HIGHER FLIGHT

Refocusing Black/Africana Studies for the 21st Century

JAMES B. STEWART

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Introduction

This is the sequel to *Flight: In Search of Vision,* published in 2004. It continues my efforts in *Flight* to offer "readers a vehicle through which they can understand the temporal development of key themes undergirding the Black Studies movement." Indeed, *Higher Flight* tracks the trajectory of Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) during the two decades since *Flight*'s publication. The term "Black/Africana Studies" and the acronym B/AS are employed to memorialize the original descriptor of the enterprise, i.e., "Black Studies," while simultaneously embracing "Africana" as a signifier of an expanded geographic focus encompassing both the African continent and its many diasporas. Several labels used to describe B/AS are currently in use, including "Black Studies," "Africana Studies," "Black Diaspora Studies," "African Diaspora Studies," "Pan-African Studies," and "Africology."

My belief in the importance of producing a sequel to *Flight* was rekindled by the publication of the Fall/Winter 2019 issue of the *International Journal of Africana Studies*, titled "James B. Stewart—Impact and Legacy," guest edited by my friend and colleague, Derrick P. Alridge. The contributors offered a variety of affirmative analyses of *Flight*'s content and offered useful suggestions for advancing the project. I can think of no greater honor for a living academic than to have a work systematically examined and affirmed in print by highly respected professional peers! This momentous honor fueled my desire to complete the *Higher Flight* project.

Ongoing debates about how to conceptualize the relationship between B/AS and traditional academic disciplines continue to fuel intellectual innovation within B/AS. Is B/AS a discipline, a multi-discipline, a field of study, an interdisciplinary field of study, a type of area study, a multi-disciplinary field of study, or something else? I employ the term "transdiscipline," which I explained as follows in the first edition of *Introduction to African American Studies, Transdisciplinary Approaches and Implications*: "This term conveys the idea that fruitful interrogation of the experiences of people of African descent requires tools of analysis beyond those used within traditional academic disciplines."[1]

The challenges related to conceptualizing B/AS as a "stand-alone" enterprise can be illustrated by invoking parallels to the story of Osiris and Isis. Set, the evil brother of Osiris, killed him and subsequently cut the body into fourteen pieces. For present purposes Set represents the external interests committed to dismembering the totality of the experiences of people of African descent and distributing

individual components among traditional disciplines. Isis, the wife of Osiris, recovered thirteen of the body parts and, with magic, created an intact likeness of Osiris. Isis represents the efforts of B/AS scholar/activists to reclaim fragmented disciplinary explanations and reformulate them in a comprehensive manner that restores their wholeness and majesty. Like Isis, B/AS scholar/activists must deploy unconventional intellectual tools to reunify the fragmented representations of the experiences of people of African descent. Finally, the fact that Isis is the heroine of this story is particularly relevant, because Africana Women's Studies, at its best, has been a critical intervention that is greatly enriching theory and praxis within B/AS while also providing a much-needed corrective to chauvinistic tendencies. Black Diaspora Studies, Black Male Studies, and Black Queer Studies are other contemporary interventions that are enhancing the ever-expanding B/AS canon.

Subsequent to *Flight*'s publication, a complex mix of influences has guided my efforts to advance the understanding of transdisciplinary B/AS. Following my 2009 retirement from Penn State I served as President of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History from 2010 until 2012. In that role I had the opportunity to become acquainted with many young scholar/activists who are now taking on leadership roles in B/AS academic units. As Associate Editor of the *International Journal of Africana Studies* (National Council for Black Studies) and a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of *Journal of African American History* (Association for the Study of African American Life and History), I was exposed to many pathbreaking analyses being produced by the next generation of B/AS scholars. Many of my own evolving perspectives regarding B/AS have been incorporated into two editions of *Introduction to Africana Studies, Transdisciplinary Approaches and Implications* (2015, 2023). That project dates back to the publication of the late Talmadge Anderson's *Introduction to African American Studies* in 1993. When his health declined, I was asked to co-author an updated version and, following his 2011 demise, I assumed sole authorship of subsequent versions.

The flight motif that undergirds both *Flight* and *Higher Flight* is inspired primarily by the myth of the flying Africans who were allegedly "so possessed of spiritual power that they were able to fly back to the motherland." For me, flight is a metaphor for seeking a "higher order" way of knowing emanating from the collective experiences of people of African descent. Both *Flight* and *Higher Flight* attempt to demonstrate possible approaches to reaching such a higher "altitude" where our range of vision is expanded beyond that afforded through prevailing Eurocentric lenses. *Higher Flight* extends the geographic focus beyond Blacks in the US by including explorations of the many interconnections among people of African descent around the world.

The Akan Sankofa image on the cover of *Flight* (a bird whose head is faced in the opposite direction to its body) is meant to convey the message that the past must be consistently interrogated to provide guidance for seeking a brighter future. My intellectual flight search requires intensive scrutiny of the knowledge produced by relevant predecessors that I endeavor to adapt, extend, and refine in ways that advance the ongoing liberation struggle being waged by people of African descent around the world. To the extent that my flight achieves its goals,

the success will be due in no small measure to encouragement received from members of my intellectual/activist network. The image on the cover of *Higher Flight* is designed to underscore the flight metaphor.

The poem "Fallen Trees" serves as the takeoff origin for the current flight. It is an ode to the departed sisters and brothers who labored in the early years to establish solid foundations for contemporary B/AS. Unfortunately, most of the original cadre of pioneering scholar/activists have transitioned to the realm of the ancestors and there is too little documentation of their struggles and accomplishments. "Fallen Trees" was written shortly before the unexpected transition of my friends and colleagues, Perry Hall (University of North Carolina, April 2020) and James "Naziir" Conyers (University of Houston, January 2021). More recently, James Turner (Cornell, August 2022) and John Bracey (University of Massachusetts at Amherst, February 2023) have also departed this life. The deaths of these important figures constitute a significant loss of important collective B/AS institutional memories and underscore the need for a systematic effort to conduct and record interviews with surviving first-generation B/AS scholar activists.

Recommendations regarding possible initiatives for B/AS academic units are offered throughout *Higher Flight*. These suggestions are partially derived from insights gained from conducting more than twenty-five reviews of B/AS programs and departments. Although the growth in the number of B/AS graduate programs has been extremely impressive, there is little overlap in curriculum offerings across units. In the undergraduate arena, some programs and departments are thriving, others continue to confront efforts to reduce unit autonomy through consolidation with other units and/or outright reduction of resources. At some institutions administrators have mounted assaults on B/AS units as a means of allowing other academic units to encroach on research topics and instructional content originally based in B/AS. Faculty trained in traditional disciplines housed outside B/AS departments and programs are often in competition with B/AS faculty for visibility, status, and resources. In many cases academic administrators choose to support intrusions by traditional academic units because these units avoid the type of political advocacy that was an integral feature of the initial B/AS movement. Both graduate and undergraduate units are challenged by denial of opportunities to fill open positions resulting from the retirement of first- and second-generation faculty members.

Higher Flight's publication is especially timely because it constitutes a response to the growing wave of political efforts by right-wing operatives to exercise control over the manner that material focusing on the experiences of people of African descent is taught in public schools and colleges and universities. Florida is the epicenter of this scurrilous effort to restrict the examination of the record of exploitation and suppression experienced by people of African descent in the US. The state's Department of Education rejected the recently debuted African American Studies Advanced Placement course in January 2023 allegedly because its content violated existing Florida law. The course in question had been in development for over a decade by the College Board. The law in question is the Individual Freedom Act, commonly known as the Stop Wrongs to Our Kids and Employees Act or Stop Woke Act signed into law by Republican governor Ronald

D. (Ron) DeSantis in 2022. This law regulates the content of instruction and training in schools and workplaces. Essentially, it prohibits instruction on race relations or diversity that implies a person's status as either privileged or oppressed is necessarily determined by his or her race, color, national origin, or sex. The law also bans both schools and workplaces from "subjecting any student or employee to training or instruction that espouses, promotes, advances, inculcates, or compels such individuals to believe specified concepts constitutes discrimination based on race, color, sex, or national origin." Even more ominously, as of June 2023, five states have passed laws restricting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives in public colleges and universities as well as how race can be discussed in many courses. States where these laws have been enacted include Florida, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, and Texas. These laws pose a draconian challenge to the status and instructional thrust of B/AS academic units in public colleges and universities in these states. Similar measures are working their way through the legislative process in several other states.

Originally, I had hoped to replicate the format of *Flight* that includes a balanced mix of previously published and unpublished material to demonstrate the temporal refinement of my ideas and concepts. *Flight* was modeled after Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk* (1903) that included four of his previously published *Atlantic Monthly* articles. Unfortunately, the publishing landscape has changed dramatically since *Flight*'s publication. Many journal articles are now easily accessible on digital platforms, and book publishers are now reluctant to take on projects that include previously published material. The material in *Flight* is organized around six themes, whereas in *Higher Flight* the material is organized into three sections: "Transdisciplinary Theoretical and Methodological Trajectories"; "In Search of Progressive Cultural Production"; and "Advancing the Global Black Liberation Struggle." This consolidation foregrounds the ways in which B/AS can more directly confront the mounting political challenges posed by the sharp rightward shift in national, state, and local venues. Over time the social responsibility mandate of B/AS has become all too marginalized as faculty across the US seek the holy grail of tenure and academic recognition. However, at this historical juncture we no longer have the luxury of ivory tower navel gazing that does little more than contribute to dysfunctional intellectual obesity. It is my hope that this volume will play some small role in influencing progressive B/AS scholar/activists and allies to recommit themselves to joining the battle to confront the revanchist efforts to reverse the hard-won gains and expand the reach of what Michelle Alexander has described as the "new Jim Crow."

I am deeply indebted to VP Franklin (*Journal of African American History*) and Bertis D. English (*International Journal of Africana Studies*) for their incisive feedback and encouragement as I struggled to produce *Higher Flight*. I hope readers will gain inspiration from my continuing "flight in search of vision" and undertake their own complementary venture!

James B. Stewart
August 2023

Forgotten Trees?

Another tree has fallen
But no one was around
Without a pair of ears to hear
Did the tumble make a sound?

But does it really matter?
Many others died long ago
Rotting roots, trunks, and branches
Fading monuments we ignore

Still the leaves you birthed each Spring
Signaled hope for a better life
And abundant Summer foliage
Was protection for our sight

And we will miss the air you cleansed
Of deadly toxins we abhorred
It brought us vital energy
For the struggle to go forth

Perhaps the seeds you spread
Will someday sprout anew
And the record of your deeds
Will bloom again for all to view

Part I

Transdisciplinary Theoretical and Methodological Trajectories

Pursuit of Knowledge?

The decline of reason
Spreads growing layers of dust
On obscure unread volumes
In darkened vaults
Still holding entombed wisdom
Between molting covers
Long forgotten and
Now supplanted
By backlit smartphone screens
Does anyone remain
To honor and repay
Past efforts to explore
The contours of freedom
And the meaning of life?

1

PROLOGUE

Many academic disciplines seek and attain prestige by demonstrating a long historical provenance. This is especially true for the liberal arts and the social sciences, but is also prevalent in other arenas, including law and medicine. From this perspective, the modern Black Studies Movement was (and still is) disparaged by some critics because it was seen merely as the product of 1960s student demonstrations, as opposed to reflecting considered deliberation by some groups of wizened scholars carefully scrutinizing historical precedents. Such critics contrast the presumed corrupted origins of Black Studies to the supposedly pristine disciplinary linkages of Eurocentric scholarship to knowledge production in selected ancient empires, especially Greece and Rome.

Cheikh Anta Diop's 1954 thesis, *Nations Nègres et Culture*,[1] argued that ancient Egyptian civilization had its origins in Black African societies. Diop's thesis was soundly challenged and Egyptian authorities refused to allow him to conduct genetic tests on mummies to test his hypothesis. The ferocity of the attack on Diop was fueled by the fear that his thesis, if documented, would refute the master narrative that asserts Black Africa has had minimal impact on world advancement. The fallback position for Eurocentrists is, even if ancient Egypt could be considered to be a Black African civilization or if it was heavily influenced by Black African societies, it produced little that was original, rather it borrowed most of its knowledge from ancient Greece.

Various scholar/activists have mounted vigorous challenges to this master narrative. Yosef Ben-Jochannan's, *Africa: Mother of Western Civilization* (1971) is a classic example of this scholarship.[2] However, these interventions have been largely rejected by Eurocentrists who have questioned both the quality of evidence and authors' academic credentials. Even Martin Bernal's *Black Athena* (1987, 1991, 2006) drew the ire of Eurocentric traditionalists.[3] Bernal foregrounded the testimonials of Greek scholars themselves who clearly indicated that the Greeks had obtained much of their knowledge from the Egyptians, as opposed to the contrary.

Although the debate still rages regarding whether ancient Egypt should be understood to be a Black African civilization, new evidence clearly suggests that the ancient Egyptians garnered much of their knowledge from an earlier Black African civilization. In the book, *Black Genesis*: *The Prehistoric Origins of Ancient Egypt* (2011), Robert Bauval and Thomas Brophy assert, "Even though there is still much controversy surrounding the origins of ancient Egyptian civilizations,

we can now say with much evidence-based conviction that its origins have their genesis with a Black African people who inhabited the Sahara thousands of years before the rise of pharaonic civilization." The authors contend, "Much work remains to be done, but the evidence is convincing that the pharaohs were the descendants of these Black prehistoric people from the Egyptian Sahara, and that the pharaohs knew about these people even in early dynastic times." The authors have drawn these pathbreaking conclusions through research using the tools of Archaeoastronomy, which studies "the astronomies, astrologies, and cosmologies, as well as the alignments of monuments and buildings of ancient cultures."[4]

This research clearly amplifies the messages embedded in the impressive body of knowledge produced by Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) scholar/activists describing the richness of ancient Egyptian culture (Kemet). Molefi Asante and Maulana Karenga have been in the forefront in excavating Kemetic spiritual, theoretical, and investigative knowledge, and practices, and adapting and incorporating them into contemporary B/AS theory and praxis.

The poem "Pursuit of Knowledge?" poses the question of whether emerging B/AS scholars are paying enough attention to early scholarship that provided a foundation for the modern Black Studies movement. The placement of Du Bois's *The Negro* as the first selection in this section provides warranted visibility for this little known monograph that is an important precedent for combatting more recent Eurocentric efforts to, in Du Bois's words, "write universal history and leave out Africa."

The intellectual foundations of B/AS are obviously not limited to the contributions of ancient African civilizations. Much of my work has focused on understanding the extent to which the modern Black Studies Movement was directly informed by the work of early 20th-century African American scholar/activists. "Black/Africana Studies, Then and Now …" examines what I describe as a "Proto-Africana Studies Movement" (PASM) that commenced circa 1915. This is an abridged version of that essay written as part of the centennial anniversary of the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (2015). I argue, "In many respects, the founders of contemporary Black/Africana Studies sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, resurrected the substance of this earlier project." I further maintain that "Careful interrogation of the PASM can provide useful guidance for directing contemporary Black/Africana Studies practitioners through the maze of challenges that have emerged in the early 21st century" and that "The PASM provides vindication for B/AS scholar/activists to be unapologetic about exploring unconventional approaches to inquiry that challenge conventional Eurocentric modalities." I conclude that "One of the most important lessons that can be garnered from studying the past is that B/AS cannot be an enterprise that is housed solely in academe if it is to be true to its historical legacy, nor can it be simply a domestic enterprise."

I have been bemused by the strong attraction that French post-structuralist thought has for some B/AS scholars. The ideas of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault, in particular, seem to have spread like wildfire in some circles, with limited consideration of the implications of this particular strand of post-structuralist

thought for the original and ongoing B/AS project. The transdisciplinary nature of B/AS mandates serious investigation of the potential benefits of all emerging approaches to enrich the overall project. However, such explorations should not overlook weaknesses of such interventions simply because they are Eurocentric products. In "Art, Politics, Cultural Studies …" I use Nell Painter's intriguing 2007 monograph, *Creating Black Americans: African-American History and Its Meanings, 1619 to the Present*, as a point of departure to undertake such a serious interrogation of the usefulness of the Derrida/Foucault variant of post-structuralist thought. I leverage critiques advanced by Boris Groys (formerly professor of Aesthetics, Art History, and Media Theory at the Karlsruhe University of Arts and Design/Center for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany) and Jacques Rancière (former Chair of Aesthetics and Politics at the University of Paris VIII) to identify alternative variants of post-structuralist philosophy that are, in contrast to the Derrida and Foucault formulations, compatible with the original B/AS project. I, in fact, endorse strategic post-structuralism to the extent that it reflects, in Groys's terminology, "a radical aesthetic linked directly to political advocacy to confront contemporary manifestations of racial and other forms of oppression."

Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity in "Black/Africana Studies, Then and Now," to comment on several other areas of inquiry especially significant for the ongoing development of B/AS, particularly Black Male Studies, Black Queer Studies, and Critical Legal Studies. Consequently, I offer the following brief commentaries to conclude my exploration of the trajectory of theory development within B/AS.

Black Male Studies

Tommy Curry is arguably the leading figure in the development of Black Male Studies and the editor of the Black Male Studies book series published by Temple University Press. Curry states that "Black male studies is an interdisciplinary field dedicated to exploring the various developmental trajectories and the vulnerabilities (racial, sexual, economic) of Black men and boys in the United States and abroad." His book *The Man-Not: Race, Class, Genre, and Dilemmas of Black Manhood* (2017) is arguably the foundational work that has set the contours for this area of research. Curry contends, Black Male Studies emanates from the premise that "[r]acism against Black men often results in their emasculation, criminalization, and death." Consistent with African American Studies' emphasis on agency, Curry argues that Black men, in confronting these deadly forces, "have not only survived but developed rich analyses of this oppression under the capitalist ethno-patriarchal regime we call white supremacy."[5]

B/AS scholar/activists would be well served to sign on to the agenda suggested by Anderson Franklin, i.e., to "show how conscious and unconscious attitudes formed through years of invisibility can be reversed and channeled into personal fulfillment for black men as fathers, friends, workers, and partners to our women."

Black Queer Studies

The formalization of Black Queer Studies as a distinct sub-discipline has created a new opportunity to further refine aspects of B/AS. Several theoretical and liberatory insights from this area of inquiry have the potential for enriching and bringing new vitality to the transdisciplinarity of African American Studies. The 2005 volume *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* is illustrative of useful interventions emerging from the exploration of the experiences of LGBTQIA+ members of the Black community, including lesbians, gay men, bisexuals, transgender persons, queer or questioning individuals, persons identifying as intersex or asexual, and persons of additional gender identities and sexual orientations that letters and words cannot yet fully describe.

Unlike Africana Womanist Studies, Black Queer Studies has achieved only limited engagement with the broader network of B/AS scholar/activists. A panel session focusing on Black Queer Studies held at the 2022 NCBS annual conference provided a useful starting point for more dialogue, one that hopefully can motivate additional exploration. Much more work needs to be done, however, to ensure that Black Queer Studies becomes, as Rinaldo Walcott envisions, a *proper* "subject of the Black Studies project."

Critical Legal Studies

A. Leon Higginbotham's pathbreaking 1978 treatise, *In the Matter of Color: Race and the American Legal Process—The Colonial Period*, is arguably the genesis of what can be described as Critical Legal Studies and Litigation, or CLSL. Higginbotham demonstrates "how the entire legal apparatus was used by those with the power to do so to establish a solid legal tradition for the absolute enslavement of blacks." In concluding his masterful exposition, he asserts "[T]here is a nexus between the brutal centuries of colonial slavery and the racial polarization and anxieties of today. The poisonous legacy of legalized oppression based upon the matter of color can never be purged from our society if we act as if slave laws had never existed." Higginbotham's declaration provides a poignant justification for the incorporation of CLSL within the broad umbrella of transdisciplinary B/AS and for greater collaboration between specialists and legal scholars.[6]

In many respects, Higginbotham's analysis is a precursor to contemporary Critical Race Theory (CRT). CRT is an academic and legal framework that examines the extent to which systemic racism is embedded in laws, policies, and institutions that uphold and reproduce racial inequalities; one goal of CRT is "to develop a jurisprudence that accounts for the role of racism in American law and that works toward the elimination of racism as part of a larger goal of eliminating all forms of subordination."

The solid tradition of legal activism closely aligned with the goals of African American Studies must be reenergized to confront contemporary challenges. The legal victories won by the NAACP Legal and Educational Defense Fund (LDF)

are well known, including its coordinated assault against officially enforced public school segregation that culminated in the landmark 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*. The LDF has also waged successful legal campaigns and catalyzed the passage of laws related to higher education access, voting rights, nondiscrimination in housing and employment, and abolishment of the death penalty. B/AS scholar/activists should explore new opportunities to collaborate with progressive legal scholars and organizations to develop viable strategies to combat legally based domestic and international racial oppression.

2

Du Bois's *The Negro* and Contemporary Black/Africana Studies

This is a revised version of an essay originally penned in 2015 to commemorate the centennial anniversary of the publication of W.E.B. Du Bois's pioneering monograph, *The Negro* published in 1915.[1] Wyatt Burghardt Turner and Joyce Moore Turner recount that the origin of the book was a 1912 invitation from Du Bois's former Harvard classmate, William Brewster. Brewster invited Du Bois to produce a volume for a Home University Library of Modern Knowledge series. Du Bois had considered a similar project in 1909 but had been unable to secure the necessary funding. The requested monograph was expected to provide a factual account of the history of people of African descent.[2] The extent to which *The Negro* constitutes an important proto-Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) precedent is underappreciated. Here, I interrogate previous assessments to excavate aspects of *The Negro* that are especially relevant for contemporary B/AS scholarly inquiry and activism.

Herbert Aptheker has documented how *The Negro* was celebrated as a major scholarly achievement in several favorable reviews shortly after its publication.[3] Subsequently, the book has been repeatedly praised and trumpeted as a monumental triumph. William Leo Hansberry and Charles H. Wesley are among the many luminaries who expressed great admiration for the volume.[4] The periodic reprinting of the text is perhaps the most telling testimonial to its abiding significance as a scholarly beacon that continues to shed new light on the Africana experience. Various reprints have included substantial and insightful introductions that interpret the significance of *The Negro*. Collectively, however, insufficient attention has been directed toward recognizing how the content of *The Negro* correlates with issues that are central to contemporary (B/AS). Although some discourses address the book's relationship to B/AS peripherally, this topic merits a more detailed treatment. Such an exploration, I contend, has the potential to reveal strong connections between the ideology, methodology, and style of presentation presented in *The Negro* and similar constructs associated with contemporary B/AS scholarship.

Aptheker presents a compelling case that *The Negro* holds a special place within the intellectual pantheon (family tree) of B/AS, declaring, "The book is a pioneering effort at depicting, within one modest volume, the entire scope of Africa's past" [insisting that] "It places also, within this context, the position of African-derived

peoples in the United States, Latin America, and the West Indies and does not fail to show the relationship between the exploitation of Africa and the rise of capitalism and imperialism in Europe and the United States."[5] George Shepperson offers a similar assessment, declaring: "The originality of W.E.B. Du Bois in *The Negro* was that he tried to pull together into one succinct but comprehensive whole the different elements of African history, home and abroad, as they were known by the first decade of the twentieth century."[6]

One important distinguishing characteristic of historical research within B/AS is the emphasis on efforts by people of African descent to shape their own destiny. This perspective is clearly foregrounded in *The Negro* as documented by John Thornton, who stated: "What counted was showing that African history had movement and that Africans were historical actors and were not simply stolid recipients of foreign techniques and ideas."[7] Similarly, Aptheker asserts, "basic to the book was its stance which presented Africans and their descendants, wherever they might be, as human beings and so presented *their history*; i.e. presented them in Africa and the western Hemisphere as subjects of history and not merely—as was then almost universal and still is predominant—as objects of history."[8]

The emphasis within B/AS on historical agency serves as an essential counterweight to tendencies to project spurious stereotypes of inferiority and dependency onto people of African descent, as either a justification or rationalization for the tragic history of systematic oppression. Du Bois's contributions to combatting the dehumanizing agenda are described succinctly by Kenneth Goings: "This first general history of 'the Negro' written during the dark days of the 'nadir' here in the United States and during the height of colonialism in Africa did serve its function of providing the facts to refute the racist allegations that Africans and their descendants were a people without a culture or a history."[9]

Foregrounding the shared interests of people of African descent in the Diaspora and on the continent is another central tendency within B/AS. As Shepperson observes,

> the attraction of much of Du Bois's pioneering work in *The Negro* is that he showed that he realized that, just as a knowledge of African history and its problems is necessary for the understanding of what has happened to men [sic] of African descent overseas, the African past itself cannot be fully understood without a recognition of the mark which the African diaspora has made on mainland Africa.[10]

Du Bois also anticipates the development of contemporary Afrocentric interpretations of the experiences of people of African descent. On this issue Goings insists,

> many of the ideas expressed [in the book] would prove seminal to later scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Basil Davidson, and even Martin Bernal. It is also important to note that throughout the history, in a focus that clearly puts him generations ahead of his contemporaries, Du Bois has written an Afrocentric

> work where the history of Africa is seen through an African, not European, perspective.[11]

Goings's treatment of *The Negro* as "Afrocentric," although apropos, is somewhat curious because he ignores Molefi Asante and Maulana Karenga, two of the most important contemporary Afrocentric thinkers specifically identified with B/AS. Asante, in particular, has been instrumental in promoting Diop's views regarding the cultural unity of Black Africa.

The Afrocentric credentials of *The Negro* are also illustrated by Du Bois's use of previous scholarship by Black authors to support his contentions, including Alexander Crumwell, George Washington Williams, and William Henry Ferris.[12]

Commentators have offered mixed assessments regarding the quality of the argumentation and evidence presented in *The Negro.* These critiques should be contextualized by recognition of the constraints placed on Du Bois. The publisher dictated the length of the monograph and two earlier drafts were substantially longer than the final version. Shepperson aptly observes,

> In *The Negro*, Du Bois had neither the space nor the intention to produce original, detailed work on particular aspects of African history. He drew upon few primary historical sources in *The Negro* and relied mainly on secondary sources which were, however, taken from a surprisingly wide range and displayed the advantage which Du Bois brought to the study of African history in his good knowledge of German.[13]

Thornton contends that "the scholarship of the African portions, though generally acceptable for the times, was often sketchy and speculative."[14] This observation seems most appropriately directed toward the discussion of human origins. Du Bois embraced the theory that human life originated in Asia and migrated to Africa. This attribution was understandable at the time because, at the time that Du Bois authored *The Negro*, "Raymond Dart and Louis and Mary Leakey were yet to make their enormous discoveries that would take the origin of Homo sapiens … out of Asia and place them in the heart of Central Africa."[15] Du Bois's acceptance of the Asiatic origins thesis led to difficulties as he tried to explain the diversity of African phenotypes and note, "he was forced to trace them [Africans] across southern Asia and into North Africa."[16] In addition, as Thornton opines, Du Bois "was careful to define the Negro race broadly, and to insist that the American definition of 'Negro'—a definition that included in the race all mixed groups—was held to. So Du Bois had no difficulty in integrating ancient Egypt into *The Negro* as part of the race's history, without having to go to the extreme measure of asserting that somehow the Egyptians were biologically identical to Africans from farther south or west."[17]

In fact, Du Bois would have been fully justified in suggesting genetic links between ancient Egyptians and "Africans farther south and west." Shomarka Keita commenting on the ongoing debate regarding the racial classification of ancient Egyptians, insists,

> very little DNA has been retrieved from ancient Egyptian remains, and there are not many studies on the modern population. However, the results of analyses of mitochondrial DNA (mtDNA) and the Y chromosome in the living Egyptian population show the existence of very old African lineages that are consistent with the fossil remains and of younger lineages of more recent evolution, along with evidence of the assimilation of later migrants from the Near East and Europe.[18]

Foreshadowing the later contributions of Cheikh Anta Diop, Du Bois foregrounds cultural practices rather than racial classifications in his discussion of African societies. As Aptheker, opines, "In addition to the striking originality of the book as a whole, perhaps the single most illuminating chapter, for its time, was the eighth on 'African Culture,' where the significance of African social and technical inventiveness, poetry, folklore, music, and art is brought forward and where the particular quality and role of religion and the church are elucidated."[19]

By foregrounding the multi-dimensional character of African cultures Du Bois in effect lays the foundation for developing a multi-disciplinary approach to explore the complexity of the cultures of people of African descent that is a central feature of how contemporary B/AS approaches this subject matter. Although *The Negro* limits discussion of the African Diaspora including Blacks in the US to two chapters, the treatment is significant. As Shepperson explains, "To set the history of mainland Africa side by side with the African diaspora in a single book is still a task of terrifying proportions."[20] Chapter X is titled "The West Indies and Latin America" and Chapter XI is "The Negro in the United States." Notably, Chapter XI alone accounts for approximately 20 percent of the narrative content of the volume's twelve chapters. Goings concludes,

> Given the limitations of the scholarship of his day, which paid no attention to women or issues of gender, Du Bois's brief history of slavery (from the point of view of the slaves), of the Civil War (from the perspective of black soldiers), and of Reconstruction (told from the perspective of the newly freed slaves) would not be much out of place in a modern textbook.[21]

Paralleling his emphasis on featuring cultural practices in African societies, Du Bois pays tribute to African Americans' achievements in creative production: "Already in poetry, literature, music and painting the work of Americans of Negro descent has gained notable recognition."[22]

The final chapter of *The Negro*, entitled "The Negro Problems," is a prescient testimonial to the emphasis on advocacy for progressive domestic and international social change that was an integral component of the original vision of Black/Africana Studies. In concluding this chapter, Du Bois predicts,

> The Pan-African movement when it comes will not, however, be merely a narrow racial propaganda. Already the more far-seeing Negroes sense the coming unities: a unity of the colored races, a new unity of men. The proposed

> economic solution of the Negro problem in Africa and America has turned the thoughts of Negroes toward a realization of the fact that the modern white laborer of Europe and America has the key to the serfdom of black folk, in his support of militarism and colonial expansion. He is beginning to say to these workingmen that, so long as black laborers are slaves, white laborers cannot be free.[23]

Du Bois's call for action against neo-colonialism still resonates today as a new geo-political/economic scramble for Africa accelerates, led by the US and China. The United States Africa Command, AFRICOM, is critical for the implementation of US Africa policy. AFRICOM is one of eleven of the Defense Department's regional military headquarters and was declared as a fully unified command on October 1, 2008.[24]

Some critics of AFRICOM charge that it will become a major tool in attempting to neutralize the growing influence of China in Africa. At a Forum on China–Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in 2000, the Chinese inaugurated a "strategic partnership" with 44 African governments. Forums have been held every three years, with the most recent being in 2018, where Beijing pledged $60 billion in economic assistance, matching the previous pledge in 2015. And China pledged an additional $40 billion during the 2021 FOCAC.[25]

This new phase of neo-colonial penetration poses a major challenge for mobilizing effective countervailing forces capable of forestalling further erosion of political and economic sovereignty. In the spirit of Du Bois's vision of Pan-African political activism, the African Union (AU) has created space for members of the African Diaspora in the Western hemisphere to become more directly involved in shaping Africa's future. The AU considers the Pan-African world to be comprised of six geographical regions—North Africa, South Africa, West Africa, East Africa, Central Africa, and the African Diaspora.[26]

Viewed through the lens of intensifying worldwide subjugation of people of African descent, publication of *The Negro* can be seen as a momentous event in a centuries-long African freedom struggle. Du Bois undertook this ostensibly academic project as an extension of his political activism in support of African liberation. In this regard *The Negro* is closely linked to Du Bois's activities as Secretary of the first Pan-African Congress held in London in 1900, his involvement in the Universal Races Conference in 1911, also held in London, and his engagement in the first Pan-African Congress in 1919 in Paris. Shepperson insightfully concludes that within *The Negro* "is to be seen the development of Du Bois's attitudes toward and thought upon Pan-Africanism in the period between 1900 and 1919."[27] Of course, Du Bois's African liberation project did not end with the first Pan-African Conference. He was intimately involved with the Second Pan-African Congress (London, Brussels, Paris, 1921) and the Third Pan-African Congress (London, Paris, Lisbon, 1923). Later he would serve as a consultant to the Founding Convention of the United Nations in 1945 and preside at the Fifth Pan-African Congress that same year. Notably Du Bois published *Black Folk Then and Now* (1939) and *The World and Africa* (1947) during this same period. Turner and Turner argue that

both volumes "were intended to move the story of Africans and their descendants forward but were still not the extensive history Du Bois envisaged."[28] In fact, they were never intended to fulfill that role. While Du Bois certainly desired to produce the highest quality scholarship feasible, this goal was always secondary to his larger objective of advancing the cause of African liberation. To illustrate, in the preface to *Black Folk Then and Now*, Du Bois relates "The kernel of this work is, I believe, a body of fairly well-ascertained truth, but there are also areas here of conjecture and even guesswork which under other circumstances I should have hesitated to publish."[29] He expresses a similar perspective in the foreword to *The World and* Africa, admitting,

> I feel compelled … to go ahead with my interpretation, even though that interpretation has here and there but slender historical proof. I believe in the main my story is true, despite the fact that so often between the American Civil War and World War I the weight of history and science supports me only in part and in some cases appears violently to contradict me.[30]

Rather than diminishing the value of these important works, Du Bois's admissions serve to foreground the issue of the role of scholarly research in a world where knowledge is a major tool of oppression.

For contemporary Black/Africana Studies scholar/activists the operative question emerging from the preceding re-examination of *The Negro* and its legacy is how will we respond to the challenges posed by renewed neo-colonial incursions in Africa and the continuing marginalization of the masses of Black people in the Diaspora? Will we follow Du Bois's example and find a balance between the goal of producing progressive research and engaging in direct action to forestall 21st-century neo-colonialism? Will we take time away from our academic pursuits to make our expertise available to progressive political leaders and policymakers to advance Africa's and its Diaspora's liberation and development? And will we risk criticism from ivory tower-oriented colleagues and openly challenge political leaders who promote policies that hamper the prospects of meaningful liberation.

3

Black/Africana Studies, Then and Now: Reconstructing a Century of Intellectual Inquiry and Political Engagement (1915–2015)

Introduction

This chapter discusses developments centering on 1915 that produced what can be described as a "Proto-Africana Studies Movement" (PASM) and explores its relationship to the modern Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) Movement.[1] The earlier enterprise encompassed publication of pathbreaking historical and social science monographs, creation of important periodicals, support for identity affirming artistic and literary expression, and the founding of long-standing professional and advocacy organizations. In many respects, the founders of contemporary B/AS sometimes consciously, sometimes unconsciously, resurrected the substance of this earlier project. Parallels and contrasts between the two movements are explored. The inquiry is intended to generate a more nuanced understanding of the antecedents of modern B/AS and to provide useful guidance for ongoing efforts to advance the enterprise.

Pathway to a New Paradigm

The founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History (ASNLH) by Carter G. Woodson in 1915, the year often identified with the beginning of the Great Migration, marks an especially critical milestone in the developmental history of B/AS. Charles Wesley has noted that Woodson's interest in "founding a new organization to educate blacks about Negro achievement and to promote Negro history" was spurred by the earlier publication of his monograph, *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*.[2] The 1915 Exposition of Negro Progress, held in Chicago, provided the setting for vetting this idea. Woodson held discussions about forming such an entity at the Wabash Avenue YMCA with several fellow exposition attendees, including Monroe Nathan Work, compiler of *The Negro Yearbook*. Following the exposition, a decision was taken to adopt the name "Association for the Study of Negro Life and History." The ASNLH was officially organized on September 9, 1915 and incorporated under the laws of the District of Columbia on October 3, 1915.[3] The designated purposes of the ASNLH were

"collection of sociological and historical data on the Negro, the study of peoples of African blood, the publishing of books in this field, and the promotion of harmony between the races by acquainting the one with the other." The other founders were G.C. Hall, J.E. Stamps, W.B. Hartgrove, and A.L. Jackson. G.C. Hall was named chairman, J.E. Moorland was designated as custodian of funds, with Woodson appointed as editor.[4]

Although the exposition may account for the timing of Woodson's effort to operationalize the proposed body, it is important to recall that he joined the American Negro Academy (ANA) in 1914. Arturo Schomburg joined the ANA that same year, three years after he and John Edward Bruce co-founded the Negro Society for Historical Research, an entity with goals very similar to those of the ASNLH. The ANA's goals included to "lead and protect their people" and to be a "weapon to secure equality and destroy racism." These goals were pursued primarily through publications and regular discussions examining various aspects of the circumstances facing Black Americans. In many respects, the ANA's agenda prefigured Woodson's ASNLH initiatives, including publication of several significant treatises.[5]

The Bethel Historical and Literary Society, founded in Washington, D.C. in 1881 by A.M.E. Bishop, Daniel Payne was another important precursor to the ASNLH. The group's large number of constituents included many members of the Metropolitan A.M.E. Church, where meetings were held regularly until 1913. Presentations by well-known persons were followed by open discussions, and Woodson was a regular participant in these sessions.[6]

Woodson, along with several other ANA members, was instrumental in establishing the American Negro Book Collectors Exchange in 1915. The organization planned to contact book collectors in Africa, the West Indies, South America, and Europe to exchange duplicates written by Black authors, and compile a list of authors and their works.[7]

The year 1915 was also when Du Bois published *The Negro*, which Kenneth Goings has characterized as the "first general history of 'The Negro.'"[8] George Shepperson observes,

> the attraction of much of Du Bois's pioneering work in *The Negro* is that he showed that … just as a knowledge of African history and its problems is necessary for the understanding of what has happened to men of African descent overseas, the African past itself cannot be fully understood without a recognition of the mark which the African diaspora has made on mainland Africa.[9]

Goings declares "many of the ideas expressed [in the book] would prove seminal to later scholars such as Cheikh Anta Diop, Basil Davidson, and even Martin Bernal …, [Du Bois] has written an Afrocentric work where the history of Africa is seen through an African, not European, perspective."[10]

The production of this historical treatise was both preceded by, and undertaken concurrently with, Du Bois's production of major sociological inquiries. *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (1899) has been characterized by Herbert

Aptheker as an "empirical, detailed study of urban life" … that foregrounds "the consequence of social environment upon human behavior" that constitutes "an exceptional piece of seminal work in the history of sociology."[11]

Du Bois also served as editor of the annual conference reports of the Atlanta University Conferences from 1898 until 1913, initially intended to examine the circumstances facing southern urban Blacks. Du Bois's involvement led him to propose a century-long research program in 1904, in which ten topics would be studied in succession, one annually, for ten cycles. This proposed methodology can be described as a macro-level panel design that Du Bois believed would produce "a continuous record on the condition and development of a group of 10 to 20 millions of men—a body of sociological material unsurpassed in human annals."[12] The proposed project can be seen as a creative effort to reconcile tensions between historical and sociological methods of inquiry.

It was abundantly clear during the first and second decades of the 20th century that additional efforts would be required to marshal the power of social science to attack the forces reproducing Black disempowerment. The long tradition of Black women organizing to pursue social uplift was formalized and institutionalized in 1896 with the establishment of the umbrella organization the National Association of Colored Women (NACW). Under the auspices of the NACW, Black women's clubs across the country began to coordinate club efforts such as fund raising, civil rights action, and voter education.[13] This tradition was taken up by the Urban League, which emerged as the result of the merger of three existing organizations. Ruth Standish Baldwin and George Edmund Haynes, along with others, founded The Committee on Urban Conditions Among Negroes in September 1910 in New York City. This body merged with the Committee for the Improvement of Industrial Conditions Among Negroes in New York (1906) and the National League for the Protection of Colored Women (1905) and was renamed the National League on Urban Conditions Among Negroes. The activities undertaken by the League included counseling Black migrants from the South and training Black social workers along with researching problems confronting Blacks in employment, recreation, housing, health and sanitation, and education. By the end of World War I the League was operating in 30 cities.[14]

Haynes was the first African American to receive a Ph.D. in Economics from Columbia University (1910), and both he and Du Bois were charter members of the NAACP and members of Alpha Phi Alpha fraternity. Haynes served as Director of Education for the Urban League from 1910 until 1918. Concurrent with these activities he organized and chaired the Social Science Department at Fisk University from 1910 until 1920.[15] Haynes's dissertation, *The Negro at Work in New York City: A Study in Social Progress*, published in 1912, followed in the tradition of W.E.B. Du Bois's, *The Philadelphia Negro* and *The Atlanta Publications* in the use of the case study method, with heavy reliance upon interviews to generate data and form interpretations.[16]

Many of the scholars involved in pioneering historical and social science research recognized that the systemic oppression facing African Americans required an aggressive political response. The Niagara Movement, spearheaded

by Du Bois and Monroe Trotter (1905–1909), was one component of this counter assault. Staunchly opposing the accommodationist strategy of Booker T. Washington, one portion of the movement's "Declaration of Principles," stated: "We refuse to allow the impression to remain that the Negro-American assents to inferiority, is submissive under oppression and apologetic before insults." Members organized against segregation in travel and education and worked to secure voting rights and civic equality through affiliates located in 34 states by 1906. Annual meetings were held until 1908 and the body repeatedly demanded equal economic and educational opportunity, as well as the vote for both Black men and women. Following the 1908 race riot in Springfield, Illinois some members joined other activists in calling for creation of a more powerful organization to combat racism. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) emerged from this initiative, and many Niagara Movement constituents, including Du Bois, were among the founding members.[17]

Du Bois's increasing involvement with the NAACP fueled a growing skepticism regarding the value of social science research unconnected to political advocacy. This shifting perspective even led him to question the usefulness of *The Atlanta Publications* and declare:

> The studies which I had been conducting at Atlanta I saw as fatally handicapped because they represented so small a part of the total sum of occurrences, were so far removed in time and space as to lose the hot reality of real life, and because the continuous, kaleidoscopic change of conditions made their story old … before it was analyzed and told.[18]

Du Bois's concern with confronting immediate challenges was echoed by Ida B. Wells Barnett, who used her keynote address at the first NAACP annual conference in 1909 to lambast the growing prevalence of lynching.[19]

Ironically, despite Du Bois's growing lack of confidence in the usefulness of social science research for combatting institutional racism, the title of the position he assumed with the NAACP in 1910 was Director of Publicity and Research and included editorship of the *Crisis* (the official NAACP periodical). The *Crisis* became an outlet for dissemination of research findings as much as a general source of information and a vehicle to promote social advocacy. In the inaugural issue Du Bois declared that the *Crisis* was intended to "set forth those facts and arguments which show the danger of race prejudice."[20] Elaborating, Du Bois explained that the *Crisis* would espouse three principles: "rights irrespective of race and color … the highest ideals of American democracy … and reasonable but earnest attempts to gain these rights and realize these ideals."[21] The interdisciplinarity of the *Crisis* was signaled by the statement that the organ "provides a forum for black writers, scholars and artists to present their works and where black issues can be examined with editorial freedom."[22] Notably, the second issue included a column titled, "Talks About Women."[23] Until replaced by a column labeled "Women's Club" in 1911, white women authored most of the "Talks About Women" columns.

The "hot reality of life" and the "continuous change of conditions" to which Du Bois referred intensified as the second decade of the twentieth century unfolded. A combination of developments would redirect the trajectory of Black life, including the Great Migration, World War I, and the ascendancy of Marcus Garvey. Other prominent scholars also felt compelled to alter their priorities to address the ramifications of these social upheavals. One of the primary reasons for the demise of the ANA in 1924 was the extensive involvement of many of its members in organizations directly confronting problems of the day, especially the NAACP and Urban League. Haynes took a leave of absence from his position of chair of the Social Science Department at Fisk University to assume the responsibilities of Director of the Office of Negro Economics for the federal government in 1918. In this role Haynes was charged with advising "the Secretary and the directors and chiefs of the several bureaus and divisions of the department on matters relating to Negro wage earners, and to outline and promote plans for greater cooperation between Negro wage earners, white employers, and white workers in agriculture and industry."[24] The office was created in response to concerns that large-scale migration of Blacks to the North following the end of World War I could become a potentially incendiary ingredient in race relations in the context of the competition for jobs. World War I posed an even more serious dilemma for champions of racial justice in the US. The central question was how to respond to this global crisis in the face of the continuing disenfranchisement and discrimination plaguing Black Americans. Du Bois made the case for confronting Germany in 1915 in an essay titled "The African Roots of War."[25] Here, Du Bois links causes of World War I to the African continent and the exploitation of African people. In the previous year, Du Bois had previously announced his support for American intervention in order to pursue global racial equality. He urged Blacks to "close ranks" with whites in support of the war effort: "Let us, while this war lasts, forget our special grievances and close our ranks shoulder to shoulder without our own white fellow citizens and the allied nations that are fighting for democracy. We make no ordinary sacrifice, but we make it gladly and willingly without eyes lifted to the hills."[26]

Du Bois's pro-war position was problematic during a time when Black Americans continued to be regularly victimized by racial terrorists. Shortly after the United States decided to enter the war in Europe in March 1917, Blacks in East St. Louis, Illinois suffered more than one hundred deaths and millions of dollars in property damage perpetrated by white mobs. Another 1917 riot in Houston led to the courts martial of 156 Black servicemen. Despite these pogroms, approximately 370,000 Blacks served in the military, most of whom were assigned to segregated labor and support military units.[27] The high profile conflagrations in East St. Louis and Houston fueled opposition to the war effort among some prominent Black spokespersons. *The Messenger*, a magazine founded in 1917 by labor activist A. Philip Randolph and economist Chandler Owen, became an important vehicle for expressing this opposition. It both rejected US participation in World War I and encouraged armed self-defense against white lynch mobs.[28]

Marcus Garvey's arrival in the US in 1916 created a different type of challenge for the PASM. Garvey's call for self-determination for people of African descent

and for Blacks to return to Africa, as well as his emphasis on ostentatious representations of Black Pride, were uncomfortable for champions of integration. Jamaican-born Garvey established the headquarters of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in New York in 1917, and by the early 1920s there were 700 branches operating in thirty-eight states. The Garvey movement gained momentum after the "Red Summer of 1919" when race riots erupted in several cities including Chicago, Washington, and Elaine, Arkansas.[29] At a 1920 Harlem meeting of the Black Star Line, the entity founded to provide transport for Blacks to return to Africa, Garvey issued the "Declaration of Rights of the Negro Peoples of the World: The Principles of the Universal Negro Improvement Association" that clearly articulated the body's separatist ideology.[30]

Despite disagreements over the merits of Black involvement in World War I, in the early 1920s the *Crisis* and *The Messenger* both forcefully attacked Garvey as questions regarding the finances of the Black Star Line intensified. The struggle between Garvey and his opponents escalated from an intra-racial dustup to a formal call for the federal government to expand its investigation of Garvey. The "Friends of Negro Freedom" initiated a "Garvey Must Go" campaign, which gained traction after Garvey met with a Ku Klux Klan leader in 1922. On January 15, 1923 the Friends sent a petition to Attorney General Harry Daugherty urging continuation of the government's prosecution of Garvey on charges of mail fraud, and requesting an investigation of acts of violence allegedly committed by members of the UNIA.[31]

Fallout from the Great Migration, World War I, and the Garvey movement had little impact on Woodson, who focused doggedly on operationalizing the mission of the ASNLH. Darlene Clark Hine has characterized "Woodson's Negro History Movement" as encompassing three tiers. The base consisted of "the ASNLH members who paid annual dues, organized the special annual celebration for Negro History Week and attended the ASNLH conventions."[32] The second tier encompassed professional historians who worked with Woodson in the conduct and publication of research, and Woodson himself serving in the role of administrator of the various entities that constituted the third tier. Commenting in 1925 on the organization's impact, Woodson opined, "The Association has rendered a distinct service in functioning as a free reference bureau for information respecting the Negro … An important by-product of the effort is the collection of valuable materials in the form of old manuscripts and rare books on the early history of the Negro in this country and the past of the race in Africa."[33]

One year after the formation of the ASNLH and the publication of *The Negro*, Woodson introduced the *Journal of Negro History* (JNH), arguably the first "professional" proto-Africana Studies journal. Woodson had begun advertising and soliciting subscriptions via the Crisis in 1916. The lead article in the inaugural edition was Woodson's "The Negroes of Cincinnati Prior to the Civil War." Two other pieces addressed African traditions, and the issue also contained several book reviews, including Mary Church Terrell's review of Woodson's *The Education of the Negro Prior to 1861*.[34] Extending his publication efforts, Woodson established the Associated Publishers in 1921, an independent publishing house.

Monographs published by the Associated Publishers in the 1920s included *The History of the Negro Church* (1921), *The Negro in Our History* (1922), *Negro Makers of History* (1928), and *African Myths, Together with Proverbs* (1928).[35]

During a brief stint as a member of Howard University's faculty from 1919 until 1920, Woodson obtained approval from the board of trustees to offer coursework focusing on Black history, extending the efforts of Charles Wesley who had previously developed such courses.[36] Notably, as chronicled by Raymond Wolters, protests "in the 1920s led to the forced resignations of several presidents of black colleges and to unrest among black students and alumni throughout the United States."[37] Du Bois was deeply involved in instigating protests at Fisk in 1924 that led to the resignation of President Fayette McKenzie. The reforms instituted by his successor, Thomas Elsa Jones, included "courses in black history and literature," "an annual conference for the most prominent scholars of black America," and an "impressive collection of Negro art and artifacts."[38] Jones also "encouraged the development of a social science department which, under the direction of Charles S. Johnson, in the 1930s, became one of the nation's foremost centers of research on race relations."[39]

After leaving Howard in 1920 Woodson concentrated his efforts exclusively on advancing the ASNLH's research mission. Securing financial support for envisioned projects constituted a major challenge, and Woodson used his personal resources while also soliciting grants from major foundations. Interestingly, Woodson steadfastly refused to affiliate the ASNLH with any historically Black college or university to help stabilize the organization. Although Woodson was occasionally successful in obtaining funds from outside sources, "after 1933 no white foundation made substantial contributions to the association, and Woodson was forced to depend almost totally on the black community for the financial support necessary to continue his campaign to promote Negro history."[40]

In addition to generating an impressive body of historical and social science research, the PASM also energized a complementary wave of creative production. Du Bois characterized the establishment of Negro History Week by Woodson in 1926 as the "greatest single accomplishment to arise from the artistic movement of blacks during the 1920s."[41] Goggins advances the view that Woodson, impressed by Garvey's success in building a large constituency, "hoped that an annual celebration of black achievements and contributions would do the same for his cause and subsequently generate funds for association programs and publications."[42] Of course the artistic component of the PASM had much deeper roots. Du Bois's elaborate historical pageant, "Star of Ethiopia," explored the history of African peoples from ancient times until the early 20th century, and was performed by the Krigwa Players of the Negro Theater Company in New York (1913), Washington (1915), and Philadelphia (1916).[43] In many respects, Du Bois's classic, *The Souls of Black Folk*, provided a model that informed the multifaceted fare of the *Crisis*. Several Harlem Renaissance luminaries received their first national exposure in the magazine and many works contained overtly political messaging. As an example, a 1917 poem by James Weldon Johnson entitled "To America" directly addressed racism.[44] Langston Hughes's classic poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers,"

was published in the *Crisis* in 1921.[45] Johnson became Executive Secretary of the NAACP in 1920 and remained in that position until 1930.

Other periodicals joined the *Crisis* in publishing both political and artistic content. *Opportunity*: *Journal of Negro Life*, which began publication in 1923 under the editorship of Charles S. Johnson, presented studies conducted by the Urban League in co-operation with Fisk University.[46] The journal also sponsored literary contests, whose 1925 winners included Zora Neale Hurston, Langston Hughes, and Countee Cullen.[47] *The Messenger*, which focused primarily on promoting unionization, also promoted the Black Arts movement. The journal published articles about Black culture, theater, and works by popular writers like Langston Hughes and Georgia Douglas Johnson.[48]

One of the critical values that infused the body of Black creative expression that blossomed in the 1920s was the notion that art must be appropriate for Black culture and its value must be defined according to an indigenous concept of beauty. Du Bois emerged as an early proponent of the idea of a "Black Aesthetic," arguing in 1925 that there was a certain group expression of Negro art which included essays examining Black life, aspirations and the problems of the color line, autobiographies of former slaves and notable Blacks, poetry, novels, paintings, sculpture, music, and plays which emerged organically from the collective experience.[49]

Du Bois gradually moved closer to Garvey's views regarding the need for Black self-determination. In *Crisis* articles published in 1933 and 1934 he championed "voluntary determined co-operative effort."[50] In September 1933 he wrote of the need for "a new plan." He cautioned that the plan "cannot be the mere rhodomontade propaganda on which Garveyism was based" but it should emanate from an understanding that "our advance in the last quarter century has been in segregated, racially integrated institutions and efforts and not in effective entrance into American national life."[51] This effort to distinguish his approach to in-group co-operation from Garvey's brand of Black Nationalism did not assuage his NAACP colleagues, and Du Bois was forced to resign from his positions with the NAACP in 1934 in the wake of controversy about his growing support for self-help development initiatives.

By the early 1930s the PASM had evolved into an organic, but loosely connected, and highly gendered, network comprised of individuals, organizations, and publication outlets collectively committed to two intersecting projects. One involved the production and dissemination of information cutting across what would be contemporarily characterized as "disciplines" chronicling and celebrating the history and current circumstances of African Americans. This effort reflected Du Bois's dictum, "scientific work must be subdivided, but conclusions that affect the whole subject must be based on study of the whole."[52] A second project entailed undertaking direct action intended to elevate the political and social status of Black people through various organizations. Although notable successes in executing both projects was achieved, sustained gains were hampered by funding limitations, necessitating solicitation of financial support from outside sources, which created risks of external control and resource dependency. The Great Depression exposed this vulnerability as a drastic reduction in external support that eroded the efficacy

of the movement. Important components of the movement did survive, however, and others morphed into new forms, providing a bridge between the early 20th-century movement and the new B/AS movement that burst onto the scene in the late 1960s.

Although much of the momentum created by the PASM dissipated in subsequent decades, several initiatives survived that would eventually influence the contours of the modern B/AS movement. For example, the activities and reach of Woodson and the ASNLH continued to expand throughout the 1930s, 1940s, and 1950s. Malik Simba notes that the ASNLH steadily grew, "establishing branches in every major northern city and dozens of cities and small towns across the South."[53] Woodson trained a cadre of historians to carry on his work, including William Brewer, Lorenzo Greene, and Charles Wesley.[54]

The growth of the ASNLH was catalyzed by a dramatic change in women's roles within the Association. Women played a vital role in establishing and maintaining branches. Deborah Gray White observes, "in their capacity as clubwomen, teachers, reformers, community activists, and professional librarians … [they] made the ASNLH's first Negro History Week possible by heading the ASNLH branches that took black history into school districts and libraries."[55] The ascension of Mary McLeod Bethune to the ASNLH presidency in 1936 was particularly significant. Bethune had become one of the first two women elected to the ASNLH Executive Council the previous year. She served as President for an unprecedented 16 years, until 1952 and was instrumental in the creation of the popularly oriented *Negro History Bulletin*.[56]

Efforts of African American intellectuals at Howard University successfully extended the interdisciplinary dimension of the PASM. Zachery Williams argues, "from 1926 to 1970, Howard University … represented the center of black intellectual life, and its scholars in various ways were heirs to the legacy of W.E.B. Du Bois's 'talented tenth.'"[57] The scholars encompassing this collective included Sterling Brown, Charles Drew, E. Franklin Frazier, Alain Locke, Rayford Logan, and James Nabrit Jr. Williams explains that this group originated a policy analysis tradition addressing various topics including the Black family, Black political organizations, and racial segregation.

Du Bois assumed the position of chairman of the Department of Sociology at Atlanta University in 1934, after his resignation from the NAACP. During the decade of his tenure at the institution, Du Bois attempted to resurrect his idea of a one-hundred-year research program. In 1943 he organized the First Conference of Negro Land-Grant Colleges as a possible vehicle for implementation of this project.[58] In articulating the mission of the journal, *Phylon*, founded in 1940, Du Bois described the immigration of Blacks to America from the 15th through the 19th centuries as "the greatest social event of modern history," leading, in his view, to the foundation of modern capitalism and the evolution of democracy in the US and providing the basis for "the greatest laboratory test of the science of human action in the world."[59]

Both Du Bois and Woodson envisioned the eventual publication of an "encyclopedia" that would present a comprehensive history of peoples of African

descent. As noted by Jonathan Fenderson, this effort spanned much of the 20th century.[60] Fenderson chronicles how each scholar's conception of this project changed over time and their inability to collaborate. Contemporary efforts to resurrect this project are also critiqued for "ignoring the legacy of Carter G. Woodson and Du Bois's shift to an Africa-centered project."[61] It is useful to note that the ASNLH did produce a ten volume series entitled *The International Library of Negro Life and History* designed to "treat in detail the cultural and historical backgrounds of Negro Americans" that can be construed as a limited effort to operationalize the idea of an "Encyclopedia Africana."[62]

Passing the Torch

Discussions of the contemporary B/AS movement have devoted primary attention to the establishment of what has been described as a "beachhead in higher education" created by a wave of protests initiated by Black students in the 1960s. Some of the responses of white administrators to these protests mirror the outcomes of the Fisk protests of the 1920s, namely new coursework exploring the experiences of Black Americans. The struggle at San Francisco State, which culminated in the establishment of the first formal Black Studies unit, has been appropriately celebrated as a major milestone in the history of the enterprise. However, Ibram Rogers challenges the conventional wisdom that the San Francisco Bay Area constituted the epicenter of the Black Studies Movement. Rogers documents protests advocating for Black Studies dating to 1965 at Tuskegee, Howard, Southern, and Hampton.[63] Irrespective of location, Woodson's classic treatise, *Miseducation of the Negro*, as well as *Black Power* and *The Autobiography of Malcolm X*, were important sources of inspiration for students who fought for the establishment of B/AS units.[64]

Noliwe Rooks attempts to make the case that efforts by the Ford Foundation had a profound effect on the trajectory of B/AS while discounting the effectiveness of student protests as a major driving force behind the explosion of Black Studies units. The Ford Foundation's decision to intervene aggressively to shape the developmental trajectory of Black Studies is said to have emanated from a 1968 conference at Yale University.[65] The Ford Foundation is also foregrounded as a major force behind the development of Black Studies by Fabio Rojas.[66] However, claims regarding the significance of the Ford Foundation in the developmental history of the enterprise have been challenged aggressively by Perry Hall. Hall asserts that Rooks's interpretation of the role of student protests, "suggests significant misunderstanding, or revision, as to the nature of the multifaceted student movements out of which Black Studies emerged."[67] Notably, Black student activists organized the Yale conference that spurred the Ford Foundation's initiatives. Moreover, the conference occurred during the same month that Black students at Northwestern University initiated protest demanding the introduction of a Black Studies curriculum.[68]

Hall also takes Rooks to task appropriately for ignoring the comprehensive exploration of the origin and evolution of B/AS contained in the volume *Out of the Revolution, The Development of Africana Studies*, that emphasizes the important role of the field's primary professional organization, the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS), founded in 1975.[69] Indeed, the Ford Foundation has funded several NCBS projects beginning in the late 1980s that have reflected NCBS's mantra, "Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility," to affirm the commitment of the enterprise to promoting engaged scholarship.

By the mid-1980s B/AS had clearly established a permanent and stable presence in higher education. As of 2000 there were approximately 50 degree-granting departments and over 200 programs housed in units with various titles including Black Studies, African American Studies, African Studies, Africana Studies, or African Diaspora Studies in colleges and universities across the United States.[70] In 2007 there were at least 311 institutions offering certification in Black/Africana Studies.[71]

In interrogating the forces that contributed to the emergence of contemporary B/AS it is important to acknowledge the important role of several organizations based outside the academy. William King describes how the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA) was founded in 1968 under the leadership of John Henrik Clarke, after initially functioning as a caucus within the African Studies Association. King suggests that one of the major contributions of the AHSA has been "to build an institutional infrastructure to foster communications between the black scholars in the West and African scholars on the Continent."[72] Clarke was also instrumental in the creation of the Association for the Study of Classical African Civilizations (ASCAC) in 1984.[73] The Institute of the Black World (IBW) was founded as an independent think tank in 1969 in Atlanta. Founders Vincent Harding and Stephen Henderson were faculty members at local Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Derrick White has explored the centrality of the IBW in the evaluation and early support of Black Studies as an informal clearinghouse for Black Studies units emerging throughout the country.[74] The vanguard role of the AHSA and IBW vis-à-vis NCBS mirrors that performed by the various organizations that preceded the formation of ASNLH in the early 20th century.

NCBS has never sought to establish a book publishing operation similar to Woodson's Associate Publishers. In fact, NCBS did not attempt to produce a professional journal until 1992, when *The Afrocentric Scholar* debuted. The journal was reconstituted as the *International Journal of Black Studies* in 1996, but NCBS has not been able to exercise the degree of influence on research and outreach achieved by the ASNLH through the *Journal of Negro History* and the *Negro History Bulletin*. The same assessment applies to the Southern Conference on African American Studies, Incorporated, founded in 1979, which publishes *The Griot: The Journal of African American Studies.*[75] Professional journals self-identifying as B/AS publications unaffiliated with professional organizations include the *Journal of Black Studie*s (1970), the *Western Journal of Black Studies*

(1977), *The Journal of Pan African Studies* (1987), and *The Journal of African American Studies* (1995).[76]

NCBS has had several notable accomplishments. In addition to hosting annual conferences since 1976, the organization has developed a widely used curriculum model to facilitate structuring majors and minors. It has also facilitated external departmental and program reviews and offered workshops (supported by the Ford Foundation) for graduate students, junior faculty, and administrators.[77] One of the most successful initiatives has been the provision of funding for community outreach efforts.[78]

NCBS owes its existence to the pioneering efforts of Bertha Maxwell (Roddey), the first director of Black Studies at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.[79] In many respects Maxwell played the same type of catalytic role in advancing Black Studies as Mary McCleod Bethune performed for the ASNLH during her presidency. As William King relates, Maxwell organized a "Black Studies National Conference for the Southeastern U.S." in March 1975. In contacts with major figures including Nathan Hare (San Francisco State and *The Black Scholar*), James Turner (Cornell), and Ewart Guinier (Harvard), Maxwell indicated, "that the main thrust of the conference [was] to stimulate and hopefully organize a national organization to evaluate and accredit black studies programs."[80] Follow-up meetings were held on the campus of the Educational Testing Service (July 1975), and at the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History (formerly the ASNLH) in October 1975. NCBS was formally established at a November 1975 meeting in Boulder, Colorado and Maxwell became the organization's first Chairperson. In the 1990s NCBS conferred the title of Queen Mother on Maxwell Roddey for her pioneering contributions to the enterprise. Subsequently several women have led NCBS.[81]

The limited impact of NCBS results from several intertwined forces. Black caucuses within several traditional disciplines were established concurrently with the emergence of Black/Africana Studies. The Association of Black Psychologists was formed in 1968, the National Conference of Black Political Scientists and the Caucus of Black Economists (now the National Economic Association) were both established in 1969, and the Association of Black Sociologists was organized in 1970. In the humanities arena, the College Language Association dates back to 1937.[82] Unlike the PASM scholars, Black scholars could now choose to identify with their discipline of training while acknowledging the failure of those disciplines to fully embrace the Black experience as a legitimate focus of research.[83] New alternatives, including American Studies continue to create challenges for the B/AS project.

Expanded options for researching the experiences of people of African descent exacerbated tensions among Black scholars regarding whether B/AS units should be organized as stand-alone departments or programs utilizing faculty housed in traditional departments. Academic administrators were quick to exploit this schism, in some cases using it to resist calls for departmental status or, in others, to introduce fewer autonomous structures. Cornell University's Africana Research Center is the poster child for this type of machination. Prior to 2010,

the Africana Studies Research Center (ASRC) reported directly to the Provost. Based on recommendations from a 2005 external committee, in December 2010 it was announced that effective July 1, 2011 the Center would become a department in the College of Arts and Sciences. Despite an outcry from around the country, the revised configuration was implemented, leading Robert Harris to resign the position of Director in protest.[84]

The ascent of public intellectuals anointed by external commentators as leading B/AS spokespersons has also blunted the impact of NCBS. In an April 1, 1990 *New York Times Magazine* article entitled "Black Studies' New Star: Henry Louis Gates Jr.," Gates was characterized as the preeminent scholar in the field. Subsequently, the influence of Gates and other Ivy-League-based scholars has increased significantly but unlike the major figures associated with the PASM, these scholars have virtually no relationship to constituency-based organization such as the NCBS, hampering efforts to build a sustainable enterprise through robust professional organizations.[85]

The embrace of B/AS by Ivy League institutions initiated a new front in the battle for its heart and soul centering on graduate education. Temple became the first institution offering a self-standing Ph.D. in African American Studies in 1988. Molefi Asante, known widely as the foremost advocate of "Afrocentricity," was the motive force behind this pathbreaking venture. Subsequently, Ph.D. certification options have proliferated with varying emphases and structures.[86] Limited overlap in curricular content across these programs continues to challenge the intellectual coherence of the enterprise.

The future of B/AS will be shaped fundamentally by the orientation and training of the next generation of faculty. Temple and the University of Massachusetts are the only units that have any significant interaction with NCBS. Moreover, the elite graduate institutions have exhibited virtually no commitment to the "social responsibility" dimension of the traditional mission of B/AS. In addition, the broader scope of inquiry reflected in appellations such as "African Diaspora" and "American Studies" signal potential diminution of the focus on Blacks in the US. Cecil Brown observes, for example, that in some institutions the expansion of the curriculum and research focus has "become a code for hiring Blacks from the Caribbean and Africa in place of African Americans" creating a schism "between the African American agenda and the Black immigrants."[87]

There are complex epistemological questions undergirding tensions associated with scope of coverage, administrative structure, and relationship to traditional disciplines. The critical question that has confronted scholars since the 1960s is "What exactly is the nature of B/AS and to what extent do affiliated theories, research protocols, and instruction differ significantly from counterparts in traditional disciplines?" In other words, "Is there a meaningful distinction between Black Studies and the study of Black people?"

Participants in the PASM had no need to address these issues and, following their lead, many initial advocates for the establishment of B/AS in the 1960s and 1970s paid limited attention to issues of epistemology and ideology.

Consistent with the precedent established by major figures in the PASM historical investigation is the linchpin that undergirds other discipline-based inquiries and Karenga appropriately insists that Black History is "indispensable to the introduction and development of all other subject areas. Black History places them in perspective, establishes their origins and development, and thus aids in critical discussion and understanding of them."[88] A new approach to historiography has been proposed that expands on Du Bois's concern with reconciling macro- and micro-historical discourses. This historiography would embrace genealogical research to enrich the understanding of historical developments and broaden commitment to, and engagement in, historical inquiry.[89]

The layering of other types of inquiry on top of the foundation created by historical inquiry has been described in various terms. Joseph Russell, the first executive director of NCBS, opined confidently in 1975 that Black Studies "has a respectable body of knowledge and researchable content with the Black humanities and social sciences comprising its core curriculum."[90] A year earlier, Nick Aaron Ford, author of the first Ford Foundation assessment of Black Studies declared, "The term Black Studies refers to educational courses concerned with the study of research in various aspects of the experience, attitudes, and cultural artifacts of people of African origin."[91] Elaborating, he maintained, "Black Studies are concerned primarily with the history, literature, art, music, religion, cultural patterns, and lifestyles developed in America, by a race of people cut off completely from all contact with the land of their origin."[92]

Unfortunately, these formulations provide no guidance regarding whether Black Studies is best conceived of as a stand-alone enterprise or an appendage to traditional disciplines. Ford's definition appears to prioritize the humanities over social sciences as the locus of Black Studies intellectual production. This perspective contrasts markedly with a definition offered by Karenga: "Black Studies, as both an investigative and applied social science, poses the paradigm of theory and practice merging into active self-knowledge which leads to positive social change."[93] This specification not only foregrounds the role of social scientific investigation, it also advocates for a direct linkage between research and efforts to improve the quality of life. In the early 1970s a group of Black social scientists called for the creation of a "Black social science."[94] Research terminology would reject sanitized descriptions and bring oppressive relationships into sharp relief and reinforce political commitments to undertake social science-based research to counter racism and discrimination and improve the life circumstances of people of African descent. This movement quickly lost momentum, and recent efforts to explicate research methodology have largely focused on the adaptation of methods based in traditional disciplines. Serie McDougal III's comprehensive discussion of research methods in B/AS demonstrates the compatibility of the adaptive approach with Afrocentric values.[95]

The Black Arts Movement (BAM), circa 1964–1976, had a profound influence on the humanistic content of B/AS. Defining and refining a Black Aesthetic was central to the BAM, hailing back to the efforts of the PASM artists during the Harlem Renaissance. Karenga suggests that the Black Aesthetic "had two distinct

but interrelated meanings—a distinctive mode of aesthetic expression enabling identification of Black art, and criteria for judging Black art in terms of both creativity and beauty and also in terms of social relevance."[96]

Some degree of clarity can be obtained through an in-depth examination of Du Bois's scholarship, which reveals a sophisticated theory of knowledge positing a complex interconnection among historical, social scientific, and fictional modes of inquiry.[97] Du Bois's interdisciplinary epistemology provides strong support for contemporary claims that B/AS is an interdisciplinary enterprise, although his contribution has not been fully appreciated. There has been inadequate attention to distinctions between the concepts of "interdisciplinary" and "multi-disciplinarity." Most claims regarding interdisciplinarity simply assume that because B/AS examines aspects of life experience that cut across traditional disciplinary boundaries that the resultant narratives are by definition interdisciplinary, when in fact the term "multi-disciplinary" may be a more accurate descriptor.[98]

The use of any variant of the term "discipline" is problematic because of the enterprise's commitment to political activism to foster social change. Stephen Toulmin argues that an area of inquiry develops into a scientific discipline when it has "one and only one set of well-defined goals at a time (that is explanation of phenomena falling within the scope of the disciplinary inquiry), and one set of selection-criteria for assessing research findings."[99] Because B/AS simultaneously engages in intellectual production and political activism, it does not meet Toulmin's criterion of having a single goal, rendering the characterization of "discipline" problematic. This does not denigrate B/AS, because a discipline is only one of many types of "rational enterprise," such as the field of law. According to Toulmin, "Rationality is an attribute, not of logical or conceptual systems as such, but of the human activities or enterprises of which particular sets of concepts are the temporary cross sections; specifically of the procedures by which the concepts, judgments, and formal system currently accepted in those enterprises are criticized and changed."[100] B/AS with its multiple objectives indeed qualifies as a "transdisciplinary rational enterprise" and the term "enterprise" has been used as the principal descriptor throughout this chapter.

Exploration of strategies to synthesize knowledge emanating from historical, social scientific, and literary/artistic investigations has led to conceptualization of a Du Bois-inspired "Jazz Theory of Africana Studies." This framework departs from the use of the disciplinary constructs to describe the enterprise, and grounds the inquiry in an "indigenous" mode of representation, i.e., "jazz." The jazz model shifts attention from the individual scholar/researcher to a collective or team working cooperatively to generate new knowledge by moving beyond traditional disciplinary limitations. It also champions the efficacy of participant observation and other qualitative research protocols to generate information appropriate for B/AS analyses.[101]

My approach to the problem of how to distinguish B/AS analyses from traditional disciplinary explorations is to propose five essential differentiating

characteristics: (a) rejection of "victimology" orientations in favor of approaches focusing on efforts by African Americans to shape their own destiny (Africana agency), (b) interpretation of contemporary developments through a framework of analysis that explores the effects of historical forces in shaping current conditions (continuing historical influences), (c) use of multiple analytical methods and modes of presentation to understand and articulate the complexities of the experiences of peoples of African descent (wholism/multidimensionality), (d) exploration of policy implications (simultaneous pursuit of academic excellence and social responsibility), and (e) exploration of historical and continuing cultural and political linkages between Africans in Africa and Africans in the Diaspora (pan-Africanism).[102] While no individual investigation can be expected to incorporate all of these elements, the absence of characteristics (a) and (b) generally suggests that a particular research study is more appropriately identified with a field of inquiry other than B/AS, per se. Conversely, studies incorporating more of these characteristics are more representative of the type of B/AS scholarship envisioned by founders than studies possessing fewer of these elements.

The momentum driving the ongoing efforts to expand the scope of inquiry within B/AS is exemplified by an April 2006 symposium convened by the Ford Foundation involving 32 participants entitled "Conversations for Sustaining Black Studies in the 21st Century." Participants engaged ten important questions central to the future of the enterprise including: the relationship between Black Studies and Critical Race Studies, Diaspora Studies, African Studies, Afro-Latino(a) Studies, and Africana Women's Studies; appropriate foci for new scholarship; and connections to communities. The presentations and discussions reflected a wide diversity of viewpoints and have been published in a special issue of the *International Journal of Africana Studies*.[103] The diversity of approaches advanced in this symposium highlights difficulty in both advancing the enterprise and focusing scholarship on solving contemporary challenges confronting people of African descent.

As an example, Africana Women's Studies has emerged as a major subject area. There are two prevailing approaches within Africana Women's Studies, broadly defined. One school of thought foregrounds cultural nationalist ideology and emphasizes the need for partnership between Africana men and women in pursuit of anti-racist political objectives.[104] A competing approach prioritizes feminism and tends to be connected to traditional academic disciplines than their counterparts and, more specifically, are clustered in the areas of literary criticism and creative writing.[105] Black women historians have tended to avoid associating themselves with either position, focusing instead on excavating the critical role of Black women in shaping the trajectory of Black life.[106]

Much attention has been focused on the role of the construct of "Afrocentricity," as articulated by Molefi Asante.[107] Asante links the construct of Afrocentricity to a theory of inquiry characterized as "Africology," defined as "the Afrocentric study of African concepts, issues, and behaviors" and is claimed to constitute "a separate and distinct field of study from the composite sum of its initial founding disciplines."[108]

Asante's Afrocentric formulations share many characteristics with the intellectual contributions of Maulana Karenga, originator of Kawaida philosophy, which foregrounds the importance of cultural authenticity, and promotes cultural nationalism as the necessary foundation for efficacious liberatory praxis. Kawaida emphasizes that socially meaningful knowledge production should have an organic connection to active efforts to combat oppression and improve the life experiences of people of African descent. Karenga has emerged as a major theorist within B/AS, including explanations of how Kawaida philosophy can be applied to address contemporary social issues. From this perspective, he insists that the mastery of scientific and technological knowledge must be pursued concurrently with "ongoing rigorous research and study of ancient African and modern African paradigms of human excellence and human achievement to enrich and expand the African's sense of human possibility and responsibility for engaging and changing the world."[109]

Although some variant of "Afrocentric" values resonates with many B/AS scholars, some, such as Perry Hall, have taken issue with some of the specific formulations set forth by Asante.[110] In addition, in previous years a Marxist-grounded alternative to Afrocentricity was suggested as an alternative worldview, but over time Afrocentricity, broadly defined, has come to dominate the disciplinary discourse.[111]

Efforts to expand the scope of inquiry in B/AS to encompass the experiences of people of African descent outside the US include the revised curriculum model introduced by NCBS in 1991. This model provides that majors are required to concentrate in one of three geo-cultural regions, i.e., African Diaspora, African Continent, or Comparative African World. In this formulation, the examination of people of African descent in the US is part of either the African Diaspora or the Comparative African World concentrations.

Useful African Diaspora resources include *Reversing Sail, A History of the African Diaspora* (2005) and *Black Europe and the African Diaspora* (2009).[112] However, instructors may find Sheila Walker's *African Roots/American Cultures: African in the Creation of the Americas* (2001) especially valuable because of its close alignment to the Afrocentric worldview. Walker indicates "This volume … represents the beginning of a comparative analysis of African Diasporan societies and phenomena from an Afrogenic perspective that focuses on African and African Diasporan agency, participation, and contributions."[113]

Efforts to introduce post-modernist conventions into B/AS pose a very different challenge that questions some of the basic assumptions that motivated contributors to the PSAM and the contemporary B/AS Movement. [Note: This intellectual intervention is addressed in a separate chapter in this volume.]

Toward a Future That Embraces the Past

Careful interrogation of the PASM can provide useful guidance for directing contemporary B/AS practitioners through the maze of challenges that have emerged in the early 21st century. Du Bois's writings in particular have yielded

useful insights regarding the conduct of historiographical, social scientific, and literary/artistic research, and exemplars within B/AS instruction.[114] The PASM provides vindication for B/AS scholar/activists to be unapologetic about exploring unconventional approaches to inquiry that challenge conventional Eurocentric modalities. Indeed, the title of this chapter is a riff on Du Bois's *Black Folk Then and Now*. Du Bois indicated the book represented an effort to confront the status quo where "significant facts today are obscured by the personalities and prejudices of observers; the objects of industrial enterprise and colonial governments; the profit in caste; the assumed necessity of bolstering the amour-propre of Europe by excusing the slave trade and degrading the African."[115] Contemporary B/AS scholar activists face similar obstacles and hopefully Du Bois's cautions will enable the enterprise to avoid domination by outsized personalities, reject intellectual colonization by Eurocentric epistemes, and decline invitations to join the "champions of white folk" on either side of the Atlantic. While the beachheads in higher education must be maintained, constant vigilance will be required to prevent them from becoming isolated desert islands inhabited by those who mistakenly believe they are protected from roiling tides of poverty, anguish, and repression. One of the most important lessons that can be garnered from studying the past is that B/AS cannot be an enterprise that is housed solely in academe if it is to be true to its historical legacy, nor can it be simply a domestic enterprise.

Finally, the activist responses of PASM contributors to the myriad of assaults waged on the masses of Black people in the early 20th century should provide a model for contemporary counterparts. Bona fide B/AS scholar/activists cannot remain silent and ensconced in pristine ivory towers in the wake of tragedies such as the executions of Trayvon Martin in Florida and Michael Brown in Missouri.

B/AS practitioners will hopefully come soon to the realization, in the spirit of Du Bois, that now is a time when there can "be no rift between theory and practice, between pure and applied science." We can all remain focused on the central challenges by continually invoking Du Bois's 1905 dictum: "We can only understand the present by continually referring to and studying the past, when any one of the intricate phenomena of our daily life puzzles us, when there arises religious problems, political problems, race problems, we must always remember that while their solution lies in the present, their cause and their explanation lie in the past."[116]

4

Art, Politics, Cultural Studies, and Post-Structuralist Philosophy in Black/Africana Studies: Deciphering Complex Relationships

Introduction

This inquiry is motivated by W.E.B. Du Bois's efforts to mobilize African American creative (artistic) production in support of liberation praxis. The discussion continues the long-standing debate regarding the role of art and the artist as social agent. Two specific related questions are addressed here: (Q1) Does grafting an explicit political agenda on an artistic project invariably diminish its "aesthetic" qualities and reduce the credibility of its claim to being a bona fide work of art? And (Q2) Can there be a politically neutral art, i.e. art for art's sake that is judged only with respect to some universalist apolitical aesthetic criteria? These are questions that have relevance not only to Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) but also to British Cultural Studies and French post-structuralist philosophy. The potential value of such an exploration derives in part from its potential to provide a means to assess the implications of the importation and/or adaptation of aspects of these Eurocentric frameworks by some commentators who challenge some conventional perspectives associated with B/AS.

In a manner similar to Du Bois, the first generation of B/AS advocates insisted that inquiry and creative production should be consciously linked to efforts to overturn the oppressive circumstances confronting people of African descent in the US. Although the political fervor that made this view attractive in the 1960s and 1970s has long since waned, a somewhat "looser" relationship between art and struggle has been suggested by Nel Painter.[1]

Painter's examination of contributions of Black visual artists to presenting the history of African Americans is distinctive, in part, because it is embedded in a relatively traditional narrative historical treatise. In explaining this strategy, she maintains "the work of black artists contradicts demeaning conventional images of black people and puts black people's conception of themselves at the core of African American history."[2] Continuing, Painter maintains, "Whereas US culture has depicted black people as ugly and worthless, black artists dwell on the beauty and value of black people."[3] Painter insists further that the content of the representations can clearly be distinguished from broader representational tendencies: "Throughout the twentieth century … black visual

artists depicted two kinds of images repeatedly that were seldom featured in American fine art: ordinary, working people and violence inflicted upon people of African descent."[4]

On first glance this formulation seems to provide a simple answer to Q1 and Q2. It preserves space for political visual representations to be treated as works of art, while maintaining an expectation that socially conscious subject matter will be the predominant content. Controversies implied by the first question are partially sidestepped by including only images in the text that have been endorsed as having aesthetic merit by art historians and critics. On closer inspection, however, Painter's efforts to bridge the art–politics chasm runs into another problem, namely how exactly should we respond to her open admission that "negative stereotypes do not appear unless in the work of black artists who are reworking them into emblems of empowerment."[5] This selection criterion raises several questions: Does her work still qualify as an historical treatise since it embeds a political agenda? Does the censoring of the artistic representations in the work contaminate the narrative historical interpretations of events that comprise the vast majority of the text? Insights from British Cultural Studies and European post-structuralist philosophy can be useful for addressing these questions. However, some ways these bodies of thought have been applied in examining the experiences of Blacks in the US are problematic.

The writings of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault have achieved almost biblical status as post-modernist guidelines for social inquiry. One unfortunate result is that this over exposure has limited attention to alternative formulations that arguably are more congruent with the original mission of B/AS that embraces notions of collective identity, associated political engagement, and the symbiosis between art and politics. Specifically, the ideas of Boris Groys and Jacques Rancière are deployed to illustrate how post-structuralist ideas can be integrated usefully into the original B/AS project.[6] In addition, the basic strategy of looking to Europe to find post-structuralist ideas to advance B/AS is challenged, and salient embryonic post-structuralist concepts in the writings of W.E.B. Du Bois are introduced as an alternative.

Du Bois, Painter, and the Social Function of Black Art and the Black Artist

Du Bois's views regarding the relationship between creative production and political action can be distilled from three statements spanning approximately 40 years. In 1897 he proclaimed (S1):

> For the development of Negro genius, of Negro literature and art, of Negro spirit, only Negroes bound and welded together, Negroes inspired by one vast ideal, can work out in its fullness the great message we have for humanity … For the accomplishment of these ends we need race organizations, a Negro school of literature and art, and an intellectual clearing house, for all these products of the

> Negro mind, which we may call a Negro Academy. Not only is all this necessary for positive advance, it is absolutely imperative for negative defense.[7]

Du Bois's second statement of interest to the present inquiry (S2) was articulated in 1925, in which he references "a certain group expression of Negro art which included essays examining Black life, aspirations and the problems of the color line, autobiographies of former slaves and notable Blacks, poetry, novels, paintings, sculpture, music, and plays which emerged organically from the collective experience."[8] The third commentary (S3), published in 1935, maintained that:

> there exists today a chance for the Negroes to organize a co-operative state within their own group. By letting Negro farmers feed Negro artisans, and Negro technicians guide Negro home industries, and Negro thinkers plan this integration of co-operation, while Negro artists dramatize and beautify the struggle, economic independence can be achieved.[9]

Several important insights emerge from the scrutiny of these statements. S1 is a general assertion of the need for what can be described as a "Black Aesthetic," i.e. "a Negro school of literature and art." Du Bois insists that this aesthetic and the associated creative production serve, at least in part, the utilitarian functions of promoting racial progress and protecting against external assaults. S2 describes both the boundaries of representation to be considered within this aesthetic canon and the particular types of creative production expected to reflect the aesthetic. Finally, S3 forcefully commands creative producers to shape their outputs to foster co-operative activities to promote collective economic (and presumably quasi-political) independence.

Arguably, the first artistic movement that consciously embraced the entire Du Boisian mandate was the Black Arts Movement (BAM) that roughly spanned the period 1964–1976 and was linked closely to the ethos of the Black Power Movement (BPM). The BAM catalyzed the creation of a large body of paintings, murals, poems, plays, and music that constituted overt assaults on racism and traditional visual and linguistic conventions.

An "artistic counterattack" against this political/aesthetic movement was waged by external interest through Blaxploitation Films. These films diluted the potential of important BAM cultural symbols to fuel political mobilization and collective action during the Black Power era. Gratuitous inclusion of negative Black Power-related visual imagery disrupted organic BAM cultural production and contributed to the demise of the BPM.[10]

From Painter's point of view, the BAM can be interpreted as one example within a broader set of possible art/politics relationships that reflects the praxis articulated in S1 and S2, but not S3. The distinctive role of artists flows, in her interpretation, from the specific manner in which they approach the representation of the experiences of people of African descent: "Black artists, like most people who are not historians, engage more emotionally with the African American past."[11]

Using Painter's logic, the argument could be reasonably made that particular representational patterns do not result primarily from collective conscious decisions by artists, but rather flow naturally from the relationship between artists and other segments of Black society. And if creative production is not consciously intended as a political statement, presumably it can still qualify as art rather than propaganda even if the subject matter is political. The claim of a work of art to be treated as such as opposed to propaganda is buttressed if the claim is validated by disinterested experts, i.e. art historians.

While this line of argument may constitute a credible response to Q1, it is insufficient to support the positions advocated by Du Bois in S2 and S3. Additional insights can be garnered through interrogation of relevant aspects of Cultural Studies and post-structuralist philosophy.

Cultural Studies and B/AS

Cultural Studies focuses attention on how meaning is generated and disseminated through cultural institutions. Strongly affiliated with the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, established by Richard Hoggart circa 1964, the field gained wider visibility under the leadership of Stuart Hall. Cultural Studies melds perspectives from a wide range of fields associated with creative production as well as philosophy, political theory, and political economy in the Marxian tradition.[12] The foci of cultural studies on issues including ideology, social class, ethnicity, and nationality have created the space for engagement with the subject matter of B/AS. In many respects the manner in which cultural studies has become highly visible in many B/AS units hearkens back to the British "invasion" by the Beatles in the early 1960s. Scholars uncomfortable with the type of "cultural nationalist" formulations introduced by various B/AS scholar activists such as Maulana Karenga and Molefi Asante were delighted to find what they perceived as a less politically charged alternative.[13]

Cultural Studies commentators have foregrounded the construct of "hybridity" to challenge the idea that individuals can be identified with a single cultural reference group and have called for reducing the emphasis on the experiences of people of African descent who are the descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States. Some scholars writing in this tradition have also attempted to highlight class differences within this population that challenge notions of racial solidarity.[14]

The extent to which this line of inquiry has generated new insights is debatable. "Hybridity" has always been an organic aspect of the experiences of people of African descent in the US within their social space manifested in skin color and hair texture politics and unwritten social mores, all of which were overlaid by the "one-drop rule" that prescribed racial identification in the larger US landscape. People of African descent from African countries and all portions of the African Diaspora found space to live and actively participate in the life space created by the descendants of victims of the holocaust of enslavement in the US.

Bernard Groys has carefully delineated some of the limitations of Cultural Studies as a framework of analysis expressing concerns, in part, about the way in which Cultural Studies models the transformation of societies.[15] Specifically, he maintains: "The currently dominant theoretical discourse in the field of cultural studies has a tendency to see historical development as a road that brings the subject from the particular to the universal, from premodern closed communities, orders, hierarchies, traditions, and cultural identities toward the open space of universality, free communication, and citizenship in a democratic modern state."[16]

Groys rejects this idea and declares that the type of "cultural diversity" championed in Cultural Studies "is merely a pseudonym for the universality of capitalist markets" and that operationally "to be universal means to be able to aestheticize one's identity as it is—without any attempt to change it."[17] As a consequence, he insists, this already existing identity is treated as "a kind of readymade in the universal context of identity."[18] Elaborating on the ties between the mantra of cultural diversity and capitalist markets Groys suggests:

> I believe that the discourse and the politics of cultural diversity and difference cannot be seen and interpreted correctly without being related to the market-driven practice of cultural diversification and differentiation in the last decades of the twentieth century. This practice opened a third option for dealing with one's own cultural identity—beyond suppressing it or finding a representation for it in the context of existing political and cultural institutions. The third option is to sell, to commodify, to commercialize this cultural identity in the international media and touristic markets.[19]

Cultural theorists associated with B/AS have clearly opted for the third strategy outlined by Groys. Failing to find their reference group identities represented within the conventional discourse of B/AS, they have commodified and successfully marketed an alternative narrative to some major institutions in ways that have enabled them to become identified as "Black public intellectuals" and reap the associated economic benefits in the academic marketplace. The demand for the intellectual products of cultural studies commentators by the accommodating institutions is partially fueled by a desire to neuter the traditional oppositional political tenor of mainstream B/AS. In the spirit of Groys, this new discourse provides outsiders with safe opportunities to engage in intellectual voyeurism with an exotic international flavor.

Cultural Studies scholars often hone in on class differentiation, reflecting the influence of Marx. However, they are certainly not the first commentators associated with B/AS to recognize that class analysis can enrich our understanding of the nature of the external and internal contradictions of people of African descent in liberation pursuits. Du Bois progressively integrated more and more class analysis into his explorations of the historical dynamics that conditioned the trajectory of Black life in the US In 1954, for example, he proclaimed: "if the influence of economic motives on the action of mankind ever had clearer illustration it was in the modern history of the African race, and particularly in America."[20] Earlier,

in 1935, he had acknowledged that *Black Reconstruction* (1935) represented his first major publication that reflected the synthesis of his earlier and Marxist-influenced approaches to historical investigation.[21]

Post-structuralist Philosophy and B/AS

Groys's critique of Cultural Studies actually constitutes an example of the praxis of "deconstruction" most closely identified with contemporary post-structuralist philosopher Jacques Derrida. Deconstruction essentially involves deeper and deeper interrogation of a text presumably leading to identification of internal contradictions that demonstrate the instability of the foundations upon which the presumed "truths" were based. Deconstruction generally tries to demonstrate that no text is a coherent entity and contains several irreconcilable and contradictory meanings. As a consequence, every text can yield multiple interpretations and no objective criterion or criteria exist to choose "rationally" among alternative interpretations. In this view, the intended message of an author has no more status than interpretive frames imposed by various readers. Taken to the extreme, such an approach would preclude the articulation of any collective interpretive scheme agreed upon by multiple parties. Derrida recognized this dilemma and offered the caveat that existing concepts must be used provisionally, but there must be an ongoing project to erase them through deconstruction so that they can eventually be transcended. Conceivably, the questions posed regarding the nature of Painter's project can be illuminated via the use of this process.[22]

Some scholars who self-identify with B/AS (primarily literary critics) have wholeheartedly embraced Derrida's deconstruction approach to inquiry. Unfortunately, most have blithely disregarded his caveat regarding the need to pursue the project cautiously. Derrida's claims regarding the validity of alternative textual interpretations have also been used to deny the existence of a master historical narrative that chronicles a shared collective experience of people of African descent. Rather, this school of thought foregrounds a scenario in which multiple narratives describing various historical trajectories are intertwined, none of which can claim primacy over any other. This logic undermines the construct of collective political struggle fueled by shared experiences and racial identification, which is, of course, an anathema to the original mission of B/AS that maintained that an organic relationship between inquiry and struggle must be continuously re-energized.

Michel Foucault's parallel critique of the Western approach to inquiry focuses primary attention on the questionable efficacy of Western science. He advances the view that what purport to be universal scientific truths about human nature are, in fact, often mere expressions of ethical and political commitments of a particular society. His "critical philosophy" attempts to undermine such claims by exhibiting how they are just the outcome of contingent historical forces, and are not scientifically grounded truths. Systems of thought and knowledge are governed by rules, beyond those of grammar and logic, that operate beneath the

consciousness of individual subjects and define a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period.[23]

Some post-structuralist commentators use this idea to reinforce their criticisms of traditional views about the nature of race and to argue that many traditional linguistic conventions used to characterize the experiences of people of African descent have become anachronisms as a result of the march of modernity (this is also an assertion made by Cultural Studies proponents). Such arguments imply the need to reduce collective energies devoted to confronting racial oppression and redirection of interests toward individualized interests. In contrast, Groys demurs from such advice, instead issuing a clarion call for the revival of radical politics and radical aesthetics:

> One must be committed to radical aesthetics to accept radical politics—and this sense of commitment produces relatively closed communities united by an identical project, by an identical vision, by an identical historical goal. The way of radical art and politics does not take us from closed premodern societies to open societies and markets. Rather, it takes us from relatively open societies to closed communities based on common commitments.[24]

To paraphrase Groys, his counter-claim to assertions about the anachronistic nature of so-called "identity politics" is that such movements are absolutely essential to survival in the contemporary era of globalization. This is precisely the stance articulated by Du Bois in 1948. Du Bois identified what might be termed the "leveling effect of capitalism on cultural diversity" as one of the major threats associated with the progressive expansion of monopoly capitalism:

> The result of world-wide class strife has been to lead civilization in America and Western Europe toward conformity to certain standards which became predominant in the 19th century. We have refused continually to admit the right of difference. The type of education, the standards and ideals of literature and art, the methods of government must be brought very largely to one single white European standard.[25]

In a more specific warning, Du Bois raises the specter of the disappearance of a distinctive African American culture:

> If this [leveling of culture patterns] is going to continue to be the attitude of the modern world, then we face a serious difficulty in so-called race problems. They will become less and less matters of race, so far as we regard race as biological difference. But what is even more important, they will even become less and less matters of conflicting cultures.[26]

Du Bois's comments provide an entrée to "deconstruct" the post-structuralist treatment of "historicity" and historical memory. The goal is to understand the logic behind post-structuralist views regarding the limited relevance of historical

conceptual constructions in examining the experiences of people of African descent. As a starting point it is instructive to recognize that both Derrida and Foucault periodize their analyses via the construction of "epochs." However, Derrida treats the entire span of Western history as a single epoch that is shaped by logic. In contrast, Foucault envisions several epochs, each in the range of about 200 years. Derrida's efforts to dismantle the logocentric foundations of contemporary civilization obviously require him to reject the relevance of history and historical memory. For Foucault, the route to rejection of history is not quite as straightforward. In Foucault's framework, each epoch is governed by an "episteme," a system of thought and knowledge (or discursive formation) that operates beneath the consciousness of individual subjects and defines a system of conceptual possibilities that determines the boundaries of thought in a given domain and period. Agents in each succeeding epoch have access only to the contemporary episteme.

Du Bois, in collaboration with philosopher Rushton Coulborn, constructed an alternative explanation of the evolution of human understanding that overlaps with, but challenges, the formulations of Derrida and Foucault. The analysis in question was constructed in response to the writings of sociologist Pitirim Sorokin.[27] For Sorokin, the appropriate unit of analysis was what he termed a "cultural system." The concepts of "systems" and "congeries" play a special role in Sorokin's formulation. Systems are comprised of persons and things, referred to respectively as agents and vehicles. Congeries are persons or things juxtaposed in time but without any connection to the systems. For Sorokin the growth and decline of these systems constituted the functioning of society and the unfolding of the historical process.[28]

A second essential feature of Sorokin's formulation is the disaggregation of the general concept of creativity into three epistemological approaches, or attitudes of mind that, he argued, could be used to classify phases in the search for meaning of different cultures: "the ideational, corresponding with intuition, the idealistic, corresponding with reason, and the sensate, corresponding with sense perception."[29] These phases can be loosely compared to Foucault's epistemes.

Sorokin claimed that the dominant culture is the sole source of meaning for a society during each period in its development, although non-dominant collectives could exist as congeries. In contrast to Foucault, Sorokin allowed that previous congerial elements could continue to exist when a given culture transitioned between phases. In fact, he saw these transitions as producing what might be described as socio-historical friction. Such transitions involved the decline of old systems and the emergence of new ones. As described by Coulborn and Du Bois, "in Sorokin's view individuals are acting 'in system' when they behave in ways that further the existing stability of the society, while acting 'in congeries' entails antisocial and/or antihistorical behavior."[30]

Suppose, for the sake of argument, that African Americans can be treated as a congery in Sorokin's model that is effectively disenfranchised within the Western cultural milieu. On Sorokin's view they would be nonentities vis-à-vis the major forces shaping human history. In contrast, the position that Du Bois and Coulborn

advanced, which maintained that this "congery" actually consisted of active agents attempting to shape their own destiny, can impact the overall transformation of the macro-system and is not simply relegated to accepting the status quo. They thus rejected Sorokin's claim that "the 'dominant culture' … [does] not … make … ontological and ethical truth for a given cultural period" and asserted instead that "it is man in his historical evolution who makes, prescribes, and does these many things."[31] The primary implication of the Du Bois/Coulborn intervention for the assessment of the usefulness of the most popular variants of post-structuralist thought is to reject claims of ahistoricity and to restore the role of collective historical memory and collective identity as valid human constructions. In addition, they mandate that we respect the collective efficacy of African Americans to contribute to the forward advance of human civilization from their own particularistic cultural roots.[32]

For Du Bois and Coulborn the capacity for African Americans to assume this role does not flow from specialization in any one of the three approaches to inquiry defined by Sorokin. They maintained that the segmented disaggregation of creativity that Sorokin introduced was flawed because "the mind must employ—in systematic relation with one another—all three methods of cognition."[33] This "unity of mind" implies that there is an organic relationship between the ways that artists and non-artists see the world as asserted in S1 and S3. In a similar vein, the interplay of social and cultural systems proposed by Sorokin and endorsed by Coulborn and Du Bois suggests that there is a linkage between art and politics of the type reflected in S1 and S3.

The Nexus Between Art and Politics Revisited

Both Groys and Jacques Rancière provide elaborate defenses of the organic nature of the nexus between art and politics. Groys declares, "All attempts to define art as autonomous and to situate it above or beyond the political field are utterly naïve."[34] If this is so, the question arises as to why the notion that such a nexus can exist is so vigorously rejected by the arts establishment. Groys's answer is:

> Under the conditions of modernity an artwork can be produced and brought to the public in two ways: as a commodity or as a tool of political propaganda. The amounts of art produced under these two regimes can be seen as roughly equal. But under the conditions of the contemporary art scene, much more attention is devoted to the history of art as commodity and much less to art as political propaganda.[35]

Given this tendency toward commodification of art, "Art becomes politically effective only when it is made beyond or outside the art market—in the context of direct political propaganda,"[36] an observation relevant for assessing Painter's strategy of including only artwork that has been "credentialed" by art historians. This perspective implies that much of the art of interest to B/AS specialists might

be devalued by traditional art critics. In fact, Groys comments on this possibility with respect to art that is openly identified with specific racial/ethnic groups: "Some images that artists insert into the context of the international art scene signal their particular ethnic or cultural origin. These images resist the normative aesthetic control exerted by the current mass media, which shuns all regionality."[37]

This comment clearly opens the door for advancing the type of aesthetic proposed by Du Bois in S1, S2, and S3. To build the case for such an aesthetic it is necessary to "deconstruct" the traditional claims regarding the divergence between art and politics. Here Jacques Rancière provides valuable ammunition with his claim that: "*art* and *politics* are contingent notions."[38] Rancière maintains "the fact that there are always forms of power does not mean that there is always such a thing as politics, and the fact that there is music and sculpture in a society does not mean that art is constituted as an independent category."[39] The contingent nature of these constructs is obscured because: "Politics and art, like forms of knowledge, construct 'fictions', that is to say *material* rearrangements of signs and images, relationships between what is seen and what is said, between what is done and what can be done."[40]

S1, S2, and S3 were proclaimed by Du Bois at a time in history before art was as subject to commodification as is increasingly the case in the early 21st century. Expanding commodification has led to a new lexicon to describe engagement in the increasingly market-driven arts enterprise. As an example, the term "cultural workers" has come to describe those who are involved in creative industries in various capacities including primary cultural production/output and the interpretation of cultural and creative works. The term "creative workers" is sometimes used to categorize artists, but also directors, producers and distributors of films, designers, visual artists, photographers, etc.

This commodification of art is a logical extension of the advance of contemporary global capitalism in part because, "Art anticipates work because it carries out its principle: the transformation of sensible matter into the community self-presentation."[41] In some ways it is ironic that the continuing efforts to represent art as a distinct activity divorced from politics depends on the production of art to be accepted as "work." In Rancière's words, "Art can show signs of being an exclusive activity insofar as it is work."[42] When these relationships are unearthed, "Whatever might be the specific type of economic circuits they lie within, artistic practices are not 'exceptions' to other practices. They represent and reconfigure the distribution of these activities."[43]

Rancière's description raises an especially critical question, namely in the contemporary world of highly commodified art, to what extent is it possible for an artist to exhibit the type of political commitment demanded by Du Bois in S1 and S3? In the spirit of Foucault it might be the case that contemporary social, political, and economic circumstances preclude a lexicon and actions consistent with S1 and S3, although those conditions may have existed during a previous episteme.

There is an important distinction between the commitment of the artist and the commitment of art, per se. Rancière intones "an artist is committed as a person, and possibly that he is committed by his writings, his paintings, his films,

which contribute to a certain type of political struggle"; however, the question still remains as to whether this art can be classified as "committed."[44] His answer is that "commitment is not a category of art," but avers that "This does not mean that art is apolitical. It means that aesthetics has its own politics, or its own meta-politics."[45]

The problem with efforts to classify art as committed derives from the fact "that there is no criterion for establishing an appropriate correlation between the politics of aesthetics and the aesthetics of politics."[46] However, Rancière insists, "This has nothing to do with the claim made by some people that art and politics should not be mixed. They intermix in any case; politics has its aesthetics, and aesthetics has its politics."[47] Rancière concludes:

> There are politics of art that are perfectly identifiable. It is thoroughly possible, therefore, to single out the form of politicization at work in a novel, a film, a painting, or an installation. If this politics coincides with an act of constructing political dissensus this is something that the art in question does not control.[48]

This paradox raises the conundrum of whether it is feasible in the contemporary world of commodified art to identify artistic creations that reflect the sensibilities expressed in S1, S2, and S3. Rancière provides a set of three general criteria that can serve as guideposts:

> (1) The dream of a suitable political work of art is in fact the dream of disrupting the relationship between the visible, the sayable, and the thinkable without having to use the terms of a message as the vehicle. It is the dream of an art that would transmit meanings in the form of a rupture with the very logic of meaningful situations.
>
> (2) Political art cannot work in the simple form of a meaningful spectacle that would lead to an "awareness" of the state of the world. Suitable political art would ensure, at one and the same time, the production of double effect: the readability of a political signification and a sensible or perceptual shock caused conversely, by the uncanny, by that which resists signification.
>
> (3) The ideal effect is always the object of a negotiation between opposites, between the readability of the message that threatens to destroy the sensible form or art and the radical uncanniness that threatens to destroy all political meaning.[49]

The core message to political progressives is that "it is up to the various forms of politics to appropriate, for their own proper use, the modes of presentation or the means of establishing explanatory sequences produced by artistic practices rather than the other way around."[50] Thus Rancière invites activists to impose political meaning on appropriate artistic representations. Ideally such appropriation is undertaken in collusion with the artist à la Du Bois, but even outside the artist's intention an art object may still become a powerful weapon in a liberation

arsenal. Given the growing commodification of art, the number of "committed" artists, to use Rancière's terminology, may be dwindling due to concerns about the commercial effects of their creative production being labeled as propaganda. However, if Painter, Groys, and Rancière are correct about the organic relationship of the artist to their cultural roots, then S1, S2, and S3 still have relevance in the globalized world of the 21st century.

Reconsidering External Interventions in Black/Africana Studies

The preceding discussion has demonstrated that post-structuralist European philosophy need not be at odds with the original mission of B/AS. In fact, invoking insights from some variants of this body of thought can strengthen claims advanced by B/AS scholar/activists. The larger issue, however, is whether this literature adds much to the knowledge base of the discipline. As repeatedly emphasized throughout the exploration, much of the same ground has been either previously, or was concurrently, plowed by an acknowledged progenitor to Black/Africana Studies, i.e., W.E.B. Du Bois.

There are many additional examples of Du Bois's embryonic post-structuralism that researchers attracted to this mode of inquiry could usefully interrogate. As a case in point, consider his comments in the postscript to the first volume of the trilogy, *The Black Flame*. Here Du Bois provides a clear indication of the critical role he ascribed to imagination in intellectual inquiry and his recognition of the contingency of traditional modes of inquiry and representation. He argued that although *The Black Flame* was not history in the strict disciplinary sense, limitations in terms of time and money had forced him to abandon pure historical research in favor of the method of historical fiction "to complete the cycle of history which (had) for a half century engaged (his) thought, research and action."[51] At the same time, he insisted the foundation of the book was "documented and verifiable fact" although he freely admitted that in some cases he had resorted "to pure imagination in order to make unknown and unknowable history relate an ordered tale to the reader" and in other cases small changes had been made in the exact sequence of historical events.[52] Du Bois claimed that this methodology was superior to the tendency of historians to "pretend we know far more than we do provided that the methodology was explicitly acknowledged beforehand."[53] In a similar vein a decade earlier, Du Bois describes *The World and Africa* as history even though he admitted that "The weight of history and science support me only in part and in some cases appears violently to contradict me."[54]

These examples illustrate how Du Bois continually challenged logo-centric Western traditions in ways akin to those proposed by Derrida and Foucault, but from an organic frame of reference, rather than from one requiring both linguistic and experiential translation. In fact, new approaches to the examination of the works of Du Bois that reflect post-modernist sensibilities have been advanced by Reiland Rabaka.[55] In addition to Du Bois, serious examination of the life and work

of Anna Julia Cooper can provide useful insights regarding the exploration of gender dynamics consistent with the directions suggested by post-structuralists.[56]

With respect to the original motivation for this chapter, i.e., interrogating the nexus between art and politics, there are also several important conclusions that can be derived from this investigation. First, it is entirely reasonable for B/AS researchers and instructors to prioritize works that can be interpreted as expressions of political agency without having to look over their shoulders to seek the approval of art historians or art critics. This means that the inventory of potential subjects can be expanded beyond that used by Painter to include many artists highly regarded by mainstream Black America but who have not been "anointed" by the arts establishment. Paintings by artists such as Charles Bibbs, Elizabeth Catlett, George Hunt, Gail Fulton Ross, and Gilbert Young present historical and political content in masterful ways that can be very effective in impacting the consciousness of youth who have been patterned on visual media.[57]

One implication of this inquiry is that it would be useful to extend the praxis introduced by Painter and conduct in-depth exploration of the embedded political content of work generated by cultural workers in various genres. Efforts to identify and categorize such themes can benefit by adapting an approach used to explore political themes in R & B music.[58] However, comparison of the two genres is likely to reveal that visual artists have been more successful than purveyors of popular music in forestalling the march of commodification and thereby generating cultural production with greater historical continuity. Thus, it is no surprise that Painter chose the visual arts as a vehicle of expression to enrich the examination of historical trajectories. The essential point is that there is a rich body of subject matter awaiting examination using by using investigatory and representational techniques that are aligned with the organic culture of people of African descent. Scholars associated with B/AS would do well to fully explore these possibilities as an alternative or complement to philosophical constructs and affiliated lexicons adapted from Eurocentric explorations.

Perhaps at some point in the future British Cultural Studies and European post-structuralist philosophy will be accepted as principal drivers for systematic inquiry into the lives and experiences of people of African descent in the US. However, for now it is more reasonable to observe Derrida's caution that we should not unthinkingly discard existing labels and foreground Groys's conclusion that there is continuing need for a radical aesthetic linked directly to political advocacy to confront contemporary manifestations of racial and other forms of oppression. In this regard Du Bois's 1897 mandate regarding collective struggle and stylized representation of such remains relevant for the early 21st century:

> if among the gaily-colored banners that deck the broad ramparts of civilization is to hang one uncompromising black, then it must be placed there by black hands, fashioned by black heads and hallowed by the travail of two hundred million black hearts beating in one glad song of jubilee.[59]

Part II

In Search of Progressive Cultural Production

Streaming to Nowhere

I'm feeling no pain
Here watching TV
Got four streaming services
To entertain me

Gave up watching the news
Too much energy
Now spending my time
Enjoying packaged comedy

Used to read books
Switched to reality TV
Groovin' with my Firestick
Can't nothing bother me

My Homey came through
Said here's a word to the wise
Gil Scott-Heron was on point
The Revolution won't be televised!

5

PROLOGUE

Cultural products play a critical role in enabling individuals and groups to navigate the day-to-day challenges of living. For many consumers, the primary benefit of having access to visual and performing arts, literature, etc. is the pure entertainment provided by consuming these products. Indeed, much artistic production deliberately addresses individuals' need for respite from ordinary routines. This type of artistic production sometimes provides a mirror allowing us to reflect on our current situation and imagine an alternative life. Oral and/or visual descriptive imagery is grafted onto consumers' reality in ways that generate pleasing psychological and emotional stimuli. Many artists intentionally design their works to focus on these basic human needs, in part, because of the lucrative financial incentives available to successful producers. The importance of this type of cultural production cannot be overstated. However, an unhealthy addiction to entertainment can blind us to other ways in which cultural products influence our lives and create barriers to active efforts to address social dysfunction. This is the message embedded in the poem, "Streaming to Nowhere."

Cultural products can be employed to reinforce adherence to social norms. To illustrate, religious music is specifically intended to promote certain values and behaviors. However, artistic production can also reinforce negative behaviors such as sexual harassment. Socialization induced by music does not necessarily require conscious commitment on the part of either the consumer or the producer. For example, a consumer may be attracted to a particular song because of its creative instrumentation, with little regard for the lyrics. However, the brain may be subconsciously processing and integrating the lyrical content in ways imperceptible to the listener. In a similar vein, a producer may perceive their work as simply a reflection of her or his freedom to produce "art for art's sake," without realizing how much collective socialization and experiences actually influence the content.

"Neutering the Black Power Movement …" focuses on the impact of "Blaxploitation" films, most of which were released between 1971 and 1975, on Black political engagement. These films were the brainchild of white male Hollywood magnates, not African American filmmakers. Approximately two hundred such films were produced during that period based on a formulaic structure that involved Black actors engaging in violence, drugs, sex, and street talk while parading around in fancy clothes and cars and hellbent on "getting over on the man." I argue that Blaxploitation films, and the wide dissemination they enjoyed, directly diluted the

potential of the Black Power Movement to facilitate Black political mobilization and collective action. I contend that these films not only systematically sought to render that Movement invisible but also to misrepresent it and its proponents as dysfunctional, disorganized, opportunistic, and impotent. I insist further that the propagation of this negative imagery complemented the direct physical assaults and disinformation campaigns that were waged by governmental officials against Black Power Movement organizations and their leaders. This "neutering," I maintain, set in motion a persistent pattern of compromised cultural production that continues to constrain contemporary efforts to develop and implement mass-based resistance to racial oppression. Film critic and film historian Elvis Mitchell has produced a riveting documentary entitled *Is That Black Enough For You?!?* (2022) that offers a more positive interpretation of the Black films of the 1970s by emphasizing the innovative techniques and perspectives involved in that body of work. By examining the tactics used to debase Black Power symbolism, hopefully contemporary filmmakers can gain insights into how to reverse engineer these tactics to bring greater collective awareness to contemporary challenges to Black survival. Recent examples of liberatory reframing of historical narratives in film include *Harriet* (2019) and *Watchmen* (2019).

Cultural products can also be intentionally deployed to foster social awareness and catalyze social change. The most obvious example is the adaption of religious music to create protest songs during the modern Civil Rights Movement. Several writers have examined the critical role that music played in the successful liberation war fought in Zimbabwe, and in subsequent efforts to pursue national unity (see for example, see Mickias Musiyiwa, "The Mobilization of Popular Music in the Promotion of National Unity in Zimbabwe," *Muziki, Journal of Music Research in Africa* 5 (1), (2008), 11–29). At the same time, in nefarious hands creative production can be used to destabilize communities and cultivate dysfunctional patterns of behavior.

In *Flight* the primary purpose of my interrogation of music lyrics was to make the case that artistic production can complement scholarly inquiry in describing the complexities of the lived experiences of people of African descent. There I focused primary attention on the treatment of male–female relationships to demonstrate how combining artistic and analytical "evidence" has the potential to yield richer explanations than singularly focused approaches to inquiry. In addition, I proposed a way to conceptualize Black/Africana Studies (the jazz model) that can facilitate the type of knowledge synthesis that I champion.

In *Higher Flight* I present two examples of contemporary music that include liberatory messaging in "Until Justice Rolls Down …" and "I Think We Killed Bigfoot." "Until Justice Rolls Down …" examines the creative production of Mausiki Scales and the Common Ground Collective whose music has a decided Pan-African flavor inspired by Fela Aníkúlápó Kútì, Hugh Masekela, and Miriam Makeba. "I think We Killed Big Foot …" introduces the Rhetorician, a Pacific west coast Hip Hop artist who is challenging the hegemony of the mainstream music industry. "Until Justice Rolls Down …" is a reminder of the global dimensions of the liberation struggle and how popular culture can strengthen pan-African

alliances. To illustrate, Mausiki Scales and his music were featured in a 2021 broadcast of a popular South African radio program. "I Think We Killed Bigfoot …" is a caution regarding the dangers associated with the commodification of Black popular culture that can neutralize its liberatory potential in ways similar to the impact of Blaxploitation films.

Essays and biographies are underappreciated as potentially liberatory cultural products. "No More Water …" explores selected themes embedded in the writings and activism of James Baldwin. Renewed interest in the life and political advocacy of Baldwin was catalyzed by the 2016 release of the documentary film *I Am Not Your Negro* I focus on Baldwin's masterful use of the essay as a vehicle to "speak truth to power." The type of boldness, commitment, perseverance, and irreverence to authority he exhibited are needed now more than ever. In Baldwin's own words, "If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious Blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world." Baldwin's example will hopefully inspire contemporary public intellectuals, bloggers, podcasters, and other social commentators to step up their games. Baldwin's message is as relevant today as it was when it was first uttered some 50 years ago.

Paul Robeson's life and activism also deserve renewed scrutiny. After first achieving acclaim as an athlete and subsequently as a performer, Robeson later became a celebrated global activist. "Does Anyone Know My Name?" examines Robeson's political ideology as reflected in speeches and editorials. The following summary of Robeson's political activism provides context for the inquiry. Robeson refined his performance skills while still in law school and his first professional performance occurred in 1922. Subsequently Robeson played a pivotal role in bringing Black Spirituals into the classical music repertory. His political activism began to blossom in the early 1930s when he became an honorary member of the West African Students' Union and became acquainted with Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta, future presidents of Ghana and Kenya. Later he co-founded the Council on African Affairs to aid in the African liberation struggle. In 1950, the federal government refused to allow Robeson to travel outside the US unless he agreed not to make any more political speeches. However, Robeson continued to speak out and regained his passport in 1958, the same year that his autobiography, *Here I Stand* was published. Robeson received numerous awards and recognitions for contributions to the liberation struggles of people of African descent and other oppressed peoples including a 1965 salute from actors Ossie Davis and Ruby Dee, writer James Baldwin, and many other supporters.

6

Neutering the Black Power Movement: The Hijacking of Protest Symbolism

Introduction

In his 1935 essay entitled "A Negro Nation within the Nation" W.E.B. Du Bois imagines a self-contained African American community in which organized cultural production continually affirms and reinforces connections among individuals and institutions. The Black Arts Movement (BAM) was, in many respects, a concrete manifestation of the type of organized cultural production that Du Bois advocated, and the relationship between the BAM and the Black Power Movement (BPM) roughly paralleled the type of synergism envisioned by Du Bois. The principal thesis of this investigation is that external manipulation and co-optation of important cultural symbols effectively neutralized the potential of organized community-based cultural production to promote BPM objectives. The analysis focuses special attention on the role of Blaxploitation films in diluting the potential of important cultural symbols to facilitate political mobilization and collective action. This particular mode of cultural counter-attack involved systematic imposition of invisibility on the BPM and/or the misrepresentation of the BPM as dysfunctional, disorganized, opportunistic, and impotent. The propagation of this imagery complemented direct physical assaults and disinformation campaigns waged by governmental officials against BPM organizations and their leaders. The systemic disruption of cultural production as a means of "Neutering the Black Power Movement" set in motion a continuing pattern of compromised cultural production that continues to constrain contemporary efforts to develop and implement mass-based resistance to racial oppression.

The examination of the treatment of cultural symbols and institutions associated with "Black Pride" in Blaxploitation films also necessitates exploration of two related sub themes. Because soundtracks played a critical role in shaping audience response to these movies, it is important to understand the linkage between audio and visual imagery in the neutering process. Second, it is also critical to appreciate how caricatured gender representations that permeate most Blaxploitation films reinforced the neutering of Black Power symbolism.

The principal thesis and related sub themes guiding this investigation are interrogated through an in-depth discussion of plots, characters, soundtracks, and other aspects of a subset of Blaxploitation films. The discussion is organized to compare how the BPM is treated in movies with different types of plots.

Popular Culture and Liberation: From Civil Rights to Black Power

As a starting point, it is useful to consider the significance of the BAM for the BPM. The broader contours of this relationship are best understood in the context of the role played by various media in mobilizing support for confronting institutional segregation in the era of the modern Civil Rights Movement (CRM). As noted by Brian Ward, the role of radio was especially critical. Ward argues "the rising tide of southern black protest in the mid-twentieth century coincided with the emergence of black-oriented radio as one of the most vital, popular, and influential institutions within the African American community."[1] James B. Stewart's analysis of selected R&B songs produced from the 1960s to the 1980s has uncovered a variety of types of political messages.[2] Specifically, Stewart proposed a typology of eight types of political messages ranging from documentaries to revolutionary manifestos. However, the delivery of such messages to a targeted audience was always problematic. As observed by William Van Deburg, although "more overtly political music often made little impact on national record charts, the message of these songs was spread underground via a modern-day 'grapevine telegraph.'"[3] This "grapevine telegraph" was simply an extension of the traditional role of music and dance at informal Black functions, family gatherings, and organization meetings. Exposure to politicized cultural products in these venues facilitated shared interpretations of embedded political messages. The political saliency of songs was further enhanced by the efforts of some African American disc jockeys to use their shows as platforms for political education.

Ward claims that radio actually compensated for dysfunctional tendencies of some BPM groups. He asserts that Black-oriented radio "helped to maintain a sense of black unity, collective power, and common purpose" at a time when there was a "flagging interest in mass activism" resulting in part from "a series of internecine battles between cultural nationalists, revolutionary nationalists, political nationalists, and other claimants to the black power throne."[4] He maintains further that many southern stations "distance[d] themselves from the most extreme and controversial expressions of black power and protest."[5]

Whether or not one accepts Ward's interpretation, the political impact of Black radio on the BPM and the CRM was largely uncoordinated. In contrast, the BAM, which roughly spanned the period 1964–1976, became a conscious vehicle for the dissemination of political messages reflecting BPM ideologies. The BAM catalyzed the creation of a large body of poems, plays, and essays, much of which employed distinctive expressive modes. Hyperbolic language was marshaled in launching attacks on racism and the organic linguistic conventions associated with African American folk and urban lifestyles were celebrated. New forms of discourse were introduced including techniques borrowed from various musical genres, especially jazz. As noted by Melba Boyd, "by 1966, cultural conferences became as commonplace as political rallies, as institutions were founded and alternative theaters were organized to garner political and artistic energy."[6] However, Boyd cautions that "Although the black authors energized a course of activist urgency that was viewed as part of the Black Liberation Movement sweeping the country,

the Black Arts Movement was primarily literary, and more specifically it generated poetry that needed to be printed."[7] Boyd's comments underscore the fact that BAM participants had their own agenda and did not necessarily think of themselves as playing a vanguard role in the BPM of the type described by Du Bois. However, it is important not to overly privilege the role of literature within the BAM. W.S. Tkweme has demonstrated convincingly that there were local settings in which jazz artists actively contributed to the movement, and drew on previous cultural productions to produce multi-genre products.[8]

The potential of BAM participants to promote BPM objectives was partially compromised by external co-optation efforts. James Smethurst relates that urban uprisings "provoked an avalanche of federal and local public money as well as private foundation support for nationalist black art and artistic institutions closely linked to revolutionary political movements … [that] often resulted in a depoliticized arts bureaucracy that undermined or straitjacketed the Black Arts movement."[9] At the same time, as Smethurst cogently observes, "Dramatically increased public and private financing … allowed African American artists to reach a black audience receptive to their radical art on a scale never seen before—even during the Popular Front and the New Deal."[10]

Fortunately, the overall influence of the BPM on the BAM limited, to some extent, the impact of co-optation efforts. According to Smethurst, the "various sorts of government and foundation support generated by black political activism … made it possible for black theaters, cultural centers, workshops, presses, journals … to flourish while promoting art with a politically radical content and an often avant-garde form."[11] The political pressures emanating from the BPM enabled the BAM to impact the representation of Blacks in the commercial media and "produced a distinct Black Arts strain in various mass culture media, especially radio, television, film, and popular music."[12] African American poets, for example, performed readings for diverse audiences, including students on college campuses across the country, and produced recordings with musicians and choirs. Several of the BAM poets used jazz to frame their cultural production, especially "free jazz," prioritizing this genre's militant dimensions and reinterpreting the music in their poetry.

The Blaxploitation Film Counterattack on Black Power Symbolism: An Overview

The introduction of the "Blaxploitation" film genre in the early 1970s was both a new tool of economic exploitation and a direct attack on the cultural ethos created by the BAM. The powerful combination of audio and visual imagery had a much more pronounced effect on individual and collective sensibilities than traditional auditory stimuli. Auditory imagery occurs when one has a "song on the brain," i.e., has the experience of hearing the song without auditory stimulation. A study by David Kraemer et al. examining how the brain processes music finds that similar to previous research regarding "visual imagery," auditory imagery

is triggered when an individual is familiar with a song. When subjects heard a version of a song with some missing lyrics, the brain involuntarily supplied the missing words. Moreover, the researchers found that this imaging occurred in a specific part of the brain that was not accessed when subjects were not familiar with a song.[13]

In a progressive sense, audio and visual imagery induced by music can enable listeners to access related memories, an idea used by Samuel Floyd to ground his study of Black music. Floyd argues "our responses to music are based on our reactions to the artistic embodiment of struggle and fulfillment as depicted in contrived events, relationships, refinements, and idealizations."[14] According to Floyd, these constructed scenarios represent analogs to the daily human struggles to achieve balance between what he describes as "various manifestations of tension and repose, including opposition and accommodation, aspiration and hope, and failure and achievement."[15] However, in the case of Blaxploitation, the combination of auditory and visual imagery was used to neutralize political mobilization efforts. In the contemporary era the music video has emerged as an extremely powerful source of auditory and visual stimulation and has much greater potential than audio recordings to impact the listener's conscious through the combination of auditory and visual imagery effects.

The Blaxploitation film genre was the brainchild of Hollywood magnates and was designed, in part, to bolster sagging Hollywood revenues by bringing African Americans into the movie houses. Moviemakers tapped into the growing frustration in Black communities about persisting poverty and lack of public resources and disseminated a perverse political message glorifying conspicuous consumption, gender exploitation, and extra-legal activity, including the drug trade, as elements of a viable strategy for "getting over on the man." On the other hand, as suggested previously, the representation of the BPM in these films was designed to neutralize the attractiveness of BPM ideology for moviegoers.

The films typically associated with the Blaxploitation genre were released primarily between 1971 and 1975. Josiah Howard defines the genre loosely as "1970s black-cast or black-themed films (or mainstream Hollywood pictures featuring at least one prominent African-American player in a modern-minded narrative steeped in and/or influenced by the concurrent Black Pride movement), created, developed, and most importantly, *heavily promoted* to young, inner-city, black audiences."[16] This broad definition allows Howard to include films such as *Cotton Comes to Harlem* within the genre. Many other critics would use a more restrictive definition that focuses specifically on films produced with a highly formulaic structure that involved violence, drugs, sex, prolific use of negative racial epithets, street talk, fancy clothes and cars, and "getting over on the man." Ultimately the Black audiences realized they were being exploited and abandoned the theaters.[17]

For the purposes of this investigation, it is important to appreciate the sheer magnitude of this enterprise. At least 200 Blaxploitation films were produced during the very short time frame of 1971 to 1975. The titles of some of these productions are well known and include *Superfly* (1972), *Across 110th Street* (1972), and *Cleopatra*

Jones (1973).[18] These films are examined in this investigation along with several others, specifically, *Trouble Man* (1972), *Coffy* (1973), *The Mack* (1973), *Black Caesar* (1973); *Five on the Black Hand Side* (1973), *Willie Dynamite* (1974), and *Friday Foster* (1975). In addition, because of its role as a launching pad for the Blaxploitation genre, *Cotton Comes to Harlem* (1970) is also looked at. As will be noted, this film provides an important benchmark for assessing how subsequent Blaxploitation films distorted the original representation of BPM symbolism. The selection of films is specifically designed to foreground the Black action film heroine. Yvonne Sims has examined this character type in detail.[19] Sims argues that these characters "confirm[ed] that black women were wresting control of their womanhood and femininity from others and no longer allowing others to define what they should look like or how they should act."[20] To the extent that this claim can be sustained, the Black action film heroine played an important role in neutralizing the typical dysfunctional representations of most Black women found in Blaxploitation films.

Selected information about each of these films is summarized in Table 1. The first column indicates the movie title and the musician(s) responsible for the soundtrack.

Focusing first on the sub theme of the relationship between audio and video imagery, the role of highly visible R&B artists is noteworthy, i.e. James Brown, Curtis Mayfield, Bobby Womack, and Marvin Gaye. Only one bona fide jazz artist, Roy Ayers, is represented in this sample.

Some conscious Black musicians contracted to develop the soundtracks for Blaxploitation films attempted to neutralize the thematic content and visual imagery by producing audio commentaries challenging the glorification of the underground economy. In effect, these cultural warriors engaged in a type of guerrilla campaign against external cultural manipulation.[21] Two of the more notable examples are Curtis Mayfield's *Superfly* (1972) and Bobby Womack's *Across 110th Street* (1972) soundtracks.[22]

Curtis Mayfield's "Freddy's Dead" (1972) is a five-and-a-half-minute tribute to the tragically naïve Freddy, who perishes unceremoniously in the cutthroat world navigated by the "Superfly" character (Priest), played by Ron O'Neal.[23] Mayfield asks listeners to think beyond immediate gratification and understand the larger political and economic forces that shape the scenarios producing tragic endings like the death of Freddy:

Bobby Womack's "Across 110th Street," written by Womack and James Louis (J. J., Jay Jay) Johnson, also focuses on one character in a larger drama.[24] The tempo of the movie version of this song is decidedly faster than on the LP. The faster tempo in the movie served to enhance the sense of fast action projected by the visual images. In the closing stanza Womack offers a collective self-help solution by making a plea for Black men to cease and desist from engagement with the drug trade and to examine the social function of the ghetto within the larger political economy.

Curtis Mayfield also attempted to broaden the dialogue regarding the sources of oppression in the monologue and first chorus of "The Cocaine Song" on the *Superfly* album.[25]

Table 1 Selected Characteristics of a Sample of Blaxploitation Films

Title	Plot Summary	Anti-BPM Representations	Use of BPM Symbols
Cotton Comes to Harlem (1970) Music—Galt MacDermot	Detectives "Gravedigger" Jones (Godfrey Cambridge) and "Coffin Ed" Johnson (Raymond St. Jacques) investigate Rev. Deke O'Malley's (Calvin Lockhart) "Back to Africa" scheme which results in money being stashed in a bale of cotton.	Caricature of "Back To Africa" movement	Extensive presence of African-inspired clothing and Afros
		Caricature of Black Panther-like militant group	Repeated positive references to Malcolm X and Marcus Garvey
		Hypocritical use of phrase "Am I Black enough for you"	Swahili classes African artifacts and *Sex and Race* by J.A. Rogers
		"Black Capitalism" as control of criminal activity	*Putney Swope* (1969) featured on theater marquis
Superfly (1972) Music—Curtis Mayfield	Priest (Super Fly) (Ron O'Neal is a cocaine dealer who begins to realize that his life will soon end with either prison or his death. He decides to build an escape from the life by making one last big deal.	Community activists portrayed as shakedown artists	
Across 110th Street (1972) Music—Bobby Womack	A corrupt white cop (Anthony Quinn) and an honest young Black cop (Yaphet Kotto) chase three Black robber/murderers who stole $300,000 of Italian mob money.	Invisibility of community activists	Malcolm X and Angela Davis poster in top Black gangster's office
		Triggerman debates strategy in front of a Martin Luther King Jr. poster	
Trouble Man (1972) Music—Marvin Gaye	Mr. T (Robert Hooks) is an LA private eye hired by a crime family to find out who is stealing from their gambling operation, but actually attempt to exploit him to destroy a competitor crime family.	Invisibility of community activism and Black Pride in street scenes.	Authentic African masks, other African artifacts, and paintings in residence of both the protagonist and his girlfriend.

Title	Plot Summary	Anti-BPM Representations	Use of BPM Symbols
Cleopatra Jones (1973) Music—Joe Simon, Millie Jackson	Cleopatra Jones (Tamara Dodson) is a US Special Agent fighting drug-trafficking. She takes on the notorious drug-lord "Mommy" who causes trouble for Cleopatra's friends who operate a community drug rehab center.	Disorganized armed self-defense Underdeveloped community empowerment ideology (drug rehab) Government agent as savior	Afros as hairstyle Black power salute (including white cop)
Coffy (1973) Music—Roy Ayers	Coffy (Pam Grier) is a nurse who exacts vengeance for her sister's death, killing drug dealers, pimps, and mobsters.	Invisibility of community activists	Afros as hairstyle
The Mack (1973) Music—Willie Hutch	Goldie (Max Julien) is the king of the pimping game challenged by corrupt white cops and a crime lord. His brother is a community activist trying to clean up the Black community.	Multi-racial stable of prostitutes Goldie and his brother collaborate in killing white cops (no difference in values between "the life" and community empowerment)	Afros as hairstyle Trivialization of Black handshake Black hero posters in crime kingpin's office
Black Caesar (1973) Music—James Brown	Tommy Gibbs (Fred Williamson) becomes a kingpin criminal/ hit man who rises to power in Harlem and subsequently becomes alienated from all close associates as his criminal empire crumbles.	Protagonist relishes symbols of white affluence—residence, clothes, etc. Protagonist is eventually killed by gang of Black youth Efforts to foster community uplift dismissed by protagonist	Afros as hairstyles but focus on wigs One minor character wears a dashiki and kufi
Five on the Black Hand Side (1973) Music—H.B. Barnum	John Henry Brooks (Leonard Jackson) is a barber and domineering head of a middle-class Black family. Jackson is forced to rethink his values when his previously docile wife Gladys (Clarice Taylor) rebels inspired by her youngest son, Gideon (Glen Turman).	Brooks eschews BPM ideology and symbols. Barbershop promotes traditional misogynistic views and behaviors Characterization of African-centered wedding plans as "Mumbo Jumbo"	Romare Bearden artwork "The Block" Prolific presence of Afros and African clothing African wedding including libation Use of Malcolm X's teachings to solve familial conflict

Continued

Table 1 *Continued*

Title	Plot Summary	Anti-BPM Representations	Use of BPM Symbols
Willie Dynamite (1973) Music—J.J. Johnson & Gilbert Moses	Willie Dynamite (Roscoe Orman) is a kingpin pimp who is outwitted by a Black social worker who rescues women caught up in prostitution rings.	Invisibility of community activists Multi-racial stable of prostitutes	Afros as hairstyle Willie's sister wears Ankh earrings at Mother's deathbed "Black is Booti-ful" graffiti on wall in prostitutes' jail holding cell
Friday Foster (1975) Music—Luchi de Jesus	Photographer Friday Foster (Pam Grier) accidentally uncovers a plot to assassinate top Black leaders which she and private investigator Hawkins (Yaphet Kotto) successfully thwart.	Image of blonde, white woman featured in magazine office run by Black editor Fashion show models/ attendees wear no Afros nor African-centered clothes Only neighborhood scene is in a Black gay bar in D.C. with a bevy of Black female impersonators	Black unity theme restricted to "traditional" Black leaders, i.e. elected officials, businessmen, and ministers Featured "Africonic Beauty" wears "Kalahari Sunrise" outfit with no African characteristics

For present purposes it is important to note that neither Womack's nor Mayfield's suggested resistance strategies invoke notions of community or collective self-help. The same can be said of Marvin Gaye's "Trouble Man," which lacks even the recognition of a broader system of oppression in championing hard edged individual survival skills. Thus, even in cases where artists attempted to blunt the celebration of dysfunctional behaviors, those counter messages, by and large, did not invoke the language of the BPM.

The second column provides a brief plot summary for each film. Common features for all of the movies except *Five on the Black Hand Side* include some combination of externally controlled organized crime, i.e. drug trafficking and gambling, prostitution, and small-time hustling. Often there is a battle for control of these illicit activities within Black neighborhoods between white and Black mobsters or between competing Black cabals. Pimping operations are typically Black-controlled and Black pimps are often depicted as controlling multi-cultural stables.

The third and fourth columns provide the content that is the central focus of this investigation, i.e. anti-BPM representations and the use of BPM symbolism. The iconic film, *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, is a useful benchmark for assessing the treatment of the BPM in subsequent Blaxploitation films.

Setting the Stage: Cotton Comes to Harlem

Josiah Howard proffers that *Cotton Comes to Harlem* "was filled with familiar and inoffensive (though 'hip') Hollywood film characters set in a romanticized urban setting."[26] Laced with multiple comedic scenes, the plot revolves around efforts to unmask Deke O'Malley's fraudulent "Back to Africa" scheme, riffing on the saga of Marcus Garvey. This satirical take on an important BPM forerunner is supported by other anti-BPM representations, including a slapstick group of Black militants, presumably intended as a caricature of the Black Panthers. The construct of "Blackness" is itself subliminally linked to local control of criminal activity via Deke's repeated hypocritical use of the phrase, "Am I Black Enough for You?"

However, these negative BPM representations are counterbalanced by a number of BPM-affirming components. The opening street scene includes several persons attired in African-inspired clothing, visual imagery embedded throughout the film along with Afro hair styles. There is also affirming Black Power graffiti painted on the walls of buildings in several scenes. Although Deke O'Malley is disconnected from authentic BPM ideology, his BPM alienation is offset, to some extent, by the highly visible presence of African artifacts and other BPM symbols in the residence of his right-hand man, including a copy of Joel A. Rogers's classic, *Sex and Race* (1940), (1942), (1944). One scene features a Swahili class in which all participants are attired in African-inspired clothing. Various characters speak positively throughout the movie about both Marcus Garvey and Malcolm X, and the film, *Putney Swope* (1969), is featured on a theater marquis in Harlem. The climactic scene takes place in the famous Apollo Theater. All of these aspects of the film work to convey a sense of community vitality and long-standing social institutions in line with the vision of BPM proponents.

To summarize, although there are various anti-BPM representations in *Cotton Comes to Harlem*, they are typically presented in a satiric format that lessened the extent to which viewers would be encouraged to dismiss the saliency of BPM symbolism. BPM-affirming symbols are normalized throughout the movie. As discussed below, anti-BPM representations increasingly came to dominate affirming images in subsequent Blaxploitation projects.

Pusherman/Hit Man

The films *Superfly* and *Black Caesar* both portray the complexities of lives heavily intertwined with high-risk/high stakes criminal activity. In *Superfly*, Priest is a cocaine dealer seeking one big score to get out of the game. Tommy Gibbs (Black Caesar) is a hit man who seeks to become the major Black criminal figure in Harlem. As suggested in Table 1, *Superfly* is almost devoid of BPM images, positive or negative. The only substantive content is a group of alleged community

activists that attempts, unsuccessfully, to shakedown Priest for money to support their ventures. The incompetence of their initiative projects a negative image of the efficacy of community activism related to the BPM.

Representations of the BPM in *Black Caesar* are also heavily censored, consisting of one person wearing a Kufi and street vendors selling Afro wigs. The plot of *Black Caesar* is much more interesting for present purposes than the formulaic and predictable *Superfly*. *Black Caesar* begins with a flashback to Gibbs's adolescent experiences that led to his incarceration as a juvenile, backgrounded by James Brown's "Down and Out in New York City." Gibbs's rise in the criminal hierarchy begins with his release from prison in 1965, and Gibbs's life trajectory is counterpoised to that of his long-time college-educated friend Joe, who, despite a very different socialization, becomes Gibbs's closest criminal associate (accountant) in Gibbs's criminal ventures. For a time Joe holds on to the dream of eventually using some portion of the ill-gotten gains from criminal activity for community uplift—an outcome that never materializes due to Gibbs's lack of support. This narrative is a subtle attack on the idealism of the generation of college students who strongly supported the goals of the BPM. Gibbs's mother is a maid for Gibbs's white lawyer. In an interesting turn of events Gibbs acquires the lawyer's Upper East Side New York residence and attempts to give it to his mother as a sort of reparation, a gift which she refuses on moral grounds. This misguided effort to rationalize his activities is reflective of Gibbs's uncritical association of success with the acquisition of the symbols of white affluence. As his rise to the top of the criminal pecking order proceeds, Gibbs alienates all of his friends and family, symbolized most directly by the rape of his love interest and a threat to kill his father.

The destruction of Gibbs's criminal empire ends with his murder by a loosely organized group of young Black males after being shot by his criminal rivals. This resolution was signaled earlier in the film by James Brown's soulful rendering of the song, "You Got to Pay the Cost to Be the Boss." In contrast, in *Superfly* Priest succeeds in getting over on the "Man" and survives to enjoy his ill-gained profits. In both of these movies the characters' fates are determined exclusively by their individual agency—notions of community central to BPM ideology are marginalized and there is no presence of BPM formations in the communities they frequent.

Big Pimpin'

As indicated in Table 1, *The Mack* and *Willie Dynamite* explore the world of "Big Pimpin'." Aside from the obvious disdain of BPM advocates for the sexual exploitation of women that is the hallmark of the pimping game, anti-BPM representations of this enterprise are magnified in several ways. The stables of pimps Goldie and Willie Dynamite are both multi-racial and the clientele is disproportionately comprised of white males. Such inter-racial liaisons are clearly antithetical to BPM values. The violation of BPM norms is attenuated by the denigration of the symbolism associated with Afro hairstyles via their use by prostitutes to increase their exotic allure. In *Willie Dynamite* there is a scene in which several ladies of the night are incarcerated in a jail holding cell

with "Black is Booti-ful" graffiti on the wall—an obvious satirical reference to the phrase, "Black is Beautiful." In *The Mack* the legacy of iconic figures in the history of the struggle for racial equality is problematized by the presence of celebratory posters on the wall of the top Black crime boss whom Goldie seeks to supplant.

Differences in the portrayal of BPM community activists in the two films warrant some commentary. In *Willie Dynamite* community activists associated with the BPM are invisible. Still, in the end Willie is outwitted by a Black female social worker whose mission is to rescue women caught up in prostitution rings. In *The Mack* Goldie's brother is a community activist trying to resolve problems plaguing his community. However, in a similar vein to the fate of Joe in *Black Caesar,* Goldie and his brother collaborate in killing racist and corrupt white cops. This subplot serves to blur the important distinction made by some BPM proponents between morally grounded armed self-defense and other uses of violence.

Although both films disproportionately portray BPM symbolism in negative terms, there is one affirming feature of *Willie Dynamite* that deserves mention. Willie's mother and sister serve as the anti-thesis to the women that Willie exploits so indifferently. His sister's loose attachment to the BPM is symbolized by highly visible Ankh earrings that she wears at her mother's deathbed. Both the earrings and the deathbed ritual introduce reaffirmation of values consistent with the BPM that offset, to a limited extent, the overall dysfunctional treatment of the BPM that pervades the film.

Walkin' the Tightrope

The extent to which Black communities can rely on law enforcement officials to support community uplift efforts has always been a complex issue. In *Cotton Comes to Harlem* Black detectives "Gravedigger" Jones (Godfrey Cambridge) and "Coffin Ed" Johnson (Raymond St. Jacques) are both admired and feared for their no-nonsense approach to thwarting criminal activity while respecting community values. The films *Across 110th Street* and *Trouble Man* also explore the ambiguous role of Black detectives attempting to balance commitments to community and law and order. In *Across 110th Street* Yaphet Kotto portrays an honest Black policeman confronting a triad of corrupt white colleagues, Black criminals, and the Italian mob. As indicated in Table 1, the anti-BPM representations are similar to those found in other films, such as misuse of images of iconic Black heroes (in this case Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and Angela Davis), and the invisibility of community activists.

In Ivan Dixon's *Trouble Man* greater care is exercised to incorporate positive BPM symbols. The residence of the protagonist, "Mister T," is laced with a variety of African masks and other artifacts. The same is true of his love interest who proudly sports an Afro hairstyle (not a wig). Positive BPM associated representations include paintings, fertility figures, and other statues.

In both films the main characters are able to navigate the complex challenges faced by competing loyalties. However, in many ways traditional law enforcement

is portrayed as the only option available, with no consideration of the potential of community self-policing—a strategy advocated by some BPM activists.

Soul Sisters

As cogently noted by Yvonne Sims, "Pam Grier and Tamara Dodson brought a new character to the screen that was instrumental in reshaping gender roles, particularly those involving action-centered story lines."[27] The accuracy of Sims's observation is obvious from a cursory review of how women are treated in the other films included in Table 1 discussed to this point. My intention here is examine the roles played by these actresses in the films *Cleopatra Jones*, *Coffy*, and *Friday Foster* in the context of the overall treatment of BPM symbolism.

As indicated in Table 1, in *Cleopatra Jones* Tamara Dodson is a US Special Agent fighting drug-trafficking. Her arch enemy is a drug-lord named "Mommy," who eventually causes trouble for Cleopatra's friends who operate a community drug rehabilitation center. While the inclusion of a rehab center in the plot can be seen as signaling efforts at community empowerment, the armed self-defense efforts of its supporters against Mommy's minions are ineffective and it is the government's intervention, i.e. Cleopatra Jones, that saves the day. In addition, the ideology that guides the work of the rehab center is underdeveloped. In summary, the government agent as savior trope serves to diminish the significance of the type of community empowerment efforts championed by BPM advocates.

The roles played by Pam Grier in *Coffy* and *Friday Foster* are more realistic than the James Bond style portrayal of Cleopatra Jones. At the outset Coffy is a nurse who becomes a female warrior as a result of her sister's death. She proceeds to exact vengeance on drug dealers, pimps, and mobsters who are implicated in her sister's demise. Her crusade is largely an individual one undertaken against a background of invisibility of community activists.

Friday Foster is a photographer who accidentally uncovers a plot to assassinate top Black leaders. She and a private investigator named Hawkins (Yaphet Kotto) are eventually successful in thwarting this plot. This male–female partnership reflects the type of cooperation championed by some BPM formations. However, there are many more aspects of this film that project anti-BPM imagery. While the magazine that employs Friday is headed by a Black editor, the most prominent image in his office is a poster-size reproduction of the cover of an issue that features the visage of a blonde white woman. One of the most memorable scenes in the movie focuses on a fashion show sponsored by Madame Rena (Eartha Kitt). The fashion show is notable for the virtual absence of natural hair styles and African-inspired clothing. The featured model, who is described as an "Africonic Beauty," does not have a natural hairstyle and the outfit that she models, termed "Kalahari Sunrise," exhibits no discernable African influences.

The action in this film switches back and forth between Los Angeles and Washington, D.C. In D.C. the only community establishment that is featured is a

Black gay bar frequented by a bevy of Black female impersonators headed by "The Black Widow" (Godfrey Cambridge). In Los Angeles there is a regular visit by a comic pimp who repeatedly attempts to lure Friday into his stable.

The effort to foster Black unity by Black leaders, which is the target of the assassination plot, is restricted to traditional leadership classes, i.e. elected officials, business leaders, and clergy. Grassroots community leaders promoting BPM values and objectives are excluded from this gathering. In summary, while *Cleopatra Jones*, *Coffy*, and *Friday Foster* are to be celebrated for opening new opportunities for Black actresses, at the same time these films contributed to the overall marginalization of the BPM found in the other films discussed previously.

The Black Hand Side or the Road Not Taken

The preceding critique of the treatment of the BPM in Blaxploitation films begs the question of whether there are counterexamples that illustrate alternative possibilities. *Five on the Black Hand Side*, produced by Brock Peters and Michael Tolan, provides such an alternative vision. This film is a comedy that chronicles the attempts of a middle-class Black family to negotiate conflicting aspirations and values of its members. The foregrounding of the Black middle class is a welcome counterweight to the relentless microscopic focus on the underbelly of Black society in the Blaxploitation films considered to this point.

The saga revolves around John Henry Brooks (Leonard Jackson), a barber by trade and domineering head of his household. He is an Army veteran and staunch advocate of capitalism who is wholly dismissive of BPM ideology and symbolism and takes great pride in his status as a small business owner. His wife, Gladys, is the prototypical docile, frumpy, obedient housekeeper who obeys her husband's every order (she is expected to address him as "Mr. Brooks") and is completely devoted to their children, Booker T., Gideon, and Gail. As suggested by his name, Booker T. is closely aligned ideologically with his father, although he works in an anti-poverty program and is rumored to have a white girlfriend. His younger brother, Gideon (Glen Turman), is in rebellion against his father's insistence that he major in Business rather than Archaeology. Gail is the character most directly aligned with BPM ideology and symbolism. Her bedroom is decorated with various examples of African-inspired clothing, Afrocentric posters, and other BPM symbols. She is engaged to Marvin, a Vietnam War Refusnik, and their "African" wedding is imminent. Her father is, of course, not supportive of the "Mumbo Jumbo" wedding plans, but feels the need to respect Gail's wishes.

The exploration of the family dynamics plays out within two heavily gendered spaces—John Henry's Barbershop and Glady's kitchen. The name of John Henry's enterprise is the "Black Star Barber Shop," an obvious riff on Marcus Garvey's "Black Star Line." Within the walls of the shop the barbers and regular customers express a chorus of misogynistic views and behaviors. No women are allowed to enter the shop. The colorful monikers of regular customers pay homage to the diversity of African American culture, including "Sweetness," "Rolls Royce," and

"Fun Loving." When an unwelcome visitor entreats John Henry to display a BPM-oriented poster, John Henry rips up the poster after the corn-rowed visitor departs, declaring that it is crazy to go around yelling "I'm Black and I'm Proud." This act firmly establishes the shop as an anti-BPM sanctuary.

The liberation of Gladys is accomplished through the intervention of two friends, Ruby (Clarice Taylor), and especially the vivacious "Stormy Monday" (Ja'net DuBois). Through a series of consciousness-raising discussions in Gladys's kitchen she is convinced to issue a set of demands to John Henry intended to achieve "peace, liberation, and self-determination"—an extension of BPM values to the individual level. However, Gladys inveighs that her real objective is simply to get John Henry to relax and "let me love him." Gladys and her compatriots don military gear and wage protests outside the Black Star Barber shop. Her forces eventually storm the shop, erasing its heralded status as a monument to Black patriarchy. However, her liberation efforts spark conflict among her children, but Gail's fiancé, Marvin, intervenes using the ideology of Malcolm X emphasizing the need for a spirit of "we-ism" to quell the tensions.

All of the guests at Gail's and Marvin's wedding are brightly attired in African-oriented clothing, except John Henry and his barber colleagues. By this time John Henry has been forced reluctantly to submit to Gladys's demands but their relationship is in question. The wedding ceremony itself is problematic because it reinforces the idea that a wife is expected to submit unquestionably to her husband's will, a curious construction given the film's emphasis on Gladys's liberation. Suspense is created during the celebration following the wedding when John Henry, who has obviously been uncomfortable throughout the ceremony, unexpectedly disappears. However, it is clear that all is well when he returns proudly clad in a dashiki and actively participates in the closing scene during which attendees form a Soul Train dance line that actually features dancers from the Soul Train TV show.

In summary, in addition to its other dimensions, *Five on the Black Hand Side* explores the complexities associated with efforts to expand the scope of African American culture to encompass broader acceptance of the values and objectives of the BPM. This treatment of the BPM clearly represents an alternative to the dismissive posture found in other Blaxploitation-era films. The prominence of Romare Bearden's painting, "The Block," in several scenes underscores the film's emphasis on community cohesion, a critical value espoused by BPM proponents.

Returning to the critical role of music in reinforcing or neutralizing the overt and subliminal messages embedded in films, *WATTSAX*, originally released in 1973, was a music-based counterforce to the 1970s Blaxploitation films. Produced by Mel Stuart, the film is a retrospective on the Watts riots of 1965. The primary focus is the Watts Summer Festival's 1972 concert held at the Los Angeles Coliseum. The concert featured various "soul" artists including Isaac Hayes, Rufus Thomas, The Staple Singers, The Bar Kays, and Luther Ingram. The concert footage is interwoven with interviews dissecting the state of Black America in the early 1970s and the effects of the riots on both Los Angeles and the US.[28] While not

appealing to the type of mass audiences sought by action films and comedies, *WATTSAX* clearly demonstrated that there are alternative approaches to the creative use of popular culture to explore critical socio-political issues beyond action films and comedies.

A Problematic Legacy

As the Blaxploitation film genre lost traction, Black sit-coms emerged to fill the void, shifting the primary locus of cultural deconstruction to television. The foundation for modern sit-coms featuring a Black cast was laid by the success of *All in the Family* (1971) leading to the spin-off of the second African American sitcom, *The Jeffersons*, in 1975. *The Jeffersons* successfully broke into mainstream television, airing over 250 shows over a ten-year run and compiling Nielsen ratings among the top 25 for eight years.[29]

Beginning in the 1990s there was a pronounced resurgence of de-facto "Blaxploitation" or, alternatively, "gangsploitation" films. The new genre of Blaxploitation films were fueled by the Hip Hop/Rap Music movement and made possible by the success of independent Black filmmakers. The exact origins are in dispute but the release of *I'm Gonna Get You Sucka* in 1988 is one important benchmark. Other significant films include John Singleton's *Boyz n the Hood* (1991), Mario van Peebles's *New Jack City* (1991), Ernest Dickerson's *Juice* (1992), and Albert and Allen Hughes's *Menace II Society* (1993). Other representative titles include *Dead Presidents*, *Set It Off*, and *Poetic Justice*. Like their 1970s predecessors, these films typically highlight drugs and violence, with a story line that pretends to say something genuine about the Black experience. The destructive messages projected by this genre were reinforced by the revival of the minstrelsy tradition in various entertainment genres including stand up comedy and most contemporary television programs focusing on Blacks.

In a manner reminiscent of the debilitating effect of 1970s Blaxploitation films on the BPM movement, this neo-Blaxploitation genre undercut an emerging movement associated with the revival of the legacy of Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz) fueled by the release of Spike Lee's 1992 film, *Malcolm X*. Lee provided an alternative treatment of this cultural icon to that propagated in the traditional media, which branded Malcolm X as a dangerous militant framed by his famous statement "By any means necessary." The influence of Lee's film was visually documented by the prevalence of the X icon on T-shirts, baseball caps, and other attire, which functioned as a statement of recognition of their oppression as well as a call for a collective movement to redress social ills. As was the case during the era of the BPM, capitalists quickly recognized the potential to commodify this renewed interest and quickly introduced a plethora of "X merchandise," including board games and air fresheners. Regrettably, the neo-Blaxploitation film genre unwittingly (hopefully) contributed to the diffusion of this emergent movement through the propagation of visions of fame, fortune, and pliant women that were presumably available through heavy engagement in the underground economy.

As the neo-Blaxploitation film genre lost momentum, progressive political tendencies continued to be neutralized by the expanding popularity of comedic depictions of the Black experience integrated into the most popular type of contemporary Black theatrical performances, so-called "Gospel Plays." These plays have been popularized by Tyler Perry, who himself plays the character of a gun-toting Grandma named Madea Simmons in drag. Perry's plays all typically revolve around vaudeville-style church services reminiscent of Greek morality plays and choruses. There are several other producers of this type of play and the titles clearly signal the moral message, including "Real Men Pray" and "I'm Doing the Right Thing … with the Wrong Man." The plotlines tend to be similar and relatively simple, typically including a wronged woman (or, occasionally, man), the no-good man (or, occasionally, woman), an easily accessible lover (milkman, janitor, or mechanic), the evils of drugs or alcohol, a comically over-the-top gay man (usually a hairdresser), and a cathartic "come-to-Jesus" moment.[30]

From the vantage point of B/AS these plays perform a constructive role in providing an alternative to the degradation of traditional values that is propagated through many other popular cultural genres. The plays are especially popular among Black women over 25 years old. At the same time, the simple solutions to life problems proposed in these presentations are not adequate to address the complex problems facing Black communities, which are far more complex than those confronting filmmakers and musicians during the 1970s.

The contemporary Black media climate is characterized by a pattern of consolidation in ownership and control that has decimated Black radio news, a key complement to R&B political commentaries in the 1960s and early 1970s. The decline of Black radio news has conditioned listeners to expect mundane news broadcasts, thereby dulling the receptivity of listeners to incisive political commentaries by progressive Hip Hop artists. *Black Commentator* argues that "the near death of Black radio news has been a major factor in the erosion of Black political organization, nationwide" and that "Chains like Radio One gradually eliminated news from the mix, passing off syndicated or local talk, instead, and pretending that morning news jockeys could double as news people."[31]

Community activists committed to formation of a new mass liberation movement must confront these realities. Hopefully they will be able to enlist as allies a cadre of filmmakers and musicians who understand the potential of popular culture as a vehicle for conscious raising and empowerment and are willing to forego the glitter of bling and commit to the vision outlined so long ago by W.E.B. Du Bois.

7

"Until Justice Rolls Down Like Water and Righteousness like a Mighty Stream": The Celebration of Black Life in the Music of Mausiki Scales and the Common Ground Collective

Introduction

Celebrating life, expressing hopes for the future, and chronicling liberation struggles are all common themes in Black social/political discourse and Black cultural production. In both arenas, references to water are often used to signify cultural nurturance, resilience, and resistance to oppression. The quotation in the title comes from Martin Luther King's Jr. famous "I Have a Dream" speech. King uses the movement of water to describe the goals (justice and righteousness) and the transformative momentum of the Modern Civil Rights Movement.[1] In his classic treatise, *There is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (1981), Vincent Harding expands the use of moving water as a metaphor to characterize the 400-year freedom struggle waged by people of African descent:

> I knew that what I wanted and needed to write about was something that had never been developed in one work: a narrative, analytical, and celebrative history of the freedom struggle of black people in this country, beginning before there was a country. I was especially concerned to try to convey its long continuous movement, flowing like a river, sometimes powerful, tumultuous. And roiling with life; at other times meandering and turgid, covered with the ice and snow of seemingly endless winters, all too often streaked and running with blood.[2]

The music of Mausiki Scales and the Common Ground Collective (MSCGC) embraces Harding's approach to interrogating the trajectory of Black life. It constitutes a paradigmatic example of progressive cultural production that continues the tradition of offering incisive affirmation of cultural connections between Africa and its tributaries. Michael Simanga, former Executive Director of the National Black Arts Festival, opines, "Mausiki Scales and The Common Ground Collective have connected deeply to the African spirit and the centuries old exchange of experiences between African people in the Diaspora."[3] In a similar vein, Akinyele Umoja relates, "Mausiki Scales (and Common Ground's) sound

concerns itself with the African ancestral musical arts, while being fully present in addressing contemporary experiences."[4]

Mausiki Scales was born on African Liberation Day (May 25th) in 1968 in Gary, Indiana. During his childhood, Scales, his siblings, and cousins would regularly perform in impromptu talent shows at family gatherings. He began taking piano lessons at age nine and soon discovered impressive improvisation skills. Scales subsequently joined his high school jazz band and also played alto saxophone in the marching band. While pursuing his undergraduate degree at Tuskegee University, Scales performed in the band, *Noire*. Scales continued his formal education at Clark Atlanta University, earning a master's degree in History. Prior to founding MSCGC, Scales played keyboard in the Atlanta-based Afro Blue Trio. Scales's musical influences include Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, Fela Kuti, Stevie Wonder, Taj Mahal, the New Orleans Mardi Gras Indians, Manu DiBango, Olu Dara, HBCU Marching Bands, Amiri Baraka, James Brown, Roy Ayers, Oscar Brown Jr., Bob Marley, Bill Withers, Parliament Funkadelic, Rakim, Nina Simone, Gil Scott-Heron, Miles Davis, and John Coltrane.[5]

Scales's leadership of MSCGC began in 1998 and the collective includes more than thirty musicians and vocalists, although some concerts feature only a trio. The group has performed in numerous celebrations, concerts, and special events throughout Africa and the Americas. These venues include Ghana's Golden Anniversary Celebration, the National Black Arts Festival, Funk Jazz Café, and the Atlanta Jazz Festival, Sankofa African Bar in the cultural center Pelourinho located in Salvador da Bahia, Brazil. MSCGC has collaborated with several well-known artists including Roy Ayers, Babatunde Olatunji, Stevie Wonder, The Last Poets, and Third World.[6] The group has recorded several CDs and EPs: *Remembrance Has Not Left Us* (1999), *Endless Summers and Southern Porches* (2001), *Oh Africa* (2013), *The Water Brought Us* (2008). Mausiki Scales solo projects include *Drums and Shadows* (2017), and *WestWest Africa* (2020).[7] More recently he released the single "The Traveler" scheduled for inclusion on an EP titled *Long Memory*.[8]

WestWest Africa is described by Kenja McCray as "an ode to the inventive spirit of America's early West African forebearers who endured the trans-Atlantic slave trade."[9] She also characterizes *WestWest Africa* as "a praise song for the late historian, Sterling Stuckey … [whose] philosophies on the influence of African culture in identity formation among enslaved people of African descent inform Scales' musical expression."[10] Excerpts from Stuckey's classic 1968 essay, "Through the Prism of Folklore: The Black Ethos in Slavery," offer valuable insights regarding his influence on Scales.[11]

Stuckey related how enslaved African Americans had "created a large number of extraordinary songs and greatly improved a considerable proportion of the songs of others" and he opined, "it is not at all difficult to believe that they were conscious of the fact that they were leaders in the vital area of art—giving protagonists rather than receiving pawns."[12] Reflecting on Black cultural influences during the Civil War era, Stuckey observed, "Whatever the nature of the shocks generated by the war, among those vibrations felt were some that had come from Afro-American singing ever since the first Africans were forcibly brought to these shores."[13] Amplifying this point, Stuckey declared, "Du Bois was correct when

he said that the new freedom song had not come from Africa, but that 'the dark throb and beat of that Ancient of Days was in and through it.'"[14] Stuckey linked this history to the modern freedom struggle, asserting, "What a splendid affirmation of the hopes and dreams of their slave ancestors that some of the songs being sung in antebellum days are the ones Afro-Americans are singing in the freedom movement today: 'Michael, row the boat ashore'; 'Just like a tree planted by the water, I shall not be moved.'"[15] The specific songs referenced by Stuckey further underscore the importance of references to water in framing the Black freedom struggle.

MSCGC's music pays tribute both to the musical traditions highlighted by Stuckey and to his emphasis on Black agency. MSCGC is primarily associated with the Afrobeat genre that combines West African styles, such as Highlife, with Funk and Jazz influences. Afrobeat also makes extensive use of complex overlapping rhythms, heavy percussion, and vocal chants, often in traditional African languages. Afrobeat is also known for the extended length of individual songs, some lasting more than a half hour. Commentators have used a variety of descriptors to characterize the style of MSCGC. Michael Simanga maintains, "Scales' music presents an authentic rendering of the pulsating African rhythm fused with jazz and R&B that is the hallmark of Afrobeat."[16] Similarly, Michael Sahr Ngaujah, lead actor in the Broadway presentation of the play *Fela!* relates, "Mausiki Scales has shown a commitment to excellence in Afrobeat and offers a creative/original interpretation of the genre. While maintaining the integrity of Afrobeat as a musical tradition, his band the Common Ground Collective takes you on a fearless exploration through the message music of Funk, modal jazz and Hiphop."[17] Ngaujah also observes, "This collective maintains a performance-style rooted in the social-community circles of ol' time New Orleans, the Caribbean and West Africa."[18] Scales's musical talents have led to several formal recognitions, including the 2015 Georgia Governor's Award for the Arts and Humanities.

The concert "Message in the Music! A Musical Tribute to Musical Giants Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, and Fela Kuti" scheduled for April 4, 2020, in Atlanta was unfortunately cancelled due to COVID-19 pandemic concerns. April 4th is, of course, forever mired in infamy as the date of the 1968 assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the choice of this date clearly signals Scales's political orientation. Moreover, the selection of planned celebrants unambiguously indicates the special significance of the artistry of Masekela, Makeba, and Kuti for the cultural production of MSCGC.

Remembering the Celebrants

The importance of Hugh Masekela's cultural production on MSCGC is underscored in the liner notes to *West West Africa.* Here, McCray informs us that the origin of the title of *West West Africa* was Masekela's performance at the 2008 National Black Arts Festival in Atlanta where he used the term to describe a "bridge connecting Africa and the Diaspora."[19] Masekela was born in Witbank, South Africa in 1939 and in the mid 1950s became a trumpet player in a jazz band led by equal rights

activist Father Trevor Huddleston. He left South Africa for New York in 1960, and inspired by Dizzie Gillespie and Louis Armstrong, developed a style drawing extensively on his African roots. The initial product was the 1963 release of the album *Trumpet Africaine*. His 1977 song, "Soweto Blues" (performed by Mariam Makeba), chronicles the horrors of the 1976 Soweto massacre. This song marks an importance elevation of Masekela's anti-apartheid advocacy that was amplified in the 1986 song, "Bring Home Nelson Mandela." Following Mandela's release in 1990, Masekela returned to South Africa after 30 years of exile. The 2002 documentary film, *Amandla: A Revolution in Four Part Harmony*, includes several performances by Masekela. The 2018 death of Masekela was an important motivation for the cancelled concert.[20]

The second celebrant of the cancelled concert, Miriam Makeba, is widely known as "Mother Africa." A former wife of Hugh Masekela, many of Makeba's songs include Swahili, Xhosa, and Sotho lyrics, the most famous of which is "Pata Pata" (1967). In describing her musical inspiration, Makeba references water—"I look at a stream and I see myself: a native South African, flowing irresistibly over hard obstacles until they become smooth and, one day, disappear—flowing from an origin that has been forgotten toward an end that will never be." Makeba and Harry Belafonte received a Grammy Award for the 1965 album, *An Evening with Belafonte/Makeba*. Through her civil rights advocacy, Makeba became acquainted with Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) who, at the time, had a leadership role in the Black Panther Party. Her marriage to Ture in 1968 eroded Makeba's popularity, and government harassment forced the couple to relocate to Guinea. As was the case for Masekela, Makeba returned to South Africa after apartheid was dismantled in 1990. Her subsequent artistic endeavors included a 1991 album with Nina Simone and Dizzy Gillespie, as well as an appearance in the 1992 film *Sarafina!* Miriam Makeba died of a heart attack during a 2008 concert in Italy. In assessing her career, she observed, "I kept my culture. I kept the music of my roots. Through my music I became this voice and image of Africa and the people without even realising."[21]

The third planned celebrant of the cancelled MSCGC concert, Fela Ransome-Kuti (Fela Anikulapo-Kuti), was born in Abeokuta, Nigeria in 1939. Kuti is credited with originating the Afrobeat musical genre, which combines Highlife, Blues, Jazz, Funk, and traditional Yoruba music. His mother, Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, was a well-known feminist and labor activist. The Afrobeat sound was developed in the late 1960s by Kuti's Koola Lobitos band. During a 1969 tour of the US he was exposed to the teachings of Malcolm X and the Black Power Movement. As a result of these experiences, Kuti's music took a decidedly more political tone when he returned to Nigeria. Much of his music attacked the unwitting adoption of European values and behaviors with representative songs, including "Upside Down," "Shuferring and Schmiling," "Zombie," "Lady," and "Gentleman." Kuti also openly challenged the oppressive policies and practices of the Nigerian Government. As a consequence his nightclub in Lagos was regularly raided, and a 1977 assault on his compound resulted in a brief incarceration. His mother

was injured during the melee and died from complications in 1978. The song, "Sorry Tears and Blood," chronicles this tragic episode. Kuti then went into exile in Ghana in 1978, but in 1979 he organized the Movement of the People party and ran unsuccessfully for the Nigerian presidency. He was jailed twice more before he died in Lagos in 1997. Fela Kuti's son, Femi Kuti, continues his father's Afrobeat legacy.[22]

Although not one of the planned celebrants, the late drummer Tony Allen deserves recognition for his important contributions to the development of the Afrobeat genre. Allen died on April 30, 2020—two weeks after the planned date of the concert. Allen was a co-creator of Afrobeat, having served as Fela Kuti's musical director. Allen joined Kuti's band Koola Lobitos in the mid-1960s, and was a founding member of the legendary band called Africa '70, founded in 1969, but parted ways with Kuti in 1978. Allen met Hugh Masekela in Nigeria in the 1970s where they often performed together, and they also performed together occasionally in the 1980s. However, Allen and Masekela did not actually record together until 2010. A previously unknown album featuring the two musicians was posthumously released in 2020.[23]

MSCGC: History, Cultural Continuity, and Liberation

The typologies I developed to classify political commentary in Black music are useful for interpreting MSCGC's lyrics.[24] Five categories, i.e. "Documentaries," "Defiant Challenges," "Awareness Raising Self-Criticism," "Collective Self-Help Solutions," and "Spiritual Transcendence Explorations" are especially apropos for analyzing the lyrical content of MSCGC compositions. Documentaries highlight negative conditions prevalent in Black communities or systemic patterns of exploitation. "Defiant Challenges" demand, rather than entreat, external forces to cease and desist from exploitative behavior, although the challenge may be phrased subtly. "Awareness Raising Self-Criticism" is commentary "designed to educate listeners about the seriousness of a particular set of circumstances and to document the need for corrective action." The primary bases of criticism are generally lack of political awareness of the origins and severity of a problem and failure to take action to eliminate debilitating predicaments. "Collective Self-Help Solutions" attempt to sharpen political consciousness with the goal of encouraging collective development and implementation of solutions to pervasive problems. "Spiritual Transcendence Explorations" urge listeners to seek solutions to their daily struggles by pursuing personal spiritual enlightenment through various processes such as meditation, changes in nutritional practices, and other lifestyle changes. Such spiritual enlightenment can proceed concurrently with collective self-help activities.[25]

Disseminating historical information and highlighting shared cultural practices and challenges spanning both time and distance are central to the music

of MSCGC. Embracing a pan-African identity is advocated as a prerequisite for people of African descent to mobilize, restore cultural authenticity, and intensify the struggle for political, economic, and social liberation. Many of MSCGC's compositions incorporate phrasings and chants in various African languages, following the tradition of Miriam Makeba and Fela Kuti. Scales strives to guide the audience and fellow musicians through an improvisational journey during live performances. He "reads" the energy in the performance space to determine which songs to play next. As a rule, the band almost never uses a set list, seldom takes breaks despite an average concert duration between two to four hours, and members rarely know what songs Scales will call next, creating a fluidity to the set. All participants, including the musicians on stage, are having a unique experience. Scales has honed his ability to create this type of dynamic, interactive, ritualistic performance driven by a deep synergy between bandleader, band, and audience through his years of studying Black music, culture, and spirituality. Scales signals are subtly communicated to the band members to guide the flow of the music. Performances often end with a New Orleans Blues-style medley.

Lyrical Analysis

As indicated previously, one of the primary goals of this inquiry is to utilize selected typologies to interpret the lyrical content of MSCGC compositions. "Sankofa People" (*Passages: The Water Brought Us*) illustrates MSCGC's approach to "collective self-help." The song is a reminder of the African roots of African American culture, as well as a plea for African Americans to return "home" and assist in repairing the horrific damage imposed on Africa over five centuries:

> Our history didn't start in slavery
> Our forefathers weren't born in chains
> They built pyramids, temples, universities, in those days
> Its Babylon and you never know what they're gonna have in store
> High winds, pure neglect, our people in the lower ninth ward
> Never forgetting what unfolded there
> From the floodings all the way back to Congo Square
> Yes we were there
> Let's return home to repair
> That which is in need of repair
> Don't despair
> Let us be clear.

The creation of the widespread African Diaspora through the horrific deeds of capitalist enslavers is recounted in the documentary presentation of "Pot Liquor" (*Endless Summer*):

How did we go from a full course dinner
To collard greens and pot liquor
Hieroglyphics to chicken scratch
Pyramids to projects

Black gold, black gold for sale
Congo-Angola to the Sahel
Once the word got out
Went around like the ring-shout
All about—all about
…

Hands from Africa in the ports of Charleston
Why?
White cotton oh white cotton
Hands from Africa in Jamaica
Why?
Sugar cane or sweet cane
Hands from Africa in Cuba
Why?
For tobacco oh tobacco
One rough road
Row to hoe
Hands from Africa in Suriname
Why?
For sugar oh sweet sugar
Hands from Africa in Virginia
Why?
Oh tobacco oh tobacco
…

The ongoing consequences of historical oppression have created major barriers for contemporary efforts to achieve liberation. The magnitude of these challenges and strategies to address resistance are suggested in the "defiant challenge" issued in "The Kaleidoscopic Universe" (*WestWest Africa*):

Welcome to the Big Game
The Kaleidoscopic Universe
This is the Big Game
In this mansion made of mirrors
Bend but don't break
When the storm winds blow
Bend but don't break
Always stretch and flow

One of the perplexing obstacles to advancing liberatory projects is the resistance among many to actively embrace their African heritage. This problem is highlighted in the "awareness raising self-criticism" articulated in "Endless Summers" (*Still African*):

Cape Coast, Accra and El Mina
Bags of ice water crown my little sisters head
Life, life in Ghana
Where women carry loads on their heads,
babies on their backs
And Brothers tend to harvest the sea
Where salt water meets the shore
And concrete impedes the land
"Door of No Return" we're still African,
In our souls,
In my soul,

For years of crimes that make your blood boil
Our mother endured
Just add water and the blood stained soil
And you got people diminished
Today someone never enter to honor the invisible list
Denial of sold family members
Returning children aint tourists
What type of spell must we be under?
Not to realize we're stolen thunder
Door of no return we're still African,
In our souls,
In my soul, … Cape Coast, Accra, El Mina

Difficulties confronting African Americans in embracing a pan-African identity are acknowledged in "Children of the Crossroads" (*Endless Summers*), with the title and the concluding line suggesting allusions to W.E.B. Du Bois's construct of "double-consciousness" in a type of "spiritual transcendence exploration":

We been searching through distant lands to find faces like the ones at home
Making sense out of heart-shaped Sankofas on the iron rails at
grandma's home
In need of ancient traditions mother culture—our continuum

To some, Anansi is just a spider
And the path is just a road
Let the way open wider
For the children of the cross-roads
To some, Anansi is just a spider
And the path is just a road

Let the way open wider
For the children of the cross-roads

Remember our first world-wide-web was spun by Anansi
Wisdom for generations told and sung by Ashanti
To pull on one end of the web
Is felt by the other three
Lessons told fifty-[e]leven times Ta-Seti- to Carter G.
Living in the hyphen confuses our identity

In "Pass Tradition" (*WestWest Africa*) consciousness-raising and spiritual transcendence are tied directly to the imparting of information by elders:

Do like our ancestors did
It's not that far to get to yesterday,
This is how you
Pass tradition, pass tradition

Gather the family
Under the shade of tree

The case that active embrace of African roots can provide collective guidance for imagining a hopeful future is made in "Ancestral Dreams" (*Remembrance*)—another example of a "spiritual transcendence exploration":

In my dreams, ancestors visit from places unseen
And I hear them speak of new horizons
Discovered yesterday and now it seems
I know just what it means to hear them whispering Sankofa …

In my dreams, Ancestors visit and they say to me
Follow me, follow me,
Follow me, follow me
Take flight
Spread your wings

Channeling the wisdom of elders through dreams is suggested to be an especially powerful type of "spiritual transcendence exploration" as advocated in "Freedom Flight" (*Drums and Shadows*):

Dream Freedom, Dream Freedom Dreams
Dream Freedom, Dream

Let's take flight,
Get your magic carpet right
Mono-rails, planes and rocket-ships

Imagine us escaping on this magic trip
It's magical bliss
Spread your wings, spread your wings and fly away
And dream your freedom dreams

Nourishment for the Body and the Soul

Food references are used regularly by MSCGC to describe shared cultural practices that span space and time as a form of collective self-help solutions as illustrated by lyrics from "Road to Kumasi" (*Remembrance*):

We both eat from this cooking pot
From this well we drink just the same
Sources of our existence and nourishment
Remains the same

Fruits and vegetables are promoted as important nutritional sources and/or metaphorically in celebratory romantic commentaries that also incorporate spiritual transcendence explorations. As an example, "Fruit Salad" (*Remembrance*) includes the lyrics:

It's hot, might think I'm joking well I'm not
I'm making fruit salad to whet my palate
Blessed divine
Are the fruits of the vine
Oh lord blessed it be
The fruits of the tree
Our passion for fruit
How we enjoy you

"Sweet Water" (*Endless Summers*) is another example of the metaphorical use of fruit to convey romantic feelings:

You're my sweet water sweet
Sweet mango peach
You're my maple syrup straight up from the tree
You're my sweet water sweet
Sweet mango peach
You're my maple syrup straight up from the tree

Notably, in the chorus of "Fruit Salad," references to fruits are connected to reminders of the importance of developing health nutritional habits as a specific type of collective self-help:

Food for my soul
Say it started in the South
Brother don't you dig your grave with your mouth
Food is true food for soul
Help you not to grow old
Food the Creator's wonderful gift
Truly a force to be reckoned with

Advocacy for wholesome nutrition is expanded to include vegetables in "Greens" (*Oh Africa*), which also contrasts the positivity of green with respect to nutrition, to negative connotations related to the color of the money when it becomes an unhealthy obsession:

Callaloo and collards
Turnip greens and dollars
More bills than the means
Everybody chasing that green,
I want to be seen
In green

MSCGC Wading in the Water

Water is, of course, essential for the growth of the fruits and vegetables celebrated by MSCGC. As discussed previously, references to water play a broader role in describing the experiences of people of African descent, and the same is true for MSCGC. Vincent Harding's metaphorical use of "the river," discussed previously, is an many respects an extension of imagery presented by Langston Hughes in the classic poem, "The Negro Speaks of Rivers."[26]

I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
flow of human blood in human veins.

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
bosom turn all golden in the sunset.
I've known rivers:

Ancient, dusky rivers.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers

The river Nile is referenced by MSCGC in "Beauty" (*Remembrance*) in the romantic phrasing "Don't you know you know your beauty Flows like the River Nile." Comparable to Hughes, MSCGC also pays homage to the many rivers intertwined with the experiences of people of African descent, as described in the documentary *Lubilu* (*Passages: The Water Brought Us*):

It has been said
If you cross the river in a crowd
The crocodile won't bite you
And we have crossed many rivers
With many more to cross
As shipmates we crossed the sea
Some squares tried to destroy my circle with their triangle
Called it "trade"
So when our children gather and ask "how we came to be?"
Let's take em on down to Charleston and point to the sea
The Water Brought Us

As was the case for Harding and Martin Luther King, Jr., for MSCGC the movement of water is a signifier of the serpentine trajectory of African American life. The importance of movement is clearly evident in the song, "Down River" (*Passages: The Water Brought Us*) where the phrase, "Down river, The river flows" is repeated several times. Similar to Harding's intervention, the chorus of "Down River" establishes a direct connection between the river and the people through a subtle defiant challenge:

We are the river's banks
The flowing water
We determine what's delivered down river

Anthony Hincks reminds us that "Water, in all its forms, is what carries the knowledge of life throughout the universe."[27] This statement declares that the existence of life as we know it is impossible without continuous access to water. Fela Kuti brings this point home graphically in the anthem, "Water No Get Enemy."[28]

T'o ba fe lo we omi l'o ma'lo
If you wan' go wash, na water you go use
T'o ba fe se'be omi l'o ma'lo
If you want cook soup, na water you go use
T'o ri ba n'gbona o omi l'ero re
If your head dey hot, na water go cool am
T'omo ba n'dagba omi l'o ma'lo
If your child dey grow, na water he go use

If water kill your child, na water you go use
T'omi ba p'omo e o omi na lo ma'lo
Ko s'ohun to'le se k'o ma lo'mi o
Nothing without water
Ko s'ohun to'le se k'o ma lo'mi o
Omi o l'ota o
Water, him not get enemy!

In a similar vein, MSCGC reaffirms the life-giving nature of water in the spiritual transcendence exploration, "Rainy Season" (*Endless Summers*):

Liquid sunshine is what my souls in need of
Like the elder's wisdom overflows
Turn this dust into clay
Lord bring the rains today
Thank God for the rainy season

And, in "Funk Like This" (*WestWest Africa*) the diversity of musical genres created by African Americans is celebrated as a product of the synergy between the river and the evolving experiences of Black Americans:

Upon our arrival
Paramount to our survival
We return to the musings of this river
To the music of this river
It always delivers

Them griots know,
The river is found in WestWest Africa

Scales most recent composition, "The Traveler" continues the emphasis on water and provides another example of the type of spiritual transcendence explorations that are consistently messaged by MSCGC.

We are born into stories
Already being told
Sunrise is the night made new
So many things to do
See the sun for myself
In the flowin' stream
In the dewdrop,
In the riverbed
Shining back on me

Conclusion

The inventive style and incisive content of MSCGC's music has placed it in a vanguard role in preserving and extending the tradition of liberatory cultural production reflected in the art and politics of Hugh Masekela, Miriam Makeba, and Fela Kuti. Mausiki Scales is uniquely prepared to lead this movement. As Samuel Livingston observes, Scales's "unique training triangulates between a profound awareness of Ancient Egyptian (Kemetic) civilization, West African cultures, including the Akan, and African diasporic traditions such as Funk, Soul, Hip Hop and Afrobeat. These three cultural dynamics blend seamlessly in his music and scholarship."[29] Scales's unique artistry is a paradigmatic example of liberatory pan-African cultural production that Black/Africana Studies instructors should bring to the attention of students.

As MSCGC continues to explore the twists and turns of the rivers of the Black experience, in Africa and its Diaspora, it will hopefully develop an increasing number of adherents across the globe who will respond by committing themselves to intensifying the liberation struggle until, as King envisioned, "justice rolls down like water and righteousness like a mighty stream" throughout Africa and the African Diaspora.

MSCGC Discography

AfroBlue Trio 1997
https://soundcloud.com/afroblue-trio-atlanta
Remembrance Has Not Left Us 1999
(CD) Mausiki Scales & the Common Ground Collective
Endless Summers and Southern Porches 2001
(Mausiki Scales, Music & Lyrics)
Oh Africa (EP) 2013
Mausiki Scales
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLqFNzuXQVfduyGceI3BxdvfCHwCiGCOen
Passages: The Water Brought Us 2008
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3cTC9xJCMo&list=PLqFNzuXQVfdtZGJI7Y-e29TymfknehRiP
Drums and Shadows 2016
https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCcVfGVtd3AvULJyK2U7eKVQ
WestWest Africa 2020
https://mausikiscales.bandcamp.com/album/westwest-africa-2
The Traveler 2023
https: soundcloud.com/mausiki-scales/the-traveler-rhythm/s-QWzm9RLH7X2?in=mausiki-scales/sets/the-traveler//s-98SgBoVRezz.

8

"I Think We Killed Bigfoot"—Conscious Rap Music in the Pacific Northwest: Introducing "The Rhetorician"

Introduction

"I Think We Killed Bigfoot" is the title of a 2020 EP by Jordan Moss, known commonly as the "Rhetorician" and the "Black Ranger," an emerging Hip Hop artist based in the Pacific Northwest.[1] The title is a metaphor symbolizing the Rhetorician's efforts to impact the world of Hip Hop while avoiding message contamination by commercial interests. For the Rhetorician, "Bigfoot," the large, elusive, ape-like creature said to roam in several Pacific Northwest states, represents mainstream music labels (MMLs) that have notoriously exploited new artists and exercised undue influence on lyrical content. However, ongoing changes in the industry, including the growing presence of independent labels and the advent of streaming, have created opportunities for artists to distribute music outside the control of MMLs.

The Rhetorician's collective work deserves scrutiny by Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) scholar/activists. His messaging is significantly influenced by three elements: Afrofuturism/Black fantasy, progressive political commentaries issued by Hip Hop pioneers, and Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) sensibilities. Recently, the visibility of Afrofuturism/Black Fantasy has been heightened by the success of the film *Black Panther* (2018).[2] As noted by Pascal Ezeabasili, the film "brings into the spotlight Afrofuturism, the philosophy that draws on sci-fi, fantasy and Afrocentrism to explore the intersection of African/African-American culture with technology … and serves to critique the present-day dilemmas of black people and to interrogate and re-examine historical events."[3] The Rhetorician pays homage to early and contemporary progressive Hip Hop artists on several tracks and challenges contemporaries to resist inclinations to pursue commercial success at any cost. Black history references reflecting Afrocentric sensibilities are regularly integrated into his lyrics. The Rhetorician's project is based in Bellingham, Washington, located approximately 90 miles from Seattle. Seattle birthed the Pacific Northwest Hip Hop movement in the early 1980s and the movement's trajectory provides useful insights regarding the contours of his struggle.

Hip Hop in Seattle

Seattle's Central District was the locus of Hip Hop innovation for the first generation of MCs and DJs.[4] In fact, this area has nurtured three generations of Hip Hop artists. On first glance, Seattle might seem to be an unlikely place to find a significant Hip Hop movement. During the 2014–2018 period African Americans comprised only 7 percent of the city's population.[5] However, as is the case for most urban areas, the Black population has been historically segregated. The Central district encompasses all or part of six Census tracts: 77, 79, 87, 88, 89, and 90.[6] In 1980, the respective percentages of the tract populations comprised of African Americans were 76.3, 44.4, 64.8, 85.0, 59.4, and 47.4.[7] This segregation both perpetuated and exaggerated forces generating social inequality, creating fertile ground for the city's emerging Hip Hop musicians. The potential Hip Hop audience also included Black soldiers and airmen stationed at military bases in nearby (40 miles) Tacoma; i.e. Fort Lewis and McChord Field.[8]

A comprehensive exploration of the history of Seattle Hip Hop is beyond the scope of this investigation. Rather, the primary interest is understanding how the movement was influenced by artists' relationship to MMLs. Information about the Seattle Hip Hop movement is easily accessible because local enthusiasts have diligently documented the origins and evolution of the local Hip Hop scene. Activists Jazmyn Scott and Aaron Walker-Loud led the organization of the documentary project, "50 Next: Seattle Hip-Hop Worldwide," launched in 2012. The project produced a free compilation of 76 Seattle/Northwest Hip Hop tracks spanning from the early 1980s through 2012, along with a short documentary film.[9] This effort was followed by the curation of an exhibit at the Museum of History and Industry entitled, "The Legacy of Seattle Hip-Hop," billed as "an exhibit celebrating the people, places, and events that make up one of our region's most vibrant cultural communities." The exhibit received the 2016 Leadership in History Award of Merit by the American Association for State & Local History.[10]

"Nasty Nes" Rodriquez, the Emerald Street Boys, and Anthony "Sir Mix-A-Lot" Ray loom large as major music innovators in the early history of Seattle Hip Hop. DJ, "Nasty Nes," Rodriguez, started *Freshtracks* in 1980, the first radio program totally dedicated to rap music in the Pacific Northwest. Both Sir-Mix-A-Lot and the Emerald Boys garnered early attention from self-produced songs played on *Freshtracks*.[11] The trajectory of Sir Mix-A-Lot vividly illustrates the complicated relationship between artists and record producers. Two of his most popular early songs, "Square Dance Rap" and "Posse on Broadway," were produced by *Nastymix*, a label he founded in 1985 in partnership with Nasty Nes and a local businessman.[12] These songs were subsequently included on Sir Mix-A-Lot's debut album, *Swass*, released in 1988 on *Nastymix*.[13] *Nastymix* folded in 1992, not long after Sir Mix-A-Lot's departure 1990.[14]

After his departure from *Nastymix* in 1991, Sir Mix-A-Lot signed onto the *Def American* label. *Def American* bought the rights to Sir Mix-A-Lot's first two albums, re-released them as CDs, and issued his third album, *Mack Daddy*, in 1992.[15] The single "Baby Got Back" went double platinum and won the Best

Rap Solo Performance Grammy in 1993.[16] Rick Rubin founded *Def American Recordings* in 1988 after leaving *Def Jam Recordings*. The name of the company was changed to *American Recordings* in 1993 and was affiliated with *Warner Bros. Records* until 1997.[17] Sir Mix-a-Lot subsequently signed with *Artist Direct* and the label originally committed to release the album, *Daddy's Home*.[18] Ted Field (co-founder of *Interscope Records*) co-founded *Artist Direct* in 2001 with plans to conjoin a traditional record label with an online delivery platform.[19] Unfortunately, *Artist Direct* failed and folded in 2003 and this implosion caused Sir Mix-A-Lot to establish his own label, *Rhyme Cartel*, which released *Daddy's Home* in 2003. *Rhyme Cartel* is still in existence and is headed by Anthony Ray III.[20]

The journeys of Nasty Nes and the Emerald Boys are also relevant for situating the Rhetorician's project. First exposed to Hip Hop in New York in the late 1970s, Nasty Nes was a mainstay on Seattle radio for 17 years, finally signing off in 1997 and relocating to southern California. There he became Rap Editor for *HITS Magazine*, a weekly national trade publication. Nes left *HITS* five years later and founded *RapAttackLives.com,* an online National College Rap Radio Promotions business that is still in existence.[21]

The Emerald Boys, comprised of Captain Crunch (James Croone), Sugar Bear (Edward Wells), and Sweet J (Rob Jamerson), released the first Seattle pressed rap album in 1983. "Christmas Rap," was released on the TeleMusic Productions label, founded in 1982. Following on the heels of "Christmas Rap," "The LP Move (Get Closer)" was also released in 1983.[22] Unfortunately, the Emerald Boys' recording momentum was short-circuited when businessman Ed Locke declined to sign them, and instead partnered with Nasty Nes and Sir Mix-A-Lot to form *Nastymix*. Despite this setback, the Emerald Boys continued to be very popular performers in the local area until their breakup in the mid 1980s.[23]

The trajectory of James Croone highlights the complex relationship between Hip Hop and community empowerment. Concurrent with his Emerald Boys activities, Croone was heavily involved in the underground economy. These forays led to a brief incarceration during which he undertook extensive Bible studies that catalyzed a wholesale personal transformation.[24] Croone subsequently obtained a doctoral degree in Religious Education in 2005 and a Master's degree in Theology and Culture in 2014. He currently serves as Supervisor of the Seattle Pastoral Care and Recovery Program and is Pastor of the Risen Church, an Assemblies of God congregation.[25] Interestingly, Croone's religiosity did not rupture his connections with Hip Hop and the Emerald Boys. The group reunited for benefit performances in both 2010 and 2012. The 2012 performance at Coolout, Seattle's premier annual Hip Hop celebration, included a new song, "When Folks was Real (Back in the Day)."[26] Group members have passed on their legacy to family members including Vitamin D, RC Tha Trackaholiq**,** and Ishmael Butler.[27]

The career of Draze (Dumi Maraire Jr.) demonstrates the potential for Hip Hop performers to channel their artistry into community empowerment initiatives. Draze has been leading the charge against the wave of gentrification threatening to displace original Central District residents. *Seattle's Own* (2016), includes the song, "Irony on 23rd," which bemoans the building of a pot shop next to a Black

church on a block where arrests of African Americans had occurred prior to the legalization of marijuana.[28] In another song, "The Hood Ain't the Same," Draze declares, "Don't try to paint me as the black man who's angry/When you gut my community it's hard to build a legacy."[29] Notably, *Seattle's Own* was released as a mixtape containing 14 songs on *Soundcloud*.[30] In 2017 Draze initiated an effort to establish 100 Black-owned businesses in the Central district in part to counter the negative consequences of gentrification. In a 2017 interview he observed, "We do not necessarily have to live in the Central area, but it can be the business epicenter for African-Americans. It should be. It needs to be. It is still our community."[31]

The preceding discussion highlights several issues relevant for examining the potential of the Rhetorician's project. The activities of Draze illustrate how Hip Hop can become more than a vehicle to describe and decry negative conditions—it can also motivate and guide direct liberatory actions. However, commercial considerations work against the cultivation of the type of consciousness that foregrounds progressive cultural production. Instead, MMLs prioritize music that celebrates dysfunctional behaviors. The criminal history of Captain Crunch is an example of how negative behaviors are often associated with Hip Hop artists. On the other hand, the career of Nasty Nes suggests that Hip Hop can diminish class schisms and become a bridge between campus-based and community-based audiences. Finally, one overarching conclusion to be drawn from the evolution of Hip Hop in Seattle is that the formidable barriers posed by MMLs to progressive cultural production necessitate the development of alternative production and distribution strategies. For such an approach to be successful it is necessary to identify and exploit Bigfoot's vulnerabilities.

Lighting a Fire Under Bigfoot

The internet is replete with warnings directed at aspiring artists regarding the exploitative nature of MML contracts along with commentaries about major changes in the music industry. Traditional artists' contracts are structured to reduce potential losses for MMLs and pay royalties to artists from CD/LP sales in the range of 12–14 percent of the retail price. However, artists must repay MMLs for loans made to enable production of a CD/LP and associated videos before any royalties are paid, whether or not the CD/LP makes a profit.[32] Thus many artists never realize anything from their first, and sometimes second album because, as Petulla reports, more than 90 percent of released recordings fail to make a profit.[33] The advent of music downloads from the internet has forced MMLs to scramble and develop new strategies to generate profits. Between 2018 and 2019 physical album sales fell by 15.1 percent and digital album sales declined by 24.4 percent.[34]

Streaming platforms including Spotify, Apple Music, and TIDAL are now the primary means by which consumers access music. While streaming increases audience access, it does not necessarily improve the earnings capacity of artists. In 2019 the number of streams needed for an artist to earn one dollar ranged from 53 for Napster to 1,449 for YouTube. Comparable figures for Spotify, Amazon, and Pandora were, respectively, 229, 249, and 752.[35] Streaming has also altered

how artists produce their music. Song introductions have become briefer, songs are shorter, and the number of tracks on an album has increased because listening to a 20-track album generates twice as much revenue as listening to one with ten tracks.[36]

The dramatic change in how music is consumed has expanded opportunities for independent music labels and independent artists to escape the clutches of Bigfoot. Up and coming artists can now record, promote, distribute, and sell their own music without engagement with the MMLs. However, even though there are now a variety of streaming services available for music distribution, artists seeking radio play of their music must still register their songs with BMI and ASCAP, which oversee licensing and copyright arrangements.[37]

The saga of Chancelor Johnathan Bennett, known commonly as "Chance the Rapper," foregrounds the emerging trends within the music industry. Chance won three Grammy's in 2017 for his album *Coloring Book*—best new artist, best rap album, and best rap performance. This was the first year that the Grammy's governing board allowed nomination of albums released only on streaming services.[38] Chance the Rapper beat out heavily funded label-backed releases including Kanye West's *The Life of Pablo* (GOOD music distributed by Def Jam) and Drake's *Views* (Cash Money Records, Republic Records, Young Money Entertainment). In many respects, the triumph of Chance the Rapper has helped create space for aspiring artists like the Rhetorician to succeed by using streaming services to distribute their music.

Introducing the Rhetorician

Bellingham, Washington is even less likely than Seattle to become a locus of Hip Hop cultural production. According to the US Census, in 2019 African Americans constituted only 1.6 percent of Bellingham's population of about 90,000.[39] In 2019 the largest local university, Western Washington University, enrolled slightly more than 16,000 students. Only 257 of these students self-identified as Black or African American, and another 176 reported mixed Black–white ancestry. Together these two sub-groups accounted for a mere 3.8 percent of Western Washington's enrollment.[40] The Rhetorician grew up in Sharon, Pennsylvania, located in the northwestern part of the state, not far from the Ohio border. Sharon's population is less than 13,000, thus it is much smaller than Bellingham.[41] However, Sharon's Black population is larger than Bellingham's (1900 vs. 1450). The youngest of six children, the Rhetorician was raised in a tightly knit family and won a state wrestling championship during his junior year of high school.

Despite the obvious demographic challenges of Bellingham, the Rhetorician (aka Jordan Moss), is having impressive early success in promoting Hip Hop artistry both there and in other West coast cities. Locally, he has performed at Bellingham Arts and Sh'Bang Music Festival and at several night spots. Outside Bellingham the Rhetorician's performance venues include Los Angeles, San Francisco, as well as Seattle.

The Rhetorician's distinctive performance style centers around an alter ego drawn from Black fantasy and Afrofuturism. In some respects this style of representation bears similarities to the dual public persona of actor/musical artist Donald Glover. Glover has adopted the moniker, "Childish Gambino," for his music projects, a name suggested by the Wu-Tang Clan name generator. Glover was signed to Glassnote Records as Childish Gambino in 2011, and he also DJs and produces his own music under the name mcDJ. Glover uses his given name in his acting career and his recent acting credits include *The Martian* (2015), *Atlanta* (2016–2020), *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017), and the young Lando Calrissian in *Solo: A Star Wars Story* (2018).[42]

The "Black Ranger," an offshoot of the character Zack Taylor, an original member of the first Power Rangers (Mighty Morphin), is The Rhetorician's alter ego. Zack exhibits highly developed street smarts and also combines gymnastics, dance, and martial arts into what is described as "Hip-Hop-Kido." Zack's costume is black, and his weapons consist of the Power Axe and Mastodon Dino Zord.[43] The Rhetorician invokes Zach Taylor in many of his songs. As an example, in the song, "I'm the New Kel (Kale)" (*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*), the Rhetorician declares:

I'm the New Kel (Kale)
If this life was black and white … I only see a gray version.

I'm a visionary person.
My Persona is like a
90's kid eating now-or-laters …
With power ranger Underwear … bout to take you on an excursion.

Black Ranger got Mastodon powers …
Smelling like Cookie Crisp and coco butter.
Finding my fit
like I'm in a sweet spot on new putter.

Man I swear imma be something
I swear imma do something!
They lookin at my experience … and sayin I ain't did nothin.

Young Zack Taylor.. chosen from lord Zordon. Rappers don't have identity

I'm in Silhouttes jumpin
bout to become that icon.

My jump man bout to turn Jordan into Ridell. I powered up to Creme soda.
Yeah …
I been the new Kel.

Hip Hop artists do not work in isolation and confront the challenge of assembling a "crew" to support production and distribution. Heather MacDonald

explains, "when you're unknown, it's not always easy to attract attention from the team members you want … To get around … [this obstacle], musicians are giving their friends a chance to build their own music business careers by taking on some of the work."[44] Faced with this conundrum, MacDonald counsels, "The other option is to go completely DIY. Of course, that takes you away from your music, but it can be a good stop-gap if you have enough time to devote to managing your own career until you can attract bigger attention."[45] The Rhetorician's crew includes Andrew Valdez (Slap Serif DJ/Producer), Nico San (Klefto/Producer), Keaton Urling (Videographer), Nick Spanos (Visual Artist), and Max Mcgloughlin (Visual Artist). Producer/Beatmaker Slap Serif is a multi-instrumentalist whose music spans several genres in addition to Hip Hop, including electronic, Soul, R&B, and Indie. Beatmaker Klefto has been instrumental in cultivating the underground Hip Hop scene in Bellingham through his label, Black Noise Records. Videographer Keaton Urling is also a marketing strategist. Graphic artist Nick Spanos has produced most of The Rhetorician's artwork along with multi-media artist Max Mcgloughlin.

Consistent with the growing use of streaming services to distribute music, the Rhetorician's music is accessible on the digital platform *Soundcloud*, with lyrics of many songs accessible on *Genius.com*. The Rhetorician's *Soundcloud* page includes the EPs *Bars and Rhetoric* (2018), *Controller Rumbles Freestyle Vol. 1* (2018), *Controller Rumbles Freestyle Vol. 2* (2019), and *Native Tongue Meets the New Wave* (2019), as well as several songs not directly associated with an EP.[46]

Elsewhere I have proposed typologies for classifying political commentary in Black music that are useful for interpreting the Rhetorician's lyrics.[46] Specifically, three categories are especially relevant, i.e.: "Awareness Raising Self-Criticism," "Collective Self-Help Solutions," and "Spiritual Transcendence Explorations." "Awareness Raising Self-Criticism" is commentary "designed to educate listeners about the seriousness of a particular set of circumstances and to document the need for corrective action."[47] As I explain, "the primary bases of criticism are lack of political awareness of the origins and severity of a problem and failure to take action to eliminate debilitating predicaments."[48] "Collective Self-Help Solutions" "also attempt to sharpen political consciousness, but have the further objective of providing guidance for solving community problems. These commentaries attempt to mobilize individuals to work collectively in self-help problem solving activities."[49] "Spiritual Transcendence Explorations" urge listeners to seek solutions to their daily struggles by pursuing personal spiritual enlightenment through various processes such as meditation, changes in nutritional practices, and other lifestyle changes.[50] Notably, this spiritual enlightenment can proceed simultaneously with collective self-help activities.

In "Too Much Kreme Soda, I'm the New Kale" (*Bars and Rhetoric*), the Rhetorician suggests another possible messaging typology. Specifically, he describes his music as social therapy to address persisting anti-black racism:

Repair the wound like I'm Dr Seuss
Rhyme therapy

(Rhymin'!)
This kind of hate
Needs chemotherapy
Attack the sinister at the root like hairapy
3 dots collect the thoughts
Or go sharing me
(Share em!)
Zip tie, ski mask
Second thoughts holding me for ransom

The fact that significant sacrifice and commitment are required for the therapy to be successful is fully recognized by the Rhetorician:

Don't run away …
Doesn't matter if you know your fate
Live that life till you reach that expiration date
I keep thinking it's my time
But I'm running late
Or I've been here before …
Just at another date

The Rhetorician's conception of Hip Hop via a therapeutic model is also evident in *Native Tongue Meets the New Wave*. This EP was heavily influenced by Common's "I Used to Love H.E.R." (*Ressurection*, 1994). Here Common talks about Hip Hop as if it were a girl and uses language implying relationship breakup to lament how Hip Hop's original mission was hijacked:[51]

I met this girl when I was ten years old
And what I loved most, she had so much soul
She was old school when I was just a shorty
Never knew throughout my life she would be there for me
On the regular, not a church girl, she was secular
Not about the money, those studs was mic-checkin' her
But I respected her, she hit me in the heart
…
Original, pure, untampered, a down sister
Boy, I tell you, I miss her
I might've failed to mention that this chick was creative
Once the man got to her, he altered her native
Told her if she got an image and a gimmick
That she could make money, and she did it like a dummy
Now I see her in commercials, she's universal
She used to only swing it with the inner-city circle
Now she be in the burbs, lookin' rock and dressin' hippie
And on some dumb shit when she comes to the city

Riffing off of Common's reproach, the Rhetorician also refers to Hip Hop in feminine terms and alludes to a search for her authentic self in "Come Up Season" (*Native Tongue Meets the New Wave*): "Lookin for Hip-Hop … I'm tryin to find her whereabouts."

The title, *Native Tongue Meets the New Wave*, pays tribute to the Native Tongues Collective of the late 1980s and early 1990s. This collective included the Jungle Brothers, De La Soul, A Tribe Called Quest, Queen Latifah, and Monie Love. The music was characterized by positive-minded, good-natured Afrocentric lyrics, and noted for pioneering the use of eclectic sampling and jazz-influenced beats.[52] The Rhetorician pays homage to notable Hip Hop pioneers in "Old School" (*Native Tongue Meets the New Wave*):

> Dark matter or nocturnal? Ode to Joy cookin in the Journal
> Fire sparked us to Digornos. Nomads doin work tho. I know I know Rappers Delight with Curtis Blow. Hardy, Antonio
> Cooler than Kool Moe Dee eating oreos
> Dj Herc to Primo. KRS all hail the teacher tho!
> Thought from Yasin booming out your stereo
> Black fist and afro floating over the drumset
> I'm rooted in this culture the real art ain't done yet
> I hear B.I.G shining in that sunset
> L, Pun, and Smalls visions of me tearing up with applause
>
> I'm down by law. Slam these kids want EFX. Simon says, "Protect ya neck"
> Tribe-Wu coming at you. Groovier than 3000 in a tracksuit
> Rule the world of the synth flutes. San Francisco to the Bayou
> Paint dripping or the Haikus. Hip Hop sprit rooted like the Red spruce old school you know I feel you.

With this legacy in mind "Old School" (*Native Tongue Meets the New Wave*) also describes the challenges associated with promoting progressive Hip Hop in a venue like Bellingham, Washington:

> Wavy with the flow like Yasin'
> Most Definitely, I'm Black on Both sides
> HIp hop in the state of Apartheid.

New Wave Pay Attention to the Long Ride

The "long ride" refers to the traditions established by Hip-Hop pioneers, and the phrase "Black on Both Sides" is a nod to Most Def's 1999 debut EP, *Black on Both Sides* (Rawkus and Priority Records).[53] Most Def seems to foreshadow the Rhetorician's battle with Bigfoot in "Hip Hop" (*Black on Both Sides*):[54]

I'm getting big props, with this thing called hip hop
Where you can either get paid or get shot
When your product in stock, the fair-weather friends flock
When your chart position drop, then the phone calls …
Chill for a minute, let's see who else hot, snatch your shelf spot
Don't gas yourself, akh'
The industry just a better cell block

The Rhetorician calls out rappers who divorce themselves from the roots of Hip Hop and succumb to the clutches of Bigfoot in "Underground" (*Controller Rumbles Freestyle*, Vol. 1):

Do Dat Rolex
Help da Graff skills?
(Does It?)
Why you black and ashamed still? …
(let em know)

Conscious zoom
Grab yo space wheels
Knowledge slicin'
Slave deals

You salty like …
Parking was free
And Dey …
Made you Pay still
Dey only show
For da free meals

Attention span Like retail

One strategy proposed by the Rhetorician to avoid capture by Bigfoot is systematic interrogation of Black history as illustrated in "Tonight's the Night" (*Controller Rumbles Freestyle, Vol.1*):

Become our ancestors
That's the Civil Right
Kinda like Martin
In The Black Knight

Rhetoric's new wave
(Yup)
Native claim's … new rave
(Yup) (Yup)

Hip hop resurrected
Out a new grave!
(Yeah!)

Graff writin' in a new cave
Industry makin' new slaves
Double loop
Tie my shoe-lace

In addition to mastery of historical information, the Rhetorician also promotes lifestyle changes as important for the success of his project. Specifically, the value of healthy nutritional practices is hinted at in "Underground" (Freestyle) (*Controller Rumbles Freestyle, Vol.1*):

Kale replaced da creme Soda
I'm Wisdom glowin'
Like I'm Yodaaa

The Rhetorician provides additional commentary regarding the importance of wholesome nutritional practices in "Say it Twice" (Controller Rumbles Freestyle, Vol. 1):

Let's …
Let truth hit you
Like the face tat
Insecurities
On the place maaaattt
Better start eatin'
And embrace that

Knowledge … zippin'
Sugar shaaaack!
Labels or mental slavery?
Some of those thoughts
Aren't you
Where is your bravery?

Childhood memories are rich sources of content for the Rhetorician's lyrics. Reminisces about family members and traditional dietary practices are frequent subjects, as illustrated in "Family Reunion," a cut on saxophonist/composer BrandonLee Cierley's debut album, *Here Comes the New Challenger*.[55]

When we with the fam outside.
Eatin up all the fried chicken it's bonafide.

Watermelon Kool-aid with the pecan pies.
Meat section amplified.

Holding the door
for the auntie with the massive thighs.

Collard dripping off the plate
before skating night.

Values all around
like I'm watching Nick at Nite.

Lil cousins bust moves
That re-invent the boogie down like D nice.

If love got to do with it
you gonna have to make a sacrifice.

Similar sentiments are expressed in "Power Ranger Days" (*Native Tongue Meets the New Wave*):

Coming home from Kindergarten watchin Blues Clues!
Pops cut my hair no line up … I look like Little Bill …
Sister listening to Lauryn Hill …
(What up Janielle!) older brothers bumpin Mass Appeal. (Joey, Jared!)
Pops Painting Classics.
Lead spilling on my paper still. NLW raised me!
I had a college phase Pittsburgh heart break.
Then Hip Hop Saved me.
Habits of fun can be distractive.
What happens when the hobbies start becoming active?

The Rhetorician's appreciation for the guidance and support provided by his father is also expressed in "Power Ranger Days" (*Native Tongue Meets the New Wave*):

Pull the strings on my routine you gonna see my greatness.
Pops said, "You got my genes and you gonna make it."
Treat "Black on both Sides" Like its Sacred. Rhyme melody delivered ancient
I'm resurrected from the watermelon. Dialect from the under-dwellin'
Power Ranger Dreams who you telling?

I Think We Killed Bigfoot presents amplified versions of themes articulated in previous releases. As noted previously, this EP directly challenges the hegemony of the mainstream music industry and the accompanying video includes images of the elusive creature, Bigfoot. The challenge to MMLs is most directly presented in "Smokey's Nemesis":

I'm Bambatta! Chiller than 2 finger peacing,
they wonder where this world is going
this greed is the reason why we getting defeated
breach the social networks they reading my data like the C-SPAN.
Toast the pumpkin seeds mix the ghee with the pecans.
I cook above a 4.4.
My style translate through different mediums
went to a different realm higher
self-labeled me the middleman.
Marketing beefing with social imaging.
If I wasn't doing this for the love I wouldn't be making the right connections.
Smokey rolled his eyes and found a nemesis.
I told him he could catch a combo.
Button mash snapppin controllers on genesis.
I'm a big head cheatcode on NBA Jams.
My expression stay dramatic.
I'm really trying to dish to the homies like magic.
Rolling start on the low keep
pushing until it becomes automatic.

The Rhetorician understands that his self-declared liberation from the clutches of Bigfoot requires a long-term commitment in the chorus of "Beez vs. Music" (*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*):

Who said this is about business and not the music
I swear you only need production to start a movement.

This firm rejection of the lure of commercial success is reiterated in "Black and Friendly" (*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*):

If I was in this for the money
I would have quit a long time ago.
Ground level … no time to stare at potential.

In "Evergreen Fragments" (*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*) the Rhetorician acknowledges that the sacrifices required to pursue his goals may reduce opportunities to maintain contact with family members:

You look back … I say "yeah me!"
Dog from what it's looking like …
It might be a while till I see my family.
Give this music shit my all.
Trying to breathe and not be antsy.
Put your focus into something
you will see what you can be.

The alignment of Rhetorician's worldview with the ideological foundations of B/AS derives, in part, from his enrollment in Africana Studies courses as an undergraduate at the University of Pittsburgh. The most explicit statement of this worldview is found in "Serif" (*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*):

> Didn't they tell you that untold truths get told through eyes?
> 7th sense
> based by the laws of balance and intuition.
>
> Verb ad-lord read books for ammunition.
> You really could be acting different …
> Perception …
>
> Some humans only really good at drawing lines. Correction.
> My tribal side wanna go back to Africa.
>
> African Medallion bring roots Garveyism.
> Found out my ancestors were soldiers
> I got a dose of narcissism.

In concert with the recognition of the central role of African American women in the freedom struggle foregrounded in Africana Women's Studies, several iconic heroines are celebrated in "Serif"(*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*):

> Spirit walked with Ruby
> but take power like Shirley Chisholm.
> Rap world
> move like the tilt-a-whirl
> It's all momentum.

Erasing Bigfoot's Footprints

In many respects, the Rhetorician is concocting a potentially powerful cultural liberation recipe that has a distinctive combination of ingredients. In "Serif," he declares:

> Catchin grooves like I'm
> Harlem shakin'.
> I'm in the norf coast cookin vegetables with all bacon.

"Cookin vegetables with all bacon" is an apt metaphor to describe the synthesis of Afrofuturism/Black Fantasy, precedents forged by progressive Hip Hop pioneers, and B/AS sensibilities in the Rhetorician's Hip Hop artistry. Of course, the

jury is still out on the fate of his project. As noted previously, there are obvious demographic challenges that constrain the growth of a local fan base. Nevertheless, it might be possible to adapt strategies developed by Nasty Nes after he relocated from Seattle to Los Angeles to engage local college students. Recalling that the Rhetorician has performed in Seattle, a well-designed marketing effort might garner additional attention in the Seattle area. Such exposure might enable him to tap into the existing Seattle Hip Hop fan base and establish useful relationships with the previous and current generation of Seattle Hip Hop artists.

There are good reasons for optimism regarding the Rhetorician's likelihood of achieving success in advancing his mission. So far he has fought Bigfoot to a standstill, avoiding the type of MML entanglements that stymied the careers of first-generation Seattle Hip Hop artists. Moreover, the Rhetorician's background in B/AS can be a source of new energy for current efforts by contemporaries who are producing "conscious" Hip Hop songs in the wake of the murder of George Floyd and subsequent nationwide and international protests. Indeed, "Black Ranger" is a persona well suited to champion the cause of Black liberation.

Two of the Rhetorician's principal assets are sincere belief that his mission has value and confidence that he has the requisite skills to achieve success. In "Ewok Shirt" (*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*) he proclaims:

> I'm looking at the details.
> Next tier I'm gonna be polished like the finest.
> My routine is on a schedule
> I don't wonder what the time is.
> I hit a microdose in the tank
> I keep finding myself till I'm timeless.

The notion of being "timeless" echoes the concept of "Sankofa," which is familiar to B/AS scholar activists. Visually and symbolically, "Sankofa" is expressed as a mythic bird facing forward while looking backward with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth. This imagery conveys the message: "In order to understand our present and ensure our future, we must know our past." Consistent with this mindset, the Rhetorician informs us in "Ewok Shirt" (*I Think We Killed Bigfoot*):

> I'm talking forever like time doesn't exist now.
> We are the glimpse in the piece of it all trying to make sense.

Hopefully, as the Rhetorician continues to pursue his craft, he will help us all make sense of the evolving patterns of oppression and serve as a catalyst for devising new strategies to deploy in the ongoing liberation struggle. There are two major implications of his journey for Globalized Black Identity discussed elsewhere in this volume. First, the fact that a robust Hip Hop movement could emerge in Seattle and Bellingham provides support for the potential for liberatory messages to reach widely dispersed agents across the globe and cultivate a shared political orientation. Second, the struggle of the Rhetorician to combat Bigfoot

is a stark reminder that efforts to disseminate liberatory messaging via Hip Hop will be strongly resisted by powerful interests committed to the status quo and the battle will require long-term commitments of the type exemplified by the ongoing work of some of Seattle's Hip Hop pioneers. Hopefully, Hip Hop artists in more well-known domestic and international centers will use the experiences of their Seattle colleagues and The Rhetorician to help operationalize the full potential of Hip Hop to become a motive force in combatting globalized oppression.

9

No More Water, the Fire this Time!: Channeling James Baldwin's Perspectives on History and Identity to Pursue Racial Equity in the 21st Century

I first encountered James Baldwin's work as an undergraduate in the mid-1960s. Seeking direction during the early days of the Black Power Movement, the many pearls of wisdom in his book, *The Fire Next Time* (1963), proved to be invaluable.[1] Some twenty-one years after the book's publication, I had the opportunity to hear Baldwin speak at a 1984 Black Studies conference in Amherst, an experience that greatly reinforced my appreciation of his vanguard role in the 20th-century liberation struggle. As I perused the various essays in the 900+ page volume, *Baldwin, Collected Essays* edited by Toni Morrison (1998), I was reminded of my original fascination with Baldwin's work and again feasted on his incisive commentary and soaring prose.[2] Baldwin spoke truth to power unflinchingly, with total disregard for the consequences of his impertinence, perhaps more than any commentator I have ever read, unflinchingly, irrespective of the consequences. His essays are complex, but if we engage this complexity, we will be better able to confront dangerous issues examined by Baldwin that have re-emerged in our time.

I want to draw special attention to Baldwin's perspectives on the importance of understanding history and constantly interrogating both personal and collective identity to achieve sustainable human progress. I believe his assessments are especially useful in today's environment where the flames of human discord are being actively fanned by public figures who openly trumpet racism and xenophobia. Baldwin believed that conscious Black citizens have a special role to play in confronting these dangerous ideologies. In the 1963 essay, "Down on the Cross," he warned,

> If we—and now I mean the relatively conscious blacks, who must, like lovers, insist on, or create, the consciousness of others—do not falter in our duty now, we may be able, handful that we are, to end the racial nightmare, and achieve our country, and change the history of the world. If we do not now dare everything, the fulfillment of that prophecy, re-created from the Bible in song by a slave, is upon us: *God gave Noah the rainbow sign, No more water, the fire next time!*[3]

This refrain is from an old Spiritual, "Mary Don't You Weep." It refers to scripture found in the ninth chapter of Genesis where God makes a covenant with Noah that the earth will never again be punished by a catastrophic flood and the rainbow was designated as a symbol of the covenant. The "fire" in the refrain is symbolic of an even greater punishment than the flood if mankind regresses to its sinful ways.

In 1976, after Baldwin determined that America's response to the demands for Black equality was demonstrably inadequate, he declared, "The grapes of wrath are stored in the cotton fields and migrant shacks and ghettoes of this nation, and in the schools and prisons, and in the eyes and hearts and perceptions of the wretched everywhere." Here Baldwin is asserting that America had ignored the warnings he had issued in 1962, and was at risk of being ravaged by "the fire this time."[4] Baldwin's call to arms and his warning of impending chaos seems to me to be at least as relevant today, as it was 45 years ago.

In contrast to the growing phenomenon of fake news and historical misrepresentations, Baldwin believed that the excavation of historical truth was absolutely critical for reversing a dangerous trajectory. Back in 1965, he had proclaimed, "the great force of history comes from the fact that we carry it within us, are unconsciously controlled by it in many ways, and history is literally *present* in all that we do. It could scarcely be otherwise, since it is to history that we owe our frames of reference, our identities, and our aspirations."[5] Baldwin was especially critical about the widespread ignorance and distortion of the history of people of African descent. In the 1963 essay, "Down at the Cross," Baldwin asserts "the truth about the black man, as a historical entity and a human being, *has* been hidden from him deliberately and cruelly; the power of the white world is threatened whenever a black man refuses to accept the white world's definitions."[6] Unfortunately, while some gains in advancing the study and appreciation of Black history have occurred, there is still much, much more work to be done.

Baldwin saw historical marginalization of certain groups as part of a deliberate effort to create a fictionalized national identity. And, today, we are again wrestling with the issue of what exactly is American identity and how do components such as Black identity and white identity relate to American identity and, global identity, more broadly. Here again, Baldwin's views are instructive. In 1976 he observed, "An identity is questioned only when it is menaced, as when the mighty begin to fall, or when the wretched begin to rise, or when the stranger enters the gates, never thereafter, to be a stranger; the stranger's presence making *you* the stranger, less to the stranger than to yourself."[7] For me, this assessment accurately describes much of the current debates about identity, migration, and international engagement.

The complex relationship among Black identity, white identity, and American identity, concisely in 1965 by Baldwin, who observed:

> It is a terrible thing for an entire people to surrender to the notion that one-ninth of its population is beneath them. Until the moment comes when we, the Americans, are able to accept the fact that my ancestors are both black and white, that on that continent we are attempting to forge a new identity, that we need each other, that I am not a ward of America, I am not an object of missionary

> charity, I am one of the people who built this country—until this moment comes there is scarcely any hope for the American dream. If the people are denied participation in it, by their very presence they will wreck it. And if that happens it is a very grave moment for the West."[8]

Baldwin's perspectives on history and identity were partially shaped by his experiences abroad, especially in Paris. These experiences enabled him to embrace both integrationist and self-determination as valid approaches to pursue racial equality. In 1963 Baldwin led the March on Washington from the American Church in Paris to the American Embassy.[9] At the same time he supported Malcolm X, and following the assassination of Malcolm X, Baldwin asserted, "whatever hand pulled the trigger did not buy the bullet. That bullet was forged in the crucible of the West, that death was dictated by the most successful conspiracy in the history of the world, and its name is white supremacy."[10] This is only one example of how Baldwin used the power of the pen to protect Black activists against biased media characterizations. Responding to attacks on Stokely Carmichael's popularization of the phrase, "Black Power," Baldwin declared "When Stokely talks about black power, he is simply translating into the black idiom what the English said hundreds of years ago and have always proclaimed as their guiding principle, black power translated means the self-determination of people. It means that, nothing more and nothing less."[11] And Baldwin hosted a birthday party for Huey Newton while he was incarcerated and declared, in the essay, "To Be Baptized," "That black people need protection *against* the police is indicated by the black community's reaction to the advent of the Panthers."[12] Elaborating, he insisted, "The Black Panthers made themselves visible—made themselves targets, if you like—in order to hip the black community to the presence of a new force in its midst, a force working toward the health and liberation of the community."[13] Hopefully, these examples can inspire today's bloggers and media personalities to confront opponents of efforts to achieve equality, such as the "Black Lives Matter" movement. Perhaps Baldwin's greatest legacy is the importance of speaking truth to power, whatever the cost. For me, inspired by Baldwin I am ready to update his 1965 call to arms and declare "No More Water, the Fire <u>this</u> time!"

10

Does Anybody Know My Name? Resurrecting the Artistic Activism of Paul Robeson

The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is noteworthy, in part, because of the significant active support received from high-profile Black celebrities. While such episodic activism is laudable, sustained political engagement is, however, required to successfully combat contemporary rejuvenated white supremacy. Scrutiny of the life and commitments of Paul Robeson can provide useful guidance for Black athletes and entertainers seeking to utilize their status to advance liberatory goals. Paul Robeson first achieved acclaim as an athlete and subsequently as a performer, but later became a celebrated global activist and paid a hefty price for his commitment to combatting racism and imperialism. However, despite his many accomplishments Robeson's name is rarely mentioned when historical figures who merit acclaim for their selfless advocacy are discussed. Philip Foner lamented in 1978, "in nearly all accounts of recent black history, the political activist Paul Robeson is a virtual nonperson."[1] This essay is intended to excavate aspects of Robeson's activist legacy that have regrettably been consigned to the dustbin of history. In addition, I also foreground elements of Robeson's worldview that align closely with those of Black/Africana Studies that warrant greater curricular visibility.

Born in 1898, Robeson was awarded an academic scholarship to Rutgers in 1915 where he played football, was twice named an All-American, and was his class valedictorian. Subsequently he received a law degree from Columbia Law School while playing professional football. Robeson became a major figure in the Harlem Renaissance with heralded performances in *All God's Chillun Got Wings (1924)*, a controversial play because of its interracial cast, and *The Emperor Jones (1933)*. Aside from his athletic and creative accomplishments, Robeson was actively involved in fighting for human rights across six decades and issued numerous insightful commentaries.[2]

Robeson in the 1920s and 1930s

Robeson's commitment to the arts stemmed from his belief, articulated in 1924, that "One of the great measures of a people is its culture, its artistic stature. Above all things, we boast that the only true artistic contributions of America are Negro

in origin. We boast of the culture of Ancient Africa."[3] While living in London in the 1930s he declared: "in my music, my plays, my films I want to carry always the central idea: to be African."[4] Observing that his commitment did not seem to be shared widely, he complained, "Sometimes I think I am the only Negro living who would not prefer to be white."[5] Robeson lamented, "the trouble is that the Negro has lost faith in himself. Slavery and the white man's machine have been too much for his confidence. He has repudiated the best in himself, tried to find salvation by imitating Europeans."[6]

Robeson's commitment to being African was reinforced by his belief in commonalities of shared characteristics of African American and African cultures. He inveighed: "It has recently been demonstrated beyond a possibility of doubt that the dances, the songs, and the worship perpetuated by the Negro in America are identical with those of his cousins hundreds of years removed in the depths of Africa, whom he has never seen, of whose very existence he is only dimly aware."[7] Robeson's commitment to being African included mastery of African languages, declaring "I am learning Swahii, Tivi, and other African dialects—which come easily to me *because their rhythm is the same as that employed by the American Negro in speaking English*."[8]

For Robeson, "being African" did not imply the total rejection of European culture. Rather, he explained in 1935, "I believe that Negro culture merits an honourable place amongst the cultures of the world. I believe that as soon as Negroes appreciate their own culture, and confine their interest in the European to learning his science and mechanics, they will be on the road to becoming one of the dominant races in the world."[9] Notably, this view is similar to one expressed by W.E.B. Du Bois who opined in 1897:

> For the development of Negro genius, of Negro literature and art, of Negro spirit, only Negroes bound and welded together, Negroes inspired by one vast ideal, can work out in its fullness the great message we have for humanity. We cannot reverse history; we are subject to the same natural laws as other races, and if the Negro is ever to be a factor in the world's history—if among the gaily-colored banners that deck the broad ramparts of civilization is to hang one uncompromising black, then it must be placed there by black hands, fashioned by black heads and hallowed by the travail of two hundred million black hearts beating in one glad song of jubilee.[10]

Robeson's belief in the efficacy of African cultures led him to become an early supporter of the liberation of African colonies. In 1936 he predicted, "I believe that the African states will be free some day. It may come about through partial withdrawal of European power, or there may be a sudden overturn. Differences between sections of the continent would indicate the eventual formation of a federation of independent Black states, rather than a single greet Negro republic or empire."[11] Notably, this conceptualization of a continental federation bears strong similarities to the type of governing body advocated by Kwame Nkrumah, the first Prime Minister of Ghana.

Robeson in the 1940s and 1950s

Robeson's 1940s' activities included a 1946 meeting with then President Truman, where he urged Truman to support an anti-lynching bill. However, most of his 1940s energies were devoted to his role as chair of the Council on African Affairs.[12] His co-authored 1946 statement announced,

> One hundred fifty million Africans and 93 percent of the continent of Africa are still in colonial subjugation. Thousands of Africans fought, labored, died to defeat fascism. Are these allies now forgotten? The colonial people of Africa are barred from the United Nations. They ask not for promises of a remote freedom, but for ACTION NOW to end their enslavement and oppression.[13]

Starting in 1948, Robeson was questioned several times by Congressional committees regarding alleged membership in the Communist Party. Although he consistently declined to answer under his Fifth Amendment rights, he denied privately that he was a member. Nevertheless, the State Department lifted his passport in 1950, eliminating his opportunity to earn a living abroad.[14] Undaunted by this suppression, Robeson asserted in 1955:

> I believe the misrepresentation of the African and the distorted picture of the American Negro still so prevalent in our American culture … can NOT be attacked or rooted out separately. Each myth is propped up by the other; both must be destroyed. When that happens, the true worth of the Negro—whether in Africa or in the Americas—and his place in the mainstream of the world's culture will be properly understood. When that happens, no one will dare speak of white supremacy or Negro inferiority.[15]

Robeson was again permitted to travel abroad thanks to a Supreme Court decision in 1958 and the same year he defiantly published the autobiography *Here I Stand* and began a voluntary exile in Europe until 1963.

Robeson in the 1960s and 1970s

While in Europe Robeson became ill, forcing a return to the United States in 1963.[16] He moved to Harlem and despite infirmities continued to wax eloquently, insisting in 1964:

> The issue of FREEDOM NOW for Negro Americans has become the main issue confronting this Nation, and the peoples of the whole world are looking to see it finally resolved. When I wrote in my book *Here I Stand* in 1958 that "the time is now," some people thought that perhaps my watch was fast (and maybe it was a little), but most of us seem to be running on the same time now. The "power of Negro action," of which I wrote, has changed from an idea to a reality that is

> manifesting itself throughout our land. The concept of mass militancy, or mass action, is no longer deemed "too radical" in Negro life.[17]

As Robeson's health continued to decline, he moved to his sister's home in Philadelphia in 1965. Unable to attend his 75th birthday celebration in 1973, Robeson sent a message stating:

> I want you to know that I am the same Paul, dedicated as ever to the worldwide cause of humanity for freedom, peace and brotherhood. Here at home, my heart is with the continuing struggle of my own people to achieve complete liberation from racist domination, and to gain for all black Americans and other minority groups not only equal rights but an equal share.[18]

However, in one of his last communications issued in 1974 Robeson declared:

> It has been most gratifying to me in retirement to observe that the new generation that has come along is vigorously outspoken for peace and liberation … To all the young people, black and white, who are so passionately concerned with making a better world, and to all the old-timers among you who have long been involved in that struggle, I say: Right on![19]

Complications from a stroke led to Robeson's death on January 23, 1976, in Philadelphia. He lay in state in Harlem and the pall bearers at his funeral included Harry Belafonte and Fritz Pollard.[20] Two years later in 1978 the United Nations Special Committee Against Apartheid organized a three-hour public tribute to Robeson on the occasion of his 80th birthday.[21] "A Celebration of Paul Robeson" was held in New York in 1988 funded by several sponsors including American Express, General Electric, ITT, Philip Morris, and The Rockefeller Group.[22]

Since Foner's 1978 decrial of the lack of appreciation of Robeson's contributions to the global liberation struggle, several isolated celebrations have been held in addition to the major tributes previously described. Some of these recognitions can be found on YouTube. However, given the resurgence of the reactionary domestic and international racist forces that Robeson challenged, there is a pressing need for a more systematic re-examination of Robeson's ideas and actions. Indeed, a comprehensive interrogation of the life of Robeson can assist progressive artists and entertainers in efforts to confront contemporary repression of people of African descent. B/AS specialists can play a vital role by ensuring that Robeson's record of accomplishments is appropriately including in course curricula and that his legacy is examined in conference sessions. These and other initiatives can assist people of African descent around the world in understanding their positionality and catalyze desperately needed Robeson-inspired domestic and international activism.

Part III

ADVANCING THE GLOBAL BLACK LIBERATION STRUGGLE

Social Inactivism

The drugs were all over
But you didn't care
Living far far away
From the urban warfare

And you kept your mouth shut
When he called her a bitch
Her pleas went unanswered
Cause you're not a snitch

Yet you support the police
Cause you can't stand the crime
But when they shot your best friend
You knew it was time

To rethink your program
You couldn't fight it alone
Cause urban pioneers
Don't care what you own

But the neighborhood changed
And you cried and you moaned
Yeah, you finally woke up
But the community was gone

Now you sit back and wonder
Was all this just fate?
Or could you have done more
But now it's too late!

They didn't wear hoods
So you didn't flinch
You ignored warning signs
Cause they didn't say lynch

Reparations Now!

R—Remembrance, Repair, Reconstruction?
E—Education, Elevation, Expansion?
P—Payments, Plans, Progress?
A—Admissions, Affirmation, Accountability?
R—Restitution, Restore, Rebuild?
A—Atrocities, Acknowledgment, Absolution?
T—Trauma, Truth, Treatment?
I—Injustice, Inequality, Incarceration?
O—Obstinance, Obfuscation, Obstruction?
N—Negation, Neglect, Non-acceptance?
S—Slavery, Serfdom, Segregation?

N—Necessity, Nigrescence, Nationalism?
O—Obstacles, Outreach, Organization?
W—Woke, Worldly, Warrior? !!!!

11

PROLOGUE

"Academic Excellence and Social Responsibility" was adopted as the official motto of the National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) in the early 1980s. Unfortunately, the commitment to social activism within B/AS Studies has eroded over the last four decades. This attrition has occurred despite efforts by NCBS to provide incentives for programs and departments to organize community outreach activities. Regrettably, this NCBS initiative has achieved limited success. Moreover, the production of scholarship specifically intended to address persisting problems plaguing Black communities has declined precipitously.

There are, of course, exceptions to this broad indictment, but they are indeed exceptions. For example, to their credit, a few B/AS scholar/activists were actively involved in initial efforts to confront the institutional forces that precipitated the police assassination of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. However, this engagement has not resulted in a sustained effort by B/AS scholar/activists to develop strategies to combat persisting racial oppression. Nor have adherents to the transdiscipline produced much useful guidance regarding the plague of Black-on-Black violence.

Retreat from social engagement is especially problematic because threats to the long-term survival and well-being of people of African descent are escalating. To illustrate, as climate change advances, massive storms such as Hurricane Katrina are likely to occur more frequently. Surely, we were all traumatized by the news reports that featured heartrending visual accounts of the disproportionate misery experienced by Black New Orleans residents. This debacle should have been a wake-up call for some B/AS scholar/activists to undertake systematic analysis of the specific factors producing this catastrophic outcome. The coronavirus pandemic should be another wake-up call for B/AS scholar/activists. Blacks experienced disproportionate mortality and morbidity resulting primarily from stratification in employment and access to health care. These disparities beg for B/AS targeted transdisciplinary scrutiny directed toward creating strategies to not only accelerate recovery from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also to forestall inequitable outcomes in the wake of future disasters.

The poem "Social Inactivism" addresses the consequences of disengagement from participating in efforts to address the structural factors reproducing persisting social and economic disparities. It attempts to convey the idea that collective social disruption is facilitated by individual decisions to avoid, rather than confront systemic injustice.

"Reparations Now!!" foregrounds what may become the most significant human rights issue of the 21st century, i.e., the campaign by people of African descent to obtain reparations for the horrors of enslavement and subsequent oppression. This issue is examined in detail in the chapter "Still Seeking Forty Acres and A Mule …"

"Onward Africana Women Warriors!" is a tribute to the active social engagement and leadership that Africana women have provided in the 21st-century Black liberation struggle. Africana women have been in a key leadership role in many anti-racism protests and electoral campaigns. Many have used their visibility in sports and entertainment to champion anti-racist initiatives and generate support for post-pandemic recovery efforts. These contributions are especially notable because of the disproportionate pre-pandemic inequities faced by Africana women in various arenas, including labor markets, access to health care, and access to public assistance. Africana Women's Studies continues to be the major focal point for advancing the important work of female B/AS scholar activists within the transdiscipline.

"Institutional Decimation of Black Males: A Trans-Atlantic Perspective" updates and extends the concept of "Institutional Decimation" introduced in 1978 to characterize the processes by which Black males experience disproportionate mortality. Institutional decimation foregrounds systemic forces that marginalize Black males including labor markets, the criminal justice system, public assistance policies, educational programs, and health care delivery that are interconnected in ways that perpetuate inequities. In addition to updating the analysis of decimating processes in the US, I also demonstrate the usefulness of this construct for examining the situation of Black males in the UK. I maintain that refinement of internationalized institutional decimation constructs as well as analyses of the operation of decimation processes in both countries can best be accomplished through research teams associated with selected Africana Studies units in the US and partnering academic units in the UK.

Internal dysfunction plaguing Black communities severely delimits liberatory projects. Unfortunately, warranted pushback against police killings of Black men and women has also created a civic order lacuna allowing disreputable entities to increase criminal activities. Gang-related conflict in particular is disrupting the quality of life in many Black communities. "Resocializing Gang Members …" proposes strategies to de-escalate gang-related violence and resocialize gang members by adapting interventions used in various African countries to reclaim child soldiers and reintegrate them into their communities. I suggest conjoining efforts to rehabilitate child soldiers and gang affiliates can become a useful starting point for developing additional strategies to advance pan-African liberation.

"Globalizing Black Identity: Challenges and Possibilities for Developing Liberatory Coalitions" explores the possibility of cultivating a progressive globalized identity among diverse Black collectives. I argue such an identity configuration can catalyze effective challenges to international white supremacy and racialized social stratification. I examine changes in Black identity dynamics among non-immigrants and immigrants in the US, in order to illustrate the challenges and opportunities associated with such an initiative. Although increasing immigration

is creating potential tensions associated with perceived cultural differences, pervasive negative stereotypes, and perceptions of labor market competition, there are also forces catalyzing identity convergence including the almost inevitable exposure of immigrants to institutionalized anti-Black racism.

In "Still Seeking Forty Acres and A Mule: Tracking and Coordinating the Global Reparations Movement," I use the lack of meaningful progress in resolving reparations claims put forth by African American, Caribbean, and African proponents as evidence of the need to develop a collaborative petition to the UN seeking timely resolution of outstanding claims. I argue that this strategy can overcome intransigence exhibited by national governments to adjudicating reparations claims. Elements of "An Appeal to the World" submitted to the UN by the NAACP in 1947 and "*We Charge Genocide*" submitted in 1951 by William Patterson et al. are identified as precedents for the proposed petition.

"Showdown at the Crossroads?" addresses the implications of the growing impacts of digital technologies on the daily lives of African Americans. The internet has created a Janus-faced pattern of online dependence vis-à-vis communication, inter-personal relationships, entertainment, etc. In many respects these developments have reinforced patterns of racism that permeate the society at large. The essay identifies four domains that B/AS scholar/activists should incorporate into instructional and research agendas: underrepresentation in technology development, racism in cyberspace, identity construction in cyberspace, and liberatory praxis in cyberspace. I suggest that B/AS departments and programs should explore the possibility of cultivating collaborative arrangements with computer science, data science, and public media units to expose students pursuing these majors to knowledge that can empower graduates to continue the legacy of fostering anti-racist technology development established by early digital technology pioneers. In addition, I maintain that B/AS researchers must expand the dissemination of their work online via Blogs and other online formats to reach wider audiences. Partnerships with existing progressive organizations such as the National Black Cultural Information Trust that are directly combatting the propagation of disinformation targeting people of African descent should be developed.

"Searching for Wakanda: Understanding and Mastering Liberatory Technologies" uses sophisticated deployment of advanced technology by Wakanda's residents in *Black Panther* and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) to develop a framework that can assist in ensuring that modern technology is used to advance rather than retard the global liberation struggle. The concepts of "*Sankofan Futurism*" and "*Wakandazation*" are introduced to further this objective. *Sankofan Futurism* refers to the conceptualization of how technologies are deployed historically to ensure Black survival and advancement in hostile environments and yet to be developed technologies can be leveraged to combat systemic oppression. Future Studies and Afrofuturism are essential sources available to *Sankofan Futurists* to conceptualize creative technological inventions. *Wakandazation* involves the development and implementation of strategic plans to create and implement potentially efficacious technologies identified from

Sankofan Futurist investigations. These constructs are utilized to explore the impacts of technology on the historical and current circumstances of people of African descent in the United States. The concluding section explores strategies to globalize the use of *Sankofan Futurism* and *Wakandazation* to advance the liberation of people of African descent around the world.

Hopefully the content of this section will spur the creative instincts of B/AS scholar/activists and lead to conceptualization of new strategies to confront morphing forms of institutional racism. And, in addition, they will hopefully commit themselves to undertaking the requisite social activism necessary for successful strategy implementation!

12

Onward Africana Women Warriors!

The 2022 film *The Woman King* foregrounds the Agojie, the all-female warrior unit that protected the West African kingdom of Dahomey from the 17th to the 19th centuries. Many Africana women are exhibiting attributes of similar to the bravery and dedication exhibited by these warriors. Indeed, Africana women have clearly emerged as the vanguard in the 21st-century Black liberation struggle. Their solid leadership in various arenas including anti-racism protests, electoral politics, business development, sports activism, and progressive cultural production is providing the necessary momentum to spur collective recovery from the ravages of the COVID-19 pandemic. These heroic efforts have been undertaken in the face of widespread increases in pre-existing inequities created by the double jeopardy generated by systemic racism and sexism.

The structural violence experienced by Africana women during the pandemic was manifested via various channels including labor markets, health care systems, and public assistance. Moreover, Africana women experienced discrimination in accessing support from various assistance programs. Although the onset of the pandemic precipitated a rapid increase in unemployment rates for all demographic groups, the increase for Africana women was especially large. To illustrate, in February 2020, the unemployment rate for Africana women was 4.8 percent, but by the end of May 2020 that rate had ballooned to 16.5 percent. This was only exceeded by the 19.0 rate for Latino women. In February 2020 the unemployment rate for Africana men had been 1 percent higher than that for Africana women at 5.8 percent. However, in May 2020 the rate for Africana men was 1 point lower than that for Africana women. This shift in the relationship between these unemployment rates reflects Africana women's disproportionate employment in sectors most affected by the pandemic.[1]

The industries where the greatest pandemic job losses occurred were accommodations and food services and health care and social assistance. Women, in general, are overrepresented in both industries, and especially in health care and social assistance where they account for some 80 percent of employees. Women of color make up a disproportionate share of workers in both industries—24.3 percent and 30.3 percent, respectively.[2] The specific occupations where the largest number of Africana women are employed are Nursing Assistants, Cashiers, Customer Service Representatives, Registered Nurses, Personal Care Aides, and Elementary and Middle School Teachers. Several of these occupations were deemed to be

"essential." As Jocelyn Frye observes, women working in these jobs "may confront higher risks of contracting COVID-19 because of their proximity to infected individuals, infected environments, or the virus itself." Notably, "nearly one-third of all nursing assistants and home health aides are Black women."[3]

Nina Banks offers the reminder that many industries where Africana women are heavily represented have limited protections for workers and "lack employer-provided retirement plans, health insurance, paid sick and maternity leave, and paid vacations" [and] "over a third (36 percent) of black women workers lack paid sick leave."[4] Raquel Gur et al. found that "Black pregnant women reported greater likelihood of having their employment negatively impacted, more concerns about a lasting economic burden, and more worries about their prenatal care, birth experience, and post-natal needs than pregnant women belonging to other groups."[5] Citing CDC data, Char Adams reports that as of 2019 the share of pregnancy-related deaths for Black women over 30 was four to five times higher than that of their white peers.[6]

In general, Medicaid, a joint federal and state program, is an especially important source of health insurance for low-income African Americans. According to the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, African Americans accounted for 34 percent of Medicaid enrollees.[7] Medicaid is also important because it fills in coverage gaps in Medicare.[8] African Americans are disproportionately located in states that have not expanded Medicaid coverage. Consequently, African American residents of these states were at especially high risk of experiencing adverse health outcomes during the pandemic. As Rachel Garfield et al. explain, in states that that have not expanded Medicaid under the Affordable Care Act, African Americans and other people of color are most likely to fall within a coverage gap—meaning they earn too much to qualify for the traditional Medicaid program. At the same time, they do not earn enough to qualify for premium tax credits under marketplace plans.[9]

Excessive exposure to the coronavirus, inordinate vulnerability associated with pre-existing conditions, and less than equitable access to health care have all contributed to a decline in life expectancy for Africana women as well as for Africana men. WedMD reports that the pandemic precipitated a 2.3-year reduction in life expectancy for Africana women and a 3-year reduction for Africana men. By way of comparison the reduction for white women and men were, respectively, .7 and .8 years.[10]

Long-standing discriminatory practices restricting Africana families' access to public assistance have contributed directly to disparate life expectancy outcomes and other unequal pandemic-related challenges. Pre-existing policy biases were reinforced when the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) block grant replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program in 1996. The Center on Budget and Policy Priorities (CBPP) argues that "Racism targeted towards Black mothers is embedded in TANF's design" manifested via "strict work and behavioral requirements and arbitrary time limits, which disproportionally cut off Black families."[11] The CBPP charges that the policy design reflects "inaccurate and racist stereotypes of Black women as 'welfare queens' who only had children to receive more assistance and needed to be forced to work."[12]

The CBPP also documents how the wide variation in benefit levels across states exacerbates national racial disparities. This outcome emerges from the fact that many of the states with the lowest benefits have larger Black populations. Most of these states are located in the South and have a history of purposely blocking Black families from AFDC and keeping benefits extremely low and limited to certain times of the year to ensure that Black labor was available for agriculture and domestic work.[13]

Labor market, health care, and public assistance discrimination experienced by Africana women exacerbated pre-existing financial problems, contributing to increased food and housing insecurity. These problems persist even as the pandemic recovery advances. Michelle Fox and Sharon Epperson report that, since the COVID-19 outbreak, 25 percent of Americans have been forced to either tap into emergency savings or borrow money from family or friends. However, for Africana women the figure was almost 40 percent, significantly greater than was the case for white and Latino women.[14] The asymmetric jeopardy faced by Africana families during the pandemic was also evidenced by differences in the utilization of stimulus relief payments. Fox and Epperson found that 20 percent of whites saved these funds compared to 9 percent of Blacks and 14 percent of Hispanics. Many unemployed Blacks, as well as Black citizens generally, faced unanticipated difficulties in accessing support via the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act because they were "unbanked"—that is, they did not have a savings or checking account, into which most of these government aid funds were disbursed electronically. According to a 2018 report, 16.9 percent of Black households were unbanked in 2017 compared with just 3.0 percent of white households.[15]

Blacks and Hispanics who did receive stimulus payments were more likely to use them to pay their rent or mortgage, 26 percent and 27 percent respectively, versus 12 percent for whites. Unfortunately, targeting stimulus payments to make housing payments did not prevent Africana families from experiencing housing jeopardy. The CBPP found that, as of February 2021, 30 percent of Africana adult renters were not current on rent, versus 18 percent for all adults.[16]

Economic hardship experienced by Africana families also exacerbated inordinate levels of food insecurity. Feeding America observes, "the ten U.S. counties with the highest food insecurity rates are all at least 60 percent African-American. African Americans experience hunger at twice the rate of white Americans, including one in four African-American children." Moreover, the report maintains that the racial disparities in food security that existed before COVID-19 persist even as the pandemic subsides, projecting that 21 percent of Black individuals may experience food insecurity in 2021, compared to 11 percent of white individuals.[17]

The 2019 poverty rate for Africana individuals was 18.8 percent.[18] Linda Wheaton et al. have estimated that the 2020 poverty rate for Africana individuals will be 15.2 percent. This estimate considers all pandemic relief provided from federal and state sources. Without the pandemic relief, Giannarelli and her colleagues estimate that the poverty rate for Africana individuals for 2020 would have been 20.5 percent. Consequently, pandemic relief kept 2.1 million Africana individuals from falling into poverty.[19]

In 2018, more than two-thirds of Black mothers were primary breadwinners for their families compared with 37 percent of white mothers.[20] While the unemployment rate for Africana men declined to 9.6 percent in March 2021 from 9.9 percent in December 2020, the rate for Africana women increased from 8.4 percent to 8.7 percent. In addition, it is important to note that the employment-to-population ratio for Africana women that was 60.8 percent in February 2020, had fallen to 54.8 percent by March 2021. By way of comparison, this 6-point drop was much larger than the 2.9-point drop for white women.[21]

The recovery prospects for businesses owned by Africana women are also unclear. Prior to the pandemic, the rate of growth in the number of businesses owned by Africana women was faster than for any other demographic group. Between 2018 and 2019 the number of businesses owned by Africana women grew at an annual rate of 12 percent.[22] Whereas nationwide 19 percent of all employer-based businesses were female-led in 2019, fully 36.1 percent of all Black-owned businesses were headed by women. Thirty-two percent of Black-owned businesses are focused on health care and social assistance and slightly over 53 percent are headed by Africana women.[23]

Despite the trials and tribulations experienced by Africana women, many are exhibiting remarkable resilience and leading the way in creating strategies to overcome pandemic disruptions along with pre-existing inequities. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement is the most visible example of a major liberatory project initiated by Africana women. Buchanan et al. have estimated that between 15 and 26 million people participated in BLM protests in the United States during 2020, making that movement one of the largest in US history.[24] Roberts has cogently described the significance of the BLM movement, emphasizing the creative genius of founders Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometti. Roberts declares cogently, "BLM will forever be remembered as the movement responsible for popularizing what has now become an indispensable tool in 21st-century organizing efforts: the phenomenon that scholars refer to as 'mediated mobilization.'"[25] Roberts insists, "By using the tools of social media, BLM was the first U.S. social movement in history to successfully use the internet as a mass mobilization device."[26]

BLM received an unprecedented level of support from sports and entertainment celebrities, both male and female. Focusing specifically on Africana women's activism, Women's National Basketball (WNBA) players have been especially assertive in their support for the BLM movement. Following the lead of the Milwaukee Bucks, three WNBA games were postponed in the wake of the Blake murder. This action built on previous social advocacy undertaken by WNBA players. Erica Ayala observes that WNBA players were "among the first athletes to wear warm-up shirts with social justice messaging affirming Black Lives Matter, hold media blackouts and even kneel during the national anthem."[27] Maya Moore postponed her career in 2016 to work for the reversal of the conviction of Jonathan Irons and Renee Montgomery of the Atlanta Dream and Natasha Cloud of the Washington Mystics sat out the 2020 season to work on social justice projects.[28] Black female tennis stars Coco Gauff, Naomi Osaka, and Sloane Stephens were also highly visible in support of the BLM movement.

Africana female entertainers also displayed strong support for the BLM movement. The song "I Can't Breathe" by H.E.R., released in 2020 is a prime example.[29] This song and others extend the tradition established previously by Africana female songstresses who have responded to police and civilian killings of Black citizens. For instance, Lauryn Hill's 2014 song, "Black Rage" was released following the murder of Michael Brown.[30] In September 2020 Rhiannon Giddens re-released her 2015 song, "Cry No More," following the murder of Breonna Taylor. The song was originally released in the wake of the June 17, 2015 mass murder of Black worshippers at Manuel African American Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina.[31]

Although most media attention has been focused on police killings of Africana men, Africana women have been killed disproportionately by police compared to white women. Since 2015 approximately 250 women have been killed by police, 48 of whom are Black.[32] Black women are about 1.4 times more likely to be killed by police than are white women.[33] It should be remembered that the murder of Breonna Taylor occurred some two months before that of George Floyd (March 13, 2020). Although, police killings are the ultimate manifestation of police brutality, Africana women suffer many other forms of victimization at the hands of police. The American Policy Forum has documented various circumstances that can lead to violent confrontations between Africana women and police including disproportionate traffic stops, perceptions of Africana women as drug "mules," mental health crises, domestic abuse situations, and sexual assault by police.[34]

The violent death of children obviously creates horrific trauma for mothers who must soldier on following such a loss. "Circle of Mothers" and Mothers in Charge, Incorporated (MIC), are two of the organizations created to support Africana women. Circle of Mothers was founded by Trayvon Martin's mother, Sybrina Martin, through the Trayvon Martin Foundation and provides opportunities "for mothers who have experienced the loss of children to senseless gun violence to engage in experiential restoration activities that will equip them to self-manage their coping and healing process." The body also hopes to open a national dialogue and form a national program agenda for the empowerment of mothers as community change agents.[35] MIC advocates for families affected by violence and provides counseling and grief support services when a loved one has been murdered. MIC also collaborates with elected officials, community leaders and other community and faith-based organizations on legislation and solutions to support safe neighborhoods and communities for children and families.[36]

The trauma experienced by Africana mothers associated with the violent deaths of children exacerbates the health risks faced by Africana mothers in particular, and Africana women in general. The Black Mamas Matter Alliance evolved from a partnership project between the Center for Reproductive Rights and SisterSong Women of Color Reproductive Justice Collective that began in 2013. The two organizations established a collaboration that has documented obstacles that southern Black women face in accessing maternal health care, which has led to poor maternal health outcomes and persistent racial disparities.[37] In October 2020, the Black Women's Health Imperative (BWHI) released the second edition of its *Black Women Vote: National Health Policy Agenda for 2020–2021*. According

to the organization's website, the BWHI agenda "addresses the critical health policy issues that impact the health and well-being of Black women."[38] BWHI also supports partnerships with policymakers and other stakeholders to achieve health equity.

While Africana women have been addressing personal and collective mental and physical health challenges, they were also instrumental in producing recent electoral victories by Democrats, especially the 2020 election victory of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris. In the 2020 presidential election 93 percent of Africana women voted Democratic, compared to 86 percent of Africana men. Black women accounted for 59 percent of all votes cast by Black voters.[39] Africana women voters also fueled the election of a record number of 57 Blacks serving in the US House of Representatives. Twenty-seven of these representatives are Africana women—also a record.[40] The efforts of four Black sororities were especially visible during the 2020 election through actions that included organizing phone banks and extensive personal outreach to potential voters. The movement they created, labeled "Stroll to the Polls," also generated widely viewed videos and images of Black women marching to voting sites. This movement proved to be a powerful response to voter suppression efforts.[41]

Stacey Abrams emerged as the most visible opponent of voter suppression and advocate for fair elections. She founded an organization called Fair Flight in 2018 after losing the Georgia gubernatorial election. Abrams subsequently established "Fair Fight 2020" in anticipation of the 2020 election to fund and train voter protection teams in twenty battleground states. Abrams is credited with engineering Georgia Democratic victories in both the 2020 presidential campaign and the 2021 Senatorial runoff election.[42]

Africana women have been in the forefront of efforts to get the government to address the issue of reparations for African Americans. As an example, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee of Texas introduced H.R. 40, the "Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act," on January 4, 2021. The Commission would be charged with examining slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommending appropriate remedies.[43]

Representative Lee has also consistently supported efforts to make Juneteenth a national holiday, a goal that was finally achieved in June 2021. Lee consistently introduced Juneteenth Independence Day legislation in the House of Representatives from 2013 to 2016.[44] The efforts of activist Opal Lee to get Juneteenth recognized as a national holiday are particularly noteworthy. Ms. Lee is a 94-year-old lifelong activist who walked from Fort Worth to Washington D.C. in 2016 to lobby for a federal Juneteenth holiday. She was present at the ceremony where President Biden announced the official designation of the Juneteenth national holiday.

Africana women are actively combating systemic gender-based legal discrimination. As an example, the National Black Women's Justice Institute (NBWJI) is working to eliminate racial and gender disparities in the US criminal legal system responsible for its disproportionate impact on Black women, girls,

and gender nonconforming people.[45] The Black Trans Travel Fund is one of the organizations specifically addressing problems experienced by Transgender Africana women. This grassroots collective provides "Black Transgender Women with financial and material resources needed to remove barriers to self-determining and accessing safer travel options."[46]

The trajectory of Africana women's financial recovery continues to be uncertain although there are some hopeful signs. The *Rise* program, initiated by the Mom's Project, offers scholarships designed to provide access to "upskill certifications while harnessing the power of community, support and job placement."[47] Brittany Oliver describes four talent agencies working to assist Africana women in obtaining jobs including HireBlack characterized as "a community and platform made by and for Black women with a mission to get 10,000 Black women hired, trained, and promoted."[48] These initiatives complement existing sources such as the Black Women's Career Network that has been operating since 2012 working to bridge "the gap of support for professional development and mentor access."[49]

In March 2021, Goldman Sachs announced an initiative titled, "One Million Black Women." Goldman Sachs' is committing $10 billion in direct investment capital and $100 million in philanthropic support to address the dual disproportionate gender and racial biases that Black women have faced for generations exacerbated by the pandemic.[50] The investments are anticipated to focus "on key moments in Black women's lives from early childhood through retirement" [with target areas including] "healthcare, education, housing, and small business."[51]

Recent popular media representations of Africana women are emphasizing their agency. Examples include *Harriet* (2019) and *The United States vs. Billie Holiday* (2021). The HBO mini-series *Watchmen* (2019) deserves special mention. The series reimagines the original DC Comic superhero saga, focusing on issues of racial trauma. The initial episode revisits the 1921 Tulsa, Oklahoma, massacre, and much of the series' action centers around a character named Angela Abar (played by Regina King), a Tulsa police detective who also goes by the name Sister Night. In the Tulsa of 2019, Abar continually confronts the legacy of the 1921 pogrom. Analogous to the historically corrective role adopted by the 1977 mini-series *Roots*, *Watchmen* foregrounds the historical record of violence and destruction experienced by Black Americans, but with an Africana woman at the center of the action.[52] *Watchmen* is a prime example of an Afrofuturist cultural production of which Africana women are major contributors. Ytasha Womack defines Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, and liberation."[53] In a similar vein, Ingrid LaFleur defines Afrofuturism as "a way of imagining possible futures through a black cultural lens" and "as a way to encourage experimentation, reimagine identities, and activate liberation."[54]

As we look beyond the pandemic, B/AS in general, and Africana Women's Studies in particular, must take on a greater role in imagining and creating new paths to a future where Africana people enjoy authentic and sustained liberation. In addition, Black/Africana Studies scholar/activists, both women and men, must participate more actively in supporting the myriad grassroots efforts of Africana women to accelerate pandemic recovery and foster cultural renewal.

13

Institutional Decimation of Black Males: A Trans-atlantic Perspective

Introduction

This chapter updates and extends the concept of "Institutional Decimation" introduced in 1978 to characterize the processes by which Black males experience disproportionate mortality.[1] Causes of institutional decimation-induced excess deaths include physical violence, disproportionate exposure to unhealthy environs, and discrimination in accessing public and private resources. Originally inspired by the biblical definition of "decimate, i.e., to select a lot and kill every tenth man," it was argued this term aptly described the forces generating the approximately 10 percent decline in the ratio of Black men to Black women in the US population between 1920 and 1970. However, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, "*Decimate* strayed from its 'tenth' meaning and nowadays refers to the act of destroying or hurting something in great numbers," a reinterpretation that more accurately describes the systemic destruction of Black male lives that can vary temporally.[2]

Institutional decimation foregrounds systemic forces that marginalize Black males, including labor markets, the criminal justice system, public assistance policies, educational programs, and health care delivery that are inter-connected in ways that perpetuate inequities. As an example, the term "school to prison pipeline" characterizes how educational inequities are directly implicated in generating disproportionate capture of Black males by the criminal justice system who have limited viable employment options. Black males have been significantly over-represented among workers displaced by declines in manufacturing employment and, as a result, have experienced disproportionate income losses and structural unemployment.[3] Constrained opportunities can induce self-destructive behavioral responses including engagement in criminal activity and Black-on-Black violence that unintentionally intensify institutional decimation. To illustrate, sentencing guidelines associated with the War on Drugs played a pivotal role in tracking Black males into the criminal justice system. The 1986 Anti-Drug Abuse Act mandated a five-year minimum sentence for trafficking in 500 grams of powder cocaine used disproportionately by whites, or 5 grams of crack, used disproportionately by Blacks. A Department of Justice study revealed that sentences for the lowest category of drug amount, the average crack sentence

was 4.8 times longer than the average powder sentence. For the highest category of drug amount, the average crack sentence was 2.1 times longer than the average powder sentence.[4] This racist discrepancy was not eliminated until the end of 2022. Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow* (2010), notes that while working as a civil rights lawyer examining drug enforcement actions, she found "the overwhelming majority of those who contacted my office to report being stopped, frisked, searched, or brutalized by the police were black men."[5]

In the original exposition Joseph W. Scott and Stewart also identified the US military as a decimating institution reflecting the disproportionate number of casualties experienced by Black soldiers during the Vietnam War. However, the unpopularity of subsequent wars waged in Iran and Afghanistan significantly reduced the propensity of Black males to join the armed forces. Nevertheless, the military continues to play a role in advancing decimation. Currently, Black veterans are significantly more likely than Black civilians to report work limitations due to physical, mental, or emotional challenges, including a greater likelihood of chronic pain, high-impact pain, hypertension, high cholesterol, Type 2 diabetes, and prostate cancer—all maladies that increase mortality.[6]

The preceding examples are intended to support my view that some 45 years after the original exposition, "Institutional Decimation" remains a powerful framework for analyzing the current circumstances facing Blacks in the US. Tommy Curry, a leading UK-based figure in Black Male Studies insists, "Unfortunately, the institutional decimation of Black males has continued uninterrupted for the past several decades."[7] I also intend to demonstrate its usefulness for examining the situation of Black males in the UK, building on the analysis of data from the Evidence of Equality National Survey that concluded: "Inequalities [in the UK] … are a result of historically embedded and culturally and politically shaped meanings ascribed to ethnic identities which generate a racialised social order."[8]

Institutional Decimation and Social Control

Scott and Stewart argue the principal function of institutional decimation is the maintenance of white social, economic, and political dominance. Various strategies support this objective including fostering social instability within Black communities to defuse pressures with the potential to foment violent uprisings. Additionally, Scott and Stewart argue the "decimation process also serves to maintain a balance between the number of Black and white males, counteracting the disproportionate number of Black male births in comparison with white male births." In a similar vein, Curry asserts, "The death of Black males is meant to prevent *his* [sic] reproduction, and impede his ability to reproduce."[9]

Widespread public support for institutional decimation is cultivated by developing and disseminating negative stereotypes that provide rationalizations for the oppression of Black males. As Ronald Jackson asserts, "The public narratives pertaining to Black men's lives comply with several racialized projections about the Black masculine body as: (1) exotic and strange, (2) violent, (3) incompetent and

uneducated, (4) sexual, (5) exploitable, and (6) innately incapacitated."[10] Similarly, Curry insists, "The concepts emerging from Black male experience are often described as pathological coping mechanisms fixated on Black males achieving their manhood at any cost, rather than liberatory ideas applicable to all Blacks."[11]

Contemporary Institutional Decimation in the U.S.

Declarations issued by the American Medical Association (AMA) and the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) characterizing racism as a public health crisis highlight the validity of focusing on institutions and their interconnections as principal culprits in operationalizing decimation. In June 2020 the AMA released a statement asserting "The AMA recognizes that racism in its systemic, structural, institutional, and interpersonal forms is an urgent threat to public health, the advancement of health equity, and a barrier to excellence in the delivery of medical care."[12] In a similar vein, the CDC declared in April 2021:

> What we know is this: racism is a serious public health threat that directly affects the well-being of millions of Americans. As a result, it affects the health of our entire nation. Racism is not just the discrimination against one group based on the color of their skin or their race or ethnicity, but the structural barriers that impact racial and ethnic groups differently to influence where a person lives, where they work, where their children play, and where they worship and gather in community. These social determinants of health have life-long negative effects on the mental and physical health of individuals in communities of color.[13]

Mortality and Excess Deaths

The five leading causes of deaths of Black males in 2018 were heart disease (24.1 percent), Cancer (19.7 percent), Alzheimer's (7.9 percent), Stroke (5.0 percent), and Homicide (4.5 percent). Homicide was the leading cause of death for Black males between 1 and 44 years old.[14] The widespread proliferation of firearms in Black communities is directly responsible for this pattern. Although Black boys and men account for only 6 percent of the total population, they comprise more than half of all gun homicide victims.[15] While homicides have traditionally received the most attention as a cause of Black male deaths, it is also important to recognize that suicides have always been a significant contributor to the destruction of Black males. My research has demonstrated how Black male suicides can be induced by encounters with police and agency interventions into Black family disputes among various other mechanisms.[16] From 2018 to 2021, the firearm suicide rate for Black people ages 10 to 24 rose 58 percent.[17]

The average life expectancy for Black men in 2019 was 71.3 years, declining to 68.0 years in 2020. The comparable numbers for white males were, respectively, 76.3 and 75.0 years. Black male life expectancy was 6.8 percent less than that of white males in 2019 and 9.3 in 2020, the latter figure approaching the original

10 percent decimation benchmark.[18] Notably, the age adjusted death rate for Black males declined slightly between 2020 and 2021 from 1,405.6 to 1,380.2 per 100,000.[19]

Black males experienced over 997,000 excess deaths between 1999 and 2020.[20] This loss represents 80 million years of life, with heart disease being the most significant cause of excess deaths.[21] These data indicate that the term "decimation" may significantly understate the magnitude of loss of life of Black males resulting from systemic oppression. Using an average of 150,000 annual deaths of Black males as a benchmark, excess deaths accounted for a staggering 31.7 percent of all Black male deaths for the period 1999 to 2020.[22]

COVID-19, Labor Disruptions and Black Male Mortality

The adverse impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the mortality experience of Black males were exacerbated by the fact that men are less likely than women to have Medicaid or other public coverage and more likely to be uninsured. Prior to the Medicaid expansion (year), the program played a very limited role for men since non-disabled adults without dependent children were not eligible.[23] Black men are less likely than white males to have health insurance and pandemic-era Black male and female workers were found to be 60 percent more likely to be uninsured than white workers, less likely to have paid sick days, and less able to work from home than white workers.[24]

In 2018, 36.5 percent of Black males worked in Blue Collar jobs and 21 percent in Services. Many of these jobs were characterized as "front line" jobs where the likelihood of contracting COVID-19 was elevated. These occupations included Public Transit workers (26 percent Black) and Trucking, Warehouse, and Postal Service workers (18.2 percent Black).[25]

The law firm Seyfarth Shaw reports that in 2021 Black workers experienced a death rate of 3.5 per 100,000 compared to a rate of 3.3 per 100,000 for white workers. Because the pandemic disrupted life in 2020, employees worked fewer hours and consequently there were fewer occupational deaths in 2020 compared to 2019. In 2020, death rates for Blacks declined by 14.7 percent and by 12.1 percent for whites.[26]

Residential Segregation and Black Male Mortality

Racial segregation and housing discrimination played additionally important roles in generating differences in mortality risk. Several studies documented that members of racial/ethnic "minority" groups who contracted COVID-19 were more likely to live in areas with higher population density and more housing units or inadequate housing, such as those without indoor plumbing.[27] Profit-hungry corporations have redlined Black communities leading to supermarket, bank, and other types of service provider *deserts*. The limited food options available to Black residents of food deserts leads to their overconsumption of unhealthy fast foods that increases the likelihood that African Americans will experience obesity and various other health problems that increase mortality. A CDC study covering the

period 2013 to 2016 found that the percentage of Black men consuming fast food was larger than for any other group of males.[28]

Criminal Justice and Black Male Mortality

Michelle Alexander's classic volume, *The New Jim Crow* examines mass incarceration described as a new caste system serving as "a gateway into a much larger system of racial stigmatization and permanent marginalization."[29] Although Blacks comprised only 15.5 percent of the total number of Black and white males in the US in 2019, there were 435,000 Black males (53.7 percent) incarcerated in federal and state prions compared to 374,500 white males. Black male inmates are substantially younger than corresponding white age cohorts with 27.5 percent younger than 30 versus 17.9 percent of white males.[30] A cohort study of 7974 individuals followed from 1979 to 2018 found incarceration was associated with a 65 percent higher mortality rate among Black participants, but not associated with mortality for other groups.[31] An analysis of data for the period 2013 to 2018 found that 1 in every 1,000 Black men can be expected to be killed by police over their life course. Black men were about 2.5 times more likely to be victims of summary executions by police over the life course than white men.[32]

Institutional Decimation in the U.K

Mark Christian's analysis of racism in Liverpool provides valuable historical support signaling the usefulness of the institutional decimation as a vehicle for interpreting the experiences of Black males in the UK. Christian presents an instructive parallel between the physical violence that targeted returning Black American soldiers during the "Red Summer" of 1919, and experiences of Black British war veterans and seamen in Liverpool and other cities in Britain who, he explains, "were also being attacked in their homes and terrorized in the streets by White lynch mobs."[33] Subsequent race riots in the UK that occurred contemporaneously with racial uprisings in the US are also discussed.[34]

Several studies document the persisting problem of systemic racism in the UK, but unlike governmental authorities in the US, some UK officials appear reluctant to acknowledge that institutional racism exists. The foreword of *The Report of the Commission on Race and Ethnic Disparities* asserts, "Put simply we no longer see a Britain where the system is deliberately rigged against ethnic minorities. The impediments and disparities do exist, they are varied, and ironically very few of them are directly to do with racism. Too often 'racism' is the catch-all explanation, and can be simply implicitly accepted rather than explicitly examined."[35]

Studies refuting the official government position include *Ethnicity, Race, and Inequality in the UK* (2020) and the *SHF Race Report* (2021).[36] The authors presenting the results of the "Evidence for Equality National Survey" (EVENS) (2023), argue "racism is the mechanism of racial injustice and a root cause of ethnic inequalities."[37] Black males in the UK experience structural inequities in

various areas akin to those impacting Black males in the US in multiple areas of their lives, including employment, criminal justice, education, and housing that generate a variant of institutional decimation.

Employment Disparities

The EVENS survey documents the fact that "Black African and Black Caribbean men showed large gaps relative to white British men with respect to employment, unemployment, and wages."[38] Black males in the UK are more likely to be unemployed or work in lower-paid and precarious jobs, even when accounting for factors such as education and experience. In 2021, the unemployment rate for Black males was 8 percent compared to 4 percent for White males.[39] Interestingly, this 2:1 ratio mirrors the Black/white unemployment ratio in the US Black men were more likely in 2021 than white men to be employed in "elementary jobs" (13.2 versus 12.4 percent) and were the most likely group to be employed in relatively low paying "caring, leisure and other services" jobs.[40]

Criminal Justice

The criminal justice system is perhaps the area where Black men face the most significant discrimination in the UK. They are more likely to experience police brutality and racial profiling, which can lead to significant harm and trauma. Moreover, the criminal justice system's over-reliance on punitive measures, such as prison sentences, can be counterproductive, leading to further marginalization and exclusion.[41] For the period April 2020 to March 2021 the arrest rate for Black males was 54 per thousand compared to 15 per thousand for white males.[42] For the same period the rate per thousand of "stop and frisk encounters" was 32.8 and 35.6 for Black African and Black Caribbean men versus 7.5 for white men.[43] Although the number of young people in custody declined steadily between 2006 and 2019, the proportion comprised of Black youth increased steadily from 12.5 percent in 2006 to 27.8 percent in 2019.[44]

Education

Black male students in the UK are more likely to be excluded from school or placed in lower sets, particularly in predominantly white schools. Additionally, there is a persistent attainment gap between Black and Caribbean male students and their white counterparts. Data for 2021 indicate that African and Caribbean students continue to have lower scores on A level, General, and Tech qualifications.[45] However, Black male school completers are more likely to continue education whereas white male completers are much more likely to become apprentices.[46]

Housing Patterns

Blacks residing in the UK disproportionately reside in neighborhoods with limited social capital and low-quality housing options. During 2015–16, 12.6 percent of

Africans and 11.7 percent of Caribbeans were residing in the most employment deprived neighborhoods in England.[47] Between 2016 and 2019, 16 percent of Black Africans and 7 percent of Black Caribbeans in England were living in households characterized as overcrowded.[48] Between 2016 and 2018, 44 percent of Africans and 40 percent of Caribbeans in England were renting public housing compared to 16 percent of white British and 23 percent of white Irish.[49]

COVID-19

Nissa Finney et al. explain that "The COVID-19 pandemic brought ethnic inequalities to the fore as it became evident that infection and mortality rates were higher among ethnic minorities than the population as a whole."[50] However, the ranking of the life expectancies of Black and white males in the UK is reversed from the pattern observed in the US Data for the period 2011–2014 for England and Wales indicates that the life expectancy for Black African and Black Caribbean males were, respectively, 83.8 and 80.7 years, compared to 79.7 years for white males.[51] Potential reasons proposed for the higher life expectancy of Blacks include the high proportion of recent migrants who tend to be healthier on average than others. In addition, it has been suggested that Black ethnic groups "engage less in harmful health-related behaviours, such as smoking and alcohol consumption."[52] In addition, unlike the situation of Blacks in the UK, the experiences of Black males in the US reflect the continuing impacts of the era of chattel enslavement as well as inferior access to health care and substantial risk of death from gun-related homicides.

In all likelihood the COVID-19 pandemic generated excess deaths of Black males that reduced life expectancy, but a disaggregated breakdown of the impact by ethnic group was unavailable. An analysis of deaths occurring between March and July of 2020 did reveal that the death rate of African males was 3.8 times higher than for white males.[53] However, during the period in which the Omicron variant was dominant (January 2020 to November 2022), Black African and Caribbean males actually had a lower mortality rate than white males.[54]

Combatting Institutional Decimation in the US and UK

Effective resistance to, and neutralization of, institutional decimation in the US and UK can be pursued most effectively via a cross-national coalition of progressive cultural workers. Developing such an alliance will require several interlaced interventions including refinement and expanded deployment of the institutional decimation framework, examination of similarities and differences in the operation of decimation processes, and cultivation of a progressive globalized Black male identity. Black/Africana Studies scholar/activists can play a critical role in advancing all three initiatives.

Refinement of institutional decimation constructs as well as analyses of the operation of decimation processes can best be accomplished through research

teams associated with selected Africana Studies units in the US and partnering academic units in the UK. Useful background information can be found in research conducted by Derron Wallace regarding school safety of Black males in the US and UK and in Pamela Nwakama's analysis of the transnational impact of the Black Lives Matter movement.[55] Notably, 78 percent of Black African and Black Caribbean respondents to the EVENS Survey expressed support for the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement.[56]

Cultivating a progressive and politically conscious globalized Black male identity is one dimension of the broader Black global identity construction project discussed elsewhere in this volume. This initiative can reduce the efficacy of externally sustained negative stereotypes that create public support for the marginalization of Black males. In addition, catalyzing a collective wholesome Black male identity profile can undercut self-initiated decimating actions such as Black-on-Black homicides in the US. A collaborative effort between Africana and Black Male Studies scholar/activists is key to the success of identity reconstruction. As Tommy Curry informs, Black Male Studies begins with the declaration that the experiences of Black males should be interrogated via a framework "that arrests/suspends the caricatures of current research described under the rubric of Black masculinity …, refuses the pathologization of Black men and boys"[57] and embraces the knowledge that "Black men have not only survived but developed rich analyses of this oppression under the capitalist ethno-patriarchal regime we call white supremacy."[58] In the long run, only the eradication of white supremacist ideology will lead to the cessation of the institutional decimation of Black males.

14

Resocializing Gang Members: A Comprehensive Strategy to Promote Violence Reduction and Community Reintegration

Introduction

The central issue addressed in this chapter is how to concurrently reduce hyper-policing of Black communities and reduce lethal gang-related violence. The widespread social protests that erupted in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020, the militarized response to these protests, and concurrent increases in community-destabilizing criminal activity in some cities all point to the need to develop a comprehensive approach to community empowerment and social capital restoration. The strategy proposed here involves (1) negotiation of sustainable gang truces, (2) creation of community organizations to sustain truces and rehabilitate gang affiliates, and (3) creation of educational and employment opportunities for rehabilitees. Concurrent with these activities it is also necessary to reduce the hyper-policing of Black communities that contributes to the institutional decimation of Black males described in Chapter 13. Potential roles for B/AS scholar/activists in refining and implementing the various proposals are suggested.

The proposed interventions are informed by strategies deployed to achieve violence reduction and rehabilitation of child soldiers drawn into civil wars in various African countries. There are significant parallels between the experiences of child soldiers and gang affiliates. Afrocentric rites-of-passage programming is proposed as an important component of gang affiliate rehabilitation. Traditional African cultural practices play an important role in some child soldier rehabilitation programs, and Afrocentric rites-of-passage programs are proposed here as an analog that can enhance positive outcomes for Black gang members in the US. Long-term success of both child soldiers and gang affiliate rehabilitation programs hinges critically on the ability to reintegrate impacted youth into their communities and provide educational and employment opportunities.

Negotiation of a sustainable cessation of hostilities must occur prior to the initiation of efforts to rehabilitate child soldiers or gang affiliates. Unfortunately, gang conflict seems to have intensified in some cities even as waves of protestors courageously confronted local, state, and federal forces in the pursuit of racial justice. The apparent disconnection between gangs and the evolving social

justice movement is disturbing, in part, because heightened levels of inter-gang violence complicate the fight against white supremacy and exacerbate community instability. In addition, intra-community violence fosters hyper-policing that diminishes the rights and quality of life of all community citizens.

Similarities between psychological and physical traumas experienced by child soldiers and gang members are examined in the second section. Key elements of violence curtailment, child soldier rehabilitation, and community reintegration projects are examined to develop insights regarding viable approaches to designing efficacious interventions targeting Black gang members in the US including expanded use of Afrocentric rites-of-passage programs.

Child Soldiers and Gang Affiliates: Parallel Tragedies?

Child soldiers (youth under 18 years old) have been widely deployed in various African countries. Conflict zones include the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Liberia, Mozambique, Sierra Leone, Somalia, and Uganda.[1] Although some child soldiers are conscripted against their will during ethnic conflicts and civil wars, many others join military and para-military units because they have limited options available to improve life circumstances. Most child soldiers come from poor families and, consequently, have limited access to education. Children are desirable military recruits, in part, because they typically have an under-developed sense of danger regarding involvement in potentially lethal conflicts.[2] Black male gang members in the US confront similar challenges.

Street gangs have long existed in the US and often are propagated among members of marginalized racial and ethnic groups. Poverty, racism, discrimination, and urban deterioration are significant factors increasing gang affiliation. Gang members generally tend to be low academic achievers who perceive few "legitimate" economic opportunities. For some young people, gangs provide an interim emotional base during the transition from childhood by satisfying the need to belong to a group separate from families. In addition to a sense of belonging, protection and respect are also factors that draw individuals into gangs. Gangs also offer a set of concrete goals, a seemingly coherent worldview, and a source of affirmation. Highly structured gangs often have a well-defined organizational structure, modes of initiation, and mechanisms to enforce loyalty and punish violation of norms. These protocols are similar to those found in military organizations, e.g. leaders with titles, codes of dress and language, and signs and symbols. Threats from competitor gangs provide an incentive to acquire the most dangerous and sophisticated weapons available, thereby creating the neighborhood equivalent of an "arms race." Gang violence also creates an aura of protection from other gangs and non-gang groups and individuals.[3]

Current data documenting the number of gang members in the US is not readily available. The original annual National Youth Gang Survey was terminated in 2012. Fortunately there is a plan to reintroduce the survey that will hopefully provide needed data regarding trends in gang affiliation.[4] Data from the 2012

report indicate that in 2011 the estimated total number of African American gang members in the US was approximately 300,000—roughly the same as the total estimated number of child soldiers (300,000) in Africa. African American and Latino youth were disproportionately identified as gang members (see Table 2).

Conflicts involving child soldiers and gang warfare both create widespread patterns of community violence producing extremely deleterious psychological and destabilizing effects on both perpetrators and innocent victims. In child soldier involved conflicts, armed violence can generate forced displacement of entire communities. On a lesser scale, armed conflict erodes social capital, disrupts ethnic cultural socialization, and destroys infrastructure such as schools, places of worship, and traditional governance structures. Continuing armed conflict can stymie efforts to recover from the destruction associated with previous waves of violence and inhibit the capacity to provide for basic human needs.[5] Children are particularly vulnerable to the ravages of armed conflict. They can be injured or killed, uprooted from their homes and communities, internally displaced, orphaned or separated from their parents and families, deprived of food, medical attention, education, recreation, and subjected to sexual abuse and exploitation, all of which result in high degrees of trauma. Existing research has clearly documented that former child soldiers and war-affected children experience high levels of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and anxiety disorder. Among all war-affected children, child soldiers are more likely to endure harsher psychological consequences, such as PTSD, major depression, hostility, sadness, loss of self-confidence, and inability to cope with daily life. High rates of PTSD (25–30 percent) among highly exposed adolescents have been reported. Direct victimization significantly increases psychological distress. Children who have directly engaged in combat, who have been forced to engage in crime and gratuitous violence, have been subjected to sexual violence, witnessed or undergone torture, or otherwise lost a family member of social status within the community of belonging as a result of their conscription, manifest the highest levels of psychological distress.[6]

Gang-related community violence has long been pervasive in the US.[7] Gangs tend to form in poor neighborhoods and in communities where historically marginalized groups are isolated by racial/ethnic, cultural, and economic

Table 2 Race/Ethnicity of Gang Members: Selected Years 1999–2011

Race/Ethnicity of Gang Members	1999	2002	2006	2008	2011
Black or African American	30.9	35.7	35.2	31.8	35.3
Hispanic or Latino	47.3	47.0	49.5	50.2	46.2
White	13.4	10.4	8.5	10.5	11.5
All Other	8.4	6.9	6.8	7.6	7.0

Source: National Youth Gang Center, National Youth Gang Survey Analysis http://www.nationalgangcenter.gov/Survey-Analysis/Demographics.

differences and rivalries. Awareness that gang members are willing and able to use deadly violence increases their social isolation from community residents. In turn, this increased separation further increases the likelihood of antisocial behavior by gang members including crime and violence. Gang-related community destabilizing activities include drug trafficking, armed robberies, high-speed car chases with rival gangs or police, beatings, muggings, gang or individual rapes, stabbings, drive-by or walk-by shootings, shootouts, and kidnappings.[8] Long-term exposure to violence is associated with several psychological problems including depression, conduct disorders, and post-traumatic stress disorder. In addition, long-term exposure to violence increases the sense of hopelessness and resignation regarding prospects for a meaningful life.[9]

Easy access to firearms fuels armed conflict in both civil wars and domestic gang conflicts. The vast majority of small arms used in civil wars are exported by suppliers based in developed countries, especially the US, France, Russia, China, and the UK, accounting for 88 percent of global conventional arms exports, much of which has wound up in Africa.[10] To illustrate, Table 3 shows the value of US arms exports to various African countries during the 1998–99 Congo War.

Various organizations have initiated efforts to reduce small arms proliferation in Africa. The African Common Position on the Illicit Proliferation, Circulation and Trafficking of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) was adopted by the Council of Ministers of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in December 2000. Under the auspices of the Declaration, Member States identified, seized, and destroyed caches of illicit weapons and established measures to control the

Table 3 Post-Cold War US Arms Transfers to Governments Involved in the Congo War, 1989–1998 (in constant 1998 dollars)

Country	Foreign Sales	Commercial Sales	TOTAL
Angola	0	31,000	31,000
Burundi	74,000	312,000	386,000
Chad	21,767,000	24,677,000	46,444,000
DRC	15,151,000	218,000	15,369,000
Namibia	2,311,000	1,934,000	4,245,000
Rwanda	324,000	0	324,000
Sudan	30,258,000	1,815,000	32,073,000
Uganda	1,517,000	9,903,000	11,420,000
Zimbabwe	567,000	828,000	1,395,000
TOTAL	**71,969,000**	**39,718,000**	**111,687,000**

Source: William D. Hartung and Bridget Moix, U.S. Arms to Africa and the Congo War. https://worldpolicy.org/2009/11/13/report-u-s-arms-to-africa-and-the-congo-war-world-policy-institute-research-project/#table1

circulation, transfer, and use of such weapons. In 2013 the African Union initiated a three-year project titled, "Fight Against Illicit Firearms in Africa." Among other elements, the project focused on strengthening the ability of law enforcement agencies to combat the proliferation of illicit weapons. The OAU set the ambitious goal of ending civil conflicts on the continent by 2020. The OAU's successor, the African Union, has reaffirmed the commitment to "Silence the Guns" in an effort to create "A peaceful and secure Africa through the use of mechanisms that promote a dialogue-centered resolution of conflicts."[11]

As is the case for child soldiers, gun-related violence in the US exacts a significant toll on the mental health of gang members. This violence also induces an epidemic-like process of social contagion transmitted through networks of people via social interactions.[12] Research examining gangs in the UK found that "Effectively addressing the relationships between gang-affiliation and poor mental health requires a strong, collaborative approach that co-ordinates services across a wide range of organisations."[13] More specifically, the report declares, "Health services, local authorities, schools, criminal justice agencies and communities all have an important role to play in promoting healthy social and emotional development in children and young people and ensuring vulnerable young people affected by gangs and poor mental health receive the support they require."[14] These proposed interventions are similar to approaches used to rehabilitate child soldiers, suggesting that it may be feasible to adapt elements from such programs to resocialize gang affiliates in the US.

Violence Suppression and Child Warrior Rehabilitation

Cessation or widespread reduction of violence is the obvious precondition for initiating rehabilitation efforts in civil wars and gang conflicts. In the case of civil wars there is disagreement among scholars regarding the extent to which negotiated settlements can eliminate violence reoccurrence. Negotiated settlements can be pursued via face-to-face talks between antagonists or indirectly through third party diplomacy. Monica Toft observes, "A key strength of negotiated settlements is their credible promise to provide mutual benefit as a reward for continued compliance."[15] However, Toft cautions, "Where negotiated settlements fall short, however, is in the credibility of their promise to inflict harm should one or both sides in a settlement fail to comply with its terms … Thus, while negotiated settlements are good at providing benefits, they are less effective in following through on their threats and are therefore not self-sustaining."[16]

The use of coercive force creates difficulties for the negotiation and stability of civil war settlements. Caroline Hartzel describes how "analysts have stressed the importance of confidence-building measures [that] mean opponents, once they disarm, a rival will not be able to take advantage of the settlement and score a victory it was unable to achieve on the battlefield."[17] Confidence building measures range from the insertion of peacekeeping troops by third-party actors

to guarantees by third-party actors that parties violating a cease-fire will be punished.[18]

As settlement negotiations proceed, one strategy to reduce the likelihood of the resurgence of violence is a guarantee that designated groups will receive material benefits such as special economic opportunities, admission into schools and colleges, jobs, promotions, etc.[19]

One of the most extensive efforts to stem the recruitment of child soldiers in Africa and facilitate their demobilization and rehabilitation was initiated via the April 1997 Cape Town symposium sponsored by the nongovernmental (NGO) Working Group on the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). This symposium produced a document outlining both principles and best practices for developing rehabilitation interventions following the cessation of hostilities. The guidelines of special import for this analysis are summarized in Table 4.[20] The Cape Town principles have been implemented in various ways and, consequently, intervention programs exhibit significant variation across locales. The typically accepted measure of success of rehabilitation interventions is the secure reunification of former child soldiers with family members. Former male child soldiers with higher levels of family connectedness have been found to have lower levels of emotional distress and better social functioning than those with lesser connectedness.[21] However, Grace Maina cautions that full reintegration of former child soldiers and other children impacted by armed conflict involves much more than family reintegration.[22]

The importance of leveraging local cultural traditions in rehabilitation program designs is well documented. Community-based approaches have been found to lessen distrust, and increase tolerance between different war affected groups, and support the reconciliation process.[23] Social reintegration should include the sensitization and mobilization of communities to assist in reconciliation and aid reintegration of ex-combatants into their communities. Stakeholders involved in mediation efforts and reintegration rituals should include public officials, community elders, leaders of religious organizations and local NGOs.[24] The reconciliation process usually involves some combination of rituals, rites, symbols, blood pact alliances, marriage, eating and drinking from the same bowl, shaking of hands, embracing, and exchange of gifts. In general, reconciliation models foregrounding traditional beliefs and practices are anchored by a commitment to restorative justice, which focuses on healing broken community relationships.[25] Abosede Babatunde insists that traditional reconciliation practices can serve as useful complements to "state organised and/or internationally sponsored forms of reintegration processes … as well as for retributive justice and truth telling for dealing with the legacy of civil war and genocide."[26] The state and/or internationally organized rehabilitation programs to which Babatunde refers often focus on economic and education support such as vocational training, apprenticeships, micro-finance loans, and formal or informal schooling. Babatunde's suggestion regarding the value of an approach that uses both traditional cultural immersion and human capital accumulation has relevance for the design of gang member rehabilitation programs.

Table 4 Selected Guidelines for Child Soldier Rehabilitation

- Preparations should be made to respond to the needs of children who will be demobilized in anticipation of peace negotiations or as soon as they begin.
- Family reunification is the principal factor in effective social reintegration.
- Psychosocial programmes should assist children in developing and building those capacities that will facilitate reattachment to families and communities.
- Programmes should be developed with the communities, build on existing resources and take account of the context and community priorities, values, and traditions.
- Traditional resources and practices in the community, which can support the psychosocial integration of children affected by war, should be identified and supported.
- The socio-economic context, with specific reference to poverty, food, and nutritional security, should be evaluated and clarified.
- Traditional ways of generating income, traditional apprenticeships and credit and money-making schemes should be identified and built upon.
- Programmes targeted at former child soldiers should be integrated into programmes for the benefit of all war-affected children.
- Provision should be made for educational activities that reflect: the loss of educational opportunities as a consequence of participation in hostilities; the age and stage of development of the children; and the potential of these activities for promoting the development of self-esteem.
- Provision should be made for relevant vocational training and opportunities for employment, including for children with disabilities.
- Recreational activities should be included in all reintegration programmes for war-affected children.
- Programme development and implementation should incorporate the participation of the children and reflect their needs and concerns with due regard for the context of reintegration.

Violence Suppression and Gang Member Rehabilitation

As noted in the introduction to this chapter, widespread social protests emerged in the wake of the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis on May 25, 2020. The Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, formed in 2013, was at the forefront of related protests. In 2018, there were 996 fatal police shootings, and in 2019 this figure increased to 1,004. Between 2015 and 2020 the rate of police killings of Blacks is thirty-one fatal shootings per million of the population compared to thirteen per million for white Americans. Between January and June 30th of 2020, 506 civilians were shot, 105 of whom were Black.[27]

The wave of social protests exacerbated longstanding concerns of Black citizens regarding the epidemic violence plaguing some Black communities. In 2018, 75 percent of Black respondents indicated violent crime as a big problem in the US, and 82 percent identified gun violence was a major issue. These global concerns filtered down to local communities. In a 2017 Pew survey, 38 percent of Black respondents stated that crime was a major problem in their community.[28]

Local, state, and federal forces utilize hyper-surveillance and hyper-policing to combat what is declared by these authorities as a worrisome increase in violent crime. However, these pronouncements do not square with the official statistics. The violent crime rate has declined by over 50 percent from the 1990s and this

trend continued with three successive years of reductions in 2017, 2018, and 2019.[29] The national murder rate ticked up in 2015 and 2016 and some conservative commentators attempted to attribute this increase to a so-called "Ferguson Effect," a reference to alleged reduction in proactive policing following the wave of protests that erupted following the murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. Notably, Nathan James found no solid evidence of widespread reductions in hyper-policing.[30] There was a significant spike in murders and an increase in aggravated assaults during the first six months of 2020 compared with the first six months of 2019 but there were significant decreases in the number of rapes and robberies.[31]

Increasing militarization of local police forces has escalated hyper-policing in Black communities. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) reported in 2014 that "the militarization of American policing is evident in the training that police officers receive, which encourages them to adopt a 'warrior' mentality and think of the people they are supposed to serve as enemies, as well as in the equipment they use, such as battering rams, flashbang grenades, and APCs."[32] The report explains, "this shift in culture has been buoyed by the U.S. Supreme Court's weakening of the Fourth Amendment (which protects the right to privacy in one's home) through a series of decisions that have given the police increased authority to force their way into people's homes, often in drug cases."[33]

The 2020 deployment of federal officers to Portland, Seattle and several other cities (all led by Democratic mayors) further escalates the pattern of racialized hyper-policing. This deployment was authorized in a June 26, 2020, Executive Order titled "Executive Order on Protecting American Monuments, Memorials, and Statues and Combating Recent Criminal Violence." Homeland Security assembled a task force to implement this order that included the Border Patrol, Coast Guard, US Marshals, and other agencies. The deployment force reportedly consists of some 200 heavily armed personnel. Forceful actions against peaceful Portland protestors, including abductions by agents in plain clothes, prompted the filing of a lawsuit alleging violations of citizens' First, Fourth, and Fifth Amendment rights.[34]

Some law enforcement officials acknowledge that hyper-policing is an ineffective strategy to combat gang-related violence. A 2010 report by the Police Executive Research Forum concluded that the most effective approach to reducing gang activity is to develop a comprehensive strategy that includes interventions to prevent juveniles from joining gangs and rehabilitate affiliates. Such a strategy should involve soliciting support and partnership of other criminal justice agencies, the juvenile justice system, and community organizations.[35]

Confronting the pernicious problem of explicit and implicit bias in policing will require additional systemic interventions. Research by Jessica Sim and colleagues suggests training techniques employing stereotypical materials are not only ineffective in reducing the likelihood of biased actions, but can actually influence the probability of their occurrence. The limited benefit of anti-bias training derives from the persisting influence of pre-existing biases. Various pervasive negative stereotypes increase the potential for police maltreatment.[36] As an example, Black youth are often incorrectly perceived to be adults. Black males are also sometimes

described as subhuman, superhuman, criminal, and/or violent.[37] The problem of biased policing is further compounded because many Black youth are socialized to fear police interaction and, paradoxically, avoidance movements are often used by police to justify stops, interrogations, and arrests.[38] Rod Brunson observes, "The combination of frequent involuntary police contact, coupled with … poor treatment during such encounters [has] contributed to an accumulated body of unfavorable experiences that collectively [shape] … young men's views of police."[39] In the end, as described by Cynthia Nadowski and Bette Bottoms "bias in initial police interactions create opportunities for racial disparities at every subsequent step of the criminal justice process (e.g., in charging decisions, interrogations, jury voir dire, and verdicts)."[40]

New York's former "Stop-and-Frisk" program dramatically demonstrates how hyper-surveillance and hyper-policing directly exacerbate racial oppression. "Stop and Frisk" allowed NYPD police to stop, question, and frisk citizens in search of weapons and other contraband without a concrete basis for suspicion. Between 2002 and 2013 New Yorkers were subjected to more than 4 million police stops and street interrogations, nine out of ten of whom were either Black or Latino.[41] In addition, in 2006 the New York Civil Liberties Union reported that 3100 surveillance cameras were operative in NYC with many targeting people of color residing in housing projects.[42]

Systematic reduction of hyper-policing will enable a dedicated focus on reducing gang-related violence. In 1987, the National Youth Gang Project found that community mobilization, educational support, and job development provided the best option for intervention and prevention.[43] In addition, sustainable reduction in gang-related violence requires a strategic combination of negotiated gang truces, provision of mental health services, school-based social services, outreach to incarcerated youth, family outreach, citizen patrols, and reductions in availability of lethal weapons. The 1992 agreement between the Bloods and Crips in Los Angeles can serve as a model for contemporary efforts to negotiate truces. In April 1992 gang members from the four major housing projects in the Watts neighborhood established a peace treaty designed to challenge police brutality, improve community security, and end years of deadly conflicts.[44] Although several community-based organizations played important roles in negotiating the truce, many gang members stated the murders of Black teenager, Latasha Harlins, by a Korean-born store owner and the police beating of Rodney King, and subsequent acquittal of the perpetrators, created awareness of the need to refocus energies on combatting collectively experienced racial oppression.[45]

Truth Commissions (TCs) can contribute to the disruption of longstanding hyper-policing practices. Such commissions have been used to pursue national reconciliation in several countries, including South Africa. TCs typically hold public hearings to determine the scale and impact of past injustices and post testimony into an official public record. TCs also officially certify both victims and perpetrators with the goal of facilitating healing that allows all parties to move beyond a painful past.[46] In the US, variants of these commissions could allow hyper-policing victims to report incidents beyond those that generate official

misconduct investigations. Also, law enforcement officials could build trust by acknowledging past misdeeds, identifying community priorities, and presenting plans to eliminate hyper-policing practices.

Some commentators have expressed skepticism regarding the sustainability of gang truces. As an example, Robert Muggah et al. observe, "In a best-case scenario, gang truces can help end violent conflict and create the necessary space for addressing underlying structural causes leading to the emergence of armed groups to begin with. But without an ongoing process, the back-slide into renewed violence seems almost inevitable."[47] During the first two years while the LA treaty was in effect, gang violence in Watts decreased by 44 percent. The coalition worked with the city and police to expand the treaty to the rest of LA and the city eventually adopted the community-based intervention and violence-reduction strategies.[48] The city formed the LA Bridges Community Gang Prevention Program, and in 2007 established the Gang Reduction & Youth Development (GRYD) program.[49]

The Amer-I-Can Foundation, co-founded by former NFL running back Jim Brown, was one of the organizations directly involved in negotiating the LA gang treaty (Amer-I-Can Foundation, n.d.). Amer-I-Can co-founder Aqeela Sherrills reports that the foundation organized treaties in fifteen other cities after implementing the LA gang truce. In 2017 the organization celebrated the 25th anniversary of the original LA gang treaty.[50] Ameri-I-Can operates programs in more than a dozen states, including New York and New Jersey. The heart of the program is a curriculum that encourages students to examine their motivations and prejudices, gain control of their emotions, solve everyday problems, and build family ties. The course also helps students find and keep jobs, as well as maintain financial stability.[51]

Several insights relevant for addressing contemporary gang-related violence can be distilled from the LA gang truce experience. Reducing hyper-policing can allow community organizations to initiate sustainable anti-violence interventions that minimize potential conflicts with law enforcement agents. In the same way that murders of Black citizens led LA gang members to recognize the greater threat posed by systemic racial oppression, an educational campaign can be implemented to generate a similar level of awareness among contemporary gang members.

The potential efficacy of such a campaign has been heightened by the advocacy of NBA players many of whom wore BLM-related messages on their jerseys in 2020. The LA gang truce experience also illustrates that long-term success of gang truces requires constant vigilance, reduction in the volume of lethal weapons, comprehensive programming that facilitates healing, and creation of educational and employment opportunities for rehabilitees. B/AS scholar/activists can play an important role in designing healing and educational programming. The scholars' and activists' understanding of white supremacy in US history and the African American experience can provide significant contributions to intervention and prevention strategies that focus on positive youth identity and cultural socialization.

MAD DADS and Mothers in Charge are examples of community-based organizations that have developed viable anti-violence strategies. MAD DADS is an acronym for Men Against Destruction–Defending Against Drugs and Social-Disorder. MAD DADS, INC. was founded in 1989 by a group of concerned Omaha, Nebraska parents who were fed up with gang violence and the unrestricted flow of illegal drugs. MAD DADS' programming includes Weekend Street Patrols within troubled areas that report crime, drug sales, and other destructive activities to the proper authorities. The organization also paints over gang graffiti and challenges the behavior of drug dealers and gang members. MAD DADS also sponsors activities for youth, such as block parties, rallies, night parades, and car shows.[52] Mothers In Charge, Inc. advocates for families affected by violence and provides counseling and grief support services when a loved one has been murdered. Mothers In Charge collaborates with elected officials, community leaders, and other community and faith-based organizations on legislation and solutions to support safe neighborhoods and communities for children and families.[53]

The efforts of community organizations must be coordinated with violence reduction initiatives based in schools and in jails and prisons. The National Gang Center cautions,

> Gang affiliation is not something that students leave behind when they come to school. Gang members do not leave their behaviors, attitudes, and conflicts outside the school environment. Gangs, unchecked and unidentified in a school setting, often engage in threat and intimidation; physical and cyber bullying; fighting; recruiting; and criminal activities such as the introduction and use of weapons, assault, sex trafficking, vandalism, and illegal drug sales.[54]

The Center further declares "The absence of a well-developed, strategic, collaborative, and effective school safety plan can lead to violence and other unsafe and disruptive activities within a school setting." Violence-reduction initiatives must also focus on the large cohort of incarcerated youth affiliates. In many cases, gang affiliates are incarcerated for only a brief period; the well-defined community links of gangs in incarcerated settings can significantly increase community violence.[55] However, a review of available research indicates that it is possible to discourage youth offenders from rejoining gangs upon release by informing them of disadvantages and the costs of membership for familial relationships and quality of life. It is also critical to demonstrate the viability of alternative lifestyles and that it is possible to exit from gangs without experiencing harm.[56] With school-age youth in placement, there is a need to integrate juvenile justice interventions with the strategies of community groups and organizations. McCrary's research found that the insights of community-based, juvenile justice workers in alternative, community-based placement programs can deter youth gang involvement and decrease recidivism after leaving placement. McCrary also suggests that juvenile justice workers must develop trusting, empathetic relationships to support youths' needs for "family" and "community" connections (social belonging).[57]

Racially discriminatory policing practices and sentencing policies fuel the engines of mass incarceration. Michelle Alexander has characterized the racialized mass incarceration process that disproportionately impacts Black males as "The New Jim Crow." She documents how the impact of the "War on Drugs" (Reagan) and "Three Strikes You're Out" (Clinton) legislation and law enforcement policing practices fueled the mass incarceration of two generations of African American and Latino boys and men.[58]

Successful long-term reduction in gang-related violence must prioritize the provision of appropriate mental health services that addresses the trauma experienced by gang affiliated youth. This trauma is one of many dimensions of what Joy DeGruy characterizes as "continual violent attacks on body, mind and spirit."[59] Such violence, DeGruy insists, engendered intense trauma that, in turn, induced both constructive and destructive attitudinal and behavioral adaptations that she designates as the Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome (PTSS). From this perspective, conflict among gangs is one especially ominous PTSS destructive attitudinal adaptation. In the US, gang conflicts among African American, Latino, and immigrant groups, is often catalyzed by the effects of white supremacy, racism, and economic oppression, which exacerbate tensions and conflicts among gangs in segregated, decaying, urban cities and communities.

Significant racial disparities exist among mental health diagnoses and treatment in both the community and the juvenile justice system. Incorrect diagnosis can result in lowered expectations that lock children into segregated learning environments or deprive them of needed services.[60] Black youth are disproportionately identified as having a disability, but researchers have found that youths of color are less likely to receive mental health or substance use treatment. While early diagnosis and treatment in schools can reduce the likelihood of incarceration, youths of color are more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system than white youths.[61] Students with disabilities are more than twice as likely to be suspended, and suspended or expelled students are almost three times as likely to be involved with the juvenile justice system within the next year.[62] Mental health disorders are prevalent among youths under control of the juvenile justice system with as many as 70 percent exhibiting a diagnosable mental health problem. Youths of color entangled in the juvenile justice system are less likely to be treated for mental health disorders than white youths.[63]

In addressing the mental health needs of current and prospective gang affiliates, it is essential that interventions are culturally relevant, and specifically African-centered.[64] The Association of Black Psychologists is an invaluable resource that can guide the development of appropriate mental health interventions in school, community, and juvenile justice settings.[65] All-male academies constitute one strategy to counter institutionalized educational barriers.[66] In these single sex settings, educators and community members aim to reverse the alarming rates for educational failure that are known to increase incarceration, homicide, fatherless homes, drug addiction, high unemployment, and poverty among adolescent boys. Marlon James suggests the most effective academies employ a "power-centered" as opposed to a "problem" or "deficit-centered" approach to disrupt the complex

of social, structural, and academic inequities. Clearly, Black/Africana Studies scholars can provide critical support.[67]

Curtailing access to lethal firearms is probably the most complicated problem associated with efforts to reduce gang-related violence. In contrast to the collective effort that restricted access to armaments in African civil conflicts, in the US ineffectual firearm regulations at the national, state, and local levels make it virtually impossible to curtail the flow of illegal guns into high-crime areas. The demand for legal and illegal firearms has increased, spurred by the COVID-19 pandemic and social protests. Gun buyback programs have been organized in several communities in an effort to reduce the number of firearms. These programs are typically of short duration and offer cash payments for surrendered weaponry. Most surrendered guns are actually not illegally acquired weapons used in street crime. However, reconceptualizing gun buyback programs can transform them into an important component of a gang-violence reduction program. As Anthony Bragga has observed, "gun violence reduction is only one of multiple goals that gun buyback programs are intended to serve. Other goals, such as mobilizing communities, promoting awareness of gun violence and youth violence, providing safe-disposal opportunities, and changing public views toward firearms, may be well served by gun buybacks. If these goals are met, then gun buybacks will continue to be worthwhile."[68]

In the wake of efforts to topple Confederate monuments, gun buyback programs can provide a means to create new public monuments that celebrate successes in reducing gang-related violence. Typically, surrendered guns are disabled and melted down. However, with the guidance of local public artists, surrendered guns could be transformed into "living" sculptures, with periodic modifications as additional guns are collected. These sculptures could be sited in a venue surrounded by bricks engraved with the names of individuals who surrendered firearms and the names of victims of gun violence. Gang affiliates surrendering firearms could be trained to assist in creating, maintaining, and updating these sculptures as one step in the rehabilitation process. In lieu of cash payments for surrendered firearms, educational, employment, and housing vouchers could be provided to encourage participation in structured rehabilitation activities.

In line with the design of programs developed to rehabilitate child soldiers, gang rehabilitation programs should focus on reconnecting rehabilitees with the community and preparing them to take advantage of meaningful employment and/or entrepreneurship opportunities. A TC process is an important intervention that can serve as a bridge between the decision to abandon gang involvement and entry into a structured rehabilitation program. It can also cultivate community support for rehabilitation efforts that includes active involvement in Rights-of-Passage (ROP) programming. ROP programs constitute an important intervention that can significantly advance rehabilitation goals. These programs are designed, in part, to cultivate an understanding of, and commitment to, values and behaviors that foster positive outcomes for both the individual and the community. Most ROP programs aim to instill values and behaviors that improve and transform the self-concept, self-esteem, self-awareness, and cultural competence of African

American youth. Paul Hill, Jr., Founder and President of the National Rites-Of-Passage Institute (NROPI), suggests that rites-of-passage is a process, not a program that liberates children and youth from socially toxic environments.[69] Afrocentric thought is the most widely used framework for values education. Consequently, with both child soldiers and gang members, Afrocentric ROP programs can powerfully affect identity, attitude, and behavior.

Most ROP programs are intended to reduce the likelihood of becoming involved in gang-related activities. Consequently, modifications to conventional programs will be required to address the trauma and behavioral adaptations engendered by gang affiliation. There are ROP programs specifically designed to serve the needs of traumatized youth. As an example, Stephen Gavazzi et al. examined a ROP program serving youth in foster care.[70] Targeted ROP programing has also been developed to facilitate the resocialization of formerly incarcerated men.[71] Black/Africana Studies scholar/activists can play a major role in the design and implementation of appropriate ROPs.

Craig Brookins views ROP programs as a collaborative process involving parents, schools, churches, businesses, and other community groups.[72] Such a program is described by Aminufu Harvey and Robert Hill.[73] This D.C.-based ROP program includes family enhancement and empowerment activities and individual and family counseling in addition to an after-school program serving adolescent participants. There are ROP programs specifically designed to serve the needs of traumatized youth. As an example, Stephen Gavazzi et al. examined a ROP program serving youth in foster care. Targeted ROP programing has also been developed to facilitate the resocialization of formerly incarcerated men.[74] The effectiveness of ROP-inspired community reconnection initiatives can be enhanced by credentializing and engaging community representatives to play a leadership role in ROP programming. Former gang leaders could be trained to lead ROP programs. Councils of Queen Mothers, comprised of mothers who have lost children to gun violence, could be created and empowered to oversee the TC process. These organizations would formalize and extend the advocacy and healer roles performed by the Circle of Mothers, founded by Trayvon Martin's mother, Sybrina Fulton, through the Trayvon Martin Foundation.[75] B/AS scholar/activists can assist in the design and operation of such bodies.

Limited employment opportunities constitute a major motivation for becoming involved in illicit gang-related activities. The Federal Job Guarantee program proposed by Paul et al. could provide a means to address this issue. Under their proposal, a federal job would be made available, at non-poverty wages, for all job-seeking citizens above the age of eighteen. The program would be administered through a new agency, the National Investment Employment Corps (NIEC). The NIEC would be empowered to create jobs focusing on needed social investments including repair, maintenance, and expansion of the nation's infrastructure, housing stock, and public buildings. NIEC jobs could also be developed to advance environmental sustainability via installation of energy efficiency upgrades to public and private buildings and provision of assistance in ecological restoration

projects. The authors argue that the gross outlays associated with implementing the NIEC would be offset substantially by increases in local, state, and federal tax revenues, decreases in uptake of existing social insurance programs, increases in the growth rate of GDP, and substantial productivity and capacity gains in the US economy.[76]

Other proposed areas for NIEC job creation would have significant longer-term preventative impacts on future gang-related violence. Specifically, Paul et al. envision jobs that increase the provision of high-quality preschool and afterschool services, increase the number of teachers' aides, provide high-quality elder care and companionship, and enrich the arts.[77] V.P. Franklin has proposed social investment addressing similar needs. His proposed programs would be funded via a "Reparations Superfund." This Superfund would underwrite development of alternatives to the existing testing regime fueling high dropout rates, support maternal and early childhood health care programs, and create a "health-care network" administered by culturally knowledgeable health care professionals.[78] In addition to supporting programs proposed by Paul et al. and Franklin, funding is needed to plan and implement many of the programs proposed in this chapter. There is a critical need for the development of creative fund-raising strategies. In approaching this fiscal challenge, it would be useful to keep in mind the position advanced by Carlton Waterhouse, who argues African Americans should pursue the equivalent of a broad-based reparations-funded development program of institutional development within Black communities, whether or not compensation from governmental or private entities is forthcoming. Carlton Waterhouse maintains that a comprehensive development program can be implemented through the pooling of existing internal resources. B/AS scholar/activists should play an active role in operationalizing Waterhouse's vision, refining and advocating for implementation of the various proposals presented in this chapter, and supporting efforts to obtain reparations.[79]

Conclusion

The third decade of the 21st century has ushered in a new phase in the ongoing liberation struggle. This moment must be seized to strike solid blows against white supremacy in all its manifestations, including hyper-policing. At the same time, an equally aggressive assault must target self-directed violence in our communities, with a special emphasis on gang-related brutality. B/AS has a unique responsibility to equip the current generation of activists with the knowledge and support necessary to achieve success in both the assault on globalized systemic racism and in community revitalization efforts. Ideally, active involvement of B/AS scholar/activists in the manner advocated in this chapter will benefit both gang and child soldier rehabilitees. Conjoining efforts to rehabilitate child soldiers and gang affiliates has the potential to demonstrate the power of pan-African strategies in confronting globalized racial oppression. By assuming the responsibility to join

the battle in the streets and provide instruction for the emerging cadre of freedom fighters, contemporary scholar/activists will be reanimating the original activist orientation of B/AS, thereby enabling the enterprise to reclaim a vanguard role in the continuing quest for uncompromised freedom and dignity for people of African descent around the world.

15

Globalizing Black Identity: Challenges and Possibilities for Developing Liberatory Coalitions

Introduction

Cultivating development of a progressive globalized identity among diverse Black collectives can become a powerful strategy to create conditions for effective challenges to international white supremacy and racialized social stratification. This analysis interrogates the feasibility of creating such an identity by examining changes in Black identity dynamics among various Black collectives in the US. These dynamics are being reshaped because of increasing immigration from African and Caribbean countries. Increasing immigration is creating potential tensions associated with perceived cultural differences, pervasive negative stereotypes, and perceptions of labor market competition. At the same time the almost inevitable exposure of immigrants to institutionalized anti-Black racism creates opportunities to cultivate alliances and counter negative stereotypes. Targeted educational and outreach efforts can diffuse potential tensions and create opportunities to mobilize members of different communities to engage in collaborative domestic and international anti-racist political actions. The global liberational objectives of B/AS mandates that scholar/activists become actively involved in educational and other efforts to promote Black identity convergence.

Contemporary Black Migration to the US

The report "Key Findings About Black Immigrants in the U.S." provides a wealth of information regarding immigration flows from specific countries. In 2019, 12 percent of the US Black population was foreign-born, and 9 percent were second-generation Americans, i.e., they had at least one foreign-born parent. Slightly more than 30 percent of Black immigrants entered the US between 2010 and 2019. Between 1980 and 2019 Black immigrants accounted for 19 percent of the growth in the *overall* Black population. Black immigrants are projected to account for roughly one-third of the US Black population growth through 2060. Between 2000 and 2019, the Black African immigrant population grew from about 600,000 to 2.0 million and people of African origin comprised 42 percent of the

US foreign-born Black population in 2019, compared to just 23 percent in 2000.[1] However, Jamaica and Haiti continue to be the largest source of immigrants as documented in Table 5.

Evolving Patterns of Identity Construction among Black Immigrants

The identity dynamics among Black immigrants are complex and include forces that perpetuate distinctive identity profiles as well as others that catalyze identity convergence.

Factors Mitigating Against Black Identity Convergence

Segmented assimilation theory identifies three possible adaptation paths for future generations of Black immigrants: (1) upward mobility into a white middle class; (2) maintenance of ethnic community and values; and (3) downward mobility into what is described as "the Black underclass."[2] As suggested previously, the interest here is in a fourth possibility, i.e., cultivation of affiliational alliances that (a) encompass the entire range of socio-economic classes and countries of origin and (b) lead to the pursuit of both domestic and international efforts to confront globalized anti-Black racism. The modal path of identity construction of immigrants from any country depends on several factors, including: (1) timing of entry; (2) immigration motivations; (3) labor market experiences; (4) religious beliefs and practices; (5) exposure to US racialized discrimination; (6) domestic and international public policy priorities; and (7) extent and quality of interaction with African Americans.

Table 5 Top Birthplaces of African Immigrants in the US, 2000 and 2019

	2000	**2019**
Jamaica	530,000	760,000
Haiti	410,000	700,000
Nigeria	130,000	390,000
Ethiopia	70,000	260,000
Dominican Republic	80,000	210,000
Ghana	70,000	190,000
Trinidad and Tobago	160,000	170,000
Kenya	30,000	130,000
Guyana	110,000	120,000
Somalia	40,000	110,000

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of Census Data, "Key Findings About Black Immigrants in the U.S."

1. Timing of Entry

Longer tenured immigrant communities can create economic and social networks that reaffirm cultural identity and create opportunities for second, third, and subsequent generations to experience upward mobility. Such communities can also facilitate chain migration by providing support for new cohorts to settle with minimal difficulties.

Immigrants from Caribbean countries constitute the primary example of such a long-tenured immigrant population. The first large-scale Caribbean migration consisted of 250,000 mostly male laborers, many of whom settled in the US after working on construction of the Panama Canal between 1881 and 1915. Subsequently, many of these Black Caribbean migrants sought jobs in the same northern factories as Black American migrants from the southern US. Caribbean migration accelerated during World War II and continued into the post-World War II period. Following passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, immigration from the Caribbean grew dramatically and by 2001 an estimated 2.9 million Caribbean immigrants were residing in the US, many living in relatively self-contained communities in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, Miami, and Los Angeles.[3] Although Caribbean immigrants have been touted as a success story because their economic outcomes exceed those of African Americans, some research indicates that this success is due to immigrants' pre-immigration socio-economic characteristics rather than ascribed characteristics such as a strong work ethic.[4] Rebecca Tesfai reports that in contrast to African immigrants, Caribbean immigrants still face high racial and socio-economic segregation[5] and Suzanne Model reports that working-class, second-generation, Black immigrants believed that their ethnic background provided them little to no advantages, and so they identified as African Americans. However, she also found that middle-class, second-generation, Black immigrants attributed their success to their ethnicity and so identified as "West Indian."[6]

Amon Emeka's study of Nigerian Americans born between 1976 and 1985 found that the number of individuals self-classifying as "Nigerian" shrank by more than 25 percent between 2000 and 2014, but no more than 2.2 percent of the Nigerian second generation identified "American" or "United States" as their primary ancestry or ethnic origin. Twenty-five percent of the Nigerian second generation identified "Afro-American" or "African American" as their only ancestry or ethnic origin. At the same time, 75 percent identified "Nigerian" as their primary ancestry or ethnic origin. Emeka suggests, "This fact may speak to the strength of affective ties between members of the Nigerian second generation and the families and communities from which they hale, but it may also reflect the protective effects Nigerian identities have when the alternative is to be seen as 'just black' in a society that continues to exclude black people." Consistent with this interpretation, Emeka concludes that "US-born Nigerian children residing in poor families with parents who have not completed high school or college degrees are significantly more likely to 'drop out' of the Nigerian group in favour of 'African American' or 'just black' identities."[7]

2. Immigration Motivation

Immigrants who came to the US to escape political turmoil in their country of origin have experienced more difficulties in navigating US society than those whose primary motivation is improved economic opportunities. For example, immigration from Liberia has been catalyzed by two civil wars, the first spanning 1998 to 1997 and the second from 1999 to 2003. Bernadette Ludwig reports that, because of these conflicts, "many Liberian parents never completed their formal education and thus are illiterate, forcing them to work as home health aides." This trajectory has created difficulties for their children, including taunts associated with their status as "refugees." Consequently, many have chosen "to distance themselves from their African heritage" and adopt an identity profile that also embodies efforts to "escape discrimination from African Americans in their neighborhoods." However, they remain constrained by externally imposed anti-Blackness social norms when venturing outside their neighborhoods.[8]

Oromo Ethiopians' immigration stems primarily from conflict between the Oromo Liberation Front and the Ethiopian government that dates to 1973. Among other provocations, the Oromo language was banned from public administration, courts, churches, and schools. Beka Guluma found that Oromo immigrants "draw a sharp distinction between Oromo and Ethiopian as both separate national and ethnic identities" and "embrace their Black identity in part by relying on narratives of Blackness rooted in a shared history of anti-Black oppression."[9] Guluma concludes that "these findings demonstrate how Black immigrants' identity can inform and be informed by notions of Blackness in both the United States and homeland contexts, and the importance of attending to subnational ethnic diversity in studies of immigration."[10]

3. Labor Market Experiences

The extent to which competition for the same jobs exists between Black immigrants and African Americans constitutes a major potential source of antagonism. Analyses by economists have generated contradictory results. George Borjas, Jeffrey Grogger, and Gordon Hanson assert that immigration significantly reduced the wages of Black workers with low levels of education and increased involvement in criminal activities.[11] However, Patrick Mason has contested these findings and concludes "for African Americans as a whole, immigration may have little effect on mean wages and probability of employment." However, Mason acknowledges that "there is some evidence that immigration may have had an adverse impact on the labor market outcomes of African Americans belonging to low education-experience groups."[12]

Mason's more recent research reveals the following:

a. Some Black immigrants, for example, Creole- and French-speaking Haitian immigrants, along with Spanish-speaking Caribbean immigrants, have less desirable labor market outcomes than native-born African Americans due to lower labor market characteristics, such as years of education; and difficulties reading, writing, understanding, or speaking English.

b. Caribbean-English and Africans are the most affluent African American ethnic groups.
c. Despite the great ethnic, nativity, and identity group diversity among African Americans, African American men and women have similar wage and employment outcomes.[13]

The leading role of Black UK actors in recent popular films has provided an interesting twist on the issue of labor market competition. Samuel L. Jackson initiated discussion of whether these actors are taking opportunities from African American actors. In an interview about Jordan Peele's thriller *Get Out*, Jackson is reputed to have complained, "There are a lot of black British actors in these movies. I tend to wonder what *Get Out* would have been with an American brother who really feels that." In response, *Buzzfeed* Nigerian writer Bim Adewunmi challenged African Americans' alleged "monopoly on how black people are perceived and portrayed in the western world which … 'flattens and reduces other blacknesses.'"[14]

d. Religious Beliefs and Practices

Differences in the degree of religiosity and choice of religious institutions constitute another barrier to cultivation of a globalized Black identity. According to a 2021 Pew Report, 54 percent of African immigrants attend religious services weekly, compared to 32 percent of US-born and 30 percent of Caribbean-born Black adults. Seventy-two percent of African immigrants indicated that religion is very important to them, compared with 59 percent of US- and Caribbean-born Black adults. The report also indicates African and Caribbean immigrants are somewhat less likely to be Protestant, and more likely to be Catholic, than US-born Black adults. African immigrants are more likely than other Black Americans to identify with other Christian faiths such as Orthodox Christianity, or with non-Christian faiths such as Islam. While some Black Christian immigrants attend churches associated with historically Black Protestant denominations such as the Progressive National Baptist Convention, others affiliate with congregations of Haitian Baptists, Pentecostals, and Catholics, or those associated with African denominations such as the Presbyterian Church of Ghana and the Nigeria-based Church of the Lord.[15]

e. Exposure to US Racialized Discrimination

Immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean are at especially high risk of experiencing both racial and anti-immigrant discrimination. Marisol Meyer et al. have examined discrimination that Black immigrants face upon adjusting to life in the United States and disparities created by systemic racism and discrimination. The authors demonstrate how "systemic discrimination and prejudice constitute racialized violence and how exposure to trauma and stress over a lifetime impacts Black immigrants."[16]

Black immigrant youth are especially at risk of experiencing overtly racist encounters like those experienced by African American males. As an example, Derron Wallace asserts that second-generation Black Caribbean youth encounters

with "the dehumanizing and oppressive policy of stop-and-frisk in New York" force them "to come to terms with being Black in society [as t]he institution of the carceral state disrupts the possibility that performing class and ethnic scripts, of accents and symbols, will shield them from anti-Black racism."[17]

The high-profile cases of Abner Louima, Amadou Diallo, and Mulugeta Seraw constitute stark reminders that physical violence is an endemic component of anti-Black racism in the US. Although Seraw, Louima, and Diallo came from different origins and backgrounds, they "were bound by the overriding power of their identity as Blacks in America."[18] Louima, a Haitian immigrant, was tortured and sodomized by NYPD. Diallo, an unarmed West African immigrant from Guinea was gunned down by plainclothes NYPD officers while he stood in the vestibule of his home. Ethiopian student Mulugeta Seraw was beaten to death with a baseball bat by neo-Nazi skinheads in Portland, Oregon.[19] As a signal of possible identity convergence, African American activists, led by the Rev. Al Sharpton undertook a victorious campaign supporting Louima and Diallo. Somewhat surprisingly a rift emerged between African American activists and the Diallo family. As Violet Showers-Johnson relates, "Sharpton and others could not understand why Kadiatou Diallo called for calm in what they have long seen as the storm of centuries of volatile race relations, [and] Mrs. Diallo could not understand the acidic language Sharpton and other activists used to indict a country she continued to insist that her son had loved."[20] In explaining this disjunction, Johnson opines, "While slavery is a central aspect in the histories of the nations and peoples of the Caribbean, violence, race, and class relations are processed mainly within the contexts of colonization and empire."[21] However, Johnson also declares, "Many black immigrants, besides the protagonists of the high-profile episodes, are increasingly subscribing to the inclusion of race in the understanding and narrative of the black immigrant experience."[22]

f. Domestic and International Public Policy Priorities

Candis Watts Smith found that "Black immigrants' sense of group consciousness has a significant influence on their attitudes about reparations to African Americans, but not in other racialized areas, such as shaping voting districts that would allow minorities to be more easily elected or calling for the government to improve the status of Blacks in the United States."[23] Smith explains, "As Black immigrants come from different countries, in some of which the government is unresponsive or even repressive, they may want the government to have a more hands-off approach."[24] At the same time, her interviewees "felt strongly that African immigrants and their children should enjoy the benefits of affirmative action policies."[25] In addition, Watts Smith reports that "Their political party memberships and voting patterns also mirror those of African Americans."[26]

g. Interactions between Black Americans and Black Immigrants

Interactions between Black Americans and Black Immigrants are strongly conditioned by immigrants' lack of familiarity with the historical struggles of African Americans and exposure to stereotypes that foreground immigrant success and purported deficiencies of domestic Blacks. One example of social

distance between African Americans and African immigrants is use of the term *akata*, "a Yoruba name for 'wild cat' that is used by some African immigrants to describe some African-Americans, especially during hostile encounters."[27]

Onoso Imoagene reports that even middle class and wealthy African Americans are often perceived as exhibiting presumed dysfunctional behavioral, cultural, and moral differences.[28] Specifically, Imoagene noted "They are uncomfortable with blacks who embody negative black stereotypes even if they have money and belong to the middle and upper classes," and "Respondents commonly used bifurcating phrases such as 'ghetto blacks and blacks,' 'poorly behaved blacks and well-mannered blacks,' 'professional blacks and stereotypical blacks,' 'educated blacks and ignorant blacks' when describing their relations with their proximal hosts."[29] Ashly Nsangou's and Lauren Dundes's study of college students' experiences found "African Americans lack a sense of connection to Africans, attributed to Africans' purported sense of superiority and disregard for African Americans' ongoing struggle to end oppression" and they conclude, "intermingling in the college environment has not resulted in first- and second-generation Africans and African Americans sharing a common in-group, race-based identity."[30]

Factors Catalyzing Black Global Identity Convergence

Despite the previously enumerated constraints on establishment of inter-group alliances, a variety of factors is, in fact, catalyzing Black identity convergence. Although tensions certainly exist, findings from a study of African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' perceptions of closeness to African nationals by Michael Thornton et al. "support a notion of a shared connection with people in Africa."[31] Factors contributing to the possibility of globalized Black identity convergence include (1) intermarriage among members of different Black communities; (2) collaboration in combatting domestic and international institutional racism; (3) outreach by Black émigrés and short tenured cultural workers; and (4) shared patterns of popular culture consumption, especially among youth.

1. Intermarriage Among Members of Different Black Communities

Studies of Black immigrants' marriage patterns typically compare African American–white with Black immigrant–white rates. Early 21st-century data indicate "West Indians have the lowest percentage of intermarriage with whites, but have the highest rate of intermarriage with African Americans [and] Africans also have comparatively high levels of marriage with African Americans (compared to percentages with whites)."[32] A more recent study by Suzanne Model confirms a "propensity of black ethnics to assimilate into the African American mainstream."[33]

2. Collaboration in Combatting Domestic and International Racism

Marcelle Medford offers the important reminder that immigrants are not experiencing "either Blackness, race, or anti-Black racism for the first time, either

interpersonally or institutionally, upon reaching the United States."[34] Elaborating, she insists, "Broader institutional structures of race act upon immigrants before their arrival through forms of US imperialism and European colonialism [and] Immigrants also encounter forms of interpersonal racism in their country of origin through interactions with institutional actors and encounters with tourists, missionaries, and nongovernmental organizations."[35] In a similar vein, Chinwe Ezinna Oriji declares "While Africans were captured, enslaved, and racialized as a homogenized Black group in the Americas, Black Africans became 'native' on the continent … [concurrent with] the consolidation of whiteness for European colonial empires."[36] Consequently, "the construction of Blackness on both sides of the Atlantic was predicated on white hegemonic entities that constructed the global coloniality of race and power."[37]

Thornton et al. offer the important historical perspective that "both African Americans and Black Caribbeans have been associated with pan-African movements—most notably, Jamaican immigrant Marcus M. Garvey Jr.'s movement to return to Africa as a means of black liberation and advancement." Thornton et al. also observe, "the time period of the U.S. Civil Rights movement and the emergence of independent African and Caribbean nations were roughly comparable and forged connections to and affiliation with liberation and civil rights movements across these different contexts."[38] Furthermore, "contemporary events associated with prominent figures in U.S. political spheres … and popular culture …, as well as the visibility of African leaders of world stature … have underscored the concerns and connections between African nations and both African Americans and Black Caribbeans."[39] Thornton et al. also opine that the "social and political implications for African Americans' and Black Caribbeans' expressed felt closeness to Africans may be focused on contemporary issues facing African nations with respect to national and humanitarian concerns involving health, overall development, national security and foreign aid … as well as health issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic [and] Ebola outbreaks."[40]

Oluwakemi Balogun found perceptions of shared experiences with Black Americans led Black second-generation Nigerian immigrants to embrace a Black racial identity that "highlights the continuing power of race, particularly blackness, on identity options, which at times can override internal differences based on class, nativity and ethnicity."[41] In a similar vein, Oriji demonstrates "how a form of Black consciousness that arises within the lives of Nigerians stems from their insertion within the contemporary Movement for Black Lives."[42] Adaugo Pamela Nwakanma observes "there is a relationship between some characteristics of black social movements outside the USA and how African American institutions work to promote international black group consciousness and encourage their constituencies' everyday political participation." Elaborating, Nwakanma asserts, "As BLM influences movements abroad, transnational Black feminist synergies across time and space are also influencing the consciousness and strategies adopted by BLM activists in the United States."[43] Nwakanma insists further that "Both BLM and EndSARS which has organized mass protests against police brutality in Nigeria, represent decentralized grass-roots movements where women are

not only forming the backbone of the movements but are also the representative faces of these movements' efforts, and this representation is engendering political consciousness transnationally " and also works in the reverse as well, in that, "black group consciousness spans across nation-state boundaries and involves African American interest in the everyday politics of black communities outside the USA."[44]

3. African American Émigrés and Short-tenured Cultural Workers

Emigration of African Americans to African countries gained heightened visibility with the announcement of The Year of Return launched by the government of Ghana in 2019. Launched by Ghanaian President Nana Akufo-Addo in September 2018, this initiative was undertaken in collaboration with the US-based Adinkra Group and encouraged African diasporans to resettle in Africa (specifically Ghana). It was estimated that in 2014 more than 3,000 African Americans and people of Caribbean descent were living in Ghana[45] and approximately 1,500 African Americans relocated there between 2019 and 2022.[46] Black American immigration to African countries also expanded in the wake of the George Floyd killing and Senegal and Gambia have also become popular destinations for Black émigrés.[47]

Earlier, Black American emigration to African countries includes the establishment of villages in Tanzania by Black Power expatriates and their active support of the Nyerere regime. In fact, Seth Markle references "The continued presence of African American expatriates of the Black Power era," some of whom are providing community service programs addressing issues including "clean water, youth leadership development, arts education, health and fitness, computer literacy, HIV/AIDS awareness, malaria prevention, and vocational training."[48] The most significant recent example of non-governmental initiatives undertaken by African Americans that have catalyzed identity convergence is the work of Rev. Leon Sullivan who established more than twenty programs under the International Foundation for Education and Self-Help (IFESH), and introduced the Global Sullivan Principles, a template for addressing social responsibility within a business organization's governance documents, codes of conduct, and operating procedures.[49]

Some groundwork for cultivation of a globalized Black identity has been created by African American Peace Corps workers and US State Department officials. As an example, Dr. James E. Blackwell served as the Acting Country Director of the Peace Corps Tanzania post, and later as the Country Director at the Peace Corps Malawi post in the early 1960s.[50] Sherry Suggs, a former peace corps volunteer in Sierra Leone, went on to manage programs in Egypt, Morocco, Mali, Angola, Benin, and Nigeria and also served as the Deputy Director of USAID/Nigeria, the largest USAID program in Africa.[51]

On the other hand, the identity convergence process has been complicated by the creation of the US Africa Command responsible for US military operations in Africa and maintaining military relations with fifty-three African nations.[52] African Americans assigned to this command could be seen as agents of neo-colonial military adventurism.

4. Shared Patterns of Popular Culture Consumption

Black creative production has long been consumed enthusiastically by international audiences. Ironically, however, African American author Chaédria LaBouvier reports that during her six-month long residency in Europe in 2016 she found "a reluctance from black Brits to acknowledge the impact African American culture has had on the wider world."[53] This is a cautionary note that efforts to catalyze a global Black identity through popular culture will face challenges.

Hip Hop culture has undoubtedly had an extremely powerful global impact. Hip Hop originated in the Bronx section of New York City during the early 1970s influenced by negative effects of post-industrial decline, political discourse, and a rapidly changing economy. DJ Kool Herc, a Jamaican immigrant, Afrika Bambaataa, and Grandmaster Flash, by some commentators known as the "Holy Trinity" of Hip Hop, are generally described as the most important originators.[54] France, Germany, and China are among the countries where local Hip Hop movements have emerged.[55]

The potential of Hip Hop to become a major vehicle for forging a globalized Black identity derives from the fact that its structure "is rooted in the centuries-old cadence and storytelling of African dance."[56] Marc Perry asserts, "hip hop functions as a 'conduit' of transnational black cultural identification and its various practices encompassing music, dance and art are among the primary circuits for the global communication of black political consciousness and counter-hegemonic resistance among disenfranchised youth."[57] In addition, Black diasporic identification enables challenges to local conditions of racial oppression, while concurrently responding "to the ways global processes are increasingly reshaping such conditions."[58] Lesley Feracho explains, Caribbean Hip Hop rejects "an exclusionary national identity through racial, gendered, and class mobilization" in a way "that demonstrates the fluidity of Hip Hop as a musical genre that rhythmically, lyrically, and socially continually adapts to other social, historic, and political factors."[59]

The evolution of Hip Hop in Tanzania provides a direct example of the genre's potential to catalyze a progressive globalized Black identity. According to Markle, several Tanzanian Hip Hop groups "have paid homage to the revolutionary activism of the Panthers and demanded that the U.S. government free the African American political prisoner Mumia Abu Jamal" (now released), and the Malcolm X Grassroots Movement held its annual Black August Hip Hop concert in Tanzania in 2005. In 2011, following the death of former Black Panther Geronimo Ji Jaga, Tanzanian rappers celebrated his life and contributions in a work titled "Rest in Uhuru." Alex Perullo observes, "Among the more progressive aspects of Tanzanian hip-hop is the emphasis placed on pro-social attitudes and the communication of initiatives pertaining to crime reduction, drug and alcohol cessation, safer sex practices, and the effects of chronic unemployment on young people."[60] These are clearly problems confronting Black youth around the world.

Implications for B/AS

B/AS specialists have an important role to play in advancing the globalized Black identity project. As suggested by Dialika Sall, "shedding light on the cultural

exchange processes among urban West African immigrant youth and their peers of colour … has implications for improving intraracial relations."[61] Sall opines, "Teachers, youth workers, and others interested in improving relationships between African and Black American youth in particular should focus on programming that centre on ethnic cultural elements around which there has been positive exchange such as food and fashion."[62] Expanding on Sall's suggestion, B/AS instructors should explore opportunities to expand existing curricula by developing courses focusing on the state of African American–Black immigrant relations that encourage students to embrace identity convergence. Organizations including the National Council for Black Studies should organize conference sessions exploring these issues and cultivate formal relationships with African and Caribbean institutions to undertake identity globalization projects.

In addition to supporting progressive creative producers, B/AS specialists should strengthen allegiances with organizations working to utilize the internet to enhance wholesome identity configurations for all people of African descent such as the National Black Cultural Information Trust. This organization describes itself as "a Pan-African initiative that uses communications, media, and cultural storytelling to share information and resources that correct and challenge cultural misinformation and disinformation surrounding racial/ethnic identity, anti-Blackness, and other false narratives that harm our communities."[63] With the spread of high-speed internet worldwide, a variety of inexpensive communication options abound including WhatsApp, Twitter (later X), Facebook, Telegram, Imo, Skype, Google Hang-out, and Yahoo Messenger. Since the takeover of Twitter by Elon Musk, who renamed the company X in July 2023, his openness to allowing racist content, many participants on "Black Twitter" are migrating to a new platform, Spill, whose founder indicates has been created as "a safe place for diverse communities."

Africana Studies specialists can contribute significantly to cultivating an understanding of overlapping domestic and international public policy interests between African Americans and Black immigrants. The previously proposed courses should include discussion of specific issues including voting rights, equitable access to government services, and community safety. Regarding community safety, Derron Wallace offers a useful example of a cross-national concern that can motivate collaboration: "Black communities in London and New York may more effectively advocate for safe routes to school for all students if they invest in intraracial coalition building, organize through civil society organizations, support Black youth's understanding of their rights, and commit to the full freedom of *all* Black people—without exception(alism)s."[64]

For the global identity project to gain sustainable traction, African Americans must increase familiarity with the circumstances facing people of African descent residing in European countries and vice versa. As Habiba Katsha opines,

> It appears that some African Americans think being Black in the U.K. is an easy ride, which couldn't be further from the truth. The main difference between racism in the U.S. and the U.K. is how racism is presented. Racism in the States seems to be overt, blunt and unapologetic. Here, racism is very passive

> aggressive and covert. It's still racism … Though it may seem easier being Black in Britain, we still face a lot of problems Black people face in the U.S., because anti-Blackness is global.[65]

Success in obtaining reparations for the myriad damages experienced during and after the era of enslavement will require collaboration across affected Black communities. Watts Smith's finding of support for reparations among both African Americans and Black immigrants suggests that the potential for such collaboration to materialize is real. It is imperative that the claims of African American groups and Caribbean and African countries be harmonized and pursued under the umbrella of a globalized identity to prevent tensions among the parties leading to sabotage of the overall movement.

B/AS specialists must position themselves to play a vanguard role in creating a globalized Black identity that can energize a movement to advance what Paul Robeson described in 1960 as, "the great struggle of [Black] people for freedom and independence, a struggle that [can] have only one ending and whose success could play a role in the full emancipation of peoples everywhere in the world."[66]

16

Still Seeking Forty Acres and a Mule: Tracking and Coordinating the Global Reparations Movement

Introduction

Future social analysts may well identify June 29 through July 2, 2023, as a watershed moment in the now centuries-long struggle for global racial justice. On July 2, the US Supreme Court ruled in *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. President and Fellows of Harvard College* and *Students for Fair Admissions, Inc. v. University of North Carolina et al.* that consideration of race in college admissions is unconstitutional.[1] In 1999 I opined, "The outcome of current political and judicial deliberations about the saliency of Affirmative Action policies have the potential, arguably, to affect social stability in this country well into the next century."[2] Unfortunately, that prediction has proven to be demonstrably accurate as the court's decision has disrupted a higher education race relations management strategy that had been in place since the 1978 Bakke decision.[3]

The close cousin of Affirmative Action, i.e., "Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion" (DEI) is also under attack. The potential adverse impacts of this new battle front on African Americans is blunted, however, because the larger number of additional potential constituents limits the potential benefits available for any single group. As I explained in 1999, "While the focus of the diversity paradigm on valuing all backgrounds is positive, the problem of pursuing social justice through the eradication of historical and contemporary sources of inequality can be too easily obscured."[4]

Despite the Supreme Court decision, the issue of how race impacts higher education is far from settled. Georgetown and Harvard are two of the high-profile universities forced to confront their complicity with the slavery regime. In the case of Georgetown, the Jesuits of the US announced a $100 million program in March 2021 as part of its "truth and reconciliation" effort, to benefit the descendants of enslaved Blacks they sold in 1838. Georgetown is now offering preferential admissions to descendants of the enslaved and the money will be managed through a trust, of which JPMorgan Chase will be a co-trustee and advisor. The Georgetown Reconciliation Fund, inspired by a 2019 student referendum, awards $400,000 annually to community-based projects that have direct impact on descendant communities whose ancestors were once enslaved on the Maryland

Jesuit plantations.[5] Harvard University announced in April 2022 that it was committing $100 million to address its past slavery connections.[6] Concurrent with the announcement, Harvard also released a major report detailing the school's involvement in the US slave trade, including enslaved Blacks owned by faculty and staff and professors teaching racial eugenics.[7] Given this history, although it may not able to identify direct descendants of individuals adversely impacted by Harvard's slavery entanglements à la Georgetown, it is reasonable to query why preferential admissions is not a legitimate form of redress when viewed through the lenses of reparations?

As Roger House observes, "The [Supreme Court] decision returns Black America to a crossroads of restitution for the wrongs of slavery and Jim Crow. Since the decades after the Civil War, the challenge has been to find pathways to economic justice. One strategy has looked to individual and class-action claims for reparations, another to the promise of affirmative action and inclusion."[8] The June 29th submission of the final report of the California Task Force to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans to the California Legislature has received much less media coverage than the Supreme Court decision. However, this 1065-page report, comprised of forty chapters, constitutes the most extensive documentation of reparations claims by African Americans to date.[9] Along with other domestic and international developments, the release of this report should significantly increase momentum behind the global Reparations Movement. Indeed, California is by far the largest and most significant government jurisdiction to take significant concrete action to develop mechanisms to address wide-ranging reparations claims. For present purposes it is especially significant that the Task Force used the United Nations (UN) reparations framework to frame its analysis.

The legislation establishing the Task Force required that the recommendations "comport with international standards of remedy for wrongs and injuries caused by the state, that include full reparations and special measures, as understood by various relevant international protocols, laws, and findings." I argue here for development of a collaborative submission to the UN by US, African, and Caribbean reparations advocates seeking timely resolution of outstanding claims. This strategy, I submit, can help overcome the intransigence exhibited by national governments to adjudicating reparations claims. "An Appeal to the World" submitted to the UN by the NAACP in 1947 and "*We Charge Genocide*" submitted in 1951 by William Patterson et al. constitute precedents for the proposed submission.[10]

A comparison of the relative efficacy of reparations vis-à-vis other forms of social intervention to ameliorate structural racial economic disparities is presented in the next section along with estimates of the amount of reparations due to African Americans as a result of chattel enslavement. Key elements of the Reparations framework developed by the UN that expands the bases for reparations claims and specifies appropriate remedies are discussed in the third section. This is followed by examinations of reparations claims made by US, African, and Caribbean advocates, with a review of responses from national governments to those claims. The case for the proposed submission to the United Nations is presented in the final section.

Reparations and Wealth Disparities

One critical advantage of reparations over other types of interventions presumably intended to redress past exploitation is the targeting of the most fundamental source of the persisting impacts of the era of enslavement—the tremendous disparity in the wealth holdings between victims and perpetrators. Focusing on the US, William Darity Jr., Patrick Mason, and I assert in "The Economics of Identity: The Origin and Persistence of Racial Identity Norms," "We believe that this wealth gap reflects the cumulative effects of both past and present racism. Moreover, these wealth differences provide material incentives that encourage the continual reproduction of racism in American society."[11] One major mechanism by which wealth concentration reproduces racial inequities is through direct and indirect distortion of governmental policies through collusion with corrupt legislators and agency officials. We explore specific implications of wealth disparities in, "Collective wealth and group identity: insights from stratification economics."[12] Here we use dynamic game theory to project the long-term outcome of racial/ethnic wealth disparities under multiple policy scenarios. The scenarios involve six regimes: one where color blindness is the norm, another in which an equal opportunity principle is operative, a third where the equal results principle prevails, a fourth in which strict apartheid is practiced, a fifth where discrimination on the basis of phenotype is practiced, and a final scenario where reparations on behalf of the sub-ordinate group have been implemented. Via a series of simulation exercises we find that a so-called "equal opportunity economy" actually locks in existing inequalities and prevailing patterns of racial segmentation in perpetuity. However, if a reparations scheme is combined with state action to create equal opportunity, it may be possible to transition the economy away from a highly racialized configuration.

Historical and contemporary wealth extraction continues to marginalize African and Caribbean countries. The enslavement and removal of Africans from the continent constitute a form of indirect wealth extraction as the human capital and labor power of the enslaved were violently torn from African societies. Of course, direct wealth extraction was also widely executed during the eras of enslavement and colonialism. As Richard Drayton informs, "Africa not only underpinned Europe's earlier development. Its palm oil, petroleum, copper, chromium, platinum and in particular gold were and are crucial to the later world economy."[13] In the contemporary era, Honest Accounts reports, although "African countries received $161.6 billion in 2015—mainly in loans, personal remittances and aid in the form of grants … $203 billion was taken from Africa, either directly—mainly through corporations repatriating profits and by illegally moving money out of the continent—or by costs imposed by the rest of the world through climate change."[14]

Several economists have attempted to measure the gains accruing to whites and the losses experienced by Blacks in the US attributable to the slavery regime. Richard America's book *The Wealth of Races* includes several important studies.[15] Richard Vedder et al. estimate that approximately 25 percent of the total income in the Southern states was attributable to slave exploitation. By 1860,

enslaved Blacks were only receiving sustenance amounting to about one-third of the value of the products they were producing. The authors calculate that the total wealth accumulated from slavery by the onset of the Civil War was about $3.2 million in 1859 dollars, a figure similar to the one generated by Roger Ransom and Richard Sutch.[16,17] James Marketti estimated the present value of losses incurred by Africans, as of 1983, resulting from enslavement during the period 1790 to 1860 and finds, depending on what assumptions are used, that the value in 1983 dollars of losses ranged from $2.1 to $4.7 billion, while Larry Neal calculates a figure of $1.4 trillion using similar techniques.[18,19] The enormous magnitude of potential claims and collective white unwillingness to take responsibility for historical injustices are important sources of ongoing resistance to serious consideration of reparations proposals by US advocates, as well as the obvious difficulty in developing precise estimates of reparations due.

The United Nations and Reparations

The UN continues to demonstrate solid support for the global Reparations Movement. The international legal framework laid out by the UN Principles on Reparation specifies that victims of gross violations of international human rights law and serious violations of international humanitarian law should be provided with full and effective reparations. Victims are defined as "persons who individually or collectively suffered harm, including physical or mental injury, emotional suffering, economic loss or substantial impairment of their fundamental rights, through acts or omissions that constitute gross violations of international human rights law, or serious violations of international humanitarian law."[20] Although the principles focus primarily on government responsibility, "non-State actors are to be held responsible for their policies and practices, allowing victims to seek redress and reparation on the basis of legal liability and human solidarity, and not [just] on the basis of State responsibility."[21]

Following the murder of George Floyd, a major investigation was authorized by Michelle Bachelet, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. The final report urged implicated countries to intensify efforts to end discrimination, violence, and systemic racism against people of African descent. It also insisted that amends be made "including through reparations." The report presents a panoramic look at the roots of centuries of mistreatment faced by Africans and people of African descent, deriving from the transatlantic slave trade, and advocates a "transformative" approach to address the continuing impact of the era of enslavement on subsequent generations of people of African descent.[22]

A comprehensive and effective reparations program must include all of the following: (1) Restitution; (2) Compensation; (3) Rehabilitation; (4) Satisfaction; and (5) Guarantees of non-repetition. *Restitution* includes "restoration of liberty, enjoyment of human rights, identity, family life and citizenship, return to one's place of residence, restoration of employment and return of property." *Compensation* constitutes "the specific form of reparation seeking to provide economic or

monetary awards for certain losses, be they material or immaterial, of pecuniary or non-pecuniary nature," including "wrongful death or deprivation of liberty." International jurisprudence divides compensation into "material damages" and "moral damages."[23] Material damages include loss of actual or future earnings, loss of movable and immovable property, and legal costs and moral damages include physical and mental harm. *Rehabilitation* includes medical and psychological care as well as legal and social services, as "victims are entitled to rehabilitation of their dignity, their social situation and their legal situation, and their vocational situation." Rehabilitation can also include "community and family-oriented assistance and services; vocational training and education," and "rectification of criminal records" or "invalidation of unlawful convictions." *Satisfaction* can entail a condemnatory judgment, or the acknowledgment of truth, as well as the acknowledgment of responsibility and fault. Satisfaction also includes "the punishment of the authors of the violation." UN Human Rights Commission's resolution on impunity asserts "public knowledge of victims' suffering" and "the truth about the perpetrators, including their accomplices, of these violations are essential steps towards rehabilitation and reconciliation." *Guarantees of non-repetition* are focused on "the restoration of confidence in a continuing relationship" and "can and often must involve 'structural changes'" that must be instated in legislation to ensure non-repetition and that the violations cannot reoccur.

Reparations Claims against the US

The title of this chapter memorializes experiences of some formerly enslaved Blacks as Union soldiers advanced through the South in 1865. Tens of thousands of formerly enslaved Blacks escaped plantations and followed General William Tecumseh Sherman's army. Sherman issued Special Field Order No. 15 to solve problems caused by the mass of refugees. This temporary plan granted each freed family 40 acres of tillable land on islands and/or on the coast of Georgia. In addition, the army had many unneeded mules which were also granted to settlers. News of "forty acres and a mule" spread quickly and newly freed Blacks welcomed it as proof that emancipation would finally give them a stake in the land they had worked for so long. However, the orders were rescinded after one year by President Andrew Johnson and later Congressional decisions regarding disposition of confiscated Southern land did not extend the 40 acres and a mule policy.[24]

Walter Vaughn described his 1891 "Freedom Pension Bill" as "a rational proposition to grant pensions to persons of color emancipated from slavery."[25] Vaughn's bill was never enacted and Callie House, a formerly enslaved African American woman, subsequently took up the call for reparations. She organized the first national Black grassroots movement in history in the early 1900s, culminating in formation of the National Ex-Slave Mutual Relief and Pension Association. House identified approximately $68 million in taxes ($1.87 billion in 2023 dollars) on Confederate cotton seized by the Union forces as the source

from which reparations payments should be made. The organization thrived until House was imprisoned by the Justice Department for allegedly engaging in mail fraud—a technique that would later be used to undermine Marcus Garvey.[26]

Decades later, in 1989, Representative John Conyers Jr. (D-MI) introduced a bill (designated H.R. 40) that called for the federal government to appropriate $8 million to establish a Black reparations study commission.[27] Conyers reintroduced the bill yearly until his retirement in 2017 and after his death in 2019, Representative Sheila Jackson Lee (D-TX) took up the mantle of H.R. 40. She introduced an expanded bill calling for the commission to study the need for "reparative payments" rather than reparations *per se*. The House Judiciary Committee voted to bring the updated bill, now dubbed the Commission to Study and Develop Reparation Proposals for African Americans Act, to the House floor in April 2021. As the official summary of the Act proposal states:

> The commission shall examine slavery and discrimination in the colonies and the United States from 1619 to the present and recommend appropriate remedies. The commission shall identify (1) the role of the federal and state governments in supporting the institution of slavery, (2) forms of discrimination in the public and private sectors against freed slaves and their descendants, and (3) lingering negative effects of slavery on living African Americans and society.[28]

There are ongoing disagreements among modern-day reparations proponents regarding some of the bill's provisions. For example, economist William Darity Jr., coauthor of the book, *From Here to Equality*, is an advocate of what is termed "pure reparations" which would restrict eligibility for reparations payments to Black Americans who have at least one ancestor who was enslaved in the United States. In contrast, the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (NCOBRA) and the National African American Reparations Commission (NAARC) maintain that the US government should pay reparations to all Black people residing in the United States. Darity also insists that the reparations-distribution process must prioritize direct payments to eligible recipients. NCOBRA and NAARC, on the other hand, call for the formation of a National Reparations Trust Authority to manage reparations proceeds.[29] Other reparations commentators also advocate prioritization of social capital investments over individual disbursements. In *The Price of Racial Reconciliation*, the late Ron Walters argued for creation of a Reparations Superfund that would develop and implement strategies for social progress tailored to the Black experience and meet Black community needs. V. P. Franklin advocates for the creation of a similar superfund that would focus on improving K-12 education in Black communities as well as create a health care network designed to improve Black maternal and early childhood health outcomes.[30]

Although the national reparations movement is stalled, California is not the only sub-national political jurisdiction where reparations advocates have achieved some success. Political leaders in the city of Amherst, Massachusetts, created a Reparations for Amherst Commission in June 2021 and authorized

that commission to establish a fund to pay reparations to that city's African American residents "to atone for slavery, discrimination, and past wrongs" as part of the nation's "racial reckoning." Specific implementation plans for Amherst's reparations program have not yet been developed; however, consistent with V.P. Franklin's emphasis, one member of the Commission has advocated that most reparation funds should be spent on education and education-related services for African American children. Such services could include the provision of free pre-K education and the elimination of strict income guidelines for free and reduced-price lunches for Black children.[31]

The city of Evanston, Illinois, has not only established a Reparations Initiative and Task Force but it has set aside $10 million to implement a reparations program aimed at repairing the damage done to its African American residents from housing discrimination. The Evanston program makes a $25,000 housing grant available to eligible Black residents for down payments on the purchase of a new home help with existing mortgages, or home repairs. The first sixteen recipients of these grants have been selected, and the nonprofit organization, Community Partners for Affordable Housing, is facilitating the payments and providing free housing counseling services for selectees.[32]

Efforts to obtain reparations settlements from private enterprises have also been initiated but have experienced less success. Several lawsuits have been filed seeking damages from companies that provided the financial underpinnings and infrastructure of the slavery regime. For example, suits filed in 2002 sought class-action status for descendants of enslaved Blacks in California, Illinois, Louisiana, New Jersey, New York, and Texas. The suits sought restitution, punitive damages, and the creation of a historical commission to study the actions of several companies before the Civil War. Four of those cases were consolidated and transferred to Illinois for adjudication. The defendants included such notable firms as JPMorgan Chase, R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company; CSX, Norfolk Southern, Union Pacific, and Canadian National Railroad companies; Aetna, New York Life, Southern Mutual, and Lloyd's of London insurance firms; Brown Brothers Harriman and Company; Lehman Brothers; Brown & Williamson; Liggett Group; American International Group; Fleet Boston; and the Loews Corporation.[33] The consolidated suit was dismissed in July 2005, with the presiding judge declaring that the plaintiffs failed to show any injury done to them that can be traced to the defendant companies—a decision indicative of the difficulties plaintiffs face in advancing "derivative claims" or claims brought by someone other than the direct victim.

Subsequently, several legal strategies have been proposed to increase the likelihood of success in litigation. Some have suggested that it might be useful to position contemporary African Americans not simply as victims of lost wages but as heirs and claimants. Another strategy focuses on persuading the legal system to recognize group rights in addition to traditional individual rights. By using such a strategy, reparations claims could focus partly on the broader concept of underdevelopment resulting from the systematic enslavement and exploitation of the African American population and contend that the system of slavery ensured

that money and other resources were channeled to whites and denied to African Americans.[34] This strategy would produce analyses similar to that generated by the UN-based strategy utilized by the California Task Force.

The success of future litigation is uncertain, particularly if the position adopted in the Illinois case establishes a precedent that the historical record clearly shows that the President and Congress have the constitutional authority to determine the nature and scope of the relief sought in this case, not the courts. At the same time, new municipal and state disclosure laws designed to identify corporations that had financial involvement in supporting slavery are likely to yield a large quantity of information that can strengthen future legal pleadings. For instance, a number of states and municipalities including California, Chicago, and Los Angeles have passed legislation requiring corporations to divulge their links to slavery. Such disclosures may cause sufficient embarrassment to induce corporations to make proactive efforts to protect their public images rather than being drawn into lengthy litigation. In 2005, Wachovia Bank, the nation's fourth largest, issued a formal apology acknowledging that two of the company's ancestral banks—the Bank of Charleston and the Georgia Railroad and Banking Company—owned enslaved Africans and accepted captives as collateral for loans.[35]

That same year, JPMorgan Chase apologized for its role in financing the slavery regime and established a five-million-dollar scholarship program for Black youth.[36] In 2020, Chase announced a $30 billion program to advance racial equity.[37]

Caribbean Reparations Claims

How Britain Underdeveloped the Caribbean: A Reparation Response to Europe's Legacy of Plunder and Poverty by Hilary Beckles examines the extent to which Caribbean economies were based on a European model of wealth extraction intended to support the development of European nations. Beckles insists that no other colonized economy was built with this purpose in mind.[38] In fact, as Ambassador A. Missouri Sherman-Peter, Permanent Observer of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) to the United Nations observes, "the Caribbean has emerged as an epicenter of the global reparatory justice movement [and] Its campaign for reparations for the crimes of slavery and colonialism has served as a template for the Global South in seeking a level playing field for development within the international economic order."[39]

CARICOM established the Reparations Commission in 2013, which is tasked with researching and developing proposals for reparatory justice. The Commission has argued that the region is owed reparations for the genocide of indigenous peoples, the transatlantic slave trade, and the ongoing effects of slavery and colonialism. The CARICOM Ten Point Program, issued in 2014, highlights "reparations as a development strategy." The goal of the program is to use reparations payments to deal collectively with pressing economic and educational problems facing the citizens in the Caribbean, deriving from underdevelopment imposed by slavery, slave trading, native genocide, and economic exploitation

by the European nations. The CARICOM nations voted unanimously to seek reparations and demand: (1) an official apology from slave trading nations; (2) support for repatriation programs for those desiring resettlement in Africa; (3) the creation of an indigenous peoples development program; (4) support for Caribbean cultural institutions such as museums and research centers; (5) the launching of public health programs to address the high rates of hypertension and type II diabetes; (6) the mounting of illiteracy elimination programs; (7) the expansion of knowledge of Africa through school and cultural exchange programs; (8) the development of rehabilitation programs to overcome the psychological trauma produced by enslavement and underdevelopment; (9) the transfer of knowledge of the latest technology and science into the training of Caribbean youth; and (10) the reduction of domestic debt and cancellation of international debt.

In October 2020 the CARICOM Reparations Committee solicited $50 billion as money for an Investment Development Fund from entities that profited from slavery to begin the Caribbean growth process, and to be managed both regionally and globally.[40] Beckles has estimated the European debt to the region just for "200 years of free labor" at seven trillion British pounds.

On "International Day for Reparations" in July 2021 the CARICOM Reparations Commission issued a statement declaring "The Reparations Movement has, indeed, become the greatest political, social justice and human rights campaign of the 21st Century, uniting its advocates across all geographic spaces and building solidarity bridges where colonialism sought to break them."[41] During a March 2022 visit by the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge some one hundred Jamaican leaders issued a letter seeking reparations in the amount of $10.6 billion, an amount equivalent to the fees that Britain paid slave owners to populate the island as well as an apology for "British crimes against humanity."[42]

The Chairman of the Digicel corporation, Denis O'Brien, met with the CARICOM Reparations Commission in October 2022. O'Brien presented a proposal entitled "Repair" designed to advance CARICOM's call for Reparations. The Plan is intended to persuade the British and European governments and institutions to establish a new long-term fund for reparations. According to O'Brien the fund will have clear five-year targets with financing flowing to the region annually.[43] A high-level delegation of royal African traditional leaders visited Jamaica in February 2023 to participate in activities hosted by the CARICOM Reparations Commission, in collaboration with The University of the West Indies (UWI), and its Centre for Reparation Research and PJ Patterson Institute for Africa-Caribbean Advocacy. One of the activities was an all-day symposium titled, "*Reparations and Royalty, Africa and Europe: Exploding Myths and Empowering Truths*," held on Thursday, March 2, 2023.[44]

African Reparations Claims

In August 2022 at a summit on reparations and racial healing in Ghana, Ghana's president, Nana Akufo-Addo declared, "No amount of money can restore the

damage caused by the transatlantic slave trade—and its consequences—which has spanned many centuries, but nevertheless, it is now time to revive and intensify the discussions about reparation for Africa." In addition, President Akufo-Addo asserted, "The entire continent of Africa deserves a formal apology from European nations that were involved in the slave trade, the crimes and damage it has caused to the population, psyche, image of the African the world over."[45] In 2018, Ghana's president, Nana Akufo-Addo, launched the "Year of Return" campaign, inviting African diaspora to return to the country to commemorate the 400-year anniversary of the first enslaved Africans brought to America. The campaign was seen as a step towards reparations by providing a way for the African diaspora to reconnect with their ancestral roots.[46]

The African Commission on Human and People's Rights issued an important statement regarding reparations in a Resolutions adopted at its 73rd Ordinary Session in November 2022. Among other features, the Resolution:

> Affirmed "that accountability and redress for legacies of the past including enslavement, the trade and trafficking of enslaved Africans, colonialism and racial segregation is integral to combatting systemic racism and to the advancement of the human rights of Africans and people of African descent"
>
> Welcomed "the reports of the United Nations Working Group of experts on people of African descent and its recommendations to eliminate racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance faced by people of African descent and Africans in the diaspora"
>
> Welcomed "the recommendation by the Working Group of Experts on People of African Descent that work begins urgently to conceptualize Africa's Reparations Agenda, seek the truth, define the harm, address the legacies of past tragedies, pursue justice and reparations and contribute to non-recurrence and reconciliation of the past"
>
> Encouraged "civil society and academia in Africa, to embrace and pursue the task of conceptualising Africa's reparations agenda with urgency and determination."

In addition, the Commission called on member states to "establish a committee to consult, seek the truth, and conceptualise reparations from Africa's perspective, describe the harm occasioned by the tragedies of the past, establish a case for reparations (or Africa's claim), and pursue justice for the trade and trafficking in enslaved Africans, colonialism and colonial crimes, and racial segregation and contribute to non-recurrence and reconciliation of the past."[47]

Individual countries that have levied reparations claims against former colonial powers include Burundi and Mauritius. Burundi has demanded $43 billion from Germany and Belgium, an amount calculated from the economic toll of decades

of forced labor and colonialist violence.[48] Mauritius is demanding that the UK pay £3.5bn in Reparations that includes compensation for the removal of the indigenous Chagossians from their homes in the Chagos Archipelago.[49]

Governmental Resistance to Reparations Claims

> "We tried to deal with our original sin of slavery by fighting a Civil War, by passing landmark civil rights legislation, elected an African American president," McConnell said. "I don't think we should be trying to figure out how to compensate for it. First of all, it would be hard to figure out whom to compensate."
>
> Senator Mitch McConnell, June 2019[50]

These comments by Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell are an enigmatic example of the strong resistance to a national reparations program. As suggested previously, opposition in the Senate tracks with the resistance to debating H.R. 40 in the House of Representatives. Moreover, the US has blocked international efforts to advance the reparations project.

At the substate level, even when direct descendants of persons directly harmed seek reparations from governmental bodies, there is no guarantee of success. As an example, in July 2023 an Oklahoma judge dismissed a lawsuit filed in 2020 by three survivors of the 1921 Tulsa Race Massacre. Viola Fletcher, Lessie Randle, and Hughes Van Ellis, who were 109, 109, and 102 years old, respectively when the lawsuit was filed. The lawsuit sought reparations for the carnage created by a mob that killed hundreds of Black residents and the once-thriving Black business district known as Greenwood. Neither the city nor insurance companies ever compensated victims for their losses and the lawsuit sought, among other relief, a detailed accounting of the property and wealth lost or stolen in the massacre, the construction of a hospital in north Tulsa and the creation of a victims compensation fund.[51]

The resistance to reparations by US government officials has also impacted the global reparations agenda. When reparations claims were advanced at the World Conference Against Racism in September 2001 in Durban, South Africa, serious consideration of the issue was thwarted by the United States and its allies.

Attempts by African and Caribbean countries to obtain reparations have met with significant resistance from former colonial powers. Many argue that too much time has passed since the end of slavery and that it is not fair to hold present-day governments responsible for the actions of their predecessors. Additionally, some argue that the economic benefits of colonialism outweighed the harm caused by slavery and that the issue of reparations is overly divisive.

In response to the CARICOM Reparations campaign, a UK Foreign Office spokesperson said in 2014, "We regret and condemn the iniquities of the historic

slave trade, but these shameful activities belong to the past. Governments today cannot take responsibility for what happened over 200 years ago." In addition, the spokesperson declared, "We do not see reparations as the answer. Instead, we should concentrate on identifying ways forward, with a focus on the shared global challenges that face our countries in the 21st century."[52] In 2015, then-British Prime Minister David Cameron had said that the country would not pay reparations, instead calling for Jamaica and the UK to "continue to build for the future."[53]

Max Fisher reports that descendants of families forcibly expelled to make room for British tea companies in Kenya appealed to the United Nations for support in obtaining compensation. A 2021 UN investigation concluded that Britain had a responsibility to settle the claim. Unfortunately, no enforcement mechanism exists so the claimants sued the UK in 2022.[54]

In 2021 Germany committed $1.35 billion in aid to Namibia alongside a formal acknowledgment of Germany's colonial-era genocide in the country. Notably, the aid was not characterized as "reparations." Germany ruled out financial reparations to individuals for the genocide because it did not want to set a legal precedent for paying reparations that might require the German government to provide financial compensation to victims of its colonial and post-colonial policies.[55]

France passed what is termed the "Taubira Law" on May 10, 2001. The Law recognizes the slave trade and slavery as crimes against humanity. The initial wording contained reparative provisions linked to the criminalization of colonial slavery. However, the final version has been interpreted as neither providing nor allowing reparations for enslavement.[56] France did repatriate twenty-six stolen artworks to Benin in 2021. This is the largest restitution France has made to a former colony. However, it constitutes only a fraction of the 5,000 works whose return Benin is seeking and the tens of thousands of seized African works held in France.[57] In May 2023 France's highest court denied an appeal that was brought by three associations and twenty-three individual plaintiffs based in the French overseas territory of Martinique, who argued that slavery had caused "transgenerational harm." The court's decision was based on the judgment that none of the plaintiffs could document instances of damage in their own lives that were directly and definitively linked to the abuses suffered by their enslaved ancestors.[58]

Officials of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) have demanded that Belgium pay restitution for its rule, marked by mass killings and forced labor. In the wake of racial justice protests, the Belgian "parliamentary committee on the colonial past" was set up in 2020 to consult historians and experts and seek to draw up policies to reconcile with Belgium's colonial history. On the DRC's 60th anniversary of independence in 2020, King Phillippe sent a letter to Congolese President Félix Tshisekedi expressing his regrets for the "acts of violence and cruelty" committed during colonial times. The committee published a report listing recommendations for eventual reparation payments in October 2021. King Philippe visited the DRC's capital Kinshasa on June 7, 2022. He personally carried one of 84,000 cultural objects that are being returned, but he made no offer of reparations issued nor formal apology for past atrocities.[59]

Overcoming Government Opposition: Engaging the UN

As noted by Max Fisher, "because claims are settled directly, they are often decided by leverage as much as merit. Absent political pressure within the former colonial power, or a diplomatic threat of a former colony aligning with China, claims often stall." I propose development of a petition to be submitted to the UN that addresses the claims for reparations emanating from the US and Caribbean and African countries. The petition would be intended to overcome the intransigence of governments to investigate and settle reparations claims. The potential efficacy of this approach is evidenced by the Kenyan case discussed previously. A positive finding by UN investigators could lay the framework for lawsuits filed with the International Court of Human Justice if nations found guilty of redressable harms continue to refuse to settle claims.

A Statement on the Denial of Human Rights to Minorities in the Case of Citizens of Negro Descent in the United States of America and an Appeal to the United Nations for Redress, submitted in 1947, provides a useful precedent for shaping a proposed submission to the UN Human Rights Council. This 94-page document consists of an introduction penned by W.E.B. Du Bois and five chapters authored by prominent scholars and jurists. The principal challenges facing the contributors were to document the systemic discrimination faced by African Americans and to establish UN jurisdiction. Du Bois opined that,

> although the circumstances of Blacks in the US is without doubt primarily an internal and national question, [it] becomes inevitably an international question and will in the future become more and more international, as the nations draw together … it is therefore, fitting and proper that the thirteen million American citizens of Negro descent should appeal to the United Nations and ask that organization in the proper way to take cognizance of a situation which deprives this group of their rights as men and citizens, and by so doing makes the functioning of the United Nations more difficult, if not in many cases impossible.[60]

Du Bois proffered "the discrimination practiced in the United States is practiced against American Negroes in spite of wealth, training and character."[61] Elaborating in Chapter 5 of the Statement, Leslie Perry concludes "The combined impact of economic and social discriminations in America casts a shadow over the Negro which extends from the maternity bed to a premature grave."[62] Perry's analysis includes presentation of mortality statistics similar to those deployed in the "Institutional Decimation" chapter in this volume.

Three chapters document how the legal system had been used over time to instantiate systemic discrimination against Blacks, and the final chapter by Rayford Logan established the case for UN involvement.[63] Citing language in the UN Charter that empowers the Economic and Social Council to undertake studies examining the situation of minority groups within a nation state, Logan argues, "there is placed upon the General Assembly the obligation to initiate studies and

make recommendations for the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms for all."[64] Moreover, he asserts that the UN Charter allows minorities in a nation state "to present petitions to the General Assembly regardless of action taken by the Economic and Social Council or any of its sub-commissions."[65] Logan also insists that, although Article 2, paragraph 7, specifies that "Nothing contained in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or shall require the Members to submit such matters to settlement under the present Charter," he maintains that many questions which could rigidly be classified as "matters which are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction" of a nation fall within the scope of the purpose of the United Nations "to maintain international peace and security" as stated in Article 1, paragraph 1 of the Charter.[66] Logan concludes, "We submit that the well-nigh universal violation of the principle of 'respect for human rights and for fundamental freedoms for all without distinction as to race, sex, language, or religion,' as far as Negroes are concerned, comes within the category."[67] Therefore,

> Not only should Article 2, paragraph 7, be interpreted in such a way as to make possible action under the Charter, but spokesmen for minorities should have the opportunity to present to the General Assembly petitions on behalf of those minorities in order to assure that the attention of the Security Council will be directed promptly to such threats to international peace and security.[68]

In addition to utilizing the 1947 document as a guide for developing the proposed petition, the framers should consider including material paralleling that incorporated into the 1951 document *We Charge Genocide: The Historic Petition to the United Nations for the Relief from a Crime of the United States Government Against the Negro People*. In the prologue to the 2021 printing of the document, Jarvis Turner opines, "The times require that we take a new look at the Genocide Conventions of the United Nations as part of the fight against the extreme right whose policies seek to keep African Americans perpetually entrapped in poverty, criminalized and oppressed."[69] Turner notes that "it took forty years and seven Presidents for the Senate to ratify and a US President" to sign the legislation ratifying the UN Genocide Convention adopted in 1948.[70]

We Charge Genocide includes an appendix titled "A Calendar of Congressional Action Showing its Consistent Refusal to Act for the Protection or Welfare of the Negro People."[71] The proposed petition should include a similar inventory of both federal and state legislative and judicial actions that are reversing previous policies presumably intended to dismantle systemic discrimination against African Americans. Examples of the type of material to be catalogued are provided in *We Charge Genocide* in a case study of Georgia. Four policies used to deny the franchise to Blacks are discussed: (a) poll taxes, (b) refusal to register qualified citizens, (c) purging names of qualified voters from registration rolls, and (d) abolishing

registration lists and requiring re-registration while ceding discretionary power to registrars to deny voting rights.[72] Notably, contemporary parallels to these policies are being introduced in several states and at the national level. B/AS programs in various states can play an important role in generating the documentation for this portion of the proposed petition.

The case to submit a collective US/Caribbean/African petition to the US is buttressed by the manner contemporary globalization has accelerated what Du Bois characterized as the "coming together of nations." For example, the "Institutional Decimation" and "Global Identity" chapters in this volume document parallels and interrelationships in the maltreatment of people of African descent around the world. Hopefully, a coalition of domestic and international reparations activists will take up the challenge issued here to raise the stakes in the global battle for reparations and engage the UN collaboratively to bolster momentum for finally achieving accountability for the gross violation of the human rights of people of African descent around the world.

17

Showdown at the Crossroads? Technology Development, Cyberspace, Liberation, and Identity Construction

Introduction

This chapter explores how the continuing evolution of computing technologies and digital media impacts Black liberation praxis and identity dynamics. "Digital media," as described by Charlton McIlwain consist of "social networking platforms, blogging platforms, the open Web, user-generated and circulated images."[1] This investigation extends my previous efforts to link science and technology studies to the larger Black/Africana Studies (B/AS) project. In "Science, Technology, and Liberation," I outlined "a strategy to integrate the study of science and technology into B/AS research and instruction."[2] On reflection some fifteen years later, that essay's most striking shortcoming was the failure to anticipate the wide-ranging impact of computing technologies and cyberspace on people across the globe, and especially on people of African descent. At the same time, many of the concerns expressed in that essay remain salient. As an example, I included the following comments expressed by Sam Anderson in 1974:

> Technological oppression and dependence blocks us from developing: (a) revolutionary black scientists, (b) scientific and technological alternatives, and (c) scientific education among the masses of blackfolk.[3]

Indeed, Anderson's observations were prescient as an accurate description of the current state of affairs regarding the relationship of Black Americans to the development of computing technologies and digital media. Some fifteen years after Anderson issued his caution, Robert McGinn insisted "the dominant role played by technology in contemporary society is that of helping corporations survive and increase their profits, something assumed to translate into substantial benefits for society at large."[4] More recently, McIlwain's *Black Software: The Internet and Racial Justice from the AfroNet to Black Lives Matter* (2020) tells "a story about how computing technology was built and developed to keep black America docile and in its place—disproportionately disadvantaged, locked up, and marked for death." McIlwain shows how the International Business Machines Corporation, or IBM, tapped by various

agencies to help tackle "the race problem" in American cities, built the technical infrastructure for a racially biased criminal justice system at the very same time that it was engaged in public programs to bring tech jobs to Black neighborhoods and recruit promising African American grads to work in computer science.[5]

Safiya Noble argues that "Racism and sexism are part of the architecture and language of technology," and maintains, "Despite the widespread beliefs in the internet as a democratic space where people have the power to dynamically participate as equals, the internet is in fact organized to the benefit of powerful elites, including corporations that can afford to purchase and redirect searches to their own sites."[6] Shining the spotlight on what she describes as "algorithmic oppression," i.e. the process by which internet search engines reinforce racism, Noble also introduces the concept of "technological redlining" to describe artificial intelligence "mediated decision-making processes that reinforce social relationships and enact new modes of racial profiling."[7]

The potential for expanded technological oppression has emerged despite early Black involvement in the development of computing and internet-related technologies. A comprehensive recounting of the important roles played by African American pioneers is beyond the scope of this inquiry. However, it is important to acknowledge the pathbreaking work of a few pioneers to counter stereotypes that question the capacity of people of color to engage sophisticated technologies.

- Mark Dean helped design the IBM personal computer, first introduced in 1981. He was also the co-inventor of interior hardware that allows computers to connect to various peripherals, such as printers and monitors as well as the first gigahertz chip.[8]
- Roy L. Clay Sr. is sometimes referred to as the "godfather of Black Silicon Valley." He led the team that created the Hewlett-Packard (HP) Company's innovative computer, the 2116A, in 1966 and served as the director for the first HP Research and Development Computer Group.[9]
- Shirley A. Jackson has received acclaim for her work in advancing semiconductor theory and theoretical physics more broadly and in 1995, President Bill Clinton appointed her chairwoman of the US Nuclear Regulatory Commission, making her the first woman and first African American to hold this prestigious position.[10]
- Emmitt McHenry co-founded Network Solutions, Inc., one of the early leading internet domain services providers. In 1995, he founded NetCom Solutions International, a telecommunications and engineering company.[11]
- William Murrell III, one of the first Black engineers at IBM, later leveraged his experience to establish the MetroServe Computer Company in Boston. His familiarity with IBM machines enabled him to develop his own designs. Murrell administered *Go Afro*, the online site of *American Visions*, the official magazine of the Afro-American Museum Association. Until 1998 *Go Afro* featured Black-themed online forums, bulletin boards, and chatrooms with celebrities and cultural figures.[12]

- Kamal Al-Mansour worked as a software contracts administrator at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory, and founded AfroLink software to distribute information about Black and African history, culture, and politics.[13]
- E. David Ellington and Malcolm CasSelle developed NetNoir, a stylish portal for Afrocentric music, sports, education, and business news that was made available to AOL subscribers.[14]

There is a general lack of awareness of emergent patterns of technological oppression, even among B/AS analysts/activists, because individuals are principally concerned with the utilitarian and entertainment capabilities offered online. As the new millennium unfolded, Black online activity expanded significantly. More than three and a half million African American adults went online for the first time in 2000, nearly doubling the size of the Black online population in 1999.[15] As a result, 36 percent of all African American adults had internet access in 2000, versus 23 percent in 1998. Women were the principal drivers behind this first wave of increased Black online engagement. Black women were more likely to seek health, job, and religious information online, whereas men were more likely to seek sports and financial information. Despite these gains, the racial digital divide persisted. Overall, 50 percent of whites had internet access in 2000 compared with 36 percent of Blacks. In addition, only 36 percent of Blacks with internet access went online on a typical day, compared with 56 percent of whites, and 27 percent of Blacks with internet access sent or received an e-mail on a typical day compared with 49 percent of whites.[16] At the same time, although whites were more likely to own computers than African Americans, younger, highly educated African Americans were more likely than whites to be working in computer-related occupations and have computer access at work.[17] More recent data indicate that the digital divide has diminished—in 2019 86 percent of Blacks had internet access, compared to 92 percent of whites. Moreover, in 2019 Blacks accessed the internet disproportionately via a smartphone as opposed to a computer.[18]

Back in 2000, African American females were using the internet more intensely and in more diverse ways than any other group. In contrast, African American males were using the internet less intensely and in fewer ways.[19] Linda Jackson and her colleagues also found that African Americans were more likely to search for religious/spiritual information and information about jobs than whites. Moreover, even though fewer African Americans were online, they spent comparable amounts per capita on internet shopping. Jackson et al. concluded that a new type of digital divide was emerging between African American females and males. Whereas African American females were often surpassing white males in use of the internet, while African American males were lagging behind other groups with the exception of playing video games.[20] Data from 2015 document that white internet users were more likely than Black users to report using the internet for "higher-level" activities such as financial services, telecommuting and searching for medical information, but had a similar likelihood of using the internet for more routine activities such as e-mail, texting, social networking, Web browsing, watching videos and listening to music.[21]

The advent of cell phones has significantly altered the way many people access the internet. Data from 2015 indicated that 77 percent of whites were using a cell phone compared to 74 percent of African Americans. Over half of these devices were smartphones capable of browsing the Web, sending e-mail messages, and accessing social networking sites, such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. Despite similarities in cell phone usage and access to the internet via this technology, racial disparities in overall internet use (i.e., from all devices) persisted. In 2015 rates of internet use among African Americans was nine percentage points lower than for whites, a gap that is comparable to the 1996–97 disparity. Blacks were also less likely to have a hi-speed connection to the internet. Seventy-one percent had a hi-speed connection at home compared with roughly 80 percent of whites. The racial divide in access to home computers remains large and relatively unchanged over the past two decades. In 1996–97, 44 percent of whites and 29 percent of African Americans had access to a home computer. Twenty years later, the percentage of whites with access to a home computer increased to 78 percent and the percentage of Blacks increased to 63 percent, but the gap remains the same in percentage points.[22]

Concurrent with the quest for equitable online access, a variety of efforts have been undertaken to create discrete online spaces where uncensored, free-wheeling discourse could transpire. As Charlton McIlwain observes, "black people stormed the World Wide Web shortly after it was launched. We built black websites, new outposts for a black diaspora hungry for knowledge about our origins and ancestry. We craved evidence that our prolific cultural productions were both real and valuable. We yearned for connection and communal support for our social, professional, and economic strivings."[23] Pioneering efforts include Afronet, Blacknet, and Blackbird as well as Black-culture oriented spaces on Myspace and Facebook. BlackAmericaweb.com and BlackPlanet.com were two of the most popular early websites that catered specifically to African Americans. Adam Banks's examination of the content and discourse on BlackPlanet revealed how users sought to "keep Black discursive traditions alive."[24]

danah boyd uses the construct "white flight" to describe the migration of white users from MySpace to Facebook in response to the growing presence of Blacks on MySpace.[25] boyd argues "to the degree that some viewed MySpace as a digital ghetto or as being home to the cultural practices that are labeled as ghetto, the same fear and racism that underpinned much of white flight in urban settings is also present in the perception of MySpace."[26] Cameron Marlow's examination of the use of Facebook by different racial/ethnic groups in 2009 revealed that African Americans constituted about 6 percent of Facebook users in January 2006 compared to about 9 percent of internet users. By 2009, the two percentages had reached parity at slightly more than 10 percent.[27] Thus, white users were unable to create a platform that shielded them from a Black presence. National Black organizations including the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the National Council for Black Studies, use both Facebook and Twitter as communication vehicles. African American interests are also increasingly present in the blogosphere. The website *Black Bloggers Connect* claims

to be "the leading social network connecting Black bloggers around the world." The site claims to have a constituency of more than 10,000.[28]

From the vantage point of B/AS it is critical to examine how internet engagement impacts Black identity production. André L. Brock Jr. asserts that Black internet usage has upended the processes by which Black identity is cultivated and expressed.[29] Brock maintains, "Where once people relied on memory and anecdotal experience to fix individual identity in time and space, the internet provides an endless archive of identity performance—or as Black online culture calls it, 'the receipts.'"[30] While I believe this position is overstated, especially the notion of a "fixed identity in time and space," there is no question that internet discourse has created new opportunities for the production and performance of Black identity. At the same time, it is also clear that the internet has created ample opportunities for the degradation and manipulation of Black cultural production. As an example, Safiya Noble describes "the commercial cooptation of Black identities, experiences, and communities in the largest and most powerful technology companies."[31] It is imperative that B/AS analyst/activists interrogate internet-related identity effects in more detail.

B/AS also privileges the investigation of strategies used to combat systemic oppression, and people of African descent have aggressively sought to combat the oppression emanating from computing technology and digital media developments. McIlwain describes how a "Vanguard" of Black innovators "positioned black folks, black content, and black culture to occupy the leading edge of the internet's popular social development … [beginning] in the mid-1970s and 1980s."[32] He relates how this effort took shape "during the advent of personal computing, and the early days of personal computer networking … and [continued] … through the World Wide Web's birth, and the dotcom boom's first bust."[33] McIlwain interprets these developments as a demonstration of "how black people have taken technology not originally designed with our concerns in mind … [and used] … that technology to further our own personal, communal, and political interests."[34] This assessment aligns closely with Robeson's views regarding the adaptability of "external" technology, although McIlwain's reference to "political interests" seems to go beyond Robeson's conception of how adapted technology can be utilized. As an example, McIlwain cites responses to the police killings of Black people to foreground how political interests are being advanced.

Mapping the Crossroads

Robeson's comments imagine that strategic adaptation of technology will allow the unfettered blossoming of artistic creativity. He implies that it is possible to appropriate technology without corrupting cultural authenticity. However, there is an open question as to whether contemporary globalization has disrupted the world order that informed Robeson's vision. Indeed, globalization has engendered worldwide movement and exchange of people, ideas, goods, services, capital, technologies, and cultural practices while also generating widespread disparities

between and within population groups.[35] The potential for globalization to sublimate cultural particularities was first elucidated by W.E.B. Du Bois in 1948 when he argued that one of the greatest threats of the continuing expansion of technology-driven global capitalism was the "leveling of culture patterns," i.e., the growing homogenization of cultures.[36]

Although Robeson's comments focused specifically on the relationship between technology and the arts, they can be adapted to include other forms of knowledge acquisition and expression, particularly if we expand our conception of who is an artist. Johannes Vermeer's definition of an artist as "a person who expresses himself or herself through a medium" can be used to qualify any credible commentator as an artist and, just as importantly, it allows political discourse to be treated as an art form.[37] The term "expression" simply refers to the result of the process of making thoughts or feelings known to others.[38] For present purposes I treat expressions via internet postings as occupying the same discursive space as articulations conveyed via more conventional media such as books or journal articles.

The rationale and necessary conditions to allow parallel treatment of different types of information is presented in "Alternative Models of Black Studies."[39] In "Alternative Models …" I conceptualize a type of "dictionary" that facilitates the translation of information generated via different forms of expression. In many respects, this conceptualization is similar to an idea advanced by Amira Baraka.

> If I invented a word placing machine, an "expression-scriber," if you will, then I would have a kind of instrument into which I could step & sit or sprawl or hang & use not only my fingers to make words express feelings but elbows, feet, head, behind, and all the sounds I wanted screams, grunts, taps, itches, I'd have magnetically recorded, at the same time, & translated into word—or perhaps even the final expressed thought/feeling wd not be merely word or sheet, but itself, the xpression [sic], three dimensional—able to be touched, or tasted or felt, or entered, or heard or carried like a speaking singing constantly communicating charm.[40]

Notably, Baraka's exploration of the relationship between art and technology addresses an issue that Robeson did not foresee. As Brock observes, "Baraka also asks an important question, one that Western technoculture and algorithmic computation rarely ask—namely, could an informational technology possess a 'spirit an emotional construct that can manifest as expression as art or technology'."[41]

The distinction between information and disinformation is especially relevant for this investigation. A standard dictionary definition of information describes it as knowledge derived from study, experience, or instruction.[42] Conversely, disinformation refers to false statements or imagery designed to manipulate the audience by either discrediting conflicting information, or supporting false conclusions.[43] B/AS analysts/activists should be involved actively in efforts to ensure that information accessed by Blacks on the internet is accurate and that Blacks are not misled by deliberate efforts to disseminate falsehoods that reduce political efficacy and/or catalyze dissension and chaos.

The concept of "technology," per se, obviously undergirds the present inquiry. Here I adopt the broad understanding of "technology" proposed by William W. Lowrance who observes, technology should be seen as "*disembodied knowledge and technical art*, not just as hardware."[44] From this perspective, Robert McGinn has suggested four possible conceptions of "technology" that operationalize Lowrance's views:

1. Technology as material products fabricated by humans.
2. Technology as the "complex of knowledge, methods, materials, and if applicable, constituent parts (themselves technics) used in making a certain kind of technic."
3. Technology as a distinctive form or kind of human cultural activity, just as the terms art, law, medicine, sport, and religion are often used to refer to distinctive forms of human practice.
4. Technology as the complex of knowledge, people, skills organizations, facilities, technics, physical resources, methods and technologies that, taken together and in relationship to one another, are devoted to the research, development, production, and operation of technics.[45]

Conceptions 1, 2 and 4 are consistent with common understandings of technology but McGinn's third conception of technology relates to the issue of the relationship between identity construction and technology, introduced previously. I treat Black identity production as a variant of the conception of technology described in (3). The foundation for this treatment is derived from Stratification Economics. This subdiscipline treats group identities as produced forms of individual and collective property with both income and wealth-generating characteristics, and whose supply and demand are responsive to changes in production costs and budget constraints.[46] This approach extends some existing ways of understanding how technology impacts identity dynamics. As an example, McGinn argues, "the items of technology a person possesses have, along with work, become increasingly important sources of identity and self-esteem."[47] At one level, technology "operates in various ways to counteract centrifugal tendencies (e.g. weakened bonds of family and community) … by promoting shared political awareness, common value orientations, and similar consumption patterns, as well as by facilitating intermittent contact between parties at a distance."[48]

Stratification Economics emphasizes that identity has both internal and external dimensions. An individual derives psychic benefit from identification with a group and engages in activities that reinforce the positive benefits from that connection. This process can be described as identity construction that is internal to a group. On the other hand, a dominant group may create negative ascriptions to characteristics of another group, such as skin color, and use available technologies to focus discriminatory behavior and/or amplify derogatory expression that target that group.[49]

The preceding discussion of the interface between identity and technology is helpful for assessing the implications of the reframing of identity proposed by

Brock. Brock introduces the term "informational identity" in a manner "meant to reconfigure Black discursive identity inclusive of Black digital practice—that is, the enactment of Blacknesss through the mediation of computational and digital technologies."[50] The term "ratchetry" is used to characterize the focus on certain Black discourse on the internet, i.e., the sensuality that is present in Black digital practice, explaining, "For Black culture, the invocation of *ratchet* conjures up someone who has no filter or propriety … Ratchet shares connotative space with *ghetto* but differs from *ghetto*'s aesthetics thanks to its enactment and performance of militant insouciance."[51]

One of the more problematic aspects of Brock's analysis is his attempt to justify a strict demarcation between "the *discursive actions* of a public sphere … [and] the *political* actions of a public sphere" in the discussion of "Black Twitter."[52] As demonstrated in my interrogations of Black popular music, libidinal and political expression have typically been closely intertwined and creators have often used surreptitious strategies to convey political messages via media that seem to be non-political. The values undergirding B/AS mandate prioritization of the interrogation of political messaging embedded in popular culture and, hopefully, some ratcheters include some degree of liberatory political messaging in their libidinal discourse.[53]

In contrast to Brock's understated approach to online racism, Safiya Noble describes in detail how institutionalized racism experienced online is, in fact, embedded in the algorithms used by search engines. Noble uses the term "technological racialization" to describe a particular form of algorithmic oppression that entails reification and reinforcement of conventional racial stereotypes.[54] Specifically, Nobles insists, "What we find in search engines about people and culture is important. They oversimplify complex phenomena. They obscure any struggle over understanding, and they can mask history. Search results can reframe our thinking and deny us the ability to engage deeply with essential information and knowledge we need, knowledge that has traditionally been learned through teachers, books, history, and experience."[55]

Overt racism propagated online involves a variety of actions that involve manipulation of Black identity. Freelon et al. have systematically examined how a Russian troll farm used "sockpuppetry," i.e. the practice of creating false social media identities in order to conceal one's true identity and motives, to exploit American racial divisions for geopolitical advantage.[56] The Report of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence contains an in-depth analysis of these efforts.[57] Thousands of Facebook, Instagram, X and YouTube accounts were created with the aim of harming Hillary Clinton's presidential campaign and supporting the election of Donald Trump. Posting subtly racist content was one of the strategies used to incite conflict within Black communities. In 2016, Facebook users engaged over 11.2 million times with a page called "Blacktivist," which was actually a Russian troll account. Almost all of that account's YouTube content involved violent acts against Black men.[58]

Russian trolls were not the only miscreants masquerading as Blacks to foment unrest and confusion in connection with the 2016 election. "How to be a Ni****

on Twitter" was an article on a white supremacist website, The Daily Stormer, that guided racists in creating a fake account. Such accounts were intended to "create a state of chaos on twitter, among the black twitter population, by sowing distrust and suspicion, causing blacks to panic."[59] One of the recommended strategies involved pretending to know people that Black users might be related to, calling Black users out on alleged drug dealing activities, and accusing them of being Neo-Nazis using fake accounts. The desired outcome of such misrepresentations was to create dissension whereby Black users would accuse each other of having fake accounts and start reporting each other to platform monitors.[60]

Foreign trolls continued their nefarious activities targeting Black online users in the run up to the 2020 election. Facebook removed hundreds of accounts on August 6 from a foreign troll farm posing as African Americans in support of Donald Trump and QAnon supporters. The troll farm was based in Romania and pushed content on Instagram under names like "BlackPeopleVoteForTrump" and on Facebook under "We Love Our President."[61] Earlier in the year, in March 2020 Facebook and Twitter (now X) took down a network of African-based fake accounts linked to previously banned Russian trolls. Postings from the accounts, based in Ghana and Nigeria, focused almost exclusively on racial issues in the US. The posts promoted Black empowerment and often expressed anger towards whites, all intended to inflame racial divisions and provoke social unrest. Twitter alone removed 71 accounts that had 68,000 followers.[62]

Domestic racists aggressively trolled Black activists in 2020. The Associated Press reported in July that after the murder of George Floyd a network of Facebook groups, launched primarily by conservative and pro-gun activists, shifted their conservation to attacks on Black Lives Matter and the nationwide protests over the killing of Black men and women. The Associated Press's analysis was based on examination of postings on forty of these Facebook groups.[63]

Conversely, police killings of Black men and women became important catalysts that energized Black online political advocacy. Discussing the aftermath of the Ferguson protests, Charlton McIlwain asserts, "Digital media—social networking platforms, blogging platforms, the open Web, user-generated and circulated images—all afforded Ferguson citizens, racial justice activists, organizers, young people, and others a powerful way to counter the Hollywood and newsmaker image machine—one that historically and continuously casts African Americans as criminal, intellectually deficient, and culturally deviant."[64]

Monica Anderson et al. report that the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag first appeared on Twitter in July 2013 following the acquittal of George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. Between July 2013 and May 2018, the hashtag was used nearly 30 million times on Twitter, an average of 17,002 times per day. The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag was used roughly 47.8 million times on Twitter between May 26 and June 7, 2020, as protests over police brutality and the death of George Floyd escalated.[65] In addition to posting commentaries on #BlackLivesMatter, Twitter social media platforms have been used disproportionately by Blacks to obtain information about political issues involving race relations. Brooke Auxier found that between June 16 and June 22, 2020, 45 percent of Black social media

users looked up information about protests and rallies in their area on social media in the past month compared to 29 percent of white users. Forty-eight percent of Black social media users reported posting a picture on social media to show their support for a cause during this period.[66]

Systematic efforts have also been undertaken to counter disinformation targeted at people of African descent as well as insidious cultural appropriation. As an example, the National Black Cultural Coalition Trust describes itself as "a Pan-African initiative that uses communications, media, and cultural storytelling to share information and resources that correct and challenge cultural misinformation and disinformation surrounding racial/ethnic identity, anti-Blackness, and other false narratives that harm our communities."[67] Two of the activities undertaken by the Trust are sharing "crowd sourced information, tools, and resources that inform and uplift Black communities" and "directly call[ing] out anti-Blackness, cultural misinformation, cultural disinformation, and other false narratives that harm Black communities."

The role of social media platforms in enabling online anti-Black racist behavior has also been challenged. In June 2020, a coalition of civil rights groups that includes the NAACP, the Anti-Defamation League, and Color of Change called on major advertisers to pull marketing messages from Facebook in July to protest the social network's failure to remove hate speech. Although this specific effort did not gain traction, it suggests a possible future strategy. As Safiya Noble has observed, "A difficult aspect of challenging *group* versus individual representations online is that there are no protections or basis for action under our current legal regime."[68] Noble's assessment means that B/AS analysts/activists and computer, AI, and social media professionals and community activists must collaborate to combat all forms of digital oppression.

Navigating the Crossroads: All Roads Must Be Followed

The use of the term "crossroads" in the chapter title is meant to suggest that the time is now for B/AS scholar/activists to decide how to engage each of the four domains explored in this chapter, i.e., "technology," "cyberspace," "liberation," and "identity construction." B/AS scholar/activists can play important roles in developing and implementing projects in all four domains, but the engagement must be strategic and undertaken in partnership with domain specialists and community activists.

Innovative B/AS instructional praxis can contribute to developing and implementing liberatory technological strategies in several ways. There is a critical need to incorporate internet literacy into existing courses. Literacy, as used here, includes cultivating the capacity to detect disinformation and identify credible sources. Cultivating digital literacy includes assigning projects that require production and posting of online material that counters stereotypes and disseminates liberatory messaging. Noble also suggests that Black digital engagement should focus on expanding "prosumer" participation, which requires

"conceptualizing how Black people can move beyond simple consumers of digital technologies to producers of technological output."[69]

B/AS departments and programs can explore the possibility of cultivating collaborative arrangements with computer science, data science, and public media units to expose students pursuing these majors to knowledge that can empower graduates to continue the legacy of fostering antiracist technology development established by early digital technology pioneers. Partnerships with organizations like Blacks in Technology (BIT) that describes itself as a global platform that is "Stomping the Divide" by providing community, media, and mentorship resources can be extremely important. Notably, BIT has both domestic and international chapters.[70]

In addition, B/AS researchers must expand the dissemination of their work online via Blogs and other online formats to reach wider audiences. Opportunities to partner with computer science, technology specialists, and media scholars in undertaking research projects should also be explored. Partnerships with existing progressive organizations such as the National Black Cultural Information Trust that are directly combatting the propagation of disinformation targeting people of African descent should be developed. Finally, B/AS units should support efforts to hold digital platforms accountable for the failure to rein in online anti-Black racism. This advocacy must include involvement in lobbying for the establishment of legal remedies for group-focused online racist attacks.

The preceding proposals are intended to be suggestive, rather than exhaustive. As B/AS units increase their involvement in advancing liberatory technology it will be useful to keep in mind the long-term goal articulated by Maulana Karenga:

> The question is raised here of how to synthesize the need and growth of science and technology with the need for human sensitivity and morality or how to humanize nature without denaturalizing and dehumanizing humans? Europe by its own admission has failed in this project. It now falls on Africans and other Third World peoples to demonstrate its possibility.[71]

18

Searching for Wakanda: Leveraging High Technology to Advance Global Black Liberation

Black Panther (2018) and *Black Panther: Wakanda Forever* (2022) serve here as a platform to develop strategies to leverage high technology to advance the global liberation of people of African descent. The concepts "*Sankofan Futurism*" and "*Wakandazation*" are central to this effort. *Sankofan Futurism* refers to the conceptualization of how technologies deployed historically to ensure Black survival and advancement in hostile environments and yet-to-be-developed technologies can be leveraged to combat systemic oppression. Sankofa (pronounced *SAHN-koh-fah*) is a word in the Twi language of Ghana meaning "to retrieve" or literally to "go back and get it."[1] Future Studies and Afrofuturism are essential sources available to *Sankofan Futurists* to conceptualize creative technological inventions. *Wakandazation* involves the development and implementation of strategic plans to create and implement potentially efficacious technologies identified from *Sankofan Futurist* investigations. This label invokes the sophisticated deployment of advanced technology by Wakanda's residents in *BP* and *BPWF*.

The rationale for the use of *BP* and *BPWF* to motivate this exploration derives from the movies' technological themes and the enthusiastic response to this representation from peoples of African descent on the continent and in the diaspora. Following the discussion of these issues, the concepts of science and technology are then interrogated to lay the foundation for the examination of the efficacy of *Sankofan Futurism* and *Wakandazation* to disrupt the trajectory of Black life. These constructs are then utilized to explore the impacts of technology on the the historical and current circumstances of people of African descent in the United States. The concluding section explores strategies to globalize the use of *Sankofan Futurism* and *Wakandazation* to advance the liberation of people of African descent around the world.

Awakening the Black Panther

The story line of Marvel Comics' *The Black Panther*, created in 1966, bridges the genres of speculative fiction, science fiction, and Afrofuturism. These genres all address issues relevant to the present study including imagined future scientific

and/or technological advances, major social and environmental changes, fictional worlds, alternative histories, and super intelligent computers and robots.[2]

Lewis Gordon notes, somewhat sardonically, that " Black Panther, the character, is not an African creation, nor even an African American one, but the brainchild of European Jewish Americans, descendants of people intimately linked to both diaspora and the foundations of race."[3] Indeed, the Black Panther—King T'Challa of the fictional African nation of Wakanda—was created not by a Black writer/artist but by "Jack Kirby and Stan Lee, the legendary creative duo behind Marvel Comics."[4] The Black Panther character was first introduced in issue number fifty-two of *The Fantastic Four* comic book series. The character's superhuman powers, and Wakanda's vast wealth and technological power are fueled by a near-magical substance called *vibranium*, which fell from the sky onto Wakandan soil. The Black Panther also appeared in several television cartoons, "including a special 2010 BET [Black Entertainment Television] miniseries with its own mythology created by Reginald Hudlin," an African American screenwriter/director.[5]

The story line of *BP* and *BPWF* were changed substantially from the 1960s comic-book presentations. For example, as Gordon relates, in the *Black Panther* comic books, the character M'Baku, leader of the isolationist Wakandan Jabari tribe, "is actually a man-ape [who] acquires his powers through killing Wakanda's white gorilla, eating its flesh, bathing in its blood, and wearing its skin."[6] Additionally, the character Killmonger is from Harlem and repeatedly attempts to conquer Wakanda. Notably, the African American co-writer of the two films, Ryan Coogler, who also produced both movies, recognized the need to affirm the inherent dignity of people of African descent in the two films, which partly accounts for their widespread popularity. Coogler subsequently received four NAACP Image Awards and four Black Reel Awards for his efforts, and *BP* received an Academy Award nomination for Best Picture.[7]

As Gordon observes: "Not only Africans, but also members of the African diaspora are critically intelligent in the movie, and they exemplify that trait through political virtue, intelligence (especially technological), and ethical virtues (courage, fidelity, integrity)."[8] Commenting specifically on the film's treatment of African women and men, he opines "Black women in the film have high self-esteem, skills, brilliance, beauty, and creativity, and they are sexy without being sexualized; Black men in the film have dignity, skills, beauty, and creativity, without being structurally subservient or lascivious; they too, are sexy without being sexualized."[9] These representations resonate with Africana Studies' emphasis on dismantling dysfunctional and stereotypical images of people of African descent throughout the Diaspora.

On the other hand, several criticisms of *BP* have been raised. As an example, Maulana Karenga decries "racist stereotypes of continental Africans in spite of their advanced technology: still carrying spears, even though sonic ones; trapped in 'tribalism'; engaging in blood ritual battles to determine who will rule instead of using elections." The role of the white CIA agent as a savior figure is also challenged because of "the CIA's brutal and bloody history and current

activities in Africa and around the world." Karenga is also concerned with the portrayal of relations between continental Africans and African Americans, characterizing "Killmonger" as a "dehumanized would-be liberation fighter that ends up being little more than a gangster from the ghetto, … who promotes and deals and participates in killing." He also broaches the broader question of "why a technologically superior country hides itself from whites who obviously know it exists and whom it can easily protect itself from or defeat, does not defend the continent and its people, and spends its hours on screen fighting within itself."[10]

Despite the problematic aspects of *BP* and *BPWF*, the two films have been received with unparalleled enthusiasm, especially by, but in no ways limited to, African American filmgoers. Domestic ticket receipts for *BP* exceeded $700 million and international ticket sales reached $680 million.[11] *BPWF* broke the record for November film releases, grossing $181 million its first weekend.[12] Within two weeks, the film had grossed $288 million in North America and $546 million globally.[13]

The special meaning of *BP* for viewers in the Caribbean and especially Trinidad and Tobago have been described thusly: "Trinbagonians celebrated the success of one of their own in the cast (Tobagonian actor Winston Duke plays the villain M'Baku), as well as the fact that this was a film populated by black actors in positive starring roles."[14] *BPWF* became the biggest industry opening weekend of all time in Nigeria with a box office tally of ₦240 million. *BPWF* also generated the largest ever weekend box office revenue in East Africa, earning Kes 25 million, and also in Southern Africa where it grossed R16.5 million.[15]

The technological superiority of Wakandan society was undoubtedly one of the principal drivers of the popularity of *BP* and *BPWF* among people of African descent around the globe. This representation obviously challenges conventional stereotypes about the technological backwardness of African and African Diasporan societies. The critical question addressed here is to what extent is it actually feasible to position people of African descent as masters of existing and emerging technologies capable of using that knowledge to advance global liberation? Addressing this issue first requires interrogating the nature of science and technology and understanding their impacts on Black life.

Science, Technology, and the Trajectory of Black Life

Africana Studies specialists' analyses of the role of science and technology in the historical, contemporary, and prospective experiences of people of African descent employ key concepts borrowed from Science, Technology, and Society (STS) investigators. Their analyses reveal that science and technology have fused into a single enterprise rather than continuing to exist separately as had been the case in the past. A key distinction between science and technology is that the outputs of technology are technological products and technic-related intellectual constructs, while the output of science is theory related knowledge about nature, including that

relating to humans and their individual and social activities and behaviors. Robert McGinn offers the important caveat that technology "as an activity existed long before the dawn of the era of modern technology in the mid-eighteenth century"[16] and Rajko Tomović declares "the most powerful factors shaping our technology—the union of science, research, and technology as well as extensive technological education—were almost nonexistent until the middle of the nineteenth century."[17]

The term *technology* actually has multiple meanings: (1) technology as material products fabricated by humans; (2) technology as the "complex of knowledge, methods, materials, and if applicable, constituent parts (themselves technics) used in making a certain kind of technic"; (3) technology as a distinctive form or kind of human cultural activity, just as art, law, medicine, sport, and religion are often used to refer to distinctive forms of human practice; and (4) technology as the complex of knowledge, people, skills, organizations, facilities, technics, physical resources, methods, and technologies that, taken together and in relationship to one another, are devoted to their search, development, production, and operation of technics.[18] It is important to keep in mind, however, that, as Harvey Brooks contends, "Technology does not consist of artifacts but of public knowledge that underlies the artifacts and the way they can be used in society."[19]

From this vantage point, the term *technology* can be applied to a wide range of human endeavors relevant to Africana Studies. Brooks argues, for example, that the activity of management can be characterized as a technology "insofar as it can be described by fully specifiable rules … and indeed a very large bureaucratic organization can be considered an embodiment of technology just as much as a piece of machinery."[20] Similarly, Bernard Gendron describes technology as "any systematized practical knowledge, based on experimentation and/or scientific theory, which enhances the capacity of society to produce goods and services, and which is embodied in productive skills, organization or machinery."[21] Thus, as William Lowrance observes, technology should be seen as "disembodied knowledge and technical art, not just as hardware."[22] Social mechanisms are designed to foster technological development and application: "Consciously or not, deliberately or inadvertently, societies choose structures for technologies that influence how people are going to work, communicate, travel, consume, and so forth over a long period of time."[23]

The modern linkage of science and technology occurred contemporaneously with the initial stages of the large-scale exploitation of African peoples. This is, of course, no mere coincidence, for, as Tomović contends: "The social structure of the world in the mid-eighteenth century shaped the basic features of modern technology, i.e., a high level of concentration of global decision power."[24] These origins fueled the ascendancy of Western hegemony, leading to differential positioning of different groups and asymmetrical power relations.

The disproportionate power and influence of large corporations leads to circumstances in which "choices tend to become strongly fixed in material equipment, economic investment, and social habit, [such that] the original flexibility vanishes for all practical purposes once the initial commitments

are made."[25] In McGinn's words, "the dominant role played by technology in contemporary society is that of helping corporations survive and increase their profits, something assumed to translate into substantial benefits for society at large."[26]

Sankofan Futurism, Wakandazation, and African Americans

Throughout history the social goals that shaped technological development in the United States included maintaining Black oppression in support of profit optimization and preservation of white supremacy. The preceding discussion of expansively conceptualized technology informs the material presented in Table 6 with the label "Technologies of Oppression Deployed to Initiate and Maintain Black Subjugation." In addition to identifying the wide variety of technologies involved in maintaining Black oppression, Table 6 also reveals the close relationship between contemporary oppressive practices and their historical antecedents.

Africana Studies foregrounds efforts by the subjugated to combat persisting oppression. African Americans have utilized various technologies—earlier to pursue liberation from slavery and subsequently to pursue civil and human rights—by applying several principles. As Adam Banks contends, Black people have consistently demanded "full access to and participation in American society *and* its technologies on their own terms and [have worked] to transform both the society and its technologies, to ensure that not only Black people but all Americans can participate as full partners."[27] He also raises an important question regarding how African Americans have adapted technologies to address that task—namely, "What cultural retentions do African Americans and other people of color bring to the technologies that they use?"[28] One of the implications of cross-temporal cultural continuity is that lay people possess information useful for actively participating in the redesign of textual, physical, and virtual spaces they occupy rather than being forced to rely exclusively on the presumed expertise of technological elites.

Table 7 presents examples of how African Americans have employed new and adapted technologies to counter the modes of oppression identified in Table 6. These interventions are aptly deemed "Technologies Deployed to Resist Oppression." Notably, several of the technologies listed in Table 6 are also found in Table 7, thus signaling their adaptation and retooling to advance liberatory praxis. In addition, the similarities between the historically deployed resistance technologies and contemporary manifestations reflect a Sankofan approach to technology development, i.e. the updating of historical technologies. Notable also is the fact that Africana Studies is included in Table 7 as one of the contemporary technologies available to combat systemic oppression.

Consistent with the expansive conception of technology introduced previously, it is important to understand that there are technological dimensions of the production, maintenance, and evolution of culture. Table 8 presents technologies developed by Black people to ensure cultural preservation and renewal. The large

Table 6 Technologies of Oppression Deployed to Initiate and Maintain Black Subjugation

Technologies Deployed for Oppression	Operation → Outcome(s)
A. Historical	
Atlantic Slave Trade	Capture, sale, and relocation of Africans to Western hemisphere → African depopulation^
Plantation Enslavement	Exploit Black labor for profit → Black dehumanization^/future economic inequality^
Jim Crow Segregation	Maintain slavery-based subordination → denial of legal rights^/inferior public goods^
Electoral Politics	Limit voting/representation → second-class status^/ suspicions about electoral politics^
Education	Limit information access/skill acquisition/ funding → social/economic disparities^
Economics	Limit access to good jobs and business ownership→ income and wealth disparities^
Terrorism	Use violence/threats to maintain control → intimidation^/lynchings^/brutalization^
Surveillance	Obtain information about potential resistance → constraints on covert strategizing^
Media	Propagate negative stereotypes → public support for discriminatory policies^
Science	Conduct research to support belief in Black inferiority → dehumanization^/ victimization^
B. Contemporary	
Mass Incarceration	Warehouse potentially disruptive Blacks → disrupted families/communities^
Politics	Suppress electorate size → limited representation^/limited challenge to discrimination^
Education	Weaken/distort public education → learning disparities^/ miseducation^
Law/Judiciary	Weaken Civil Rights protections → discrimination and social disparities^
Economics	Limit access to good jobs/wealth accumulation → income and wealth disparities^
Surveillance	Use high-tech methods to monitor potential revolts → limited covert strategizing^
Urban Planning	Disrupt self-sustaining neighborhoods → displacement^/disruption of social networks^
(a) Gentrification	Remove Black residents from valuable sites → displacement^/ disrupted social networks^
(b) Desertification	
(1) Food Access	Relocate facilities to profitable areas → nutritional deficiencies^/food costs and qualities^

(2) Health Access	Relocate facilities to profitable areas → overuse of emergency care^/health disparities^
(3) Financial Services	Relocate facilities to profitable areas → predatory lending^/unbanked households^
Ecological Management	Create differential exposure to environmental hazards → health disparities^
Mobility	Limit public transportation options → travel problems for work and shopping^
Digitization/Cyberculture	Extend existing racist behavior into cyberspace → stereotype and threat propagation^/
Artificial Intelligence	Replicate human generated racism → economic and social discrimination^

Note: ^/ indicates a negative impact.

Table 7 Technologies Deployed to Resist Oppression

Technologies Deployed to Resist Oppression	**Purpose → Outcome**
A. Historical	
Mutinies	Disrupt sale and transit of Africans to the West→ prevention of enslavement^
Rebellions	Attack slaveholders and property → disruption^/ induced fear^/Black agency^
Underground Railroad	Facilitate escape from enslavement → individual freedom^/ Black agency^
Sabotage	Reduce profitability of plantations → economic disruption^/Black agency^
Education	Provide information and skill acquisition → Literacy^/ agency^/reasoning capacity^
Mass Protests	Combat oppression through community mobilization → reduced discriminatory practices
Selective Patronage	Punish discriminating product and service providers → jobs^/products & service quality^
Labor Strikes	Punish discriminating employers → job quality and security^/ compensation^
Litigation	Challenge discriminatory laws → freedom from discrimination^/opportunities^
Self-Defense	Prevent violent attacks on communities → security^/ Black agency^
Cultural Production	Use creative arts to promote political agency → activism^/identity affirmation^
Migration	Move to less hostile domestic jurisdictions → freedom^/opportunities^/security^
Emigration	Relocate to different nation state → freedom^/ opportunities^/security^

Continued

Table 7 *Continued*

Technologies Deployed to Resist Oppression	Purpose → Outcome
B. Contemporary	
Litigation	Challenge discriminatory laws → preservation of Civil Rights^/ individual freedom^
Suffrage	Mobilize electorate to elect advocates/pass laws → Civil Rights^/ agency^
Mass Protests	Combat oppression through community mobilization → reduced discriminatory practices
Anti-Desertification	
(a) Food	Challenge corporate location decisions/create options → nutrition^/ health^/agency^
(b) Health Facilities	Challenge corporate location decisions/create options → health^/
(c) Financial Services	Challenge corporate location decisions/create options → savings^/loan access^
Ecological Management	Challenge hazard siting decisions/seek hazard remediation → health^/quality of life^
Mobility	Remove barriers to freedom of movement → access to public/private spaces & goods^
Neighborhood Preservation	Organize community groups to resist incursion → neighborhood cohesion^
Migration	Reverse migration from Northern locales → receiving region's knowledge/cultural capital^
STEM	Increase representation in technical fields → constraints on racist scientific research^
Cultural Production	Use creative arts to promote political agency → activism^/identity affirmation^
Cyberculture	Use internet to share information/political mobilization → cultural affirmation/agency^
Artificial Intelligence	Develop innovative anti-racist strategies → repertoire of liberatory praxis^
Africana Studies	Provide resistance praxis Information clearinghouse → repertoire of liberatory praxis^

Note: ^/ indicates a positive impact.

repertoire of strategies that have been deployed has been critical for sustaining cultural integrity in an environment in which public policies have attempted to disrupt the connection of African Americans to their cultures of origin.

Implementing Sankofan Futurism

The information contained in the tables provides the input for conducting Sankofan Futurist analyses. Such analyses borrow techniques from Future

Studies and Afrofuturism to develop possible future scenarios that improve the life circumstances of people of African descent. As Wendell Bell maintains, "The purposes of Future Studies are to discover or invent, examine and evaluate, and propose possible, probable, and preferable futures."[29] As envisioned here, relevant Future Studies approaches include (a) an assessment of the probability that a given scenario is likely to manifest, and (b) a comparison of the quality of life associated with various scenarios. However, the extent to which imagined scenarios preserve and enhance cultural integrity is the primary criterion for assessing salience.

Timothy Jenkins and Khafra K Om-Ra-Seti have developed an important Future Studies analysis of possible impacts of future technological developments on Black workers in *Black Futurists in the Information Age*. Appropriately they identify multinational corporations as key actors shaping future scientific and technological developments. They conclude, "The loss of employment opportunities for unskilled, or even skilled labor as it has been known traditionally, promises a worldwide shift in unemployment and employability likely to be catastrophic to certain segments of the black workforce, and threatens Depression-like conditions."[30] Their study has been described as "a wake-up call to technicians and non-technicians alike, to become vitally concerned with the sweeping technological undercurrents radically and silently changing the demographics of the future."[31] Additional technological innovations the authors identify as likely to come into widespread usage during the 21st century include holographic imagery (three-dimensional photographic images), virtual reality (computer-simulated environments and models), and advances in superconductivity that will enable high-speed levitated trains and ships, and hypersonic air travel.

A Sankofan Futurist analysis would expand on this work by envisioning different scenarios in which a particular technological product is introduced, with each posing a different degree of potential exploitation. The Sankofan futurist would then investigate whether historical technologies exist that can be adapted to minimize the potential exploitation and determine what new technological products will be required to further reduce the magnitude of expected exploitation. Finally, the analyst(s) would explore opportunities to move beyond exploitation minimization and develop technological interventions that actually have the potential to improve the life circumstances of people of African descent.

The conceptualization of both defensive and liberational technologies requires intensive forays into the growing body of Afrofuturist explorations. Afrofuturism is a rapidly emerging as an important subfield within Africana Studies. Mark Dery introduced the term Afrofuturism in 1994 to describe "speculative fiction that treats African-American themes and addresses African-American concerns in the context of twentieth-century technoculture."[32] Describing Afrofuturism as "an intersection of imagination, technology, the future, and liberation," Ytasha Womack explains that as "Both an artistic aesthetic and a framework for critical theory, Afrofuturism combines elements of science fiction, historical fiction, fantasy, Afrocentricity and magic realism with non-Western beliefs."[33] Music is also a mode through which Afrofuturism is presented, as illustrated by the cultural production of Sun Ra, Janelle Monáe, and Outkast.[34]

Table 8 Technologies of Cultural Preservation and Renewal Used by African Americans

Technologies of Cultural Preservation and Renewal	Operation → Outcome(s)
A. Historical	
Cultural Production	Preserve/adapt African cultural practices → development of distinctive identity^
Religion	Express collective spirituality → sense of meaning of life^/coping capacity^
Social Networking	Create and sustain communal networks → community cohesion^/ Black agency^
Rituals	Celebrate survival/events/triumphs → identity affirmation^/memory preservation^
Education	Provide Identity enhancing information/skill acquisition → agency^/reasoning capacity^
Self-Isolation	Create self-sustaining communities → quality of life^/ buffering against racism^
B. Contemporary	
Cultural Production	Celebrate and invigorate Black life → quality of life^/identity affirmation^
Education	Provide Identity enhancing information/skill acquisition → agency^/ reasoning capacity^
Religion	Express collective spirituality → sense of meaning of life^/coping capacity^
Rituals	Celebrate survival/events/triumphs → identity affirmation^/memory preservation^
Remembrance	
(a) Rituals	Celebrate survival/events/triumphs → identity affirmation^/memory preservation^
(b) Museums	Preserve information/documents/artifacts → identity affirmation^/memory preservation^
(c) Archaeology	Recovery of historical artifacts/spaces → identity affirmation^/memory preservation^
Restoration	Rebuild neighborhoods/organizations/edifices → quality of life^/ community cohesion^
(a) African American Studies	Generate/disseminate culturally affirming knowledge → cultural renewal/ Black agency^
(b) Social Networking	Create and sustain communal networks → community cohesion^/ Black agency^
(c) STEM	Increase representation in technical fields → technologies improving Black quality of life^
(d) Genetic Research	Identify ancestral African heritage/unknown kin →identity refinement^/affirmation^
(e) Cyberculture	Use internet for cultural production/political mobilization →identity affirmation^/agency^
(f) Reparations	Compensate Blacks for historical oppression → cultural renewal^/economic vitality^

Note: ^/ indicates a positive impact.

In *Afrofuturism 2.0: The Rise of Astro-Blackness*, editors Reynaldo Anderson and Charles Jones present research that extends the scope of inquiry beyond speculative fiction to encompass religion, architecture, communications, visual art, and philosophy.[35] It is this expanded scope of inquiry that provides the entry point for Afrofuturism to play a pivotal role in imagining and designing the type of technological innovations referred to in Tables 7 and 8.

The contours of Africana Studies' role in advancing Sankofan Futurism can best be outlined by interrogating a Sankofan-inspired effort to conjoin historical and contemporary information and identify strategies to produce a Black liberatory future known as The 1619 Project. The project culminated in the publication of a collection of essays and creative writings compiled by *New York Times* reporter—now Howard University professor—Nikole Hannah-Jones. The resulting volume entails a multifaceted reinterpretation of four-hundred years of US history, retelling it from the vantage point of the people of Africa who were brought by force to America to toil without compensation in its fields. And their descendants, whose liberation from the vestiges of their ancestors' enslavement is not yet complete. As Jones notes on the flap jacket of the edited book, both the Project and the book "[speak] directly to our current moment, contextualizing the systems of race and caste within which we operate today."[36] Not only does the 1619 Project powerfully reframe how the American past is interpreted, it also demonstrates how historical processes and outcomes continue to reverberate in the present. For these reasons, the 1619 Project represents the type of intensive, restorative, information-collection and analysis processes required to fully operationalize the Sankofan Futurism.

Implementing Wakandazation

As noted previously, *Wakandazation* involves the development and implementation of a strategic plan to operationalize and implement efficacious technological interventions identified via previously described Sankofan futurist studies. The most fundamental question facing Wakandazation teams is what types of technological developments are likely to generate the most positive outcomes? Criteria that would be utilized to rank technological scenarios include various quality-of-life indicators including wealth, employment, physical and mental health, education, infrastructure and services, environmental quality, access to cultural and leisure activities, social belonging, spirituality, safety, security, and freedom. Wakandazation teams must then make determinations regarding the following issues: (a) what resources will be required to produce and implement a particular technological product and how will those resources be acquired; (b) what incentives will be necessary to recruit needed investors, fabricators, social impact analysts, and creative producers; (c) what is a reasonable time frame for development and implementation; and (d) what safeguards will be required to minimize the likelihood of external sabotage. This latter issue is critical because of the increased prevalence of spyware technologies including key loggers, trojans, and screen capture spyware used by large companies and law enforcement agencies.

Globalizing Sankofan Futurism and Wakandazation

The goal of the preceding US-focused case study is to motivate interest in establishing an international *Sankofan Futurism/Wakandazation* movement. The aspirational goal of this movement would be the creation of a global state of affairs devoid of systemic racism and the vestiges of slavery, where people of African descent around the world can live and thrive without limitations. I term this movement Project 2119, an obvious nod to the previously described *1619 Project*, with the year 2119 designated as the point in time when the liberatory goal is realized.

Project 2119 will require the creation of Sankofan futurist/Wakandazation research and implementation teams in interested countries. Individual country activities would be coordinated at the regional and international levels. Although there are many differences in the specific exploitation mechanisms and resistance and cultural preservation strategies across countries, the analytical framework outlined previously is sufficiently flexible to accommodate this variation. Moreover, irrespective of country- and region-specific differences in historical and contemporary experiences, people of African descent around the world collectively face a variety of common technologically related challenges that are escalating in severity. These challenges include disproportionate exposure to environmental toxins, limited access to potable water, food insecurity, limited access to quality health care, inadequate educational access and quality, employment insecurity generated by robotic displacement, limited digital access and literacy, and media- and internet-based racist representations and manipulation.

The enthusiastic response to *BP* and *BPWF* across Africa and the diaspora suggests that there is widespread recognition that greater mastery of advanced technology can advance the ongoing global liberation struggle. Hopefully, this enthusiasm can be mobilized to generate support for Project 2119. Indeed, Project 2119 could well become a major catalyst for a renewal of historical Pan-Africanist explorations. Obviously, much work will be required to implement Project 2119. However, this case study demonstrates both the feasibility of such an initiative and its many potential positive benefits and, consequently, will spark preliminary discussions among possible participants.

As Jenkins and Seti have proclaimed:

> Black people need to understand that this is clearly the time to make dramatic changes in response to the enormous implications of … expected future developments [and] … to develop strategic plans, hold conferences, and strongly consider reengineering many of our current organizations in order to fully participate in what we consider to be a period of incredible change.[37]

Conclusion: A Higher Flight to Liberation: Don't Let Them Clip Our Wings!

You hit me with the one-two
You tried to clip my wings
Bled two pints of blood
Dem dere is broken wings
Now hear my hammer ring
Cause it don't even mean a thing
Mausiki Scales, "The Solution," *WestWest Africa* 2020

This concluding commentary revisits the flight metaphor to explore the role of B/AS in confronting selected challenges facing people of African descent as we traverse the third decade of the 21st century. Indeed, there are a few hopeful signs that suggest we may be preparing for a higher flight in search of sustainable psychic and physical liberation. At the same time, however, there are serious internal and external challenges that have the potential to "clip our wings" and disrupt our flight plan.

Imagine the ongoing liberation struggle as flights originating from various geographic locales, each in proximity to a B/AS academic unit. B/AS scholar/activists have four roles to play in this scenario: (1) members of the ground crew, (2) ticket and boarding agents, (3) members of the flight crew, and (4) members of the air traffic control team. As members of the ground crew our first responsibility is to participate, along with other interested parties, in conducting a comprehensive "pre-flight infrastructure assessment" to gauge our readiness for a successful take-off. As ticket and boarding agents, we engage directly with communities to explain the importance of booking a passage and provide assistance in preparation for "boarding." Our flight crew responsibilities include providing detailed information regarding flight progress to passengers, i.e. students in B/AS courses and community members, and helping them to prepare for their responsibilities upon landing. Finally, our role as air control team members is to coordinate the various flights, i.e. to foster collaboration across B/AS units to leverage impact and to share best practices. The chaotic nature of our current circumstances mandate that we prioritize the assessment role of the ground crew to ensure we are fully

apprised of the pandemic-generated flight headwinds that threaten to delay our liberatory flights.

The State of Our Liberatory Infrastructure

The term "infrastructure" is used here to describe the legal and political safeguards that have provided some degree of insulation from the worst manifestations of white supremacy, along with the community-based institutions and organizational strategies that have traditionally enabled African Americans to undertake liberatory projects. Several historic sources of security, protection, and stability continue to exhibit erosion. Heavily damaged safeguards include legal and judicial protections, opportunities for advancement via educational attainment, mass mobilization potential, and the capacity to initiate self-help strategies. Although these traditional safeguards were exhibiting weaknesses prior to COVID-19, the social turbulence disrupting our flight pattern is intensifying.

Legal and judicial protections against institutional racism have been systematically attacked, especially in the electoral arena. Well-publicized cases of racial gerrymandering are testimonials to persisting efforts to reverse Black electoral gains won through intense struggles over the last half decade. In addition, systematic voter intimidation and miseducation campaigns have been mounted with the objective of reducing the capacity of Black citizens to influence public policy through the franchise. Foundational Civil Rights laws have also come under attack, especially the Voting Rights Act of 1965, leading to the revival of traditional racial gerrymandering and voter suppression.

Initiatives designed to advance equal educational access in both K-12 and higher education for African Americans have been methodically undermined, most visibly by the 2023 Supreme Court decision ruling that consideration of race in college admissions decisions is unconstitutional. In addition, whitewashing legislation in several states is restricting how the history of people of African descent can be taught both in K-12 and higher education.

In the face of these momentous challenges, the potential of African Americans to mobilize to oppose these retrenchments is encouraging. The historic "culture of resistance" was rejuvenated via the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, formed in 2013 in response to the acquittal of the murderer of Trayvon Martin. The movement morphed into an international network with the mission "to eradicate White supremacy and build local power to intervene in violence inflicted on Black communities by the state and vigilantes."

Black electoral power was mobilized effectively in 2020 to beat back an existential threat to Black well-being posed by a prospective second term for Donald Trump. African American women played highly visible roles in marshalling Black voters, as did both male and female athletes and entertainers. Former state representative Stacey Abrams played an especially crucial role in producing victory in Georgia for the Biden/Harris ticket. Black sororities undertook a massive get-out-the-vote effort in support of Alpha Kapp Alpha

soror, Kamala Harris, via the "Stroll to the Polls" campaign. More than thirty major sports figures actively promoted racial justice during the 2020 campaign, with Lebron James in a vanguard role. High-profile Hip Hop artists who actively supported the Democratic candidates included Beyoncé (Beyonce Giselle Knowles), Diddy (Sean John Combs), Common (Lonnie Rashid Lynn), Cardi B (Belcalis Marlenis Almánzar), and John Legend (John Roger Stephens).

Several high-profile celebrities are also supporting a variety of community development projects. Former President Obama's "My Brother's Keeper Alliance" is an especially highly visible quasi-self-help initiative self-described as leading "a cross national call focused on building safe and supportive communities for boys and young men of color where they feel valued and have clear pathways to opportunity." Netflix has announced plans to allocate 2 percent of its cash holdings—up to $100 million initially—to financial institutions and organizations that directly support Black communities in the United States. In 2019 Black billionaire Robert Smith donated an estimated $41 million to pay for the educational debts of Morehouse's 400 graduating seniors. Philanthropists MacKenzie Scott, Wilmot Reed Hastings Jr., and Hastings's spouse Patty Quillin have pledged donations to selected HBCUs totaling some $250 million.

Facing COVID-19 Generated Headwinds

Although aspects of our pre-flight infrastructure check signal readiness for takeoff, the headwinds created by the COVID-19 pandemic were formidable and could force major delays in our hypothetical flights. Indeed, the disproportionate misery experienced by African Americans has generated long-lasting negative effects on the capacity to undertake self-help community projects and, derivatively, on future political mobilization prospects. Although space does not permit a full accounting of the widespread harm exacted on African Americans by the pandemic, it is important to highlight significant negative COVID-19 impacts on health outcomes, economic well-being, and educational attainment.

Black Americans were infected with COVID-19 at nearly three times the rate of white Americans. Moreover, they were twice as likely to die from the virus. There are several reasons for these disparities. African Americans are overrepresented among the throngs of "essential" workers, who were forced to endure exceptionally high risks of exposure to the coronavirus. Although Black workers make up about one in nine workers overall, they comprise about one in six of all "front-line-industry" workers. Black workers are also overrepresented in the workforce of grocery, convenience, and drug stores; public transit; trucking, warehouse, and postal service; health care; and childcare and social services. Black workers and their families also faced greater risk of exposure to the coronavirus because of the greater likelihood of living in densely populated housing. Out of proportion COVID-related Black mortality and morbidity also resulted, in part, from underlying health conditions fueled by limited access to primary care and insurance coverage.

Although Black workers are overrepresented in so-called "essential occupations," they still experienced disproportionate levels of job loss as the pandemic spread. Between February and April of 2020 more than one in six Black workers lost their jobs. As a result, in April 2020 less than half of the adult Black population was employed. According to a 2018 report, 16.9 percent of Black households were unbanked in 2017, compared with just 3.0 percent of white households. The job losses resulting from the pandemic created significant vulnerability for Black homeowners and renters. Between November 25th and December 7th of 2020 some 19.2 percent of Black homeowners were not currently caught up on mortgage payments compared to 7.2 percent of white homeowners.[26] During the same period, 29.1 percent of Black renters were not currently caught up on rent payments compared to 13.1 percent of white renters. The poverty rate for Black families was 17.7 percent in 2018, declined to 16.3 percent in 2019, but rose to 17.4 percent in 2021. The comparable figures for non-Hispanic white families were, respectively, 5.8, 5.0, and 5.6 percent.

Black-owned businesses were also inordinately impacted by the pandemic. Overall, between February and April 2020 the number of active business owners fell by 22 percent. However, the number of active Black business owners fell by 41 percent, while the number of active white business owners declined by only 17 percent. Loans through the Paycheck Protection Program, the federal government's signature relief program for small businesses, reached only 20 percent of eligible firms in states with the highest densities of Black-owned firms, and in counties with the densest Black-owned business activity, coverage rates were typically lower than 20 percent. A survey based on May 2020 data found a majority (51 percent) of Black and Latino small business owners who sought assistance requested less than $20,000 in temporary funding from the federal government and only about 12 percent received the assistance they requested. Almost two-thirds reported they had either received no assistance (41 percent) or were still waiting for a decision (21 percent). Another survey conducted in September 2020 found that 63 percent of Black and Latino small business owners sought and received financing, but 3 in 10 did not receive the requested amount.

The final COVID-19 generated headwind highlighted here is the likely increase in educational achievement gaps resulting from the shift from in-person to online instruction. Several studies have documented that Black and Hispanic students were disproportionately shifted to online instruction during the pandemic. A December 2020 report by Emma Dorn and colleagues found Black and Hispanic students were twice as likely as white students to have received no live contact with teachers over the previous week and were three to six percentage points less likely to be receiving consistent live instruction. Although gaps in access to a computer or comparable device and internet access narrowed in Spring 2021, Black and Hispanic households were still three to four percentage points less likely than white households to have reliable access to devices, and three to six percentage points less likely to have reliable access to the internet. Researchers warn that the learning loss has widened the pre-existing achievement gap affecting Black and Hispanic students and could deepen racial and economic inequality for decades to come.

Charting a Sustainable Flight Path

The headwinds described in the previous section clearly pose a formidable challenge for B/AS scholar/activists in our roles in supporting flights in search of sustainable liberation. The National Council for Black Studies (NCBS) has initiated a new project to increase the effectiveness of B/AS's ground crew operations. Specifically, NCBS is now producing an annual report assessing the state of our liberation efforts using the knowledge base and values of B/AS as the point of departure. These reports complement other evaluative projects such as the Urban League's annual "State of Black America." The NCBS reports will buttress B/AS's ticketing and boarding operations by focusing on the problems confronted daily by our constituents. This emphasis will strengthen existing NCBS outreach programs and resulting increased visibility should encourage more students to major in B/AS and/or enroll in more B/AS courses. This increased enrollment will be a boon to our "in-flight" instructional activities. In addition, strengthened community connections can create new internship opportunities and post-baccalaureate employment possibilities in enterprises committed to collective empowerment.

B/AS scholar/activists throughout the Diaspora and Africa have the opportunity to contribute essays for possible inclusion in these annual reports. This global solicitation process will ensure published works present the best possible analyses and recommendations. This systematic sharing of best practices will greatly enhance the efficacy of the B/AS "air traffic control" network. Most importantly, the projected impact of enhanced B/AS ground crew operations has the potential to rejuvenate traditional support systems that have undergirded liberation efforts, thereby positioning our communities to expand efforts necessary to accelerate takeoff frequency and realize higher and longer domestic and international flights. Indeed, this initiative will hopefully enable the caged bird, about which Maya Angelou wrote, to sing loudly and triumphantly as it spreads its wings after escaping from captivity.

NOTES

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