe our arts, sciences, and even the very use of speech; and when we recollect that, in the midst of those nations who call themselves the friends of liberty and humanity, the most barbarous of slaveries is justified; and that it is even a problem whether the understanding of negroes be of the same species with that of white men.<sup>47</sup>

The message is clear, Western philosophy must match the historical evidence and dialogue with every single other science.



This script is also the outcome of my great love of you, dear African sister and brother. To you I hand over this vital message of the "Pharaoh of African Studies," Cheikh Anta Diop:

L'Africain qui nous a compris est celui-là qui, après la lecture de nos ouvrages, aura senti naître en lui un autre homme, animé d'une conscience historique, un vrai créateur, un Prométhée porteur d'une nouvelle civilisation et parfaitement conscient de ce que la terre entière doit à son génie ancestral dans tous les domaines de la science, de la culture et de la religion.<sup>48</sup>

Your Brother!

#### NOTES

1. Ivan Van Sertima, *Great African Thinkers: Cheikh Anta Diop* (New Jersey, The Journal of African Civilizations Ltd., 2000), 321.
2. *Ibid.*, 317. Those words are from the speech addressed to C. A. Diop by the President of Morehouse College, Hugh M. Gloster, on April 4, 1985.
3. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pharaoh>, accessed on January 11, 2014.
4. In the Kemetic hermopolitan cosmogony, the Noun is the Creator-God, father of Ra, the demiurge that completes the creation of his father Noun. See C. A. Diop, *Civilization ou Barbarie* (Paris, Présence Africaine, 1981), 430. Diop suggests that the Walaf word *nul* (black) is the equivalent of the Kemetic word *nwn*, which was translated *Neilos* (Nile River) in Greek. See *ibid.*, 481. Besides, it is striking that there a river in the West province of Cameroun called the Noun, after which an entire department (the Noun Department) is named. The Bamun Hieroglyphic Script was developed by King Ibrahim Mbombo Njoya in the Noun Region. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noun\\_River\\_\(Cameroun\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Noun_River_(Cameroun)), accessed January 10, 2015.
5. Christopher Stringer and Robin McKie, *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1996), 179–93.
6. My people, the Beti people of Africa, consider that a human being, by which I mean one who lives with the consciousness of being human, is a *mfefeg* (*mfeg-feg*). The latter word is composed of *mfeg* (bag), and *feg* (wisdom). The human being is therefore a "bag of wisdom" or wisdom squared (*mfefeg*); wisdom multiplied by itself. This understanding throws some light on the Latin expression *sapiens sapiens*. The point here is that if *feg* (wisdom) is not doubled, that is to say optimized in a human being, the latter is exposed to stray from humanity and become barbaric. Strikingly enough, we have another ethical category in Beti to define a true human being. We say that she/he is a *mmimie* (*maât-maât*), that is, endowed with the principle of creation and life. On the equivalence of *mie* and *maât*, see Théophile Obenga, "Egypt: Ancient History of African Philosophy," in *A Companion to African Philosophy*, ed. Kwasi Wiredu (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2004), 48.
7. Diop, *Civilization ou Barbarie*, 133–38.
8. Vulindlela I. Wobogo, *Cold Wind From the North: The Prehistoric European Origin of Racism Explained by Diop's Two Cradle Theory* (Charleston, Book on Demand, 2011).
9. Martin Heidegger, *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part* (Paris: Gallimard, 1980), 265.
10. James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (Ringwood, Penguin Books, 1965), 17.
11. Frantz Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1952), 188.
12. Richard Wright, *Black Boy, Cutchogue* (New York: Buccaneer Books, 1945).
13. The word "Beti" is an ethnonym, which literally means "Lords" and/or "Honorable ones." Beti is the plural form of Nti, meaning Lord, an honorific title. The name is also an existential program to becoming divine and godlike. Therefore, the Beti consider that they are a people endowed with the power to create (*kom*) themselves and the world they live in according to the principles of *Mie/Maa* (*Maaf*). A righteous person is called *nmimie*. P. Laburthe-Tolra, who focused his scholarship on the Beti defines us as *die Herren*, the *Seigneurs de la forêt* (Lords of the forest), the nobles. See Philippe Laburthe-Tolra, *Les Seigneurs de la forêt: Essai sur le passé historique, l'organisation sociale et les normes éthiques des anciens Beti du Cameroun* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2009). But the Beti themselves belong to a larger population spread all over Africa; the Bantu people. Placide Tempels is right when he writes: "God is a great muntu." See Placide Tempels, *Bantu Philosophy* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1969), 55.
14. The African continent today, fragmented as a result of the colonial Berlin Conference in Germany (1884-1885), is our most urgent political project. We must really become independent, unite, and form a single Maa African country predicated on justice, truth, and love.
15. My sister took the *n(fa)nan* (Caucasian) in the movie with a *nnan* (albino). *Ntanan* is a name formed from *nnan* (albino) and *tâ* (tobacco). Etymologically then, the *ntanan* is an albino who acts under the influence of tobacco or any hallucinogen. The same word also refers to a type of redDish and very disastrous ant that can infest homes and cattle.
16. The phrase literally means the "house of humans."
17. The translation is "a creature twice wise that speaks, being a body, being a shadow, being righteous, having a good heart, etc."
18. See Uwaezuoke Precious Obioha, "Radical Communitarian Idea of the Human Person in African Philosophical Thought: A Critique," *The Western Journal of Black Studies* 38, no. 1 (2014).
19. Jacques Fulbert Owono, *Pauvreté ou paupérisation en Afrique: Une étude exégético-éthique de la pauvreté chez les Beti-Fang du Cameroun* (Bamberg: University of Bamberg Press, 2011), 63.
20. *Ibid.*, 71. In the following translation, the pronoun "he" can fittingly be replaced by "she": "Once out of his early infancy, the young fang, from the age of 7 to 8 years, learns his mebara, first teaching, that is, the names of ancestors from whom he descends and that is at the same time the sign of his filiation and of the nobility of his origin. Question any kid and you will see him answer: I am the son of so and so, up till the first ancestor of the tribe; where he stops to say: And that one was the son of Nzame, that is, of God, and beyond, I was not there, neither me, nor anyone!"
21. Eza Boto, *Ville Cruelle* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1971).
22. Sembène Ousmane, *Le Mandat* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1966).
23. Aimé Césaire, *Discours sur le Colonialisme* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1955).
24. I give the English translation here. See Anténor Firmin, *The Equality of the Human Races* (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2002).
25. Cheikh Anta Diop, *Nations Nègres et Culture* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1954).
26. The Beti word "melo" means at once "ears" and "stubborn." The difference in meaning resides only in the use of auxiliary verbs. To have *melo* means to have understanding, while to be *melo* refers to being stubborn.
27. Emmanuel Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, trans. Alfonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Duquesne, 1969), 43. It would be interesting to examine whether the Cartesian "I," the Kantian transcendental unity of apperception, the Husserlian ego, or the Heideggerian *Dasein* could problematize Otherness as an epistemological preoccupation.
28. Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, 17.
29. Georges Canguilhem, "Dialectique et philosophie du 'non' chez Gaston Bachelard," in *Études d'histoire de la philosophie des sciences*, 2nd ed. (Paris: Vrin, 1970), 206.

30. Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity: The Theory of Social Change* (Chicago: African American Images, 2003), 42.
31. George G. M. James writes that "the Greeks called the Egyptians *Hoi Aiguptoi* which meant Black people." See George G. M. James, *Stolen Legacy* (Chicago: African American Images, 2001), 160.
32. Betty Radice, *The Letters of Abelard and Heloise* (London: Penguin Books, 2003), 73–75.
33. Hildegard of Bingen, *Scivias* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 169–76.
34. Arthur Comte de Gobineau, *The Inequality of Human Races* (Burlington: Ostara Publications, 2011).
35. See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2005).
36. E. Kant taught more courses on "anthropology" and "physical geography" (72 times) than he did in logic (54 times), metaphysics (49 times), moral philosophy (28 times), and theoretical physics (20 times). See Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, "The Color of Reason: The Idea of 'Race' in Kant's Anthropology" in Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *Postcolonial African Philosophy: A Critical Reader* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 104.
37. Immanuel Kant, quoted by Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze, *ibid.*, 116.
38. E. Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 43.
39. See, for example, <http://politicalvelcraft.org/2014/07/03/bill-gates-henry-kissinger-depopulation-africa-paralyzing-vaccine-deaths-47500-with-50-children-recently-paralyzed-with-bill-gates-meningitis-vaccine/> and <http://www.infowars.com/operation-depopulation-exposed-africa/>, accessed both on January 14, 2015.
40. See Willie Lynch, "The Making of a Slave," [https://www.google.com/?gws\\_rd=ssl#q=the+making+of+a+slave+pdf](https://www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=the+making+of+a+slave+pdf), accessed on January 14, 2015.
41. See "La Charte de l'Impérialisme," [https://www.google.com/?gws\\_rd=ssl#q=charte+de+l%27imp%C3%A9rialisme+pdf](https://www.google.com/?gws_rd=ssl#q=charte+de+l%27imp%C3%A9rialisme+pdf), accessed on January 14, 2015.
42. See Stephen C. Ferguson II, "Marxism, Philosophy, and the Africana World," *The Black Scholar* 43, no. 4 (Winter 2013): 65.
43. The United States military forces occupy the following thirteen African countries: Niger, Burkina Faso, Nigeria, Chad, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia. See <http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/worldviews/wp/2014/05/21/map-the-u-s-currently-has-troops-in-these-african-countries/>, accessed January 13, 2015). France is implanted militarily in these countries: Mauritania, Senegal, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast, Gabon, Central African Republic, Chad, Djibouti. See <http://punkonomics.org/2015/01/13/french-military-bases-in-africa/>, accessed January 13, 2015.
44. Nicolas Agbohohou, *Le Franc CFA et l'Euro contre l'Afrique* (Paris: Solidarité Mondiale, 1999). See also [http://www.civox.net/Nazisme-monetaire-de-la-France-en-Afrique-Les-verites-du-Professeur-Nicolas-Agbohohou\\_a2382.html](http://www.civox.net/Nazisme-monetaire-de-la-France-en-Afrique-Les-verites-du-Professeur-Nicolas-Agbohohou_a2382.html), accessed on January 13, 2015.
45. See, for example, Lewis Gordon, *Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1995); Joy James, "Bread and Land": Frantz Fanon's 'Native Intellectual,'" in *Fanon: A Critical Reader*, eds. Lewis R. Gordon, T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, and Renee T. White (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1996); Ross Posnock, "How It Feels To Be a Problem: Du Bois, Fanon, and the 'Impossible Life' of the Black Intellectual," in *Critical Inquiry* 23 (Winter 1997); Jeremy Weate, "Fanon, Merleau-Ponty and the Difference of Phenomenology," in *Race*, ed. Robert Bernasconi (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001). Also, see George Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes: The Continuing Significance of Race* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2008). The index on p. 254 shows that Yancy is also familiar with Fanon's work.
46. James T. Campbell, *Middle Passages: African American Journeys to Africa, 1787–2005* (New York, The Penguin Press, 2006), 327.
47. Volney cited by Diop, *Nations Nègres et Culture*, 58. See also C.-F. Volney, *Travels through Syria and Egypt, in the years 1783, 1784, and 1785. Containing the present natural and political state of those countries, ... Translated from the French. In two volumes. Volume 1 of 2* (Dublin: Ecco Print Editions, 1788), 51.
48. Diop, *Civilisation ou Barbarie*, 16. My translation: "The African who has understood us is the one who, after reading our works, would have felt a different human being birthing in him, moved by a historical consciousness, a true creator, a Promethean bearer of a new civilization and perfectly conscious of what the entire world owes to his ancestral genius in all fields of science, of culture, and of religion."

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## The Task at Hand

A. Todd Franklin

HAMILTON COLLEGE

Wednesday, December 3, 2014

Today I sit in my office. Alone. Alone because at this very moment I do not have the strength to face the world. I know that the world can be a loveless place and I know that it has been and continues to be rife with injustice, but today that knowledge has grown ever more visceral.

How do I face my students? How do I face my son? How can I console them when I myself have been laid so low? How can I encourage them when I myself feel virtually without hope? Here I sit in my office. Alone. Here I sit in silence. Not afraid to speak. On the contrary, afraid of what I might say. Pain and rage both eagerly seek expression, yet I sit and wait in hope that restraint will somehow find its way to the fore. The only thing that calms my mind and consoles my heart is the thought of the task at hand. What can I say? What can I do? How can I face my students? How can I face my son? How can I face a loveless world that fails to offer the slightest semblance of justice? What and How I do not know—The only thing I know for certain is that I must.

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## CONTRIBUTORS

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**Ralph Dumain** is a librarian and independent researcher, now living in Washington, D.C. In 1991 he became librarian/archivist of the C.L.R. James Institute in New York, founded by Jim Murray (1949–2003) to document James's life and work. Murray's roots were in the political and cultural activism of the '60s and '70s, and the Institute continued in the same spirit, with the aim of making James's work available to all researchers and the wider public, remaining outside and independent of academia and other traditional institutional forms. This ideal is also reflected in Dumain's website, the Autodidact Project ([autodidactproject.org](http://autodidactproject.org)), which publishes original bibliographies, research guides, and varied writings by Dumain himself, as well as a wide range of writings by others, famous, obscure, or forgotten, providing study material and perspectives that might not otherwise come to the attention of both formally and self-educated readers.

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