



Philosophy and the Black Experience

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FROM THE EDITORS

We are most happy to announce that this issue of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* has several fine articles on philosophy of race, philosophy of science (both social science and natural science), and political philosophy. However, before we introduce the articles, we would like to make an announcement on behalf of the Philosophy Department at Morgan State University (MSU). It has come to our attention that MSU may lose the major in philosophy. We think that the role of our Historically Black Colleges and Universities and MSU in particular has been of critical significance in attracting African American students to philosophy. At the most recent Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference in Newark, the attendees unanimously passed a resolution in support of MSU. We are appealing to our readers to join the cause by sending letters of support to the MSU Department of Philosophy, so they may therefore have more ammunition in their struggle to maintain the major.

On a different note, we want to acknowledge that Dr. Shannon M. Mussett's article, "On the Threshold of History: The Role of Nature and Africa in Hegel's Philosophy," in our last issue of the *Newsletter* (Fall 2003) was a revised version of an earlier article that appeared in Gary Backhaus and John Murungi, eds., *Tensional Landscapes: The Dynamics of Boundaries and Placements* (Lexington Books, 2003). She wishes to thank the editors and the press for permission to reprint.

Our first article, "On Jordan and Jordan B.: Uncomfortably Personal Reflections on Race, Identity, and Social Responsibility," by Dr. Carol V. A. Quinn offers a personally engaged philosophical reflection on how race is a decisive factor in the very contours of our day-to-day lives and how the attendant choices we make about questions centering on racial identity have profound ethical and social implications. Quinn brings to the fore how the practice of racial labeling has associated harms, which may or may not be the intended consequences.

Next Dr. Lee Brown also addresses the philosophy of race and the specified harms linked to racial classification, but his essay is from the standpoint of the philosophy of natural science. Brown's, "Genetic Reduction and its Implications for Theories of Race," grapples with the biological dimension of race and examines the theoretical problems associated with efforts at racial classification based on genotypic and phenotypic considerations. Brown is particularly concerned with how biology of race is often conflated with genetic reductionism.

The following article of Dr. Jane Duran brings the discussion back to political philosophy and even to Du Bois; however, her

elaborations on the sage of African American scholarship is by way of centrally investigating the contributions of Amilcar Cabral to Marxist philosophical analysis of the African condition. Duran's "Cabral, African Marxism, and the Notion of History" is a comparative look at Cabral in light of the contributions of Marxist thinkers C. L. R. James and W. E. B. Du Bois. Duran conceptually places Cabral in the role of an innovative philosopher within the Marxist tradition of Africana thought. Duran highlights Cabral's profound understanding of the historical development as a manifestation of revolutionary practice in the African liberation movement.

In this issue of the *Newsletter*, philosopher Gertrude James Gonzalez de Allen provides a very insightful review of Robert Birt's book, *The Quest for Community and Identity: Critical Essays in Africana Social Philosophy*.

Our last contributor, Dr. Leonard Harris, is, of course, no stranger to us; he is a former Editor and Book Review Editor of our *Newsletter*. Harris provides us with his bibliography on Africana philosophy. As more and more philosophers and students of philosophy seek to teach about and learn from this rapidly growing field of inquiry, tools, such as bibliographies, will increasingly become a vital intellectual tool of growth and development in Africana philosophy. We hope you enjoy these stimulating articles, and we look forward to your response.

ARTICLES

On Jordan and Jordan B.: Return to the Uncomfortably Personal Reflections on Race, Identity, and Social Responsibility

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My nine-year-old nephew, Jordan, has a best friend in school, Jordan B. The kids at school call them "Jordan" and "Jordan B." They call each other "Jordan" and "Jordan B." My brother and sister-in-law (Jordan's parents) call them "Jordan" and "Jordan B." This seems like an innocent and effective way of referring to the two boys, since they share the same first name. But here is the catch: "B" stands for "black." Jordan B is a nine-year-old African American boy; my nephew is white.

When my nephew talks to me about Jordan B, it is clear that he genuinely likes him, and I would guess that, at least for my nine-year-old nephew, the "B" is not intended to harm. It is merely the way that he and the other school children (predominantly white) refer to their friend. Yet should we

accept this? Should I, as a family member, professor, and community member, accept this? If not, how do I teach my nephew and his friends that the name is inappropriate?

Since I began teaching, I have always included topics on race and identity; however, a year ago, taking a job in the South, I now have the privilege of being able to teach these issues to a racially diverse student body. Moving to the South has been eye opening. As a new white woman in the South, I was immediately confronted with racist ideology. For example, within a few weeks of my move, I had the following encounter. At a bar-and-grill—one in which throwing peanut shells on the floor is an acceptable, and even encouraged, practice—I was engaging in conversation with three African American men. After they left, a large white man called me a “Nigger lover.” We exchanged words, and the bouncer kicked me out of the bar—I presume that it was because I was easier to throw out than the big man. Since then, I routinely encounter racist thinking, but I have also enjoyed interracial friendships, including with some of my favorite students.

Race has deep social significance in American culture, and as I have experienced firsthand, especially in the South. Obviously, as an ethicist and educator, I want to change racist thinking, but also as an aunt to my young nephew, I want to change *the more subtle, yet still harmful*, racist thinking. Clearly, as the name “Jordan B” demonstrates, we in American society are overly color-conscious and interact with others on a whole set of assumptions based on race. Because of this, “Jordan B” is not “neutral” (as it would be were “B” to stand for Jordan’s last name, were it Billings). The “B” says a lot about Jordan’s identity, place, and value in the world.

What does it mean to be black in our society? What words, for example, are associated with the word “black”? This is difficult for me—a white woman—to answer. Here is what many people might think about Jordan B, not knowing anything else except that he is an African American boy. Jordan B is probably athletic—certainly more so than my white nephew. He is probably more likely to be a troublemaker, or violent. And he is probably more likely than my nephew to get a girl pregnant, since he is more sexually aggressive (or certainly will be when his testosterone kicks in). Further, he is probably lazier and less intelligent than my nephew. That is, with “B” unfortunately come assumptions, stereotypes, myths, and half-truths.

I discovered my own prejudices when I met my neighbor for the first time. An overly thin, young African American woman with kinky purple-dyed hair, she seemed drugged out when I introduced myself. I immediately assumed that she was a crack addict (notice how I chose this “black” drug, rather than one associated with white people); and because she had different cars outside of her home, I assumed she must have been dealing. Fear and disgust began to overtake me. I was convinced that what turned out to be an orange tic-tac candy was a drug, and I insisted that my boyfriend crush it and smell it to convince me otherwise. It turned out that my neighbor seemed drugged out because she has lupus, and was having a particularly bad day. All of those cars were her many friends visiting her to check in on how she was doing. Notice how great stereotyped thinking like my own perpetuates harms and hatreds. Imagine if I did not fight this thinking and refused to get to know her.

Back to Jordan B. Note that were many of us (white people) to discover that Jordan B goes to a predominantly white, upper-class school, we would be more accepting of him because he is more “like us” or “acts white” (at least his wealthy and educated parents do), and so on. But this comes to Jordan B, with or without the “B” designation; just in virtue of the way

he looks. A major question before us is: does the “B” further negatively affect him?

Obviously, these nine-year-old children are aware of race. Unlike when I was growing up, they regularly see racial and other diversity in cartoons and television programming. The children do not call their friend “Jordan B” because he wears black t-shirts. They want to distinguish between the two Jordans, and the meaningful difference to these children, and indeed to most in our society, is race. We should not at all be surprised, then, that they chose this naming strategy. It is refreshing to see interracial best friendships, especially since we still live in a society where such friendships are rare and social segregation—in schools, neighborhoods, and churches—is common. This was particularly salient to me when I gave a lecture on environmental racism before an audience of over 400 of North Carolina’s “most gifted” high school seniors. Looking out at a sea of mostly white faces, I noted the small group of people of color all sitting together.

One problem with the “B” designation is that Jordan B does not racially belong, and he is reminded of that whenever the children use that name. My nephew is not called “Jordan W.” My nephew is not identified according to his white racial classification. That is because the dominant, and so expected, race is white. Whiteness is normal. Peggy McIntosh, writing almost twenty years ago, does a wonderful job pointing out the subtle and not-so-subtle ways in which whiteness predominates especially in American society. Whiteness, which does not need to be pointed out, carries with it positive connotations, and all the benefits of being white. As Charles Mills writes in his essay “Black Trash,” “white trash” needs to be explained. People who are white trash do not live up to their whiteness. “Black trash” on the other hand, is redundant. To be black is to be *deficient* (except for athletic ability and—as many of my white students routinely point out—penis size). So it is significant if whites accept a black person like Jordan B.

To try to understand my nephew and his friendship, I cannot help but ask: Did Jordan B choose this name? Does he approve of it? And if he identifies with it, is it out of self-pride, or loathing? As an outsider looking in at my nephew and his friendship, I have many unanswered questions. For example, why did the children choose to change only one name? This question is seemingly easy-to-answer, since, in our culture, white is the unspoken, and so *default*, race. But perhaps my nephew was the original Jordan in his circle of friends; and since race is an important marker in our society, it was *obvious* to the children (even *natural*) to change the latecomer Jordan’s name in this way. As I have discussed, Jordan B has been reduced to his race, and set apart by his race. Is this harmless (or relatively so), because innocent children marked him this way?

Of course naming my nephew’s best friend “Jordan B” is not racist in the way that institutional segregation is racist. But it is potentially harmful nonetheless. What if my nephew were in a predominantly black school? If the children called him “Jordan W” (for white) would that be harmful in the way that it might be harmful to Jordan B? With whiteness, and especially male whiteness, comes the presumption of status and privilege. Children might hate Jordan W because of his whiteness, but there would not likely be self-loathing in virtue of group-identification unless the particularly reflective nine-year-old Jordan W feels shame for his privileged status in white male patriarchy. But perhaps Jordan B, and even Jordan B’s family, do not accept the label in terms of self-loathing but black pride; after all, many members of groups self-identify with negative labels, such as Queer, Bitch, and even Nigger. Note though that group members give themselves these labels. This

suggests that if Jordan B gave himself this name, it might be acceptable.

I find myself wondering what Jordan B's parents think of this designation. Such a term might be affirming and empowering to Jordan B and his family. Perhaps Jordan B's parents, having experienced much more vicious forms of racism, do not think much of this, even accepting the name as just the way American racist society is. Embracing the B label need not be negative. However, several African Americans have written about self-loathing as a result of always being reminded about their race, and some of my African American students have described their own self-loathing and willingness to accept poor treatment even in encounters at least not obviously involving race. One of my students, for example, regularly enters into and stays in romantic relationships with abusive women, and blames this on his self-loathing because he is biracial.

Even if Jordan B and his family were to accept this name in a positive way, a problem still remains concerning why that designation, and not some other, is made in our society in the first place. Whiteness, as I mentioned above, is normal, though it is refreshing to see television programming, which not only includes, but also stars, persons of color in positive roles. Whites impose this idea of normal on non-whites and use it as a (the) standard of evaluating them. Whiteness, for whites, is the accepted and expected racial condition. Indeed, it is the ideal. That is, the "normal" is the "ideal," and "different from normal" means "different from ideal." Whiteness has been historically associated with moral and intellectual superiority. When my nephew and his classmates impose white values and standards of evaluation on Jordan B; not only are they constantly reminding him of his racial identity, but they are also contributing to his understanding of himself and his values on standards of whiteness.

People, and not just children, commonly impose nicknames and other labels on others as a way of identifying and categorizing them. For example, I dated two men in a row named Ken. When I met the most recent Ken, the original Ken had just dumped me. Upon learning this new Ken's name, I jokingly insisted that he cannot be "Ken," and so I renamed him "Walter." I now refer to him as "Walter-Ken" to distinguish him from Original Ken.

Imposing nicknames on others is not necessarily a bad thing; my friends outside of academia, for example, often call me "Doc." But note that "Doc" has incredibly positive connotations of status and education. On the other hand, one of my male friends calls me "Dolly Dimple." Dolls are inanimate playthings; dimples are cute and pinchable. Dolly Dimple is the familiar, short, chubby, pinchably cute, bonnet-wearing baby doll. "Dolly Dimple," though not intentionally harmful, places me in a particular (low) position in patriarchal society—I am an object (of course it could be a term of endearment. I could remind him of his favorite childhood doll!). Men are not regularly referred to as objects or playthings. But at least Dolly Dimples are not *sexual* playthings! The only activity Dolly Dimple engages in that comes close to being sexual is kissing her boyfriend in the jump rope song bearing her name. On the other hand, I am also called "Carmen" by the chair of an IRB of which I am a member. While everyone else is "Dr. So and So," I am "Carmen" (of the sexy opera), because, I was told, that name is sexier and suits me better.

Despite these labels, I can always appeal to my "Doc" title, and to my education and status in society, for affirmation. Of course I recognize that many women cannot, and even though I can appeal to more positive labels, this does not make labeling women (me included) as sex objects or playthings

acceptable. This is not to say that all terms of endearment, especially between lovers (such as the ones with which I am familiar: Baby Girl, Cupcake, or Love Scone), are harmful.

Perhaps Jordan B can also appeal to more positive labels. Perhaps he lives in an affirming environment where he can easily shake off that label. Or perhaps the B label, because he lives in such a nurturing community, does not negatively affect him at all. A problem is that such labels have the *potential* to harm—and not just those with thin skin; and even if it does not harm Jordan B, it could harm other black children who see Jordan B accept that name. That is, such labels teach us about power relations between blacks and whites generally, and not just between this particular black boy and that particular white boy; similarly, gendered labels say something about relations between males and females generally.

Let us consider two eight-year-old girls named Ashley. If one is called "Cute Ashley," this suggests that the other Ashley is not cute. This can harm Regular Ashley who lives in a society, which overly values (female) beauty, and in particular, lighter skinned, white-featured beauty. I have a male student who calls himself "Fat Andy," and I too call him that, on his invitation. But I always do so uncomfortably, despite his embracing this name. In part, this is because I do not know why Andy accepts this name. Is he comfortable with his size, or is this a term of self-loathing? And what of the other students who are self-conscious about their bodies, who struggle with body image, and who perhaps even compare their body size to Fat Andy's? College-aged people—and not just females—are particularly vulnerable to negative body images and eating disorders. Might I, in calling Andy this name, be perpetuating harms in Andy and others? And those labels not only harm those labeled, but also those labeling, by perpetuating, rather than challenging, stereotyped, negative thinking, by continuing to buy into white, middle-class, male values and standards.

According to T. Alexander Aleinikoff, to be born white is to be free from confronting one's race on a daily, personal, interaction-by-interaction basis. But just because we do not want a society in which people label each other according to race, gender, or ability, we do not want a society altogether blind to such a difference. A color-conscious society, for example, is a good thing in that it helps create new cultural narratives, working towards overturning false, negative, or devaluing narratives, which works towards achieving racial justice. It is good, too, for whites to be aware of their own whiteness. I remember a discussion about race last semester where I suddenly paused and said aloud, "I am very aware of my whiteness right now." The African American students laughed, and one said, "That's how we feel every day." My being aware of my whiteness was a good thing, and being color-conscious in class is generally a good thing.

Sometimes the educational experience is the most basic. That is, I routinely find that despite my assigning rather sophisticated philosophical readings on race and identity, students want to know the seemingly most simple, and often even offensive, things about each other. More than once, for example, white students have asked black students why their hair "smells funny," and I have had black students ask whites why they do not know how to have a "real barbeque," pointing out that African Americans enjoy a sense of community, exemplified in the barbeque, unfamiliar to white folk. Although such questions probably come from stereotyped and generalized thinking, they also come from a genuine desire to know the other on an intimate level. One's hair, after all, can be a very visible part of one's identity, including group identity, as one of my dreadlock-wearing students has written about.

Although being race conscious in the classroom is often a good thing, sometimes teachers, even well-meaning ones, make students color-conscious in a negative way. Consider the following recent exchange between a white, female, visiting professor, and a couple of my African American students. We were talking over dinner about one of my student's plans after graduation and his likelihood of success in graduate school. The visiting professor said to him, "Well at least you don't talk black," suggesting that therefore he should go far. When he did not respond to her (at least *verbally*—he shot her a look), the professor turned to another black student for affirmation, asking, "he doesn't, does he?" My student's response was "I don't know." It was clear that the professor's comments made my students and me feel uncomfortable and even offended. Her message was that one must at least *talk* white (and act white) if one cannot *be* white, or at least pass for white. This was a clear devaluing of blackness, including black talk, though some people with whom I have shared this story have told me that she was merely pointing out the reality of succeeding in graduate education.

I did not say anything to this professor. I should have. I did not say anything *then* to my students, and I should have. My letting such comments go—just as if I continue to let my nephew unreflectively call his best friend "Jordan B," continues to perpetuate the valuing of white over black. As an educator, family member, and community member, I have a moral obligation to shake up such thinking. Perhaps I will ring up my nephew today.

An Exciting Afterword

During my most recent telephone conversation with my nephew, I happily learned that the children now refer to their friend as "Jordan E," which stands for his last name.

Genetic Reduction and its Implications for Theories of Race

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The harms associated with racial categorization have inspired significant efforts within both the natural and social sciences to question the respectability of racial categorization and to abolish its use. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Naomi Zack have acknowledged such efforts, and they have added illuminating philosophical perspectives that are intended to deconstruct and otherwise abolish the concept of race. Appiah contends that there is no cultural basis for racial categorization.¹ Zack contends that there is no epistemic warrant for racial categorization.² Each offers compelling arguments, and each adds an important dimension to the debate on the existence of human races.³ Moreover, interpretations of emergent research from efforts to sequence and understand the human genome have fostered the position that there is no biological basis for racial categorization. Francis Collins, Director of the National Human Genome Research Institute, has voiced, on many occasions, the position that human races are mere social constructs, and that the genetic differences between individuals selected at random are insignificant and insufficient to merit racial categorization.⁴

Within the context of ordinary usage, "race" has two significant senses: folk and biological. White, Black, Asian, and Indian are folk categories and are not to be taken as equivalent to Caucasoid, Negroid, Mongoloid, and Native American. Appiah and Zack argue that both senses are fatally flawed. I argue

otherwise. However, I do contend that the folk usage is ethically problematic, since one of its functions has been an attempt to justify the various inequitable distributions of rights, privileges, and accesses to societal resources. Those concerns will not be the subject here. The scope of those concerns deserves significantly more attention than is available in this format.

The conception of race that I shall characterize is grounded upon the biological sense of "race." That sense reflects the origin of the term, whereas the folk sense may not. The folk sense of "race" allows for the use of either biological or broad ethnic criteria for categorization.⁵ In most cases, the folk sense varies with social/political context, and there is no clear or consistently used algorithm for discerning the extensions of its categories outside of the specific contextual usage.⁶ For example, given folk usage, an individual can either be Asian and Negroid, Asian and Caucasoid, Black and Mongoloid, White and Caucasoid, Black and Native American, and so on, or neither. The rap singer Vanilla Ice has been characterized as Caucasoid and Black; Justice Clarence Thomas has been characterized as Negroid and White; and the news reporter Connie Chung has been characterized as Mongoloid and White. Such characterizations are meaningful, and they lend support to Francis Collins's position that race is merely a social construct and that the usage has no viable biological foundation. Still, even if the folk sense of "race" reflects merely a socially constructed grouping and lacks a viable genetic or otherwise respectable biological foundation, that is not sufficient for concluding that a usage reflecting the root sense of "race" is grounded upon a mere social construction and lacks a viable or respectable biological foundation.⁷

I show that the offered arguments against the existence of human races are flawed and that there is a respectable scientific sense of "race." It is hoped that such a characterization will better enable us to: track and understand causal histories of human biology, interface human genome research with rich conceptions of human biology, and ground more tractable criteria for understanding and addressing the inequities and injustices that are rooted in racial prejudice, racialism, and racism.⁸ Concerning the latter, were the concept of race abolished, there would not exist a viable legal basis for identifying and for rectifying injustices that are associated with racial discrimination. It would not be simply obvious what would count as falling within the extension of a category that has no criteria for membership or a term that no longer has meaning. Abandoning the practice of racial categorization will neither correct past injustices nor end discrimination against those whose phenotypes provide the reference for identification. Moreover, race-based harms emerge from racial prejudice, racialism, and racism, and not from mere racial categorization.

The primary meaning of "race" is rooted in biological kinship, and that sense of "race" is not a social construct. When first introduced into the English language, 1580 AD, "race" was used to mean: "a breeding stock of animals; a family, tribe, people or nation belonging to the same stock; a division of mankind possessing traits that are transmissible by descent and sufficient to characterize it as a distinct human type."⁹ With the advent of Darwin's work on evolution and Mendelian genetics, "race" came to mean "a local geographic or global human population distinguished by evolved and genetically transmitted phenotypes."¹⁰ By the late nineteenth century, it became popular to view races as separate species. However, this view is conceptually flawed, since within the natural sciences, there is not a conception of race that accommodates viewing any known proper subset of humans as a distinct species.¹¹ A look at other animal groupings should help make this clear. The Tabby, Siamese, and Rex can be viewed as

distinct breeds of cats, but not as distinct species of cats. The Percheron, Clydesdale, and Arabian can be viewed as distinct breeds of horses, but not as distinct species of horses. Similarly, Negroid, Caucasoid, and Mongoloid can be viewed as distinct breeds of humans, but neither is a distinct human species. Unless otherwise noted, my use of “race” will have the sense of the first two characterizations; the third is misguided and conceptually flawed.

Folk race and biological race are different concepts and their criteria for membership are not the same. It is one thing to have merely a Negroid lineage—to have some ancestor within, say, twenty generations who has Negroid phenotypes. It is quite another to be Negroid—to have only Negroid ancestry. To be Negroid is to have an inherited biological ancestry linked to the early human populations of sub-Saharan Africa while not having an inherited biological ancestry linked to non sub-Saharan populations—to populations traditionally characterized as Mongoloid and Caucasoid. There are others.¹²

A similar characterization cannot be made for what counts as being Black. Black, as a racial category, is a folk concept. Its criteria for membership are rooted in sociopolitical concerns and as such, it is a social construction. Given the “one drop rule,” having any Negroid phenotype permits one to be classified as Black.¹³ Moreover, one can be Black and not be Negroid; and in the cultural sense of being Black, one can be Black and have no known Negroid ancestry. Concerning the former, most post-nineteenth century African Americans have multiple biological lineages to at least two of the notable racial groups. Because of the frequency of less than legal unions imposed upon African American women by men of European ancestry during the first four hundred years of American history, and because of the more humane unions between Native Americans and Africans Americans during that era, one would be hard pressed to find an African American whose lineage was indisputably only Negroid. Concerning the latter, cultural norms and other social/political dispositions that are usually associated with Black communities can function as defining criteria for viewing a person as Black.

This does not imply that racial membership, as originally conceived, is inherently ambiguous, or that the criteria for membership in biological racial groups are arbitrary. It implies instead that folk race and biological race are different concepts and that the extensions of White and Caucasoid, of Black and Negroid, and of Asian and Mongoloid are not the same. Moreover, it implies that racial membership is not necessarily exclusive and that it is more appropriate to speak of an individual as having racial lineages rather than an exclusive membership in a racial group. Only in African communities is one likely to find an individual with but one racial lineage. Almost all other individuals have at least two racial lineages, one of which will be Negroid, since the biological origin of all humans is sub-Saharan African. Not having phenotypes that are usually associated with being Negroid does not mean that one’s genome does not include genes that, if expressed, would correlate with individuals with typical Negroid features. The same is so for all other races.

Problematic for the biological sense of race is that there appears to be compelling data within human genome research that support the denial of the respectability of race categorization. I intend to show that the data interpretations that yield such perspectives are methodologically flawed, and that the offered denial is not warranted. The denial is rooted in a three-tiered critique of the claim that humans can be grouped into races. The first was briefly mentioned in a previous paragraph. That is, evolutionary biologists claim that the word “race” as used in evolutionary biology, precludes the

existence of human races. A race, according to evolutionary biology, is a subspecies, and a subspecies is a proper subset of a species that is either unable or shows a tendency to becoming unable to mate and produce offspring with the members of the species that is not within the proper subset. Given that those characterized as Caucasoid, Native American, Negroid, and Mongoloid show no inability to mate and produce offspring, claiming that the groupings represent separate subspecies is not appropriate. Moreover, the characterization of races as subspecies can be viewed as reflecting a specialized taxonomy, and as such, it has little relevance to the uses of “race” about which I am concerned. The point of relevance here in the first tier is that purported human races cannot be characterized as different subspecies of humans.

The second and third tiers are more to the point. Recent findings in human genome research suggest that there is, to date, no acknowledged gene or gene cluster that is recognized by the scientific community as a determining marker for being Negroid, Caucasoid, or Mongoloid, or for being Asian, Black, or White. There has been no found correlation that can be said to be either one-to-one or direct. This is, in large part, because there is no known gene for race and because genetic variations within purported racial groups are significantly greater than genetic variations between purported racial groups.¹⁴ Furthermore, for any two randomly chosen humans, the genetic differences between them typically is less than 0.1%, and that difference is viewed as insufficient for establishing or for otherwise grounding purported racial differences.¹⁵ Phenotypes are expressed genotypes, and two individuals with phenotypes that mark them as racially distinct can both have genes, which if expressed, would permit classifying them in the same race. That said, modern genetics has found no genetic basis for categorizing humans into distinct racial groups or for identifying an individual as a member of a racial group.

The third tier has two groundings, and it claims that there is no biological basis for race categorization. First, since modern genetics purports to provide the basic building blocks of human biology, and since those building blocks do not explain human races, human races cannot be a biological phenomenon. Were human races a biological phenomenon, the differences that permitted racial distinctions could be reducible to genetic differences, but they are not. Hence, given current genetics, what are characterized as racial differences are not biological differences.

Second, the differences that are fixed upon to distinguish individuals racially are not sufficiently significant to frame a taxonomy to separate individuals into distinct biological groups. There are numerous ways to group individuals. Blood type, foot size, hair texture, and range of vision are just a few. However, no such grouping constitutes a type of human. They instead reflect variations within the species—within the human race.

There are several problems with the critiques. Concerning the first, there being no known genetic difference does not imply that there is no genetic difference. Implied is that current genome research provides no epistemic grounds for making racial distinctions. Human genome research is in its infancy, and the type of genetic material that is currently fixed upon for determining the codes for human biology is only a fraction of the human genome. In addition, we do not know how the codes work. Little study has been done on the “unused” material, and scientists are at a loss about its significance. The bulk of the research on the human genome is fashioned upon the models for the basic building blocks of biology that emerged from the research of Mendel, Watson, and Crick. The current effort is much like that of reducing mental states

to brain states without taking into account the significance of electromotive forces, electromagnetic fields, and the chemistry of the brain bath.

Concerning the second, there being no genetic difference does not imply that there is no biological difference. Genetics, as a reducing theory, appears to be incomplete. At present, it is unable to encompass some human differences that historically have been viewed as biological. For example, when a pregnant woman experiences a significant trauma, that trauma can affect the hormonal balance of the immediate environment in which her fetus resides. That balance influences the development of the fetus. Fetal development is biological, but environmental influences upon development are not explainable by appealing only to DNA, genome sequence, and the associated laws. Hence, there are some biological phenomena within individuals that genetics does not subsume—that from the purview of genomics are underdetermined. Concerning group biology, for any given family, cousins, uncles, and aunts are biologically linked, but there is no known genetic marker that permits any such identification. Moreover, from an observational perspective, there are obvious physical differences between humans, and some of those differences permit systematic groupings of humans into what have traditionally been called races or breeds. Those groupings are based upon phenotype correlations. Phenotypes are inherited, and that is a biological phenomenon.

In addition, something's being genetically insignificant does not imply that it is also biologically insignificant. A look at practices in animal husbandry should prove useful for gaining a broader insight into how phenotypes have biological significance without an accompanying known genetic significance. Within animal husbandry, there are many breeds of cattle, and each has a biological heritage that links its members to specific geographic populations. Yet, those breeds are distinguished on the basis of phenotypes and not genetics. Holstein, Brown Swiss, and Guernsey are distinguished solely on the basis of differences in their observable phenotypes. Moreover, although they are of the same species, there are significant biological consequences for being a Guernsey as opposed to a Holstein or a Brown Swiss. The environment for each to flourish is different. Also, the Guernsey produces high-butterfat yellowish milk, while the Holstein produces milk with low-butterfat content. The Brown Swiss is in between. As of the writing of this essay, there exists no complete mapping of the genome of any breed of cattle, although the mapping of the Holstein is rather advanced. Moreover, when completed, the mapping of the genome for Holsteins is not expected to provide definitive information for distinguishing the different breeds of cattle. Were the mapping of the genome of the other breeds of cattle complete, the expectation would be the same. Again, genotypes are for the most part common to all member of a species, but that being so does not mean that all genotypes are expressed as phenotypes. The current state of science is such that, with few exceptions, variations within the genome of a species do not permit identifying the various races or breeds within the species by merely looking at the genome.

Although grouping organisms via the uniqueness of their phenotypes is a highly reliable way of determining their biological lineages, racially grouping humans, as typically practiced, poses a significant methodological problem that cannot be overlooked. Most problematic for racially classifying humans into historical racial groups is that there is significantly more biological diversity within individuals today than in the past. Within modern multicultural communities, cross breeding

is not uncommon, and offspring with multiple racial lineages are no longer the exception. Still, an individual's exemplification of phenotypes that are uniquely associated with a specific local geographic human population permits a biological linking of the individual with the specific local geographic human population that gave rise to the identifying phenotypes. With rare exceptions, the offspring of pairs of indigenous Scandinavians and of Native Americans will each look very much like their respective parents, and neither will be mistaken as the offspring of the parents that are not its own. The offspring of an indigenous Scandinavian and Native American pair will usually have phenotypes that link her to at least one of her parents, and will not be mistaken as a Zulu offspring. As such, she will have a multiple lineage.

Each biological racial category has readily recognizable criteria for membership, and once those criteria are known, identifying members is highly reliable. The fact that a significant number of individuals have multiple lineages is not an impediment to the practice. Not everyone can be grouped exclusively into a specific racial category or shown to have phenotypes indicative of any racial membership. The latter merely shows that race categories do not subsume every individual and that shows the theory about races to be incomplete. Still, valuable diagnostic and treatment information can be gleaned from knowing an individual's biological lineages. Such information, in conjunction with information about an individual's more immediate history, provides a more complete biological base for understanding an individual's health dispositions.¹⁶ The fact that genetics is not capable of accounting for the practice does not negate the respectability of the practice, nor does it show that the categories have no biological import; the phenotypes that are used for racial classification are inherited and inherited characteristics are biological.

Genetics may develop to a point where knowledge of one's ancestry is not relevant to medical diagnoses and treatment—where illnesses are diagnosed and treated at a molecular level. However, that is not a current reality, and it is neither simply nor wholly obvious that science can reach such a level of precision without initially appealing to biological ancestry—including phenotypes for its correlations—and to the causal influences that shape current human biology. Very little functions as if in a vacuum—without causal or standing influences from something distinct. The environmental and cultural influences that gave rise to earlier biological adaptation are causal or standing influences within modern human biology.¹⁷ Knowledge of those influences provides a richer basis for understanding the workings of biology and for understanding the human genome and fruitfully correlating genetic data with our current understanding of human biology. To ignore phenotype lineages—racial lineages—is to ignore information about the causal history of biological adaptations to environmental and cultural influences within earlier human populations—to those biological factors that have enabled us to exist today.

Concerns about categorizing humans into races can become concerns about viewing races as natural kinds. Phenotypes are naturally occurring phenomena, and they are the results of natural selection. Phenotype patterns that are specific to geographic populations are also the result of natural selection. Members of a race are those whose inherited traits link them to specific geographic human populations. Those traits are the results of natural selection, and as such, those with the traits constitute a kind of human. However, being a kind of human, as we say, but more strictly speaking, being of a kind of human does not mean that one is different in kind. It does not mean that one's characteristically human dispositions

are different or that one has qualities that merit or otherwise “call for” a different kind of treatment. Variations in phenotypes are accidental to being human. Racism advances the perspective that difference in phenotypes corresponds to differences in human kind—in human nature. Racism is a false theory and should be distinguished as such. This is all the more important because racism is grounded upon racialism. Viewing racial groups as natural kinds is conceptually problematic, and it is not a gracious way to think about people. It is not fecund. It does not raise interesting questions for us to examine, and it does not help to advance our understandings of what it is to be human.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

1. See K. Anthony Appiah, “Illusions of Race,” *In My Father’s House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 28-46. See also, K. Anthony Appiah and Amy Gutmann, *Color Conscious: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).
2. See Naomi Zack, *Race and Mixed Race* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993) 9-50. See also, Naomi Zack, “Race and Philosophic Meaning” in *Race and Sex: Their Sameness, Difference and Interplay* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 29-43.
3. Their essays on race are exemplars of how analytic philosophy can be used rigorously and meaningfully to illuminate and clarify issues of vital human concern.
4. Such a position was voiced at the opening of the National Human Genome Center at Howard University in Washington, DC on May 1, 2001. However, there being no significant genetic difference does not imply that there is no significant biological difference. Such a position assumes that because there is no genetic foundation for race, there is no biological foundation for race. Not all of human biology is captured by genetics, and as a reducing theory, genetics is incomplete. For example, genetics does not account for states of an organism that are determined by nurture, by trauma, or by environmental influences.
5. By “ethnic,” I mean having a common national, religious, linguistic, or other cultural heritage. Racial groups are sometimes referred to as ethnic groups; but in such cases, the reference is grounded upon subsuming cultural norms. To be Jewish is to be a member of a group with a specific religious heritage, but one can be Jewish and have immediate and significant Mongoloid, Negroid, or Caucasoid ancestry. To refer to Jews as a racial group, in the biological sense of race, is a misnomer. See “Race and Ethnicity” in *Encyclopedia Britannica, Britannica Online*.
6. For a more detailed discussion of this failing, see references in endnotes 1 and 2.
7. The root sense of “race” is grounded in biological kinship. A contention here is that “lacking a genetic foundation” does not imply “lacking a biological foundation.” Not all of human biology is reducible to genetics.
8. Racialism is the theory that human races exist and that the biology which gives rise to the phenotypes that permit racial classification also gives rise to essential qualities such as intellectual, spiritual, ethical, and aesthetic dispositions. Racism is racialism accompanied by the belief that one’s membership in a particular race makes one biologically superior to those in another race. Typically, accompanying that belief is the belief that one’s racial superiority gives one the right to oppress those believed to be racially inferior. Neither theory is true.
9. Historically, referring to races as “breeds” has been a derogatory practice as evident in Westerns—movies about the early American west—wherein the offspring of European Americans and Native Americans were referred to as half-breeds. However, the extensions of each term are the same, although “breed” as a verb often connotes a controlled mating or selection of offspring. See “race” and “breed” in *The American Heritage Dictionary, Third Edition, version 3.6a* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994).
10. “Phenotypes,” as the word is used herein, denotes physical features of an individual that are used for identification. They include eye color, hair color, skin color, hair texture, nose size and shape, and height. They correspond to underlying genotypes. Genotypes are the genetic components—the protein structures—that provide the blueprints and codes for organisms being what they are.
11. “Heredity: Genetics of Race and Species Differences.” *Encyclopedia Britannica, Britannica Online*. <http://search.eb.com/eb/article?eu=120936>, August 27 2002.
12. All human races have Negroid ancestry. Racial categories reference to unique populations that emerged from adapting to new environments after leaving Africa some sixty thousand years ago. In brief, a racial group is one with recognizable inherited traits that are common to a specific population. That said, African Americans do not make up a racial group—biologically speaking. Their phenotypes do not distinguish them from other populations with obvious Negroid ancestry, and many have phenotypes that permit them to “pass”—to function as full members of Anglo-European communities.
13. “African American,” “Black,” “Negro,” and “Colored” are time-sensitive labels, and they refer to special populations within American culture. “African American,” “Negro,” and “Colored” have the same extension within, say, the United States. African Americans are Americans who are descendants of Africans brought to America during the American slavery era. A recent naturalized African immigrant would not be an African American or a Negro. He would be a Black American. “Black” is used to refer to anyone of known Negroid ancestry or to anyone who is identifiable with the ethnicities typically associated with those of Negroid ancestry. Black is a more general concept, and it subsumes all Americans with Negroid phenotypes and those publicly known to have recent Negroid ancestry—“the one drop rule.” Of late “Black” is used to refer to aboriginal South Africans and to offspring who lack other racial ancestry.
14. See G. Barbujani, A. Magagni, E. Minch, and L. L. Cavalli-Sforza, “An Apportionment of Human DNA Diversity,” *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the U.S.A.* 94 (1997): 4516-4519. See also, R. C. Lewontin, “Race: Contemporary Views of Human Variation,” *The Encyclopedia Americana, International Edition, v. 23* (1996): 119-122. See also, M. Nei, and A. K. Roychoudhury, “Genetic Relationship and Evolution of Human Races,” *Evolutionary Biology* 14 (1983): 1-59. See also, M. Nei, and A. K. Roychoudhury, “Gene Differences between Caucasian, Negro and Japanese Populations,” *Science* 177 (August 1972): 434-35.
15. There is some controversy over the precise percentage difference. Depending on what part of the genome is analyzed, the percentage range can vary. The 0.1% includes the genes that give rise to the phenotypic features that are used to group humans into races.
16. Recent findings from the study of the human genome suggest that more than 50% of medical disorders have a genetic foundation. Tracing the lineages of those who carry the gene for, say, cystic fibrosis can lead to a better understanding of the cause of the gene’s occurrence and of how best to deal with its influence. There are significant medical advantages to having one gene for cystic fibrosis. With the gene, one is less likely to die from being infected with dehydrating bacterial such as *E-coli*.

17. Without the assistance of modern technology, Zulu families would have a significantly lower likelihood of surviving in arctic environments than would indigenous Scandinavian families, because of their biological differences.

Cabral, African Marxism, and the Notion of History

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Abstract

A number of Black thinkers within the framework of the Marxist tradition have tried to employ its chief concepts for work on matters of the African diaspora and Africa itself. The level of success of the theorizing involved has varied, it is contended, along the lines of whether the theorist in question tried to work within the confines of the classical tradition as formulated by Marx and Engels. It is argued that Amilcar Cabral, in *Return to the Source*, does important work in Marxist theory, and that work is contrasted briefly to the work of C.L.R. James and also to that of W.E.B. Du Bois. A key argument is that Cabral has employed the notion of historical progression to recapture the future of Guinea Bissau.

In contemporary discussions of Black Marxism, the name of Amilcar Cabral is frequently bandied about, but often without a great deal of awareness of what it is that is constitutive of Marxist theorizing in Cabral's work.¹ Marxism has always posed a problem for Black/African theoreticians, since it is clear that there is little in Marx or Engels that directly speaks to the problem of race, and a great deal that is, in fact, overwhelmingly Eurocentric.

Because of the renaissance of interest in such thinkers as C.L.R. James and W.E.B. Du Bois, it might prove to be instructive to examine closely the printed work of Cabral, since it is clear that he, unlike some other theorists, was actually involved in a revolutionary movement.² Moreover, not only was Cabral a man of action as well as of words, but it is apparent in reading a work such as *Return to the Source* that Cabral was a more able Marxist thinker than many who have claimed that particular rubric for themselves.³

Cabral had a deep sense of history, and it is history, of course, and the materialist interpretation of it, that is crucial for Marxist thought. In the following sections, I will attempt to give an account of the ways in which Cabral's take on the historical is fruitful for Marxist theorizing in general and for Black Marxism in particular.

I

A crucial notion in the work of Marx and Engels is the concept of a nation or a people proceeding through historical stages, by way of the dialectic, in a manner such that they will inevitably wind up at the stage of revolution. In fact, in "The British Rule in India," Marx makes it appear as if there is a sense in which the British have done India a favor, so to speak, since it can be interpreted that they have started her on the path to industrialization, which will inevitably result in a revolution by the proletariat against the bourgeoisie.⁴ If there is a concept here that is offensive to Third World nations, it is the Eurocentrism, or even racism, that is implicit in the notion that the path that the European nations have taken is the path.

Nevertheless, given Marxist theory as promulgated by its originators, the difficulty for a Black Marxist has been to make this theory applicable to those of African ancestry. This

conundrum already appears in theorizing about the New World, the United States in particular, since it is obvious in a work such as Du Bois's *Black Reconstruction* that the author has to do some thinking to deal with the plight of the nonindustrialized Black worker in Marxist terms.⁵ But the difficulty might appear to be even more pronounced for an African theorist dealing with the topic of newly emerging African nations, since these nations were, at the time of independence, even less industrialized than the Black portion of their New World counterparts, and since in any case, there is very little in standard Marxism that might be deemed to be of relevance.

Various African theorists have chosen various paths to try to come to grips with the problem of the application of Marxism to African nations. Nkrumah, at least for a while, chose a path similar to that of some of the Russian theorists of the turn of the century in that he chose to emphasize the communitarian aspects of preexisting (that is precolonial) African societies.⁶ Serequeberhan, a contemporary writer, has concocted an amalgam of Marxist and other sorts of theorizing.⁷ (However, Serequeberhan criticisms of Nkrumah are precisely aimed at Nkrumah's Marxism.) But Cabral stands alone among Black Marxist thinkers to whose work we have ready access in simultaneously participating in revolutionary movements, theorizing about them, and trying to retain at least some minimal adherence to standard Marxist theory. In *Return to the Source*, Cabral uses the notion of reclamation of history as a springboard for theorizing about African Marxism.

II

If Marx posited a number of stages through which societies must pass for the momentum required by a revolution to develop and build, African nations in the twentieth century have the difficulty that, almost without exception, they have not passed through those stages. If we may think of the stages, loosely, as encompassing ancient, feudal, bourgeois-capitalist, and late-capitalist/revolutionary, then most African societies of the precolonial type are still in the "ancient" mode, and even the more Westernized sections of the major cities of some African nations are, in terms of Marxist theory, perhaps early bourgeois. Cabral realized that one cannot rush a nation through the stages, and that to ignore the important theorizing by Marx and Engels that alludes to the stages is to take issue with crucial, or even necessary, components of Marxist theory.

It was Cabral's peculiar gift that he chose, especially in the essay in *Return to the Source* entitled, "National Liberation and Culture," to promulgate the notion of a people's reclaiming their history as the key to the use of Marxism in African nations. In other words, the claim that Cabral is making is that the colonizers forced certain types of development (usually truncated at that) on the colonized, and in so doing, robbed them of the natural course of their history. One cannot say what that history would have been, but what one can confidently say is that it would have been different had not the colonizers intervened. As Cabral argues,

Whatever may be the ideological or idealistic characteristics of cultural expression, culture is an essential element of the history of a people. Culture is, perhaps, the product of this history just as the flower is the product of a plant. Like history, or because it is history, culture has as its material base, the level of the productive forces and the mode of production . . . Thus it is understood that imperialist domination, [denies] the historical development of the dominated people. . . .⁸

Cabral has fastened on the notion of culture, because he understands that culture defines a people and its historical development. More importantly, for the revolutionary, culture, as a source to which one may return, envelops the freedom fighter in the fluid that he will need to sustain him in his trials. But from the theoretical standpoint, still another salient line of argument emerges—if the concept is the recapture of history, then the concept is also the recapturing of stages. With this insight, Cabral has at once done something that comparatively few working in the Black Marxist tradition have been able to do—he has defined Black movements in terms of theoretical elements that are classically Marxist and that do not entail a large deviation from Marxism simpliciter.

Movements within the culture are important for the African revolutionary because they help him or her defeat the colonial mentality that is foisted upon the indigenous population as part of the scheme of the oppressor. This would seem in some sense to be obvious, but it appears to be important to Cabral to articulate this point because so many of the revolutionary class will, inevitably, have come from the towns and the cities that have been most exposed to European culture. If they have been so exposed, then it is doubly important to them to try to get a handle on whatever they can glean from the local culture; for in obtaining a grasp of it, they recapture that which can become a “history.” This is why, in the same section of *Return* that we have already cited, Cabral writes: “In our opinion, the foundation for national liberation rests in the inalienable right of every people to have their own history, whatever formulations may be adopted at the level of international law.”⁹ Having one’s own history is, as we have said, a concept that throws the culture out of the path of the oppressor; for if there is one thing that the oppressor accomplishes (as Marx notes in his work), it is the turning of the history of the indigenous people to some other kind of historical path.

III

It might prove instructive to contrast briefly the work of Cabral with that of some other Black Marxist theorists. Cabral’s work is probably most easily contrasted with that of C.L.R. James. Both thinkers have the virtue of an excellent command of standard Marxist thought, and both seem compelled to at least try minimally to accomplish a line of theorizing within the framework of that thought. Yet James, although he has been widely cited as a “Hegelian” Marxist, in some ways is not as attentive to notions of history as Cabral himself, or at least in the same kind of way.¹⁰

James is largely concerned in his writings about the African diaspora population—that is, the Black population of the New World. Nevertheless, given the peculiar history of the New World Black population, particularly the American population, it is intriguing to see what types of categorizations James employs to try to come to grips with the recurring problem of conceptualization within the frame of Marxist theory. James sees the American population, in particular, as, obviously, not a “classical” proletariat, at least until WWII. Being a thoroughgoing Marxist himself, James realizes—and acknowledges in his written work—that the proletariat has a formative role to play in the revolution. What, then, can be the role of the New World Black population? How can a revolutionary role for this group be theorized, given its non-proletarian status?

In a piece entitled, “The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the United States,” which is especially concerned with the 1930s and 1940s, James notes that the tenor and spirit of the Black American population is “anti-bourgeois,” and that this in itself constitutes a basis for rebellion

within it.¹¹ In a well-known argument, he cites that those who have had contact with Black Americans and who have seen them in their neighborhoods and in their own culture, know that the very spirit of revolution lives within the Black culture. In this piece and in other pieces, James demonstrates awareness of the key role to be played by the proletariat in the Marxist account of the revolution, but he also sees that some groups (including some ethnic groups) may have more revolutionary potential than would accrue to merely working-class status alone, and in that case, it may not be that individual members of that group, are or are not, classical proletariat.

Here James accomplishes the very difficult. While acknowledging key points of Marxist theory, he manages to carve out a place for the population of African derivation without actually undercutting the classical theory. Cabral performs, in some sense, the same sort of task for the newly emerging African nations. Looking at work done by Marx and Engels, Cabral is able to pinpoint areas of strength that can be used within the African cultures, while still not denying the force of key Marxist concepts such as the concept of the stages.

It might not be so important to try to acknowledge how Black thinkers stay within the framework of Marx’s theory were it not for the fact that these same thinkers are being labeled “Marxist.” Just as within the European tradition we do not label a thinker Marxist for no reason, so these thinkers also, if they are to be called Marxist, must show their intersection with Marxist theory.

IV

A brief comparison of the use of some specialized terms in the work of W.E.B. Du Bois with the use of Marxist concepts in Cabral will reveal again the extent to which Cabral has mastered the theory in question.

For a variety of reasons, many of which have to do with events that occurred later in his life, Du Bois is also frequently labeled a Marxist. But interestingly *Black Reconstruction*, the work that is most often cited in this regard, employs the relevant theoretical concepts in ways that might be regarded as more metaphorical than straightforward. A footnote to one of the long chapters on the Reconstruction in South Carolina indicates that the chapter was originally titled, “The Dictatorship of the Proletariat in South Carolina,” and the retained title was, “The Black Proletariat in South Carolina.”¹² The intriguing aspect of the conceptualization here is that the workers referred to, newly emancipated slaves, do not constitute a proletariat, and their emergence to power certainly cannot constitute a “dictatorship of the proletariat,” since it did not arrive by revolution. That Du Bois himself sensed some slippage is evident not only from the footnoted entry of the title, but also from some of the work in his first chapter, “The Black Worker,” where he does extensive comparison between working conditions for both slaves and newly emancipated Blacks in comparison to the more classically cited British, German and French workers of the nineteenth-century industrialized economies.

None of the foregoing means, of course, that we are not entitled to think of Du Bois as a Marxist; rather, the contrast highlights (as it also does in the case of James, to some extent) the strength of Cabral’s theorizing. Cabral has shown himself to be completely comfortable with the use of the classical theorizing of the stages and of historical progression.

V

I have endeavored to come to grips with the extent to which Cabral, a revolutionary in the fullest sense of the word, merits the appellation Black or African Marxist. My concern has been to try to articulate the lengths to which Cabral goes to stay

within the framework of the theory as espoused by Marx and Engels, without failing to do justice to his overall concept that he was, of course, dealing with non-European conditions.

If Marxism is a paradigmatically Eurocentric theory, then it will require a great awareness on the part of Black theoreticians to use portions of the theoretical structure for Black purposes, because it seems clear from the outset that there will be little, if any, fit of categories. The danger—as we have seen—is that some theorists, aware of the liberatory potential of the theory, but disinclined either to tinker with its conceptualizations or to abandon it completely, will use it only metaphorically or symbolically, without regard for what Marx and Engels would have regarded as its special epistemic status.

That this can be done is beyond question, but it weakens the impact of the theory, and concomitantly lessens the strength of the work of Black/African thinkers, since it is also clear (as can be seen, for example, in the Russian tradition) that the theory can be altered to take into account special sets of circumstances and the given trajectory of a people.

Cabral, like James, is sensitive to the task before him, and does not shrink from it. Like James, he understands that it does not make sense to use Marxism without trying to grapple with the specifics of a situation, in this case the situation of an African colony.¹³ Employing Marx's notion of the progression of historical stages, he categorizes Guinea Bissau as deprived of its history and its possible progression. He argues that it cannot reclaim its path without a violent rupture from the colonizer, and he urges other radicals to return to the cultural source of the people to reacquaint themselves with the culture itself, and to help to achieve the task of liberation.

In so doing, Cabral shows himself to be a theorist who has fully mastered Marxist thinking. And in so doing, he paves the way for the future of the soon-to-be released Guinea Bissau.

Endnotes

1. An exception is Tsenay Serequeberhan's, *The Hermeneutics of African Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994).
2. Cabral was affiliated with the P.A.I.G.C., which led the breakaway movement of what was then known as Portuguese Guinea from Portugal, and resulted in the formation of the state of Guinea Bissau.
3. Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983).
4. Karl Marx, "The British Rule in India," *Karl Marx and Frederick Engels: Selected Works*, Vol. I (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1962), 345-351.
5. See particularly the first chapter of W.E.B Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Macmillan, 1993).
6. For an interesting critique of his work, see Serequeberhan, op. cit.
7. See fn. 1.
8. Cabral, in op. cit., 42-43.
9. Cabral, in op. cit., 43.
10. See the introduction to *The C.L.R. James Reader*, Anna Grimshaw, ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1992).
11. C.L.R. James, "The Revolutionary Answer to the Negro Problem in the USA," Grimshaw, ed., 188-189.
12. W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction* (New York: Macmillan, 1994).
13. Throughout *Return to the Source*, Cabral spends a great deal of time on the particularities of the relationship with Portugal, a topic into which I have not entered here.

BOOK REVIEW

The Quest for Community and Identity: Critical Essays In Africana Philosophy

Robert Birt (New York and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. vi + 291).

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In *The Quest for Community and Identity*, Robert Birt has created an anthology that goes beyond merely documenting and deconstructing elements of the terms community and identity for Africana peoples. It is a practice in what Birt calls "liberatory discourse" (1). Birt names Alain Locke, Paulette Nardal, W.E.B. Du Bois, and Anna Julia Cooper as the intellectual progenitors of this liberatory discourse that focuses on Black experiences and reflection, and is "imbued with an abiding social concern for the dignity and happiness of Black (and other oppressed) peoples" (1). Inspired by their liberatory predecessors, the writers in the anthology also engage in an emancipatory production of knowledge based on experiences and theories by and about Black people. Implicit in this intellectual practice is participation in a movement for liberation engendered in, but not limited to, "Black" oppression. Special attention is paid to engaging meaning, self-development, and liberation from two crucial aspects of personhood, the individual and the community. Although, as Birt points out, not all of the authors in the anthology are African American, the volume is unapologetically steeped in the Africana philosophic tradition in the way in which the editor frames personhood within the confines of both individual and communal realities, as well as the consistent conversations by essayists in the volume with Africana realities, philosophers, and their perspectives.

There are four themes in the volume: (1) exploring the perplexities of identity; (2) sociality and situated freedom; (3) historical crisis of identity and community; and (4) liberalism, postmodernism, and the quest for community. In the first thematic grouping of essays, understanding and developing identity is seen as the key to freedom. In keeping with post-Negritude and post-Afrocentricity critical attitudes, this section speaks of identity from the perspective of rejection of "essentialist identities." Given this rejection of essentialized racial identities, important questions arise: Are racial identities valid? Is race nothing but a conceptual legerdemain? Can non-essentialist racialized identities be liberated? And, can non-essentialized racialized identities gain power to help liberate others?

The second thematic group explores the importance of not only developing a communal identity in an Africana context, but also the tensions that arise when one simultaneously insists on developing, expressing, and asserting individuality. Both community and individuality are valued as avenues for gaining freedom from oppression. Given this context, the essayists throw into relief the complexities of how both communal and individual identities are deeply affected by oppression. In particular, they show how the constitutive elements of both of these aspects of personhood are, in part, founded on a reaction to a world that misnames and misinterprets them. Thus, the tension that may exist with

the need to assert individuality in the face of communal relations, is also, in part, caused by oppression. From this, one can infer the presence of an existential crisis. Indeed, another question arises: What is one to do in the face of a re-inscriptive source of power?

On the foundations laid in previous sections that give rise to an awareness of an existential crisis, stand related questions asked and answered from a differing approach. Authors in the third section of the anthology emphasize historical, sociological, and literary approaches to theorizing identity and community in an Africana context. The relationship between identity and community is seen as necessary. According to Birt, “the human quest for identity is ultimately inseparable from the quest for community” (6). A clear continuum of linkages of terms appears in the construction of this section. That is, since the development of identity is the key to freedom, and since both communal association and individuality are the keys to understanding and developing identity for Africana peoples, the frame of the anthology deduces a link between communal and individual expressions of identity as exercises in freedom.

Finally, in the fourth and last segment of the anthology, two cultural, intellectual, and, in some ways, political movements are examined for their relevance to the search for community: liberalism and postmodernism. At stake is the discovery of an intellectual and social framework from which to ground and launch a social justice platform and a campaign for a communal existence. Evident is the trope of a continued rejection of essentialist claims. That is, communities are seen neither as static nor absolute. Nevertheless, another series of questions arise: Is liberalism still useful for obtaining social justice in the twentieth century? What are we to do with communal fragmentation in this postmodern world? And, given this fragmentation, can we succeed in realizing self-actualization and liberation?

On the Essays

The contributors of this volume rise to the occasion to address not only the complex questions provoked by Birt’s framing, but also to participate in a praxis that is at the same time philosophic and liberating. Arnold Farr’s response to the question of the validity of racial identities is a resounding critique on the unsound ways in which they are constructed and used. He speaks of racial identities, especially Black and White identities, as essentialist stations, which are oppressive, destructive, and dehumanizing. Walter Benjamin’s concept of ruins is offered as an antidote for restoring humanity and conceptualizing an identity that can be human. Freedom comes from an exercise in one’s humanity made possible by re-inscribing history. Kevin Cokely echoes Farr in that he also believes that racial identities, particularly Blackness, are often operating from an essentialist framework “fraught with problems” (30). Among these problems is a stifling of “communication and diversity of ideas” (38). He argues in favor of an African cultural/ethnic identity, which can better facilitate communal connections. In negating essentialist conceptions of Blackness, a complex, diverse, and liberated self emerges that is capable of addressing difficult communal issues with integrity.

In the essay, “Postmodernism, Narrative and the Quest for Black Identity,” Cleavis Headley engages postmodernism as a useful theoretical tool for repairing problematic constructions, functions, and practices of identity. Headley objects to Jon Michael Spencer, Joyce A. Joyce, and Nancy Hartsock’s critiques of postmodernism and allies himself with bell hooks, who argues that postmodernism is relevant to theorizing Black identities. In particular, Headley claims that “instead of seeking to erase the voice of the other, or the voice of those long

treated as being ‘voiceless,’ postmodernism can be reasonably construed as supportive of giving voice to the other and to those long denied the opportunity to speak for themselves” (50). Finally, Headley engages Derrida, Foucault, and Macintyre on his way to denying the need to pathologize Black identities. This line of discussion proves to create an interesting contrast and conversation with Farr and Cokely’s essays, which do speak to the issue of pathology. Patrick Goodin is the last author in the section to address the problematic of identity. In the essay, “Du Bois and Appiah: The Politics of Race and Racial identity,” Goodin examines Appiah’s conceptual reading of race. He shows how Appiah and Du Bois agree on understanding race as a socio-historical phenomenon. Goodin concludes “a community formed on the basis of a shared legacy of suffering seems at odds with one formed on the basis of construing community” (82).

In the second section entitled, “In the Quest of Community: Sociality and Situated Freedom,” Robert E. Birt and Lewis R. Gordon offer existentialist and phenomenological (respectively) approaches to community. First, Birt argues that popular conceptions of freedom must be rethought to include sociality, since communal existence is a conduit for freedom, because to be human is to be free, and humanity is best expressed in community. Second, Gordon addresses the tension between a communal association and existence provided by racial categorization and individual identities, which carry the problematic of difference that is often co-opted or conflated in a racist world. Gordon cautions that there are no easy answers. Phenomenology, particularly its epistemological and semiotical dimensions, is offered as an entry to examining the tension. Of interest is the conversation between both Birt and Gordon’s perspectives. Whereas Birt emphatically propounds sociality as necessarily communal, Gordon insists on individual dimensions to existence, which once nurtured encourage sociality.

Part three of the anthology opens with Joy James’s preoccupation with “community and ancestors while confronting dehumanizing cultural representations and practices” (127). Morrison is read as not only preoccupied with the questions of demythologizing Black (ethnic) subjects in European American literature, but most importantly with theorizing and participating in community building as a resolution to the problematic of oppression in America. An interesting dialogue is created between James’s essay entitled, “Visions of Transcendent Community in the Works of Morrison,” and Tracy Denean Sharpley-Whiting’s, “Paulette Nardal, Race Consciousness, and Antillean Letters,” since the works of Morrison and Nardal are seen as pursuant of liberation through a close examination of Africana peoples as symbolic entities who are in themselves capable of reconstituting their symbolic, and thus, political function. Agency is exercised through rewriting oneself. The process of rewriting is different for both authors, however. Whereas Morrison insists on deconstructing symbols, Nardal promotes co-opting the existing symbols of Black people in France and the French Antilles. Of interest is Nardal’s call for the recognition of the role of women in this liberation struggle, as well as her methodology of embracing Blackness in an anti-Black French world, a spark that eventually gave rise to Negritude. A historicist trope continues in the essay, “The Revival of Black Nationalism and the Crisis of Liberal Universalism,” where Rod Bush delineates the parameters of Black nationalist discourse and practice (including its global dimensions). Bush provides a provocative discussion of the misrepresentation of Black nationalist movements as fascist with an equally fascinating reading of liberal universalism as a destructive force against the building of Black communities. Paget Henry joins the conversation in pointing to the presence

of a system that maintains domination through rupturing frameworks of identification. He contends that African American communities are disrupted through commodification and technocratic rationalization (generated by capitalism), which introduce not only competition, but also a tendency to exaggerate one's productive capacities. According to Henry, racism in America creates processes of dehumanization for African Americans. Added to this dehumanization are marked differences, which create rifts and reduce possibilities for communal responses to dominant systems of oppression.

The quest for community is continued in the fourth and final segment of the anthology, where Eddy Souffrant in, "Black Philosophy as a Challenge to Liberalism," expands upon an earlier problematic of liberalism first alluded to in Rod Bush's essay. Specifically, Souffrant argues that liberalism and its emphasis on the individual is insufficient for democratic praxis. Souffrant offers Black philosophy's advocacy of communal existence in its many forms as a necessary element to freedom and democracy. Freedom and justice are the impetus of George Carew's essay, "Democracy, Transitional Justice and Postcolonial African Communities," which is in dialogue with Souffrant, Goodin, and Cokely's essays. Carew declares that racial and ethnic identities are constructions that restrict not only one's freedom, but also prevent justice. In so doing, Carew echoes Goodin and Cokely who also address the problematic of race as a term and an identity categorization. However, Carew calls for liberation from oppression through embracing what he calls, "moral ethnicity," a system of preferences, which corrects past, current, and common injustice. Whereas Souffrant speaks of freedom as a practice, Carew defines freedom as a moral necessity that must be ceded preferentially to those to whom it has been denied. A search for freedom through understanding the characterization and function of community is an impetus in Leonard Harris' essay, "Community: What Type of Entity and What Type of Moral Commitment?" In this essay, Harris also suggests that understanding moral commitments is the key to resolving problems with the construction of identity as a "raciated ethnicity" and to gaining ground in the fight for liberation. Similarly, in the essay, "Theorizing Black Community," Richard Jones asks, "What is community?" (257). In search of the answer to this and other related questions, Jones engages the work of Martin Luther King, Jr., Cornel West, and Lucius Outlaw. He concludes that liberalism, communitarianism, and socialism, whose strains are found not only in Western social and political philosophy, but also in African American thought, do not offer workable means of constructing and understanding community. This results in a "malaise," which hampers activism. Following Jones' argument, then, liberation comes from avoiding the pitfalls of liberalism, communitarianism and socialism, some of which are found in King, West, and Outlaw. African American philosophy, he insists, is still important in finding a theoretical solution to the problem of liberation, community, and identity.

Contributions to Africana Social Philosophy

Robert Birt accurately assesses *The Quest for Community and Identity* when he says, "We invent no new themes" (10). All of the aforementioned tropes (freedom, liberation, identity, community, power) are representative of questions and conversations within Africana philosophy, in particular its social dimensions. Nineteenth and early-twentieth century Africana thought found in Frederick Douglas, Martin Delany, Marcus Garvey, David Walker, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ana Julia Cooper, Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and Paulette Nardal did not question the presence of "Black" communities and "Black" identities. The racial markings and identifications were clear. The question

was, "what are we to do to improve ourselves?" And most importantly, "how and where can we best exercise our humanity?"

There is no question that in the debates about emigration and assimilation a tension existed between "I and we" (i.e., the individual and the communal). However, this tension was always already superseded by the irrevocable reality of racial marking, which clearly restricted freedom. Much of this racialized reality has remained. Africana thought, in the twenty-first century, continues to ask and answer similar questions, but with a greater critical eye. We no longer simply accept racialized ethnic identities either communally or individually crafted and imposed without question. Thus, although there are no new themes, this anthology clearly represents a new critical attitude vis-à-vis racial, communal, and individual inscriptions. This is one among some of its great merits.

Second, *The Quest for Community and Identity* contains many useful dialogues between varying perspectives in Africana social philosophy, since not only does it explore the existential and phenomenological dimensions of Africana thought on the question of freedom, community, and identity but it also engages feminist, postmodernist, nationalist, liberal, Marxist, and humanist dimensions, as well. From these perspectives emerges a volume rich in dialogues and questions which give rise to its third major value. That is, this volume is useful for undergraduate and graduate instruction, because the essays are accessible to anyone who may or may not be familiar with Africana thought. In addition, the contributions can be used for understanding and clarifying varying approaches to some of the most basic questions in Africana thought.

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ANNOUNCEMENT

Once again, please accept our profound thanks for your contribution in making the Tenth Anniversary Celebration of the Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference such a resounding success. Our theme, "Rethinking the Intellectual Life," afforded us the opportunity to reflect on the rich intellectual heritage of the Black Experience in the Americas and reaffirmed the original intention of the conference: to be a partner with the wider community in cultivating the life of the mind. As a result, more than five hundred people attended one of our sessions.

We are expanding our outreach program through our reconstituted website, and we welcome your active participation by joining and forming discussion groups, by posting your work, and by suggesting ways of improving the site. Visit us on the Web at pbos.com.

I am very pleased to announce that the Africana Studies Department at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, New Jersey has generously offered to host our Eleventh Philosophy Born of Struggle Conference.

Theme: "A Black Aesthetic and the Politics of Recognition."

Date: October 22 & 23 2004.

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EDITORIAL NOTICE

We request that prospective authors include a short biographical summary along with their papers. Please have all biographical materials on a separate sheet from the actual submission. Second, we will have a regular working bibliography on Africana Philosophy in each issue. So therefore, we are requesting bibliographical contributions along with articles and book reviews. Bibliographies and articles should be sent to Dr. John H. McClendon III, jmcclelland@bates.edu (Associate Professor of African American Studies/American Cultural Studies). Book reviews should be sent to George Yancy, Georgeandsusany@aol.com (McAnulty Fellow in the Department of Philosophy at Duquesne University). To expedite the review and publishing process, submissions must be made by electronic mail before June 15 for consideration of inclusion by the next issue. Contributions can be sent via an email *file attachment* in the following formats (in order of preference): Microsoft Word (.doc) or Rich Text Format (.rtf). References should be in the form of endnotes rather than footnotes, and titles of books, journals and other sources italicized and not underlined.

Any other questions about formatting contact either of the editors of the *Newsletter on the Philosophy of the Black Experience*.

