



Early Black Thinkers in the Diaspora and Their Conceptualizations of Africa

Edited by
Abdul Karim Bangura

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Foreword by Kchbuma Langmia

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*Mwalimu Dr. Michael Frazier, an Effulgent Teacher,
Mentor and Humanitarian!*

FOREWORD

I accepted the invitation to write the foreword for a work of this grandeur because it reechoes the dreams and aspirations of great scholars like Kwame Nkrumah and Harold Cruse from the continent and in the Diaspora. The authors of this and its companion book have embraced Nkrumah's "consciencism" that an African/Black scholar trained in Eurocentric tradition that continuously belittles his people, their education, and culture cannot go back to his community and espouse Euro-American cultural and educational aesthetics at the expense of those from his/her roots in Africa. The Black scholars of this book are no longer being "mis-educated" in the word of Carter G. Woodson. Rather, they have become the *bolekaja*: i.e., the protagonist in the famous Yoruba proverb calling for the opponent to come down and fight. This book rejuvenates the theme of self-dignity that was seized from the Black person during and after the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade and colonization of their mother continent of Africa. Since then, the African race has continued to search for a voice that can be heard and to be adhered.

This and its companion book have revealed the sores on our feet and the bruises on our bodies. These authors need to be celebrated! The brilliance with which they write, the breadth and depth of their ingenuity, and the clarity of their vision have provided much-needed hope for the Black race. Their reflections and in-depth discourse on contemporary Black luminaries who have charted the path for self-discovery for a group of people who have been disrespected for years because of their race are felicitous. Their conceptualization of Africa is rooted in the DNA of being African in Africa and the Diaspora and having experienced life both

naturally and psychologically in Africa and the Diaspora or what Molefi Kete Asante (2015) has aptly described in his theoretical postulation as “Afrocentricity”: i.e., to be a Black thinker means your vision of the continent is unapologetically transparent whether you are presently in the continent or the Diaspora. Those in the Black Diaspora are going to read in this book a treatise that encapsulates the essence of being the sons and daughters of the soil which has been mischaracterized by those who stood from afar to describe the life and future of the continent. President Donald Trump of the United States was noted to describe the continent as a “shit-hole” and he denied saying so. This means that the thinkers have their work cut out for them to defend the purity of the heart of the African toiling and moiling every day on the continent to make meaning out of his/her life. The truth or the lack thereof of that alleged description of the continent was in the minds of these Black scholars. Their overarching theme was unity.

Unity seems to be the buzzword among Africans, African Americans and other Blacks in the Diaspora in given contexts during the post-colonial and post-slavery era. Whether that unity is fractured because we loud-speak it more than we practice it is any body’s guess. Since the 1945 Pan-African Conference in Paris with Kwame Nkrumah, George Padmore and W. E. B. Du Bois and others following up with conference resolutions for all displaced Blacks all over the world, there has been, and continues to be, a challenge; it is almost a herculean task for us. Suffice it to say that the ever-gazing lingering eye on Black people, wherever they find themselves on planet earth, is whether they are up to the task. According to Elliot P. Skinner, “their cultures were inferior to others” (Skinner 2001: 29) and that blatant unapologetic smear on their culture continues to haunt them till this day at home and abroad.

This and its companion book are an attempt by Blacks, especially those in the Diaspora, to debunk this pernicious mythology that has morphed into all Black endeavors and enterprises even in the twenty-first century. Du Bois’ double consciousness epitaph on Blacks in what Ali Al’Amin Mazrui calls “the diaspora of enslavement” (Mazrui 2001: 345) has now become the triple consciousness for Blacks in the “diaspora of colonialism” (Mazrui 2001: 345). We are trapped both in our minds and our vision. The African American scrutinizes the world through the front and back mirror while the other Blacks in the other Americas including the Caribbean view the world through the front, back, and a side mirror superimposed on them by a third eye. This third eye is consciously or unconsciously coming

from what Robert Guest calls “the shackled continent” (Guest 2004: 13). His picturesque notion of the shackled continent is omnipresent in the minds of Westerners who from the onset in 1884 decided to partition Africa at the Berlin Conference with no African or any member of the Black Diaspora present. Since then, we have been engaged in a battle of the mind to ask for a seat at the table of decision making. The election of President Barack Hussein Obama to the helm of power in the United States ushered in a new dispensation that the Black person does not have an “inferior brain” after all. The Black personhood has suffered the trauma of colonization, Trans-Atlantic slavery, neo-colonization, and now globalization, but s/he continues to resist the temptation of giving up the struggle. These authors are exemplars who have embodied the *bolekaja* mythology because they are ready to win the battle of the mind. The poets, novelists, political pundits, and social science scholars of Black origin that are alluded to or discussed in detail in this book are a testament to this.

The 25th Annual Conference of the African Studies and Research Forum (ASRF) convened in March of 2022 became the Alter for which the echoes of the 1945 Pan-African Congress seemed to be heard. Black scholars from all parts of the world uplifted their vociferous voices to defend the significant contributions of the Black race to the progress of all humankind. It is my fervent hope that the readers of this volume and its companion seek the blessings of their forebears as they devour the great chapters by great minds who have no other hidden agendas but to get all of us out from groping in the dark.

Shalom!

Washington, DC, USA

Kehbuma Langmia

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Kehbuma Langmia is a Fulbright Scholar and professor and Chair in the Department of Strategic, Legal and Management Communication, School of Communications, Howard University. He has extensive knowledge and expertise in Information Communication Technology (ICT), Intercultural/International Communication, and Social Media. He has published 12 books, 17 book chapters, and 9 peer-reviewed journal articles nationally and internationally. He regularly gives keynote speeches on Information Communication Technology and Social Media at prominent national and international institutions, including the Library of Congress,

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had the opportunity of working for five members of Congress, including two members of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC). She co-authored a book with a former member of Congress. She is currently an associate professor at North Carolina Central University, where she teaches courses on American politics and the politics of race, class, gender and crime.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The major argument in this book is as follows: Just as the ideas of Pan-Africanism birthed by Henry Sylvester-Williams and others in the late 1800s and *Négritude* ushered by Aimé Césaire and others in the early 1900s (most of these major Black thinkers being in the Diaspora) that emboldened many major Black thinkers on the Motherland to push for independence across the continent, so will these early thinkers' ideas help in the building of a "new Africa," which is conceptualized in this book as a thriving continent that is constructed on growth that is all-inclusive, development that is people-driven and maintainable, political environment that is unified, good governance, democratic dispensation, human rights, and peace. The various chapters for this book are the outgrowth of a colloquia series titled "Conceptualizations of Africa by Major Black Diaspora Thinkers: Delineating Ideas for Building a New Africa" presented at the 25th Annual Conference of the African Studies and Research Forum (ASRF) convened in March of 2022. The focus of this part of the colloquia series was on the proposition that the thoughts of early great Diaspora Black thinkers are still wellsprings of tenets that can be used to build a new Africa. The panels examined how these thinkers conceptualized Africa in their works, with the main objective of delineating their conceptualizations to generate suggestions on how to build a new Africa.

As part of the conference's agenda, participants for the colloquia series were invited to present papers on ways to build a new Africa by addressing past, present, and future issues pertaining to the African continent, people of African descent, institutions in the continent and the Diaspora, and

relationships between Africa and other countries and regions around the world. The conference sought to bring together researchers from around the globe and from various disciplines to take stock of current research and foster communication across approaches to the study of Africa. In keeping with the spirit of diversity, we welcomed abstracts for the colloquia series that engaged with various theoretical foci, types and sources of data, methodological questions, and practical applications. Selected papers were considered for this book.

The review criteria included promise of a novel and productive contribution to the study of Africa; clarity and evidence of a well-organized, engaging presentation; and relevance to the theme of the colloquia series. Authors were given two months after the conference to revise their papers based on the suggestive evaluations by conference participants.

This book will be suitable as a main or supplementary text for undergraduate and graduate students taking courses in African/Afro-American/African American/Africana/Black Studies, Social Studies, and Ethnic Studies. It also will be useful to professors teaching about and scholars doing research in these areas. In addition, policy makers in these areas will be interested in the valuable information that the book provides. Furthermore, relevant political activists and advocacy groups will be interested in the book to pursue their objectives.

THE ORGANIZATION OF THE BOOK

The chapters of this book are organized in the alphabetical order of the last names of the thinkers studied. Chapter 1 by Abdul Karim Bangura is about the conceptualization of Africa by Alfredo Antonio ben-Jochannan whose works were among the early systematic analyses to challenge the Eurocentric postulate that “African political life before the advent of the white man was virtually a miserable affair of tribal chieftains, primevally vicious, locked in primitive power struggles over deadly forest and savannah lands and sluggish streams that constituted their only sources of existence.” He began leading educational tours to Egypt as early as 1947, and these tours would span decades. His teachings and writings about Black Jews and ancient Africans, and how Europeans, notably White Jews, appropriated their culture and legacy provoked spirited attacks by Eurocentric scholars. And the audience attending the observance of the Holy Day of Atonement in celebration of the seventh anniversary of the Million Man March at the Salem United Methodist Church in Harlem,

New York, on October 16, 2002 was “stunned” when ben-Jochannan announced that he was donating his private library of more than 35,000 books to the Nation of Islam. But as he asserted, it is with the Nation of Islam that this knowledge can be preserved for our Black people. His critical examination of “Western religions” reveals the African thought processes and practices embedded in them. Accordingly, *Race and History* (2000) characterized him and his work as follows: “For more than five decades, Dr. Yosef ben-Jochannan, a master teacher, researcher, author, lecturer, has led what has now become a mass effort to emphasize African contributions to the world. *African Origins of the Major ‘Western Religions,’* first published in 1970, continues to be one of Dr. Ben’s most thought-provoking works. By highlighting the African influences and roots of these religions (Judaism, Christianity and Islam), Dr. Ben reveals an untold history that many would prefer to forget.” This chapter therefore utilizes the explanatory case study methodology to elucidate ben-Jochannan’s conceptualization of Africa and how it can contribute toward the construction of a new Africa.

Chapter 2 by Bangura entails the conceptualization of Africa by Edward Wilmot Blyden in his famous book, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race*, which posed the following salient question to Blacks everywhere: “Is what we want to achieve simply and uncritical imitation of what the white man has created?” (1994: 91–92). Coincidentally, in my book titled *Toyin Falola and African Epistemologies*, I mention that “although the back to Africa movement gave way to what we now know as Pan-African ideologies, it was Edward Wilmot Blyden who would emerge as the first to actually articulate the ideas and concepts of Pan-Africanism” (Bangura 2015a: 208). I note that “with this emphasis on Africanness, Blyden discussed the Muslim faith as a way for Blacks to reconnect with their African roots in his 15 published articles and essays” (Bangura 2015a: 208). I also point out that for working in Africa Blyden is seen as a father of Pan-Africanism. I add that he “wrote about the potential for African nationalism and self-government during the growing European colonialism” and “inspired a new generation of Pan-Africanists at the turn of the 20th Century” (Bangura 2015a: 209). In this chapter, the tenets of Blyden’s conceptualization of Africa are teased out of his works, augmented by the works of other scholars who have examined them, and shown how they can be utilized to help build a new Africa. A careful reading of the works by and on Blyden makes it possible to delineate at least three categories of tenets in terms of his conceptualization of Africa: (1) African Personality,

(2) Africa for Africans, and (3) Islam and Africans. Before delving into his teachings on these features, I first provide brief, albeit general, descriptions of them for the reader who may not be familiar with them.

Chapter 3 by Saidat Ilo examines Alexander Crummell's conceptualization of Africa and the lessons that can be learned from it to help build a new Africa. Crummell has been viewed as an eloquent voice in the Black Nationalist and Pan-Africanist movements. He was considered a Black Nationalist and a Pan-Africanist for his desire to unite all people of African descent. Crummell's *The Future of Africa* (1862) is a series of lectures given by the author in Liberia in 1862. Crummell was a complex figure who grappled with his own identity, which one of his protégés W. E. B. Du Bois referred to as a "double-consciousness." As an American, who also studied in Europe, living in Liberia, he represented the views of his homeland, America, and of the colonizers; nonetheless, because he saw himself as a descendant of the continent, he wanted to represent the views of Africans as well. He referred to Africans as "barbaric" and believed slavery was a "necessary evil" for them to achieve Western civilization; nevertheless, he had an interest in the continent, so much so that he moved to Liberia. He believed that Black self-help, religion, notably, and education would help the people of Africa and of African descent to realize and achieve their self-actualization. Using a qualitative explanatory case study methodology (which emphasizes words, as opposed to numerical values, to answer the questions *how* and *why*), the chapter shows, through self-reliance, education, and embracing religion, Africans in the continent and those in the Diaspora can thrive. Moreover, the chapter shows that all races have their own unique identities that should be embraced and celebrated.

Chapter 4 by Elan Mitchell-Gee concerns the conceptualization of Africa by Martin Robinson Delany who was an exceptional orator, journalist, medical doctor, and civil rights activist during the nineteenth century, and how his ideas can be used to build a new Africa. Delany spoke of the injustices of slavery and proposed a great migration of African descendants to the Caribbean, South America, and Africa. He is also widely revered as the "Father of Black Nationalism." Although Delany is well-regarded for his contributions to Black Nationalism, his work does not often receive credit as his contemporary Frederick Douglass. Delany was a proponent of the emigration to communities in countries that were accepting of African descendants, whereas Frederick Douglass was a proponent of integration into and equality of African Americans in the

economic, political, and social life of America. Delany also authored and edited several publications on the state of African Americans. Some of his most famous publications included *The Origin of Races and Color* (1879), *The Condition and Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States* (1852), and *Blake or the Huts of America* (1859–1861). These publications and others are qualitatively analyzed by employing the explanatory case study methodology to delineate ideas that can be used to build a new Africa.

Chapter 5 by Artemesia Stanberry broaches the African conceptualization of Frederick Douglass, who is one of the most recognized and influential figures in United States history. His escape from slavery, his efforts to abolish the institution of slavery, and his pursuit of freedom, justice, and equality for all make him a respected figure. His stance against the colonization/emigration movement whereby free Blacks would leave for Liberia and/or other areas of Africa, thereby leaving the soil of the United States, was less about his views on Africa and more on his belief that this country is now the country of Blacks on its soil and, therefore, there should be an expectation that the laws and freedoms articulated in its founding documents apply to African Americans. The key point in Douglass' thinking is that an oppressed group of people wherever they may be must continue to fight and agitate on moral grounds until the system changes. This cannot be done by leaving a country or a region; rather, it must be done by continual social and political agitation. This can be informative for efforts to build a new Africa because the people living in communities across the continent have a stake in society. Political movements must consist of agitating the power structure and changing oppressive institutional structures. This chapter explores books and other works written by Frederick Douglass, including the *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1962), where he articulated his rational for sometimes unpopular viewpoints given the level of oppression faced by African Americans. His body of work is examined as a means to extract his intellectual viewpoints in an effort to provide a roadmap for citizens advocating change. An explanatory case study methodology is used to provide a clear articulation of his viewpoints and to offer a roadmap for political reforms in Africa.

Chapter 6 by Junior Hopwood and George Kintiba deals with the conceptualization of Africa by Marcus Mosiah Garvey, who is well known for his exploits abroad than at his country of birth that is Jamaica. He is not only a national hero but also a mythic figure in Jamaica. Garvey's arrival on the sociopolitical scene epitomized by White supremacy, White

privilege, and racism in the United States was reminiscent of Moses' arrival in Egypt with the mandate to Pharaoh to "let my people go." The Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) founded by Garvey was a symbol of Black pride, intelligence, entrepreneurship, and solidarity fueled by his philosophy which postulates that the time had come for people of African descent to cease from hero worship and idolatry of other races and to create and emulate Black heroes of their own (Hill and Bair 1987). This chapter analyzes the sociological impact of Garvey's work using the Content Analysis methodological approach. The focus is on the following questions: (a) What was the push-pull factor that precipitated the migration of Garvey's ideology from Jamaica to the United States? (b) How did the transition of Garvey's philosophy and works and the UNIA form a subculture to a counterculture entity? (c) What impact did Garveyism have on the development of social movements in the Diaspora and Africa? (d) What is the potential influence of Garveyism as an ideological and philosophical antithesis to the reemergence of the thesis of White supremacy and White privilege? Answers to these questions lead to suggestions on how to Garvey's ideas can be employed to help build a new Africa.

Chapter 7 by Mario D. Fenyo explores the conceptualization of Africa by Nicolás Guillén (1902–1989) using historiographical approaches. Guillén was the most famous Cuban poet of the twentieth century and one of the three or four greatest poets of Latin America in that century. The focus in this chapter is on how his ideas can be used toward efforts to build a new Africa. Guillén is also recognized as the leader of the *Negrismo* moment, the Hispanic counterpart of *Negritude*. It must be understood, however, that, by the same token, Guillén is a humanist and a universalist, reflecting the culture, multi-culture, or civilization of the Caribbean, White or Black, beyond any "movement," "style," or "genre." One of his best-known collections of poems, titled *Songoro Cosongo*, may be singled out as representative of his writings and personality. To quote a verse, "En esta tierra, mulata/de africano y espanol /(Santa Barbara de un lado,/ del otro lado Chango)" is a fusion of Yoruba and Hispanic languages and media. Incorporating onomatopoeic terms and syncretic creeds, it is also a manifestation of his political ideology which led him to become a revolutionary, many years before the Cuban Revolution of 1959. He joined the Communist Party in 1937, as a consequence of which he was barred from the United States. Nevertheless, he developed a close friendship with Langston Hughes, a frequent visitor to the island, who he called "my

dearest friend.” In 1954, Guillén was awarded the Stalin Peace Prize, and in 1961, he began serving as President of the National Union of Cuban Writers. Not unlike the case of Fela Ransome Kuti, his father was assassinated by the government, which probably exacerbated his anti-establishment stance. His holistic achievements and universal spirit notwithstanding, he is not appreciated by everyone. When Fenyo approached a distinguished Cuban colleague (with a PhD), a professor of literature, he told him that he had never heard of Guillén.

Chapter 8 by Walter W. Hill is about the conceptualization of Africa by Alain LeRoy Locke. As Hill recounts, after agreeing to write this chapter, but before beginning the project, Jeffrey Stewart had just published his extensive biography of Locke titled *The New Negro: The Life of Alain Locke* (2017). The tome is over 900 pages in length. Michael P. Jeffries (2018) favorably reviewed the book with the subject described as an art lover who preached revolution. In describing Stewart’s role as the curator of the American Negro Exposition in Chicago in 1940, the professor is described as one of the most prominent African Americans. Jeffries says that Stewart reviewed many letters. An earlier biography of Locke by Christopher Buck titled *Alain Locke: Faith and Philosophy* (2004) references 220 boxes of papers at the Howard University Library. Another well-known biography of Locke was by Leonard Harris and Charles Molesworth (2009). This chapter adds to the key findings in these and other works to tease out what can be learned from them to help build a new Africa. Note: The author thanks Robert C. Smith and Garrey Dennie for comments on a previous draft. Errors are the sole responsibility of the author.

Chapter 9 by Lisa K. Brown and Sarita Barton investigates the conceptualization of Africa by Booker T. (Taliaferro) Washington, who is well-regarded as an historical icon in American history, a political activist for African Americans, and thought leader on industrial education. Nonetheless, only a few historians have acknowledged or focused on Washington’s contributions to and on Africa. While Washington advocated for education and economic self-sufficiency, he also advocated for improved conditions in Central and West Africa. As the Vice President of the Friends of the Congo, Washington lobbied the White House on Congo issues; in the Liberian Crisis, Washington facilitated negotiations on Liberia’s behalf to prevent foreign encroachment; and Washington spearheaded a mission to West Africa’s Togo to transform its cotton economy. This chapter uses historiographical methodology to review primary sources from Washington to illustrate his involvement in and influence on

African international affairs. Additionally, this chapter discusses how Washington's philosophy of self-determination, education, and self-reliance may continue to influence African countries today as they contend with unemployment, corruption, overpopulation, and poor governance.

Chapter 10 by Jennifer Bronson is about the African conceptualization of Ida Bell Wells-Barnette, more popularly known as Ida B. Wells, who was an anti-lynching activist, pioneering journalist, and newspaper editor that championed the cause of Black America across the United States and overseas. Wells' campaign against lynching began in 1892 when three Black men, all friends of hers, were murdered by a violent White mob in Memphis, Tennessee, where Wells lived at the time. These events were a catalyst for Wells who soon after wrote an editorial calling for Blacks to immediately emigrate from Memphis, echoing the last words of one of the dying men to his killers: "Tell my people to go West—there is no justice for them here" (Wells 1891: 51). Wells herself left Memphis in the months following the murders, barely one step ahead of her own lynching. She was not alone in her calls for Blacks to migrate from the South and she joined a chorus of Black intellectuals who advocated the same. Indeed, it is no coincidence that the resurgence in the Back-to-Africa movement occurred at a time when hundreds of Black people were being lynched. Nonetheless, there were differing opinions among leading Black thinkers and activists about to where Blacks should migrate. In contrast to some of her contemporaries, Wells offered only tepid support for Black migration to Africa, despite being a vocal proponent of Black emigration from the South. This chapter explores Wells' views on Africa, Africa's development, and Black migration to better understand how misconceptions of Africa, particularly Liberia, influenced her perspective. The material for the chapter were derived from Wells' professional writing, such as her 1892 essay in the *AME Church Review* titled "Afro-Americans and Africa," as well as from her autobiography and published works about her life. The analysis should yield valuable lessons that can be applied to constructing a new Africa.

Chapter 11 by Lydia Kakwera Levy investigates the conceptualization of Africa by Richard Wright in terms of his views on Africa, colonialism, and Black Power by looking at a sample of his non-fiction works: *Black Boy* (1945), *Black Power* (1954), and *The Color Curtain* (1956). As an expatriate living in France, Wright and a group of intellectual heavy weights—Alioune Diop, Aimé Césaire, Leopold Sedar Senghor, Jean Paul Sartre, and Albert Camus—founded the journal *Presence Africaine* in 1947. This

journal became a leading voice in terms of interrogating the colonial system for the oppressed. In addition to the above-mentioned intellectuals, Wright had also developed a close friendship with C. L. R. James and George Padmore, who were seen as radicals for decrying colonialism as exploitative and calling for a Pan-Africanist movement. In 1953, with the encouragement of George and Dorothy Padmore, Wright traveled to the Gold Coast (now Ghana) to see and chronicle African life. Upon his return to France, he published *Black Power* (1954), which captured his views of Ghanaian politics, culture, and customs. Next, Wright published *The Color Curtain* (1956), which synthesized his observations of the Bandung Conference in Indonesia. In these books, Wright explores the physical and psychological harm caused by colonialism. What makes these books compelling is that they were written as travel journals, and thus, they reveal autobiographical insights into his outsider gaze on Africa. At the same time, these works capture the trauma of the colonial system on all people of color. While his fiction work has received tremendous attention, few scholars have studied Wright's contributions to the decolonization of Africa. This chapter hopes to fill this gap.

It nevertheless behooves me to end this chapter with a very important caveat. To state it succinctly, our book, and any other book on Africa for that matter, does not cover every respective understanding and engagement with early Africa as it was a continent that was bedeviled by numerous challenges.

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