

Mapping Transnationality: Roots Tourism and the Institutionalization of Ethnic Heritage

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One of the most important issues in the anthropology of Africa of the late twentieth century has been the “invention of Africa.”¹ V. Y. Mudimbe (1988) has demonstrated that, in addition to the existence of particular forms of native logics, colonial constructions of history, classifications of ethnicity, boundaries, and the imposition of European languages have informed the discourses through which Africans understand each other and themselves. This “invention” of Africanness has been revived by some black Americans in the United States, who, looking to Africa for ancestral roots, have reinvented themselves as both Africans (through descent) and U.S. Americans (through lived experience).

It should be no surprise, therefore, that two of the most powerful ideological narratives of U.S. black nationalist imaginaries that took shape in the mid-1960s and continue to circulate in the present are the “slavery narrative” and the “African nobility-redemption” narrative.² The slavery narrative (Martin Shaw and Clarke 1995) is based on notions of ancestral and therefore biological commonalities among black people. It narrates how Africans were torn from Africa, how they were enslaved because of racial oppression and brought to the New World. It also highlights how, despite the oppressive conditions under which they lived, enslaved Africans produced “diverse cultures” and maintained a fundamental connection to their African past. Through the symbolics of blood³ and diasporic displacement and suffering, these narratives signify a connection to Africa that produces notions of ancestry as being constituted through and from one black ancestor to another. It describes black Americans as surviving incarnations of pre-slavery African societies, thereby enabling a self-identification of black Americans as not simply racialized, but fundamentally embedded in genealogies of heritage.

The African nobility narrative, on the other hand, legitimates the centrality of slavery as the basis for African American connections to Africa, while also eliding it as secondary to the pride of black heritage. By highlighting the idea that African Americans are not merely victims of slavery but descendants of an

African noble and religious elite who are, at the present time, culturally imprisoned in the racist United States, the African nobility narrative ambitiously links the noble African past with African American hopes for an institutionally empowered future. Because black Americans are seen as having “lost” their “traditions” and “culture” to white America, the nobility narrative offers them the promise of reclaiming their “true African selves” by embracing “African” traditions. This narrative incites black Americans to take control of their destiny by reclaiming their ancestral identities.

Since the late 1960s, these narratives have come to represent a popular common sense that links blackness to Africanness, thereby reinscribing the signs of slavery and nobility within trans-Atlantic global circulations, past and present. Admittedly, ideological attempts to create linkages between America and Africa long preceded late 20th century shifts in global capitalism, since a cultural politics of black racial belonging to Africa was central to many late 19th and early 20th century black nationalist formations. However, as a result of both nationalist and transnational forms of agitation during the cold war, and with the U.S. post-World War II emphasis on democracy and economic integration, there was also an ideological shift within U.S. educational, governmental, and cultural institutions that institutionalized the a heritage model for U.S. American identities.

In this essay, I argue that as a result of the globalization of cultural heritage opportunities, claims to African membership are increasingly deterritorialized and far more negotiable and manipulable today than ever before. Yet the development of diaspora studies in the United States has contributed to place-based conceptions of racialization and cultural formations. The very term “diaspora” – a Greek word whose root, *dia*, means “through,” and *speirein*, means to “scatter seeds” – refers to the scattering of people’s offspring. Thus, the term African diaspora is often used to refer to the dispersal of black people from Africa to the Americas.⁴ By the 1970s and 1980s, African diaspora studies not only overdetermined the homogeneity of race and culture, but also created an approach to diaspora that charted migration as a uni-polar link from Africa to its elsewhere. By emphasizing Africa as the originary homeland of black people, the myriad circular influences between (and within) the Americas and Africa were ignored, and the institutionalization of African American studies in the U.S. presumed teleologies of ancestry that were uni-polar and racially constituted. The problem with this approach to race and diaspora in

contemporary studies is that it presumes both the possibility of finding an “authentic” articulation of origins (which depends on Africanness as being produced in Africa alone), and because it maintains biology as the basis of this linkage.

Analyses of diasporic circulations should instead demonstrate how, through particular complex interactions between Africa and the United States, diasporic identities and consciousnesses are made, and therefore how narratives of descent are constructed in historically constituted ways. Approaches to diaspora should demonstrate how agents, institutions, the state, and markets selectively set ideological roots where physical and material routes do not always exist (Scott 1991). In what follows, I examine how late 20th century conceptions of racial belonging were embedded in a more aggressive form of capital institutionalism conducive to the marketing of black Americanness as a sign of African slavery and the glorification of a pre-slavery past. By focusing on what Ariana Hernandez-Reguant (1999) has referred to as the ethnicization of the African diaspora, I explore new cartographies of blackness as they are taking shape in culturalist terms.

My points of departure for this exploration emerge from data collected in Ôyõtúnjí African Village in South Carolina. Named after the once powerful West African Ôyõ Empire of the 16th to 18th centuries, Ôyõtúnjí African Village is a black nationalist community that was founded in 1970 by African American religious converts to Yorùbá practices who have reclaimed West Africa as their ancestral homeland. By the late 1970s, the village boasted a residential population of 191 residents.⁵ For those living there, 5,000 miles from the Western-most tip of West Africa, Ôyõtúnjí represents the home of black people in America whose ancestors were enslaved, sold to traders, and transported to the Americas as slaves. Because revivalists in Ôyõtúnjí believe they have a right to control the African territory that was their homeland prior to European colonization, they claim diasporic connections to the ancestral history of the Great Ôyõ Empire of the Yorùbá people and so have reclassified their community as an African Kingdom outside of the territoriality of the Nigerian post-colonial state. The community’s ultimate force, however, is in its national and international network of economic and political linkages. These revivalists’ production of identity provides a springboard for a discussion of how new ideas about diasporic belonging are constituted by (and, to a degree, also constitute)

changing political and market forces, forces that have also shaped the institutionalization of racial categories over time.

Roots Tourism and the Institutionalization of Race as Culture

“Welcome to Lagos, Nigeria,” read the tattered white sign above the stairway encircling the airport. It was dark and windy by the time the plane landed on the Lagos runway and we disembarked. As the king of Ôyõtúnjí Village and the six members of his entourage walked down the plane’s steel staircase, he fell to the ground to kiss the cold white concrete. Some members of his entourage helped him to stand up as he embraced himself, raising his fists in the air to signal victory.

His facial expression changed from that of someone involved in sobering prayer to enthusiasm, as if to say, “The hardships are over. Africa, I’m home.”

“I don’t know, I think I’ll wait for the broooown soil,” muttered Adé Bíólú, one of the younger members of the contingent. “This concrete isn’t the real Africa,” he added.

For Adé Bíólú, as a first-time visitor to Nigeria, the airport runway’s concrete was not satisfyingly symbolic of what constitutes appropriate “African” soil. For the venerating priest, in contrast, as he later stated, “The fact of arriving [in Nigeria] is the homecoming, not the way [that] it’s been colonized.”

As the six other members of the entourage walked to the terminal building with the other passengers who were on the plane, I noticed Adé Bíólú greeting many of the staring workers and observers.

“Àlàáfíà,” (peace) he saluted them in Yorùbá, continuously initiating eye contact with the native onlookers. The interaction resembled the arrival of a delegate who had just descended from a private jet and was greeting his fans. However, most of the onlookers reacted nonverbally by either nodding or ridiculing him with nearby coworkers or companions. Most refrained from responding in Yorùbá, perhaps because they assumed he would not understand their response or perhaps because they did not speak Yorùbá at all. They either smiled or nodded and waved back.

Adé Bíólú was the first from our group to approach the line for immigration clearance. The rest of us followed him, chatting quietly among ourselves and laughing at what we referred to privately as his bluff—the pretense of familiarity and assumption of acceptance. When it was our turn to

proceed to the front of the line, Adé Bíólú greeted the officer saying, “Àlàáfíà,” this time in a more serious tone.

“Good evening,” replied the official in his crisply ironed police uniform and curved hat, as if to correct him. “You are visiting,” he declared without asking. “What is your country of citizenship?” he demanded, staring at Adé Bíólú with an outstretched hand signaling for our passports.

“United States,” the others replied in staggered order as Adé Bíólú turned to us to collect our passports.

“Canada,” I chimed in.

The officer looked at them and then at me. We were dressed in “African clothes,” with cowry shell jewelry and common beads around our necks. A few seconds later the officer seemed to notice the *ilà* (tribal scarification designated to show tribal descent from *Ôyô*) on their faces. He stared at one of the darker-complexioned people in the group whose *ilà* were prominently figured on his upper cheeks and in a new turn of disbelief he asked, responding to our statement of origin, “All of you?”

I looked at everyone in our group. Half of us had a dark brown complexion, the other half was lighter-skinned. Together, we were distinctly different shades of brown. We wore the “traditional” “Nigerian” clothes that *Ôyôtúnjí* residents are expected to wear – the women with elaborate head wraps and colorful garments, the men with their *filà* (a Yorùbá traditional hat) and traditional cotton pant suits – known in Yorùbá as *aṣò òkè*. I looked to the back of the line and observed men, women, and a few children with faces darker than ours, wearing plainly colored “Western” clothes. We “North Americans,” it seemed to me, were the only people in this section of the airport who were wearing what was seen as “traditional” Nigerian clothing. Twenty men with brown, black, or beige jackets or shirts, carrying briefcases and multiple large bags, and women with varying hairstyles – chemically straightened hair, loosely curled, long, braided and unbraided “weaves,” watched us with curiosity, amusement, and perhaps even disdain.

“Purpose of your visit?” continued the immigration officer, as he looked at our passports, eventually raising his eyes to study us.

“Educational,” responded Adé Bíólú, just as seriously.

“Vacation,” another one in the group said, immediately and loudly, as if to correct Adé Bíólú and hide the ritual initiation and learning goals that inspired their travel.

“What kind of education?” the officer asked as he looked toward those standing near Adé Bíólú.

“Traditional education,” Adé Bíólú replied. “I was born in America, but Africa is my home. We have all come home,” he added, motioning his hands slowly as if to encircle all of us in his description of a homecoming – all of us, including the unimpressed officer. The officer’s serious and unwavering frown turned into an unflattering smirk, perhaps a response of disbelief, non-acceptance, or offense at Adé Bíólú’s attempt at so liberally re-mapping us as African citizens.

“What are those marks there?” continued the officer, cutting off Adé Bíólú’s “homecoming” performance, and instead pointing at the cuts on the upper cheeks of three of the lightest brown people in the entourage. As he looked at the last person’s *ilà*, he exclaimed self-assuredly as he shook his head and smiled, “Why did you let them do that to you? These Nigerians will do anything for money.”

“They’re *ilàs*,” Ìyá Sisilum responded boastfully. “And we did it. We do this in America too, you know, and ...” she hesitated and speaking in Yorùbá this time, overemphasizing what should be tonal inflections with Standard American English ones, “Àwá À lö Abèòkúta and Ôyô,” (we are now going to Abèòkúta and Ôyô).

“O kú isè! (Well done!) Obìnrin (lady), you speak Yorùbá!” responded the officer approvingly and with a smile. He looked over to one of his colleagues, who had already been listening to our interactions and looked amused. They both raised their eyebrows and the officer who had been questioning us said quickly and with a chuckle, “Òyìnbó ní they are African!” (White man say they are African!).

As both of them chuckled together, Ìyá Sisilum added charmingly, as if to indicate that she understood the paradoxical subtext, “Bèê ni, a wá kǒ èdè Yorùbá!” (yes and we are here to learn more Yorùbá).

Without an attempt to request a bribe for not harassing us, clearly tourists, the officer chuckled and, as he opened each passport, looked at the picture and matched it to the correct person, and said, “o.k., a dúpě” (thank you), or “you can go now,” each time opening a passport, looking at the photo and scanning our faces to match the appropriate face to the photo. Ìyá Sisilum’s passport, though, he put aside.

After ushering all of the men through and then me, he handed Ìyá Sisilum hers and, with a sly smile he said, “Olúwa yíó pàṅà mō (the Lord will keep you safe on the trip!), American Nigerian lady,” and then he asked, in English, if she had anything for him.

“A dúpě púpô,” (thank you very much), she responded, flirting with a bashful smile, as if to misunderstand his question as a request for a monetary payoff (bribe) and not as a potential future meeting or date. As she walked away, both of the officers waved good-bye to all of us and chuckled, watching Ìyá Sisilum’s buttocks as she walked toward the baggage and customs area.

Rethinking Race through Ancestral Heritage

The above vignette raises questions concerning whose “Africa” is “Africa”? Whose “Africa” is “African”? Which patterns of cultural production are “authentic”? And with what authority do diverse actors speak, judge, and shape the processes of cultural production and the diverse implications these processes have for claiming a “Black,” and African, and African American raced identity? Here, the encounter between African American heritage tourists and Nigerian governmental officials is part of a larger political economy in which Western tourists seek cultural heritage experiences from the non-West. Disjunctures in formulations of belonging, on both sides of the Atlantic, highlight the complex (and sometimes conflicting) basis upon which membership is forged, and the institutional norms through which meanings are understood. For many Nigerians, for example, the terms of Yorùbá membership may be understood in relation to both norms of state citizenship and sociocultural laws of paternal descent (as the term òyìnbó suggests). For the Ôyõtúnjì revivalists, membership may involve historical connections that predate the formation of the Nigerian colonial state as well as racial ancestry. Ultimately, members of both groups seem to desire what the other group has and the existing features of desire and belonging continue to be deeply rooted in economic conditions of possibility and production. Nigerian Òrìsà practitioners, for example, tend to want access to the resources and connections of the West; Ôyõtúnjì revivalists, predominantly heritage travelers, want the knowledge of ritual through which to develop increasingly independent deterritorialized mechanisms for reclaiming and legitimizing their ancestral membership – what they see as their birthright (see also Ebron 2002). However, because these dialogues between black American heritage tourists and religious revivalists on one hand, and African-

born practitioners on the other, are embedded within particular relations of power, the contours of their exchanges are unequal and asymmetrical. And despite the differing claims to membership, the criteria for legitimacy are still connected to particular institutional norms.

In understanding the development of roots tourism and the institutionalization of “Africa” as the homeland for black Americans, it is important to recognize that the publication of *Roots: Saga of an American Family* by Alex Haley and its subsequent broadcast as a television miniseries was critical to new imaginings of the African past.⁶ As the third most watched program in the history of television – 130,000,000 people, representing a broad spectrum of viewers worldwide, were estimated to have seen it – *Roots* contributed to the production of collective memory of an already marginalized U.S. American community. As time progressed, the nobility of the African past featured prominently in the development of cultural blackness as a heritage identity. Bringing to life narratives about the complexities of African American enslavement, loss, struggle, victory, and survival, the *Roots* story began with the birth in 1750 of the protagonist, Kunta Kinte, in a West African village in the Gambian river region. Detailing the trials and tribulations of seven generations of Kunta Kinte’s descendants in the U.S. American South, *Roots* ends in Arkansas with the life of Alex Haley, who traces his family history back to its African origin. Declaring his ancestry as a narrative of African continuities and freedom, redemption and triumph, Haley’s story follows the movement of Africans to slavery in the U.S. South, to freedom and, finally, to their empowerment in mainstream America. By creating a narrative by which the cultural politics of blackness merged with the ancestral history of slavery, *Roots* brought to life a history that was not part of the personal experience of African Americans, but became part of black popular social memory in the United States – a memory of the production of subservience which had relevance in their personal lives.

Locating *Roots* as a key force in the shift in black American imaginings of their connection to the African heritage is critical for understanding the establishment of a new common-sense notion of racial categories in heritage terms. The early 20th century dominant textual narratives of slavery – that is, Africans being captured, enslaved, and sold to white traders, and suffering at the hands of white plantation owners – were reconfigured with what became a different public discourse about black American connections to African

kingdoms. In the late 20th century, these new constructions of the incorporation of the nobility of the ethnic past did more for the development of a widespread common-sense notion of the African roots of black American identities than any other back-to-Africa social movement in the United States. Ultimately, these nobility narratives contributed to the establishment of ideological terms for on-going black American genealogical roots of African nobility.

In addition to foregrounding the centrality of slavery in transporting African captives from Africa to the Americas, *Roots* contributed to a narrative shift from what was popularly represented in schools as black Americans being victims of slavery who were saved by Abraham Lincoln, to blacks as noble survivors and agents of their own freedom. Blackness became a popular signifier of cultural heritage and ethnicity emblematic of multicultural principles of a post-Jim Crow, post Black Power “American society” and signaled a classificatory shift in categories of U.S. citizenship. For, unlike past Pan-Africanist and black nationalist movements of earlier centuries, the mass circulation of *Roots* contributed to the widespread invention of an African ethnic identity constituted as a derivative of African-Atlantic heritage. It followed a wave of wide-scale demands for American civil rights that re-conceptualized black America’s inclusion as one of a larger pantheon of U.S. American ethnic histories. After *Roots*, genealogies of ancestry became a popular activity among Americans in general, and for African Americans in particular, assertions of their African heritage began to over-determine perceptions of racial belonging as cultural belonging. Given that black Americans could not draw on the experiential memory of trans-Atlantic slavery, in the collective experience of a nation watching the story of slavery unfold, *Roots* brought to life the remaking of a collective memory of subordination that gained its experiential power through the power of association and re-articulation.

In 1999, some twenty-four years after *Roots* was published and televised, Henry Louis Gates produced *Wonders of the African World*. Though *Wonders* did not circulate as widely as *Roots*, this documentary also represents a significant moment in the history of Black Studies in the United States, having rattled the American academy by disrupting dominant institutional representations of slavery as a product of white Europeans and Americans exclusively. Unlike *Roots*, which reinforced a predominant narrative about

European and Muslim participation in the transatlantic slave trade, *Wonders* invoked the grandeur of African civilizations by pointing to the complicity of Africans in contributing to the enslavement of Africans. *Wonders* had been preceded by another significant televisual moment – the airing, in the 1980s, of Ali Mazrui’s *The Africans*, a PBS television series about colonial and contemporary African politics that also emphasized the cultural attainments of the pre-colonial African past. Following up on a theme set by its two most influential predecessors, *Wonders* highlighted a noble African past that had been rendered invisible in Eurocentric histories. Gates’ retrieval of this pre-colonial past as a site for the acquisition of African American heritage established a new intellectual discourse about Africa’s contribution to world “civilization.”

Structured as Gates’ pilgrimage back to the symbolic “homeland,” the filmic text is organized as a travelogue, a personal voyage that was also a homecoming, in which Gates – successful Harvard professor, family man, and tourist – returns as the distinguished son of the formerly enslaved who has embarked on a leisurely trek in search of Africa’s wonders. Rather than focusing on an imaginary of shared roots, *Wonders* signaled the nobility of the African past, as well as the complex relationships between Africans and African Americans. By highlighting the complicity of Africans in the enslavement of Africans, while at the same time unraveling the negative image of Africa as a dark and primitive continent that lacked “culture” and promoting an image of “Africa” as a place of great civilizations, *Wonders* foregrounded a dialectic of slavery and nobility. The documentary incited controversies within U.S.-based African and African American Studies programs that centered around three key problems. First, by limiting his focus to pre-colonial African civilizations, Gates was accused of de-centering the importance of contemporary African concerns and sources of pride. Second, by highlighting African participation in slavery, he was accused of placing the minor role of Africans on a par with that of the European machinery of the slave trade. And finally, by claiming to be the voice of Africa’s prodigal son returned home with riches, Gates’ success, on one hand, was a statement about middle-class black America’s place in the new world order, and on the other, raised issues regarding how (and by whom) African history should be represented for mainstream America. Despite the outrage, however, *Wonders* like *Roots* responded to an absence that addressed a social void, providing alternatives to imagining the African past.

The content of the representation in *Roots* and *Wonders* and the role of presenting alternatives to re-conceiving the African diasporic past have contributed to new forms of black social memories. Yet, traditional debates in the anthropology of the African diaspora have tended to address issues of cultural transmissions in relation to asymmetrical flows from homelands to places of migration – from Africa to the diaspora. Such approaches have established the presumption that the only practices that are authentic are those from so called source counties, and have neglected to recognize the ways that African peoples also incorporate and refashion “Western practices” as their own. As Terrance Ranger and Eric Hobsbawm (1983) have shown us, even the practices seen as the most “traditionalist” are often themselves equally dynamic and have changed over time and space.

Nevertheless, in highlighting the connections between Africans and African Americans as a result of slavery, these films not only began to highlight the complicity of African and European slavery, they also left an opening for rethinking African enslavement as an experience of a long and sophisticated African heritage of empires and rulers. And by providing knowledge about the “secrets of the African past,” black public intellectuals contributed to the setting of new terms for the ways that common-sense notions about slavery and the African American past were to be understood. Moreover, because communities of black cultural nationalists became willing to claim a different narrative about Africa and slavery, new consumer demands for an African heritage industry took shape. The eventual proliferation of heritage literature, market products, heritage days, popular public artists and celebrities, as well as public intellectuals, such as Ali Mazuri and Henry Louis Gates, were possible as a result of the creation of a population willing to consume the productions of a growing heritage market. In order to understand what is new about contemporary U.S. American workings of race and the invocations of diasporic connections to heritage, therefore, we must recognize the workings of transnational capital in the production of a new heritage consumer.

Capitalism, Mass Media, and Institutions of Belonging

The mercantile and trans-Atlantic slave trade set in motion the ideological terrain for particular forms of racial mappings, and the eventual globalization of transnational capital has further reinforced pre-existing norms by which notions of difference were demarcated, thereby setting the terms for territorialized black

heritage claims to Africa. The spread of televised political forums, characteristic of the changing domain of the modes of communication, led to the development of an imaginary about shared black political struggles. Satellite television has thus played an important role in the late 20th century development of Pan-Africanisms and related forms of black nationalism.

Several scholars have examined the ways recent transformations of mass media have contributed to a shift in the centrality of information technologies in people's lives by examining the role of telemedia in shaping subjectivities (Abu-Lughod 1989, 1993; Appadurai 1996; Larkin 1997; Mankekar 1999). They have demonstrated that these technologies required the development of new daily practices and new ways of imagining social relations that, in turn, led to a distinctive reorganization of space and a shortening of temporal horizons—the time-space compression (Harvey 1989:147). The burgeoning mass media also played an important role in publicizing black complaints about the institutionalized racism black Americans encountered on a daily basis (Van Deburg 1992). And though Martin Luther King's 1963 March on Washington was televised nationally and internationally and made U.S. American racial inequalities public, the growing reach of the media, especially telemedia and radio, captured and sensationalized the rising tide of protest throughout the United States in the 1960s. Despite the political success of civil rights activism that ushered into law the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, U.S. American social and political institutions were as politically regulated and racially divisive as ever before. As a result, many black activists were convinced that civil rights, as a means to an end, could not be the only goal of black self-empowerment in the United States.

By 1966, advocates for civil rights had developed a more radical social movement—one that advocated black power as the basis for racial equality. Black power ideologies extolling positive black self-esteem, social empowerment, and self-determination were incorporated into organizing strategies as an attempt to challenge racial hierarchies. Accompanying the development of black power identities was a shift from “being a Negro” to “becoming black,” a shift that also signaled African pride as the term “negro” — a term associated with slavery and the biological justification of racial segregation — was exchanged for the term “black.” In this way, empowerment was connected to black (and eventually African) pride, and blackness became a form of “consciousness” that black Americans needed to undergo. The cultural

politics of blackness, then, involved a multi-layered and increasingly transnational ideological movement advocating a revolution through which black people attempted to transform the cultural tenets of European influences in their lives.⁷ One of the famous slogans of black power, black is beautiful, was incorporated as a challenge to dominant signs of whiteness as superior and blackness as primitive. By expressing black aesthetic virtues and solidarity against white racism, members of the growing black Power movement self-consciously recast the centrality of whiteness in their lives, rendering it marginal, but curiously dialectical. By rejecting their given names as residual names from traditions of slavery and changing them to African names, using African-derived kinship terms such as “brother” or “sister” as new ways of communicating racial unity, Black Power adherents reeducated themselves about the existence of African civilizations, village life, and “traditionalist” lifestyles. And even though Black Power had the effect of acknowledging linkages in biologically racial terms, becoming black and conscious was a fundamentally cultural process.

By the early 1970s, Black Power sentiments became increasingly radicalized when Stokely Carmichael (later known as Kwame Ture),⁸ of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), told reporters on the nightly news that “the greatest hypocrisy we have is the Statue of Liberty. We ought to break the young lady’s legs and point her to Mississippi” (Carmichael, quoted in Karim 1971:131-32). Carmichael was expressing the sentiment held by many black activists that the Statute of Liberty was a contradictory symbol of liberty, contradictory because though they were born in America, they had not experienced the benefits of liberty and equal rights. By capitalizing on controversial statements like this one, media forums played a fundamental role in not only sensationalizing racial strife, but also rendering trivial the grievances of black people in the United States. Black organizing was often labeled by the press as violent and radical, and black protests were often depicted as militant and therefore too radical for White America to take seriously.

Carmichael and many others began to develop larger cultural organizations in which they rejected the possibility of claiming rights to America, instead, in the most radical innovations, claiming transnational linkages to diasporic homelands outside of the United States. In the case of the Black Panther Party, for example, which implemented revolutionary and community-based approaches to black American’s social problems, these links were often forged

ideologically through their sympathetic ties to communism. Despite this, their activism was decidedly locally grounded – they promoted black health and educational programs, the Buy Black protests, as well as the “Don’t Buy Where You Can’t Work” calls for economic solidarity, prison outreach and education programs, welfare counseling, security programs, and a voter registration drive as an attempt to put more black people on juries. Other organizations also proliferated during this period, including the Revolutionary Action Movement, the Black Liberation Front, and the Black Liberation Army. They followed the ideological principles of the BPP, but adopted covert approaches to defending their communities against what was, at the time, a white backlash against the integration of predominantly white institutions.

Black nationalist Islamic movements also provided forums within which black people could claim self-determination based on shared racial oppression and religious convictions. The spiritual leader, Elijah Muhammad, became a prominent icon of political significance, especially in the urban U.S. North, and popularized the Nation of Islam as a political alternative to racial marginalization. The Nation of Islam extolled black personal empowerment as a tool for social change and insisted that quotidian participation in pilgrimages to either Mecca or the African continent and learning about the Koran should constitute a critical component of daily self-teaching. The range of Black Islamic movements that developed in the United States was, unlike that of the multi-racial religious Islamic networks worldwide, often highly racialized (Turner 1969). Black Muslim political leaders such as Malcolm X, for example, also advocated black empowerment and racial justice, inspiring thousands of black Americans to convert to Islam. Blaming white racism and the political domination of black people as the basis for the growing poverty in inner cities, Malcolm X attracted hundreds of thousands of black Americans to follow his leadership.

Islam was one of many growing religious movements that provided an alternative to Judeo-Christianity. Other religious movements, for example, African-based religious practices, became popular in the black American search for non-European religions. It is here that the roots for new formations of back to Africa cultural movements took shape with the development of African-based religious diasporic movements such as Ashanti Ghanaian, Haitian Vodou, Brazilian Candomble, and Yorùbá Orisa revivalism, with the latter finding its most radical form in Ôyõtúnjí Village and other intentional religious

communities in the rural American South. These religious awakenings not only became increasingly lucrative institutions from which to create a new market for narratives of slavery and nobility, but also led to reconceptualizations of citizenship that extended beyond the nation state. These re-conceptualizations are of considerable significance for understanding the forces of power that shape who can access to new forms of citizenship or who controls new maps of cultural belonging.

Toward Institutional Shifts in Belonging

By the 1980s, then, there had been a more general shift in heritage consciousness, a shift that complemented new forms of post-Cold War national consciousness. This shift was institutionalized within educational institutions as the idea of learning about one's heritage became framed as a right, and was increasingly accepted over time. Students around the U.S. lobbied for the formation of black studies departments and demanded that university administrations provide African studies courses with tenure-track jobs for black faculty. They also agitated for the recruitment of black students and faculty into predominantly white universities. The eventual proliferation of African and African American Studies in universities and community colleges throughout the United States overlapped with the curriculum of already established disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, and political science. In response, activists demanded separate programs to further promote racial and national origins, as well as gender studies, thereby leading to the establishment of Africana (African and African American) studies, as well as ethnic and women's studies programs on educational campuses. The institutionalization of these special programs marked the beginning of a significant shift in new approaches to origins and heritage as the basis for the widespread importance of "roots" as central to the learning and teaching about human civilizations.

The development of multiculturalism in U.S. colleges was accompanied by a critical legislative shift. In 1980, the American census for the first time used ancestral heritage as the official unit of difference through which American differences were classified. Where once the U.S. Census had organized identity according to racial groups – "Whites, Orientals, Negroes, Amerindians, and Non-Whites" – the Census now shifted the terms of classification from race to ethnicity (Hernandez-Reguant 1999). Ancestry, such as country of parental birth, became the form of classification by which Americans were asked to

identify themselves. This led to a shift from a bureaucratic politics of racial biology to an incorporation of new heritage standards by which U.S. American belonging was framed through hyphenation. Similarly, the category of “African American” was used by the Reverend Jesse Jackson in his 1988 presidential campaign to recast the centrality of slavery in the lives of black people by laying claim to the noble African “origins” of black Americans. Jackson popularized “African American” as a middle-class household term that would fuse an idea of ethnic origins with U.S. American citizenship. Further, his notion of the “rainbow coalition” linked African Americanness to other hyphenated identities that were simultaneously entering the American mainstream. These relations of belonging – though inscribed within modern notions of race, biology, descent, and nationhood – cultivated the virtues of ancestry that it valorized.

With the development of African American and ethnic studies programs in U.S. colleges and universities and the proliferation of a heritage agenda, a multi-cultural curriculum was integrated into schools around the country, and African American subjectivities as ethnically African took on new a new meaning. Where race had been the basis for African and black American unity during earlier periods of social protest, blackness now came to stand for African heritage and, more importantly, for the right of black Americans to reclaim the heritage taken from them as a result of the history of trans-Atlantic slavery. The educational system was not the only institution through which new variants of classifying difference were redefined along ethnic lines throughout the 1980s. The governmental institutions which regulated laws; the cultural and religious intermediaries which interpreted religious knowledge; the international organizations which convened conferences; the shopkeepers, traders, and manufacturers which sold ritual and cultural commodities; the groups of corporations which looked for commodity possibilities; as well as academics and amateur historians, music companies, and jazz and rap artists all became conduits for a new (ethnic) expression of subjectivity. With the already developing global demands for these heritage artifacts, the commodification of African heritage gave rise to markets of transnational travelers.

To fill the demand for knowledge about the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the pre-colonial African history that preceded it, black bookshops proliferated in U.S. cities. Not only were books about African history readily available for purchase outside of African countries, but in the mid- to late 1980s, with increasing numbers of literate and educated populations⁹ and a wider range of

black university-trained graduates, a new middle class black American consumer developed. Some public intellectuals, self-trained or recently trained in urban college programs, contributed to the development of new networks of African knowledge and of a black history industry.¹⁰

In satisfying the demands of this new market of heritage-conscious consumers, black-owned publishing houses used newly emerging computer technologies to either reinvigorate or create new African-centered black and third world publishing houses,¹¹ such as Africa World Press (AWP), Third World Press, and Black Classic Press.¹² While corporate mergers dominated the late 1980s and many small mainstream American publishing houses were subsumed by larger national and international corporations; in some cases publishing houses negotiated contracts with smaller presses to reprint key bestsellers. For example, Grove Press, through Vintage Co., sold the rights to publish Malcolm X Speaks (1965) to its new corporate parent, Grove-Weidenfeld, then a subsidiary of oil magnet Getty Corporation. The reissue of *The Black Jacobins* by C.L.R. James, first published in 1938 and reprinted in 1963, was another example of both changing public interests and business responses to new market demands.

The development of a black history industry also led to a new crest of black cultural nationalism, starting with the celebration of black American history. A special day in February, called Black Heritage Day, was set aside to commemorate black history. By the early 1980s, Black Heritage Day was officially renamed Black Heritage Week, and eventually the week developed into a full-fledged monthly celebration supported by educational and governmental institutions. With February marked as the month for celebrating African culture and history, cultural nationalists began to participate in the celebration of black American and African history, arts, literature, and music. The concept of heritage months spread throughout U.S. American social institutions in the 1980s, and African American history month was vertically incorporated into U.S. educational programming, again, institutionalizing the shift from biological race to cultural race.

Throughout the 1990s, with the development of computer technology and the Internet, the transnational marketing of heritage products – music, art, books, rituals, and travel packages – increasingly occurred in cyberspace and through merging of the interests of African exporters and American importers and consumers. Corporations and small-business investors participated in the

production of African linkages to American blackness by marketing of the symbolic nobility of black history. African trading corporations worked with small and large U.S. corporations to export increasing numbers of African-related commodities. Some of these included Ghanaian kente cloth and prints,¹³ as well as African jewelry, artifacts, food, and accessories. U.S. corporations such as McDonalds, K-Mart, J.C. Penney, and a range of other urban department chains began to sell what many store managers referred to as an Africa-friendly image to mostly middle-class black Americans. Their consumers were black middle-class women and men who were interested in African-centered images, self-help books, fabrics, artifacts, and tourist packages, and were willing to wear African clothes and embrace African history.

Furthermore, with the increasing affordability of air travel in the 1980s, increasing numbers of corporations marketed heritage tourism to a range of regions. These included West and Central Africa in search of slave castles and heritage lessons; East and South Africa in search of game safaris, ancient ruins, and unspoiled wildlife; and North Africa, especially Egypt, in search of noble civilizations and the cradle of humanity. The expansion of heritage tourists, the development of commemorative events further propelled the institutionalization of African American heritage identities. Those who were able to afford travel to various African regions did so and for many others, the development of African rituals – like manhood training programs and Kwanzaa¹⁴ – further propelled the institutionalization of the narratives of African slavery and African nobility. Black cultural nationalism, then, was an extension of the rights revolution. It produced an African-heritage movement that, through the workings of market mechanisms, went from occupying a marginal place of radical black power to a multi-million dollar industry in mainstream America. While the middle-class appeal of the developing cultural nationalist movement broke down in the 1990s as some youth embraced a counterculture of African-invoked pride and American-based protest, the proliferation of films, events, music, consumer goods, and black academic production that emphasized an African heritage forced a fundamental rethinking and reworking of the racial imaginary at the end of the twentieth century that was unlike earlier forms of black nationalism.

Cultural Heritage, African Pride, and Global Capital

As I have shown in this essay, blackness in the United States was reconfigured institutionally through diasporic reformulations of roots, racial

categories were reconstituted through a quest for humanity. These shifts operated on a terrain of protest that also worked toward better working and social conditions, access to employment, gender egalitarianism, and overall equality for dispossessed people. New conceptions of race through the prism of rights and heritage have not supplanted biological conceptions, but the development of a post-Cold War democratic politics of rights and shifts in market technologies worked alongside economic and political institutional transformation to produce new institutional mechanisms through which race could be classified in terms of culture. This shift from racial classifications that were regulated through governmental policies manifest in the body to the concepts of culture and ethnicity in “popular culture” reflects how conceptualizations of race have been tied to developments in capitalism, new technologies, and the intensification of a maturing rights tradition which displaced histories of insubordination and struggle and recast in noble terms.

The changes in classifications of black subjectivity within the context of a rights “culture” has implications for how we approach the category of “African diaspora” in the twenty-first century. Because diasporic connections have been made and remade through time, scholars need to go beyond the mere charting of modern notions of territorial descent and instead demonstrate the ways race and diaspora are shown to be processes in the making rather than stable categories. We must strive to understand the selective processes through which diasporic formulations of blackness are shaped, and must focus far less on prescribed attributes of race, religion, and presumptions of a unidirectional homeland. In doing so, we will need to be far more attuned to changes in relations of global power and how these changes are producing different lines of alliance and circulation. And we need to focus on the making and disjunctures of diasporic connections, and on the specific ways diasporic formations are embedded in hegemonic institutions of power, including its language of inclusion.

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Notes

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² By black nationalist and black cultural nationalism I refer to the loosely configured conceptualization of nationalism that transcends statehood and instead converges around racial biology or symbolics of ancestry.

³ By symbolics of blood I am referring to Michel Foucault's (1978) invocation of blood as biology, thus lineage.

⁴ It was not until after the 1965 International Congress of African Historians that the African Diaspora, as a subject of study, was introduced to the academy as an intervention into the survivals discourse and as a popularized intellectual linkage between Africa and its history of African dispersal and exile.

⁵ Ôyõtúnjí is a small community built to accommodate up to twenty-five housing compounds with a potential capacity of over five hundred people. It is organized around three main sectors – religious ritual and organizations, political governance, and a small-scale market economy – through which practitioners enact a politics of redemption from slavery as a response to the hierarchies produced within U.S. society as a result of racism.

⁶ First published in condensed form by Reader's Digest in 1974, and then in its entirety by Dell in January 1976, it was televised by ABC over an eight-night period in 1977.

⁷ The fundamental principles of becoming black included: (1) nurturing a positive self image, (2) reaching a state of black self-actualization, (3) seizing the power to shape black images and creating new symbols of black lifestyles that would lead to the production of a new and unique form of African American culture, and (4) the reclamation of black manhood and family.

⁸ In 1978, Stokely Carmichael changed his name to Kwame Ture, an African name.

⁹ In 1980, compared to the 950,000 black Americans enrolled in undergraduate education in 1976, there were 1,028,000 blacks enrolled in undergraduate study. This compares with 72,000 blacks in graduate study in 1976 and 66,000 in 1980. In the Digest of Educational Statistics. 1989. P. 194. of the U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Educational Statistics, "Fall Enrollment in Colleges and Universities," and Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Fall Enrollment, 1986.

¹⁰ Some of these included Dr. Henry Clarke, Ivan Van Sertima, Dr. Ben among hundreds of others.

¹¹ The following is a list of African-American publishing houses that spread throughout the 1970s to the present: Africa World Press and Red Sea Press, African American Images, Ananse Press, Basic Civitas Books, Beckham Publications Group, Inc., Black Classic Press, Black Words, Inc., Empak Publishing, FIRE!! Press, The, Fitzgerald Publishing Co. Inc., Holloway House Books, IC Publications, MG-Publishing Company, Mind Productions, Inc., Rapture Publishing, Sohaja Publishing Co., Urban Research Press. Waverly House Publishing

¹² Of the black-owned presses, some of their best sellers were: Wade W. Noble's African Psychology: Toward Its Reclamation, Reascension and Revitalization. (A Black Family Institute Publication, 1986), Molefi Kete Asante's Afrocentricity (Africa World Press, 1988), Maulana Karenga and Jacob Carruthers' Kemet and the African Worldview: Research, Rescue and Restoration (1986), and Chancellor William's The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race From 4500 B.C. to 2000 AD (Third World Press, 1987) were among the best sellers. In the 1990s, books such as Dr. Frances Cress Welsing's The Isis Papers: The Keys to the Colors (Third World Press, 1991), and Carter G. Woodson's The Mis-Education of the Negro (1933) predominated cultural nationalist circles.

¹³ Kente Cloth is a Ghanaian cloth that became popular in North American cities with predominant black American populations.

¹⁴ Kwanzaa was first celebrated in 1966 in Los Angeles at the height of the Black Power movement. Invented by Maulana Ron Karenga, a black nationalist who was interested in focusing on the cultural nationalism instead of following a strictly Marxists ideological approach to black liberation. Kwanzaa is based on the celebration of seven principles – Unity, Self Determination, Collective

World and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity, and Faith – that were seen as necessary to rebuild black families and redefine the nation.