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John McClendon & George Yancy, Co-Editors

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LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

A Special Tribute to Dr. Francis A. Thomas (1913-2001)

This issue of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* is dedicated to the memory of Dr. Francis A. Thomas. Dr. Thomas's (1913-2001) teaching career spanned from 1940 to 1997 at two historically Black institutions, Central State University and Payne Theological Seminary, both located in Wilberforce, Ohio. In addition to the tributes from William R. Jones, Jeffrey Crawford, Leonard Harris, Cheryl D. Marcus and John H. McClendon III, there were many others who made this Special Tribute to Dr. Francis A. Thomas possible. Our sincerest thanks must be extended to President John Garland and Professor Lee Ingham of Central State University for their timely assistance and steadfast encouragement. Along with writing their respective tributes, Professor Crawford and Ms. Marcus were also instrumental in gathering support for this issue of the *Newsletter* and our Tribute to Dr. Thomas. We would like to thank all who took time from their busy schedules to make this commemoration to Dr. Thomas a fitting remembrance in the pages of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience*. We would also like to acknowledge Mr. Abdelfetah Jibril of Dartmouth for his technical assistance on this issue. We will not comment on the tributes to Dr. Thomas, we will instead let each one speak for itself. For each tribute brings some unique aspect of Dr. Thomas' life into bold relief.

Shannon M. Mussett's "On the Threshold of History: The Role of Nature and Africa in Hegel's Philosophy," is an inquiry into Hegel's philosophy of history and its homologous connection to his conception of nature and geography. Dr. Mussett insightfully demonstrates that the very grounds on which Hegel constitutes European historical being and consciousness must of necessity (given Hegel's general conception of the dialectic) push Africa out of the very realm of history. For in Hegel's account of history, we have none other than Africa's locus as the 'cultural negative' to the affirmation of European history. Moreover, this dialectic plays itself out in an isomorphic manner, especially with respect to Hegel's dialectic of Nature/Spirit. Where Nature stands as a negative force to Spirit, so we find that Africa functions as the 'cultural negative' to Europe.

Our final essay, Charles Peterson's "Blowing the Cobwebs Out of Student Minds!": An Assessment of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, we return to the question of the dialectic. However, we discover

that his dialectical encounter emanates from a different standpoint than what we have examined in Mussett's essay. Yet it is in many respects decidedly closer to where Monteiro takes us with Du Bois. Dr. Peterson's central focus is to explicate Robinson's thesis about the dialectical relationship between the intellectual trajectory of Africana struggle and European Marxist traditions. What becomes salient is that this dialectic leads toward the "re-interpretation of the relationship between Marxian thought and questions of nationalism." For pedagogical purposes, Peterson pushes his students to study the Africana experience in its complexity, all along "Blowing the Cobwebs" of the minds affixed to non-dialectical thinking. I think our readers will find that all three essays are provocative philosophical approaches to exploring dialectical method.

In the first book review, philosopher Clarence Shole' Johnson, Middle Tennessee State University, has written a critically insightful review of Rosemary Cowan's *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption*. Johnson summarizes Cowan's salient concerns in three questions. Although locating points of agreement, Johnson raises very significant concerns that fundamentally challenge the implications of Cowan's thesis that Cornel West's corpus and identity can best be made sense of through viewing West as a liberation theologian. The second and third book reviews, written by historian Alphine W. Jefferson, constitute a thematic continuum exploring the lives of Joseph Gomez and Reverdy Cassius Ransom, respectively. Both of these very significant Black historical figures have tragically undergone a process of historical erasure or certainly historical amnesia. As Alphine W. Jefferson reveals in his two very insightful and informative reviews, both figures, Reverdy Cassius Ransom being the mentor of Joseph Gomez, were dedicated to issues of Black uplift and justice. They were "race men" who fought against white racism. Both embodied the vital spirit, dignity, and endurance of the AME Church; they were educators of the spirit and were political activists who manifested a combined sense of spirituality and political praxis within the context of historical hardship and existential malaise resulting from America's staunch injustice toward people of African descent.

Endnotes

1. This refers to a lyric from Parliament-Funkadelic's, "Children of Production." *The Brides of Dr. Funkenstein*. Warner Brothers Records, 1976.

TRIBUTES TO DR. FRANCIS A. THOMAS

My Tribute to a Teacher, Mentor, Philosopher and Friend: Dr. Francis A. Thomas (March 16, 1913 to September 17, 2001)

Dr. John H. McClendon III
Bates College, Lewiston, ME

As I reflect on the tremendous influence that Dr. Francis A. Thomas had on me over the years, I can truly say he epitomized, at the most pristine level, what it means to be a teacher, mentor, philosopher and friend. Frances A. Thomas was born to Alexander and Frances (Lee) Thomas, on March 16, 1913 in Wilberforce, Ohio, where his family had deep roots in the African Methodist Episcopal Church tradition. His maternal grandfather, Bishop Benjamin F. Lee, served as President of Wilberforce University. Lee assumed the helm of Wilberforce, the flagship of AME higher educational institutions, at a historic moment by immediately succeeding the tenure of the venerable Bishop Daniel A. Payne. It seems most fitting and yet ironic that Dr. Thomas would initiate and ultimately terminate his extensive teaching career at Payne Theological Seminary. Named after the aforementioned Bishop Payne and associated with Wilberforce University, Payne Theological Seminary became the place where a rather young Francis Thomas honed his skills as a provocative and stimulating teacher. Then, after his retirement from Central State University in 1978, he concluded his academic career, from 1979-1997, with teaching and administrative duties as the Dean of Payne Theological Seminary. Meanwhile, in 1981, Dr. Thomas was awarded the coveted status of Professor Emeritus of Philosophy by Central State University during the tenure of Dr. Lionel H. Newson.

My remark that it was most fitting for Thomas to start and conclude his teaching/ administrative career is self-evident. Given his family roots and ties to Payne Seminary and Wilberforce University, I see no need for any further explanation. However, perhaps my suggestion that it was ironic for him to do so does require further explanation. The core meaning of my use of 'irony' resides in the fact that Thomas was, if you will, quite unorthodox in his theological perspectives and commitments. Never one to embrace dogma and always open to the wide possibilities of various streams of thought from Situation Ethics, African Sage Philosophy, Spinoza's Pantheism, Whitehead's Process Philosophy, to the ontology of Panpsychism and the kind of Humanism embodied in Dr. William R. Jones' *Is God a White Racist?*, Dr. Thomas did not by any means portray what is generally thought of as the "typical" person who would serve in the capacity of dean of a seminary.

Dr. Francis A. Thomas's significant contribution to the history of African-American philosophy is a chapter most cherished and well known by his colleagues and many former students. Yet despite the last several years within which we have witnessed a virtual intellectual renaissance associated with the philosophy of the Black experience, Dr. Thomas remains somewhat of a secret among those who now inhabit the broader Africana philosophical community. In part, I think this lack of public recognition is due to the fact that his multitude of contributions

and accomplishments were not so much a matter of his publishing various kinds of philosophical works. Rather, Dr. Thomas's contributions are more importantly and relevantly measured by his teaching, mentoring and dialoging with students and colleagues. Moreover, his administrative role both as Chair of the Philosophy Department at Central State University and later Dean of Payne Theological Seminary did not afford him the public exposure adjoined with being employed at more prestigious white institutions. That fact harbors a tremendous narrative and testament, for it conveys that Dr. Thomas was part and parcel of the Historically Black Colleges and Universities' (HBCU) struggle to survive and flourish in the midst of white power and domination. Thomas's intellectual contributions therefore could not and did not revolve around the academic ethos of publish or perish. Rather, his motivating intellectual and political principles were "push and persist" and "survive yet resist" white supremacy, even when the financial resources were meager and more than often the acquisition of funds required going to white sources.

Thomas's lack of publications was not due to a lack of intellectual profundity, academic rigor or personal discipline. To the contrary, his teaching career, which expanded over fifty-seven years, was precisely a long legacy of critical pedagogical engagement and administrative duties at the highest level of excellence. In the period from 1948 to 1978, when Thomas was a faculty member at Central State University, his duties ranged from Chair and Professor of Philosophy and Religion to Director of the Audio-Visual Center, not to mention his numerous committee assignments and extensive teaching loads. How odd it seems that a philosopher and theologian would be saddled with the duty of running the Audio-Visual Center. The reality, however, was that Thomas held a doctorate from Indiana University, and the M.A. from Miami University, in audio-visual communications. Thomas had elected, after receiving his B.A. from Wesleyan and the B.D. from Yale University, to pursue post-baccalaureate degrees in education with an emphasis on audio-visual communications.

Yet having such diverse skills was a boon in and for the academic setting at Central State University. At a small Historically Black University, Thomas's ability to wear many hats proved to be invaluable to the mission and very survival of the institution.

Also less known was his vital role as a pioneering voice at various APA meetings. For example, Thomas called attention to the need for increased African-American representation in the professional ranks of philosophy. Along with his long-time colleague and dear friend, Dr. William R. Jones, now Professor Emeritus at Florida State University, Dr. Thomas's unrelenting fight is an unwritten chapter of a long overdue historical narrative about how our contemporary stage and status in philosophy as Black philosophers was "Born of Struggle." While Leonard Harris has successfully popularized this phrase, I am sure he learned this cardinal principle from his mentor, Francis A. Thomas.

I can still remember the day that I entered into Dr. Thomas's Introduction to Philosophy class. There was a certain air of excitement for me; this is because I came to philosophy in search of finding ways to forge a path, theoretically and conceptually, toward Black liberation. At the time, I was engaged in numerous political and social movement activities, which required leading various groups and organizations in ideological discussion and philosophical study. Philosophy for me was (and continues to be) a weapon that would aid in our understanding about how to change the world.

When I came into Dr. Thomas's class, he provided an encouraging and rich space that provided me with the opportunity to grow and enrich my understanding of philosophy in precisely the terms that emphasized Black liberation. Furthermore, he had a deep appreciation for doing philosophy from an African context. I was most elated to find out that Dr. Thomas encouraged us, his students, to explore African philosophy and its meaning for African Americans. Moreover, he welcomed radical ideas and ideals in an atmosphere filled with talk of revolution and radical change. Dr. Thomas welcomed those of us who, as activist students, were charged with a growing sense of revolutionary ambitions and responsibilities. Not one to join in with that less "progressive" segment of Central State University faculty and those who were more adverse to radical and creative alternatives to learning and thinking, Dr. Thomas consciously encouraged us, and particularly me, along the very path of revolutionary struggle and Black liberation.

Thomas's classroom instruction was always based on critical dialogue and he required us to think through our most basic assumptions and fundamental presuppositions. Countless students left his classes with a profound sense of shock as they tried to recover from his interrogations concerning their beliefs about God, morality and understanding of certain texts, such as 'The' Bible. When students would have recourse to 'The' Bible as justification for their belief in God, Dr. Thomas would then ask, 'which Bible?' or 'which set of ten commandments?'

I will never forget my own class presentation, which was a talk on Nkrumah's *Consciencism* and his defense of materialism. Dr. Thomas questioned how 'dead matter' could be the ontological grounds for our dynamic life processes. He and I immediately embarked upon a critical discussion of dialectical materialism, process philosophy and panpsychism for an extended period long after the class had terminated.

Over the years, after my graduation from Central State University, Dr. Thomas and I continued to engage in jointly enthusiastic philosophical discussions. It was his sense of dry wit and intellectual humor, which he interjected from time to time within the course of the most profound philosophical dialogue, which I will always cherish. He was less one to lecture and more inclined toward asking thought-provoking questions that demanded further discussion. The consummate teacher, wise mentor and dear friend, he always accepted my invitations. Whether it was to have lunch in Wilberforce, to lecture on African philosophy and religion at the University of Missouri, or appear on my television talk show, *The McClendon Report*, and share his insights into the African philosophical and religious roots of African-American Culture, Dr. Thomas enthusiastically made himself available.

Quite a number of years ago when I was preparing a working paper on Afro-American philosophers, at the University of Illinois, I called Dr. Thomas to see if he was working on any kind of manuscript for publication. He said that his project was to be entitled, "A Philosophy for the Small Planet Earth."

Although he did not complete that manuscript, he provided for many, and especially this author, philosophical insights into changing the small planet earth. Equally as important, he offered to many of us—his former students, colleagues and friends—the requisite inspiration to continue the struggle for the transformation of the earth's rather huge but not insurmountable problems. This tribute to Dr. Francis A. Thomas is foremost an acknowledgement of his courage to stand and fight, his wisdom to teach and counsel, and his tenacity to preserve and enrich what is today for many of us, who knowingly or unknowingly

stand on his shoulders, an important dialectical moment in the flowering of Africana philosophy. Although he died on September 17, 2001, may his memory live on as the coming generation of scholars, students and activists are destined to take up his call for the advancement of *Philosophy and the Black Experience*. Dr. Thomas's legacy will always live as long as each of us continues to forge a philosophy of liberation for *The Small Planet Earth*.

William R. Jones

Professor Emeritus, Florida State University, FL

Dear Francis,

Your contribution to the liberation struggle of African Americans has gone unrecognized and underappreciated—except by those who have benefited so much from your exquisite mentoring and unselfish encouragement. As those like myself became acquainted with you and your work, the unsung merit of your work and its foundational excellence was illuminated. Looking beyond the easily surmised and easily accepted, you pioneered out onto the cutting edge of intellectual pursuit, illuminating for us verities that were invisible to most of your contemporaries.

And as your calculus to enhance and enlarge our understanding of our increasingly volatile "small planet earth" emerges more visibly from the conceptual incarceration of mis-religion and Miseducation that you demystified, Frederick Herzog's fateful prediction about black theology, will also embrace your intellectual legacy: ["Francis Thomas's"] work forces us to raise questions about the very foundation of black religion and philosophy. By the time we have understood what it is all about, we will have realized that the whole structure of theology and philosophy will have to be rethought."

Let this occasion of grateful remembrance and recognition initiate that reconstruction we so desperately need.

Yours still in the struggle,

William "Bill" Jones

In Memory of Francis A. Thomas

Jeff Crawford, Professor of Philosophy

Central State University, Wilberforce, OH

I met Francis Thomas in the summer of 1975, and worked directly with him until his retirement three years later. He gave me much: inspiration, direction, and my first and last postgraduate school job, one that has lasted twenty-eight years. He also gave me a copy of Gayraud Wilmore's *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* with the inscription "To Jeff, Who is beginning to understand. Francis."

I was instructed when we met face-to-face to call him anything but Dr. Thomas. "Francis," "F.A.," even, he said, "Thomas." My first contact was a brief phone call in which he asked me whether I was primarily interested in teaching or research. I said teaching. I guess my answers to that and his other questions were close enough, because he told me to come down to Central State. I asked if I should come down for an interview. He told me I had just had the interview.

Francis Thomas didn't mess around. His main piece of advice about how philosophy should be taught was that thinking

was like eating and going to the bathroom: you have to do it for yourself.

The book for Intro to Problems in Philosophy (two sections) had already been ordered. I told him I planned to let students review the book and make their own decisions about what they wanted to learn and how. After a week both sections were in full revolt. "You're not teaching." "Why aren't you doing your job?" "Tell us what we're supposed to learn." I thought I could handle it, but I was getting a little worried. Francis's take was simple: That's what you wanted, isn't it?

Francis Thomas was forthright. Not long after I got to Central State, he filled me in on how I got the job. The other person in the department had resigned in the early summer. Francis told me that he called various contacts trying to locate an African American who was just finishing a degree or was ABD. No luck. "So," he said, "I started calling around to the urban graduate schools to see if I could find someone who had at least taught black students." His call to Wayne State in Detroit netted me.

Francis Thomas was skeptical, pragmatic, and visionary. He saw analytic philosophy as sterile, unable to challenge an unjust status quo. He was skeptical of most religiously-based philosophy, which he saw as "thought gone on a holiday." To be of use, philosophy, like science and its applications, needed precision. Philosophy, like science and life, was best when motivated by love. Faith of whatever stripe was best when provisional and when tested through engagement. Francis Thomas was a liberation philosopher on a criterion analogous to James Cone's for theology: Any philosophy worth its salt had to be of use in liberation. His primary institutional affiliation after retiring from Central State was as Academic Dean of Payne Theological Seminary. He knew chaos theory before it had a name.

Think, understand, and live in spirals and spheres, not in lines. Keep faith with ancestors as you prepare to join them.

Francis Thomas: Gate Keeper

Leonard Harris

Purdue University, IN

I was an undergraduate student at Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio between 1966 and 1969. It was in the spring of my last year that Professor Francis Thomas, Chairman of the Department of Philosophy, approached me outside of my dormitory. I had no idea of what he wanted. At first, I was simply afraid that I was, again, in some sort of trouble. I was hippie by all accounts, and a Black power advocate by those who knew me. I wore yellow bellbottom blue jeans, sported Afro hair, and dandelions behind my ears, never shaved and wrote poetry. I supported just about any protest, but unlike far too many radicals that dedicated their time to protesting and organizing protest, I was rather studious. So, when Professor Thomas approached me, I assumed that I must be in trouble because of some recent protest.

Professor Thomas either told me that I was going to Miami University to attend graduate school in philosophy or he asked me in such a way that I assumed that I was being told. In either event, I remember clearly that I was going to Miami University because they had an opening for a Negro. Professor Thomas told me that he had read my poetry and my philosophy papers and that my aptitude was not in literature, but prose. I was told to report to his office the next day and fill out a form.

I thought that Miami University was in Florida. I had no idea that it was in Oxford, Ohio. I also had no idea that I would receive a teaching assistantship, nor did I know what a teaching

assistant was supposed to do. I knew that the only way Blacks were admitted to institutions of higher education was if they were at the absolute top of their class or they were selected for affirmative action reasons. I was elated. I had no job, no idea about what to do after a life of undergraduate protesting, and no idea of how to use philosophy. But once I was at Miami University, I knew exactly what to do – propose and teach a course on Black philosophy. I do not think that Robert Harris, the "contact" who called Professor Thomas to recruit me, nor my advisor, Carl Hedman, knew exactly what to do with me other than approve of my request/demand. They were gracious and helpful. The syllabus for that course was not all that different from current courses—themes of justice, inequality, racism, pacifism, and revolutionary violence. I showed pictures of Black people being lynched and played jazz. However, I was troubled by the lack of resources I could find on philosophy by Blacks. I put together what I could and vowed to go ask Professor Thomas for guidance.

Driving from Miami University to Cornell University in the summer of 1970, I stopped at Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio to see Professor Thomas. I asked him to tell me about the history of Black philosophers. He looked at me in utter amazement. What history? I asked him to tell me about his publications. He told that that was not a focus of his work, but rather, he was focusing on educational administration. I was devastated.

I sojourned on to Cornell University to pursue my doctorate. In 1973, I began looking for a position as an ABD. I landed one interview. I interviewed for a faculty position at Northwestern University. The interview included discussions with faculty members (including one from South Africa who considered Negroes an "odd sort of being"), the presentation of a paper (on Marx's philosophic anthropology) and a dinner. After the dinner, I was politely informed that I had been interviewed in order to satisfy the requirements for affirmative action hiring procedures. I was thanked for coming. Feeling worse than devastated, I went home to my wife and child, unemployed and with no prospects of employment. One week later I received a telephone call from Professor Thomas with a job prospect at Central State University. I interviewed and was hired.

As a faculty member and administrator at Central State I taught a course on Black philosophy. I again asked Professor Thomas about Black philosophers and again he was elusive. My seething desire for more information remained, and bit by bit, year after year, I met more Black philosophers and ran across more information on the history of African Americans in philosophy. Professor Thomas had opened the gate, stood by the gate, and allowed me to not just walk through the gate, but his stalwart support made it possible for me to help re-define the role of a gatekeeper.

Gatekeepers no longer have to just be the person whites call to select a 'proper' Negro to fit their programs while simultaneously remaining in the shadows. Gatekeepers can publish. Gatekeepers can help uncover the history of African Americans in philosophy and make history. Gatekeepers can participate in shaping graduate programs and educating students at the graduate level. It was the help, trust, respect, and recognition accorded me by Professor Thomas that made my life possible.

In May 2003, at the Second Black Atlantic Community Conference: Black Being and Consciousness, I presented a discussion on cosmopolitanism and race at Central State University. I brought packages of Purdue University information and applications for admission to graduate school (I've been at Purdue since 1991). I encouraged students to continue their education and pursue doctorate degrees. I mentioned to some potential

students in philosophy that Jason Hill, author and director of graduate studies at DePaul University, Darryl Scriven, author and new scholar on David Walker at Southern University, Sally Scholz, Director of Graduate Studies at Vanderbilt, and Alain Locke scholar, Daphne Rolle, author and first African-American woman since 1927 to receive a doctorate degree under the dissertation committee head of an African-American, now at Indiana University, Erin McKenna, author and organizer of Alain Locke sessions at the Society for the Advancement of American Philosophy, were only a few examples of Black, white, and a-racial persons knowledgeable about issues and works by African-American philosophers and scholars of their own lights. I tried to convince students that it is possible to be a professional philosopher if you passed through the gate that Central State University and its faculty had made possible. I later had the great honor of spending time with Central State University's President, John W. Garland, Esq., a former classmate at Central and now the guiding hand of Central's emergence as a strong institution. Although Professor Thomas was not in the audience, or at the home of President Garland, his soul shadow had been cast.

I saw Professor Thomas for the last time in October of 1993, at Central State University. I presented two papers, "The Concept of Racism and Postmodernism," and "Alain Locke's Value Theory." Professor Thomas came to the later paper and smiled. I never had an opportunity to properly thank him. It is with the deepest respect and recognition that I offer my personal history as one small testimony to the grand accomplishments of Professor Francis Thomas.

Tribute to Francis A. Thomas, Ed.D.

Cheryl D. Marcus, M.Ed.

Central State University, Wilberforce, OH

As a first year student, I entered Central State University in the fall of 1975. As a philosophy major, Dr. Francis A. Thomas was my advisor. Throughout the years since my undergraduate days, I have reflected on my college classroom experience in general and most fondly on my experiences in my philosophy courses. Francis Thomas taught me in courses such as Introduction to Philosophy, Logic and Communication, and Philosophy of Science. A memorable characteristic of F.A. Thomas centers on his expectation for students' responsibility for their own learning. I have come to believe that Dr. Thomas did not view philosophy as a series of courses in which students sit and listen passively to the professor's lectures. Instead, I believe that he viewed the study of philosophy as the free engagement of dialogue and shared ideas.

The one interesting behavior he exhibited daily was his entrance to class a few minutes after the students. Upon his entry he would immediately ask a question. If no one in class would respond to the question, he would say OK and would leave the classroom. On his way out, he would tell us to let him know when we were ready to talk. As a first year student, the first time he walked out of the class, the other students and I were stunned. We sat in our seats and looked at each other and tried to figure out our response. He, of course, would return to the classroom, and then conversations amongst him and the students would ensue.

His strategy to get students to talk and share their ideas was based on his desire and belief that philosophical issues

could not be explored or appreciated in a lecture format—but could best be understood and communicated with others when all persons engaged in the dialogue. More importantly, for the African-American students from urban communities, he expected us to come to understand issues of religion, education, economics, and the social condition of human existence through the intersection of the readings with the free expression of our personal beliefs and concerns.

Francis A. Thomas, Ed.D., will always be remembered for his warm smile, the smell of his pipe, his small yet quick steps across the campus, and his consistent response of "I don't know" to questions raised by students about the essence of life.

On the Threshold of History: The Role of Nature and Africa in Hegel's Philosophy

Shannon M. Mussett

Utah Valley State College, Orem, UT

Introduction

This paper takes up Hegel's analysis of nature and geography and the resulting determination of Africa as an entirely unhistorical continent. I argue that Hegel needs Africa as a cultural negative to Europe just as Spirit requires Nature as a negative force against which to define itself. Yet the negative definition of both Africa and Nature is contradictory, in that they both prefigure the emergence of European culture and Absolute Spirit respectively. In the case of Africans and Nature, Hegel maintains that both are implicitly rational, yet not actually so. He reaches this conclusion due to the immanent necessity of his system, which requires a negative boundary to every positively defined facet. In the case of Africa, Hegel fuses the natural and the human into a geographical and anthropological negative that functions as the threshold of the spiritual, unfettered, and self-determining European ideal.

The character of physical and temporal place has an unusual role in Hegel's philosophical discussions of Nature and history. In general, the position that human beings occupy in a given historical and cultural period always appears as naturally enforced rather than self-consciously chosen. Thus, at any given point in history, the geographical and anthropological situation of a people appears to them as the natural order. This is a striking claim for Hegel to make because he is the self-proclaimed thinker of the end of history. Consequently, from *his* perspective, different geographical and anthropological developments contribute to a teleological development of self-conscious freedom in Spirit (*Geist*). This historical development culminates in the free State. Toward the conclusion of *The Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes,

History is the mind clothing itself with the form of events or is immediate natural actuality (*unmittelbaren natürlich Wirklichkeit*). The stages of its development are therefore presented as immediate natural principles. These, because they are natural, are a plurality external to one another, and they are present therefore in such a way that each of them is assigned to one nation in the external form of its geographical and anthropological existence (*Existenz*).¹

It is only at the end of history, with the emergence of a free State, that the geographical and anthropological conditions of a given people are understood to be part of a larger, necessary development of freedom. In any given

historical epoch previous to or even contemporaneous with (but developmentally inferior to) the State, the geographical and anthropological conditions have the form of the natural order of the world. What then, is the status of those communities that never move beyond the natural order and thus never enter into the historical movement toward the free State? If Hegel is concerned with the progressive development of historical actualization, what is the fate of the peoples excluded from history?

To answer these questions, I focus in particular on Hegel's treatment of Africa. Through the lens of the African continent, this paper investigates the claims made by Hegel that certain societies are excluded from history because of their geographical and anthropological situations. I begin with an analysis of the macrocosmic relationship between Nature and Spirit in Hegel's theory. After showing how Hegel uses Nature as a necessary limit to, and collaborator of, Spirit's perfection, I then show how Hegel repeats this construction at the level of Africa, where the continent serves as the geographical and cultural limit to European freedom. This limit hinges on Hegel's utilization of a geographical, and hence natural basis to argue the anthropological inferiority of Africans. He employs this characterization of Africans as exemplary of "natural man" with the purpose of providing an "unfree" and irrational limit to European progress.

In the macrocosmic employment of Nature as the absolute negative and irrational (or prerational) force acting against free, self-determining Spirit, we can see Hegel's emphasis on Africa as playing the same role to European achievement. From Hegel's position of Africa as dominated by natural determination, we can attempt to unravel Hegel's claims that "What we properly understand by Africa, is the Unhistorical, Undeveloped Spirit, still involved in the conditions of mere nature, and which had to be presented here only as on the threshold of the World's History."² Africa's configuration at the border of history is largely constituted by its relationship to its geography because it remains trapped by its own natural landscape and climate. As such, Africans embody the "natural soul" which does not overcome its materiality. Contrasted with this, Europe's relationship to its geographical surroundings is such that it *overcomes* its natural boundaries and thus triumphs over its geographical and climatic limitations.

For Hegel, the natural world functions as the threshold of both limitation and surpassing. As limitation, Africa figures as the necessary unhistorical boundary against which to gauge the beginnings of history. As surpassing, Europe emerges as the pinnacle of historical development through the overcoming of natural conditions.

I argue that the way in which Hegel describes Africa as entirely "unhistorical" is grounded in a conflictual account of its geographical configuration as hot, dry, and lacking in major waterways, as compared to Europe, which (as the flowering of World History) has a moderate climate surrounded by seas. Even though Hegel grounds this difference between the continents on geography, he himself will admit that the physical land proper is not *in itself* historical. Thus, Hegel's analysis of Africa as wholly unhistorical turns out to be a thinly veiled prop used as a natural foil to Europe's humanity.

Part One: Freedom and Nature in Hegel's System

According to Hegel, freedom is characterized by self-determination and the absence of any form of alterity which would function as a limitation. The development of humanity out of natural life and into history requires a thoroughly temporal realization of freedom. This realization occurs in historical stages and is told from the viewpoint of Spirit, which moves from an immediate

consciousness of itself as essentially free to a mediated self-consciousness of this freedom. For Hegel, history ends with the present moment of the completed development of the Absolute Spirit.³ This is not to say that progress stops with Hegel's conclusions, only that we have now reached a self-conscious awareness of history as such. This translates into our ability to look back at history and not merely see a hodgepodge of random events that are unrelated to each other, but instead to grasp each major epoch in humanity as part of the larger, rational development of freedom. Although in Spirit at the beginnings of humanity, the implicit Concept (*Begriff*) of freedom must traverse a long and arduous path where it becomes explicit to itself in history. To understand this process is to grasp *universal* history which "shows the development of the consciousness of Freedom on the part of Spirit, and of the consequent realization of that Freedom. This development implies a gradation—a series of increasingly adequate expressions or manifestations of Freedom, which result from its Idea."⁴ Thus, each major historical advancement makes freedom more *explicit* and thus more adequate to its goal in the fully actualized Idea (*Idee*). Although the Concept of freedom is *implicit* in all cultures and all times in which humanity exists, certain cultures and certain historical periods play fundamental roles in the *advancement* of freedom's becoming explicit to itself. Once a culture has played its developmental role, Spirit leaves this culture behind and moves to the next time and place in its progressive drive to know itself. Accordingly, major world civilizations play a role in the development of freedom, but they play it only once and then fall back into the memory of universal history. And some civilizations, such as those found in Africa, never play a role at all.

Only when we comprehend this progressive movement can we understand the current stage of World history as the culmination of a number of previous stages. At each stage along the way—be it the ancient Oriental world, the Greek world, the Enlightenment, etc.—the Spirit of the age appears as the natural order. The way society is structured, the products of human industry, and the cultural institutions remain, to greater or lesser degrees, *external* to the societies in which they are manifest, rather than appearing as spontaneous creations of Spirit. At the end of history then, humanity recognizes that it is not determined by external forces but is instead self-determining. The concrete manifestation of this self-determination is the free State where individuals recognize their individual freedom in an existing, universal institution. The modern State is the objectification of man's rational will and is the concrete actualization of his implicit freedom.⁵

Hegel's emphasis on the historical and experiential development of Spirit makes the relationship to brute nature problematic. His encyclopedic system begins in abstract, *a priori* Logic, moves into sheer determinate Nature, and concludes with a synthesis of the two in Spirit.⁶ The starting point in Logic "is the exposition of God as he is in his eternal essence before the creation of nature and a finite mind."⁷ The *Logic* concludes with the emergence of the Absolute Idea, which is the fully actualized thought of God. According to dialectical movement, the Absolute Idea because it is still abstract, necessarily passes into its concrete opposite, Nature. But this externalizing movement from the inwardness of thought into the externality (*Äußerlichkeit*) of nature is cast as a corrosion of the perfection of thought. Nature, therefore, has "been spoken of as the *self-degradation* (*Abfall*) of the Idea, in that the Idea, in this form of externality, is in a disparity (*Unangemessenheit*) with its own self."⁸ Nature thus appears as thoroughly imbued with externality (which is the opposite of the *inwardness* of truth) to the Idea which was its predecessor. It

emerges out of the Idea but simultaneously remains wholly other to it.

The relationship between Nature and Spirit is no less problematic, and follows along the same lines of discussion. In the opening *Zusatz* of *The Philosophy of Nature*, Hegel explains that, “Nature confronts us as a riddle and a problem, whose solution both attracts and repels us: attracts us, because Spirit is presaged in Nature; repels us, because Nature seems an alien existence, in which Spirit does not find itself.”⁹ Thus Nature is a necessary corollary to Spirit because freedom is foreshadowed (or implicit) in it but this freedom is never actualized in Nature proper. Nature, it turns out, is connected to Spirit, as it is its necessary other, but Nature does not *cause* Spirit to exist. Consequently, Nature is not actually spiritual but is rather *related* to Spirit as only the ground or prefiguration of it. In itself then, Nature is an irresolvable enigma that pesters abstract logical thought and experiential Spirit because of its elusivity—elusive because it both beckons and repels these two realms to which it is connected.¹⁰

Part of what contributes to its limiting and enigmatic character is the fact that “Nature exhibits no freedom in its existence, but only *necessity* and *contingency*.”¹¹ Yet, Nature is not so other to Spirit and thought that it does not in any way interact with them. Nature is unfree in its determinations, but it is *implicitly* free. Thus nature, although capricious and contingent, is the ground for the development of freedom because it is inherently free. In fact, Spirit is responsible for *liberating* Nature from its unfreedom by knowing and experiencing, and thereby idealizing Nature.¹² Hegel explains that the study of Nature is the liberation of Spirit within her because “implicitly she is Reason, but it is through Spirit that Reason as such first emerges from Nature into existence. Spirit has the certainty which Adam had when he looked on Eve: ‘This is flesh of my flesh, and bone of my bone.’ Thus Nature is the bride which Spirit weds.”¹³ Like Eve, Nature is the derivative element that is implicitly rational, but is not in itself rational. In addition, Nature, like Eve, is raised into Reason through being wed to the Spirit of man (or Adam). We may conclude from this that without Spirit, Nature would be lost in irrationality, but with Spirit, Nature can be liberated from its enslavement to necessity and caprice through its idealization.

Hegel repeats this structure of the implicitly free and therefore slavish character of the natural world in his discussions of Africans. Before the encounter with European influence, Africans remain thoroughly unhistorical and thus unfree, prerational, and enslaved to natural circumstances. But through Europe’s influence, Africans exhibit the potential to become rational. It is here where the confining, natural (i.e., geographical and climatic) conditions of Africa proper come to the foreground.

Part Two: Geography and History in Africa

At this point, we turn to the way in which Hegel uses physical nature to construct a prison in which to keep Africa from the theater of world history. Of utmost importance in the constitution of Africa as natural (and therefore unhistorical) is the fact that for Hegel, race and geography are intimately tied together. This association is created by the very shape and contours of the earth itself:

According to the concrete differences of the terrestrial globe, the general planetary life of the Natural Spirit (*Naturgeistes*) specializes itself and breaks up into the several Natural spirits (*Naturgeister*) which, on the whole, give expression to the nature of the geographical continents and constitute the diversities of *race*.¹⁴

In fact, race is the first physical characteristic of any importance that the geographical configurations of the earth

generate. Hegel considers race to be a *natural* quality of a people and therefore directly caused by the natural world in which it emerges.

Because race is natural and yet clearly occupies an important role in the exclusion of societies from spiritual history, we begin to see the way in which Hegel uses nature in a directly causal manner. Robert Bernasconi attempts to put Hegel on trial for his decision to exclude Africa from history in his article, “Hegel at the Court of Ashanti.” In the rich analysis of Hegel’s sources, Bernasconi writes that Hegel was influenced by the volume on Africa written by the famous 19th century geographer, Karl Ritter, who was his colleague at the University of Berlin. Bernasconi notes that Ritter’s work on African geography “seems to have been a source only for the initial geographical division of Africa, and not for the details that follow.”¹⁵ Bernasconi is correct in assessing Ritter’s influence on Hegel’s discussion of the geographical determinations of Africa and I argue below that these determinations are immensely important philosophically. In fact, the geographical and climatic descriptions of Africa are the primary justification that Hegel uses to exclude Africa from history.

Although Nature is understood in a number of different senses, one of the senses that Hegel employs is the natural layout of the physical landscape, the temperature, and the impacts these forces have on the societal organization of a people. In the “Introduction” to the *Philosophy of History*, Hegel devotes a special section to the “Geographical Basis of History” which addresses these issues specifically. In the opening sentences of this passage, Hegel explains that the “*natural* connection that helps to produce the Spirit of a People, appears as an extrinsic element; but inasmuch as we must regard it as the ground on which that Spirit plays its part, it is an *essential* and *necessary* basis.”¹⁶ Thus, natural geography and climate are necessary as the foundation out of which the Spirit of an individual people *and* the absolute Spirit emerge. Just as Nature in general is both derived from and external to Spirit, the physical surrounding of a culture is both outside of and necessarily connected to the development of its own national Spirit. Bernasconi acknowledges the impact that nature has on the development of Spirit as Hegel attempts to avoid a metaphysical dualism: “if their relation is...not to be a dualism in which spirit has an abstract form independent of nature, nature must be a determining factor.”¹⁷ Hegel thus simultaneously asserts that the natural element of a people remains external to society but also offers itself as a ground or stage upon which Spirit plays itself out. Thus, natural conditions are both unspiritual *and* give rise to Spirit.

The given geography of a place is one of the natural distinctions that provide the soil from which the spirit of a people emerges. The geographical layout, or the “natural type of the locality...[is] intimately connected with the type and character of the people which is the offspring of such a soil.”¹⁸ As Hegel explains, without the Greek sky, there would have been no Homer, but “Nature should not be rated too high nor too low; the mild Ionic sky certainly contributed much to the charm of the Homeric poems, yet this alone can produce no Homers.”¹⁹ Certain geographical and climatic conditions are thus more or less conducive to fostering Spirit’s development.

In terms of the climate’s effects on the development of Spirit, Hegel dismisses Africa in the first place because it is simply too hot. Unlike Africa, Hegel emphasizes, “the true theater of History is ... the temperate zone; or, rather, its northern half,” or rather, Europe proper “because the earth there presents itself in a continental form, and has a broad breast, as the Greeks say.”²⁰

Europe's moderate climate is in direct contrast to the extreme zones of cold and heat in which human beings are constantly occupied with directing their attention to Nature merely in order to survive. Consequently, Hegel attributes Africa's exclusion from World History essentially to the sweltering climate:

We must first take notice of those natural conditions which have to be excluded once and for all from the drama of the World's History. In the Frigid and in the Torrid zone the locality of World-historical peoples cannot be found. For awakening consciousness takes its rise surrounded by natural influences alone, and every development of it is the reflection of Spirit back upon itself in opposition to the immediate, unreflected character of mere nature.²¹

Nature, although it conflicts with Spirit, must still be manageable for Spirit. In the lands where there is extreme heat and cold, Nature is too powerful to overcome and thus human beings are never able to extract themselves from the natural world and come to understand themselves as free. In the extreme climates, the forces of Nature are simply too overwhelming and combating them takes a demanding and relentless vigilance. What is interesting in Hegel's dismissal of the frigid and torrid zones is two-fold. On the one hand, Hegel, the philosopher of extremes *par excellence*, dismisses extreme climatic conditions as impediments rather than preconditions to the awakening of human consciousness. The question naturally arises as to why such extreme conditions are excluded from History, rather than being the basis for it. On the other hand, Hegel spends little time dismissing the frigid zones of the earth as unphilosophical and devotes the bulk of the discussion to the torrid zones, which are exemplified by the African continent. Hegel leaves the discussion of the colder zones aside because African "immaturity" presents such a perfect foil for the emergence of European "maturity." Hegel needs Africa as the natural limit to historical humanity just as much as he needs the natural limit to his philosophical system in general.

Hegel begins his discussion of geography and its relationship to historical development by dividing it into three essential and rational categories: 1) the arid elevated land of steppes and plains, 2) the transitional land of valley plains which are littered with great rivers and, 3) the coastal region immediately connected to the sea.²² Africa is grouped into the first kind of geographical landscape while Europe belongs to the third.²³ The superiority of the coastal lands over the arid lands lies in the prevalence of water in the former. Hegel explains that "nothing unites so much as water" because "The sea gives us the idea of the indefinite, the unlimited, and infinite; and in *feeling his own infinite* in that Infinite, man is stimulated and emboldened to stretch beyond the limited."²⁴ Thus, those pockets of civilization that are concentrated along the sea are consequently those peoples who first learn to transcend their finitude by tackling the seemingly infinite oceans. This is why all of the lands of the "Old World" which border on the Mediterranean Sea come to play a prominent role at some point in world history. As Hegel claims, "Without it [the Mediterranean Sea] the History of the World could not be conceived."²⁵

True to the triadic form, Hegel asserts that all three of the aforementioned geographical landscapes can themselves be divided according to the same determinations. He begins with a description of the layout of the African continent in great detail so as to justify how its geographical condition causes it to be compressed within itself and its people to remain in a state of unreflective childhood. This is unexpected given that Hegel locates uplands, coastlands, and valley-lands in Africa. The upland lies south of the Sahara desert and is deemed "Africa proper" and is "almost entirely unknown to us." The second area is the river region of the Nile and is defined more by its

connection to Asia than it is on its own terms. Finally, the coastland lies north of the Sahara and is called by Hegel, "European Africa (if we may so call it)."²⁶ Although clearly Hegel believes that "Africa proper" is at the lowest stage of geographical and thus spiritual development, it seems that, on the surface, Africa's geography will allow it to play a role in historical development. However, Hegel takes a different turn:

Africa proper, as far as History goes back, has remained—for all purposes of connection with the rest of the World—shut up; it is the Gold-land compressed within itself—the land of childhood, which lying beyond the day of self-conscious history, is enveloped in the dark mantle of Night. Its isolated character originates, not merely in its tropical nature, but essentially in its geographical condition.²⁷

Regardless of the fact that Africa contains all three of the main geographical divisions, "Africa proper" is distinguished from the rest of the world by being shut up within itself in a perpetual state of childhood.

Understanding what Hegel means by defining Africa proper as "shut-up" and "compressed within itself" is aided by Karl Ritter's analysis of African geography. Ritter claims that Africa has the "least contact with the ocean of all the continents" and is thus the least subject to "oceanic influences."²⁸ Using Hegel's aforementioned discussion of the influence of the sea on the development of Spirit, we can see that part of what Hegel means by the shut-up and compressed nature of Africa is its lack of contact with the physical sign of the infinite. Of course, this requires omitting much of the lands that actually constitute the African continent and lie on major waterways. Ritter further defines African geography as the most simple, having "the most uniform contour of all the continents,"²⁹ and that the African mainland is "a trunk without articulation: a mere compact continental mass."³⁰ This geographical description, far from being merely the starting point of Hegel's discussion, infuses the entire characterization of Africa and its inhabitants as simple, unvaried and unhistorical. In short, because of the land that they occupy, Africans are the perpetual children of history. Hegel claims African "Negroes are to be regarded as a race of children who remain immersed in their state of uninterested *naïveté*." In fact, "their mentality is quite dormant, remaining sunk within itself and making no progress, and thus corresponding to the compact, differenceless mass of the African continent."³¹

Echoing Ritter's geographical discussions of Africa, Hegel is able to reduce Africa to merely the southern, innermost areas of the continent. In fact, Hegel dismisses two of the three geographical divisions by claiming that its northern lands are not, strictly speaking, Africa proper. Having no historical movement of its own, whatever historical movements might be evident "in its northern part—belong to the Asiatic or European world."³² Thus locales such as Carthage and Egypt are historically important only insofar as they play a role in Asiatic and European cultures, but not insofar as they are part of the African continent. In fact, all of northern Africa which lies on the Mediterranean and the Atlantic "must be attached to Europe... like Hither-Asia, it looks Europe-wards."³³ Thus, in one grand gesture, Hegel portions off Northern Africa as merely a prefiguration of Europe so that he can deal with the rest of Africa proper. In his work, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*, Molefi Kete Asante rightly points out that this division was a "false division" of the African continent; "a division superimposed on the land, not by the people of the continent themselves, but by European historians, anthropologists, and colonial administrators who said Africa consisted of Asian Africa, European Africa and Africa proper."³⁴ Hegel's division of the

African continent does not adhere to the logic of his own system which promises to treat the African continent as a geographical and anthropological whole. Such a parceling up does little to describe the actual historical developments of Africa on its own terms and merely serves to buttress Hegel's claims concerning the historical centrality of Europe.

Part Three: The Anthropology of Africa

Hegel's characterization of Africans as unhistorical translates into a conviction that Africans have never changed: "The Africans of Hegel's time were, he insisted, the same as they have always been. This was what Hegel meant by saying that Africa is unhistorical."³⁵ I have argued that it is necessary to preserve the active role that geography and climate play in this characterization in order to see how Africans have not developed historically. Since Hegel must maintain that Africans are at least *implicitly* rational because they are human, there must be another factor operative in their arrestment as the prerational children of world history. That factor is their association and equation with Nature proper. Constantly absorbed in combating the extreme heat and the shut-up, enclosed layout of their continent, Africans cannot achieve spiritual liberation without outside help and guidance. In this light, we can see the forces of Nature in Hegel's system as continuously working to keep Africans subordinate and even enslaved to their European (and American) betters.

Bernasconi argues that Hegel's colonialism supported the idea of enslaving Africans as the first step in educating them toward freedom, but that this claim makes sense "especially if the comments about climate with which Hegel began could somehow be minimized."³⁶ Bernasconi goes on to say that, by the conclusion of Hegel's discussion of Africa, the constraints of climate (let alone geography) are "somewhat forgotten."³⁷

On the contrary, I argue that only by *emphasizing* Hegel's comments on African climate and geography can we understand Hegel's characterization of Africans as childlike, slavish, and unhistorical. In this light, we understand the weight of geography and climate on African culture is much more pronounced than on most other cultures and therefore more damning to their development. Taking his cue from Ritter's claims that in Africa, "the characteristics of race remain in their primitive condition, and have made no progress with the lapse of time: this region seems to be kept as the refuge of a yet undeveloped future,"³⁸ Hegel himself is able to maintain the unhistorical nature of Africa as well as to point to the arrival of a new age in which Africa, through its contact with Europe, can finally enter into history.

Before turning to Hegel's discussion of the integration of Africa into history, it is crucial to draw out the anthropological implications of the African continent and people as somehow more natural. Africa and Africans are initially excluded from history because of their geographical location and their tropical climate, and Hegel emphasizes that the Africans' lack of historical impact results from their character as natural human beings. Hegel explains that "Negroes" lack the universality of thought necessary for comprehending a monotheistic God or Law as embodied in the State. Rather, the Negro "exhibits the natural man in his completely wild and untamed state." In fact, "there is nothing harmonious with humanity to be found in this type of character."³⁹ For Hegel, Africans are wholly dependent upon a capricious nature that they attempt to subdue through magic, rather than recognizing their dependence upon a Higher Being. This recognition and dependence is necessary to arrive at consciousness of a Higher Being so that humans can attain a consciousness of *themselves* as the Highest. The closest Africans come to the threshold of Spirit is the worship of the dead which, of course, confines them at the threshold of the eternal life of Spirit.⁴⁰ And yet, unlike Native Americans who are entirely without value for Hegel "the Negroes are far more susceptible

of European culture."⁴¹ Therefore, even though they have no recognition of God or the State on their own, they are still predisposed to European education.

But, as he does with Nature (which he views as a degradation of the Idea and also as a prefiguration of Spirit) Hegel has an ambiguous interpretation of Africa. Although Africans are receptive to Europe's influences, they are also the absolute negative of European enlightenment. Instead of merely being shut up within itself and being excluded from World History because of geography and climate, Africa also gets cast as the dark underside of humanity—it becomes the negative of all that will come to fruition in Europe. In short, Africa assumes the role of the negative community just as Nature came to be the negative of Spirit. Recall that Nature is characterized as the limit or threshold of both the Idea and Spirit; it is that contradictory and capricious realm that beckons and frustrates Spirit. Without Nature, there could be no completion of logic or phenomenology as Nature functions as a negative limitation to both. But Nature, in its unfreedom and determinacy, is essentially antithetical to the freedom of self-determination. Since Hegel needs Africa as a cultural negative to Europe just as Logic and Spirit need the negative of Nature, not only must Africa be the territory of "natural man," as explicated above, it must also be the *opposite* (or absolute negative) of the essence of free humanity. Hegel is all too eager to provide a description of Africans that fits this account. He writes,

Negroes indulge, therefore, that perfect *contempt* for humanity, which...is the fundamental characteristic of the race...the undervaluing of humanity among them reached an incredible degree of intensity. Tyranny is regarded as no wrong, and cannibalism is looked upon as quite customary and proper.⁴²

No longer merely portrayed as simply natural, Africans become the epitome of the forces of anti-humanity. They are quite content not only to consume other human beings (because they lack the self-reflection requisite to comprehend humanity's essence as freedom) but they are also quite fitted for slavery because tyranny is their natural state of affairs. Not wanting to condone the practice of slavery in any way, Hegel still wants to explain, if not justify, the condition of slavery among Negroes as a direct result of their natural ties. Lacking moral sentiments in general, Negroes buy and sell each other in Africa and do not contest such practices in America. In Africa (and clearly in America too, albeit in a different form⁴³) they need the rule of a despotic monarch who maintains the community by sheer external force. This is because they simply cannot recognize their humanity reflected back to them in the form of the free State. It is safe to say that Africans are still human beings for Hegel, but that their humanity is not actualized. Because of this, they do not regard slavery as unjust or just, but merely as part of the natural order.

In light of the foregoing analysis, Hegel makes a most unanticipated claim in his section, "Anthropology": "Man is implicitly rational; herein lies the possibility of equal justice for all men and the futility of a rigid distinction between races which have rights and those which have none."⁴⁴ With this remarkable claim, Hegel does not advocate that the differences between people are *spiritually* determined, but are merely natural differences that belong to geography. Although this appears to contradict his claims about climate and geography prohibiting *or* fostering Spirit's development, in fact, it is wholly consistent with his two-fold desire to have civilizations which are both other than Europe and amenable to European influence. The implicit humanity of Africa requires contact with Europe for its actualization; and this follows the same line of

argumentation that Hegel uses on the macrocosmic level where we find that Nature's inherent irrationality requires Spirit in order to overcome natural necessity and enter into freedom. Thus, just as Nature is the bride that Spirit weds in order for Nature to be brought into a state of rationality, so too does Africa need Europe so as to overcome its enslavement to natural life. In this light, Hegel's following comments regarding the connection between Europe and Africa on the basis of slavery become clear. He explains that, lacking self-control, Africans are not capable of

Development or culture, and as we see them at this day, such have they always been. The only essential connection that has existed and continued between the Negroes and the Europeans is that of slavery...we may conclude *slavery* to have been the occasion of the increase in human feeling among the Negroes.⁴⁵

Consequently, Africans become integrated into history through their contact with Europe. This contact orbits around slavery, which is beneficial to Africans because it brings them into relationships of freedom, and servitude where they can learn the advantages of self-determination, religion, and governance, which are lacking in their homeland. Once explicitly rational human beings enslave them, rather than implicitly rational Nature, they can begin the process of achieving real freedom.⁴⁶ Bernasconi emphasizes that Africa does not cross the threshold into history and morality until it comes into contact with Europe: "Africa was not a moment in such a transition until it came into contact with Europe. Until that time it was neither just nor unjust...only contact with Europe could redeem it."⁴⁷ In fact, without the influence of free Europe, Africans remain enslaved to their geographical landscape. Hegel asserts, "In the interior of Africa proper, surrounded by high mountains in the coastal regions and in this way cut off from this free element of the sea, the mind of the African remains shut up within itself, feels no urge to be free and endures without resistance universal slavery."⁴⁸

Lacking the institutions of true religion and politics, Africans are evidence of what Hegel calls the natural will in *The Philosophy of Right*. There he writes, "The will which is but implicitly free is the immediate or natural will (*natürliche Wille*)."⁴⁹ This will, although *implicitly rational*, lacks explicit rationality as it is externally determined by natural impulses, desires, and inclinations. Lacking the self-conscious freedom of what the European State comes to embody, this will "is the will absorbed in its object or condition, whatever the content of these may be; it is the will of the child, the ethical will, also the will of the slave, the superstitious man, &c."⁵⁰ It is safe to conclude that this is the also the will of the African as Hegel has already informed us that the African Negroes are superstitious, childlike, and well adapted for slavery.⁵¹ Africans, who Hegel has told us are trapped in the continent of perpetual childhood, have the potential for realizing their implicit freedom. After all, in the *Philosophy of Spirit*, Hegel explains that "the child [who] is still in the grip of natural life, has only natural impulses, is not actually but only potentially or notionally [conceptually] a rational being."⁵² It takes the educative process of Spirit, as embodied in the free State, to bring the implicit rationality of the child into explicit actuality. Consequently, the Africans who are immersed in nature, who exhibit no historical development, and who have evidence of only a natural will, can only benefit from being physically *removed* from their geographical and climatic prison in Africa and transplanted to a more agreeable location. In the temperate and seaside European lands, as well as the burgeoning, expansionist promise of the New World lays Hegel's hope that Africans will be brought into history.⁵³

Conclusion

Hegel's egregious exclusion of Africa from world history denotes a fundamental limitation to his philosophical system. Asante remarks:

The key to an adequate analysis of Hegel's posture on history is his prosecution of an ethnocentric perspective as if it were universal. To claim, as he did, that Africa, the birthplace of the oldest human civilizations, was devoid of morality and consequentially ahistorical, was to demonstrate both an aggressive Eurocentrism and an ignorance of Africa.⁵⁴

In addition to the obvious Eurocentrism exhibited by Hegel's privileging of Europe and denigration of Africa, we also find the weaknesses of his philosophical system. As each progressive moment in his theory requires a negative moment against which advancement stands out all the more brilliantly, certain vital perspectives are obstructed. Thus his system necessarily degrades both Nature and those societies which he finds imprisoned by natural conditions. It is noteworthy that he quickly moves past his discussion of geography because his agenda is less to understand how land and sea formations as well as climate affect the development of Spirit, than it is to understand humanity's self-definition *against* the natural world. In order to accomplish this, he must construct a negative historical element to counteract history proper. This negative element is Africa, which, unlike the rest of the world's great cultures, remains entrapped in its climate and geography. Hegel uses Africans as a snapshot of "natural man" who is too immersed in the natural world to develop the self-consciousness necessary to initiate World History.

It is left to other civilizations to accomplish the progression of history at unique moments of cultural flourishing. Only in Europe can the free State can be fully actualized, and thus the burden is on Europe to circle around and bring its African neighbors into the historical family. Once this is accomplished, Africa, as it exists in itself and outside of European history, *is no more* and this is how it should be. Thus, with a final dismissal, Hegel draws to a close the discussion of the "Geographical Basis of History" with the statement: "at this point we leave Africa, *not to mention it again*. For it is *no historical part of the World*; it has no movement or development to exhibit...having *eliminated* this introductory element, we find ourselves for the first time on the real theater of History."⁵⁵ Interestingly enough, the following discussions of the geography of Europe and Asia are sparse compared to Africa. Again, we can only conclude that this works to reinscribe Africa and its inhabitants as simply more natural, more affected by their landscape and climate, and thus less free, than their European and Asian brothers and sisters. Hegel has successfully provided the negative to human history in the shut-up continent of Africa. Just as the Idea and Spirit require Nature as their irrational limit, so too does history require the unhistorical and natural humanity as the limit against which to define itself as freedom. And for Hegel, it is only through Spirit—whether divine or cultural—that both Nature and Africa will achieve liberation from the irrationality and capriciousness which are their defining characteristics.

Endnotes

1. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, trans. T. M. Knox (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 217; translation modified; *Hauptwerke: in sechs Bänden, bd. 5, Grundlinien der Philosophie des Rechts* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1999), 290. See also the *Philosophy of History* where Hegel writes, "in the History of the World, the Idea of Spirit appears in its actual embodiment as a series of external forms, each one of which declares itself as an actually existing people. This existence falls under the category of Time as well as Space, in the way of natural existence; and the special principle, which every world-historical people embodies, has this principle at

the same time as a *natural* characteristic...mutual exclusion is the mode of existence proper to mere nature." G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Sibree (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1956), 79.

2. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 99.

3. Hegel does not merely dismiss the possibility of a future to the world, only that the development of Absolute Spirit concludes in Old World Europe and the recognition that history has been a progressive actualization of freedom. Yet, the New World (and America in particular) is "the land of the future, where, in the ages that lie before us, the burden of the World's History shall reveal itself," *The Philosophy of History*, 86.

4. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 63.

5. See the *Philosophy of Right*, 160 where Hegel explains that "The state is the actuality of concrete freedom. But concrete freedom consists in this; that personal individuality and its particular interests not only achieve their complete development and gain explicit recognition for their right ... but for one thing, they also pass over of their own accord into the interest of the universal."

6. Although Hegel traces the movement from the Idea, through Nature and culminating in Spirit, it is important to note that each branch of the triadic development is equally necessary to the whole and can serve as the starting or ending point of the development: "the science of philosophy is a circle in which each member has an antecedent and a successor," G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature: Being Part Two of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 2.

7. G. W. F. Hegel, *Science of Logic*, trans. A.V. Miller (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press International, Inc.), 50.

8. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 17; translation modified; *Gesammelte Werke, bd. 20, Enzyklopädie der philosophischen Wissenschaften im Grundrisse, 1830* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1992), 237.

9. Hegel, *Philosophy of Nature*, 3.

10. In my assertion that Hegel conceives of Nature as both wholly other to Spirit *and* derived from it, I am arguing against William Maker's claim that Nature is a radically separate realm from Logic and Spirit and not merely derived from either. Maker argues that Hegel "neither denies the genuine existence of an independently given nature, nor conceives of nature as a product of thought, nor identifies thought with nature. On the contrary: Hegel originates the *Philosophy of Nature*, with the notion of the radical *nonidentity* of thought and nature." "The Very Idea of the Idea of Nature, or Why Hegel is not an Idealist" in *Hegel and the Philosophy of Nature*, ed. Stephen Houlgate (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 4.

11. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, 17. See also G.W.F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind: Being Part Three of the Encyclopaedia of the Philosophical Sciences*, trans. William Wallace and A.V. Miller (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971), 9.

12. See Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind*, 13 where he claims that Spirit "negates the externality of Nature, assimilates Nature to itself and thereby idealizes it."

13. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Nature*, 13.

14. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 40; translation modified; *Enzyklopädie*, 392.

15. Robert Bernasconi, "Hegel at the Court of Ashanti," in *Hegel After Derrida*, ed. Stuart Barnett (London: Routledge, 1998), 44. The text to which Bernasconi refers is Ritter's, "Die Erdkunde im Verhältnis zur Natur und zur Geschichte der Menschen oder allgemeine, vergleichende Geographie, Erster Theil, Erstes Buch. Afrika," (Berlin: Reimer, 1822).

16. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 79.

17. Bernasconi, "Court of Ashanti," 52.

18. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 79-80.

19. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 80.

20. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 80.

21. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 80.

22. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 88.

23. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 88. Hegel also includes middle Asia, and the deserts of Arabia and Barbary, as well as parts of South America in the first grouping. China and parts of Babylonia and Egypt make up the second locale but will not be dealt with in this paper. The

second group is significant however, in that Hegel finds the beginnings of the State in the extensive Kingdoms of these civilizations.

24. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 90.

25. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 87. Hegel's emphasis on the importance of the Mediterranean to the development of the Old World is also found in Karl Ritter's exposition. See Karl Ritter, *Comparative Geography*, trans. William L. Gage (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1865), 197.

26. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 91.

27. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 91.

28. Ritter, *Comparative Geography*, 188. Contrasting with the claim that Africa proper is unaffected by its coasts, Europe's coast is "the first natural condition of its progress, the true physical basis of the fact that, upon the most limited of the continents, the greatest historical diversity has sprung up," 198.

29. Ritter, *Comparative Geography*, 188.

30. Ritter, *Comparative Geography*, 190. Hegel makes an almost identical claim when he says, "Africa, taken as a whole, appears as a land mass belonging to a compact unity, as a lofty mountain range shutting off the coast," *Philosophy of Mind*, 41.

31. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 42-3.

32. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 99. With almost no justification, Hegel elaborates, "Carthage displayed there an important transitional phase of civilization; but, as a Phoenician colony, it belongs to Asia. Egypt will be considered in reference to the passage of the human mind from its Eastern to its Western phase, but it does not belong to the African Spirit."

33. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 93. Hegel will reformulate the obvious importance of Egypt to African history by claiming that as "a mighty centre of independent civilization ... [it is] as isolated and singular in Africa as Africa itself appears in relation to the other parts of the world," 92.

34. Molefi Kete Asante, *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge* (Trenton: Africa World Press, Inc., 1990), 33. Asante continues that Hegel must have been aware of the absurdity of "asserting that the 'real Africa' is actually only in a portion of the continent," 34.

35. Bernasconi, "Court of Ashanti," 60. For further discussion on the ways in which Hegel's discussion of how Africa's exclusion from history colors the emergence of European history see Robert Bernasconi, "With What Must the Philosophy of World History Begin? On the Racial Bias of Hegel's Eurocentrism," *Nineteenth-Century Contexts* 22 (2000), 171-201.

36. Bernasconi, "Court of Ashanti," 59.

37. Bernasconi, "Court of Ashanti," 62.

38. Ritter, *Comparative Geography*, 189.

39. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 93.

40. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 93. For an account of the connection between the four historical realms (Oriental, Greek, Roman and Germanic) and their relationship to the divine, see Eric von der Luft, "The Theological Significance of Hegel's Four World-Historical Realms," *Auslegung* 11 (1984), 340-357.

41. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 82. Hegel reiterates these claims in the Berlin lectures on the *Philosophy of Spirit*. See Bernasconi, "Court of Ashanti," 50. For an analysis of the Hegel's placement of American Indians (rather than Africans) on the bottom of the social hierarchy, see Michael H. Hoffheimer's "Hegel, Race, Genocide," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 39 (2001), 35-62.

42. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 95. In fact, "the devouring of human flesh is altogether consonant with the general principles of the African race; to the sensual Negro, human flesh is but an object of sense—mere flesh." Thus, rather than housing the infinite freedom of Spirit, the body to the African is nothing more than a body and can thus be consumed as any other animal body.

43. It is important to note that Hegel was explicitly used to justify slavery in America. See Hoffheimer, "Hegel, Race, Genocide," 36; Michael Hoffheimer, "Does Hegel Justify Slavery? *Owl of Minerva* 25 (1993), 118-119; Lawrence S. Stepelevich, "War, Slavery, and the Ironies of the American Civil War: A Philosophic Analysis," in *Beyond Liberalism and Communitarianism: Studies in Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, ed. Robert R. Williams (Albany: SUNY Press, 2001), 159.

44. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 41.

45. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 98. Clearly based in the logic of the master/slave dialectic, Hegel believes that through slavery, the Negroes will come to learn that the essence of humanity is in fact freedom.
46. Darrel Moellendorf argues that Hegel's claims as to the necessity of racism do not necessarily follow from his theoretical views but are merely compatible with them. As such, he tries to loosen the claims that slavery is necessary for freedom and the belief that the moral status of a person requires winning freedom (or recognition) from others. "Racism and Rationality in Hegel's Philosophy of Subjective Spirit" in *History of Political Thought* 13, no. 2 (summer 1992), 251.
47. Bernasconi, "Court of Ashanti," 59.
48. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, 46.
49. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, 25; *Grundlinien*, 35. Hoffheimer points to the fact that Hegel posits a strength of will in Africans contrasted with a lack of vigor in Native Americans in "Hegel, Race, Genocide," 36.
50. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Right*, 32.
51. Bernasconi argues that even though Africans are not explicitly mentioned in the *Philosophy of Right* and the discussions of the "uneducated, uncultured, or uncivilized (*das Ungebildete*) ... it is clear from other texts that they could have been." "Court of Ashanti," 58.
52. Hegel, *The Philosophy of Mind*, 21. Hegel continues in this quote to say that childhood, or what amounts to a general state of natural being must be characterized "as the most inappropriate for mind, simply because it is still an abstract, immediate reality in the natural sphere." Thus children or childlike adults (such as Africans) exist in a natural state, which is the furthest removed from the active life of realized rationality.
53. Hegel's belief in the possibility of transplanted Africans coming to be educated by European rationality is a move beyond his predecessors. For example, Kant agreeing with Hume, believes that the gulf between Caucasians and Negroes is immeasurable: "Mr. Hume challenges anyone to cite a single example in which a Negro has shown talents, and asserts that among the hundreds of thousands of blacks who are transported elsewhere from their countries, although many of them have even been set free, still not a single one was ever found who presented anything great in art or science or any other praiseworthy quality, even though among the whites some continually rise aloft from the rabble, and through superior gifts earn respect in the world." Immanuel Kant, "On National Characteristics," in *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, Ltd.), 55.
54. Asante, *Kemet*, 33.
55. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, 99. Italics my own.

nexus for discussions of Modern racial identity and identifications and the formation, character and continuities of the African Diaspora.

In the context of discussions germane to African-American Studies research and its classrooms, *Black Marxism* functions in two critical arenas. Intellectually, Robinson's work was published at a moment when the activist aspects of the U.S. wing of the African Liberation Movement were being brought to an aggressive slowdown and those energies were being narrowed to the arena of intellectual engagement. This moment made space for the studied re-consideration by African-American Studies of the basic assumptions of its intellectual-political mission. As many scholars of the time brought a critical revision to questions of gender and politics, *Black Marxism* compelled Africana Studies to re-think explorations regarding culture, class, and race. The surgical examination of "race" and the deliberate examination of Africanity as a coherent global community, preceded discussions held by Africana Studies scholars by nearly a decade. Pedagogically, Robinson's *Black Marxism* ranges from a complementary addition to courses focusing on Euro-Marxist thought and diasporic African anti-colonial struggle, to serving as a central text in courses that self-consciously attempt to dissect the origins of contemporary geo-political circumstances. This writer has used the work in the following courses, "Sociology of Black Protest," "Cinema of the African Diaspora," "Marxism and Anti-Colonial Struggle," and "Marxism and Africana Radical Thought." In these courses, *Black Marxism* has been used to examine foundational works of Africana social-political and cultural expression, Marxist thought, and later interrogations of the basic tenets of Karl Marx and Frederick Engel's philosophic, political, and economic postulations. In the classroom, Robinson's contribution to these areas functions as a knot that ties together the theoretical concerns of 20th century Marxism and Africana national liberatory struggle. This paper will discuss *Black Marxism's* value to student engagement with these areas and its larger contributions to the field of Africana Studies.

As Robinson affirms in his Preface, a people's history has, "philosophy, theories of history and prescriptions native to it."³ These philosophies, theories of history, etc. also contain within them other ways of academic/intellectual seeing. *Black Marxism's* pedagogical value resides in Robinson's articulation of the development of an African Diasporic revolutionary *continuity* that proactively engages, critiques and transforms the Western radical tradition on its own terms. The assertion of this tradition of African resistance serves as a starting point for a critique of the basic assumptions regarding the historic and contemporary organization of the modern world. Robinson's articulation of the relationship between African labor and culture and capitalist/"Modernist" expansion brings before students questions apropos the political, economic, social, and historic role of Africans in the formation of the "West." These various questions contribute to classroom discussions that force students to re-think ideas regarding Africana history, culture and its foundational relationship to the development of the modern world. *Black Marxism* challenges students to consider the ways in which tensions around race and class inform the nature of contemporary societies across the globe. These concerns contribute to an analysis of the inherent social-civil dynamics of the Western radical tradition as rooted in the material, philosophical, and ideological circumstances of Modernity. And finally, *Black Marxism* exposes students to major intellectual, literary, and political figures in the tradition of Africana life and culture and discusses their contributions to world culture.

"Blowing the Cobwebs Out of Student Minds¹": An Assessment of Cedric Robinson's *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*

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Introduction

Cedric Robinson's work, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, occupies various intellectual and theoretical spaces. Within the monograph's pages is Robinson's delineation (1) between the tradition of Africana struggle and European leftist thought, (2) a reinterpretation of the relationship between Marxian thought and questions of nationalism and (3) an evaluation of the singular contributions to Black radical thought on the parts of W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James and Richard Wright. However this author's experience with the text is centered on its disciplinary and classroom presence within Black/African-American Studies² as a

I

Race as Origin, Process and End of Capital

As *concepts* race and nation are largely empty receptacles through and in the names of which population groups may be *invented* [emphasis mine], interpreted, and imagined as communities and societies.⁴

In *Black Marxism*, Robinson provides the opportunity to (a) teach the idea of race as a historically dependent category and “social construct,” (b) discuss ethnic, national and “racial” differentiation as a systematic process of alienation and manipulation for economic, social and political domination, (c) investigate the nature of “racial” consciousness, (d) understand race as part of both capitalism’s super-structure and *infra-structure*,⁵ and (e) recognize originary features of colonial and metropolitan capitalism that further realized themselves in the imperial assault upon Africa and its Diaspora.

Section I of *Black Marxism*, “The Limitations of the European Radical Tradition,” focuses on the development of capitalism in Western Europe. Meticulously arguing the halting starts of continental capitalism in the 14th century and its Mediterranean rim origins among those elite groups that funded the 15th and 16th century expeditions of the Iberian peninsula, Robinson explains the growth of Western European political systems as they developed in relation to economic re-organization in early modern Europe. Within the formation of the early European “state,” the realization of the “nation” as such lagged far behind. The 16th Century State, defined as a social-political apparatus of elite control, was not yet what would become, in the 19th century, the nation as concept of mass popular ideological identification. Robinson, quoting Eli Heckscher, states, “The collective entity [to peoples of the 16th and 17th Centuries] was not a nation unified by common race, speech, and customs: the only decisive factor for them was the state.”⁶ The development of an apparatus to develop and exploit labor and commodity markets (the State) *sans* the ideology (nationalism) that would encourage the willing participation of the laboring classes created an antagonism between the burgeoning bourgeoisies and the embryonic proletariats. This prototypical antagonism between labor and capital in turn necessitated reliance by the bourgeoisie upon relatively more reliable and exploitable laboring populations.

Though a regular feature of post World War II European economic organization, migration of foreign (colonial) laboring groups to Western European societies was evident as early as the 16th century. The importation of labor from the Mediterranean rim and Eastern Europe planted, within the fresh soil of merchant capitalism, the process of *othering* as part and parcel of capitalist development, and with it the physical and philosophical bonding of race to class and class to race. This transformation of foreign laboring populations into different *species* of *Homo sapiens* afforded a more convenient means by which to control laboring populations. States Robinson: “There has never been a moment in modern European history ... that migratory and/or immigrant labor was not a significant aspect of European economies... The tendency of European civilization through capitalism was thus not to homogenize but to differentiate – to exaggerate regional, sub-cultural, dialectical differences into ‘racial’ ones.”⁷ This creation of seemingly immutable difference between

laboring populations served as the rationalization for the exploitation of migrant working masses, while also working to justify the widening gaps between the capitalists and laborers. The differentiation among laboring groups was joined to the exploitation of labor in service of the growth of merchant and later industrial capital. The establishment of connections between class and color, culture, ethnicity and “nationality” created a wedge, which undermined the possible unification of foreign and indigenous laboring groups and simultaneously created the ideology of racial (cultural) unity that would bind native working classes to their native bourgeoisie. Thus, “race” served as a necessary device in the expansion of early capitalism. The inclination to “other,” as social, psychological, and economic strategy, which Robinson reads as inherent to “Western” civilization, was maintained across historical moments. As capitalism expanded and developed across temporal moments and national boundaries, Robinson states, “New mystifications, more appropriate to the times, were required. “⁸ Whether the 17th century German *Herrenvolk* to the 18th century, “‘mythical’ Anglo-Saxonism,” of Great Britain, the “[racialist] accouterment of 19th century European science” or the 20th century anthropological imperialism in Africa that would lay the groundwork for Nazi eugenic theory and praxis, Robinson argues, “Race became largely the rationalization for the domination, exploitation and/or extermination of non-‘Europeans’.”⁹ Racialized vision served as a way to create and define, who and what is European.

The flexibility of “race” as idea and social economic mechanism would serve the interests of various North Atlantic bourgeois classes depending on capital’s labor demands and the presence of “foreign” bodies. As an ever-present feature of capitalist development, Robinson establishes the *rac-ing* of alien laboring groups (i.e., racism) as ingrained in, and a necessary dimension of, the capitalist mode of production¹⁰ and an effective means by which to divide and dominate both “racially” similar and different laboring populations. As an example, Robinson notes how the utilization of “race” disrupted the early 19th century possibilities of English and Irish labor unity.

Recognizing “whiteness” as racial signifier and, as Stuart Hall tells us, race itself as a floating signifier, Robinson’s examination of the division among mid-19th-century British working classes reveals racial distinction as a fundamental element of capitalism through which race displayed its objective integrity (i.e., its universality of application) as a category of identification. As whiteness consolidated itself over and against colonized peoples during the course of the 19th century, it retained the potential for discrete application within European societies. The various political and economic changes which affected the English and Irish working classes of the latter half of the 19th century instigated the, “ideological and physical drifting apart of the two ‘races’.”¹¹ Intra-class differences, accentuated by English and Irish nationalist ideology, (e.g., “English-ness,”¹²) and exaggerated through a racial idea imposed upon a “national” grouping, reflect Robinson’s recognition of the malleability of race and its preternatural ability to serve as functionary of bourgeois ideological-economic interests and its position as *faux* transcendent historical phenomenon.

Robinson’s analysis of the role of race in early capitalist formation stands as 1) a dissection of the process of European-instigated racial “othering,” 2) a criticism of “Whiteness” as an unconscious, existential position and 3) the revelation of its origins as economic-political tactic; it

contributes to the clarification of, “the changing historical connotations of *race* and its specific significance at various historical moments.”¹³ Robinson’s goal is to explore the presence of race and nationalism within the tradition and theory of European radicalism as informed by the writings of Marx and Engels. Toward this end, he argues that capitalism, interwoven with race and nationalism, established the primary material and ideological foundations that affected the course of African material development.

Cedric Robinson opens the door to the possibilities of teaching Marxist, Afri-Marxist thought, and Africana Studies with questions of race, whiteness and nationalism at the forefront. Central to these questions is the assertion of race not as simply phenotypical difference but as a flexible, omnivorous category of understanding that functions as referent to any imaginable difference (e.g., culture, language, gender, or geography). The development of western European nations under capitalist organization has served as a general model for national and capitalist development across the North Atlantic. This model allows the experience of race in the Western Hemisphere (specifically the United States and the Caribbean) to be recognized as necessarily bound to the construction of class within the logic of Western capitalist development. These aspects of Robinson’s work allows vital links to be forged within the classroom between (a) the formation of capitalism as a mode of production, (b) race as an infra-structural element of capitalist expansion and domination and (c) the origins of the conditions that would later inform the liberatory efforts by enslaved and colonized African peoples.

II

E Pluribus Unum Africanum

watch now these cold men, bold
as the water banging the bow in a sudden wild tide,
indifferent it seems to the battle...
in indifference, in anger,
will create new soils, new souls, new
ancestors; will flow like this tide fixed.¹⁴

“When Jesus asked the man his name he said,
‘Legion for we are many.’”
Mark 5:9¹⁵

Cedric Robinson’s description of the “Black Radical Tradition” contributes to central discussions taking place within contemporary Africana Studies. The Black Radical Tradition (BRT) forces a consideration of the existence of Africans as a collective group having commonalities of tradition, movement, and consciousness across national borders and historical moments. Contemporary Africana Studies has returned its attention toward the conceptualization of the global dynamics of African peoples under the signifier of “Diaspora.” As a recent issue of the *African Studies Review*¹⁶ indicates, the notion of Africa’s Diaspora has moved to the center of discussion among African, African-American and Africana Studies’ departments in the United States. Diaspora as a discussion of the inherent transnational nature of the African presence in the West can be presented to students with two central questions. (1) What are the external conditions and forces that have historically shaped and continue to shape the manner in which African peoples organized and re-organized their lives in the West? And 2) what are the intrinsic social, political, cultural and psychological strategies that African peoples have used, and continue to use, to re-organize their social, political, cultural, and psychological lives in the West?

In “The Process and Consequences of Africa’s Transmutation,” Robinson interrogates the way in which the political, economic, and socially-driven

ethnocentricity of European capitalist powers have defined and categorized subjugated labor groups. Robinson examines the process by which the dominant images of peoples from distinct African *societies* were transformed into a singular new image. Dramatically different from the images of Africans inherited from ancient Greece and Rome, this new image served as an imposed collective identity that rationalized the new material conditions of Africans kidnapped to the West. States Robinson:

The creation of the Negro, the fiction of a dumb beast of burden fit only for slavery, was closely associated with the economic, technical and financial requirements of Western development from the 16th century on ... this ‘Negro’ was a wholly distinct ideological construct from the images of Africans which had preceded it. It differed in function and ultimately in kind.¹⁷

The tension between the fictional construct of the Negro and the material/corporeal African, as a personality embodying the actual characteristics of peoples from the African continent, is tangible. Yet this tension was subservient to the fact that the societies and histories that make up the multitudes of peoples and cultures of Africa were to be subjected to a destructive reductionism.

The concept of *Diaspora*, taken from Jewish and Greek culture and history, signifies a dispersal of a people from their physical, psychological and spiritual homeland. *Diaspora*, akin to its sibling concept *galut*, denotes the undoing of a unified entity, be it unwillingly or voluntarily.¹⁸ In the case of Jewish history, that unified object is the political, religious and cultural community of ancient Israel. As the idea of dispersal is applied to the circumstances of African peoples in the Modern era, the concept of *Diaspora* paradoxically signifies a vast consolidation of the continent’s multitude of societies into both a single idea and people. Africa the singular idea and the phenomenon of Africans as a people, initially existed as a singularity ensuing from the commonality of human experiences which resulted from the various slave trades (Atlantic, intra-African and Indian Ocean) and the subsequent conditions of chattel slavery and colonialism. The conditions in which kidnapped, and later colonized, Africans found themselves, transcended national boundaries and maintained a horrifying consistency of intent and procedure. According to Robin Kelley and Tiffany Patterson:

The African Diaspora itself exists within the context of global race and gender hierarchies which are formulated and reconstituted across national boundaries and along several lines: (1) along legal lines that curtail citizenship ... (2) along cultural lines that ascribe negative cultural value to indigenous forms ... (3) along economic lines through the planned persistence of plantation/colonial economies ... (4) along imperial lines through the international development of ‘Jim Crowed’ modes of industrial production and (5) along social lines ... that define and limit access based on race and gender in both open and segregated societies.¹⁹

The dramatic expropriation of Africans from almost every corner of the African continent, and the universal deployment of Africans as slaves in the Western Hemisphere, determined a near universality of experience and absoluteness of position for captured and enslaved Africans that pervaded the Western world. The position of the Black/Negro/African was inevitably on the bottom rung of western societal ladders.

Robinson, in “The Atlantic Slave Trade and African Labor,” critiques the dominant historiography on the Atlantic Slave Trade for its failure to describe the extent of the transformation of the Western world wrought by the presence of African peoples. In “The Ledgers of a World System,” Robinson gives a view of the Atlantic Ocean rim as saturated with the presence of African peoples. Robinson analyzes more than “the significance of African labour for the development and formation of the commercial and industrial capitalist systems...”²⁰ He as well examines the temporal and geographic scale of the trade and number of captives (i.e., the extent and complexity of human interaction within the system). These numbers and the perceived scale indicate the vastness of the movement of captured Africans and the *necessary* vastness of those ideological, social, cultural, political, and economic systems that sought to contain and exploit them. The success of Western European societies, as they drew from various sections of the African continent to deliver captive Africans to every part of the Americas, begins to provide a sense of the power of the institutions and concepts that could impose an almost singular shape over the lives of millions of transported captives and the millions left behind over the span of centuries.²¹ At the crucible where continental African humanity met European machine was a new type, subject to the strengths and vulnerabilities of both the old and new worlds. What Western capital and its various needs were ignoring were the “cultures, critical mixes and admixtures of language and thought, of cosmology and metaphysics, of habits, beliefs and morality”²² of African peoples. It is within this array of human variety that the totality of a single identity was inserted and as Robinson argues, was necessarily realized. Despite the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic differences that existed amongst enslaved Africans, over time, the conditions of chattel slavery and the African place in the social, political and economic hierarchy of the West forced the *recognition* by the enslaved that they were all children of Mother Africa and with that the possibilities of that new designation.

The conditions of the enslaved African in the West and the subsequent post-emancipation lives they would live²³ served as the all encompassing ground for the distinctly Euro-American character called the “Negro.” This idea/image of Diasporic Africans was a distinct conception of Africans related to the degrading physical conditions imposed on them by their pre- and post-emancipation political, economic, and social circumstances. Not the only determinant of Diasporic life, these circumstances are an example of the way in which African peoples were defined and controlled from the outside. In the dialectical logic of racialized civil policy in the West, to be Black/Negro/African in the white gaze is to be mis-shaped by the vision of another and to turn that vision back onto the eye of the beholder. As Frantz Fanon wrote in recognition of the existential and phenomenological aspects of this “crushing object-hood,” “For not only must the black man be black; he must be black in relation to the white man.”²⁴

These external determinations and identities are what I term, the *imposed* aspect of the Diaspora’s existence. This material ground of the African Diaspora, Robin Kelley and Tiffany Patterson describe as “Diaspora ... as condition.”²⁵ Or rather the objective conditions in which Africans in the west had to negotiate their agendas. In response to the material circumstances of slavery and colonialism that informed the lives of Africans, the persistent and developing forms of self-awareness among New World and continental Africans were

informing their circumstances. As dominant ideologies pushed, African’s self-consciousness pushed back.

It is within the material and social conditions of chattel slavery and in the midst of the gap between the imposed idea of the African (the result of western institutional policies and practices) and Robinson’s articulation of the objective conditions for the rise of the BRT (the experience of African being *for itself*²⁶) that we discover the proactive nature of the African Diaspora. The same imposition of identity that Paul Laurence Dunbar described as, “the mask,”²⁷ and battered Fanon down with, “toms toms ... slave ships ... and ‘sho good eatin’” hid the possibilities of the people that lived behind the caricatures and stereotypes. For Robinson, the cauldron of western life served as the site of the necessary re-organization of those elements that “Africans” brought with them to the west. For Robinson, the questioning of African humanity by the dominant cultures of the west is a non-question. The criteria for humanity that was used dismissed the self-awareness developed by African captives. He states, “The more authentic question was not whether the slaves were human ... It was, rather, just what sort of people they were.”²⁸ The development of a self-conscious and determined Africanity produced the pro-active side to the formation of the African Diaspora. Simultaneous to the imposition of Negro-ness, enslavement and colonialism upon African captives was the dialectical movement of Africans responding to their dehumanization by the gradual consolidation of the variegated garden of continental African cultures that was brought to the fields of the West. Paradoxically, as North Atlantic societies sought to divorce peoples of the African continent from the great family of humanity, these same peoples and their descendents constructed a new human being. This African-ness in praxis was (is) responsive to the conditions of European and American hegemony, yet self-consciously formed its own ideas of what the future of Africa in America would look like. In the lands of the African continent itself, in the fields of the Americas, at the hands of plantation masters, colonial administrators, mobs and soldiers, undoubtedly, “The peoples of Africa and the African Diaspora had endured an *integrating* experience.”²⁹ Contesting the degraded and stultifying forms imposed by plantation and colonial societies, Robinson’s BRT proposed/proposes/exemplifies the African Diaspora as a dynamic open-ended process.

The process of the African Diaspora or rather the African Diaspora as process, at various moments, argues itself to be a trans-cultural exchange, linguistic innovation, aesthetic development, political movement, and/or spiritual amalgamation. However, at the heart of these movements, Robinson asserts a radical, revolutionary tradition and resistance to oppressive conditions as the central plank the African Diaspora used to develop its self-awareness. Robinson’s “The Historical Archaeology of the Black Radical Tradition,” argues Guinean revolutionary Amilcar Cabral’s assertion that through liberatory struggle, subjugated peoples will re-create themselves and thus develop an expanded self-awareness and “national” consciousness.³⁰ Captive Africans’ various attempts to liberate themselves from the condition(s) of chattel slavery and colonialism (eg., sabotage, work slowdowns, escape, reform, rebellion, and revolution) resulted from a kernel of self consciousness as agents.

This agency was part and parcel of the retention by various individuals and groups of various forms of pre-Western *being* in the world. The connection to these various forms of being disrupted the idea of Africans as *tabula rasa* or having become so as a result of the traumatic experiences of enslavement and debasement at the hands of North Atlantic systems. As Robinson declares, “African labour brought the past with it, a past which

had produced it and settled on it the first elements of consciousness and comprehension.”³¹ With the loss of the material elements of their lives, the Africans were forced to rely upon transportable cultural elements (memory and tradition) to retain a sense of centered-ness. In short, the echoes of pre-captive culture were the foundations of the captive’s sense of self, yet it was the active pursuit of freedom that activated a larger group consciousness and contributed to the crystallization of the African Diaspora as active phenomenon.

Although Robinson acknowledges the variegation of pre-western life by asserting, “the transfer of African ontological and cosmological systems ... presumptions of organization ... codes embodying historical consciousness and social experience,”³² the use of the totalizing term, “African” to describe pre-captive life is a misnomer and belies the complicated array of cultures, histories and social systems brought by the captives. Scholars such as historian Michael Gomez have analyzed the ways in which the various African based ethnic and cultural prerogatives consolidated themselves into the “African-American,” by mid 19th Century. This is not to ignore larger similarities between the groups occupying especially the Western coast of Africa. Kelley and Patterson note that, “what he [Gomez] ultimately describes is a series of units of organization, from village and clan relationships and linguistic groups, to entire ‘civilizations,’ that shared cultural practices and cosmologies and in some cases, a lingua franca.”³³ Gomez communicates a balance of similarity and difference amongst the ethnic, social, and national groups of the Senegambian region. However, the orderly equilibrium of this macro system is thrown to the wayside in the chaotic dispersal of the Atlantic Slave Trade. The formation of western identities was done with, at times, widely disparate elements. However, if pro-active Diasporic formation is to be seen as a relative muting of the multiplicity of African backgrounds in order to create a heterogeneous unity of identity, then to understand this transformation, we must acknowledge Robinson’s focus on slave resistance as the alembic through which the African Diaspora proactively developed as a rough singularity. It is through this historical conditioning that the enslaved peoples of the continent of Africa became Africans and their dispersed companions, *African Americans*, the physical elements, and later conceptual proponents, of the African Diaspora.

Robinson’s articulation of a singular presence of Africanity in the west, “Diaspora,” formulates itself in a dramatically different way from the idea of a larger Africanity and its trans-national unity utilized by Afro-British cultural historian Paul Gilroy, the “Black Atlantic.” Gilroy, in *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*,³⁴ sets out to chart that cultural and political space where African life in the west extends itself transnationally and organizes itself in the context of the European/Modern world. The question of origins sits at the center of Gilroy’s discussion as he attempts to negotiate a position between Black Nationalist racial-cultural reductionist extremes. Gilroy critiques what he sees as the essentialist positions taken by recent African-American radical activists and thinkers concerning questions of race and culture among Africans in the West. For Gilroy, these positions ignore the complicated nature of African intellectual and cultural identity and engage in a, “vokish popular cultural nationalism ... and ... absolutist conceptions of cultural difference allied to a culturalist understanding of ‘race’ and ethnicity.”³⁵ Gilroy’s project seeks to understand questions of cultural hybridity among diasporic Africans, thus releasing them from the oppressive conditions of national limits, cultural exclusivity, and racial Manichaeism. States Gilroy, “In opposition to both ... nationalist or ethnically absolute approaches, I want to develop the suggestion that

cultural historians could take the Atlanti”³⁶ However, Gilroy’s understanding of complexity, difference, and hybridity in the Atlantic system focuses on a small element of the Atlantic world: African elites in relation to European traditions.

Originally seeking to determine the ways in which Black British settler communities have contributed to the larger category of British identity, Gilroy sought support from similar populations across the Atlantic. This effort centers itself on what Gilroy describes as, “the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering.”³⁷ Gilroy’s attempt to understand the hybrid nature of Black Atlantic cultures, those traditions and forms originated by African peoples but now common currency among the various Atlantic rim populations, like those cultural historians he responds to, assumes a singularity of cultural perception from within communities of Africans. In Gilroy’s quest, it is this singularity which, when coupled with European forms, creates difference. What is not spoken of is the multiplicity of identity, culture and worldview revealed in the large-scale presence of various African-based ethnicities in the Western hemisphere. What of the heterogeneity of diasporic African cultures, the result of the mixing and matching of patchwork traditions originating in the Atlantic slave trade? Gilroy overlooks the fact that the continent of Africa holds *worlds* within itself and its enslaved refugees brought pieces of those worlds with them. Gilroy’s focus on Afri-US figures in relation to Europe,³⁸ though subverting strict national boundaries, avoids the constant interplay of African-based traditions within diasporic cultures and the transformation of continental African social-cultural remnants. An acknowledgement of this level of difference opens the door to understanding the foundation of Black Atlantic (diasporic) hybridity.

Gilroy’s focus on individual figures as representative of African-based consciousnesses coming into relationship with divergent experiences of race and culture in Europe does not give particular insight into the foundational (mass popular) experiences that concretize Diasporic life and consciousness. Gilroy’s focus on the expansion of Diasporic elite consciousness targets the ways in which articulations of racial and Diasporic experience are informed by elite movement beyond the U.S. space, but does not include the experiences that were the foundations of elite consciousness. Gilroy’s analysis of “Black Atlantic” political culture assumes foundations limited by the influence of European discourse and its reliance on racial linearity and authenticity. States Gilroy, “Marked by its European origins, modern black political culture has always been more interested in the relationship of roots and rootedness than in seeing identity as a process of movement and mediation that is more appropriately approached via the homonym routes.”³⁹ This approach to the question of African trans-nationality and political culture veers away from the means (mass popular historical experience and action) by which racial-cultural self-consciousness developed and the *necessity* thereof.

Markedly, Robinson’s treatment of the persistence of the captives’ resistance to North Atlantic domination provides insight into a larger movement of fits and starts (resistance to subjugation) working its way toward a self-realization that would be actualized in the achievement of material liberation for the enslaved. Each moment of resistance, whether magnificent or mundane, asserts the presence of a scattered awareness re-assembling itself, forming itself toward a new, other self, informed by the dynamic of a new set of historical conditions (i.e., domination in the west) and spurred on by the possibility of being for itself. To quote Robinson, “The battle against

Euro-American hegemony was transferred into the battle to *create the self-conscious* collective identity of African peoples.”⁴⁰ The merging of cultures, languages, and traditions among the captives served as a means by which to sharpen the New World African’s approach toward the problematics of *de jure* and later *de facto* slavery. These mergers were moments of compromise, arbitration, and resignation that necessitated the creation of new elements to contend with the unique problematic of being “African” in the west. For continental Africans, the consolidation takes place within national spaces carved out by European powers and on the continental level with the originary creation of Africa and its inhabitants as a social, political, and cultural singularity.

A fundamental point of Cedric Robinson’s analysis of the BRT is the presumption of (1) the unity of an African experience prior to the destructive contact with burgeoning European capitalism, and (2) the BRT as the process of preserving that totality. The question of a historically transcendent ontological and metaphysical foundation within the breasts of the hundreds of groups and millions of captives dispersed along the Western Hemisphere disrupts the cultural, material, and historical dynamism of the BRT and its resultant phenomena, the African Diaspora. Robinson argues, “The Black Radical Tradition cast doubt on the extent to which capitalism penetrated and re-formed social life and on its ability to [create] entirely new categories of human experience stripped bare of the historical consciousness embedded in culture.”⁴¹ It should be understood that capitalism did significantly re-form the social life of the captives and their descendants. To deny that would deny the ability of Africans — on and off the continent — to grapple with new conditions, problems, and circumstances, and render their liberatory struggles mere attempts at re-creating a past life. The encounter with the Modern West, the subsequent transformation of Africans on and off the continent and the creation of a world-wide sense of self locates Africans as agents in their own lives driven by, “the impulse to make history in their own terms,”⁴² as opposed to the terms of a life beyond retrieval.

Cedric Robinson’s investigation of the Black Radical Tradition yields provocative questions regarding the dynamics and nature of the worldwide set of communities, awarenesses, behaviors, histories and identifications we call the African Diaspora. As a vehicle of exploration into Africana life past, present, and future *Black Marxism* remains a fundamental assessment of the coming into being of the African in the world of Western racial capitalism. In the classroom, the discussion of the centrality of the African presence in the development of the “modern” world serves as a vehicle to discuss the centrality of race, class, and Euro-American hegemony to an understanding of that same world. As a text central to Africana Studies’ efforts to unravel the manner in which the contemporary world came to be, and develop progressive strategies to change that world, *Black Marxism* serves both as a guide to understanding historic systems of domination and as inspiration to those who would challenge contemporary forces of exploitation.

Endnotes

1. This refers to a lyric from Parliament-Funkadelic’s, “Children of Production.” *The Brides of Dr. Funkenstein*. Warner Brothers Records, 1976
2. Throughout the paper, I will use the terms, “African American” and Africana interchangeably. Primarily, this is done out of recognition of these terms as used by various academic departments and programs that focus on African peoples as subjects of study. Secondarily, I use the term

African American to denote the western hemisphere’s various communities of peoples of African descent. African American is a much more accurate description of Africans living across the Americas. I defer to the term *Afri-US* to speak specifically about the descendants of Africans enslaved in the United States. It follows the examples of other intra-national designations of African groups (ex. Afri-Cuban, Afri-Jamaican, Afri-Cadian, etc.) *Africana* is a universal umbrella term under which the preceding groups exist and includes the cultures, histories, traditions and populations of Africans on the continent and in all other places beyond the western hemisphere.

3. Cedric J. Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (London: Zed Books, 1983)
4. David Theo Goldberg, *Racist Culture: Philosophy and the Politics of Meaning* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Press, 1993.) 79
5. W. E. B. Dubois argued, “In reality ... the economic foundation of the modern world was based on the recognition and preservation of so-called racial distinctions.” *Dusk of Dawn: An Essay Toward An Autobiography of a Race Concept* (New York: Schocken Books, 1968, 103). In short, despite the conceptual and ideological nature of racial thought and the lack of basis in any credible form of biological differences between groups of humans, the effect of racial thought on material conditions has rendered the ideology of race a material force unto itself.
6. Robinson, 21
7. Robinson, 27
8. Robinson, 27
9. Robinson, 27
10. Arguably, whether or not racism or racialism is inherent to the capitalist mode of production can be debated if one considers the possibility of the formation of the capitalist mode of production beyond western European societies. However, as we understand capitalism to be the result of a specific set of historical conditions, the relationship between racialized laboring bodies and the accumulation of capital is intractably wed to, “the Surplus value filched from human beasts ... [Generated] out of the exploitation of the dark proletariat.” W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*. (New York: Atheneum Press, 1992, 16.)
11. Robinson, 27
12. Goldberg, 79
13. Goldberg, 79
14. Edward Brathwaite, “New World A’ Comin’” in *The Arrivants: A New World Trilogy*, (Oxford: Oxford University press, 1992, 11)
15. *The Holy Bible Revised Standard Version*, (New York: New American Library, 1962) 37
16. *African Studies Review* 43, 1
17. Robinson, 106
18. George Shepperson, “African Diaspora: Concept and Context.” *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*. Joseph E. Harris, ed. (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1993, 46)
19. “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World.” *African Studies Review* 43 (2000): 20.
20. Robinson, 156.
21. Robinson, 156. Robinson utilizes the “preliminary summation” of historian Joseph Inikori’s estimates of the number of Africans taken during the *major* periods of the trade.
22. Robinson, 173
23. Eric Foner’s, *Nothing but Freedom* (Baton Rouge: University of Louisiana Press, 1983) provides an insightful comparative analysis of post-emancipation governmental policies by the British Empire in the Caribbean and the United States during Reconstruction.
24. *Black Skins, White Masks*. Charles Lam Markmann, trans. (New York: Grove Press, 1967, 109-110.)
25. Kelley and Patterson, 20
26. “As long as the black man is among his own he will have no occasion ... to experience his being through others.” Fanon, 110

27. "We Wear the Mask." Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of the African American Literary Tradition. Patricia Hill Liggins, et al, ed. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998.) 615
28. Robinson, 177
29. Robinson, 222
30. An important question to ask, in light of this position, is what exactly can we determine to be a "national consciousness?" The idea of diaspora necessarily moves against the idea of discrete national boundaries and cultural, political and historical limitations within these boundaries. Yet nationalism beneficially or dangerously used as an organizing principal creates a concrete sense of a larger self vis-à-vis one's perceived foes, racial, political, religious or otherwise.
31. Robinson, 173
32. Robinson, 174
33. Kelley and Patterson, 17
34. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994)
35. Gilroy, 15
36. Gilroy, 15
37. Gilroy, 3
38. States Gilroy, "I want to consider the impact that this outernational, trans-cultural reconceptualisation might have on the political and cultural history of black Americans and that of blacks in Europe." 17
39. Gilroy, 19
40. Robinson, 184
41. Robinson, 245
42. Robinson, 245

BOOK REVIEWS

Rosemary Cowan. 2003. *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers, Ltd, a Blackwell Publishing Company. vi + 216 p.

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Within the past few years, we have witnessed in relatively quick succession a spate of sustained book-length studies of Cornel West's writings.¹ Each of these studies examines the varied, complex and multidimensional thought of West with the express aim of showing, among other things, whether or not there is any unifying principle behind West's diverse writings. Rosemary Cowan's book is the latest of these studies. I will begin by saying that this is an exemplary book. Like the others, it contributes significantly to an enriched understanding of the writings of West. So, in what follows, I simply will elaborate some key issues that Cowan addresses and comment on her analyses of selected aspects of West's discussions.

Cowan's overall concerns in the book may be summarized in three questions: (1) What exactly are the issues to which West is responding in his writings? (2) What intellectual resources does West draw upon to address these concerns? (3) And how effective is West's proposed solution(s) to the issues he addresses? To answer these questions Cowan structures the book into three corresponding sections. In Section One, the first two chapters, "Reading West as a Liberation Theologian" and "Race and Democracy," respectively, Cowan suggests

that West's philosophy is a response to what he deems the major crisis confronting America, viz. racism. Specifically, West's philosophy consists of a moral vision, grounded in liberation theology, that is aimed at solving or overcoming America's weak will toward racial justice in the face of the democratic ideals of equality of all human beings that the nation professes in its Constitution. In Section Two, chapters three through six, Cowan elaborates and discusses the various intellectual positions upon which West draws in his attempt to address the crisis of racial justice in American society. These are West's version of American Pragmatism that Cowan entitles "Jazz Philosophy or Westian Pragmatism" (chapter three); "Prophetic Christianity" (chapter four); West's reconceptualized version of Marxism that Cowan dubs "West's Radicalism" (chapter five); and West's Public Intellectualism that Cowan describes as "West's Multicontextualism" (chapter six). Section Three, entitled "Interventions," consists of chapters seven and eight. Here, Cowan examines West's well-known proposed solution of "love ethic" and the politics of conversion to address both the crisis in question and West's claim about the nihilistic threat to contemporary Black America (chapter seven). And in chapter eight, "Achieving Democracy: Applying the Love Ethic," Cowan endeavors to show how West's "love ethic" works in actual situations, while also bringing out its limitations.

Given this structural framework, Cowan begins by arguing that the unifying principle in West's multifarious writings is liberation theology. West's diverse and eclectic writings, she says, "should be read and interpreted primarily as a theology of liberation as this is the perspective from which we can best 'make sense' of his overall thought" (p. 5). What is interesting about this descriptor is that, as Cowan is fully aware and goes on to note, West "explicitly disavows the description of his work as any form of theology" (p. 9). Consequently, Cowan describes her own characterization of West's position as "contentious." Yet she insists that only by reading West primarily as a liberation theologian can we make sense of his diverse preoccupations. What is Cowan's justification for this view?

First, Cowan calls attention to West's fusion of (and emphasis on) his Christian belief and his political vision of egalitarianism. West's claim of his Christian mandate to confront the plight of the afflicted clearly suggests that his political concerns are motivated by his Christian belief. Second, Cowan notes a number of important liberal theologians whose influence on West is very significant in the way West articulates his concerns. These are Walter Rauschenbusch, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Martin Luther King, Jr. These figures exerted considerable influence on American intellectual and political life. And, for Cowan, West is unquestionably following in their footsteps. Third, Cowan lists six tenets of liberation theology that, in her view, West's writings fulfill. These are: (i) that liberation theology places less emphasis on theology as presented by clerics and pastors and more emphasis on dialogue and a collective reading and interpretation of the Bible; (ii) liberation theology develops and advances a critique of both church and society; (iii) liberation theology emphasizes action on behalf of the oppressed over theory and theorizings (about oppression, for example); (iv) liberation theology fundamentally believes that God sides with the oppressed; (v) liberation theology is rooted in and thus is responding to the specific contingent situations of human beings; and (vi) liberation theology "draws upon extra-theological sources to reach conclusions about society." In this regard, Cowan notes that the socioeconomic analysis of liberation theology is most notably, though not necessarily, Marxist (p. 11). An example is West's proposed synthesis of the virtues of

Prophetic Christianity and Marxist social analysis to effect liberation of the oppressed.²

In light of these considerations, Cowan then advances the view that there are “very strong continuities” between West’s thought and the central tenets of the doctrine (p. 12). Indeed, she asserts, “it is Christianity that provides the normative standard” by which West judges the moral quality of American democracy (p. 9, cf. p. 8) and it is through Christian lenses that West examines American democracy and registers his dissatisfaction with what he sees — à la prophetic Christian. Thus, in her view, West has no basis either to disavow the epithet “liberation theologian” or to reject the characterization of his work as liberation theology. But Cowan does not speculate on why West is insistent on disavowing claims to being a liberation theologian or why he is reluctant to have his work classified as theological even despite the evidence she has adduced to show otherwise. And equally important, she does not address the issue whether or not West’s disavowal can be reconciled with his explicit Christian affirmations.

One reason, however, that I think West is reluctant to be characterized as a liberation theologian (or that his work be so characterized) is that such a characterization would commit him to, among other things, certain theological doctrines that are metaphysical in nature and cannot coherently be defended on empirical grounds.³ One needs only to read West’s *The American Evasion of Philosophy* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1989) to see that he endorses the antimetaphysical outlook of American pragmatism of which his own Prophetic pragmatism is a variant. In addition, a liberation theologian characterization would commit West to a variant of the Divine Command Theory of Morality, including its transcendental claims and objectivist commitments, and all the conceptual difficulties of which such a theory admits. More perspicuously, subscription to a (Christian) theological position entails affirming certain doctrines such as the Doctrine of the Trinity, of God as a transcendental, mysterious entity who serves as the ultimate reference point and court of appeal on all matters pertaining to the life of human beings. Moreover, it is God who supposedly prescribes moral edicts for humans to follow regardless of the differing situations in which individuals find themselves, and those moral edicts must be obeyed unconditionally.

These doctrines are central to Christian theology. Yet, as is well-known, these positions are vulnerable to certain standard epistemological objections. For example, theological claims about a transcendental being and His supposed moral injunctions, being metaphysical, are not subject to verification or falsification, let alone revision. Indeed, philosophical descendants of Hume, those who subscribe to the verificationist principle, would say that the propositions that express such claims, both individually and collectively, are literally insignificant or unintelligible, and so are “pseudo-propositions.”⁴ We know, on the contrary, that West emphasizes the empirical content of his philosophical position particularly in pragmatism; we know also of his antifoundationalism and historicism in religion,⁵ as also his assertion about the revisability of his assessments in light of new and changing experiential data. The empirical nature of his philosophical and religious positions thus would conflict with the kind of claims asserted in, and the metaphysical commitments of, strict theological doctrines.⁶

A second reason I think West resists being characterized as a liberation theologian, a practical one at that, is that he may be seen as viewing social concerns only through the lens of Christian doctrine. But such a limiting view runs counter to his express desire to advocate on behalf of all those who are afflicted in society and who therefore in his estimation comprise “the wretched of the earth.” These include Christians and non-Christians, atheists, agnostics, religious believers, Jews and

Gentiles. I should note in this connection West’s opening sentences in his review essay entitled “Of Liberation Theology: Segundo and Hinkelammert.”⁷ West states that “Liberation theologies ... present the ways of life and struggle of Christians around the world who have convinced remnants of the church to open its eyes to human misery and oppose socioeconomic systems and political structures that perpetuate such misery” (*The Cornel West Reader*, p. 393, emphasis added). Although West goes on to talk about liberation theologies preoccupation with “human misery,” he may be distancing himself from such theologies because the focus of such theologies is unquestionably on the Christian way of seeing the world. But it can very easily be argued that such a perspective is narrow, and some might even say that it smacks of Christian chauvinism. We need only to remember the Crusades of bygone years to see that the Christian way of seeing the world need not necessarily be the right way.

So, arguably, it may well be that West’s refusal to being described as a liberation theologian is a deliberate attempt to circumvent all such limitations of liberation theology, and indeed a strict theological nomenclature, while affirming his Christian belief. It is particularly noteworthy that he accepts the characterization of his concerns as humanistic, albeit with a Checkhovian Christian prefix (Yancy, 2001, p. 360; cf. 347). Whether or not West consistently can affirm his Christian background and repudiate a commitment to a transcendental being and related religious doctrines, however, is worthy of serious discussion.⁸ At the very least there is some tension between West’s explicit Christian-based pronouncements, his seemingly larger social concerns that go beyond the confines of Christianity, and his protestations against being classified as a liberation theologian. But Cowan seems reluctant to charge him with inconsistency even though that is what her examination seems to suggest.

This leads me to Cowan’s discussion of West’s treatment of the major crisis in American society to which she says West is responding, namely, American anti-Black racism. Here, Cowan amply shows that the ideal of American democracy lies in the concept of freedom and equality. Yet this ideal historically has been betrayed by the society’s endemic anti-Black racism. Not only has the society deliberately constructed and problematized Blacks by racializing and identifying them with social problems, but it also has simultaneously constructed and identified American democracy with whiteness. To the extent that American democracy thus far has failed Blacks, she points out, West’s objective therefore is to demolish its practice and the institutions through which it is manifested and to reconstitute them in such a way that would uphold the egalitarian ideals professed in the U.S. Constitution. And as a first move in that direction, West calls for an eradication of institutional racism. Of course, West is aware of the insidious, complex, and intractable nature of racism, and thus of the enormity of the task to effect its dismantling. Accordingly, he suggests that the society approach the task through experimentation, improvisation, and creativity much in the manner of jazz and blues musicians.

Cowan’s treatment of West’s discussion of America’s endemic racism is quite good because it clearly demonstrates, if anything, that West’s own discussion suggests that race issues trump class in American sociopolitical life. Indeed, granted Cowan’s reading that West’s liberationist project is to emancipate African Americans from the oppressive forces of anti-Black racism — although I think West’s project goes beyond this — why then does West sometimes give the impression that African American oppression consists essentially in class deprivation or maldistribution of economic resources? Does not his very

preoccupation with American endemic racism clearly suggest that class deprivation of African Americans is the *effect* of such racism and so racism is *the* source of Black oppression? In effect, does West not have the proverbial cart before the horse? No doubt others are oppressed in the society. But the source(s) of their own (forms of) oppression is (are) not the same as that of Blacks. My point, in short, is that West need only ask himself the question “What explains Black lack of ownership of resources at all?” to see that the answer lies at the heart of his own very preoccupation with American anti-Black racism. And this is what comes out very loudly in Cowan’s controversial reading of West as a liberation theologian *responding to the crisis of anti-Black racism in American society*.

But even as Cowan defends her view of West as a liberation theologian, she fails to probe the consequences of West’s invocation of his Christian belief as the driving force behind his liberationist or emancipatory project. In particular, she fails to see that by grounding his liberationist project on his Christian belief, even despite his radical historicist claims, West cannot escape certain grievous paradoxes such as that Black oppression is inevitable, even necessary, and so struggle is pointless. To see how these paradoxes arise one only needs to consider carefully the implications of West’s Christo-existentialist assertions about the all-pervasiveness of evil (here read universal anti-Black racism) and of the inevitability of (Black) suffering due to human fallenness.⁹ If evil is inevitable due to human fallenness, as he claims, then it would seem to be necessary both for human moral development on earth and for Easter to be intelligible.¹⁰ It should be pointed out that for West (and Christians in general), Easter is significant because it marks the commencement of a new epoch for humanity. As West puts it, Christ’s brutal death is a condition for the Resurrection, and the Resurrection is the commencement of a new history, a new epoch or era for humanity.¹¹ But saying that evil, in the form of universal anti-Black racism, is necessary entails that its existence is allowed and sanctioned by God. So, the most we can hope for and aim at through struggle is its *curtailment*. And it is precisely for such curtailment that West advocates. Indeed, given West’s position, it would seem that evil has both a teleological and an ontological function. From a teleological point of view, evil is a condition for hope and redemption, and from an ontological perspective, it is part of the reality allowed for and hence sanctioned by God. It is in this regard that evil is necessary and so cannot (and ought not) be eradicated, unless of course by God.

Many, however, would find such a view highly disturbing. This is because they believe that racism, like the other forms of evil West himself lists, is a human social construction, not an ontological fact, and so its existence is neither necessary nor a condition for hope. Thus it can be *eradicated* through struggle, as can similar human social constructions. West’s Christo-existentialist outlook, on the other hand, would seem to be suggesting otherwise; specifically, that the Black experience of universal racial hatred and oppression is inescapable because it derives from God’s very own deterministic laws, against which struggle is pointless.¹² On such a view, the white racist is an unwitting tool of, or accomplice to, God’s unfathomable and incomprehensible desire, and thus is as much a victim as the Black whom she/he oppresses. My contention, in sum, is that the Christo-existentialist view at the heart of West’s liberation project entails theological determinism, in this case God’s deterministic law of anti-Black racism that subjects Blacks to the fate of racial oppression. Paradoxically, it is against God’s deterministic law of anti-Black racism and racial oppression that West is recommending that we (the oppressed) should struggle. We should do so because — and here again is another paradox — God is on our side, the side of the oppressed!

I leave it to the reader to try and make sense of West’s Christian-based view on this score. I wish only to note here that the concepts *evil* and *human fallenness* are theological, and supposedly have an explanatory power in theological contexts. It is for this reason that some were alarmed when President George W. Bush, in his January 2003 State of the Union address to the nation, used the expression “axes of evil” to describe certain countries — Iraq, Iran, and North Korea — as terrorist enclaves. To characterize those countries as “axes of evil” is to say that they are a *transcendent* force with which the United States, the good, must wrestle and overcome. The fitting response to such a transcendent force then is a religious crusade by an equally transcendent force of good. One cannot miss the religio-metaphysical overtones here. In a similar vein, therefore, West’s invocation of the concepts *evil* and *human fallenness*, despite his repudiation of a theological nomenclature, unquestionably commits him to a similar religio-metaphysical stand. But furthermore, his use of these concepts while rejecting a theological nomenclature is equivalent to appealing to the doctrine of Original Sin but denying the Biblical Creation story of Adam and Eve.

So, while I agree with Cowan’s analysis of the importance of West’s concern with racism in his liberationist project, I wish only that she had probed further the implications of the central role of West’s Christian belief in that project. She might have seen that his talk of the fallenness of humans, the inevitability of suffering, and the all-pervasiveness of evil (again read universal anti-Black racism) from which we cannot extricate ourselves, entails that his own purported struggle for justice, freedom and democracy is empty and pointless. Then again, perhaps he was (theologically) determined to struggle even if to no purpose.¹³ In any case, given West’s invocation of his Christian belief as foundational to his emancipatory aims, he cannot escape such paradoxes as I have exhibited, and certain ontological or metaphysical commitments, the latter of which he is anxious to repudiate. (These are the difficulties in West’s empirical religious outlook that I indicated in Note 6). Unfortunately, Cowan failed to see this.

Cowan redeems herself, however, in her penetrating analysis of West’s proposed solution of a love ethic and politics of conversion to meet the crisis confronting Black America and the society at large. At least two places where West’s proposed solution of a love ethic and a politics of conversion appear prominently are his discussions of (what he deems) Black nihilism and the Black-Jewish conflict.¹⁴ Black nihilism, he says, consists in a state of utter despair, self-loathing, self-devaluation, and absolute lovelessness. This state of affairs derives from Black inability to participate in the ephemeral and banal “virtues” of a capitalistic society, with the consequence that there is considerable Black-on-Black crime and an exponential increase in murder, suicide, and overall violence. But to such a horrifying spectacle West’s suggested remedy is a love ethic. And in his discussion of the conflict between Blacks and Jews, a conflict that he says derives from and reflects Black anti-Semitism and Jewish anti-Black racism, West’s proposed solution is a politics of conversion. This is a mechanism of mutual empathy through which Blacks and Jews would recognize each other’s humanity, come to identify with each other’s concerns, and consequently come together to form a coalition to fight oppression. Of course, a politics of conversion is predicated on the love ethic, in that unless (say) I love myself I will not be able to love others. Self-loving, as distinct from the egoistic concept of self-love, is thus a condition for me to undergo the psychic

conversion through which I recognize the humanity of others, as well as mine, and thus become able and willing to enter into a coalition with them.

But how effective are the love ethic and the politics of conversion to address social issues of the kind West himself has outlined? Cowan rightly questions the practical value of West's love ethic as a response to social crises given West's own apocalyptic (or gloom and doom) picture of society and humanity (Cowan, p. 151). At best, love ethic and a politics of conversion may work only on an individual, one-one, basis as is exemplified in the relation between West and Michael Lerner. But would such a relation work between or among groups? Cowan correctly points to the problematic nature, even hopelessness and impracticability, of West's solution by inviting West to elaborate how a love ethic and the politics of conversion might work between the paradigmatic white racist, epitomized by the Ku Klux Klan, and Blacks. The upshot of her remarks, to me at least, is that there are some groups to whom West's love ethic and politics of conversion simply will not apply or discussion with whom is a sheer waste of time. And there is a sense in which West seems to concede as much even despite his usual optimism. This concession comes out in his response to a question from George Yancy about how he might try to convince a member of the Ku Klux Klan "that her/his racist ideology is *false*, that she/he has actually *gotten the world wrong*."¹⁵ West talks about dialogically historicizing the racist's world-view and engaging in a critique of her or his narratives and all. But at the end, he says, "even after all of this...one may still be unsuccessful" (ibid. 45).

I think Cowan is right on the mark here in bringing out some limitations of West's psychological remedy to crises. Given the gravity of the social crises West describes — namely, anti-Black racism, Black nihilism and the Black-Jewish conflict, to name a few — some would say that what is needed is action instead of a reassessment of one's feelings, wherein such reassessment is both highly subjective and contingent on individual whims and caprices.

I will conclude with a brief comment on Cowan's treatment of West's brand of Marxism, noting in particular that she addresses some recent criticisms of West. One such criticism, advanced by Mark David Wood, for example, is that West has altered his castigation and denunciation of American capitalism as the chief source of social inequities, together with his call for its demolition, in favor of reforming the status quo. This means, in other words, that West has traded his Marxist mantle for that of a liberal reformist, albeit one with a heart. But this alteration is not good enough because fundamental elements of the status quo remain intact. So, West's supposed advocacy for the oppressed *sans* a Marxist approach is highly problematic (Wood 2000, p. 45-62).

Cowan takes up this issue in her analysis of West's brand of Marxism that she terms "West's Radicalism" (Chapter 5). Among other things, she contests this (kind of) criticism, first, by distinguishing between Old Style Marxism (or Old Left) epitomized by Marx himself, Antonio Gramsci, and Frederic Lukács, on the one hand, and The New Left epitomized by Mao Tse Tsung and Che Guevara, on the other. She then points out, second, that West synthesizes elements from both Marxist strands to create his version of the position. According to Cowan, West draws upon the method of analysis of the Old Left, shorn of its dogmatism as exemplified in its binary opposition between bourgeois and proletariat, and incorporates from the New Left the oppositional voices of minority groups such as Blacks, Latinos/a, feminists, gays and lesbians, the disabled and the like, to forge a coalition to challenge oppression. In Cowan's view, West's critics have failed to grasp the nature of his own

variant form of the Marxist position, especially its diversified nature and composition that necessitates coalition politics as its *modus operandi* to realize its liberationist aims. Consequently, those critics level the kind of accusation noted. But, she concludes, West is consistent in his commitment to Marxism.

I entirely agree with Cowan on this point. To appreciate West's consistency as a Marxist, one needs only to revisit his view of the cause of Black oppression in the society. Although cognizant of the fact of racism, West nevertheless often privileges class over race as the chief source of social inequities. And the result of such privileging is that he thinks economic redistribution measures are adequate to combat Black oppression. But holding such a position as he does, even though I think wrongheaded, is strong evidence, in my view, that he is tenacious in his subscription to Marxism. And I have not seen any evidence that he has relinquished that position despite what his rhetoric might lead some to believe. Of course, it is arguable that Marxism is the only remedy to socioeconomic oppression, and I have cast serious doubt on this claim in my critique of West.¹⁶ My criticism therefore would apply equally to Wood as to West on this issue. To sum up, Cowan's treatment on the subject of West's commitment to Marxism is highly commendable.

There is a lot more to Cowan's book than I can discuss in these few pages. But despite my reservations about her treatment of some issues, *Cornel West: The Politics of Redemption* is an intellectually engaging book. It is thoroughly researched, well-organized and clearly written. Readers will be provoked either to re-read West's texts or to respond to Cowan's interpretation of them. Either way, the book is an important contribution to the study of West's thought.

Endnotes

1. Mark David Wood, *Cornel West and the Politics of Prophetic Pragmatism* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000); George Yancy (ed.), *Cornel West: A Critical Reader* (Malden, MA and Oxford, England: Blackwell Publishers, 2001); and Clarence Shole' Johnson, *Cornel West and Philosophy* (New York and London: Routledge, 2002).
2. See, for example, West's *Prophecy Deliverance* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1982), chap. 4.
3. I say this cognizant of West's rejection of empirical testability as too narrow and limiting a concept of epistemic justification and his proposed, but in my view problematic, alternative criterion of group/communal acceptance of propositions for meaningfulness. See his "A Philosophical View of Easter," in *Prophetic Fragments* (Trenton, New Jersey: Africa World Press, 1988); hereafter cited simply as *Prophetic Fragments* with page numbers given in parenthesis.
4. See, for example, A. J. Ayer, *Language Truth and Logic* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1952), pp. 31-45. Admittedly, West rejects such a view in the essay "A Philosophical View of Easter," describing it as the dogma of sentential reductionism. The dogma is one in which sentences are construed as isolated entities with the consequence that truth-value ascription is to atomistic sentences that have no bearing or relation to other sentences. Contrary to this view, West suggests that truth-value ascription to individual sentences, whether in science or religion, is intelligible only in a *context or network of sentences* to which a particular sentence belongs. This is because, he says, any attempt to describe or theorize about the world, self or anything else for that matter, presupposes a network of sentences, not individual sentences *simpliciter*. Accordingly, to say that theory or description about self or the world is accurate is to say that there is a network of sentences within one's domain of inquiry such that the truth-value of individual members is dependent on the truth-value of other members in the network (*Prophetic Fragments*, pp.260-263). I take West to be advancing a variant of the coherence theory of epistemic justification. Even so, I do not think that his position threatens my claim about the empirical content of his philosophical outlook.

5. See his "Dispensing with Metaphysics in Religious Thought," in *Prophetic Fragments*, pp.267-270.
6. Even so, I later exhibit certain difficulties in West's position through an analysis of certain theological concepts that I take to be central to his Christian views. For some critical discussions of West's religious position, see for example, George Yancy, "Religion and the Mirror of God: Historicism, Truth, and Religious Pluralism," in *Cornel West: A Critical Reader*, chap. 6 and Victor Anderson, "Is Cornel West also Among the Theologians? The Shadow of the Divine in the Religious Thought of Cornel West," chap. 7 of the same volume.
7. In *The Cornel West Reader* (New York: Basic Civitas Books, 1999), chap. 29.
8. Yancy and Anderson have each taken up such issues. See Note 6. As Yancy notes, "When Christians assert that 'God exists,' they mean more than what West's historicist philosophy of religion will allow. Their assertion is intended to refer to a transcendent Being with such-and-such metaphysical attributes. But for West, the claim that 'God exists,' as an intended assertorial representational truth-claim, is to be construed as a constructed contextual affair which is related to human goals, human groups, and human communities" (ibid. 127; cp. 126).
9. Other forms of evil that West lists are economic and class inequalities, male supremacy, homophobia, mistreatment of the disabled, and ecological abuse (Yancy 1998, p. 44).
10. This is a central idea in West's "A Philosophical View of Easter."
11. *Prophetic Fragments*, p. 265-266.
12. Such a view undoubtedly commits West to the very metaphysical position he is anxious to reject. Besides, it makes God a white racist, which He may or may not be. I need not pursue this matter here. William R. Jones examines varieties of this notion in his book appropriately titled *Is God a White Racist?* Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1973.
13. For West's reasons for rejecting contemporary theology see his essays "Christian Theological Mediocrity" and "Dispensing with Metaphysics in Religious Thought," both in *Prophetic Fragments*.
14. West, *Race Matters* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), chaps. 1 and 6; and (with Michael Lerner) *Jews and Blacks* (New York: Plume Books, 1995).
15. George Yancy (ed.), *African-American Philosophers: 17 Conversations* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), p. 44; emphases in the original.
16. *Cornel West and Philosophy*, chap. 3.

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Annetta Louise Gomez-Jefferson. 1998. *In Darkness with God: The Life of Joseph Gomez, A Bishop in the African Methodist Episcopal Church*. Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press. xvi + 439.

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Five years after its initial publication, biographers, genealogists, religious and secular scholars, members of the AME Church, and researchers in civil rights, philosophy, and politics as well as African-American studies are still reading Annetta Gomez-Jefferson's biography of her father, Bishop Joseph Gomez.¹ This is a very important book because it is both a very thorough and well-written biography as well as a critical analysis of a man, his church, and the world he encountered. Armed not only with many fond memories, personal anecdotes, experiences and insights, but also a host of documents, including church and family records, diaries, letters, annotated picture albums, and scrapbooks, Gomez-Jefferson writes with both detachment and passion. Although this is a daughter's biography of a father, she is neither sentimental nor timid. The author recounts the basic facts of her father's life and the many philosophical positions he embraced, with affection, critical commentary, and historical accuracy. This is a significant work because it contains a variety of valuable information and it outlines several areas crying out for additional research and study.

Joseph Gomez was born on the Caribbean island of Antigua. This biography traces his life from the genealogy of his grandparents to his death in Wooster, Ohio and his funeral in 1979 at Bethel in Detroit. In many ways, the saga of Bishop Gomez is the story of the AME church, the black middle-class, and the role of local black leadership in several urban communities. Moreover, this biography examines both civil and religious society from the 1920s through the election of Ronald Reagan. In addition, it is a documented genealogical and historical account of African Americans and their foreign relatives, black and white. Without consciously doing so, Gomez-Jefferson reveals very strong diasporic connections between people of African and European descent in the Caribbean and North America. It is these kinds of "hidden gems" which make this biography a veritable "gold mine" for many academic researchers. Not since Alex Haley's *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*² have the interactions between diasporic populations been so clearly and convincingly documented. Building upon the genealogical information unearthed by her son, Curtis Antonio, Professor Gomez-Jefferson establishes direct connections between Africa, the Caribbean, Europe, and the United States.³ Joseph Gomez was educated by English tutors

in the British tradition. Like many foreigners, he experienced discrimination from both black and white Americans. Tragically, many Americans equated his upper-class British accent, light skin and patrician manner with snobbery. Yet these attributes constitute an important facet of this book's gravity. The life of this charismatic man, who rose through the ranks of the AME Church from innocent lad to Bishop, is a remarkable tale of how one person's journey can illustrate larger historical realities and be used as a vehicle to decipher an age.

Joseph Antonio Guminston Gomez, "the Little Giant," as he was affectionately called, was born November 26, 1890 in Willikies Village, Antigua. One of eight children, he was the oldest son of Manoel Gomez, a wealthy Portuguese merchant, and Rebecca Richardson, a woman of African descent. When his father's business failed in 1902, the circumstances of the family changed and the Gomezes moved from Antigua to Trinidad. There Manoel's business fared no better. Consequently, in 1908, Joseph's parents sent him to New York City to live with his uncle, James Richardson. Having an uncle in New York eased Joseph's adjustment to one of the world's largest and most complex cities. After attending the Episcopal Church with his uncle for several Sundays, Joseph found his way to Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church. That Sunday, as fate would have it, Reverdy Cassius Ransom was preaching a sermon that was part radical political commentary on the plight of Afroamericans and part advocacy for the Church's greater involvement in the material and physical well-being of its members. Hence, Joseph was exposed to a ministry that at once emphasized activist politics and a "social gospel" of action. Little did he know on that first Sunday that Ransom would become his mentor, best friend, and the most important influence on his entire life. Gomez and Ransom developed a father-son relationship that endured for fifty years. In actuality, Bishop Ransom died in the arms of Joseph's wife, Hazel Gomez, as her husband looked on in despair. For more than fifty years, the story of Joseph Gomez and that of Reverdy Cassius Ransom would be linked.

From 1908 until 1911, Joseph attended public high school, worked as an elevator operator, and became a waiter. It was Ransom who persuaded Joseph to pursue the ministry and secured a scholarship to Payne Seminary at Wilberforce University in Ohio. At Wilberforce, Joseph Gomez fell in love with Hazel Eliza Jane Thompson from Toledo, Ohio, a student in the two-year Normal School (teachers) program. On June 18, 1914, he graduated from Payne with honors, was ordained an elder, married Hazel Thompson, and assigned to his first charge, Bethel AME Church in Shelly Bay, Hamilton Parish, on the island of Bermuda.

While in Bermuda, Joseph and Hazel developed their life-long joint religious philosophy of ministry that simultaneously emphasized dedication to the AME Church and social activism. While adding over fifty new members to the church, repairing the building, and decreasing its indebtedness, they became strong advocates of prohibition, critics of the British Government's segregated school policies, property requirements for voters, lack of Black representation in the Assembly, and the segregation of black army troops during World War I. Joseph Gomez was the first Black ever-elected Executive Secretary of the Interdenominational Alliance of Bermuda. Together, Joseph & Hazel engaged young people on many levels and organized the largest Allen Christian Endeavor League on the island.

Three years later, in 1917, Joseph was sent to pastor St. Paul AME Church in Hamilton, Ontario (Canada), and two years after that, Bishop C. S. Smith transferred them to their first American charge, the prestigious Bethel AME Church in Detroit, Michigan. Very quickly, Reverend and Mrs. Gomez

were forced to confront American racism, and they joined the civil rights struggle during their first domestic assignment. Despite vigorous protest from other clergymen who coveted the prestigious and wealthy Bethel pulpit, and those members of the congregation who wanted to retain their current minister, "the boy preacher and his baby wife"⁴ assumed their positions in 1919. His erudite and passionate sermons and infectious personality, and Hazel's exemplary manner and method as First Lady quickly won the affection and respect of their new parishioners. Consequently, within a month, they added a second Sunday service to accommodate the overflowing crowds. Under their leadership, however, the congregation grew so rapidly that they soon had to make plans to build a larger edifice. Despite threats from the Ku Klux Klan, the congregation bought a lot in a white neighborhood on the corner of Frederick and St. Antoine, and in 1925 built what came to be known as Greater Bethel, one of the finest churches of its kind in the U.S. owned by Blacks. To the annoyance of their antagonists, the membership of Greater Bethel eventually grew to over 3,520.

Believing in free speech, the necessity of church involvement in civil society, and to support the civil rights movement, labor unions and the rights of workers, their activism antagonized many facets of established Detroit society. They earned the disapproval of both black and white Detroit when they opened up a social service agency to find housing and jobs for the numerous blacks who were migrating from the South. A public forum on Sunday afternoons which featured addresses by controversial and prominent speakers from around the country caused outrage when A. Phillip Randolph and Chandler Harris, editors of the radical socialist magazine, *The Messenger*, spoke. As President of the Detroit Alliance of AME Preachers, Joseph openly criticized the all-white Detroit Council of Churches for not speaking out against the terrorism of the Klan. Along with other prominent Blacks in the city, he became one of the founding members of the first Board of Directors of the Detroit Memorial Association, a cemetery where Blacks could bury their dead with dignity.

Using the excuse of Bethel's plans to build a new church in a white neighborhood, the Ku Klux Klan burned crosses on the church lawn and made harassing and threatening telephone calls. Joseph and Hazel Gomez were determined to demonstrate their courage as well as their love for Mother Bethel, the congregation, and freedom. Since the police refused to act, they acquired and learned to shoot firearms.⁵

God tested the faith of Joseph and Hazel Gomez. They encountered misunderstanding and jealousy from some family and church members who objected to both their substance and style. Also, they had to contend with hostility, intimidation, and threats from the Detroit Underworld of cabarets, illegal alcohol and racketeers against which they both campaigned. Yet Joseph and Hazel exhibited grace under pressure. In 1923, two years before Ossian H. Sweet⁶ became infamous because he defended his home with gunfire against a menacing white mob, Reverend Gomez conducted church services as armed men stood at the doors and windows. Perhaps the courageous actions of Gomez and his members emboldened Sweet and others to usher in the day when blacks would defend themselves against white violence. When Ossian Sweet, a prominent Black physician, bought a house in a white neighborhood and was charged with first-degree murder for protecting his house from a white mob, not only did Reverend Gomez head a financial campaign for Sweet's defense, but he became active in the fight to remove all restrictive covenants in housing. Despite the personal and

political risks, Joseph Gomez remained loyal to his college friend and became president of the Detroit Sweet Defense Committee.

It was during this decade of racial turmoil in Detroit that Hazel gave birth to two daughters, Eula Viviana and Annetta Louise. Having a family made Mr. and Mrs. Gomez more determined to continue their struggle against injustice without and within the church. Reverend Gomez caused an uproar when he wrote a letter condemning the Council of Churches for its refusal to oppose and repudiate the actions of the KKK. Despite this lack of municipal and religious support, Joseph waged a mighty campaign against the Klan and its supporters in Detroit. Joseph and Hazel even took their activism into the Church. At the General Conference in Louisville, Kentucky in May of 1924, Mrs. Gomez and other women asked the Church to evaluate the place of women in its hierarchy and structure. Being progressive on the issue of women's rights, Joseph supported Hazel when she joined other women in an historic march during the report of the Missionary Department. One banner proclaimed: "We want Women Suffrage and Want It Now"; another charged that: "Taxation without Representation is Tyranny"; and, a third pennant urged: "Vote for Women."⁷ With their place in both the Church and civil society as activists confirmed, Joseph and Hazel were punished for the former's resolution to rotate bishops regularly and break their feudal monopolies of local largess, power, and prestige, which often did not serve the interests of the Church or God. At the General Conference in Chicago, he caused a great stir when he proposed a resolution that all bishops who had served two or more quadrennials in a district should be moved. Despite the dissension of many of the bishops and several very slick and unethical parliamentary maneuvers, the resolution passed 642 to 203. This action caused him to lose many friends; however, he was comforted in the righteousness and propriety of his actions. On the last day on the General Conference in May 1928, Joseph and Hazel were assigned to Allen chapel in Kansas City, Missouri. Although he did not believe it to be true, others suggest that they were being punished for their activism with a demotion to a smaller, less significant church.

Not content to rest and too committed to retreat, the Gomezes went to work immediately. They founded the Paseo Interdenominational Bible Class which had over 400 astute young members, including Roy Wilkins, who was later to serve as the Executive Secretary of the NAACP, particularly during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. As had been the case in Detroit, the Kansas City Council of Churches excluded Negro churches from its membership. Joseph addressed the white Ministerial Alliance concerning this hypocrisy. In an editorial entitled "Talking It Over," Roy Wilkins described Gomez's "diplomacy, irrefutable logic, telling persuasion, [and] uncompromising reasoning," in his use of "fluent citations of ecclesiastical history and stirring plea for the practical application of Christian principles to the problems of the day, ...which resulted in the Council voting to admit 'colored churches'."⁸ As an act of kindness, in July 1930, Bishop John A. Gregg asked Joseph and others to represent the Church at the World Christian Endeavor Convention in Berlin, Germany. This was Joseph's first trip to Europe. In the articles he sent back to the Black press, Joseph discussed how he met prominent Black artists such as Paul Robeson, Louis Drysdale, renowned singers, and other men and women of distinction. Hazel could not leave the young girls; thus, he promised Hazel T. a trip around the world in the future.

After four years in Kansas City, Joseph was assigned across the state to St. Paul AME Church in St. Louis, Missouri in 1932. Continuing his civil rights agitation, he contributed weekly sermonettes on religious and secular questions to the *Pittsburgh*

Courier, a popular national Black newspaper. In addition to integrating the all white Ministerial Alliance of Greater St. Louis, he and Rev. John F. Moreland became the first blacks admitted to and graduated from the Masters Program of Eden Seminary, at Webster Grove, a suburb of St. Louis. Joseph wrote his thesis on *The Significance of Negro Spirituals in a Program of Religious Education*. His research revealed that the genius of the Negro Spiritual is its "religious appeal, the upward reach of the soul, the wailing spirit, the heart throb, the questioning of life, destiny and of God himself, the triumphant notes of Faith and Hope." At the St. Louis Ministerial Alliance held at Eden in 1936, Joseph was elected vice-president of the group. His other accomplishments included active membership in the YMCA and serving as vice-president and member of the Executive Board of People's Hospital. After becoming a mother, Hazel continued to function as church mother and "helpmate." She remained active in both Church and civic affairs. She worked with the YWCA and its summer camps, with the missionary society and she directed the young people's choir at St. Paul.

As a reward for dutiful service without complaint, Joseph and Hazel were assigned to St. James AME Church, Cleveland, Ohio from 1936-1948. He was reunited with his mentor, Reverdy Cassius Ransom, bishop of the district, who now resided at Tawawa Chimney Corner in Wilberforce, Ohio. In Cleveland, Joseph became heavily involved in civic affairs, actively fighting for the improvement and integration of the school system, obtaining paroles and assisting in finding jobs for men and women once they had been paroled, securing public housing for the homeless, heading the St. James Literary Forum, which brought national and international personalities to debate pertinent contemporary political, economic, civic, and social problems. The impact of their social gospel was so widespread that when St. James burned to the ground on January 1, 1938, Joseph launched a fund raising program that was so successful in involving other city organizations that one year later the congregation was able to move back into the new building.

During World War II, Joseph was chosen to chair War Price Rationing Board 18-11, which served most of the Black community in Cleveland. Hazel organized a young men's Sunday School class which grew to over 100 members, all of whom were drafted, and, miraculously, none of whom were killed in the war. As president of the Cleveland Methodist Ministers' Union and member of the Interdenominational Ministers' alliance, Joseph led the protest against the Red Cross, which would not accept blood from blacks. He continued his opposition when later the Red Cross further insulted blacks by accepting their blood but separating it from what they alleged was "white blood."

Joseph lectured for several years at Payne Seminary in Wilberforce, Ohio and in the seminary at Oberlin College. He served on both the University and State Boards of Trustees at Wilberforce University for several terms, and became heavily embroiled in the fight against Bill 258 passed in the Ohio Senate, which reduced University representation on the State Board to one member. Believing the State was attempting to take control and set up a segregated state school at Wilberforce, Joseph and others addressed the Ohio Senate in Columbus and further voiced their objections in the media. Despite his vehement objections and that of Bishop Ransom, the bill was passed in 1947. To the chagrin of many, the result was that two institutions existed at Wilberforce, Ohio — Wilberforce University run by the AME Church and Central State run by the State of Ohio.

Gomez-Jefferson is at her best when she describes the betrayal of the AME Church in general, and Wilberforce University in particular, and when she lays the blame for this unspeakable travesty squarely at the feet of Charles Wesley.⁹ The author extends her criticism of Wesley even more with

substantial Church, private, and public documentation that confirms her conclusion that Charles Wesley betrayed his church and his God. Quoting Bishop Ransom, who was burned in effigy for trying to maintain a single institution at Wilberforce, Gomez-Jefferson reveals the gravity and magnitude of actions which many judged traitorous to a people yearning for a liberal education and knowledge. Of Wesley, Ransom wrote:

There is no question in the minds of those who are familiar with Dr. Wesley's five years of laissez-faire administration ... at Wilberforce that he has proved himself weak as well as vain...interested in his own advancement...He leaned rather heavily toward the state board which had ample funds and accepted his leadership without question.¹⁰

In discussing this issue, the author's multiple perspectives allow her to analyze the sources and render this harsh verdict against the esteemed and distinguished Charles Wesley. Both Bishop Ransom and Reverend Gomez lost friends and support over this issue, which literally and figuratively tore Wilberforce University apart.

Despite the fact that Joseph had failed to be elected bishop four times before, he finally won an episcopacy in 1948. Overcoming the objections of those who said the South would never elect him because he was from the West Indies, too light-skinned, and northern, a new generation of colleagues could no longer deny his erudition, intelligence, passion, and suitability for Mother Bethel's highest office.

Initially, Joseph was assigned to the Fifteenth Episcopal District (South Africa). However, when Bishop Henry Y. Tookes died a few days after the General Conference, fate interceded. Instead, Joseph was reassigned to the Tenth Episcopal District (Texas) which also involved becoming Chancellor of Paul Quinn, a small college in Waco, Texas. Paul Quinn was a dying institution when Joseph and Hazel arrived. The large and unwieldy district, which encompassed all of Texas, needed stern leadership. Although he was a controversial overseer and even sued by his minister, before his eight years were over, Joseph had built on the campus of Paul Quinn College a new chapel, a gymnasium, a combined dining/student union building, a girl's dormitory and a combined classroom and office structure which the district named the Joseph Gomez Administration Building. In addition, he had reorganized the college's educational program, organized its records, and set up professional management of the finances of both the school and the churches. He angered many by insisting that ministers acquire more seminary training and that they and their wives live in the parsonages of their churches. He revised budget procedures to make them more efficient and to make ministers accountable for the appropriate utilization of funds. Despite the resistance to his leadership, many members noted that membership in the AME Church in Texas had increased by twenty-five percent since Bishop Gomez had come to Texas.

Committed to integration and progressive race relations, Bishop Gomez became an active participant in the Waco Commission on Interracial Cooperation. He was the first Black to address the students of Baylor University and in 1951 was instrumental in influencing the Mayor to proclaim the week of the Annual Congress, held on campus, as Paul Quinn Week, and to open all the downtown hotels to the delegates. To complement the Mayor's efforts, the transit company desegregated and renamed the downtown loop bus after the College.

The same year Joseph was a delegate to the Eighth Ecumenical Conference of Methodists held in Oxford, England. During the trip, which included visits to Italy, Germany, and France, he wrote articles for the *Houston Informer*, the *Waco*

Messenger, the *Christian Recorder*, and other church newspapers that reflected his reactions to Europe's slow economic and spiritual recovery from World War II.

In 1953, Joseph was elected First Vice-President of the Texas Council of Churches, an honor never before extended to a Black in the South. The same year a tornado struck Waco, leaving more than 150 people dead, 300 wounded, and the downtown almost destroyed. All of the buildings on the Paul Quinn College campus were damaged except the chapel. In a radio address to the citizens, Joseph said that, like that chapel, the people's faith and courage remained undamaged by the storm. People throughout the state responded to the crisis. Mayor Edgar Dean of Fort Worth proclaimed June 16 as Paul Quinn College Disaster Fund Drive Day. By March 1954, the Waco Appeals Review Board was able to report that, under the leadership of Bishop Gomez, Paul Quinn College had retired its mortgage, and its repair bills from the tornado would be paid in less than a year.

In May of 1954, when the Supreme Court struck down the 1896 *Plessy vs. Ferguson* decision, which had sanctioned segregated schools, Joseph was appointed by the governor to serve on the Texas State Board for School Desegregation. Then in 1956, along with other bishops of the AME Church, he went to Montgomery, Alabama to kneel in prayer at the capitol in support of the bus boycott inspired by Rosa Parks, "a daughter of the AME Church," which was being led by an unknown, Martin Luther King, Jr.

As the Gomezes left Texas in 1956, W. R. White, President of Baylor University, wrote a letter to the AME General Conference which called Gomez: "one of the outstanding citizens and personalities in Waco...a Christian gentleman, an incisive thinker and a masterful leader."¹¹ A local newspaper noted that Bishop Gomez would go into the history books as "the savior of Paul Quinn College, for the old Negro school was near extinction when he came here in 1948." The writer called him the "principal architect" in racial cooperation, and acclaimed his "rare qualities of leadership, of eloquence, of understanding."¹²

At the 1956 AME General Conference in Miami, Joseph was assigned to the Thirteenth Episcopal District, comprised of Tennessee and Kentucky; however, fate intervened again, for he only remained there for a few months. When Bishop Joseph Allen died in November, Joseph replaced him in the Fourth Episcopal District (Indiana, Illinois, Michigan and Ontario, Canada). The next eleven years turned out to be the apex of his career as a bishop. He was reunited with many of his classmates, and several of the students he had taught at Payne Seminary. Chicago sponsored a welcome banquet for the Gomezes during which Richard Daley and other dignitaries of the city brought greetings. Soon after, Detroit held its own banquet. G. Mennen Williams, Governor of Michigan, flew to Detroit to welcome the couple.

Joseph's activities in the Fourth District were numerous and varied. Annually, he held a Minister's Retreat at Camp Baber, Cassopolis, Michigan. In 1959, he was one of the religious leaders who spoke before the Ohio General Assembly and Governor Michael V. Disalle in favor of the passage of the Fair Employment legislation then pending in the U.S. Senate. With great humility and remorse, he delivered the eulogy for his mentor at Wilberforce, Ohio in April, 1959. It was entitled: *Reverdy Cassius Ransom, Prevailer Extraordinaire*, acknowledging Ransom's ninety-eight-year life. At the AME General Conference in May, 1960 in Los Angeles, California, he delivered the Episcopal Address which, according to the minutes, "brought the bishops and other delegates to their feet."

During all of his Annual Conferences, Joseph pleaded with AME members to register to vote, and he joined the

Crusade for Freedom Movement headed by Martin Luther King, Jr., and other civil rights leaders. He held several Summit Meetings in his district, urging his ministers to attend more to the social, civic, and economic problems of their communities as well as to their spiritual needs. With the other Bishops, Joseph visited Presidents Kennedy (1961) and Johnson (1966) at the White House urging them to be committed to civil rights. In August 1961, he was a delegate to the Tenth World Methodist Conference in Oslo, Norway, and in November, the World Council of Churches in New Delhi, India.

In August 1962, the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs in Washington, D.C. honored Joseph for his valuable contributions in his field. Others who were honored in their fields were: Robert Kennedy, Arthur Goldberg, Walter Reuther, Jonas Salk, Henry Ford, A. Phillips Randolph, Senator Phil Hart, A. G. Gaston, Isabelle Lindsay, Louis Blound, and Harvey Russell. During the NAACP National Convention in Chicago, in August 1963, Joseph marched with 18,000 people to Grant Park. When asked to speak, he urged the crowd to show courage in the struggle and compassion for those who failed to understand the serious nature of contemporary issues.

Joseph was the Commencement speaker at Eden Seminary, June 5, 1964 and received an Honorary Doctor of Divinity degree. Although he had spoken at many college graduations and been awarded several honorary degrees, this one was particularly rewarding since it came from Eden, the seminary he and John Moreland had integrated in 1934. The most significant honor, however, came to the Gomezes on Friday, November 13, 1964, when over 3,000 people gathered in the ballroom of the Sherman House in Chicago to celebrate the couple's fifty years of marriage and fifty years of service in the ministry. Joseph's brother, James Gomez, flew in from Trinidad and presented him with the Golden Jubilee Medal from Mayor Edward Taylor. This was the first time the medal had been presented to anyone from outside of Trinidad. Mayors Ralph Locher from Cleveland and Richard Daley of Chicago were present to bring tributes from their respective cities. Also on hand were representatives from the various departments of the AME Church, other churches, and national church organizations, white and Black. Joseph responded with gratitude and humility to the gifts and accolades and closed with a special thanks to his "Hazel T." In recognizing her special place in his life and ministry, with tears flowing from his face, he looked at her and told the assembled:

What more can I say of this woman
- my Hazel T. - who
For fifty years wrought wonders,
whobreasted storms,
Crossed oceans, endured hardships, cheered my
Successes, gave wings to my dreams,
allayed my fears,
Turned darkness to light? Companion,
friend, critic, Team-mate, mother, wife.¹³

Hazel's public demeanor and private strength were attributes that sustained her family over several decades of major adjustments and moves. She was the model wife of a progressive member of the AME clergy. At the 1968 AME General Conference, Bishop Gomez, who was then 78, was relieved of all district responsibilities and was asked to write the *Polity of*

the AME Church. Despite failing eyesight, with the help of family and friends he was able to complete his task.

On December 26, 1970, George W. Baber of the Second Episcopal District died. The Bishops Council made several reassignments. Once again, fate would surprise Hazel and Joseph Gomez. The Bishops decided to send Joseph, who was eighty, to the Seventeenth District in Central Africa (Zambia, Southern Rhodesia, which is now Zimbabwe, and Malawi). Elated to stand finally on African soil, to visit the AME churches and schools in Zambia, the copper mines and small villages, and to meet Zambian President Kenneth Kaunda (formerly an AME) and other leaders involved in the African liberation movements, Joseph and Hazel had accomplished a life-long dream.

At the age of eighty-two, Joseph retired from active service during the 1972 General Conference. For about three years, he and Hazel resided in Cleveland, and then moved to Wooster, Ohio, to live with their daughter, Annetta, who was a professor at the College of Wooster. They spent the summers with Eula and her husband, Harold Williams, a former Cleveland NAACP president, at Woodland Park, Michigan, in a cottage by the lake which had once belonged to Hallie Q. Brown and Reverdy Cassius Ransom, who left it to Hazel and Joseph.

On April 28, 1979, Joseph Gomez died in Wooster, Ohio. Funeral services were held at Bethel in Detroit. He was buried at Detroit Memorial Park, the cemetery he had helped to create fifty years earlier. Hazel T. survived him by three years. Her funeral services were held at St. James in Cleveland. Afterwards, her body was shipped to Bethel Detroit for a special wake and service. The following day she was buried beside Joseph, her companion of sixty-five years.

In telling the life story of her parents, Gomez-Jefferson examines the role and place of the AME church in American society as well as presents an unabashed narrative on the often-derided and neglected black middle-class and its internal and external operations. The AME church was one of the vehicles that the middle-class used as an instrument of social change. The Church also provided a safe space to critique public policy and protest discrimination and racism.

Thus, this book is more than a family biography. It is the story of educated black America. "My dad's story [had] to be told,...People think nothing happened until the '60s," she told *The Cleveland Plain Dealer* in 1986.¹⁴ Without directly trying to do so, Gomez-Jefferson counters *Black Bourgeoisie*, E. Franklin Frazier's critical examination of the black middle-class as self-indulgent, materialistic, and superficial.¹⁵ Indeed, *In Darkness with God* presents the black middle-class and the AME Church as essential elements in the political aspects of the civil rights movement. Both Gomez and his church were strong supporters of education, social progress, and racial advancement. The life of Bishop Gomez and his family delineates the path of upward mobility that was possible for African Americans through education, the influence of a mentor, and the AME Church. In his eulogy (1979), Bishop Hubert N. Robinson said of the 5'4" Bishop Joseph Gomez, "though small in stature, his compatriots had to look up to see him, for his heights of vision and his ideals made him lofty in stature." Speaking at the funeral on behalf of the General Officers of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, Ezra Johnson called him a "Bishop non-parallel, an effective author, a preacher par excellent, a prophet with a thundering voice when aroused, a civil rights champion, even in the pre-civil rights era—a man of kingly bearing, immaculate in attire, a bishop who looked like a bishop, spoke like one, presided and administrated like one."¹⁶ He also noted

that Joseph Gomez had lived, loved and worked in a world of the darkness of sin. Now, together with his Hazel T., a faithful 'daughter of the AME Church' places her parents in the light of God.

Endnotes

1. Joseph Gomez changed the spelling of the last name of his father, Manoel Gomez, whose parents were from Madeira, Portugal, because the Portuguese pronunciation (Gomesh) was too cumbersome. When he enrolled at Wilberforce in 1911, he dropped his two middle names and was thereafter, Joseph Gomez.

2. Alex Haley, *Roots: The Saga of an American Family*. New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc. 1976. In this monumental work, Haley uses nine words he grew up hearing to trace his family's lineage to the Gambia in West Africa. His research on several continents required a great deal of time and money. It took him twelve years to write the book.

3. Antonio Curtis Gomez is a world-class genealogist who has traveled extensively in Europe, the Caribbean, and the United States, including Hawaii, to uncover his family's history. Conducting extensive searches in all kinds of records in English, Portuguese, and Spanish, he was able to correct several misconceptions in the oral history of the Gomez family as well as trace their lineage to Funchal, Madeira, an island 400 miles from Portugal. In addition, he located and contacted several branches of the Gomez family and has visited these relatives on several occasions. Since then, he has taken his mother on trips to Portugal and the Caribbean to meet family members of whose existence she was not aware. Several major reunions have occurred in the last fifteen years.

4. Members of the Bethel congregation who opposed Joseph Gomez as their pastor referred to him and his wife using these terms. See: *In Darkness with God*, p. 71.

5. A police officer, who was a member of Bethel, taught Joseph and Hazel how to use a gun. Hazel exhibited more skill than her husband. "I could aim high and shoot straight," she always claimed." p. 82

6. In what became a landmark court case and major victory for the NAACP, with Clarence Darrow as lead attorney, Sweet and the others were acquitted of murder. This case is a "crucial juncture" in African-American history. It marked the first time that blacks were acquitted for the killing of whites. So significant was this victory that poet Claude McKay wrote his famous poem: "If we must Die," which advocated physical resistance against white brutality.

7. See *In Darkness with God*, p. 90.

8. *Kansas City Call*, Feb, 7, 1956.

9. See: *In Darkness with God*, pp. 189-93.

10. Annetta Gomez-Jefferson. *The Sage of Tawawa: Reverdy Cassius Ransom, 1861 - 1959*. Kent and London: Kent State University Press, 2002, p. 236.

11. W. I. White, To the Delegates of the General Conference, Miami, Florida, *The Texas Record*, May, 1955.

12. *Waco New Tribune*, May 28, 1956

13. See: *In Darkness with God*, p. 315

14. Marianne Evertt, "Stage is set for learning at Wooster College," *The Cleveland Plain Dealer*, June 29, 1986.

15. E. Franklin Frazier. *Black Bourgeoisie*. New York: The Free Press, 1957. Passim.

16. See: *In Darkness with God*, pp. 375-376.

Annetta Louise Gomez-Jefferson. *The Sage of Tawawa, Reverdy Cassius Ransom, 1861-1959*. Kent, OH and London: Kent State University Press, xv + 325.

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Reverdy Cassius Ransom, "the Sage of Tawawa Chimney Corner," was one of the most progressive figures of the late nineteenth and early to mid-twentieth centuries.

Yet few people are acquainted with this enigmatic and controversial figure. This civil rights activist, AME Bishop, editor of the *AME Review*,¹ and church historiographer, editor, friend to Presidents William McKinley, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and Harry Truman, orator, political philosopher, race and religious leader, social critic, writer, and theologian was so self-effacing and unassuming that only a few people know and understand the importance of his varied accomplishments and broad contributions to American life and thought for more than eighty years. Ransom was "a man ahead of his times." He focused on the unfinished agenda of Reconstruction and agitated to make America redeem itself and grant to all people the rights guaranteed in the constitution. In this biography spanning his ninety-eight year life, Annetta Gomez-Jefferson presents a candid internal exposé² of this little known, although very influential, public figure whose primary philosophy was that the AME Church had to concern itself with the affairs of the people as well as those of the state. The devotion to the principle of a "social gospel" would guide all of the major actions and decisions of his long and varied life as a "man of the cloth." This graphic biography resurrects Bishop Reverdy Cassius Ransom of the African Methodist Episcopal Church (AME) from obscurity. For example, no less a figure than W. E. B. Du Bois credits Ransom with the idea of creating the NAACP.³ However, most Americans do not even know his name. Reading this book will reveal that Ransom advised presidents, fought against lynching, created the first institutional church, opposed the death penalty, supported women's rights and their ordination, questioned the oppressive mechanisms of capitalism, rallied against social injustice, and used the terms Afroamerican and black long before Marcus Garvey in one era and Stokely Carmichael in another would take credit for investing those terms with political currency. Moreover, he was the first major public figure in his time to caution against unexamined support of the Republican Party.

Reading this powerful book is comparable to probing a century-long history from the perspective of a very intelligent, highly-educated and well-read individual. Moreover, it presents a well-told story of a man's life and the many people of high and low station with whom he interacted. In addition, it is full of intimate details and provocative insights. Hence, Gomez-Jefferson provides essential reading for anyone trying to understand the history of black and white America as the nation experienced the transition from slavery and Reconstruction to industrialization, migration, and urbanization. In the vanguard of these multiple transformations, with Ransom's influence and insight, the AME Church emerged as a major force in education, religion, and secular society from 1861 to 1959.

Ransom is a unique and important figure because he did not limit his message to the pulpit and the church. He gained notoriety as a provocative speaker in a series of addresses spanning several decades at Faneuil Hall in Boston. Major political figures, captains of industry, and social reformers sought his advice and counsel. Even though he often vehemently criticized public figures, several presidents befriended him. He was patriotic and supported black participation in war; but he protested segregated facilities and unjust conflicts. Despite the fact that he organized the black soldiers who fought with Teddy Roosevelt at San Juan Hill, he shocked the nation with the outrage he expressed and the protest he mounted as he denounced "a grave miscarriage of justice." Ransom saw the so-called "Brownsville Raid" and the unjust treatment to which the black soldiers were subjected from the president and the courts as a grievous blow to race relations. He called the court-martial and subsequent hanging of some of the soldiers "a legal lynching."

Ransom believed in ecumenical church relations and practiced iconoclastic politics. Thus, in 1934 he founded

the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches and he was asked to give an opening prayer at the Democratic National convention in Chicago in 1940. Franklin D. Roosevelt appointed him to the Forty-Fifth Defense Corps, and Ransom maintained friendships with many influential businessmen and politicians, including men as diverse as Andrew Carnegie and Richard J. Daley. Not afraid of taking on controversial positions, Ransom joined A. Philip Randolph in urging President Truman to pass the Fair Employment Practices Act.

Interestingly enough, Ransom could never separate his religious and political beliefs. He fused them into one ministry, at once sacred and secular, which sought to simultaneously redeem America while it uplifted the black race. Thus, he ran for a seat in Congress from the Twenty-First District in New York in 1918 and headed the “Smith for President” colored league of New York in 1928. When both parties either ignored or seemed to take the black vote for granted, Ransom often threatened to “sit-out” the election or vote for Eugene V. Debs and other socialist candidates. In a slow evolutionary move motivated by both disgust and disenchantment, he abandoned the Republican Party for its racist and reactionary policies and practices. This move culminated in his open support for Al Smith’s bid for president in 1928 as a final protest against the retrograde policies of the “Dixiecrats” who now controlled the Republican Party. By 1932, Ransom was a registered Democrat and chairman of the National Colored Citizens for Roosevelt Committee. Obviously, this caused a major rift among black civil rights leaders and politicians.

Ransom responded by increasing his objections to black leaders who gleaned their support from the white power structure. Indeed, he spoke out against and wrote critical articles and reviews about Booker T. Washington’s accommodationist policies. With voice and pen, the two men waged a war of words and became bitter enemies as a result of their philosophical differences. Although they never reconciled, on some issues they occasionally agreed. Hence, it was to Ransom that Washington turned for aid and comfort after Robert Ulrich physically assaulted him in New York City in March of 1911. Arriving at Ransom’s home bandaged and bleeding, Washington sought Ransom’s assistance in quelling a matter of potential public embarrassment that might undermine his power and prestige among both his black and white supporters. Little is known of this incident; yet, Gomez-Jefferson is able to tease out the facts with passion and insight.⁴ During his lifetime, Ransom was steadfast in his belief that protest and political agitation were essential parts of the responsibility of engaged and responsible black leadership.

As a major civil rights leader and social reformer for eight decades, Ransom made many friends with his uncompromising integrity, and created many enemies with his outspoken commentary and unorthodox views. Having heard the “Rebel Cry” and rejoicing in the Supreme Court’s decisions in 1948 and 1954,⁵ Ransom had known every major public figure from Frederick Douglass to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He promoted the literary career of Paul Lawrence Dunbar and agreed with William Monroe Trotter by fighting colonization. While a pastor in Boston, he sponsored Samuel Coleridge-Taylor and forced elite white America to come to his church for a “not to be missed” concert.⁶ Over his ninety-eight year lifetime he interacted with every major figure from Jane Addams to Elijah Mohammed and Ida B. Wells. Although he numbered among his friends and associates a host of “who is who” in America for over eighty years, he has never received the public recognition he deserves.

Although better known in the religious circles, he advocated progressive positions and supported unpopular ideas. His attempts to modernize the African Methodist Episcopal Church involved the elevation of the status of women, the reduction of

the power of the “ecclesiastical oligarchy,” and containment of the autocratic power of bishops, district officers, and local pastors. Moreover, he urged that the elevation of the gospel was the central duty of the AME Church. Consequently, he argued that the church had to address the social needs of its congregations as well as participate in the affairs of society. His calls to decentralize church authority and make all financial and business matters transparent were routinely rejected. He was strongly reprimanded when he embraced Father Dicing and supported his street ministry in New York; in the same manner, he was chastised when he started the Institutional Church in Chicago. Both actions went beyond the traditional horizons of mainline Christians. However, over time, he and others would win the battle to professionalize the pastorate and support educated and trained ministry.

Although married three times, Ransom was a devoted family man and he responded without bitterness or self-pity to the ever-changing fortunes of his life. His two sons gave him scores of grandchildren, great-grandchildren and even one great-great-grandchild before he died. He delighted in the company of these children and shared with them books, stories, and tales of days long gone. His second wife Emma, to whom he was married for fifty-six years, was a major force in his life and participated fully in every aspect of his religious and secular work. Well-loved as a couple, they were invited to social affairs, dinners, and major private and public events. Having an international array of friends, their anniversary celebrations were comparable to “affairs of state.” He received local, national, and international guests and dignitaries from the arts, business, education, politics, and religion. Always surrounded by friends and family, Ransom was loved and admired.

Yet at times he felt a deep sense of loneliness. Few people understood the depth of his intellectual hunger and his quest to affirm the place of black Americans in the Western Hemisphere and their contributions to America. He was one of the first black elders to call for “Black Studies” and argued for a sustained and systematic study of Africa and its diaspora. As a participant and witness of many important events in American history, he possessed a unique perspective on history, culture, religion, and politics in this country. He was among the first to articulate the idea of the centrality of black Americans to American life and culture. In postulating the idea that Toni Morrison would later develop in *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*,⁷ Ransom would see contemporary Hip Hop and Rap as a logical culmination of the “Negroization”⁸ of America. He urged each succeeding generation to codify, research, and study the essential contributions of Africans to both world and western history. In this way, he affirmed his philosophical belief in the redemptive power of education.

Annetta Gomez-Jefferson has written the first comprehensive biography of this extraordinary, but not very well-known, public figure whose life spanned almost a century. Gomez-Jefferson has written about Ransom from the inside out. In doing so, the author discusses a man of vast intellect, selfless commitment, and dedicated activism. Conscious of his own shortcomings and somewhat plagued by the failure of not having achieved all of his ambitions and goals, Ransom dedicated his life to “Mother Bethel” and the people around him who craved and needed his immediate attention. His intense religiosity and his burning social vision sustained him throughout his long life.

Although he never achieved the recognition of his contemporaries and associates such as Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Paul

Lawrence Dunbar, and W. E. B. Du Bois, Ransom was just as important. He remains a lesser-recognized public figure because he confined most of his activity to the affairs of the AME church and he was shunned in many circles because he was “wet.” At great personal risk, he supported Al Smith for the presidency in 1928 because of disenchantment with the Republican Party. In so doing, he let the issue of alcohol continue to haunt them both. Although he knew that black and white Protestants opposed the manufacture, sale, distribution, and consumption of alcoholic beverages, Ransom continued to imbibe. Despite his drinking, Ransom maintained public and private relationships with some of the most important people alive during his lifetime.

Gomez-Jefferson was able to produce her significant biography of this extraordinary man because he left many of his books, documents, letters, materials, papers, and personal effects to her father, Bishop Joseph Gomez, whom he called “my son in the gospel.” Using these sources, and a lifetime of intimate familial and religious contact with Ransom, Gomez-Jefferson has been able to unearth the many personal contradictions and societal contributions of this phenomenal man. Tragically, the author, in attempting to be detached and scholarly, tends to treat important events and personalities in a mundane and superficial manner, for example, that Du Bois credits Ransom with the conceiving the idea for what became the NAACP. Paul Robeson offers similar credit to Ransom for his devotion to Afro-American music. Therefore, even though the issue is mentioned in text and footnote, as the first comprehensive volume on Ransom’s life, this biography unearths more avenues for discovery and research than it adequately covers. Overall, the failure to place this incredible man and his unprecedented life in a larger historical context is the greatest weakness of this incomparable manuscript. In addition, although the evidence is presented throughout the book, Gomez-Jefferson only hints at the two most important reasons that Ransom is less well-known than his contemporaries. Bishop Reverdy Cassius Ransom was just as important as Du Bois, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Malcolm X, and many other black and white leaders. However, his decision to dedicate his life to God and the AME Church limited his exposure to and acceptance within certain facets of secular society. Moreover, his quiet passion for alcohol probably prevented him from receiving more accolades and greater recognition. Despite these minor shortcomings, Gomez-Jefferson makes the century-long life of Reverdy Cassius Ransom accessible and exciting. She skillfully weaves a narrative that brings the major political figures and situations of Ransom’s ninety-eight year life into a well-written history of the AME Church and illuminates Ransom’s unquestioned devotion to God, his country, his people, and “Mother Bethel.”

Endnotes

1. *The AME Review* is a quarterly journal of church activities, book reviews, news, and personalities as well as features that has been published since 1883. First published in 1841, it was a weekly magazine called *The Christian Herald*; in 1852 it became *The Christian Recorder*.
2. Bishop Ransom was the life-long mentor of Bishop Gomez. Encouraging him to carry on the good work of the Church, Ransom gave Gomez many of his books, papers and documents. Hazel Gomez preserved these materials, and they now reside with Annetta Gomez-Jefferson. In addition, Ransom’s second wife, Georgia Myrtle Teal Ransom gave Annetta Gomez-Jefferson access to a trunk with other primary sources. This wealth of material gives Annetta a full and accurate perspective on her father’s mentor. Both the written record and my conversations with Annetta confirm that Bishop Ransom had a problem with alcohol. Obviously, because he lived to be ninety-eight years old, this was no

compromise to his health. Those who opposed him for economic, political, and religious reasons used the presence of this “private demon” as a way to diminish his stature and prominence,

3. In *The Sage of Tawawa*, Gomez-Jefferson quotes Du Bois as writing that Ransom’s speech entitled: “The Spirit of John Brown,” created the NAACP. p. 91. In 1935, Du Bois wrote: “That speech more than any single other event stirred the great meeting. It led, through its inspiration and elegance, to the eventual founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.”
4. With both personal knowledge of this event and using a *New York Age* article entitled: “Booker T. Washington,” and dated March 23, 1911, Gomez-Jefferson put the pieces of this rather peculiar event in perspective. There is the inference that Washington was involved in an interracial romance and the husband objected. See: *The Sage of Tawawa*, p. 113.
5. *Shelley v. Kraemer* (1948) abolished restrictive covenants in housing and *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas* (1954) eliminated racial segregation in public education.
6. Of that evening, with sardonic wit, Ransom wrote: “In the midst of this congested condition, Boston society came marching in gowned in evening clothes, protected by expensive furs and adorned with its best jewelry.” Quoted in *The Sage of Tawawa*, p. 93, from: Reverdy C. Ransom, *The Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom’s Son* (Nashville, TN: A.M.E. Sunday School Union, 1950) 17.
7. In this brilliant work, Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison discusses the central place and role that African Americans have played in defining the nation’s life and culture. She argues that even when white authors are writing for white audiences, an “Africanist presence” pervades their work and defines both actions and characters. See: Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, 1993.
8. Although rarely explicitly stated as such, much of the early writing on black and white relations in America demanded and supported segregation as a way to keep the “Negro” from “infecting” or “rubbing off on” white people. However, what is clear is that much of the culture of America is a response to the presence of Africans. From dance and food, clothing and hairstyles as well as music and speech, the presence of African-Americans is undeniable.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Dr. Alphine W. Jefferson is currently Professor of History at the College of Wooster in Ohio, where he was the History Department Chair from 1996 to 1999. Upon returning from sabbatical leave as a Visiting Professor at The Institute for Global Studies in Culture, Power and History at Johns Hopkins University (1999–2000), Wooster asked Jefferson to transform one of the nation's leading Black Studies Programs (1973) into a department. As Founding Chair of the Black Studies Department from 2000–2003, Jefferson expanded the Program's historic domestic emphasis by adding a diasporic and international focus. Professor Jefferson has taught at Northern Illinois University and Southern Methodist University in Dallas, Texas, where he served as Director of African-American Studies. The recipient of many awards, including an NEH Fellowship and Mellon Fellowship at Harvard, Jefferson has degrees from the University of Chicago and Duke. Overseas and post-graduate education and training have included study at the University of Warwick in England, Michigan State University, the University of Salvador in Bahia, Brazil, and the University of Nairobi in Kenya. Professor Jefferson is widely published in African American Studies, American History, and Interdisciplinary Studies, including Oral History. Jefferson is completing two books with Annetta Gomez-Jefferson. They are: *From Back Door to Center Stage: A History of Blacks in American Theater*. It is the first comprehensive treatment of black theater in America; and, *Two Bishops - One Church: Selected Sermons and Writings of AME Bishops Gomez and Ransom*, which will include sermons, a diary and other writings of these two important AME figures. Jefferson is also completing a monograph on "The Contract Buyers League of Chicago." It explores the CBL, which was a local, interracial, and interfaith civil rights organization. Founded in 1968, this organization challenged housing discrimination in Chicago through a series of public protests and precedent setting legal actions and court cases.

Clarence Shole' Johnson is Professor of Philosophy at Middle Tennessee State University. He specializes in Early Modern Philosophy, Ethics, and Africana and African American Philosophy. He is the author of the groundbreaking book, *Cornel West & Philosophy: The Quest for Social Justice* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003). Johnson has also published in various distinguished scholarly journals, including *Dialogue: Canadian Philosophical Review*, *Journal of Philosophical Research*, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, and the *Encyclopedia of African Religions and Philosophies*.

Dr. William R. Jones is an internationally renowned scholar in the areas of Africana Philosophy, Multiculturalism, Liberation Theology, and Oppression. Now he is Professor Emeritus at Florida State University. He had been a member of the Florida State University faculty since 1977, and was the first Director of African American Studies, with a joint appointment as a Professor in the Department of Religion. Jones has conducted extensive field research on social change in the Republic of South Africa with annual research trips since 1990. Dr. Jones has presented his research in South Africa, Kenya, Martinique, Ghana, Korea, Belgium, Puerto Rico, Spain, Uruguay, Canada, and Great Britain. In addition to endowed and major lectures at such institutions as Cornell, Union Theological Seminary, Tufts, Vanderbilt, Ohio State, University of Missouri,

Bates College, Tuskegee Institute, and Wesley Theological Seminary, he has worked with countless grassroots organizations and churches across America. Dr. Jones received his B.A. with highest honors in philosophy from Howard University his Master of Divinity, from Harvard University, (W.E. B. Du Bois Institute) and his Ph.D. in Religious Studies from Brown University. Prior to accepting his positions at FSU, he was a member of the faculty at Yale Divinity School and served as Coordinator of African American Studies. He has also held visiting professorships at Brown University, Princeton Theological Seminary, Union Theological Seminary, Iliff School of Theology, and The Humanist Institute in New York. Dr. Jones' text, *Is God a White Racist* and his "The Legitimacy and Necessity of Black Philosophy: Some Preliminary Considerations" are foundational contributions to Black Liberation Theology and Africana philosophy, respectively.

Cheryl D. Marcus, after graduating from Central State University as a philosophy major, earned a Masters in Education and returned to her alma mater to serve as an administrator in the Office of the President at Central State University. Utilizing her critical thinking skills and creative ideas from philosophy, she has substantially aided in the financial solvency of the University. In her role as Principal Investigator of three different proposals for funding the CSU campus, Ms. Marcus has acquired grants from the United States Department of Education in the amounts of \$1,054,362 (1999-2000), \$1,109,120 (2000-2001) and \$1,397,813 (2001-2002).

Shannon M. Mussett recently earned her Doctorate in Philosophy from Villanova University. While at Villanova, she was the Assistant Director for The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy from 1998-2000. Last academic year, she taught at Bryn Mawr and currently is on the faculty at Utah State Valley College. Her main research interests center around 19th Century German Philosophy, French Existentialism, and Feminism. Dr. Mussett is a member of The Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy and will present a paper at its annual conference in 2003.

Charles Peterson received his Bachelor's degree *cum laude* in Philosophy from Morehouse College and holds a Master's degree and Doctorate in Philosophy, Interpretation, and Culture from Binghamton University. He is a faculty member in the Black Studies Department at The College of Wooster in Wooster, Ohio. Peterson's research and teaching interests focus on Africana Philosophy, Afri-Marxist Philosophy, Marxist Theory, Black Intellectual History, African History, African Diasporic History, African-American Literature, and Cultural Studies. Dr. Peterson has presented scholarly papers in Ethiopia and Tanzania as well as at the APA Eastern Division. He is a member of the International Society for African Philosophy and Studies.

EDITORIAL NOTICE

The Editors of the *APA Newsletter on Philosophy and the Black Experience* are pleased with the increasing number of papers submitted and inquiries about contributions to the *Newsletter*. With that in mind, we have instituted two additional changes to our format. First, we will now have a separate listing of biographical information of all the contributors to each issue. This, we think, should enhance our readers' opportunity to know more about

the background and accomplishments of our contributors. Therefore, we would like to request that prospective authors include a short biographical summary along with their papers. Please have all biographical materials on a separate sheet from the actual submission. Second, we will have a regular working bibliography on Africana Philosophy in each issue. So therefore we are requesting bibliographical contributions along with articles and book reviews. We think that a working bibliography is one way to enhance both teaching and research in the Philosophy of the Black Experience. Bibliographies and articles should be sent to Dr. John H. McClendon III, jmcclelland@bates.edu (Associate Professor of African American Studies/American Cultural Studies) and book reviews to George Yancy, georgeandsusany@aol.com (McAnulty Fellow in the Philosophy Department at Duquesne University). In order to expedite the review and publishing process, we are requesting that *all submissions* be made by *electronic mail* before January 15, 2004, for consideration of inclusion by the next issue. Contributions can be submitted via email *file attachment*, in the following formats (in order of preference): Microsoft Word (.doc), Rich Text Format (.rtf), or Word Perfect (.wpd). References should be in the form of endnotes rather than footnotes and titles of books, journals and other sources italicized and not underlined. Any other questions about formatting contact either of the Editors of *NPBE*.