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OF DU BOIS AND DIASPORA

The Challenge of African American Studies

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This article explores the role African American Studies has played in responding to the quandary of multiple consciousness as initially outlined by Du Bois, arguing that the origins of African American Studies were informal but nonetheless incisive in its analysis, as can be seen in such works as David Walker's *Appeal*. When taken as a hemispheric phenomenon (as opposed to a North American boundedness), certain fundamental themes reoccur in both the informal and the subsequent formal scholarship, such as the condition of exploitative labor extraction, the relationship to Africa, and the transnational linkages and meanings of the diasporic experience. The article ends with a call to marry prescription and praxis.

Keywords: *pan-Africanism; African Diaspora; double consciousness; African American Studies*

After the Egyptian and Indian, the Greek and Roman, the Teuton and Mongolian, the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second-sight in this American world, - a world which yields him no true self-consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the other world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness, - an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. The history of the American Negro is this strife, - this longing to attain self-conscious manhood, to merge his double self into a better and truer self. In this merging he wishes neither of the older selves to be lost. He would not Africanize America. . . . He would not bleach

his Negro soul in a flood of White Americanism. . . . He simply wishes to make it possible for a man to be both a Negro and an American, without being cursed and spit upon by his fellows, without the doors of Opportunity closed roughly in his face.

—W. E. B. Du Bois (1903/1969, pp. 45-46)

Thus I begin my remarks, with this familiar passage from *Souls*, one that many have committed to memory because it has provoked and inspired seemingly endless commentary and rumination. This is as it should be, for here and elsewhere in *Souls*, Du Bois displays his own second-sightedness, a profound insight into the condition of the African-descended that continues to reverberate and instruct some 100 years later. This particular passage is crucial because in it, Du Bois provides a window into the interiority of the Black experience and lays his finger on the principal condition arising from the African's confrontation with the withering, steady blast of American racism. The resulting disorientation is indeed the defining feature of the African diasporic experience in North America, the notion of irreconcilability at the core of the dilemma.

Du Bois's concern for the plight of African Americans was never far from his interest in the oppressed and downtrodden throughout the world, connected as they were not only by affinities of blood and culture but by their common relationship to an emerging global capitalism and their subjugation to regimes of colonial and imperial design. This he makes clear in his famous statement: "The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line, -

AUTHOR'S NOTE: This article was a paper delivered on the occasion of the 30-year anniversary celebration of African American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, March 20, 2003. I would like to thank Professor Tukuferi Zuberi, the Center for Africana Studies, and the University of Pennsylvania for the invitation to participate in your celebration of both the 30-year anniversary of African American studies at Penn and the 100-year anniversary of the publication of W. E. B. Du Bois's *Souls of Black Folk*. I can think of no setting more fitting than the University of Pennsylvania. Indeed, the transition from an Afro-American Studies Program to a Center for African Studies reflects a maturation of vision and expansion of purpose, underscoring the interdependencies of our lives and the interrelations of our struggles, an undertaking deserving of every accolade.

the relation of the darker to the lighter races of men in Asia and Africa, in America and the islands of the sea" (1903/1969, p. 54). Although he would become a champion for the interests of the working class the world over, Du Bois would take special interest in Africa and its dispersed daughters and sons in the Americas, Europe, and elsewhere, and would lead a series of Pan-African Congresses in the early 20th century. His commitment to the plight of Blacks and the oppressed everywhere also informed his considerable scholarship, which continued to his death in 1963 at the age of 95. His prodigious body of work, which includes novels, poetry, plays, essays, and studies of history, sociology, and economics, clearly identifies Du Bois as a leading architect of the construct we now call the African Diaspora. Although we therefore cannot stop with *Souls* if we desire a comprehensive understanding of Du Bois's signal contributions, we limit our deliberations to that work today, in honor of the occasion.

It can be argued that the African Diaspora is the quintessential imagined community, existing as both academic project and social agenda, its precise location a matter of considerable debate but certainly not far from the verges of scholarly endeavor and political exigency, concomitantly inhabiting realms of the noumenal and experiential. It is perhaps more useful to envision it as a (at least) 500-year conversation, in myriad languages and cultural expressions, among various members of African-descended communities (both within nation-states and between them) over the meaning of loss and displacement.¹ Insofar as the Atlantic world is concerned, discursive patterns characteristic of the African Diaspora tend to be preoccupied with navigating the implications of the middle passage, the principal divergences (ideological and often literal) heading in one of two directions: toward Africa or the Americas. Of course, the great conundrum has been the unattainable nature of the polarities: Africa, once lost, has yet to be recovered; whereas America, as an ideal, has yet to become home. This is the essence of the African Diaspora, of Du Bois's "twoness," this inability to achieve wholeness of spirit and vision, a psychic exile.

The desire to be made whole, which includes the yearning to overcome the debilitation of the fractured consciousness, is one of

the most powerful mechanisms of motivation known to humankind. In both corporate and individual history, persons move toward the light of circumstances whereby health—psychological, social, physical, and so forth; in other words, health in all of its facets—is maximized. Indeed, it is becoming clear that differences between these aspects of the person are more a matter of perception and abstraction than lived experience; that the human condition is best approached as an integrated whole. As such, it should come as no surprise that the forced geographical displacement of persons would result in an all-out search for a return to equilibrium, to the organization of a social ensemble in which, to the furthest extent possible, wrongs are righted, wounds are healed, and dignity is restored.

It should further be observed that human beings move in streams of relation, wherein persons continuously negotiate agencies, dimensions, and qualities of connection to other persons and entities inhabiting lands seen and unseen. The capture of Africans in Africa, and their subsequent shipment to the Americas, was the quintessential disruption of such negotiations, resulting in the redirection of the tributaries of life, now flowing through bitter waters of dismemberment and disease, emptying into silver-laced seas of indigo and cane and coffee and cotton. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of them, about 90%, would be consumed by the production of sugar throughout the Americas between the 17th and early 19th centuries. The apocalypse had come, in every way as murderous and cataclysmic and altering as any scenario envisioned by prophetic revelation. If not a new heaven, certainly a new earth was in the making, transforming existence as many would know it on both sides of the Atlantic.²

It must have been quite a spectacle for the creatures of the sea, this stream of humanity aloft ships of varying size, surging and heaving, ever straining toward the mark. Had they the capacity, the fish would hold their own conferences on the significance of such activity, beginning as it did with a trickle and peaking in the 18th and early 19th centuries with a flood. In the end, at least 12 million Africans were forcibly removed from the continent of their birth by means of the Atlantic trade between 1500 and 1867. There were

probably many more, for what we know of their quantification has been driven by mathematical projections informed by the gradual uncovering of shipping and sale data in Europe and the Americas during the last 30 years, and there is every reason to believe that there will be further archival discoveries together with a more intense inquiry into clandestine trafficking.³

The separation of millions from their homes and families is without question the basis of the fractured self, and it is at this (dis)juncture that we can begin an examination of the relationship of African American studies to Du Bois's problem of double consciousness, which in the case of Black women becomes triple conscious; indeed, the quantification of the condition is a function of the variability of identity and its performance and is therefore extendable to multiples of prime factors. To be sure, a great deal of print has been devoted to this question of double or multiple consciousness, and the interpretations vary. I have also often wondered what Du Bois meant by the concept. For many, resolution of the formulation, at least enigmatic if not opaque, is to be found in the twoness principle—"an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings" (p. 45). That is, the American Negro, as she was then known, was a disjointed individual, unable to fully merge identities in opposition.

Although the relationship between multiple consciousness and twoness is certainly there, I am not so sure that they are immediately collapsible, that they are referring to the same phenomenon. Rather, I believe what we have here is a discussion of one condition that issues into and thus explains the other. Allow me to develop my own hermeneutic a bit further.

Careful scholar that he was, Du Bois wrote to be understood, taking time to define his terms. In this instance, he characterizes double consciousness as "this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (p. 45). That is, the core issue of double or multiple consciousness is the mediation of the self-perspective, the acquisition of self-knowledge through mechanisms controlled by a hostile other. To state it differently, the American Negro, in Du Bois's analysis, was in the predicament of

learning about himself and herself, about her native potential, her intelligence, her beauty, her historical contributions, her social standing and value to society, and her future prospects through the prism of American racism. He was taught that as a member of a despised and degraded "race," he was locked into a condition of inferiority and continuing servility. This Western formulation of caste was deeply embedded in nearly every aspect of the American experience, so that the lessons of racism employed pedagogical tools and strategies extending far beyond the narrow confines of the school house. The limited opportunities, differential pay scales, and constricted spaces of the work place conveyed that message. The proscribed movement within public facilities, restaurants, courthouses, and means of transportation throughout the land of Jim Crow certainly reinforced the lesson. The circumstances of residence and social interaction, a quartering of Black folk whether at rest or in motion, resulted in the engineering of demographic patterns so dramatic and stark as to even provide a template for South African apartheid. The arrogation of power by a select few; the projection of a White iconography via film, radio, and subsequently, television; indeed, the very imagery associated with divine unction, all attested to the sanctioning of order and the futility of remonstrations. In contrast, the only images of the African's descendant was the coon, the shine, the buffoon, and the object lesson dangling from a tree. The curse of Ham, from all indications, had come to pass.

In presenting the core dilemma of Black folk, in trying to approximate the bearing of their souls, Du Bois borrows the trope of the "two-headed" Negro, the specially gifted person, seventh in the birth order and born "with a caul," confirmations of an otherworldly choice by which the anointed has been empowered to peer into the interstices of sacred and profane, spirit and flesh, time and before-time, to locate the cause of disease and trouble and discord. But instead of seeing into the unknown, those "born with a veil and gifted with second-sight" in Du Bois's formulation are in fact visually impaired, for as a consequence of this circumstance of birth, their vantage point "yields [them] no true self-consciousness" (p. 45). They know as they are known.⁴

To be sure, there is every evidence that many of African descent completely rejected the idea of their innate inferiority and instead nurtured convictions of self-worth and beauty and promise that operated in an autonomous locus of cogitation, impervious to the psychological and physical forays and assaults of American racialism. Du Bois himself is an example of this ability to sustain the health of the mind and spirit, as he relates his own initial encounter with racism during his youth, how the “revelation . . . dawned upon me with a certain suddenness,” and how he “lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows.” We will return to the matter of resistance momentarily, but in following the trajectory previously laid by Du Bois, it is only logical that some, if not many, would necessarily succumb to the assault and internalize the message:

But the facing of so vast a prejudice could not but bring the inevitable self-questioning, self-disparagement, and lowering of ideals which ever accompany repression and breed in an atmosphere of contempt and hate. Whisperings and portents came borne upon the four winds: Lo! we are diseased and dying, cried the dark hosts; we cannot write, our voting is in vain; what need of education, since we must always cook and serve? (1903/1969, pp. 44-45, 51)

For someone born in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, in 1868, and who went on to study at Harvard and in Berlin, Du Bois’s ability to enter the world of southern Black peasantry and workers, first through his matriculation at Fisk, followed later by his tenure at Atlanta University, is nothing short of remarkable. His insight into Black music and the Black church and their relationship to African antecedents was certainly prescient and in many ways remains unsurpassed. Even so, one wonders if there was something of the southern Black experience that escaped his attention or ability to comprehend and articulate. When one turns to the writings of Zora Neale Hurston (1891-1960), for example, one does not see pervasive self-doubt and the internalization of pathos as suggested in *Souls*. Rather, one enters a respite of self-assurance and strength, a certainty of beauty and worth. That is, it is possible to argue that in the characters and stories of Hurston, one finds the very anti-

thesis of Du Bois's fears, attributable perhaps to Hurston's origins in all-Black Eatonville, Florida, where White intercession was more indirect and circumstantial than direct and targeted (see, e.g., Hurston, 1937/1990, 1942/1991).

Notwithstanding Hurston's contribution, there can be no question that racist intervention has had some impact on the Black community, and it is at this juncture that the African American academy, via African American studies and by any other means, can be considered. Indeed, to the extent that the recovery of wholeness among the African-descended has been achieved, it has in large measure been facilitated by the Black intellectual, the Black writer and artist, the Black journalist, the Black healer. The quest to arrive at a true self-knowledge, in Du Boisian language, has been a long and arduous process that continues to unfold as we speak. That process began with the earliest of African "arrivants," with every soul who dared to speak his own name or her own language.⁵ It certainly continued in the formation of folk tales and animal stories, works of orality fashioned by the earliest of African American intellectuals, featuring the African as implacable and triumphant, outwitting and outmaneuvering larger and ostensibly more powerful foes. It undoubtedly continued in the spirituals and work songs and field hollers and liturgical styles of worship traditions, refined by these same artists, forms as transcendent and expectant in orientation and carriage as they were African in expression and movement. The Black intellectual response therefore began on the shores if not the slave ships themselves.

With respect to the printed word, efforts to enfeeble the meditation of White racialism to illuminate what the natal veil had obscured can be seen as the dawn of the informal Black academy, arising to meet the challenge of that obscenity called slavery. But it must also be underscored that from the earliest origins of this informal academy, the attack on slavery was never confined to North America, nor was it joined only by those born on American soil. Rather, the literate from various places in the Americas expressed their opposition to slavery wherever it was to be found. Stated differently, early Black intellectuals saw from the beginning that the struggles of the African-descended were related not only by heri-

tage and aesthetic, but they were linked through complementary systems of labor extraction and racialized social hierarchies. These critical insights into the symmetries, if not ligatures, of the experience of people of African descent throughout the world held that the African was foundational to global capitalism, her enslavement the starting point of modernity.

The core ideas relating to the positing of an African Diaspora, the imagining of it, are therefore nothing new. As early as the 1820s and the publications of John Russwurm and David Walker (Russwurm, 1827; Walker, 1829/1965), certain principles foundational to the configuration of diaspora were articulated. The mere mention of Russwurm and Walker, the one from the Caribbean and the other possibly the scion of an African father, speaks to configurations of space, as their very presence underscores the permeable and otherwise artificial nature of political maps and boundaries and points to the larger context of the Black experience. Stated differently, there was never a time in African American history that those living in the North American continent were not meaningfully connected with persons and events originating elsewhere in the world (see Bay, 2000, for a discussion).

Individuals like Russwurm and Walker clearly grasped this fact and boldly made the claim that 19th-century Blacks were connected to the ancient histories and cultures of pharaonic Egypt and Nubia in ways that qualified the latter as the ancestors of Africans in the so-called New World. Walker in particular went on to argue that the similitude of conditions for Blacks in North America and Haiti further cemented the relatedness that they shared in a community of blood and circumstance. Denmark Vesey, himself most likely from the Caribbean, would certainly attempt to operationalize the implications of such linkages, drawing on the example of the Haitian Revolution as both encouragement and inducement in the 1822 planned uprising (Gross, 2001, 2002). A glorious ancient past, combined with a shared contemporary struggle, were twin pillars of a view of African American history enunciated nearly 200 years ago.

This early rendering of history, then, this early school of African American studies, was nothing short of a mobilization of memory,

forged in the fiery furnace, as the contestation over slavery raged throughout the Americas, its origins in Africa establishing a legacy of violence, instability, and impoverishment from which the continent has yet to extricate itself. Therein lies another principle that has characterized African American studies: its vital concern with the plight of Black people, as well as others, and the corresponding effort to marshal learning, fashion intellectual arguments, and indeed create movements and institutions for the purpose of addressing their needs. It would have been an absurdity in the extreme, totally alien to the tradition, for the learned of the 19th century, surrounded on every side by a nefarious system of labor exploitation in which were trapped the majority of their people, to have pursued letters and enlightenment for their own sake, or for personal aggrandizement, in the quest for an illusional exceptional status.

Whereas the mechanisms by which a number of 19th-century Black intellectuals acquired their learning remain a subject of speculation, there can be no doubt that the interpretive skills they brought to bear on their readings of history and social analyses were from some interior place of the mind, some unique faculty of reasoning informed by both material conditions and communal commentary, unaffected by Du Bois's notion of double consciousness. The autodidactic tradition was therefore a crucial factor in the rise of African American studies, an indispensable means of navigation against the stiff and disorienting headwinds of a master narrative that, in its quest to rewrite histories in ways that served imperial, colonial, and capitalist interests, took every precaution to write subject populations and cultures out of history, or to at least render them as inconsequential, while recasting those histories sanctioned by the undeniability of sacred text and archaeological evidence as in fact Western cultural precursors, racializing them in conformity with their own image and likeness in the process. Absent the ability to critically evaluate the tendentious, the patience to piece together a coherent counternarrative by way of independent research, and the courage to champion arguments at variance with the conventional, African American studies in incipient or derivative form would have never materialized. Originality is a hallmark of genius and necessity (in this instance) the mother of originality. It is there-

fore the case that the best of our tradition, the finest of African American intellectual expression, has been consistently characterized by a remarkable independence of thought, whether honed in ivory towers or in the backwaters.

Although the few who managed to publish their views in the 19th century were men, there can be no doubt that they drew deep from knowledge wells excavated and maintained by women, further underscoring the critical role of the informal academy. Concerning the connection to Africa, for example, it is very probable that those who published learned a great deal from women; certainly, an examination of the Work Projects Administration (WPA) interviews of the 1930s reveals that the majority of the accounts discussing Africa as homeland, and/or concerning themselves with the hardships of initial capture and subsequent expulsion through the middle passage, were mostly provided by women, consistent with a view of women as culture bearers (Rawick, 1972, 1977, 1979). That women did not emerge as nationally recognized proponents of liberatory strategies, embracing an entire nexus of subjugated communities, has more to do with masculinist assumptions and avenues of socialization than anything else. It remains for contemporary scholars to more clearly delineate the discursive contributions of these early women, but it is clear that the insistence on the combining of learning and action and the resultant scholar-activist synthesis was a project significantly shaped by them.

It was also the case that Black inhabitants of early 19th-century North America traversed a world well acquainted with the African-born, and like Henry Highland Garnet, many were themselves the sons and daughters of those either stolen from Africa or transhipped from the Caribbean (see Stuckey, 1987, pp. 138-192). What today we write about in the theoretical they knew then in the concrete. They lived alongside the African-born, they heard their languages, they observed their behaviors, and they knew the African presence and their connection to it as a lived reality. The diaspora had a tangible form; the transnational was their world. It therefore comes as no surprise that they wrote and organized in ways that took such a universe as a given.

Predicated on this earlier work and set of experiences, the middle to late 19th century would see the rise of early pan-Africanists or Ethiopianists like Alexander Crummell, Martin R. Delany, and Henry McNeil Turner, men whose advocacy of repatriation was often flawed by the imperative of the civilizing mission, along with assumptions about African cultural inferiority (see Adeleke, 1998, for a provocative and controversial discussion). This can even be seen in the works of Edward Blyden (1888/1994) of St. Thomas, whose admiration for the impact of Islam in West Africa vis-à-vis his disdain for ancestral cultures is only tempered by his masterful, even dazzling, display of masking and dissimulation. But as powerful and as evocative as were their appeals and interventions, it is possible to argue that with a number of the mid- to late-19th-century scholars, a translation of sorts had transpired, and that while the policies of oppressors came under heavy analytical assault, the aversion of such scholars to things African constituted the core dilemma of the diasporic experience, that of alienation from both original and adoptive homelands. They lived in the time of the ethnogenesis of the Negro, a new addition to the human family, and notwithstanding protestations to the contrary, they represented a brand of leadership that was critical of a society and hegemonic power in and by which they themselves were deeply affected. Double consciousness had set in.

To be sure, the pan-Africanist impulse in North America carried into the late 19th and early 20th centuries, its evolution directly informed by subsequent migrations from the Caribbean and the American South into the North. Individuals caring deeply about the plight of the African-descended, but whose ideas of implementation were as varied as their personalities and provenances, were emblematic of the period. The meaning of pan-Africanism was therefore contested between the Garveys and the Du Boises and the Washingtons (yes, Booker T., whose support of several pan-Africanist organizations is deserving of greater scrutiny), a struggle of personalities and regionalist claims that, ultimately, was saddled by the broader political discourse privileging the nation-state (thereby encouraging both xenophobia and a degree of parochialism antithetical to pan-Africanism) and by the lure of success flow-

ing from a gilded age. The embrace of Marxism by many African American thinkers certainly deepened the debate, but few were more creative and insightful in linking race and gender inequalities with global capitalism than was Anna Julia Cooper (1892/1988). There are arguably numerous reasons for the failure of early 20th-century pan-Africanists to coalesce around a common agenda, but in the end, the divisions and vitriol of the period are certainly a reflection of the considerable differences between various communities and by the sheer enormity of the project. In almost every way, African American studies has inherited the multiple legacies of this critical moment in time, complete with all of its contradictions and inconsistencies. But to their credit, the pan-Africanists of the early 20th century, like their predecessors of the early 19th, were at least dedicated to the proposition of struggle—what other choice did they have? The question becomes, To what extent has this part of the legacy been transferred to the present?

As for the Caribbean, its contribution to pan-Africanism and the concept of the African Diaspora has been instrumental and foundational. In addition to Garvey and Blyden, there was the Trinidadian Henry Sylvester Williams, who called the first Pan-African Congress in London in 1900 and collaborated with Dr. Robert Love of Jamaica to establish branches of the Pan-African Association in Jamaica in 1906. Deeply disturbed by the 1935 Italian invasion of Ethiopia, Harold Moody transformed his League of Coloured Peoples from an educational organization to a decidedly political one, while Trinidadians George Padmore and C. L. R. James responded by founding the International African Service Bureau in London in 1937, along with the future president of Kenya, “Burning Spear” Jomo Kenyatta. A gifted writer, Padmore became editor of the influential *Negro Worker*, rising to prominence in the Communist International, for which he wrote *The Life and Struggles of Negro Toilers*. But 4 years before establishing the bureau with James, he exited the Communist Party over differences concerning race. Padmore would control the bureau until it became the Pan-African Federation in 1944 and supplied many of the organizers for the Manchester Congress the following year. Padmore’s influence as a journalist covering labor strikes in Trinidad and the Caribbean in

1937 and 1938 was far-reaching, exposing the relationship between foreign capital and colonial rule in the increasingly desperate plight of the peasant-turned-wage-laborer. He would precede Du Bois in Ghana, where in the 1950s he served as an adviser to Nkrumah.

C. L. R. James, another towering scholar-activist whose work continues in influence, left Trinidad in 1932 with only a high school education. In 1938, James published *The Black Jacobins*, the seminal work on the Haitian Revolution, simultaneously igniting a scholarly revolution by inaugurating a movement in which history is written “from the bottom up,” or from the perspective of the working and downtrodden classes. Whereas James’s work may arguably (and ironically) constitute an example of double consciousness, his 1938 *History of Negro Revolt* centered people of African descent in world history, emphasizing the vital role they must play in future global struggles. As was true of *Black Jacobins*, James demonstrated in his 1963 publication concerning cricket, *Beyond a Boundary*, how the African-descended could take ownership of ideas originating in Europe and forge them into forces of liberation.

No less important was North American Paul Robeson, born in 1898, at a time when the memory of slavery was quite fresh, his father having escaped from the institution at the age of 15. Raised in Princeton, New Jersey, Robeson graduated from Rutgers and then Columbia Law School after stellar accomplishments both academically and athletically. His acting and singing careers began while in law school, and he traveled to London in 1927 to study at the London School of Oriental Languages, where he met James, Padmore, Kenyatta, and Nnamdi Azikiwe, first president of Nigeria, and would later recall, “I discovered Africa in London.” Robeson studied African languages and read widely on Africa, adding to his understanding of art and spirituality in the African Diaspora. His 1934 publication, *What I Want from Life*, is one of the most incisive inquiries into the collective psyche of the African-derived, emphasizing the importance of retrieving an African-centered identity. During his travels to the Soviet Union and Spain in the 1930s, he developed a deeper appreciation of the plight of

the downtrodden and began to stress the need to coordinate anti-colonial and antiracist struggles throughout Africa, the African Diaspora, and Asia. He became increasingly radical as his singing and acting careers soared, helping to establish in 1937 what became the Council on African Affairs (CAA), serving as its chair for most of its existence after 1942. Perhaps the CAA's most important work was in South Africa, where it supported the African National Congress. Robeson's anticolonial activities intensified after World War II, but after the CAA's "Big Three Unity" rally in June 1946 at Madison Square Garden in New York City, attended by 19,000 people and led by Robeson, Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, and others, Cold War politics caused a major split in African American leadership. As early as 1942, the FBI had begun investigating the CAA as subversive, and by 1948, a previously receptive White media joined the NAACP under Walter White in denouncing Robeson (and Du Bois, who was dismissed from the NAACP that year). Concerned by the influence of Robeson and Du Bois in West Africa and elsewhere, the U.S. government revoked Robeson's passport in 1950. Robeson would suffer a fate similar to that of Du Bois, virtually forgotten by his people who owed him so much, reaching the end in 1976 (Eschen, 1997).

Consciousness of a larger Black world also developed in Brazil. In São Paulo, Black newspapers such as *A Liberdade* and *O Mene-lick*, published early in the 19th century, gave way to *O Clarim da Alvorada* (The Clarion of Dawn) in the 1920s and *A Voz da Raça* (The Voice of the Race) in the 1930s, unifying the African-descended community through examining the challenges of the day and by emphasizing African Brazilian history. At the same time, the first African Brazilian activist organization in São Paulo was founded, the Centro Cívico Palmares, its name a tribute to the famous *quilombo* (a maroon society in the Brazilian context).

Black Brazilian consciousness took a momentous step forward in September of 1931, when the Frente Negra Brasileira, or Black Brazilian Front, was founded under the leadership of Arlindo Veiga dos Santos and others. A civil rights organization as well as a benevolent society, the Frente Negra launched *A Voz da Raça*. However, schisms between the Frente Negra and other sectors of

the African Brazilian community arose due to Vega dos Santos's autocratic style of leadership and embrace of fascism. Dissolved (along with all political parties) by the imposition of the *Estado Novo* (New State) under Getúlio Vargas in November of 1937, the Frente Negra nevertheless remains a critical turning point in the effort to both unify the African-descended in Brazil and to connect them with Blacks elsewhere (Butler, 1998). A similar movement developed in Cuba, where the Cuban Independent Party of Color was established in 1907. Fighting for equality of treatment from a government under heavy American influence, they were opposed by others of African descent, such as Juan Gualberto Gómez, who saw their race-based efforts as divisive and anti-Cuban. The party was outlawed in 1910, its leaders arrested, and the ensuing revolt by aggrieved party members brutally repressed by President José Miguel Gómez (with American backing). Unlike members of the Frente Negra, thousands of party members were slaughtered, including women and children. The aspirations of African Cubans would suffer for many years to come (Ferrer, 1999).

Nearly 2 centuries have passed since the publication of David Walker's *Appeal*. In that time, African Americans have fought in American armies, contributed to the industrial and overall economic development of the nation, achieved the spectacular in sports and the arts, registered political gains, raised families, settled and resettled throughout the country, and have otherwise become a critical social component. We have invested heavily in the United States, and in many ways, our current circumstances are considerably different from those characterizing our predecessors in the 19th century. And yet, there remains a continuity of resistance to our full incorporation into the society as full and equal citizens, there are significant lags in economic and educational levels, there are serious disequilibria in levels of health care and rates of incarceration (e.g., the *New York Times* ["Prison rates among Blacks reach a peak, report finds"] reported on April 7, 2003, that 12% of all Black men between the ages of 20 and 34 are either in jail or in prison, compared with 1.6% of similar White males. This is a daily average; the projection is that 28% of all such men will meet with such a fate). The fundamental condition of diaspora, that of

estrangement and detachment, a kind of numinous displacement, continues to resonate with many.

I look forward to the further progression of African American studies, such that the adoption of the diasporic lens, in tandem with the continuation of inquiries more territorially circumscribed, is more readily embraced, and to that end, I would argue that Africa should play an ever-increasing role (rather than the reverse). I look forward to a deepening of our understanding of the advantages of interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary study and to the proliferation of venues and collaborations within which students can actually be trained in the methodology. Equally, it is no longer acceptable to engage in any field of endeavor without at least some component of gender analysis and some familiarity with feminist theory(ies). Rather than move along corridors of intellectual isolationism, a contradiction in terms, we must encourage and foster greater dialogue with disciplines outside of African American studies, including Latino and Asian studies, with whom we share so much potential. The growth and expansion of African American studies in these directions can only bode well for the discipline and place us in the forefront of innovation and creativity.

But what of our relationship to the larger community? Does the academy bear some special responsibility to those working-class individuals who, given the exigencies of their lives, simply do not have time to explore avenues of resolution? Black studies as a category of academia grew out of a period of considerable struggle, and as the outcome of the civil rights, Black power, and Black arts movements, bears striking resemblance to those intellectuals laboring under much more trying circumstances in the early 19th century. In the year 2003, the 30th anniversary of African American Studies at Penn, and the 100th anniversary of Du Bois's *Souls*, what is the academy's role with respect to the ongoing struggles of Black folk in this country and around the world?

It is my view that we have a responsibility to the larger community, to engage that community with what we bring to the table, and to in turn learn from what other members of the broader community bring as well, as we collectively seek to reverse the impairment of multiple consciousness. Although in concrete terms relatively priv-

ileged, the academy should not assume such a poise but rather serve as an important medium through which ideas, from whatever sector they are generated, can flow and inform. We as academics have the time and resources to lead an assault on policies and circumstances antithetical to our interests, rather than simply turning over such matters to politicians and activists. Some of us are in fact politicians and activists, and have in instances served admirably. But the academy can do much more. We cannot simply publish and conference and “speak truth to power” and believe that we are effectively serving the larger community. At the very least, we can begin to cohere around the weighty matters of the day, organizing community members and leadership to engage the scholarship as well as the informed opinion. We should be able to make a far greater impact on the education of our children, encouraging a process through which the regular exchange of ideas and information lead to consensus and engagement of actual praxis. We can link up and coordinate our efforts.

The battlefield of our lives in this country is strewn with the corpses of ideological and personal agendas. We are divided by any number of political affinities, economic statuses, religious beliefs, regionalisms, and delusional thinking. Our leadership, such as it is, is too often characterized by the absence of imagination and an apparent megalomania, paying lip service to women but in the end replicating the familiar, lining their pockets in the process.

We can do better.

NOTES

1. Here, I am influenced by L. Randy Matory's ideas about dialogue. See, for example, Matory (2000).

2. A recent discussion on the implications of the slave trade on the global economy is Inikori (2002).

3. One should consult with Eltis, Behrendt, Richardson, and Klein (1999) for access to recent and significant quantitative information on the slave trade.

4. See Gomez (1998, pp. 286-287) on “two-headedness.”

5. Here, I borrow language from Braithwaite (1973).

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