

Engendering the Diaspora: Gender, Culture, Race and Identity in the Contemporary African World

by

guest editors

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Yaba Amgborale Blay (M.A., Temple University; M.Ed., University of New Orleans; B.A. Salisbury State University) is a doctoral candidate in the Departments of African American Studies and Women's Studies at Temple University. Her dissertation, tentatively entitled “ ‘*Ne Nso Oben?*’ (“*Why would you do a thing like that?*”): A Holistic Cultural Portrait of Skin Bleaching in Ghana,” relies upon African-centered and African Feminist methodologies to investigate the social practice of skin bleaching in Ghana and further seeks to situate skin bleaching within the history and culture of Ghanaian society. Yaba is currently a Visiting Pre-Doctoral Fellow in the African~New World Studies Program at Florida International University. Her recent case study on skin color politics entitled “Pretty Color ‘n Good Hair: Creole Women of New Orleans and the Politics of Identity” will be published as a chapter in the forthcoming volume *Blackberries and Redbones: Critical Articulations of Black Hair/Body Politics in Africana Communities* edited by Regina Spellers and Kimberly Moffitt.

Kaila Adia Story (M.A., Temple University; B.A. Women's Studies DePaul University) is a doctoral student in the Departments of African American Studies and Women's Studies at Temple University. Her dissertation tentatively entitled: *Consuming Black Femininity: Commodity Racism and the Gendered & Sexual Scripting of the African Body* through discourse analysis explores four corporeal figures, (Sara Baartmann-the Hottentot Venus, Josephine Baker-the Black Venus, The Video Vixen, and the Black Male Bodied Drag Queen), at four different moments in history to investigate the dominant representations of the Black Feminine body and uncovers how these public figures became and continue to be the corporeal manifestations of the political, cultural, and ideological investments of Western society. Her essay “Performing Venus: From Hottentot to Video Vixen: The Historical Legacy of Black Female Body Commodification, which is a small portion of her dissertation will be published as a chapter in the upcoming March 2007 anthology *Home Girls Make Some Noise: Hip Hop & Feminism* edited by Aisha S. Durham, Elaine Richardson, Rachel Raimist and Gwendolyn Pough.

Following the spirit of *The Journal of Pan African Studies (JPAS)*, “an interdisciplinary scholarly journal devoted to a synthesis of African world community studies and research that works to ask questions and seek answers to critical contemporary issues, based on an affirmative African centered logic and language of liberation,” this special edition, **“Engendering” the Diaspora: Gender, Culture, Race and Identity in the Contemporary African World,**” includes new approaches to the study of gender dynamics in Africa and the Diaspora that hold paramount the influence of race and culture on the development/maintenance of gendered identities.

We begin this special issue with an examination of whether contemporary (Western) feminism has place within the consciousnesses of Africana women through a report of the proceedings of the “F” Series, a collaborative program between the Chicago Foundation for Women and the Columbia College Center for the Study of Gender in the Media and Arts. A discussion of the rearing of Black children follows, arguing that the future of healthy relationships within the Black community necessitates attention to the significance of gender and sex role socializations. In fact, within the genres of “Hip-Hop & Hip-Hop Soul” we find an example of the influence that gender and sex role socialization has had on societal perceptions of “sexual consciousness” through an analysis of female artists such as Erykah Badu and the Notorious K.I.M. We conclude with an exploration of Africana women’s literature, specifically the works of Toni Morrison and Calixthe Beyala, and its capacity to resist normative (Western) constructions of female identity.

While the variant topics addressed here reflect the primacy of gender and sexuality to the construction and projection of African identities, the task of uncovering the intersections of gender, culture and race in the formation of these identities is not yet complete. There remains a need for additional analyses -- namely those that indeed address these and similar issues as they manifest *throughout* the Diaspora. Thus, it is our hope that Pan African Studies scholars continue to grant particular attention to the inner workings of gender, culture and race in their research.

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