

I want to thank members of the Selection Committee and ASTR officers for this award. I am deeply honored and humbled to receive this recognition, particularly when I think of the distinguished company I am now joining. I am *almost* left speechless because I barely know the appropriate protocols for such an occasion, other than to say “thank you.”

But I do want to say a bit more about where I have come from and with whom I have traveled, because I trust that you know that no one achieves such recognition by working alone. Coming from a working-class background and inspired by the proud affirmations of what was then a nascent Black Arts movement, I entered a graduate program in drama because it seemed a more compelling way to communicate with people than my other option of social work. At that time, there were no African American Studies courses; I worked as a teaching assistant for Bill Chace who taught the first African American literature course at Stanford. The language and conceptual tools used at that time were largely dismissive, rendering African American creativity an inferior imitation of work produced by white Americans. And thus, a scholar like Margaret B. Wilkerson, who was teaching not at Stanford but Berkeley and *nonetheless* took me under her wing, was critical to my development. She modeled a research methodology of closely observing black church and community life, remembering the ground on which she stood, and building her analysis of theatre upon that foundation.. I believe while I was still in graduate school, Harry Elam came to Berkeley to study with Margaret, and he has been an important interlocutor and colleague ever since. Outside the seminar room, black nationalist and anti-war protest movements were occurring, spurring many of us inside to better understand how the arts had a stake in defining what kinds of life we might imagine living. Courses on Brecht and classical Greek drama, taught by Andrzej Wirth and John Chioles

respectively, enabled me to cast some of what I was learning about black theatre—and life—into wider frames of reference. Scholars such as St. Clair Drake and Sylvia Wynter, with whom I worked as a young, untenured faculty when each served as director of the African and African American Studies Program at Stanford, were trailblazers in establishing African Diaspora studies as a field in which I can now locate my own work; equally importantly particularly in the 1970s and 80s, they modeled how rigorous scholarship is in itself a form of activism. A Fulbright Fellowship to Nigeria and playwright-scholar Femi Osofisan would enable me to learn about Yoruba cosmology and performance; I would find in that rich corpus of legend and philosophy tools with which to analyze theatre. Fast forward yet again, and I proudly cite folks like Joe Roach—who left Northwestern soon after he hired me!—Tracy Davis, Susan Manning, Margaret Drewal, and the late Dwight Conquergood who were beginning to build Northwestern's graduate programs in Theatre and Drama and in Performance Studies into the power houses they have become today. I wanted to participate in conversations with my colleagues; their high level of scholarship inspired me to strive harder. We would be joined by bright graduate students and younger faculty colleagues like E. Patrick Johnson, Ramon Rivera-Servera in Performance Studies; Harvey Young in Theatre; Mary Pattillo, Celeste Watkins-Hayes, Martha Biondi, and the late Richard Iton in African American Studies. Their research questions fed my own work and broadened my horizons. ATHE, ASTR, and the African Literature Association offered additional, intellectual networks in which I could try out ideas and be challenged by others' scholarship.

In closing this abbreviated genealogy, I want to riff on an assertion that Anna Julia Cooper made in 1892. This author, educator, and activist would go on to become, in 1924, the

fourth African American woman to earn a PhD. She declared in part, "...when and where I enter,...then and there the whole Negro race enters with me." In many respects we have come a long way nearly a century later. As I look out at this audience today, I see many familiar faces. Though I am taking home the award, I recognize those of you with whom I have entered. Your intellectual perseverance and scholarship, your friendship and generosity have contributed to my standing at this podium today. To you, a special thank you for having walked parts of this road with me. To the ASTR leadership and membership, I am extremely proud and grateful that you find merit in my scholarship. Thank you.