

# **Innovative Connections of Africana Cultures: Issues and Literatures with Policy Studies and Analysis**

by  
guest editor

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The genesis of this special issue of the *Journal of Pan African Studies* goes back to the summer of 2005 when members of the Africana Cultures and Policy Studies Institute (ACPSI) gathered in Charlotte, North Carolina, under the hosting of one of its executive members and senior fellows Dr. Robert Smith, to examine key issues facing people of African descent in the twentieth- and twenty-first centuries. The ACPSI, then barely one year old, decided to edit a special journal issue that would gather the theories of various scholars of Africana Studies on this crucial topic. With the support of Dr. Itibari M. Zulu and of scholars of Africana Studies, including those of the ACPSI, the special issue has become a reality.

In 2003, the ACPSI was formed as a part of our intellectual community at Bowling Green State University. The ACPSI is a unique research think tank that examines the intersections and linkages among Africana culture(s) and policy (public and private), emphasizing an interdisciplinary approach comprised of disciplines including but not limited to history, cultures studies, literature, education, etc. Our main mission is the definition of the field of Africana Cultures and Policy Studies and the establishment of a new and innovative research paradigm for Africana Studies. The scholars of the ACPSI seek to develop methodologies that involve the canonization of Africana Studies texts and materials for the purposes of policy analysis, development, evaluation, and implementation. We believe that the next phase of the Africana Studies movement is the production of scholarship that centrally addresses the connections between Africa and African-descended peoples in an effort to substantively link theory and praxis and impact the policy process from both bottom-up and top-down approaches. More information about the Institute, including its Senior Fellows and publication projects, can be found at: <http://www.theacpsi.org/>.

The major objective of this special issue is to establish connections between people of African descent while providing answers to the following questions: How have forcefully imposed relations between haves and have-nots across the regions where Black populations live shape the inequalities that are plaguing the Black world? What roles do racism and prejudice play in constraining African populations? Can such challenges be overcome through reevaluation of African cultures?

The contributors to this volume have reached this goal by drawing strong linkages between Africans, African American, and, other groups. Such connections dispel the enduring Eurocentric vision of Africa as a continent “frozen in time” and reveal the wide range of linkages in cultures and conditions Africans of the continent and of the Diaspora have and will share well into the new millennium. A major theme among the essays is the consequence of enslavement, racism, colonialism and other forms of inequities on people of African descent. Thus, traumatic historical experiences, which have lingering effects on Blacks on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean, compromise the dreams of democracy and racial and economic integration. Drawing from various disciplines such as history, anthropology, philosophy, postcolonial theory, education, literature, popular culture, and cultural studies, the contributions show the tremendous potential in scholarly analysis of the relation between Africa and its Diaspora.

Speaking about the regenerative powers of African cultures, Dr. Diedre L. Badejo suggest that the regenerative power of the Odu; Ifa oral texts and of Yoruba; and Akan cultures provide a model for understanding the social, political, and cultural significance of African women’s roles globally. Dr. Badejo’s broad and complex interpretation of African womanhood supports her groundbreaking vision of African Studies curriculum as a system of knowing and being grounded on the valuation of leadership discourse and ideological framework in Odu; Ifa narratives.

Dr. Wendy Wilson-Fall and Charles Sow develop a similar analysis of the regenerative power of African cultures by examining the hidden meanings of a nineteenth-century African American song that the Work Progress Administration declared to be a “nonsense song.” Intersecting research on the early free Black immigrants in Virginia with scholarship on the linguistic parallels between Wolof and African American English, Dr. Wilson-Fall and Sow reveal the range of factors which make the Wolof song a creolized narrative of continuity, resistance, and invention in nineteenth century America.

Drawing from Derrick Bell’s theory of racial realism as well as John A. Bruce’s racial ideology, Mr. Tommie J. Curry, who is completing his doctorate degree, demonstrates the continuing significance of Delany’s conception of Blacks in America “as a nation within a nation.” Mr. Curry brilliantly weaves his analysis of “nation-ism” in the writings of Delany and Bruce into a review and critique of the theories on Delany’s racial ideologies that scholars such as Tunde Adeleke, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Tommie Shelby have developed.

In her article, Dr. Rosemary Traoré explores the misrepresentation of Africans in European history texts and its effect on young African American students' perception of Africa. Using a strong interdisciplinary methodology that draws from history, education, and popular culture, Dr. Traoré argues that exposing these students to African and African American authors from an early age would be an effective way to protect them from the stereotyping of Africa that permeates American culture.

Dr. Tim Lake's article is in perfect synch with Dr. Traore's and Dr. Vaught's, since it, too, explores the image of Africa in Western culture. Referring to Winthrop Jordan's *White Over Black* (1968) and other pivotal texts, Dr. Lake traces this image to the early contact between English and Africans from which commercial relationships which led to enslaved and colonialism. Discussing numerous legal cases in the United States, Dr. Lake suggests the endurance of the "color line" that W.E.B. Du Bois identified as the motor-force of American history. Dr. Lake dexterously links this color-line to the colonial state in Africa.

Professor Mwatabu Okantah provides a thoughtful study of the biography, key works, and theories of Chief Fela Sowande. Placing some of Chief Fela Sowande's writings and ideas about the importance of African culture in the cultural, social, and intellectual development of African Americans, Professor Okantah provides new ways of understanding Africa's relations to its Diaspora. Professor Okantah does a marvelous job at suggesting the importance of African cosmologies and philosophies in the development of an African-centered Black Studies curriculum.

As the remarkable essay of Dr. Seneca Vaught has shown, the demonization of Africa in Western thought is symptomatic of the devaluation of African lives in Western political agenda, as was the case during the terrible genocide in Rwanda of which causes, Dr. Vaught shows, are traceable to the parallelism between racism in America and human atrocities in Africa. Dr. Vaught clearly shows the importance of using African American popular culture as a means for understanding African American historical relations with Africa.

In a similar vein, Dr. Zachery Williams provides an excellent study of the relationships between African Americans and Africa during the twentieth century. Tracing African American involvement in United States' foreign policy towards Africa since before the middle of the twentieth century, Dr. Williams shows the continuity of this commitment to the current periods. Through a study of African American participation in U.S. foreign affairs and State Department, Dr. Williams explores the evolution of a Black Foreign Policy Constituency.

Colonialism is a recurrent theme in the two book reviews in this issue. It is salient in Dr. A. Clare Brandabur's assessment of Caroline Elkins's *Britain's Gulag: The Brutal End of Empire in Kenya* (2005) which suggests strong parallels between the history of British colonialism in Kenya and that of Israel's settlement in Palestine. Dr. Brandabur shows not only the pertinence of Elkin's book as a memory of the brutal Mau Mau War which strongly affected Kenya's modern history, but also the significance of this history as trauma and genocide that parallel those in Palestine.

In a similar vein, Professor Idris Kabir Syed's synopsis of Manthia Diawara's *We Won't Budge: An African Exile in the World* (2003) is steeped in denunciation of colonialism. The review shows Diawara's exploration of the meaning of his personal experiences with immigration and his reflections about race relations in both France and the United States. Reflecting on his own recent travel to India, which mirrors Diawara's emigration from Africa into France and the United States, Professor Syed shows the power of roots as means for resisting the ambiguities of exile.

As the above essays have shown, culture is a vital means of Black survival that enslavement and racism cannot annihilate within Africa and its Diaspora. This African cultural heritage provides Africana people with the tools for creating the consciousness, unity, and intellectual praxis which will lead to Black liberation. In this sense, there is hope in Africa and in the Black Diaspora. Looking at the history of African American retention of African traditions and the intimate and fruitful associations between other Blacks of the Diaspora and Africans in the twentieth century, there are strong reasons to believe that the dawn of freedom, equality, and socio-economic advancement for Africana people is not far from being a reality.