Journal of American Studies of Turkey
29 (2009): 15-32

Interrogating the Problematic of Race, Ethnicity and Identity in African American Studies

Tunde Adeleke

Introduction

Since its inception in the late 1960s, African-American Studies has advanced phenomenally and is now integral to American intellectual life. African American Studies departments, Center and Programs are now permanent features of the educational landscape. During the past four decades, the field has had to overcome rejection, neglect and marginalization. Recognition, integration and institutionalization have, however, not been attended by clarity and consensus on the essential and defining character of the discipline. Opinions remain sharply divided on its scope, mission and philosophical paradigm. What should constitute its defining character? What paradigm best advances its mission? What considerations should shape and determine scholarship in the field? How critical are, and what roles should be assigned, race ethnicity and ethnicity? Responses to these questions have been contentious and conflicting. The resulting divisions are reflected in the ideological trajectories and configurations of the field. Some scholars essentialize race, given the preeminent role race, and racism played, and continue to play, in the black American experience. Others, focusing on heritage, emphasize ethnicity (Africanness). Furthermore, given the close identification of the field with the black struggles, opinions are also divided on the degree to which blacks, and their interests and aspirations, should determine the course, contents and character of the field. Attempts to resolve these challenges have provoked heated debates on, and conflicting constructions of, the role and place of race, ethnicity, and the nature and essence of black American identity.

Race and Ethnicity

Three dominant paradigms and perspectives dominate this debate, and they reflect in chronological order, the developmental trajectories of African American Studies—Liberal-Consensus (Inclusionist), Afrocentricity and Transformative. The first to develop was the liberal-consensus. It grew out of the struggle to vindicate and validate black American history, and secure its integration into

mainstream American education. Advocates deemed such validation crucial for the acceptance, and integration of blacks into American society. The liberal-consensus perspective portrayed America as a liberal and progressive society. It is driven by an optimistic vision about the perfectibility of American society, and the attainability of the American dream. Historians of this pioneering genre deemphasized race, prioritized integrative values, and appealed to American liberal tradition.[1] This school had its roots in the early decades of the 20th century, and attained preeminence from the 1930s to the 1950s. In fact, it was the efforts of historians of this school that secured scholarly recognition and respectability for black history, and thus laid the foundation for the development of African American Studies. Prominent historians included Carter G. Woodson, William E. B. Du Bois, Alrutheus Taylor, Rayford Logan and Benjamin Quarles, to name a few.[2] They are popularly referred to as historians of the "New Negro" genre. They used their combined scholarship to redeem and vindicate African and black Diaspora historical experiences, and stake strong claims for integration into mainstream American society. Since the dominant historical tradition had been used to justify black subordination and desegregation, these scholars used their historical writings to advocate desegregation. They were succeeded in the historical genealogical line by the likes of John Hope Franklin, Benjamin Quarles, and Philip Foner. Their efforts won recognition and respectability for black history, and inspired future generations of scholars to continue serious and sustained research into African and black Diaspora history.[3]

By the 1960s, however, there were new demands on black history. Redeeming the black historical experience primarily for integrative purpose was no longer adequate and satisfactory. Scholar-activists of the bourgeoning civil rights struggles such as Vincent Harding and Sterling Stuckey forcefully advocated a new black history, one that jettisoned the vindicationist character of the old. They urged the adoption of an instrumentalist focus, pushing black history beyond the traditional rehabilitationist, contributionist and appellate themes. They sought a much more combative, anti-establishment history.[4]

1 August Meier and Elliott Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1986), 1-160. John H. Franklin, "On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History," in Darlene Clark Hine ed., *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, And Future* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1986), 13-24.

2 Ibid. Also, Robert L. Harris.

3 Ibid.

4 Meier and Rudwick, *Black History and the Historical Profession*, 161-238. Also, Vincent Harding, "Beyond Chaos: Black History and the Search for the New Land," 267-292. Sterling Stuckey, "Twilight of our Past: Reflections on the Origins of Black History," 261-296.

Harding contended that the "founding fathers" of Negro History (i.e., the Liberal-Consensus School) had so much faith in America that enabled them to write with so much optimism, ignoring the glaring contradictions and problems. As he argued, "They believed because they had internalized America and its 'promise.' They believed and wrote out of belief because they had come so far through 'clanking chains and melting prayers' that they could not afford to consider unbelief as a live option. Essentially America was a great land, and one day its greatness would overwhelm it, partly as a result of black struggle, partly because of 'well-meaning' whites" (Harding "Beyond Chaos" 275). Advocating a new black history, Harding rendered a clear articulation of the challenge of writing *Black* as opposed to *Negro* history. As he explained it,

> We who write Black history cannot track our 'bleeding countrymen through the widely scattered documents of American history' and still believe in America. We cannot see luster when we must glimpse it through the ocean of tears. We cannot—do not wish to—write with detachment from the agonies of our people. We are not satisfied to have our story accepted into the American saga. We deal in redefinitions, in taking over, in moving to set our own vision upon the blindness of American historiography. Black history is that plung which refuses to fall prey to the American dream, which is romanticism and childlike avoidance of tragedy and death. ("Beyond Chaos" 278-79)

Harding's distinction is very clear. Historians of black history would inevitably become alienated from America. In his judgment, it is not possible to write about the ugly realities of the black experience and at the same time be optimistic and enthusiastic. "Black History looks upon America with little of the affection and admiration which was obviously carried by our Negro History Fathers," he contended (280).

In his own criticism, Sterling Stuckey basically agreed with Harding, accusing "historians of the Negro history movement," of failure to "condemn America for her crimes against black people. So strong was racism in American life that almost all of those involved in this movement concentrated their efforts on using history to prove the black man's humanity and to demonstrate to the larger society that their people were Americans entitled to the rights and privileges of all other Americans" (277-78). Their stress on progress, he argued, ignored the tragedies of black American life. The violence of the Sixties, according to

him, exposed the failure of the optimistic perspective. He urged a new direction for black scholarship insisting that, "Only from radical perspectives can the necessary new questions and answers come to consciousness. As we move away from 'integrating' blacks into American history, we must concern ourselves increasingly with examining that larger society which arrogantly calls itself the mainstream. White institutional and personality development must be subjected to the most careful scrutiny" (289). Merely redeeming black history was no longer an end in itself. History became endowed with a higher purpose. It became an *instrument* for ideological propagation, for radical critique of the mainstream, and for the advancement of the black struggle. The switch from contributionism to instrumentalism was undoubtedly induced, and strengthened by the anti-establishment, and cultural-nationalist slants of the civil rights movement, in conjunction with the anti-European, and *ipso facto*, anti-colonial, character of Black Nationalism worldwide, coupled with the positive affirmation of race and ethnicity that characterized the decade of the 60s in both the United States and Africa.

The relevance of the new history that Harding and Sterling advocated was ascertained by its adaptability to the struggle, that is, its capacity to advance the black struggle. Put, differently, this is a history induced by the exigencies of a social revolution. In order for this history to effectively execute its revolutionary and social *raison d'etre*, it had to be very critical and condemnatory of, and judgmental *vis-à-vis*, mainstream society. "Applied Negro history," as the late Earl Thorpe referred to it, sought the reinterpretation of the past in the light of the experiences of blacks, utilizing their own frame of reference, and taking due cognizance of the peculiar needs of their struggles. This is history with a mission, one specifically designed for the advancement of a revolutionary struggle. The scholar-activists of the 1960s thus rejected the traditional redemptionist focus of Afro-American historiography that they perceived as overly integrationist to the extent of compromising too much. They wanted a history that is strongly anti-establishment. They criticized the New Negro history, and its emphasis on progress, and optimistic appeals to whites for integration. The scholar-activists opted for a new history with a radical perspective, one that focused in on the mainstream society, critical and condemnatory of its institutions and values. Ironically, Stuckey, however, traced the beginning of this new combative historiography to the publication of Du Bois' *Black Reconstruction* (288).

The need for a socially focused and utilitarian history therefore set the guidelines for historical studies. The scholar-activists reached into the past, both remote and immediate, in search of resources for this new combative history,

propelled by the twin objectives of reshaping the past in the militant image of the present, and using that past in the service of the revolution. By rejecting the liberal-consensus paradigm, they laid the foundation for what would later become the racialist character of African American Studies, reflected in the Afrocentric genre. The instrumentalist tradition became dominant in the 1960s, and by the late 1970s, had developed into Afrocentricity. As its leading scholar, Molefi Asante contends, African American Studies is not simply the study and teaching about African people but *it is the Afrocentric study of African phenomena*. He defines Afrocentricity as, "a frame of reference wherein phenomena are viewed from the perspective of the African person" (171). Afrocentricity seeks to restore, Africans and peoples of African descent abroad, to the center stage of intellectual inquiry, as historical actors, and contributors to the advance of world civilization. An underlying preoccupation of Afrocentrism is the deconstruction of Eurocentric conceptions and misrepresentations of the African past. It also emphasizes the distinctiveness of blacks, while instilling in Africans, and black diasporans, a sense of corporate identity. It could be described as the intellectual expression of Black Power. Today, Afrocentricity emphasizes race, ethnicity and identity as the defining character of African American Studies. The assertions of Afrocentricity, especially in its formative years, and the emphasis on race and ethnicity (projecting African American Studies within a racially configured paradigm) have reinforced the perception of the field as "for blacks only." Premised on a deep suspicion of mainstream education, Afrocentricity derives its major impetus from the construction of the mainstream within the discourse of alienation. According to Afrocentric scholars, mainstream education had infused, and continues to infuse, self-abnegating and denigrating values in blacks (Asante "Afrocentric Idea").[5] Afrocentricity is the ideology for reversing the situation by centering African American education on the original African heritage and history (i.e., the de-centered heritage). The goals of Afrocentric education include enlightenment, self-rediscovery and empowerment.

Grafted into African American Studies as a defining paradigm, Afrocentricity gave the discipline a strong ideological and combative character. Afrocentricity is premised on a conflict conception of society and social change. The alienation of black Americans only reinforces and strengthens, for many, the need for situating African American Studies within a countervailing, anti-establishment paradigm. Afrocentricity is built on racial essentialism and, in the judgment of some, strong ethnocentrism. In the Afrocentric worldview, all blacks, regardless

5 Also, Mwalimu J. Shujaa, ed., *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies*.

of geographical locations, are united by negative historical and cultural experiences deriving largely from Eurocentric hegemonic ambitions. Race and ethnicity (i.e., Africanness) constitute not only the unifying elements of the black experience, but also its most authentic defining and identitarian constructs. Thus, Afrocentricity offers African American Studies a unique and distinctive paradigm that re-locates and re-centers dislocated and de-centered Diaspora blacks on their original African heritage. In consequence, African American Studies is not just an academic discipline, but also a weapon, an ideological and social weapon in the racial and cultural wars, and encounters, between blacks and whites. Thus, Afrocentric scholars identify race and ethnicity (i.e., African identity) as the critical defining essence of Black Studies, projecting all blacks as one people (Africans), unified by racial experience.[6] They insist on an instrumentalist construction of knowledge, within an adversarial cultural context in which the mainstream and its educational institutions and values are deemed suspect and implicated in a conspiracy to keep blacks down *ad infinitum*. The field became narrowly constructed as a race discipline. The implication that it is "for blacks only" grew out of this racial configuration.

This instrumentalist or applied construction of African American Studies has consequently become perhaps its most distinguishing and controversial feature. The ideological and combative character of Afrocentricity has provoked questions and doubts about the intellectual validity of African American Studies. Many critics perceive irreconcilable conflict between *scholarship* and *ideology* within the field. Undeterred, Afrocentric scholars advance Afrocentricity as the *litmus* test for the validation of African American Studies. They consider African American Studies duly validated by how efficient and effective it accomplishes its dual mission, particularly the ideological.[7] In their judgment, African American Studies cannot, and should not, be subjected to the cannons of intellectual validation set by the mainstream tradition. They are deeply suspicious of universalism and objectivity. They deem the universal Eurocentric, and objectivity, an illusion, favoring a perspective in which the bias of the researcher determines the selection and interpretation of data. The utilitarian needs of blacks became the defining and legitimizing basis of scholarship, and Black Studies programs that fail to embrace this instrumentalist paradigm are dismissed as

6 Molefi Asante, *Afrocentricity*. See also his, "African American Studies: The Future of the Discipline" and *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Also see Cecil Conteen Gray, *Afrocentric Thought and Praxis: An Intellectual History*.

7 Maulana Karenga, "Black Studies: A Critical Reassessment," 162-169.

inherently Eurocentric. Asante's writings are infused with unequivocal rejection of objectivity in favor of ideological engagement.[8]

The grounding of African American Studies within what Asante calls "African agency"—a paradigm that depicts the mainstream as inherently hegemonic—raises a critical question on the role of non-black scholars in the discipline. Since Afrocentricity was constructed within a conflictual framework, and projected as a field "for blacks only" where only blacks were deemed to possess the necessary cultural and racial qualification to teach, it seemed illogical and counterintuitive to entrust whites with critical roles and responsibilities within the field. Hence the tendency among several early Black Studies Programs to adopt an unwritten racial code that deemed whites ill-equipped to teach in the field. White professors simply could not be trusted to teach "Afrocentrically"! Although this view is no longer openly defended, there are still institutions and programs that are deeply skeptical and suspicious of white professors, however qualified academically. White and black professors whose interpretations of black history seem to contradict canons of Afrocentrism, have been vociferously challenged, and their credibility questioned by Afrocentric-minded black students and faculty.[9] This racial credentialist ethos remains a disturbing element within the field. Several Afrocentric scholars, including Asante, have once advocated confining the field to black scholars. Although, Asante has since revised his position, he remains adamant on the "African agency." As he affirms in his most recent work, *The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism*, "Without a fundamental orientation to the data that centers on African peoples as subjects and agents of historical experiences, the African American Studies programs are nothing more than extensions of the English, History or Sociology departments" (111). As for the qualification of white scholars, Asante offers this critical question: "are whites willing to make the necessary commitment to teach accurately and Afrocentrically?" ("Where?" 19). This question, observed Gerald Early, establishes a new credentialism. As he rightly argued, "This racial demarcation of the curriculum has particularly worked against the best interests of both the black professor and the black student by defeating a fundamental purpose of a liberal education: to learn about and to become expert in experiences outside yourself" (n.p.).

---

8 Asante, *Afrocentricity*, 51-52. Also his, "The Afrocentric Idea in Education," "African American Studies: The Future of the Discipline." Terry Kershaw, "Emerging Paradigms in Black Studies," and Ronald L. Taylor, "The Study of Black People: A Survey of Empirical and Theoretical Models," 11-16.

9 Robert Blackey and Howard Shorr, eds., *Perspective* (special issue), 31.6 (1993). Also Michael Eric Dyson, *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X*.

The Afrocentric push to essentialize race (blackness) has resulted, in the judgment of many, in a narrow construction of African American Studies, as essentially a black discipline, characterized by ethnocentric and cultural jingoistic values. Even as it accomplishes the important task of affirming a black epistemological perspective rooted in African cosmology, and promoting the utilitarian objective of enhancing the self-esteem of blacks, the Afrocentric perspective forecloses the possibility of discovering and appreciating the complexities of the black historical experience. The choice of *race* and *ethnicity* as defining elements further erodes the credibility of the discipline since both are deemed too fragile a foundation for illuminating the true nature and character of the African and black Diaspora experiences.

Identity

Constructing identity is a fundamental human disposition, and for black Americans, it constitutes an unending historical preoccupation. At the root of the crises of African American Studies lies a profound disagreement on the identity of blacks. Blacks have long been isolated in what Gerald Early terms, "the prison house of identity." "Black studies programs," he contends, "are fixated on identity . . . the entire enterprise seems more about authentication and restoration of identity than anything else." As I argue in several publications, it has become perhaps the most contentious issue in the discourse on African American personality, and for many, it is the crucial determining factor in constructing a philosophy for African American Studies.[10] The pivotal importance of identity in the black struggle today stems from the equally pivotal role identity played in the mechanisms of misery and dehumanization that slavery created. The identity of slaves was the very first that slave-owners attacked in their earliest attempts to create a stable and reliable slave population. Little wonder then that reconstructing identity has since become, for blacks, a potent weapon of resistance. The pivotal question, "Who are we?" evokes conflicting and ambivalent answers. A very simplified way of looking at this problem is in the definitions of identity represented by the contending paradigms, especially in response to the Du Boisean dual identity construct. In his classic study, *The Souls of Black Folk*, William E. B. Du Bois underscored the dual and conflicted nature of black American identity. He characterized the black American as a person tormented by dual and conflicting identitarian consciousness. As he

10 Tunde Adeleke, "Black Studies, Afrocentrism and Scholarship: A Reconsideration," and "Enduring Crises and Challenges of African American Studies."

described it; "One ever feels his twoness,—an American, a Negro: two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled striving, two warring ideals in one dark body . . ." (3). Du Bois went on to caution against privileging any dimension of the duality. Both (the American and the Negro), he insisted, are intrinsically relevant to understanding of the true nature and identity of the Black American. Many scholars have since acknowledged the Du Boisean duality construct as aptly representative of black American identity. Not everyone agrees. The inclusionist, liberal-consensus perspective tends to deny or minimize the distinctiveness of the black/African (Negro) side of the duality. By minimizing the *black* aspect of the black American duality, according to Manning Marable, "the inclusionist vision implicitly assumes that black Americans are basically 'Americans who just happen to be black'" (qtd. in Hall 77). Afrocentricity, on the other hand, tends to deny or minimize the American side of the duality. Molefi Asante, Marimba Ani, and other Afrocentric Scholars unequivocally define the black American as quintessentially African.[11] No doubt this contention is premised on a view of the transplantation experience that de-emphasizes cultural transformation and change. That is, black diasporans are supposed to have maintained their Africanness intact through these centuries. Critiques deem this ahistorical, particularly since it ignores the other cultural experiences and encounters that the transplantation process facilitated. Many scholars, including blacks, have rejected this ethnicization of black American identity.

The Afrocentric conception of identity is a legitimate response to rejection and alienation. Furthermore, it is also premised on African cultural adaptations and survivals, and on Asante's "African agency." The fact of survival and African cultural retentions justify, according to Afrocentric scholars, affirmation of African identity for all blacks in Diaspora. This shared identity itself mandates a monolithic construction of culture and *ipso facto*, a single Afrocentric philosophical foundation for African American Studies. The Afrocentric construction of identity has come increasingly under attack.[12] The fact is that the projection of African identity is more defensible politically than historically. Unfortunately, those who advocate Afrocentricity imply a certain historical depth and legitimacy to claims of absolute African identity, ignoring what many

11 Dona Marimba Richards *Let The Circle be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora*. Molefi Asante, *Afrocentricity*.

12 Stephen Howe, *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes*. Yaacov Shavit, *History in Black: African-Americans in Search of an Ancient Past*. Clarence E. Walker, *We Can't Go Home Again: An Argument about Afrocentrism*.

scholars underscore—the complex and conflicting conceptions and utility of Africa among blacks.[13]

The more recent transformative historiography challenges Afrocentric emphasis on race, ethnicity and homogenization of black identity. A product of the macro-black Atlantic/Diaspora focus, the transformative perspective represents a move away from distinctiveness to transformation; from narrow cultural provincialism to cosmopolitanism; revealing a complex black Diaspora world that invalidates affirmations of monolithic historical, and identitarian values (Hall 47-83). Although critical of Afrocentricity, this postmodernist paradigm equally affirms the imperative of rehabilitating the historical heritage of Africa and blacks. However, it transcends the Afrocentric paradigm in its emphasis on the transforming and complex character of the transplantation experience. This entails, according to Earl Lewis, historicizing "the processes of racial formation and identity construction. Race . . . is viewed as historically contingent and relational, with full understanding of that process dependent on our abilities to see African Americans living and working in a world of overlapping Diasporas (dispersed communities)" (5). It is thus powerfully driven by racial transcendentalism. It de-essentializes race, suggesting the necessity of deconstructing and jettisoning prevailing racialized constructions of reality. As Stuart Hall underscores, the transformative perspective, "is defined not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of 'identity,' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity" (qtd. in Williams 110). Fundamentally, it entails deconstructing, and gradual jettisoning of, the prevailing monolithic, racialized, and ideologically driven, Afrocentric perspective. According to Jack Greene, the perspective emphasizes, "the flow and mixture of peoples and cultures and implied a process of social and cultural formation that, far from being imposed from the top down, derived from a continuing process of negotiation or exchange among the various peoples and cultures involved" (332). It acknowledges and essentializes experiential variations and complexities, and situates Africa among other contending historical and cultural factors in the construction of black Diaspora identity. It does integrate African American Studies with a broader, global context of historical transformations and complex identity constructions.

13 Darlene Clark Hine and Jacqueline McLeod, eds., *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*. Ronald Segal, *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa.*

Emphasis on race, ethnicity and essentialist construction of identity seriously compromises the adaptability of African American Studies to the challenges of globalization. As the discipline expands beyond United States, and as globalization renders traditional boundaries of differentiations fluid, Afrocentric scholars have expressed serious concerns, and advocated strengthening the enclave character of African American Studies. They are convinced that the loss of racial distinctiveness in the global context would lure blacks into a false sense of security. The de-emphasizing of race in the global context would render blacks vulnerable to European hegemony. Thus, Afrocentric scholars deem the global context a continuation and extension of the domestic American racial/cultural war.[14] Afrocentric scholars portray globalization as a euphemism for Eurocentric hegemony. As Asante contends, "We have come to the end of racist capitalism because the world now understands the numerous ways that globalization masquerades as a new philosophy when in reality it is the old trying to slide into our consciousness without our knowledge" ("Afrocentricity: General Notes"). This distrust of globalization and global engagement is widespread among Afrocentric scholars. They would rather construct African American Studies as essentially an intellectual bulwark in the black cultural war against Eurocentric ideas and influences. Hence, Asante and his cohorts respond to globalization with a clarion call for racial vigilance, and strengthening of cultural and racial essentialist ethos. This is largely because the Afrocentric genre constructs the global context as an extension and expansion of the parameters of Eurocentric hegemony. The dominance of essentialist ethos in African American Studies would reflect negatively on the intellectual character of the discipline.

Paradoxically, Afrocentric distrust of globalization comes at a time when the globalization of the African and black experience is generating increased scholarly recognition and attention in Europe, where the black experience is becoming integral to discourses on nationality and identity. Demographic changes in Europe are compellingly increased intellectual attention to both immigrant and minority experiences within Europe, and the black experience in America. The African and black presence in Europe has gained increased visibility in the last two decades. Though the antiquity of blacks in Europe has never been in doubt, it was not until recent years that new migrations and their demographic and cultural challenges have provoked critical discourses on nationality, race, ethnicity and identity. Discourses and debates on the place of immigrant populations in the overall construction of national identity in

14 Dona Marimba Ani, *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*.

France, Germany, the Netherlands, Australia, Austria and Scandinavia, have also generated European scholarly interests in the black American experience.

The growing interest of Europeans in interrogating the black experience is reflected in the number of conferences on the subject. In November of 2005, the Johann-Gutenberg University in Mainz, Germany hosted an international conference on the theme: *Black European Studies*. In 2006, the University of Southern Denmark hosted an international conference on *The Black Atlantic*. Two international conferences, occurring almost simultaneously, underscore the attention now given to race, ethnicity and nationality in Europe. The first is the 2008 European Association for American Studies Conference which took place from May 9-12 in Oslo, Norway. Delegates were expected to address, among others, questions about the growing problematic of ethnicity, nationality and identity in the United States, especially in relation to immigrant and minority experiences. From the 12th of May through the 14th, the Center for Comparative Studies, University of Lisbon, hosted another conference on the theme: "Europe in Black and White," inspired no doubt by the need to interrogate how race, ethnicity and identity are being reconfigured and re-defined. These are clear evidence of a growing interest in understanding the challenges of America's diverse and multicultural character at a time when European nations are increasingly being forced to deal with increased, complex, diverse and multicultural societies and immigrant populations.

This interest is also reflected in the subtle but no less significant changes reflected in American Studies Programs in Europe, particularly the gradual shift in emphasis from traditional themes such as Politics, Diplomacy, Literary and Cultural Studies, to ethnic and minority experiences, and subjects dealing with diversity and multiculturalism.[15] The increased attention that Black Studies now attracts in Europe is not due solely to intellectual curiosity and interests. Other considerations include the crises and challenges of immigration and nationality, especially the tensions generated by increased foreign and immigrant communities in France, Russia, Germany and other parts of Europe. The critical nature of the crises has only increased European interests in interrogating American minority experiences. There are now calls for a paradigmatic shift in American Studies Programs in Europe to a "bottom-up" perspective that emphasize minority experiences, as well as the interplay of race, ethnicity and identity within America.[16] Furthermore, demographic changes in Europe, in consequence of

15 See the online *European Journal of American Studies* (URL: http://ejas.revues.org/document).

16 Ibid.

influx of immigrants from less developed countries have increased European scholarly attention to the challenges and implications of these migrations.

In a provocative essay on the political changes in post-Soviet Europe and the growing tension between Europe and America, especially as more European countries engage the challenges of nationality and identity, John Borneman argues that, "the new form of subjectivity, the European, which looks more fragmented and incoherent the closer one gets to it, is nonetheless increasingly taking definition against the cultural practices of members of a particular other country, the United States" (qtd. in Federmayer). In essence, America has become, in his word, "Europe's other." In several countries, American Studies Programs are being revised to reflect more than just Political, Literary and Cultural Studies. Interrogating American minority experiences would, some now argue, help European societies better understand how to respond to growing ethnicization, demographic changes, and the problematic and complex racial, ethnic and nationality questions. This growing "blackening of Europe" has compelled some attention to the black American experience in American Studies Programs across Europe. Although, this "blackening" is conceived within a much broader process of Americanization, there is a growing fascination with black American, Caribbean and African themes in Europe. For example, according to Heike Raphael-Hernandez, MTV is having tremendous impact on youth culture in Europe. It is spreading Black music "to even the most remote little village in Europe—be it the very north of Norway or Sweden or Finland, or the very south of Greece or Spain or Italy" (Raphael-Hernandez 6). This "blackening" is also evident in the spread of rap, and Hip-Hop in Poland, France, Germany, Hungary, and even among the gypsies in Romania (Mudure).

This attention to the black American experience is also significant because there are ethnic minorities in Europe whose experiences mirror those of black Americans. Greater understanding of the black American experience would shed lights on possible approaches to understanding and dealing with the challenges of European minorities. In the case of Romania, for example, Ruxandra Dragan contends, that the black American experience does offer;

> the best case study possible because their social situation resembles that of the Roma in many ways and the stereotypes applied to the former also apply to the latter (for instance both minorities are stereotypically viewed as marginal and inferior, both are known for their talents at music and dance, etc.). (5)

Dragan was a Fulbright scholar in the United States who promised upon return to Romania to develop a course based on his Fulbright project within the American Studies Program in Bucharest. "I consider this study useful," writes Dragan, "because it can shed new light on issues such as race and racism, ethnicity, multiculturalism, cultural pluralism . . ." (5). In the mid-1990s in Hungary, according to Eva Federmayer, there have been increasing attempts to map out new American Studies involving;

> de-centering American Studies from its traditionally assumed 'core' constituted of 'high' literature and (consensus) history in order to embrace new themes of study and research relating (among others)…to emigration, ethnic studies, popular culture, African American history and culture, multiculturalism, as well as methodologies derived from cultural Anthropology, Feminism, Sociology and critical multiculturalism.

Writing in a similar vein, Raphael-Hernandez strongly argues for African American Studies as "the lens through which one looks at Europe, thus making African American knowledge *primary* instead of *secondary* (as opposed to the usual methods of most European or white American theorists)" ("'Niggas' and 'Skins'" 286). Other scholars illuminate the growing impacts of black America in Europe. For example, there are Cathy Waegner's study of the impact of black America on German youth culture, and Felicia McCarren's study of the impact of Hip-Hop on French culture. Since the mid-nineties in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, according to Josef Jarab, the Center for Comparative Cultural Studies, Palacky University in association with the Czech and Slovak Association for American Studies has organized and shaped the directions of research, which are generally focused on "the plurality and pluralism of America and American culture." Besides the racial or ethnic considerations, the black American experience also offers Europeans valuable insights into the problems of the underclass, poverty, youth culture and rebellion. For example, Raphael-Hernandez demonstrates how the black American experience helps better understanding of, and shed brighter lights on, the process of ghettoization in former East-German satellite cities, small towns, and rural communities ("'Niggas' and 'Skins'").

Given this growing attention to, and interest in, American minority experiences, especially blacks, it is not implausible to venture the prediction

that shortly, black America could indeed become "Europe's other." It is the likelihood of attaining this global "otherness" that argues strongly against an isolationist paradigm in African American Studies. As an increasing number of European institutions and scholars construct the black American experience as a lens through which to view and analyze emerging and complex immigrant minority experiences and problems, they are going to turn to African American Studies programs and scholars in the United States for insights and collaboration. As the black experience becomes increasingly global, and as it also increasingly gains visibility and grows in global recognition and importance, African American Studies scholars must shed all trappings of racial, ethnic and cultural essentialism. We are living in an increasingly shrinking world, where the parameters for intercultural, cross-cultural engagements and discourses are expanding rapidly, while those of distinct national, racial, ethnic or some other primordial constructions of identity are shrinking. The goal of African American Studies is to prepare students to engage this expanded terrain; to equip them to function effectively in this context.

Works Cited

Adeleke, Tunde. "Black Studies, Afrocentrism and Scholarship: A Reconsideration." *The Griot: Southern Conference on Afro American Studies* 12 (1993): 10-18.

——. "Enduring Crises and Challenges of African American Studies." *The Journal of Thought* 32.3 (1997): 65-96.

Anderson, Talmadge, ed. *Black Studies: Theory, Method, and Cultural Perspectives*. Pullman: Washington State UP, 1990.

Ani, Dona Marimba. *Yurugu: An African-Centered Critique of European Cultural Thought and Behavior*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994.

Asante, Molefi K. "The Afrocentric Idea in Education." *Journal of Negro Education* 60.2 (1991): 170-80.

——. *Afrocentricity*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1988.

——. "African American Studies: The Future of the Discipline." *The Black Scholar* 22.3 (1992): 20-29.

——. *The Painful Demise of Eurocentrism: An Afrocentric Response to Critics*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1999.

——. "Where is the White Professor Located?" *Perspective*. Eds. Robert Blackey and Howard Shorr. 31.6 (1993): 19.

——. "Afrocentricity: General Notes toward African Reconstruction," (unpublished paper).

——. *Kemet, Afrocentricity and Knowledge*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Souls of Black Folk: Essays and Sketches*. Chicago: A.C. McClurg, 1903.

Dragan, Ruxandra. "Hate Speech in American and Romanian Print Media." *American Studies in Romania*. Newsletter. 4 (2003): 5. Web. Oct. 2007.

Dyson, Michael Eric. *Making Malcolm: The Myth and Meaning of Malcolm X*. New York: Oxford UP, 1995.

Early, Gerald. "A Place of Our Own." *New York Times* 14 Apr. 2002. Web. Oct. 2008.

Federmayer, Eva. "American Studies in Hungary." *European Journal of American Studies.* 1 (2006). Web. Oct. 2007.

Franklin, John H. "On the Evolution of Scholarship in Afro-American History." *The State of Afro-American History: Past, Present, and Future*. Ed. Darlene Clark Hine. Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State UP, 1986. 13-24.

Gray, Cecil Conteen. *Afrocentric Thought and Praxis: An Intellectual History*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2001.

Greene, Jack P. "Beyond Power: Paradigm Subversion and Reformulation and the Re-Creation of the Early Modern Atlantic World." Hine and McLeod 319-42.

Hall, Perry A. *In the Vineyards: Working in African American Studies*. Knoxville, TE: U of Tennessee P, 1999.

Harding, Vincent. "Beyond Chaos: Black History and the Search for the New Land." *Amistad 1*. Eds. John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris. New York: Vintage, 1970. 267-292.

Harris, Robert L. "Coming of Age: The Transformation of Afro-American Historiography." *Journal of Negro History* 67. 2 (1982): 107-21.

Hine, Darlene Clark and Jacqueline McLeod, eds. *Crossing Boundaries: Comparative History of Black People in Diaspora*. Bloomington IN: Indiana UP, 1999.

Howe, Stephen. *Afrocentrism: Mythical Pasts and Imagined Homes*. New York: Verso, 1998.

Jarab, Josef. "American Studies in the Czech Republic and Slovakia." *European Journal of American Studies* (2006) 20 Jan 2006. Web. Mar. 2008.

Karenga, Maulana. "Black Studies: A Critical Reassessment." *Dispatches From the Ebony Tower: Intellectuals Confront the African American Experience*. Ed. Manning Marable. New York: Columbia UP, 2000. 162-169.

Kershaw, Terry. "Emerging Paradigms in Black Studies." Anderson 17-24.

Lewis, Earl. "To Turn as on a Pivot: Writing African Americans into a History of Overlapping Diasporas." Hine and McLeod 3-32.

McCarren, Felicia. "Monsieur Hip-Hop." Raphael-Hernandez 157-170.

Meier, August and Elliott Rudwick. *Black History and the Historical Profession, 1915-1980*. Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1986.

Mudure, Mihaela. "Blackening Gypsy Slavery: The Romanian Case." Raphael-Hernandez 263-284.

Raphael-Hernandez, Heike, ed. *Blackening Europe: The African American Experience*. Ed. Heike Raphael-Hernandez. London: Routledge, 2004.

——. "Introduction: Making the African American Experience Primary." Raphael-Hernandez 1-12.

——. "'Niggas' and 'Skins': Nihilism among African American Youth in Low-Income Urban Communities and East German Youth in Satellite Cities, Small Towns, and Rural Areas." Raphael-Hernandez 285-302.

Richards, Dona Marimba. *Let The Circle be Unbroken: The Implications of African Spirituality in the Diaspora*. Trenton, NJ: The Red Sea Press, 1980.

Segal, Ronald. *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995.

Shavit, Yaacov. *History in Black: African-Americans in Search of an Ancient Past*. London: Frank Cass, 2001.

Shujaa, Mwalimu J., ed. *Too Much Schooling, Too Little Education: A Paradox of Black Life in White Societies*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1994.

Stuckey, Sterling. "Twilight of our Past: Reflections on the Origins of Black History." *Amistad 2*. Eds. John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris. New York: Vintage, 1971. 261-296.

Taylor, Ronald L. "The Study of Black People: A Survey of Empirical and Theoretical Models." Anderson 11-16.

Waegner, Cathy Covell. "Rap, Rebounds, and Rocawear: The 'Darkening' of German Youth Culture." Raphael-Hernandez 171-186.

Walker, Clarence E. *We Can't Go Home Again: An Argument about Afrocentrism*. London: Oxford UP, 2001.

Williams, Dwayne E. "Rethinking the African Diaspora: A Comparative Look at Race and Identity in a Transatlantic Community, 1878-1921." Hine and McLeod 105-20.