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**Politics of Race, Power and Ideology:
The Fluctuating Fortune of African Studies
in the United States**

Apollos O. Nwauwa

As an academic discipline, African studies in the United States has always had a precarious existence. Its relevance has ascended or declined in proportion to the strategic politicized and racialized value of Africa in US calculations. Before the formal institution of the first African studies program at Northwestern University in 1948, efforts by African American scholars to draw attention to African studies were consistently frustrated. This was hardly surprising in a society where blacks and their African heritage were denigrated until the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s launched a major struggle against blatant, official racism. Since the 1960s, however, interest in African studies fluctuated depending on the existing (inter)national, political, and ideological situations. Continuing bickering among Africanists (Whites and Blacks) over scholarly authority, authenticity, and gate keeping as well as the issues of paradigms, relevance, biases, boundaries, and ideological and intellectual agendas, further politicized and racialized African studies. This essay, therefore, is an appraisal of these challenges and how they impinge on the fortune of, and approaches to, African studies in the United States.

Introduction

Reminiscing on the events of the past fifty years, it would be quite deceptive for stakeholders in the field of African Studies to assume that all has been well just as it would be an illusion to feel that its demise is imminent. Tension within the field has been external and internal, with the external pertaining to the variable nature of public support and the internal relating to the persistent conflict among Africanists. Race and power are problematized in both instances. Historically, the support for African and Diaspora Studies in the United States has been quite capricious. For so long, authoritative "voices" on Africa and peoples of African descent were dominated by non-Africans, especially European colonial anthropologists and later American scholars. The rationale for initial Western interest and support varied. For the Europeans, anthropological research on Africa was related to their direct imperial expansion and domination, whereas for Americans, it was largely linked to the extension of U.S. informal, neo-colonial, global influence.¹ In both circumstances, a genuine concern to study and understand Africa and Africans remained peripheral for Western writers; African and African-American scholars only played second fiddle until the modest gains of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1950s/1960s. Although the 1960s through the 1980s witnessed an upsurge of support and expansion of African Studies, the era equally marked the heightened tension between many conservative white Africanists and African/African-American scholars over disciplinary canons, authenticity, and leadership. From the late 1990s, however, the demographic and intellectual parameters of African Studies began to change

as the number of African academics teaching in the US steadily increased; white control or gate keeping became a contested question.²

African Studies, as Thandika Mkandawire reminds us, "is unfortunately still a contested terrain and sometimes bitterly so."³ The age-old debate on the epistemological, methodological, and paradigmatic approaches to African Studies has not yet been resolved. One of the most contentious issues that confronted African Studies in the 1960s centered on the representation of black scholars in the African Studies Association (ASA) as well as the engagement of ASA with issues of crucial relevance to Africa. For black scholars, the disciplinary approaches to African Studies were too academic and therefore irrelevant to Africa. To what extent were these issues addressed? This study examines the challenges of race and power relations, contentious disciplinary ideologies, cold war rivalry, and globalization for African Studies in the United States. It demonstrates that in spite of the global context the racialized conflict between white and black Africanists not only impinges upon the nature and level of public and private interests and support for African Studies but also informs the methodological approaches and control of African Studies.

Although Africa is the world's second largest continent, for so long, very little was known in America about the land, the peoples, their heritage and some of their cultural advances. For so long, American knowledge of Africans hardly transcended their encounters with the slave trade and slavery as a whole. Only a few Americans visited Africa for either tourism or scholarship. For over 100 years, (between 1850 and 1960) the United States dealt with Africa through the embassies of colonial powers in their European capitals. During that period, Americans

learned about Africa through the eyes of European imperialists who emphasized the "primitive" and "docile" nature of Africans in order to justify colonialism, the claims of white superiority, and the "civilizing mission."⁴ The period coincided with the era of scientific racism and Social Darwinism. Since then, Americans have yet to gain any reliable knowledge of Africa as the story of the continent between 1950 and 1990 was gleaned through the prisms of the cold war, and more recently through Africa's status in the global (dis)order.

Comprehensive information on Africa was consistently "delivered within the context of arrogance, contempt, and condescension".⁵ Old myths were passed on to the next generation as new ones were invented by Western writers, which further beclouded American understanding of Africa. The origins of these myths and stereotypes are quite age-old, extending back into antiquity through the Middle Ages when Euro-American Christians eased their consciences and justified the slave trade and slavery by arguing that Africans were not fully human nor were they Christians. To date, Americans are used to sensational and outlandish news stories about Africa and Africans. Indeed, negative depictions of Africa have become the norm so that reports on socio-cultural, economic and political advances and any innovation have become an aberration. As Madeleine Albright, the former US Secretary of State, confessed: "our impressions of Africa are dominated by images of famine and strife, exotic wildlife and vast deserts". Albright further noted that it was high time that Americans embraced a more complete image of Africa including modern cities, first-rate universities, fast developing economies and hard working people with aspirations similar to those of Americans.⁶ It might be helpful to consider some of the

negative depictions of Africa that have further extended the difficulties for a better understanding of this continent and its heritage.

Euro-American Portraiture of Africa

Negative attitudes, or, sometimes, outright neglect of Africa in meaningful scholarly inquiry has a long history – from the Greco-Roman times through the Enlightenment to modern and post-modern times. The myth of savage Africa “was created out of philosophical necessity, not out of observations,” and was predicated on the European view that they had the best religion and civilization in the world. It therefore followed that “someone else, somewhere, must represent the other extreme – the non-civilized extreme.” Africa became the favourite place to locate this extreme since Europeans knew little about the continent.⁷ Consequently Africa was dismissed as worthless and undeserving of any serious, scholarly inquiry. As one of Europe’s most respected 19th century philosophers, Georg Hegel, concluded:

It is manifest that want of self-control distinguishes the character of the Negroes. This condition is capable of no development or culture, and as we have seen them at this day, such have they always been... At this point we leave African not to mention it again. For it is no historical part of the world; it has no movement or development to exhibit.⁸

But Hegel never visited Africa about which he so negatively depicted in such a categorical fashion. Preceding Hegel,

however, were classical and Enlightenment Euro-American writers with stereotypic and debasing commentaries and conclusions about Africa and Africans. Strangely, most of these writers never actually visited the continent, and yet wrote exotic things about an "imaginary" Africa inhabited by barbarous savages and sub-human beings, with monstrous shapes, color and character. Bizarre and sometimes comical as these writings appear to modern Africanists, they were authoritative for Euro-American readers. As William Summer noted: "if you asked Thomas Jefferson ... whether in 'all men' he meant to include Negroes, he would have said that he was not thinking about Negroes" when he wrote the American Declaration of Independence.⁹ It is only safe to conclude that the Western world that regarded blacks as sub-human would have no compunction in relegating their history and cultural achievement to the background.

Nevertheless, Hegel and others who denigrated and ignored Africa, African peoples (including the Diaspora) and their heritage, became very persuasive to their Euro-American audiences. After some dubious studies on Egypt and North Africa, a British anthropologist, C.G. Seligman, concluded that "the civilizations of Africa are the civilizations of the Hamites...." As for whom the Hamites actually were, Seligman further insisted that they were Europeans.¹⁰ Although Seligman recognized the splendour of Egyptian civilization, he was quick to attribute significant African achievements to outsiders, usually Caucasians. Similarly, Margery Perham, a respected authority on British imperialism argued, "The meeting of the West with Asia, for all the present disparity of material power, will have to be between equals in status" while the "dealings between tropical Africa and the West must be different." She further stated that until

it came in contact with Europeans, most of Africa "was without the wheel, the plough and the transport animal; almost without stone houses or clothes except for skins; without writing and so without history."¹¹

Perham's depiction of Africa, its peoples and their cultural achievements was aptly challenged by African scholars prominent among whom was K.O. Dike, a Nigerian historian, who received his doctorate degree in African history from the University of London in 1950.¹² In a published rejoinder to Perham's piece, Dike argued, "there is no criterion by which to compare one culture in terms of progress with another" because each "is the product of its environment and must primarily be judged in relation to the community which it serves." Culture and civilization are relative concepts. For Dike, the term culture must cover a wide field – laws, customs, traditions, music, art, morals, belief, dress, and everything that makes a full life of a given community. Consequently, "there is no people without a culture and civilization of its own; without some means of controlling its environment in a manner more or less corresponding to its needs." Dike, therefore concluded that many negative statements about Africa "rest not on the evidence of history, or of ascertained facts, but on preconceived notions which in other contexts the scholars responsible would dismiss with appropriate academic detachment."¹³

Today in the United States, the myth of "savage Africa" survives the same way that racism lives on despite the civil rights advances of the 1950s and 1960s. Yet, like racism, the myth of barbarous Africa has become subtler in our own time as evidenced in *Roots* and *The Gods Must be Crazy*. In fact, African and Euro-American culture and social organization have more in common than with the cultures of eastern Asia, native North

America or Australia. Such similarities could be found in agricultural techniques, market organization, religion, family organization, and even disease immunities. Western fixation with difference in skin color beclouded the appreciation of these commonalities, and, instead, spurred negative attitudes toward black peoples.

African-American Pioneers and Euro-American Successors

Prior to the 19th century, African-Americans interest in African Studies was quite low. Traditionally, educated African-Americans “have the attitude of contempt toward their own people because in their own as well as in their mixed schools Negroes are taught to admire the Hebrew, the Greek, the Latin and the Teuton and to despise the African.”¹⁴ While this attitude, entrenched by the experiences of servitude, may have partly accounted for the dearth of advocates for African Studies, it must be acknowledged that, for so long, and with little success, some distinguished African-American scholars labored not only to correct the myriad of misrepresentations of Africans and peoples of African descent but also to advance a scholarly inquiry on their cultures and civilizations. W.E.B. Du Bois was one such African-American scholar. After earning his doctorate from Harvard in 1895, with a concentration in African area studies, Du Bois began to champion the cause of African Studies. Described by Kwame Nkrumah as “the first citizen of Africa,” Du Bois was a leading figure in the Pan-African movement who strongly believed that the color line – racism – was the fundamental determinant of U.S. policy towards Africa.¹⁵ Later tormented by the US government for his Communist connections, Du Bois ultimately renounced

his US citizenship and relocated to Ghana in 1961 where he worked on the *Encyclopedia Africana*, a reference work on all peoples of African descent worldwide.

Carter G. Woodson, who also earned his doctorate from Harvard in 1912, was instrumental in the founding of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History in 1915. Woodson was probably the most significant scholar promoting the history and achievements of African-Americans. In 1926, Woodson launched a movement to observe "Negro History Week," now popularly known as Black History Month. Although Woodson did not directly concentrate on African Studies per se, his promotion of African-American studies and connection to Africa indirectly spurred interest in African heritage. Notably, it was William Leo Hansberry, who received a master's degree from Harvard in 1932 that pushed the frontiers of African Studies in the United States. Although Hansberry did not hold a doctorate, he became the most distinguished pioneer of African Studies in the United States. When he joined Howard University faculty in 1922, "the black academic community was far more concerned with creating a livable present than with resurrecting an ancestral past".¹⁶ Hansberry "was slighted and snubbed for much of his life, not only by white academia, but by many of his Black academic colleagues, as well".¹⁷ Yet he proceeded to establish the first three new courses on African history at Howard. Although these courses were popular among Howard students, two distinguished white faculty members accused Hansberry of "endangering Howard's reputation by teaching subject matter for which he had no proof."¹⁸ But for Hansberry's documentation of mass of detailed primary source evidence, Howard Board of Trustees came close to scrapping the program. Disdain for African Studies was at the heart of the matter.

Denied of grants for further research on Africa and derided by colleagues, Hansberry could not publish any monographs before his retirement in 1959. Yet, in Africa, he was honored and respected as the scholar who placed African Studies on a global map. Posthumously, however, Joseph Harris edited and published Hansberry's research and notes in two volumes in 1974 and 1977. No doubt, Hansberry was one of the most remarkable pioneers of African Studies in the United States.

Indeed, these African-American pioneers were ahead of their time as they pushed ahead even when they could neither secure federal funds nor philanthropic support for programs in African Studies in American colleges. They were the unsung pioneers of African Studies who deeply felt and acted on the need not only to rediscover but also to reconstruct the histories and cultures of their African ancestors. They continued to drum up the value of African heritage in an era when peoples of African descent were regarded as either "freed slaves" or "second-class" citizens and viewed with disdain by white Americans. However, given the endemic racism in America at the time, efforts of these black scholars could not attract public and government interest for African Studies programs.

It was not until white Euro-American scholars, now Africanists by their training, began to lobby for African Studies, as they carried out research and constructed and represented "Africa" to their largely white audiences, that support was forthcoming. Knowledge about Africa was considered crucial mainly to safeguard American interests. Increasingly, white Africanists assumed the role of gatekeepers for African Studies, and the American public, government, and research foundations readily accorded them that respect. Since then, African Studies has been

under the stranglehold of conservative white Africanists who felt a sense of entitlement partly for their role in helping to push for American support and partly because they belonged to the dominant race. Indeed, this was the beginning of what Molefi Asante described as "the terror of domination in the field of African Studies...."¹⁹ While it is true that white Africanists contributed in advancing the cause of African Studies, their accomplishments must be placed within the context of the solid foundation by African-American scholars whose efforts were overlooked in a highly racialized society such as the pre-civil rights United States.

The Dawn of a New Era

Beginning just after World War II and expanding through the 1960s and 1970s, interest in African Studies began within the larger context of American national and foreign policy interests. Three major factors peaked American interest in the post-war years. The first was the need to find ways for coping with the challenges of African nationalism and independence movement, both of which were creating a new horizon for the advancement of democracy and neo-colonialism. The second was the civil rights movement of the 1950s and 1960s, through which African-Americans took an unprecedented interest in learning about their African heritage. The third factor centered on internationalism and the need for increased U.S. knowledge about, and presence in, Africa in the context of the Cold War and subsequent globalization.

It was in 1948 that the first academic center of its kind dedicated to the study of the cultures and history of Africa and African peoples was founded at Northwestern University although there is a claim that Fisk University

(a black university) "organized the first African Studies program in 1943."²⁰ Of course, the nature of race, power and class relations would naturally diminish whatever feats that Fisk recorded in this regard. Nevertheless, under the leadership of Melville Herskovits of Northwestern, a non-African cultural anthropologist whose doctoral dissertation was on *The Cattle Complex in East Africa* (1923), African Studies began to gain a new institutional impetus and national recognition. The break-up of the old colonial empires and the attainment of independence by many African states constituted some of the initial preconditions for African Studies. Furthermore, the increasing presence of African representatives at the UN and African Ambassadors in Washington convinced the US government of the need for positive action. In response, the US government created new positions – an Assistant Secretary of State for Africa and African sections in USAID, CIA and other agencies.²¹ Soon, federal dollars were made available not only for the establishment of new programs of African Studies in other universities but also for supporting field research in Africa. African Studies became a "gold mine" as an increasing number of Euro-American scholars ignored Georg Hegel's admonition about the worthlessness of Africa, and proceeded to "specialize" in various aspects of African Studies. Yet, information continued to be delivered "within the context of arrogance, contempt, and condescension"²² even in the face of this ostensible increasing interest.

Underscoring this new interest, however, was a dramatic increase in government and private funding for area studies. Granted that this was a direct response to the Soviet Sputnik and Communism, the passage of *Title VI of the National Defense Education Act in 1958*, benefited African Studies in many ways. Under this Act, the United

States government designated about 20 universities as the *National Resource Centers* on African Studies, and authorized the establishment of language and area studies centers, with hundreds of millions of private and public dollars being invested in African and international studies programs in the 1950s and 1960s. At any rate, it would be rash to ignore other non-strategic reasons such as individual interest and philanthropy in Africa and the commitment to reforming educational curricula, which influenced some decision-makers both in Congress and within the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations. Disinterested philanthropy under the cold war politics was, by and large, idealistic.

Indeed, for a variety of reasons, Immanuel Wallerstein, former president of the African Studies Association, described 1960 as the "Year of Africa."²³ In that year, 16 African countries became independent states and members of the United Nations; Malcolm X visited Africa twice between 1957 and 1966; and Vice President Richard Nixon was the US official delegate to Ghana's independence celebration in 1957. When he came to power in 1961, John F. Kennedy not only supported publicly Algeria's struggle for independence, but also created the sub-cabinet post of the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs. That same year, President Sekou Toure of Guinea, one of Africa's foremost radical (socialist) politicians, was given a "red carpet" reception in Washington by President Kennedy despite the fact that Toure was en route to Cuba. Paradoxically, it was under Kennedy's leadership that American involvement and the CIA's complicity in the Congo crises resulted in the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, the first African prime minister of Congo. The United States deeply suspected that Lumumba had pro-Soviet "tendencies" and therefore must be checked. The Congo scenario was a constant

feature in US-Africa relations during the cold war.

By the end of 1960, the membership of the African Studies Association (ASA), founded in 1957 with only 36 scholars, had dramatically risen to over 1400. Similarly, the establishment of comprehensive centers and programs for African Studies rose from one in Northwestern to more than 34 by 1970. These were the rosy years when American interest in Africa reached its peak; when programs in African Studies were established at many universities and colleges; when student interest was at an all time high; and when the Peace Corps, established by the Kennedy's administration, became a major means of recruitment of graduate students for these programs. African art and culture began to gain recognition in American museums as evidenced in the establishment of the Smithsonian Museum of African Art in Washington. Furthermore, the continuing importance of African heritage in shaping American popular culture and music from jazz to rock came to be recognized. Clearly the Cold War rivalries between the United States and the Soviet Union "temporarily increased Africa's global strategic value and enhanced Africa's influence in the United Nations, UNESCO, the Commonwealth, and a number of other international forums."²⁴ What was not certain was how momentary this momentum would be.

The Great "Schism": Of Rationale, Paradigm and Methodology

As African and African-American scholars began to feel marginalized, a crack in African Studies and thus the African Studies Association in America became imminent. Black and white Africanist intellectuals had longstanding but conflicting visions of the notion,

methodology and purpose of African Studies. Curiously, some white Africanists seemed to have recognized this when they forewarned: "The Africans of course see the difference between scholarly work and the popular press, between good research and bad, between a genuine search for knowledge and an effort to prescribe for Africa according to American interests."²⁵ It was ironic that, at that time, most white Africanists themselves had consistently disregarded this warning on a mistaken anticipation that Africans and African-Americans would not notice. At issue also were the gatekeeping functions of white Africanists, the purpose of African Studies for Africans and the methodological approach to the field.²⁶ Since 1948 when the first African Studies center was created at Northwestern University through the 1960s and beyond, white Americans have dominated the field at both programmatic and organizational levels. African perspectives were systematically ignored in American analyses of African affairs and this produced the recipe for a rift.

The African Studies Association (ASA), could not reconcile the purely "academic" *raison d'être* supported by conservative white Africanists with an activist/liberationist function called for by mostly Africans and African-Americans in the field. Cummings has questioned the use of African Studies if it is not tinted with some doses of activism and liberationism for Africa and the Diaspora.²⁷ What remains undeniable in any analysis is the fact that it was not mere academic gymnastics that brought about the formal support and institutionalization of African Studies in North America. Nationalism and decolonization in Africa and the civil rights movement in America were pivotal in bringing African Studies to the segregated North American universities. Furthermore,

as Zeleza argued, the production of knowledge about Africa "has been structured by the social and spatial inscriptions of class, race, nationality, ethnicity, gender, and location."²⁸ Academic neutrality remained a mirage. Already, a critical contradiction existed whereby white Africanists themselves gravely politicized African Studies in the service of the US government, with institutions and agencies such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the Ford and Rockefeller Foundations providing the bulk of the funding for area studies. As Martin and Young put it:

As most US scholars involved in research on Africa became increasingly dependent on these institutions for financial support, and as they came to play a growing role as official or unofficial advisers on African affairs to various government agencies, it became obvious that a major contradiction was developing between academic neutrality and political involvement and constraints.²⁹

Soon, however, a new breed of Africans and African-Americans, who numerically dominated the membership of other ASA-affiliated organizations such as the African Heritage Studies Association (AHSA), the Association of Concerned African Scholars (ACAS), and the National Association of Black Political Scientists (NABPS), began to challenge the status quo of not only African Studies but also the ASA. For these black scholars, African Studies "has been heavily polluted by white-institutional America..."³⁰ The founding of African

Studies, as Kwasi Konadu has asserted:

lies ostensibly in anthropology and through agents of the European colonial enterprise...which provided the knowledge base for much of the other academic disciplines, including colonial planners, whose policies of (in)direct governance mandated ethnographic data for establishing and perpetuating an effective hegemony (even without their physical presence).³¹

Consequently, it became imperative to "free Africanist research from the outdated, inappropriate, and culturally-biased conceptual and methodological frameworks in which it still largely operates and which result in an inaccurate and Eurocentric image of contemporary African society."³² Furthermore, black scholars strongly made a case for ASA to "concede a conspicuous role for AHSA members on the decision-making committees."³³ ASA's rejection of this request alienated many African and African-Americans, and forced a permanent rupture with the formation of AHSA as an independent organization in Montreal in 1968. To date, African Studies has yet to recover fully from this rift as each passing decade introduces new elements into the discord. White Africanists continued to argue that African Studies must remain simply research-focused and apolitical whereas Africans and African-Americans contended that research on Africa must serve tangible functions for Africa and Africans.

Many African and African-American experts in the field agree that African Studies has been permeated

by the dominant theory based on the 'developmentalist paradigm.' Martin and Young have dismissed this as a "unilinear evolution according to which all societies – following the example of Western societies – must necessarily follow the same historical evolution which will take them from 'savagery' to 'civilization.'"³⁴ Since the 1990s, empirical African evidence has been used to fit the theoretical constructs developed in the West. White Africanists have been pushing for this approach to the discomfort of Africans and African-American scholars.³⁵ This preoccupation with prescriptive and deductive methods based on predictions of certain models of research and analyses has been quite detrimental to African Studies. Thus, Asante forewarned that African Studies would continue to be plagued "until black scholars are able to wrest control of the paradigm from narrow Western objectives."³⁶ For Oyekan Owomoyela, "perhaps the surest way of getting Africa back into African Studies is to get African Studies back to Africa."³⁷ If this could not be achieved in geographical terms, it should be accomplished epistemologically and paradigmatically. This approach, as Konadu insisted, "not only affirms African agency and serves their best interests, but also authenticates the notion of an African cultural-historical continuum that predates African Studies and would continue even if the academic field ceased to exist."³⁸

Nevertheless, the 1990s was decisive for African Studies in a dramatic fashion. Although white Africanists continued to dominate in major research granting agencies and editorship of mainstream journals on the field, African scholars began to make some progress in determining the direction of African Studies. The large-scale migration of African scholars to the United States, which began in the 1980s and peaked in the 1990s, increased their visibility

but also heightened the tension in the field. African academic labor migration resulted from a variety of "push and pull" factors which have been explained in political and economic terms: nationalization and politicization of the university labor market as well as the economic crisis of the mid-1970s that further compounded the problem of knowledge production and reproduction.³⁹ With the exigent emphasis on diversity and cultural authenticity, North American universities readily hired these highly qualified intellectual migrants. Soon, peoples of African ancestry began to reshape the course of African Studies in American higher educational institutions. Their personal, lived experiences as Africans and pro-active dispositions began to tip the balance in terms of faculty hire and approaches to African Studies. Furthermore, the increasing volume of research and publications churned out by Africans as evidenced at the annual ASA book exhibits as well as the number of African professors currently teaching in American universities and colleges attested to the strong African presence. Although African ancestry did not always guarantee better erudition and Africa-centered scholarship, there was no doubt that African scholars carried with them deep passion, motivation and lived experiences that were re-invigorating to African Studies.

The growing presence and influence of many distinguished and outspoken African scholars in the field of African Studies soon began to worry many white Africanists. Fearful of losing control, the conservative elements within them could not restrain their objections or even outright resentment against what to them had become "the African threat." For these scholars, African Studies was being hijacked by Africans, and the result would be the lowering of standards. Philip Curtin, a well respected

white Africanist, became their spokesperson with his piece in 1995 bemoaning the increasing number of Africans being hired in African history positions. According to him, "I am troubled by increasing evidence of the use of racial criteria in filling faculty posts in the field of African history."⁴⁰ For Curtin, this was not only "reverse discrimination" but also amounted to "ghettoizing" the field. Unfortunately, Thomas Spear and Chris Lowe have shown that the evidence for reverse discrimination have not been substantiated by available data in hiring.⁴¹ Rather, a serious suspicion of long suppressed racist attitudes was implicated. For Curtin and his contemporaries, times were changing too fast as they no longer have an exclusive credibility and dominance in shaping American opinion about Africa.

Amidst the contentious disciplinary authenticity and authority by many established white Africanists, a growing number of African scholars, supported by African-American and some radical white Africanists, persistently called for a new orientation and approaches to African Studies from mid-1990s. It was no longer business as usual. For some time, a number of African-American scholars including Michael West, Molefi Asante and William Martin had advised that until this new orientation occurred, African Studies was doomed. As Michael West and William Martin lamented, African Studies has been "grievously wounded," and hence Asante advised that until African scholars reassess the kind of scholarship advanced by Western interests, "Africa and its study will remain wrapped in a career system designed to retain a strangle-hold on the interpretation of African data unlike anything else in the academic marketplace."⁴² Encouraged by their African-American counterparts, insulted by Curtin's tirade, and buoyed by their continued growing

visibility, African scholars seized the initiative not only to engage in vigorous scholarly and activist campaign for re-conceptualizing, re-directing and re-centring African Studies in Africa, but also to meaningful participate in setting the intellectual agenda for the field.

American Retreat from Optimism and Progress

While the internal tension within the field persisted, the 1990s witnessed a dramatic retreat in American interest in Africa. African Studies was now like "an endangered species" in terms of support and funding. In Africa itself, the largely optimistic economic and social developments of the 1960s and 1970s gave way to acute depression. Although a positive development, at least in capitalist calculations, the collapse of the Soviet Union and end of the cold war in 1990 created a crisis of relevance for Africa, resulting in U.S. retreat and concomitant marginalization of the continent. The end of global dual-power rivalry "reactivated Africa's marginalization...a kind of 'dis-globalizing' experience."⁴³ The West's old adversaries were now turned into Africa's competition for Western resources. Western rationales for foreign aid have been undermined by the end of East-West rivalry as Western legislatures allocated less and less money for foreign aid. Thus, the new world order coupled with Africa's internal crises had adverse effects on both the continent and African Studies in the United States.

Furthermore, the shift from area studies to multi-disciplinary, multicultural, and international studies, together with budgetary crises in many universities and colleges, and exceedingly bad press for Africa (Somalia, Rwanda), placed African Studies in a precarious situation. Even Africanists, themselves, as Iris Berger noted, began

to voice out "a comparable sense of crisis, a feeling that our understanding of the continent must be re-imagined, reconfigured and reconstructed."⁴⁴ Some white Africanists became so disillusioned with Africa's grim situation that they deployed anti-African and anti-disciplinary invectives that negatively affected African Studies. As Americans, particularly the politicians, turned away from Africa, retreating to pre-1948 culture of neglect and disdain, the issues of scholarly authority and authenticity continued to haunt African Studies. Although student interest in African Studies remained promising, the news media seized the momentum once again; exotic and sensational stories about Africa were resurrected. The myths of a "Dark Continent" and savage Africa were recalled in different forms. Thus, it was hardly surprising that the Rwandan mayhem was dismissed as savage killing while that of Kosovo was considered as ethnic cleansing or genocide and given due international attention.

The consequences of all these for Africa are quite ominous. Research grants for African Studies dwindled. Given the problem of funding, and frustrations over the economic, social and political situations in Africa, Africanist faculty, especially blacks, are finding it harder and harder to visit the continent for fieldwork. The old model of faculty exchange between the US and African universities are no longer possible except with some Southern African institutions. The cost of research continues to swell as many graduate students who are unable to get funding for their research trips to Africa often abandon their study for good. Everyone in the West, including Africanists, unfortunately, appropriated the competency to admonish Africans and their leaders for bad choices and practices, and to offer plans on economic recovery, transitions to democracy, conflict resolution,

sexual habits, education policy, etc. This is what has been referred to as "the preachy approach" and "the prescriptive and adjudicatory proclivity of the writing on Africa."⁴⁵ Based on the outcome of the World Bank and IMF structural adjustment plans and programs in Africa, it is no longer debatable that much of these Western "expert" advices and theoretical approaches for Africa were misguided. As Colin Bundy puts it:

"In economic and development studies, for example, the advocates of modernization, the theorists of dependency and underdevelopment, the analysts of the world systems and modes of production, and the technicians of structural adjustment have left the ring with bloodied noses...."⁴⁶

Yet, given the emerging global village (or globalization), many Americans began to view the world as an intricately interconnected unit of which Africa was an integral part. During a visit to Uganda in March 1998 as part of a two-week tour of Africa, U.S. President Clinton stated: "The biggest mistake America ever made with Africa over the long run was neglect and lack of understanding that we share a common future on this planet of ours that is getting smaller and smaller and smaller."⁴⁷ Apart from his well-informed comment, many American colleges continued to pay only lip service to African Studies programs which they could not scrap altogether for fear of the political repercussion especially in terms of student protests and negative publicity. For instance, many college libraries neglected the acquisition of African-related materials because they viewed African

Studies as an irrelevant area of intellectual focus. Funding for research in Africa dried up further resulting in a number of well-known American Africanist scholars abandoning the field for other more "relevant" areas of study such as Middle East, Japan, and China. Teaching assistantship funds especially for international graduate students were severely cut and adversely affected the number of Africans entering the field.⁴⁸

American publishers equally became apprehensive of publishing African-related research and manuscripts on account that sales were very poor and the topics usually narrow and unattractive to the American reading public and students alike. When they agree to publish at all, university presses preferred works done by white Africanists than by black scholars. Zeleza's review of the publication record of five English-language Africanist journals has amply demonstrated the reality of marginalization of African intellectual production and a glaring connection between race, power and power relations in the production and reproduction of knowledge on Africa.⁴⁹ The founding of African-owned publishing houses such as Africa World Press and Sungai Press dedicated almost entirely to publication of researches on Africa and the inclusion of more Africans on the editorial boards of some major Africanist journals such as *African Studies Quarterly* and the *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, and *History in Africa* have begun to make a difference. With these new generation presses and increasing African participation in reviews and editorship of submissions, African-authored research and writings have been receiving more publication attention.

Globalization and African Studies

Although the place of Africa in the new era of globalization remains unsettled, by its nature and scope, globalization rekindled American interest in Africa and African Studies in different ways. Under the new emphasis on democratization and economic liberalization, Africanists with expertise in political economy - democracy and civil society - have become much more relevant as they now reconfigure the place of Africa in the globalizing world. As the vanguard of globalization and democratization, the U.S. government now seeks better knowledge about African countries to develop the "pills" needed for the successful democracy and free market restructuring. As always, white Africanists are readily called upon to advise and "prescribe" the solutions and approaches for effective integration of Africa into the global order. However, globalization portends different meaning and impact for Africa - homogenization and hegemonization. Yet, some proponents of globalization argue that it can be a strategy of development provided its concomitant free trade regime is checked with protections for the poor and the weak, and when it is related directly to the economic rather than the political.⁵⁰ Without doubt, in principle and practice, globalization remains a very complex and contentious phenomenon.

Under globalization, Africa faces a new threat of re-colonization. It can be argued that the current renewed support for research on Africa, though small in comparison to the pre-1990 era, funded by the US government and private and semi-private agencies, is in pursuit of American national interest anchored on the dividends of globalization. In some sense, this approach parallels those of the European imperial powers whose ultimate purposes

for supporting studies on Africa were to consolidate their colonial hegemony. Thus, the same cloud of suspicion that pervaded the writings of European colonial anthropologists on Africa now inundates American interest in African Studies and the resultant corpus of research and literature under globalization. Although colonialism and globalization seem conceptually dissimilar, both are interrelated in their negative impact on Africa and the fortune of African Studies respectively.

Yet, in some sense, the Cold War constituted the first major wave of globalization, which compelled Europe and America to temporarily suspend the marginalization of the continent as the new adversaries – U.S. and Soviet Union – jostled for global influence. In other words, this first wave was somewhat beneficial to Africa because it recognized the continent's strategic values and stimulated Western interest. However, whatever benefits Africa gained, whether strategic, economic, military or political, in this phase were ephemeral as they were soon obliterated by the disconcerting legacies of the Cold War. The second wave of globalization (with its comrade, democratization), post-1990 phenomenon, "witnessed a reversion to the historical attitude of U.S. policy makers to place African issues on the back burner."⁵¹ While the first wave of globalization was marked by unprecedented American interest in Africa – in South Africa, Angola, Namibia, Ghana, Ethiopia, and Somalia – the second wave portended a retreat from Africa as the U.S. neglect of the Rwandan genocide, Liberian mayhem and Sierra Leonean crises in the 1990s demonstrated. It must be stated that Africanists helped greatly in creating the bleak mood for African Studies in America.

Several factors, including events in Africa, aid fatigue, the news media, and images of extreme poverty

have conspired to create a sense of despair among Africanists, especially white Africanists, turning them into fierce "Afro-pessimists" whose views and scholarship are now based entirely on cynicism. Increasingly, Africanists now treat Africa, Africans, and African social, political and economic institutions in derogatory fashion. Mkandawire has noted that during the 1960s, scholars employed more laudatory words in portraying African nationalist elites in comparison to the present disdain and contempt. African elites are now written off as possessing no redeeming qualities and African economies are dismissed as pirate capitalism, crony capitalism, or nurture capitalism. Apocalyptic predictions are made about Africa moving toward final collapse, oblivion and destruction.⁵² Africanists felt "classy" in their ability to manufacture or invent all sorts of sophisticated lexicographic epithets not only to demonstrate their expertise in the field but also, consciously or unconsciously, to proclaim their sense of hopelessness for Africa and African Studies. Thus, the fortune of African Studies in the United States was, sometimes, responsive to the mood and predictions of Africanist "experts".

Since 2002, however, there have been some significant positive signs. A national survey conducted by Larry Bowman and Diana Cohen in 2002 indicated that many African Studies faculty remain upbeat about African Studies programs at their various institutions; and that despite the funding problem, most institutions still support research on Africa.⁵³ Similarly, more Africanists, both white and black, have now begun to revisit the existing paradigms and traditional intellectual orthodoxy on African Studies. Many now feel that the time had come for redefinition and repositioning of African Studies as a discipline. In their 2002 article, for instance,

Edward Alpers and Allen Roberts made a strong case for broadening African Studies to include the African Diasporas and reposition Africa in its global context. Accordingly, "it behoves us all to acknowledge the importance of regularly revisiting our paradigms and re-centering the study of Africa in Africa and in partnership with Africans and African institutions."⁵⁴

Likewise, the concept of scholar-activist orientation for Africanists, which African-American scholars, supported by African and some radical white Africanists, had called for in the 1960s resulting in ASA schism, is now gaining wider acceptance just as the pioneering roles of African-Americans scholars in the founding of African Studies are being increasingly recognized. In his ASA presidential address in 2002, Allen Isaacman boldly confronted a number of issues that have been the objects of tension among Africanists. Insisting that Africanists must come to grips with the fact that it is impossible to conduct a value-neutral research, he cited the exemplary careers of six prominent Africanists – Claude Ake, Basil Davidson, Francis Deng, Susan Geiger, Joseph Harris, and Walter Rodney – who were motivated by a mutually reinforcing intellectual and political agenda. For Isaacman, therefore, "activist scholars are uniquely positioned to confront the prevailing dogmas and inherited orthodoxies in the academic and the wider world."⁵⁵ While calling for appreciation of the important pioneering legacies of African-American scholars, he also acknowledged the need to build intellectual bridges between research communities in America and Africa that no longer privilege Western scholarship.⁵⁶ Thus, the era of condescending gatekeeping and agenda-setting in African Studies that had long excluded Africans and African-American scholars now seems to have past.

Conclusion

The fortune of African Studies in the United States has been quite tenuous. Before the formal institutionalization of the first African Studies center at Northwestern in 1948, many Western writers denigrated Africans and portrayed them as savages. Africa was considered as unworthy of any serious scholarly concern. African-American scholars such as DuBois, Woodson, Hansberry and others who researched and wrote on African heritage in global contexts were despised as intellectually uninspiring, concentrating on a dead-end civilization. With the proliferation of African area studies centers in major universities in the 1950s through 1970s with concomitant government and private support, non-African Africanists dominated the field and alienated Africans and African-American scholars, resulting in a conceptual and paradigmatic rancour and a split among Africanist scholars. Some prominent African-American scholars including Molefi Asante, Tsehloane Keto, Maulana Karenga and others forged ahead with an Afrocentric approach to African Studies. The economic crises of the 1980s witnessed the beginning of American retreat which reached a climax in the 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. The new era of globalization, with its emphasis on democratization and free (open) market economies, compelled American policy reversal and renewed interest in Africa. Yet the level of interest and support has been highly measured.

Although constantly under siege, African Studies has proven to be quite resilient. For instance, despite the budget cuts, Michigan State University, which houses one of the largest African Studies centers in the country,

still operates with an annual budget of \$2.7 million and over 160 faculty; and currently other Title VI institutions such as the University of Florida, Indiana University, University of Wisconsin, and Ohio University have substantially increased their African Studies faculty to 90, 85, 70 and 65 respectively.⁵⁷ While the rupture of the 1960s now seems distant, vocal black scholars have induced a shift in methodological and paradigmatic approaches to African Studies; more African-American scholars are, once again, active at the ASA; and more black scholars serve in executive positions within the ASA. As some progressive white Africanists now argue, "the richness of the new scholarship reflects the fact that there are now more Africans participating who forthrightly contest Western Africanists' intellectual hubris (or simply, pointedly ignore it in favour of more pressing concerns)."⁵⁸ Clearly, both white and black Africanists need each other for the enrichment of scholarship on Africa; how long the gatekeeping and the authoritative voice mentality will endure among many white Africanists remains uncertain.

Endnotes

¹ Guy Martin and Carlene Young, "The Paradox of Separate and Unequal: African Studies and Afro-American Studies," The Journal of Negro Education, Vol. 53, No.3, 1984, p. 258.

² See Goran Hyden, "African Studies in the Mid-1990s: Between Afro-Pessimism and Amero-Skepticism," African Studies Review, Volume 39, No. 2 (September 1996), p.7.

³ Thandika Mkandawire, "The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence. The Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola Distinguished Lecture Presented to the 1996 African Studies Association Annual Meeting," African Studies Review, Vol. 40, No.2 (September

1997), p.26.

⁴ Martin and Young, "The Paradox of Separate and Unequal: African Studies and Afro-American Studies," p. 257; See also Basil Davidson, The Black Man's Burden: Africa and the Curse of Nation-State, Times Book, New York, 1992 and Thomas McClendon, "Who Put the Mission in Civilizing Mission? Reconsiderations of Shepstone's Early Career," paper presented at the North East Workshop on South Africa, April 2002. <http://southwestern.edu/academic/bwp/pdf/2002bwp-mcclendon.pdf>

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⁶ Madeleine Albright, (U.S. Secretary of State), "US Policy Toward Africa," speech delivered at George Mason University, Fairfax, Virginia, March 19, 1998, see URL: <http://secretary.state.gov/www/statements/1998/980319.html>

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¹³ See K.O. Dike, "African History and Self-Government," West Africa, London, February-March, 1953.

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¹⁵ See W.E.B. Du Bois, The Souls of Black Folk, A.C. McClurg & Co., Chicago, 1903.

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¹⁷ Chancellor Williams, "William Leo Hansberry, Teacher: As Seen By A Former Student" Published in A Tribute to the Memory of Professor William Leo Hansberry, Washington, D.C.: Howard University Department of History, 1972. URL: <http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/hansberry2.html>; See also Rashidi, Rukono (posted), "William Leo Hansberry: Pioneer Africanist Scholar (1894-1965)," The Global African Community, History Notes, 1998. URL: <http://www.cwo.com/~lucumi/hansberry.html>

¹⁸ See Biographical Profile of William Leo Hansberry.

¹⁹ Molefi Asante, "More Thoughts on the Africanists' Agenda," Issue: A Journal of Opinion, Vol. 23, No. 1, (Winter-Spring, 1995), pp. 11-12.

²⁰ Jacob U. Gordon, "Teaching the African Experience: A Pan-Africanist Approach," African Studies Review, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1976, p. 110.

²¹ See David Robinson, "The African Studies Association at Age 35: Presidential Address to the 1993 African Studies Association Meeting," African Studies Review, Vol. 37, No. 2, 1994, p. 3 and Gordon, "Teaching the African Experience," *ibid.*

²² McCarthy, Dark Continent: Africa as Seen by Americans, p. 145.

²³ Immanuel Wallerstein, "Africa in the Shuffle," in Issue: A Journal of Opinion, vol.XXIII/I, 1995, p. 22.

²⁴ Ali Mazrui, "From Slave Ship to Space Ship: Africa Between Marginalization and Globalization," African Studies Quarterly (Online), Volume 2, Issue 4, 1999, p.3: URL: <http://web.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v2/v2i4a2.htm>

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²⁹ Martin and Young, "The Paradox of Separate and Unequal: African Studies and Afro-American Studies," p. 259.

³⁰ Robert Cummings, "African and Afro-American Studies Centers: Towards a Cooperative Relationship," Journal of Black Studies, Vol. 9, No 3, 1979, p. 296.

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³² Martin and Young, "The Paradox of Separate and Unequal: African Studies and Afro-American Studies," p. 262.

³³ Cummings, "African and Afro-American Studies Centers: Towards a Cooperative Relationship," p. 303.

³⁴ Martin and Young, "The Paradox of Separate and Unequal: African Studies and Afro-American Studies," p. 260.

³⁵ See Mahmood Mamdani, "A Glimpse at Africa Studies, Made in USA," CODESRIA Bulletin 2 (1990), pp.7-11.

³⁶ Asante, "More Thoughts on the Africanists' Agenda," p. 11.

³⁷ Oyekan Owomoyela, "With Friends Like These: A Critique of Pervasive Anti-Africanisms in Current African Studies Epistemology and Methodology," African Studies Review, Volume 37, No.3, 1994, pp. 96-97.

³⁸ Konadu, "The Cultural Identity of Africa and Global Tasks of Africana Studies," p.2 and Martin and Young, "The Paradox of Separate and Unequal: African Studies and Afro-American Studies," p. 260.

³⁹ Zeleza, Manufacturing African Studies and Crises, p. 11-

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⁴⁰ Philip Curtin, "Ghettoizing African History," Chronicle of Higher Education, March 1995.

⁴¹ See Thomas Spear, 4 April 1995, with an additional comment by Chris Lowe, "Ghettoizing African History?: Affirmative Action and African History," H-Net List for African History, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45/311.html>

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⁴³ Mazrui, "From Slave Ship to Space Ship: Africa between Marginalization and Globalization," p. 3.

⁴⁴ Iris Berger, "Contested Boundaries: African Studies Approaching the Millennium Presidential Address to the 1996 African Studies Association Annual Meeting," African Studies Review, Vol. 40, No.2, 1997, p. 1

⁴⁵ See Mkandawire, "The Social Sciences in Africa: Breaking Local Barriers and Negotiating International Presence," p. 31 and Zeleza, Manufacturing African Studies and Crises.

⁴⁶ See Colin Bundy, "Continuing a Conversation: Prospects for African Studies in the 21st Century," African Affairs, Volume 101 (2002), pp. 61-73.

⁴⁷ President Bill Clinton, a speech delivered during a state visit to Uganda in 1998. For an audio version of this address, please visit: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1035622>. See also F. Wafula Okumu, "Reflecting on Clinton's African Safari," 1998: http://www.theperspective.org/clinton_safari.html

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⁵³ Larry W. Bowman and Diana T. Cohen, "Identifying New Directions for African Studies: The National Survey of African Studies Faculty," African Issues: Identifying New Directions for African Studies, Vol. 30, No. 2, (2002), pp. 2-10.

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⁵⁶ Isaacman, "Legacies of Engagement: Scholarship Informed by Political Commitment," p. 30.

⁵⁷ Guyer, African Studies in the United States: A Perspective, p. 48; See also <http://africa.msu.edu>; <http://africa.wisc.edu/facstaff/faculty/index.htm>; <http://web.africa.ufl.edu>; <http://www.african.ohio.edu>; and http://www.indiana.edu/~afrist/directory_faculty.html.

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