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New Directions in Africana Studies/Africalogy: Bridging the Gap between Liberal Arts and Utilitarianism

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Origins of Africalogy: A Challenge to European Academic Orthodoxy

Africana Studies/Africalogy thrust itself in the late 1960s and early 1970s upon European university campuses in the United States as a direct challenge to European intellectual and cultural hegemony. Its central goal was to transform the intellectual landscape in the European academy by forcing the construction of knowledge in terms that, according to Karenga, were shaped in the human, cultural, and intellectual image and interests of African people. Africans advanced this agenda in light of the fact they were for the first time being admitted to these institutions in substantial numbers ("Vital Signs" 73-79). A key demand made by African students entering into European universities during this time was for an education relevant to their strategic need to discover their place in the world and to fashion a project of study and practice that could be devised to help them address and solve the challenge of ending their subordination in European society and related multidimensional problems they faced as a colonized people (Karenga, *Introduction* 3-31; Karenga, "Black Studies"; Asante, "Afrocentricity"; Asante, "Discourse"; Van Horne; Okafor; Mazama; Baker; Nelson).

Houston A. Baker notes that the African student articulation of the need for systematic academic study of African world initiative and experience in the liberal arts and social sciences was characterized by a categorical rejection of the subordinate and inferior role into which African subject matter had been cast in the European academy. The advent of African students, instead, represented a disruption in its normative ideological functioning, bringing, among other things, "radically different racial and class inflections to the discourse of the academy." Indeed, their

> very presence on the university landscape challenged all existing norms . . . Far from 'grateful' subjects, the black arrivants were vociferously cantankerous. . . . No one had imagined that if blacks were admitted to the university, they would be anything other than grateful for such an 'opportunity.' It was assumed that blacks, like

> compliant colonial subjects, would swear allegiance to Western civilization and quickly take up the business of assimilating white behavioral codes and intellectual fare. (Baker 35-36)

The intent of this posture, and the academic discipline that emerged in the face of this intention—developed by African scholars and intellectuals in the United States—was dedicated to breaking the European monopoly on the production and dissemination of knowledge and using that knowledge produced by Africans for the liberation of Africans. The African struggle over academic knowledge represented, consequently, a struggle against the European political, economic, social, cultural, and military hegemony in the United States. This intellectual struggle within the European university was, in fact, a revolutionary project. From the heart of this revolt emerged a unique African intellectual innovation in the exploration of phenomena in academic study. Such innovation, compelled by the all encompassing nature of the liberation project, included an approach to scholarly examination that defied disciplinary boundaries and that stressed holism, interconnectedness, and the central importance of both history and culture in re-envisioning the possibilities for African existence. It was thus that the discipline of Africana Studies/Africalogy was born.

Okafor and Baker underscore that in the initial stages this African posture by students, intellectuals, and scholars produced panic, resentment, and reaction of various kinds in European academic circles. Baker characterized the reaction as symptomatic of moral panic, the fear of the oppressor or colonialist class to the revolt of its subjects and the implications of that revolt on its ability to monopolize its privileges, to preserve its hegemony. Typical responses included demonization and surveillance activities intended to neutralize the threat, even by force (37-38). Okafor, likewise, identified that the intensification of the intellectual struggle culminated by the 1990s in "an academic Cold War" between Africa-centered and European scholars exemplified in the formation of the National Association for Scholars (NAS). Okafor notes this organization charged that scholarly objectivity was subverted by the diversity of peoples approaching scholarly questions from their different points of view (131-133).

Even if such a concept as scholarly objectivity could be demonstrated (Van Horne 106-109), the implications of the charge were clear: 1) Objectivity only exists when there is one point of view; 2) Objectivity only exists when the European view is that one point of view; 3) The European point of view is the only permissible point of view; no group that is not European can have a relevant, compelling, or universalistic point of view; 4) European power to define

reality (so-called objectivity) is subverted when Europeans are compelled to consider other peoples' points of view; 5) The only permissible approach to the production of knowledge is one that supports intellectual and epistemological dictatorship, not freedom of ideas or freedom of the expression of those ideas; and 6) The European point of view, called objectivity, is the only view that is implicitly universal.

African Education: the Product of African Agency and Initiative

There are two main observations here. One is that there is no reluctance on the part of authentic African intellectualism in the United States to challenge hegemonic arrangements and, further, that this challenge is recognized by hegemonic interests as a serious threat to its continued hold on power. Second, authentic African intellectualism has consistently evolved creative and innovative approaches to knowledge production that address the reordering of the world in accord with African interests. This African control of knowledge production and the formulation of its priorities dates back to antiquity and to the necessity of socializing human beings who could contribute to the orderly continuity of human society and human governance. The matter here entails not simply ethical, moral, spiritual, or character preparation for social mission, but also technical preparation for the effective sovereign management of African society (Carruthers 113-142; Karenga, "Sociology").

The quest for power that informs the objective of Africana Studies/Africalogy is not a unique period in African world history. In the United States alone, coming out of one phase of the history of American dictatorship called slavery, Africans, formerly enslaved, were already busy fashioning a system of education designed to train young men and women to use literacy in the conquerors' language, culture, and scientific method to fashion a means by which to liberate themselves in an environment in which European dictatorship must be challenged.

This ethos affirming the necessity of creating independent, African-run institutions of learning—even at the primary and secondary levels, and however undercapitalized—predated and succeeded the Civil War and the US constitutional abolition of the legality of individual ownership of persons under United States law. Anderson explains the African approach to education and literacy at the end of the Civil War was characteristically informed by the "values of self-help and self-determination" and "an ethic of mutuality" in which they rejected not European assistance, but European superintendence and dictation. "Many missionaries were astonished, and later chagrined, . . . to

discover that many ex-slaves had established their own educational associations and collectives, staffed schools entirely with black teachers, and were unwilling to allow their educational movement to be controlled by the 'civilized' Yankees." This confrontation by the northern European missionaries with the prevailing ethos of Africans newly emancipated impugned preconceived ideas they harbored that Africans would necessarily be "little more than uncivilized victims who needed to be taught the values and rules of civil society." The missionaries had come to the South "bent on treating the freedmen almost wholly as objects" (5-6).

Hence, John W. Alvord, appointed to the Freedmen's Bureau's educational initiative in September 1865 and who later became its national superintendent of schools, filed in January 1866 a general report based on his travel and observation of African education throughout the South up to December 1865. In his report, Alvord disclosed that "native schools," which were founded and controlled by Africans themselves, were operative throughout the South and that many of them had been visited or assisted neither by the Freedmen's Bureau nor by missionary organizations or northern European benevolent societies. He estimated there were at least 500 operating in 1866, adding the figure was not, in his view, an overstatement. Indeed, Anderson notes, such schools date back to the early nineteenth century, when for 32 years Africans in Savannah, Georgia, under the leadership of a woman named Deveaux, covertly operated a school "unknown to the slave regime from 1833 to 1865" (6-7).

Du Boisian and Woodsonian Autonomous Agenda for African Education

This ethos of formulating an autonomous agenda for African education in the United States was similarly reflected in the thinking of W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson, who in the 1930s extensively outlined their views on the subject. Rabaka explains Du Bois's philosophy of education called upon African teachers to offer for instruction subjects they had not learned in American schools because he "knew, first, that his philosophy of education was at loggerheads with Western European and European American educational thought and practice." In addition, Du Bois demanded that "Africana educators . . . go above and beyond their training in Western European and European American history, culture, religion, politics, arts, and so forth and re-root themselves and their constituencies in African history and culture and African thought, belief, and value systems and traditions" (414-415). In 1935 Du Bois himself urged that "Negroes must know the history of the Negro race in America, and this they will

seldom get in white institutions. . . . They ought to study intelligently and from their own point of view, the slave trade, slavery, emancipation, Reconstruction, and present economic development." Moreover, he continued, "Beyond this, Negro colleges ought to be studying anthropology, psychology, and the social sciences, from the point of view of the colored races" ("Separate Schools" 428-429).

Du Bois had argued two years earlier in a discussion titled "The Field and Function of the American Negro College" that the African university in the United States must base its education on the needs and interests of Africans first and foremost, serving the same function that a university in Spain serves for Spaniards and a university in France serves for the French. Clearly, a "university in Spain is not simply a university. It is a university located in Spain," he observed. "It uses the Spanish language. It starts with Spanish history and makes conditions in Spain the starting point of its teaching. Its education is for Spaniards." Similarly, a "French university is founded in France; it uses the French language and assumes a knowledge of French history," Du Bois noted. "The present problems of the French people are its major problems and it becomes universal only so far as other peoples of the world comprehend and are at one with France in its mighty and beautiful history" ("Field and Function" 416). He continued:

> In the same way, a Negro university in the United States of America begins with Negroes. It uses that variety of the English idiom which they understand; and above all, it is founded, or it should be founded on a knowledge of the history of their people in Africa and in the United States, and their present condition. . . .
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> . . . starting with present conditions and using the facts and the knowledge of the present situation of American Negroes, the Negro university expands toward the possession and conquest of all knowledge. It seeks from a beginning of the history of the Negro in America and in Africa to interpret all history; from a beginning of social development among Negro slaves and freed men in America and Negro tribes and kingdoms in Africa, to interpret and understand the social development of all mankind in all ages. It seeks to reach modern science of matter and life from the surroundings and habits

> and aptitudes of American Negroes and thus lead up to understanding of life and matter in the universe.
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> And this is a different program than a similar function would be in a white university or in a Russian university or in an English university, because it starts from a different point. . . . In no other way can the American Negro college function. It cannot begin with history and lead to Negro history. It cannot start with sociology and end with Negro sociology. (Du Bois, "Field and Function" 416, 418)

Woodson, writing in 1933, agreed, noting that Africans "taught the same economics, history, philosophy, literature and religion which have established the present code of morals, the Negro's mind has been brought under the control of his oppressor"(xii). Woodson argued the "same educational process which inspires and stimulates the oppressor with the thought that he is everything and has accomplished everything worth while, depresses and crushes at the same time the spark of genius in the Negro by making him feel that his race does not amount to much and never will measure up to the standards of other peoples." Unfortunately, "Negroes are taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton and to despise the African"(1). As a consequence, the "thought of the inferiority of the Negro is drilled into him in almost every class he enters and in almost every book he studies" (2).

The Need for a Program of Economic Decolonization in Africalogy's Curriculum

The Du Boisian and Woodsonian admonitions are instructive and, as established above, axiomatic of African-centered analyses concerning the exigencies of liberation struggle in the post-sovereign period of African life and history. Du Bois pointedly recognized that education for Africans had a role "aimed precisely at finding the means to end the oppression" (Butchart 333). Similarly, Woodson underscored that Africans had been subjected to a systemic miseducation that derived "from the failure of African people to develop an educational system that is for, by, and about Africans and their liberation." The absence of an educational system that is "culturally relevant, grounded in history, and directed towards some grand future vision for Africans" is a miseducation system, controlled by the enemies of Africans, "that consistently fails to serve the interest of African people both historically and presently" (Rashid 543). A key factor in those interests, as Booker T. Washington emphasized, was economics (Weems 376-377). Hence, while Africalogy serves as the foundation for this

larger project of Afrocentric systemic education, it has not as yet fashioned an education for African students to address the vital question of the economic dimension to African liberation.

The urgency of adjustments to the Africana Studies/Africalogy curriculum, following the analysis by Du Bois and Woodson, compels the implementation of a utilitarian component to Africalogical education and the imperative of addressing strategic issues of the brain drain, foreign economic colonization, and foreign socialization through education in African urban communities in the United States. These conditions impede prospects for self-sufficiency, self-determination, and, ultimately, national sovereignty.

Cannon in 1977 pointed out the critical role of economic decolonization in African liberation, noting that the already "small and struggling" African private sector in the United States, "an essential ingredient for community self-sufficiency and self-determination" that facilitates African "economic interdependence," was rapidly shrinking in the post-segregation era. Indeed, the depth of economic colonization was evident in the fact that there was a chronic absence of production in stark disproportion to consumption. "The dollar earned by black community residents circulates once, if at all, in the community. This lack of currency re-cycling causes increased community dependence on non-community [foreign] suppliers of goods and services," rendering impossible "the old dream of nation building and community self-sufficiency." In sum, the "twin devils of black economic dependency and brain drain [of educated Africans leaving African communities in massive numbers] are crippling community phenomena which continue unabated" (205).

Weems in 2007 underscores that the dilemma of African economic colonization in the United States, described by Cannon 30 years earlier, had not appreciably changed. To the contrary, he protests, Africans in the United States remain "confused about their own economic self-interest," while "other [foreign] groups, with more clearly defined goals, have made considerable business inroads in our community" (375).

The enormity of the crisis can be seen in a 2004 report by the Magazine Publishers of America on African consumption/economic dependency in the United States, which increased from $318 billion in 1990, to $723 billion in 2003, and that is estimated by 2009 to reach $965 billion annually (4). By contrast, according to the United States Department of Commerce, US exports in 2007 to the country's top 10 trading partners—Canada, Mexico, China, Japan, United Kingdom, Germany, Korea, Netherlands, France, and Taiwan—

was $733.751 billion. This is $231.249 billion less than projected African consumption in 2009 and only $10.751 billion more than African spending in the United States four years earlier. Indeed, US exports to Canada, the United States's premier trading partner, reached, comparatively, only $248.904 billion. Moreover, and rather remarkably, US exports to the country's top 30 trading partners increased from $916.486 billion in 2006 to $1.015 trillion in 2007. This means that projected African consumption in 2009 is expected to exceed by $48.5 billion US exports to the country's top 30 trading partners in 2006 and would be merely $963.985 million less than the value of US exports in 2007 to these countries. The top 30 US trading partners include Singapore, Belgium, Brazil, Hong Kong, Australia, India, Italy, Israel, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Russia (1).

As Africalogy is committed to the liberation project, a project that Asante has partly defined as taking cognizance of the condition of African agency in the world and "the fragility of African agency in systems of social, economic, political, and cultural hegemony" ("Discourse" 646-647), the discipline must adjust its curriculum to provide the theoretical and cultural grounding for a committed cadre of students with a Pan African nationalist or Afrocentric vision and mission. This pertains to the functional paradigmatic approach to research in the discipline (Asante, "African American Studies" 26). More than simply theoretical, however, this mission must be concretely tied to training and expertise in three strategic areas of direct relevance to the material developmental needs of Africans to obliterate American colonialist dependency, foreign economic exploitation, and American educational colonialism within their urban communities. These three strategic areas are small business development, real estate development, and education teaching and management specifically suited to African needs, interests, and realities in the urban United States.

Hence, there is in the twenty-first century an urgent need for the discipline of Africana Studies/Africalogy to revisit the question of relevance and to formulate adjustments in its curriculum that are attentive to the intellectual, cultural, political, and economic need of Africans in the United States to be independent, self-determining, and, ultimately, to become nationally sovereign. To facilitate this process requires a blending of approaches articulated by Du Bois and Woodson regarding the nature, function, and purpose of African education in the United States, including their concern for academic preparation in the humanities and the social sciences, with the practical economic concerns Washington articulated in his approach to education in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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