Life Begins at Fifty: African Studies Enters Its Age of Awareness

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Abstract: The impending fiftieth anniversary of the African Studies Association offers the occasion for a historian to reflect on the maturation of the field as a historical process. The essay employs metaphors from human development to highlight the inevitably incremental, always partial, steps by which people—including professional Africanists—accomplish significant change. For African studies these steps have moved from an initial social-science orientation and reliance on the abstractions of the high modernity of the mid-twentieth century to more experiential ways of understanding that have opened the door to new epistemologically African sensibilities. Africanists based in the United States are already moving beyond the limits of the external and objectifying tendencies inherent in "studying" anything and instead are listening to and learning from their full partners and collaborators in and from Africa.

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FROM MY PERSONAL perspective from the sunny side of middle age, I am more optimistic than ever about the future of African studies, and the African Studies Association, as we approach a robust semicentennial professional maturity. These remarks reflect on the developmental processes of academic disciplines in general, as background to a vision of what we as an association of Africanists in the United States are becoming as we move beyond our founders' initial "concerns" for Africa toward a confident articulation of the intellectual insights we are learning from our African colleagues.

The "we" in the preceding sentence, and throughout these remarks, as well as "us" and "our," is a diffuse referent with varying specific meanings that will be evident from the contexts in which the word appears. It sometimes refers to the recovering heirs among us to the abstractions of the high modernity of the era of our birth as an association in the 1950s. In other contexts it refers to the diverse members of the present African Studies Association, many of whom will consider themselves untainted by the objectification that I criticize. We now include members who work in many diverse epistemological registers—and celebrating that richness is one of my principal points, with particular attention to African epistemologies, even ontologies, but without the remotest implication of diminishing the separate routes through which many among us have queried the modernist hegemony of fifty years ago. I will proceed, then, in what I sense is a quite African way of counting those "in" as "we" according to the situations that my text evokes.

From our privileged positions in the United States, of course, we all remain "concerned" for the ongoing racial, economic, medical, and political challenges that many people in Africa face every day, but these remarks focus instead on assessing the half-century-long path that professionals in the United States—teachers, policy analysts, activists, media developers, librarians, NGOs, as well as academics—have followed to reach the productive tone of collaboration in which we are already proceeding, and then to outline something of the promise of life after fifty for African studies in the United States that emerges from that premise.

One theme of these remarks is that, in our intellectual pursuits no less than in our personal lives, none of us can put a foot forward without propelling it from the other foot, positioned solidly behind. The second theme is that, at fifty, we have taken enough of these incremental forward steps that we are approaching an age of moral awareness, in which we are poised to abandon what I see as unintended but unfortunate overtones of patronization lingering from the objectifying concerns of our youth.

Addressing so richly interdisciplinary an association, I feel some obligation to develop these accents by venturing respectfully out to discuss disciplines far beyond my own experience as a historian. A historian, in looking toward the future, even one already emergent, is already on thin epistemological ice. But historians are also trained to try to understand others in the past as those others understood themselves. On that epistemological ground, my characterizations of my colleagues, as well as my anticipation of our shared future as Africanists, will, I hope, touch on, and even extend, and thus encourage their diverse efforts in ways that each might find productive, though these intuitions are entirely mine. As I will conclude, inclusive, engaged, mutually respectful multiplicity is one of the very productive principles that scholars in the modern West are learning from their colleagues in and from Africa. That spirit of diversity is the heart of the African Studies Association, even as we sometimes struggle over the practical challenges that it poses to support all of our several constituent selves. However, collaboration in support of multiplicity is a particular mission of African studies, operating as we do in academic environments that arise from the deep-running, intensely competitive divisions of race and human welfare that constitute the modern world—as distinct from Africans' sense of differences as complementary.

Academic Inquiry as Process—A Reflection on Growing Up

Our (that is, my post–middle age cohort's) elders of the founding generation of students of Africa faced the challenge of creating a new field of disciplined academic study all but ab initio. Fifty years later, their heirs and successors have created the rich "rainbow" of disciplinary hues in which we now portray Africans and their continent. In doing so, we have proceeded by squeezing Africa into the existing disciplinary frameworks more than we have drawn on distinctive perspectives and experiences from Africa to reinvent these disciplines in an epistemological sense. However productive this limited first step of attempting to fit Africa into their modernist premises has been, it has not challenged their supreme epistemological self-confidence, particularly those with strong bases in behaviorism. However, by the historical principle of the incremental nature of change in the significant aspects of all human life, this extension of the familiar was unavoidable as a youthful initial exploration.[1] The challenge was to break through the near-universal doubt of early twentieth-century academic disciplines so that they could shed light on a place then all but defined as unintelligible by the enlightened standards of modern rationality of the time.

Africa thus might have lots of languages, but it had no literature comprehensible in terms other than as quaint folkloric motifs. It seemed to have strikingly exotic traditional crafts, even a powerful and earthy aesthetic sensibility, but it lacked individual creative artists (Vansina 1984). Its political institutions were "traditional" ones lacking in politics. A particularly afflicting lacuna, given the materiality of modernity, was economic "rationality" of the accumulative sort, utterly absent from the perspective of the academic discipline and also a fundamental justification of colonial governments and private enterprises confident that wages would waste good money on African workers unconcerned with what they earned, beyond the cost of a bicycle or—of course—taxes calculatedly imposed in cash (Polanyi et al. 1957; Dalton 1971; Austen 1987). About all that Africa was rich in was what the modern world vaguely suspected itself of having lost—spirituality and other human sensibilities marginalized as "religious" in the marvelous world of secular modernity, virtually all of them defined as irrational. Africa, as you have already anticipated that a historian like me would conclude by emphasizing, also utterly lacked "history," as the giants of the field in the interwar years understood what they were doing.[2]

From the perspective of the "modern" academy triumphant in the immediate aftermath of World War II, the only thing that Africa didn't appear to lack was ethnography. To the liberal few who noticed, so anomalous a place was curious in the extreme.[3] Ethnographic description and anthropological theorizing thus led the academic way into Africa, by converting apparently exotic behaviors to one kind of social-scientific rationality or another, depending on the several European national definitions of rationality brought to the task: sociological British social anthropology, the essentially linguistic and psychological French *sciences humaines*, and German *Kultur* ethnology, with its emphasis on material "culture" and the coherent tracking of the folkloric motifs that it displayed. These ethnocultural national variants reacted against Enlightenment Europe's discovery of human differentiation as a core part of distinguishing itself as superior to all others, contradictorily condemned to inferiority by their deficient approximations of modernity's definition of humanity by universal, and therefore singular and exclusionary, terms.

These twentieth-century sociological saviors therefore had to humanize apparent difference by demonstrating what Wyatt MacGaffey (1978) wryly termed "the rationality of the natives." They intended "rationality" as a compliment, even the quintessential qualification for respect in the intensely calculating minds of the academic champions of modernity. In every register, Africans (and other people defined negatively and thus revealingly as "non-Western") could be rescued from the calumnies of the rampant racism of the time—that is, they could be understood in the terms Westerners had developed to understand themselves as "moderns"—by rendering "them" (sic!) in objectifying (and distancing) Western terms that Western observers could appreciate (see Evans-Pritchard's famous interview with his Nuer counterpart [1940: 12–13]).

These significant, if (or because) also marginal, gains bring us face-to-face with the inherent limitations of the processes of human inquiry in any academic discipline, or of learning, or for that matter in our everyday lives. We can "discover" only within the conceptual frameworks that we bring to our inquiries, only through the mental or cognitive (or cultural) lenses through which we already observe what we think we "know." About Africans, who were the ultimate tropes of alterity for Europeans of the times, Europeans saw only difference, not people.[4] From afar they abstracted what they could observe as generalized, stable "customs," barely contaminated by the varying behaviors or understandings of individual human beings, but thereby reduced to intelligibility for malcomprehending outsiders.

This initial attribution of Western-style rationalism to outcomes (and inattention to inputs, what their creators had brought to the task), however stereotyping it may appear in retrospect, was the necessary inversion of the preceding tropes of utter animality (and enslavement), then cultureless savagery (which is how one terms incomprehensibly formidable enemies), to acknowledge a humanity then seen as an essentially rational quality. Our anthropological colleagues creatively performed the intellectual (and, as they themselves subsequently acknowledged, also the political) job that had to be done at the time, in the formulations that they had to do it with: rendering the "natives" intelligible in terms that European sociologists, philologists, linguists, district officers, and even a few of the more aware members of the public fancied in themselves. However, George Bernard Shaw would have recognized the narcissism of this kind of patronizing triumphalism, as he had ridiculed other aspects of its opening phases in *Pygmalion,* in which the highest attribute that the arch aristocrat Henry Higgins could recognize in Cockney Eliza Doolittle was her adeptness in echoing himself.

But Shaw's *Pygmalion* was a complicated composition of complementing vulnerabilities, in which Eliza eventually outgrew her initial sense of fulfillment in remaking herself in the image of her crushingly benevolent patron. He turned out to need her more than she eventually needed him. Hegel had made a similar point about the ambiguities of claimed superiority in terms of the dependence of the "master" on the nominal "slave" (see Patterson 1982). Too many parents similarly end up trying to infantilize their growing children rather than nurturing them to robust maturities of their own. Literary tropes of the contradictions of growing up abound, of course, and they lurk in the background of my initial metaphor of African studies' coming of age. Supporters, driven by concern rather than by respectful confidence, struggle with standing back, or even recognizing when the time has arrived to learn from the mentee as she becomes herself, a contributing, responsible adult and collaborator.

However well we personally all know these clichés of parenting, as Africanists many of us are still struggling to move beyond the intellectual instruments that our founders brought to the task. My seven-year-old son's fascination with Spider Man has left me mumbling Peter Parker's uncle's avuncular incantation: "With great power comes great responsibility." Victorians contemplated the overwhelming power and technology they had achieved with horror as Frankenstein's monster. Kipling's "White Man's Burden" captured the irony of triumph—and the two can't be separated.

More to the point of these remarks, we also have a rich literature on African expressions of the contradictions of power of any sort (see, among others, Vail & White 1991; Geschiere 1995).

Considerations of power like these are also the politics of the academy, and they are accordingly prominent in African studies, a field that owes its very origins to the pervasive inequalities between the students of Africa and the people whom they studied. Marginality in the academy has also been a feeling experienced by many of those who study Africa as marginalized. But I will not pause on these struggles of African studies, other than to acknowledge that they were stronger at their invention on the margins of the emerging Western academy in the late nineteenth century even than charter members of the African Studies Association experienced in 1957. The "founding fathers" (again, sic!) were rather the Victorian-era Africans and diasporic Africans who immediately applied their training as modern academics—mostly in Europe—to pursue obscure careers in the colonies. In the United States, which had no colonies in Africa to which to exile them (other than Liberia), the threat they would have posed at home was too great to welcome them into the academy.

Beyond Allen Isaacman's fascinating reflections in this same format on the activism of several members of that founding generation (Isaacman 2003), the epistemological levels of the process of creating this "proto" phase of African studies remain to be fully explored. Their work was decidedly not "proto" in the sense of anticipating or leading directly to the modern style of African studies that the African Studies Association has facilitated, but it was protean in the quest of the men who elaborated it for historicized respectability, that is, human achievement seen in the technological and imperial triumphalism of their own times. They accordingly celebrated the African past in terms of its "great empires" and lamented the subsequent thwarting of their military promise.[5]

More than a century later, as we approach the threshold of reinventing African studies in twenty-first-century terms, we must distinguish this Victorian-era legacy of Africans' and African-Americans' (and now Africanists') applying the conceits of modernity to Africa from Africans' (and more and more also Africanists') introductions of African sensibilities to expand and enrich ongoing postmodern revisions of the academic disciplines. This same contrast a century ago led African intellectuals—Egharevba in Benin (1971), Alexis Kagame in Rwanda (1943, 1949–51), Tito Winyi (K.W.) in Bunyoro (1935–37) (see Henige 1980; Doyle 2006), among the many others whose presence behind much of the colonial-era historiography and ethnography is often acknowledged but seldom appreciated in its historical dynamics—to canny adaptations of their listeners' limited visions of reality to try to explain matters African to Europeans. These African intellectuals' metaphors for what Europeans saw as "realities" were dismissed by the purists of Western academic integrity as quaint and "distorting" in contrast to their own metaphors for African experiences which, while in fact much more selective and hence more distorting, they accepted as comprehensive and transparent "truth."

Again, observing the processes of epistemological maturation at work: one ought not condemn African studies' early selectivities, no matter how limited we look back on them as having been. Rather we can understand them as necessarily incremental, arising from and hence rooted in precisely the ideas they were straining to overcome. We Africanists simply observe among ourselves the epistemological process that Thomas Kuhn (1962) detected in "experimental" laboratory confrontations of working theory with the behaviors in fact observed; the insight applies to people as well as to particles. African intellectuals similarly strained to extend their own sensibilities into European realms of thought framed in very different conceptual fields.

The observant researcher always bumps into the unexpected in attempting to replicate, to verify, or to confirm what is accepted as "reality."[6] Particles are unpredictable enough for scientists; people, fortunately for Africanist humanists and social scientists, are much worse. The most disappointing research turns up precisely what we are looking for. Truth, as we all know, whatever our disciplinary persuasions, is stranger than fiction; experience is radically more challenging than imagination; research results are more interesting than our working hypotheses. And nowhere in the world more so than in Africa, as has been the case since ancient times from the Western perspective.[7] It behooves us all, particularly as scholars, to be acutely on the alert for anything unexpected, and to engage it until we discover how to appreciate it.

But in politically charged contexts like the racist one that motivated contemporary African studies since its inception, this openness to novelty is often discomforting. U.S. Africanists have been embarked on a rescue operation, at times pulling back to strategies of damage control. Under intellectual assault, anyone tends to retreat to safe intellectual comfort zones and to rationalize the strange in terms of the familiar, and this tendency makes a certain kind of sense in a defensive mode, in which the burden of proof is imposed on the accused. We then proceed according to what I call the "90/10 rule," a kind of "Parkinson's Law" (1958) of epistemology. Teachers experience this rule when they realize that 10 percent of their students demand 90 percent of their time.[8] For human perceptions, the Rule highlights the fact that we are capable of gaining on ignorance only in increments of about 10 percent, and we rely for the other 90 percent on the familiar. In modern cultures rigidified by the high political and emotional charge of anything involving race, the elation of achieving even those incremental gains entices us into embracing the 10 percent as though we had revealed the 90 percent. The Rule applies in varying ways, of course, to the several approaches within our field, and the elation I cite here applies most directly to the neoliberal majority embarked on saving those viewed as suffering. For others, similarly intense elation arises from pride in difference.

The same 90/10 Rule generates and sustains stereotypes of all sorts, including the ethnic and racial ones that in African studies figure so prominently. Stereotypes rest on some minor element of validity. Their perpetrators focus selectively on the valid 10 percent, made accessible and hence attractive by its oversimplification and its obscuring of the unfamiliar, and thus easily distract attention from any who try to acknowledge the other 90 percent. Since the job of academics is to complexify, we try to take account of more, but we inevitably appear to obfuscate by introducing distractions irrelevant to the reassuring 10 percent of "truth." No one in our field can have missed the sobering experience of having been instantly and effortlessly defeated by audiences dedicated to one or another of the stereotyped convictions about Africa that abound in Western cultures. To invoke my metaphor of maturation one more time, the delusions of grandeur that stereotypes support parallel in their dynamics the hormonally driven adolescent mistake of taking the 10 percent initial autonomy they have just gained from their parents as the 90 percent of responsible maturity.

African Studies as a Process of Academic Inquiry

Africa's seeming intractability in modern culture, all too familiar to Westerners, is thus not hopeless. It is merely the incremental stage through which we heirs to Western modernity have committed ourselves to pass simply by inventing the academic study of Africa. It takes time—several generations, in fact—to work through the sequence of 10 percent increments that lead to a fundamentally new, consolidated conceptual space.[9] Westernizing styles of engagement across the Euro-African cultural divide, rationalist inclusions as well as racist dismissals, prevailed in colonial Africa. Both produced selectively exoticizing stereotypes, since one constructs contrasting "others" by denying the shared 90 percent of basic humanity. Though the intellectual hegemony of modern discourse—but fortunately not its universality (e.g., White 2000; Isichei 2002)—suppressed the effort to explain "the West" in African terms, the capacity to do so was anything but destroyed (Feierman 1990; Vail & White 1991). Africanists have now had a century to face this challenge and fifty years to work through its current—but, I am arguing, soon to become recent—adolescent phase of modernism.

However, the epistemological challenge engaged many very able scholars. As the autobiographies of the founding grandparents of modern African studies in Europe and North America, or rather of studying Africa in modern styles, are now starting to recount for us, their children who weren't in on the excitement, the challenge was adding Africa to the existing disciplines, in terms of their most narrowly construed, that is "rigorous," parameters (Vansina 1994; Oliver 1997; Fage 2002; Curtin 2005).[10] As everyone knows, converts must show themselves "more Catholic than the Pope."

The practitioners of triumphant, hence complacently un-self-reflexive, academic disciplines seldom have much perspective on the epistemological principles underlying how they think, what it is that they do that makes them distinctively who and what they are. They are likely to mistake what they think with, always an expression of their own historical contexts, for thinking about how they think, that is epistemologically.

Thus the focus within my own discipline of history did not center on understanding human actions (in the past only incidentally) as motivated out of our African subjects' momentary, unique, and multiple perceptions, individual and shared, of the (African) contexts in which they found themselves, that is, however they construed these "contexts" as meaningful. Rather, on the necessary principle of "first things first," Africanist historians focused on developing methods to gather and array evidence of any sort that might conceivably appear to meet the literate, objective standards of the social science that "history" was then thought to be. And so the Founders turned first to archaeology, linguistics, oral traditions, and other sources novel to historians to attempt to meet their discipline's sine qua non of dating, or at least sequencing closely, whatever data these strategies turned up. They appropriated the "kings" of oral traditions, languages of the linguists, potting styles or ferrous technologies of the archaeologists on which these other disciplines focused to mount a pervasive effort to chronologize.[11] They also accepted the "cultures" that ethnographers assembled to imagine some kind of "coherence" of whatever they had collected for their own varied (but not historical) purposes. The rescue mission to "rationalize the natives" was so intense that few paused to query whether the rationality imputed was that of the natives observed or that of the observers.[12] Most of the "things" (sic!) thus studied in fact were modern abstractions of the observers—"religions" and "kingdoms," "structures," "modes" of this and that, "cultures," and "institutions"—not the people observed, or their thinking. Modernist Africanists discovered, at best, what people in Africa had created rather than how or why they had created it. As Jan Vansina, with veritably African proverbial pithiness, recently put it: these abstractions explained nothing but instead were what Africanists needed to explain as products of human imagination and creative effort.[13]

I single out my own discipline, including myself in my own days on historical training wheels, only because I know these early, not really misguided but necessarily partial, gains of Africanists most directly in their manifestations among historians. However, we were not alone. Parallel enthusiasms also limited the vision of political science, the third principal partner (along with anthropology and history) in African studies' foundational disciplinary triumvirate. Insofar as political scientists distinguished themselves from the highly politicized histories of the proto-nationlike "kingdoms" that historians then wrote about, they laudably extended their discipline's enthusiasm at the time for understanding "nation-states" as a kind of millennial culmination of participatory democracy, following European-style "modernization" and "Westernization" around the world as they finally appeared in unanticipated places, above all (because most surprisingly) in Africa. Even studies of "religion" in Africa tended to focus on its politicized manifestations, replicating Terry Ranger's brilliant conversion of what had seemed superstitious and atavistic anti-European violence in early colonial Africa into forward-looking, "proto-nationalist" expansions of the scale of political action beyond the limited confines of otherwise warring, or at least mutually wary, groups we declined to call "tribes" (see Ranger 1967 and many subsequent works).

The sociologists and other social scientists weighed in with quantitative behavioral research that explicitly and rigorously eschewed perceived (and thus just possibly motivating) meanings for individuals in favor of the seemingly more meaningful, because objectively measurable, aggregates. Since the statistical patterns they thus constructed could not have been perceived by their enactors, and therefore conceivably were meaningful only to the external observer, again rendered superior to the observed, Africans were left without a clue as to what they were "really" up to and could be credited for being "right" or "rational," even in spite of themselves. Economists and economic historians similarly studied behavior, quantitatively if at all possible, to find Africans conforming to the predictions of neoclassical, liberal economic modeling, provided that the proper assumptions were made, without considering the relevance to Africa of the thoroughly modern materialist rationality on which these methods are based. Political economists of varying persuasions adopted Africa in terms of their respective analytical modes and discovered "class"-like exploitation of one sort or another nearly everywhere. That is, the disciplinary contributors to African studies tended to claim Africans as disciples of the theories of their respective behavioral academic disciplines. Since few yet took Africans seriously as thinkers, the rationality attributed to them was a kind of academic colonization of the "savage mind" by all-knowing Western intellectuals.[14] Few African academics were attracted to this sort of analysis, with the celebrated and notable exception of Joseph Inikori, who frequently extended his primary interest in quantitative aspects of Atlantic slaving into Africa (many publications, e.g. 1999, culminating in 2003).

These early modernist days of African studies saw only a faint presence of literature and art and music and other humanistic methods of discerning meaning, creative techniques of conveying sensibilities. The faintness of their presence was owing only in part to the only-then-just-emerging expressions of Africans themselves in Western literary modes; subsequent scholars in these fields have also applied their critical skills to oral and other popular cultural expressions of meaning from as far back in time as their research can reveal them (e.g., Austen & Jensen 1996; Sutton 1997). These texts and performances and other expressive forms were then still comprehended largely within the quasi-social-scientific realms of "culture," which could be rationalized and "translated," and thus dehumanized by objectification. The naively diminishing rationality attributed to the natives, for all the good intentions behind it, brought them into respectable academic circles as "different, but arguably the same," as distinct from the inclusive and respectful tones of the alternative: fundamentally "the same, if also differently so."

These youthful enthusiasms, however roundly early modern Africanists rejected the patronizing *mission civilisatrice* of their colonial-era parents, ended up making them more like their elders than they sometimes recognized. They celebrated Africans for having long been more European than the Europeans had become.[15] Africans had not needed European tutelage to modernize themselves; in fact, they had tutored the classical founders of the West (see El-Nadoury 1981). Such are the dilemmas of all adolescents: our kids hate us when, and partly because, they discover how much like us they are becoming. In modern cultures children have to go through this rejection of their ancestries because they are required to define themselves as individuals, with responsible adulthood all but necessitating an agonistic separation from one's parents. But, to anticipate where these reflections on ourselves as people first and secondarily as academics, and particularly as Africanists, are going next, separation is a particular problem for moderns, both as adolescents and as professionals inventing a new academic field under demanding and (not surprisingly) harshly disciplinarian academic disciplines. The timing of Freud's discovery of oedipal guilt among his Viennese patients in the early-twentieth-century was more than coincidental.

The Western academic disciplines into which the Founders needed to mold Africa, without particularly disturbing them, are defining products of the very modernity that they attempted to extend to Africa. Construing change as "progressive," as modern Westerners do, means that one must abandon the old to get on with the new, and presumably also better. Africa was expected to "modernize" in the substitutive sense of progressive change, hence abandoning "tradition" (Ajayi 1968). But in Africa, contrastingly, one retains the old and incorporates the novel to renew gratefully what has been received, to keep it vital, contemporary, and relevant; one venerates the benefits that have come down from the ancestors. As we have now learned, in Africa the challenge is to belong, or rather to earn admittance, to the intently guarded cores of human collectivities. The child aspires to join rather than to separate and thinks of herself or himself as adding to the collectivity of ancestors to prepare the way for future ancestors rather than having the burden, as we create it, of replacing our predecessors. That is to say that the processes of incremental intellectual development that I am sketching—not just of African studies—need not be as combatively substitutive as we have tended to make them; rather they are potentially additive, integral, diversifying, and enriching.

Africans and African Studies

Even our founders had only a human epistemological capacity—no doubt something around the 10 percent level—to reverse the progressive vector of the inquiry with which they began, from remaking Africans in their own likenesses to trying to sense the very different ways in which they might also be like Africans.[16] But Western Africanists have discovered that very African verity only belatedly through the rich work in many disciplines on what is often, though still not without a certain wry, very modernist resonance of irony, called the "reinvention of tradition" (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983; Vansina 1990).

The modern Western academic—that is, "social scientific"—disciplines focusing on Africa accorded little recognition in the 1950s and 1960s to African intellectuals drawing on local thought. Africans with whom they spoke or whom they observed performing were understood not as "colleagues" but instead marginalized (and also objectified) as "objects of scholarly study." I was taught to approach them, respectfully of course, as "informants" rather than sitting respectfully before them as the "collaborators" or "authorities" they in fact were. It should therefore not surprise us that African intellectuals during the years between the World Wars began to express themselves, for themselves, and as themselves—with some acceptance in Western intellectual circles—first through literary and artistic strategies.

The door of humanism was wide open to them. The modern academy did not require the "expressive arts" to be "rational" in the same empirical, efficient, and "true" ways that the social sciences made them over to appear. By marginalizing the humanities as emotional, romantic residues (think of Garrison Keillor's subtle celebration of "English majors," who in modern culture sound like jokes), this modern dedication to utilitarianism left the arts accessible even to otherwise marginalized Africans. Diasporic and continental Africans thus thrived in these expressive *métiers*. Beyond the pure fulfillment and delight that people derive from expressing themselves aesthetically through music, in religious participation, in the arts, and in literature, they developed vibrantly creative, often subtly subversive, political critiques from these seemingly harmless positions of mere meaning. "Fiction" has always been a place to reflect on facts that cannot be spoken of as such. From a sociological perspective, James C. Scott brilliantly senses these "weapons of the weak," their transcripts hidden by the categorical and abstract modern thinking of "the state."[17] The considerable literary output of the African and Caribbean *négritude* writers in the Parisian circle around *Présence africaine* achieved intellectual, if not always also political, respect. A parallel output in literary form developed also in South Africa. Western scholars only later discovered the sharp performative critiques of abusive power of any sort that Africans had always cultivated (Ranger 1975; Vail & White 1991; Strother 1998).

In Africa these performative and inherently participatory "arts"—and I place quotes around this Western designation, with its overtones of separation from daily life, to give it the ironic twist that it merits when applied to Africa—thus have deep roots as intellectual endeavors, though they are not "academic" with the connotation of solitary "ivory tower" irrelevance that the term conveys in modern Western culture. Africanists using the modern secular perspectives of their colleagues, developed to study their own epistemologically segregated culture, initially found it difficult to distinguish the lived and experiential quality of these expressive *métiers* in Africa. Contemplating this seemingly mysterious realm beyond the limited reach of rational contemplation, the behavioral instruments of Western scholarly disciplines tagged most externally observable aspects of it as "religion." Only through representation of collective experiences of Africans in literary formulations did Western academics glimpse, however fleetingly, the experiential essence of Africa (Jules-Rosette 1975; Scheub 1977; Vansina 1984b). Only occasionally did Africans' efforts to express collective, participatory, and consensual forms of inquiry come across to Westerners given to thinking of "study" as individual and objective (and, as always, also objectifying). The African socialist rhetorics of the 1970s, or such political formulations of this sensibility as *Harambee* (Kenyatta, in Kenya: "Pull together") or Nyerere's *Ujamaa* (*togetherness* in Tanzania), or socialists' calls for "collective self-criticism" expressed this sensibility in political terms that appealed to Western academic Africanists, but still more as "objects" of external analysis than as the participatory and experiential processes that they inherently were.[18]

Among the many steps along the lengthy road toward Africanizing African studies epistemologically, the eventual "turn" arose, incrementally as ever, not from these now-evident contributions of Africans—since scholars tried to maintain their objective dignity as observers, not participants—but rather indirectly from the European intellectual tradition. Dawning recognition took the objectifying and contradictory form of observing oneself as an observer; the resulting "self-reflexivity" tended in its more extreme manifestations to lose sight of whatever outside the observer might have been observed. From within the neo-Marxist theorizing of the 1970s, Africanists found the accessible intellectual move through Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Marxist theorist of ideology as "hegemony" and the "consciousness" of the European working classes (Jones 2006). His British heir was E. P. Thompson (1963), who had studied the "making of the English working class" as a participatory process of self-definition. Terry Ranger, always alert for consciousnesses, collaborated with Eric Hobsbawm, Thompson's successor as historian of working-class consciousness, to explore—substantively for the first time—the integrating parallels, not the externalizing and exoticizing differences, between Africans and anyone else in the world (Hobsbawm & Ranger 1983). Eugene Genovese's (1974) magnum opus on "the world the slaves made" in the American South brought diasporic Africans, or their American heirs to the burdens of enslavement and racism, into the same framework of intellectual creativity—more than coincidentally also in the idiom of "religion" in which these processes were still subtly marginalized in the 1960s.[19]

Continental philosophers of language and representation, in effect of consciousness and perception—Habermas, Foucault, Heisenberg, and others—then became additional sources of theoretical inspiration to whom literary scholars, in particular, turned to start to move in the 1970s beyond the academic disciplines' objectifying modernity. They constituted a serious critique of objectivity, as all of us know, whether or not we (I mean my generation of social scientists and social historians) have personally faced the truly profound—indeed wrenching and often disruptive—epistemological challenges that "postmodern" self-reflexive uncertainties pose to the comforts and certainties (or, one might say, arrogance) of millennial modernism, or modernist millennialism. Anthropologists moved quickly to integrate themselves as ethnographers into their descriptions of no-longer-paradigmatic villages; some moved even further and contextualized their villages beyond the presence of the observer as moments in the times and places in which they were observed (e.g. Hutchinson 1996; Piot 1999). At the same time as postindependence Africans flocked to rapidly growing cities, where researchers could blend into the crowds, "African" realities, or at least "experiences," became much more open to participation beyond "observation" by outsiders (Adenaike & Vansina 1996). The rural processes of integrated collective and participatory thought, which had essentially excluded outsiders, yielded to much more individualistic urban forms of what is called "popular culture," allowing scholars trained in Western disciplines of performative studies to join in the performances, no longer as defenders of their disciplines but rather as learners in an involved way, as Africans' disciples (Coplan 1985; Feierman 1990; Barber 1991).

The circuitous, not really fortuitous, and very profound "turn" toward the integrated, collective, and participatory levels of human life opened Western academics to the experiential ways in which Africans have always concentrated their intellectual endeavors. The first attempts to express this discovery in the still-modern discourses of the academy left intellectuals to phrase this sensibility in vacuously negative phrases like "*post*-modern" (no more meaningful than "*pre*-colonial" or "state*less*" or other phrasings of modernist bewilderment with regard to Africa, when all we could sense was that whatever must be familiar to them was not to us), but they nonetheless rehabilitated former terms of differentiation—like "culture," as distinct from "civilization"—to terms of inclusion, if not also of endearment. We have also embraced the concreteness, discreteness, and multiplicity of experiences, a radical sort of existential notion not directly approachable from within the abstract modeling of the social sciences, and so modified as "historicized"—though we historians would settle for simply "historical," or, at least so would the minority of historians so far willing to drop out of the social-historical abstractions that they needed to ride into the African past beyond the European sources to which "history" in the 1960s had been confined (Miller 1999).

Meanwhile—in the rest of the world, it is no accident that some of the most articulate, probing applications of the postmodern "turn" have spoken from regions once negatively designated as "non-Western," and they are now speaking across a steadily growing range of disciplinary discourses. The spokesmen of these alternative paradigms in an earlier era were Gandhi in India, whose politics of reconciliation were expressed, or rather popularized, from the perspective of the dominant Western colonial power, by the thoroughly paradoxical (even oxymoronic) notion of "passive resistance." From Martinique via Germany and Algeria, Franz Fanon (1961) began to explore the agonies of violent victimization and proposed a psychological theory of redemption, or restored human dignity (see Perinbam 1982). Edward Said (1978) wrote similarly from the perspective of the Muslim Middle East. And more recently the so-called Subaltern School of South Asianists turned political resistance to colonial rule into penetrating intellectual critiques of the lingering "postcolonial" hegemony of modernist thinking (see the Subaltern Studies series from Oxford University Press, 1982– ; see also Ludden 2001). Many of the last have remained relatively focused on the critique of modernity, but some are moving on to a positive articulation of the alternatives that have been there, all along, on their own terms (Miller 2004a, 2004b; Trouillot 1995, 2003).

Since the Western academy has not yet traveled far along this road, the resolutely modern social sciences (particularly the most strongly behavioral ones, including economics) have accordingly attempted to purify themselves by turning to ever-more abstracted mathematical realizations of their underlying behavioralism. In doing so, they have dismissed as inconsequentially "cultural" the regionalizing tendencies through which economists and political scientists and sociologists first brought Africa within the ranges of their disciplinary radars. So long as Africa was primarily the "same," if curiously so, even intriguingly different, the social sciences could include it as suitably "modern," or at least potentially, and in some ways even unconsciously, so. But when the "cultural turn" brought Africans' ways and meanings into focus, Africa appeared to "fail" to live up to the singular standard of highly modernist expectations of "nationalism," or "development," or "democracy," and the social sciences lost interest in "failed states," "failed economies," and all the other teleological shibboleths of modernity. By retaining a relentless modernity of method, they retreated to well within their behavioralist comfort zones and left Africa to the softer pseudo-sciences—as this narrow standard made them appear—of anthropology, history, religious studies, and the arts. Their rational perspectives again excluded Africa, or rather have left the generation of loyal political scientists and economists (less so sociologists) trained in and on, and committed to, Africa during the hopeful era of Africa's anticipated "modernization" to fend for themselves as Africanists.

The rigid disciplinary boundaries that developed out of the objectifying and homogenizing impulses of modernity are now dissolving as Africanists have begun to sense the experiential subtleties of African intellectualism, thus combining literary analysis of verbalizations (whether spoken or written, indifferently), anthropological insight via "cultures," the expressive arts, and the truly collective quality of experience that moderns artificially isolate and objectify as "religious." Recent best-practice books in African studies are seamlessly interdisciplinary integrations of religion as art and art as politics, politics as witchcraft, disconnected cultures of medicine, hunger and politics, culture as performative, and so on.[20] The interdisciplinarity of the African Studies Association thus becomes not an avocation ancillary to the disciplinary "homes" into which our institutions have divided most of us but rather an outpost of African sensibilities from which to launch a profound critique of the narrow modernism of the institutions in which we survive. The ASA of the future is our forum for nurturing this holistic sense of the human experience and then feeding this African sensibility into the modernist disciplines of the Western academy.

Some Semi-Centennial Conceptual Prospects

This assertion of experiential alternatives to the emotionless objectification of modernity is now moving beyond literary and artistic expressions to theorized intellectual articulation and incorporation into the academic disciplines of the modern West. African studies has a major contribution to make to this momentous prospect, perhaps the most fundamental epistemological development since the Enlightenment. The challenge is to replace modernity's emphasis on homogeneity, a singular (and hence conveniently phrased statistically) standard of normalcy against which all are measured and to which all are held accountable, a statistical world that qualifies differences from a mean in unconsciously expressive terms of "deviations."

In fact, it is not the standard that is "normal," in the sense of normative, but rather human variability itself. And in Africa, as I have come to understand its distinctive values, the prevailing understanding of the human experience is fundamentally multiple, though in more agonized ways in the Muslim portions of the continent.[21] That is, human diversity contributes to the collectivity rather than contaminating it. In Africa, the first efforts to articulate this truly humanistic initiative in English have come—appropriately enough—from philosophers and in the capacious French conceptual legacy of the *sciences humaines* (see, among others, Appiah 1991; Mamdani 1996, 2006; Mbembe 2001; for history, see Keita 2000; Muriuki 2002). Africanist academic anthropologists and theoretically inclined historians (see, among others, Cooper & Stoler 1997; Cooper

2005), at their best now virtually indistinguishable from one another in terms of their epistemological roots (however distinct they are and should remain in their applications of these subtle evocations of experience, either to generalizing theory of it or to comprehending or sensing particular experiences, or experiences of particulars), have sensed the significance of these accents from Africa. The theme of the 2006 annual meeting—"(Re) Thinking Africa and the World: Internal Reflections, External Responses"—reverses the inherited vector of the modern gaze and specifically evokes Africans' distinctive perspectives on themselves and on the world. This reversal of the implicit standard of comparison is a productive rite de passage to mark our moving on from our half-century of infancy and adolescence to a responsible adulthood adding African perspectives to the world's understandings of itself.

These articulations of Africa, rather than the objectifying study of it, are now coming—as they must—increasingly from African intellectuals, emboldened and enabled to speak in voices of their own and to be heard, and increasingly from bases on the continent (see Zeleza 1997 and CODESRIA's *The Study of Africa* [2006–], both of which projects were launched at the 49th annual meeting). Beyond these intellectual insights, the institutional framework in Africa (led by CODESRIA and the Association of African Universities) is now growing to support these scholars and to disseminate the results of their research. Africans can draw on local sources of self-reflexivity of the sort that have recently enabled outsiders—the "Africanists"—to imagine genuinely "others," not crude inversions or abstracted extensions of themselves, to formulate their understandings in Western academic discourses as intelligible versions of "difference," rather than one more version of the "same." It has taken a full half-century for Western heirs of European civilization to move through iterative incremental extensions of each preceding contrastive and singularizing abstraction of modernity to understand and value this experiential alternative in substantive terms (S. McIntosh 1999; R. McIntosh 2005). Since Africans move on additively, not substitutively, these African epistemologies need not present Western triumphalism with an equally exclusionary hegemony but rather integrate as an additional, enriching alternative.

Retreating once more back to my own discipline of history: In the now-glowing light of the dawn of inclusive intellectual diversity, historians in Europe and in Africa (and incipiently also in the United States as well as Latin America, South Asia, China, and around the world) are beginning to join in collaborative explorations of the inherent multiplicity of the discipline. All histories are parochial "our stories," and they should be (Miller 2004a, 2004b).[22] We are accepting—though slowly, and appropriately so, since history, too, is historical—the essentially self-celebratory epistemology of the "nationalist" project at the base of the modern discipline (see my entry on "Historiography" in *The New Encyclopedia of Africa*, in press). From within the European intellectual tradition, this erosion of the reigning modernist positivist certainty appears in the negative phrasing characteristic of the initial incremental intellectual move as "the limits of history"—that is, "history" in the sense of all-knowing (Fasolt 2004).[23] Africa's deserved place at the disciplinary table of the twenty-first century has contributed greatly to welcoming who else has arrived for dinner. We are, in effect, starting to historicize "history" itself, to develop a "critique of history" epistemologically comparable to the "critique of anthropology" mounted so productively twenty years back.[24]

The epistemological enterprise of African studies is now shifting—however irregularly, and characteristically, and in ways that are often obscure because they are still being expressed incrementally in the self-contradicting terms of what they are straining to move beyond—from studying "Africa" to thinking and learning with Africans, to adding African (not Africanist) discourses to an increasingly multiplistic concept of the increasingly global academic disciplines. For African intellectuals, contributing substantively means moving beyond the more-than-justified resentment of having been objectified, the consequent and entirely understandable impulse to turn the Western tables back on the Westerners.[25] This initial (and incrementally unavoidable) blame game focused on the failures and hypocrisies of the thoroughly modern colonialism, underdevelopment, and racism imposed on Africa.[26] But now I sense a confident contribution of what Africa has to add to (not replace in) the modern world. Modernity polarizes; and, to coin an ad hoc sense for a term introduced in a slightly different vein, though to the same effect, at the birth of our field, "Africanity" integrates (Maquet 1967; Senghor 1971).

And the African Studies Association?

The future of African studies rests on this premise of partnership, in which Africans have authority, authorship, even rights to the intellectual property in their "oral traditions," "proverbs," "memory," and "culture." In the past, modernist academic students of Africa too often stripped this precious knowledge from the knowers, as surely as the "raiders of the lost ark" at the end of the nineteenth century stole the continent's material culture (Schildkraut & Keim 1998).

The prospect of partnership presents an opportunity and a challenge to the African Studies Association no less profound than the challenge and the opportunity of bringing Africa into the modernist academy that our organizational forefathers and foremothers faced in 1957. Consider, for example, the institutional review boards of our colleges and universities in the United States, required by federal human rights legislation to protect and to inform fully people whom researchers in all fields—and particularly the quintessentially modern biological and behavioral ones—treat as "human subjects." Some of us Africanists have resisted the jurisdiction that some of these boards have claimed over our work, even though we have objectified the people we consult as "informants," since we feel that we are not exposing them to risks of the sort generated by our clinical colleagues, or the pharmaceutical companies who transfer some of their research to "subjects" in Africa (and elsewhere) to avoid the high costs of exposing "real" people in Western nations to still-risky procedures and products. In fact, the "subject" moral and professional standings of the people with whom we work are created by the objectifying pretensions of the "social sciences" in treating motivated behaviors and human inspiration by analogy with the presumed random molecular, genetic, chemical, electrical, and organic systems of modern biomedicine. Rather, if we take in fully the African notion of experiential knowledge, of observant participation (rather than the very modernist, but oxymoronic, early anthropological notion of "participant observation"), and of collaboration, we cannot have "human subjects" subject to boards of institutional review; we, and they, have "colleagues."

Your African Studies Association has been moving along these lines, and particularly since Executive Director Carol Martin began building the institutional capacity to implement the vision of the membership, through their elected representatives on the association's Board. Bashorun M. K. O. Abiola Lecturers have, since 1992, placed the thoughts and words of our colleagues from Africa at the center of our annual meetings; on this occasion I am honored to follow Amina Mama (2007), the 2006 Abiola Lecturer, in the pages of this journal. Among other specifics, beyond the theme of the program for the 49th annual meeting of the African Studies Association: Joel Samoff led a "Higher Education in Africa Initiative."[27] The Board has adopted a statement of professional ethics that prominently incorporates this spirit of collegial collaboration.[28] Jean Allman, a recent Board member, led an extremely promising effort, sponsored by the Rockefeller Foundation, to collaborate with the intellectual leadership at CODESRIA in partnership with the African Union to disseminate more of the creative and critical thinking voices that have emerged from Africa. Your new president, Pearl Robinson, met last summer (2006) with CODRESIA colleagues in Senegal to pursue these and other possibilities of active partnership. Thanks to Elizabeth Mudimbe-Boyi and John Harbeson, in San Francisco we were invited to consider "African reflections upon, and responses to the myriad facets of... the world: its power structures; cultural and religious currents; artistic trends; economic patterns; international organizations; arrays of public and private bilateral agencies that have focused on Africa; investment patterns and great transnational corporations; as well as international regimes which are supposed to represent policy commitments and interests shared by strong and weak nations alike."[29] Your Board will consider a new collaborative status for partners in the study of Africa among the growing number of counterpart organizations around the world, particularly in Africa.[30]

The next step, once we can sense the substantive implementations of these initiatives, will be to reflect on the basic mission statement of the association—one that may or may not date back to our foundation, but one that discernibly reflects the era nearly fifty years ago in which we thought of ourselves as studying Africa, from afar, rather than listening to and working with Africans. The African Studies Association was founded in 1957 as a nonprofit organization open to all individuals and institutions interested in African affairs. Its mission remains that of bringing together people with a scholarly and professional interest in Africa. I would extend this capacious and welcoming statement to "bringing people with scholarly or professional interests in Africa together with African professionals, scholars, and artists to jointly advance understanding of Africa's contributions to global culture."

That collaboration with African scholars and professionals to emphasize Africa's contributions to world cultures would make explicit our commitment to reenvisioning the postmodern world on Africa's terms of multiple inclusivity. It means that a primary opportunity for the ASA is to disseminate Africans' understandings within our own Euro-North-American frameworks of institutions, policy formulation, and popular culture. This opportunity particularly extends beyond the academy to the North-Atlantic-based professions engaged with Africa and thus to rethinking "development" in terms of low-investment, dispersed, and collaborative African strategies (which we so far have called "sustainable," but primarily as a modification of "development" by Western standards), to understanding the politics of personalism (not just patrimonialism but also of networks [Feierman 1993, 1995; Cooper 2001] and collectivities) rather than of abstract and often ineffective "imagined [national] communities" (Anderson 1983), to accepting and working through Africa's functioning "civic communities" to explore the complementarities of ethnic identities rather than forcing them to serve as divisive "tribal" deviations from the normative (but never realized) homogeneities of the modern nation-state. It is the homogeneity of the modern "nation state" ("equal rights," but sharply differentiated access to them) that is imagined, and thus a highly ideological false paradigm that converts potentially complementary differentiation into mutually destructive competition over its implicit standard of singularity. In personalized African terms, competition can become mutually destructive when it reaches intensities of collectivized desperation.[31]

Applications of the standards of collaboration and reconciliation that we can learn from Africa then extend to dissemination among our own constituencies within the United States. We would continue to imagine an "Africa" independent of the needs of American popular culture, neither a residually racist vision of failure, filth, and infirmities nor its romanticized dichotomous counterpart as a haven of racial resurrection and unity. The popular and profoundly politicized culture of the United States features a particularly intense idealization of homogeneity that makes it a battleground over the singular standard of inclusion in a uniform political community; diversity here becomes sharply divisive (Hunter 1991; Gates 1992). As a result, modern popular culture is even more resistant to change than the professions, or even the academic discipline of history, and much more so than the vibrant popular cultures of Africa, which thrive on participatory spontaneity rather than revolving around abstracted categorical stereotypes.

We, as Africanists in America, thus have a special obligation to keep on teaching, as we have always done, but what we teach will be less what we derive from our modern academic disciplines than it will be the distinctive values and strategies we learn from Africa. That insight is our "comparative advantage," as the economists would put it, what U.S. Africanists are positioned to do, literally by being here in the United States, on the ground. Africa-based colleagues are better, and complementarily, positioned—also literally by being there, or accessibly from there—to define the issues, to set research agendas that tap American (and European) technical capacities and funds, and to apply them to problems conceptualized in their terms, to priorities that they set, to create changes there that are incrementally accessible to them, not merely theoretically imaginable to us.[32]

Finally, some readers must be wondering whom they might find in the United States to employ them as interpreters of agendas set in Africa. If the academy here is modernist (as it has given every sign of continuing to be), and if its disciplines have taken so little from Africa thus far, what departments filled with Americanists and Europeanists (in any discipline), or mathematicians or economists or rationalist philosophers, are going to tenure Africanists attempting to research and teach from and about radically alternative African premises? The challenge of finding an effectively contributing place is even greater in any department or ministry or agency in a national government outside of Africa, where professionals are employed in the service of the (parochially defined) *national* interests, or the international organizations that they fund and control. As with the rest of the prospects that I have sketched, I am not envisioning our mission in the modernist abstracted polarities in which I have tended to phrase my argument, rhetorically. Rather, I think that we Africanists have now reached a stage of vigorous intellectual maturity in which we can abandon the relatively, often subtly, defensive posture that has—not always inappropriately—marked the first half-century of an association hovering on the margins of the mainstream academy, to bring Africa in, and having to fight against the dismissive neglect of the continent, its peoples, and its diasporic descendents in the environments we inhabit.

I have not phrased these comments in Geertzian terms of the "global in the local," and the "local in the global" (Geertz 2000), or "glocal" in one current phrasing of the imbrication or—in a historical phrasing—mutually contextualized deep relationality of life. My argument for multiplicity is cognate with this aphoristic phrasing of that famed herald of the reduction not of difference in itself but rather of the artificial distances that we generate from mere diversity, the competition that we thus create out of potential complementarity.[33] The diversification that we need to add to our academic disciplines will—like all human, even including academic, processes—be mutual and incremental. Adding it will require us to resist the impulse to withdraw into a cabal of victimized Africanists, intent on replacing it and bemoaning the "victimization" of people in Africa who experience their differences from us (including material wealth and poverty) differently from the way we experience our differences from them: with pride rather than shame, with savvy initiative rather than passive defeatism, in the spheres of life where they are entirely in control and vitally creative rather than in other arenas where they would labor at significant, even insurmountable, disadvantages.

We are in positions to infuse all of our academic disciplines—not just the humanities—with insights from Africa, in a kind of academic move "out of Africa" that will replicate Africa's ancient infusion of the world with its human genetic makeup by practicing what we have learned in intellectual terms about mutual collaboration. We Africanists can use our understanding of the modernist epistemologies of our respective disciplines to demonstrate the limitations of modernism, even to modernists; like Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man," we are the outsiders within, the minority intellectual perspective, who stand partially aside while simultaneously being sufficiently a part of the majority intellectual culture that we can see limitations that those within it cannot. We can expand the range of literary criticism on the terms of the literary critics, or of historical insight for historians, and on throughout the other disciplines.

Let me illustrate that potential by returning to Clifford Geertz, by way of an anecdote from a fascinating conference that the Carter G. Woodson Institute for African-American and African Studies at the University of Virginia organized in 2003. Geertz himself lectured in an initial morning session, routinely and brilliantly enough. But succeeding sessions featured appreciations of Geertz's work from colleagues at the university, who elaborated Geertz's profound contributions to the intellectual vitality of the array of schools and departments that they represented. Hearing such appreciation from the anthropologists was interesting, though hardly a surprise, and not much less so from the historian, the sociologist, the ethnic studies programs, and the School of Education. But the series of testimonials became intriguing when the modernists followed; the professor from the School of Law was fascinating, the economist (of all behavioral purists!) who had introduced Geertz into her discipline got my attention, and I sat back in my chair when the engineer followed her. The seemingly limitless relevance of Geertzian multiculturalism to even the most centrally modern disciplines paralleled what I see as our ability, as Africanists channeling Africa for Americans and for a modernist academy, to enrich rather than to erode, to challenge by contributing rather than by confronting, and simultaneously to acknowledge the ways in which modern academic disciplines—for all their past abuses—can also enrich, rather than impoverishing, the continent.

If the academic mission of the Africans and Africanists who will carry the African Studies Association into its second half-century is to reinvent the existing disciplines epistemologically along these multiple and perspectival lines, what is the collective future of a regional (U.S.) area studies association formed defensively as the Cold War heated up fifty years ago, along geographical lines that (for very practical reasons of funding) uncomfortably parallel the strategic division of the world by the U. S. Departments of State and Defense? The academy consists of its disciplines, defined epistemologically, and so it always marginalizes studies defined by "areas," as well as any other topical focus of study, in "programs" rather than embedding them as "departments." Departments give final professional degrees, and programs (including area studies programs) do not, although they may offer nondisciplinary undergraduate majors, or even M.A. degrees oriented professionally, but not academically. And so the colleges and universities tend to leave the funding of such programs to external agencies with regionally or topically defined missions, as the National *Defense* Education Act, discreetly administered through the U.S. Department of Education.

Since funds in the U.S. academy flow in terms of disciplines defined by their respective epistemologies, as they should and will continue to do, the disciplines define us in academic administrative terms as "interdisciplinary." Intellectually, in modernist terms Africanists may have a topic, but we do not have a defining and accrediting epistemology. As Africanists we assemble colleagues with appointments in their respective departments sharing our regional applications of our disciplines. And we are personally pulled strongly back into the departments that pay us and that appoint us to committees, where—as Africanists—many of us have lingered in the margins to which the modernist structure of our institutions consigns us. In terms of our broader professional affiliations, we find ourselves sent to our respective disciplinary associations on departmental business or to earn our academic spurs. Our loyalty to the African Studies Association, however little we may like it, ends up as a personal commitment secondary to the pulls of institutions. The good news is that this marginalization in our home institutions lends intensity to the personal connections within the ASA that we all cherish. The collectivity, personalism, and spontaneous networking of our association in turn approximate the same qualities that we appreciate in Africa. Here we can *be* what and whom we also study.

Thus the African (and also Africanist) enrichment of these disciplines that I see already happening, though still in inchoate ways, constitutes a position in institutional as well as intellectual terms. It is not like an objectifying discipline, since it is not modern. Rather, we—and our colleagues working in and with other world regions—are on the threshold of becoming the ones to whom our Americanist and Europeanist colleagues will be turning as the modernist frameworks of their academic disciplines continue to erode. I am saying that our mission is no longer to defend Africa, or African studies, against a hostile and uncaring world of modern neglect but rather to stand tall and prepare to contribute what we have accomplished, additively. I am saying that they now need us more than we need them and that a multiplistic, perspectival African-derived vision will decenter the disciplines, or rather enrich them as an assemblage, a composite, of mutually constituting multiple centers, including Africa and not excluding others. As such they would approach the compositionality that Africanists recognize as fundamental implementations of the strength, wealth, and pride of rich assemblages of diversity in Africa.[34]

I see this infusion of the modern academic disciplines with Africa as vitalizing for the African Studies Association. I do not see it diminishing the role of the now nearly half-century-old Title VI Africa area studies centers. Proceeding in an African mode of assemblage, the composite of disciplines focused on shared understandings that we achieve here in the African Studies Association is essential to our fundamental mission of channeling African epistemologies for Americans. The African Studies Association, and the African Studies centers in the universities, are where we come together in all our intellectual and personal diversity, to learn from one another and to have fine times together as friends and colleagues of the sort who have been "through it" together, "mates" bearing the scars of battles shared, bonded by adversity. But now we move on toward a true community of mutually supportive scholars and professionals, as our mission statement says, "interested in Africa."

The unique strength of the African Studies Association is the grand scale on which we mix and mingle the disciplines in our vision of multiple mutualities. Our vitality as an association depends on bringing together all the disciplines through which the academy now views Africa, and they are all necessary to begin to appreciate the richness of the people and the place we study. We must therefore avoid resegregating ourselves within our separate disciplinary inclinations. Thus the disciplinarily focused "coordinate organizations" of the ASA—the political scientists, the creative artists and art historians, the African Literature Association, among others—belong here, every year. Their urge to distinguish themselves among Africanists has been an understandable and rewarding method of affirming themselves against disciplinary backgrounds of unconcern for, even rejection of, regional interests in the Modern Language Association, the College Art Association, or the American Political Science Association. However, as they infuse their respective professional associations with Africa, they will feel less need to seek regionally focused disciplinary solace among Africanists and instead will develop greater inclinations to thrive on the interdisciplinarity of the ASA.

I see a complementary implication for engaging the regional subfields within the disciplines with one another. My own disciplinary professional association, the American Historical Association, has been moving now for years toward a vision of history more inclusive than its disciplinary heritage in Western Europe, though not without the struggles that accompany all significant change. In recent months, under the very energetic leadership of our colleague Carolyn Brown and others, it has recognized Africa specifically with the creation of a book prize for works in the history of Africa.[35] But there is a tension in this process between the opportunity these historians have to infuse the entire discipline with their perspectives from Africa and the understandable impulse to "add" a reified and implicitly resegregated "Africa," or even to form a separate caucus within the AHA of its Africanist members. Rather, we Africanist historians are poised not to sponsor more panels composed of ourselves, talking yet again only to one another, but rather to join Americanists, South Asianists, Native Americanists, and medievalists in panels integrated across regions and periods. Such composites of regional epistemologies will quickly and spontaneously reveal how much more we share, as historians, than we differ in our respective area specializations. They will reveal that we are all studying just the same "folks," everywhere and always. The AHA is a place where I engage colleagues outside the African regional field in which I also live, and the more I do both, the more I learn about each.

Subgroupings of Africanists form a third category recently forming as African studies matures. Altogether, counting only the groups formally registered with the ASA as "coordinate organizations," their numbers are already approaching forty strong. We should not discourage this robust diversification among our members into groups of colleagues with focused interests of all sorts—national, cultural, linguistic, or thematic—who would not have opportunities to meet other than under the sheltering umbrella of our annual meetings. Many of these groups express precisely the interests that our African colleagues bring from Africa to enrich the Association. Other colleagues with professional business to conduct—the librarians, the exhibit and museum specialists, teaching and other outreach professionals, editors of specialized journals, and others—conveniently and appropriately also gather under the auspices of the ASA, as well as each year also meeting independently. However, both we—the ASA—and they—our coordinate colleagues—will collaborate additively as Africanists, not competitively, by concentrating their specialized programming outside the principal academic sessions for ASA-programmed panels, round tables, and other events, which should concentrate on the interdisciplinarity and continental scales that make us unique as an association, and uniquely Africanist. Members of the coordinate organizations can do their business and also participate in the full ASA program by beginning their separate meetings on the day preceding the Thursday start of the academic program. This sort of complementarity would extend to our interests in partnering actively with our colleagues from the continent, since we—or they—would each year have to finance and schedule around only a single, multipurpose meeting.

Finally, Diverse and Converging Experiences of Shared Humanity

Beyond the intellectual value of African compositional diversity to Africanists in a world moving beyond modernity's claim to epistemological monopoly, we all still face very modern concerns of time and money. The additive strategy I envision would combine Africanist disciplinary interests in a single grand annual multidisciplinary Africanist conclave. As we move into our second half-century, very real professional practicalities like these churn just beneath the surface of all our intellectual lives. But the opportunities of partnering in disseminating voices from Africa on the world's stage, of enriching the academic disciplines of the modern academy, and doing that in the spirit of Africa's full multiplistic richness leave me confident that we, through the African Studies Association, will respond with commitments of principle, time, creativity, and also our money that will position the ASA to follow its first half-century of defending Africa from racism and modernity's other afflictions with a new half-century's success in disseminating the vital contributions to the world's composite of cultures that our African colleagues have preserved through it all and now, with characteristic generosity, offer still to the people who for so long could not hear. We in the African Studies Association are listening.

In humanistic metaphors parallel to those of human maturation that structure this appreciation of African studies, one might add that Fanon accurately articulated the "anger" phase necessary to break with the past and to start to discern the way forward in the 1950s; other thinkers continued to express their own resentments, sometimes even rage, in the succeeding academic discourses of the 1960s and 1970s, to grieve the loss of identity, of confidence, that modernity imposed on Africa. African studies in and from Africa proceeded then through a generation of "reconciliation"; that is, it came to terms with and mastered the intellectual games of the modern West. That accomplishment in turn provided the self-confidence that allows the current generation of intellectuals to resuscitate and articulate in Western modes what was suspended in modern Africa, but not lost. A parallel sequence, from dependence on parent academic disciplines to responsible independence of—and collaboration with—them, of course, also describes the way in which intellectual generations of Africanists in the ASA incrementally embraced the alternative epistemologies of the subjects they studied.

It is not fortuitous that these two separate paths are now converging, given that they both have wound their incremental ways through the same forest of humanity.

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Notes

1. I use the phrase"significant aspects" in the precise sense of motivatingly meaningful to the human actors who make history.
2. Taking advantage of the liberties accorded an officer on this occasion, I will also provide the inevitable reference to the atavistic H. R. Trevor-Roper (1965): "Perhaps in the future, there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none: There is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness" (see also 1969).
3. I have limited my discussion on this occasion to the background of the formation of the African Studies Association. The intellectual history of African studies, of course, begins with diasporic Africans in the later nineteenth century and reached its culmination in Du Bois (1915). For a brief review and further references to the early field, see Miller (1999).
4. A story that a historian passes by only with a considerable sense of loss; see Curtin (1964).
5. I cannot pause here, other than to acknowledge the intellectual courage of these academic ancestors of us all, epitomized in the United States by Du Bois (1915).
6. Not in a metaphysical sense, but only in terms of being beyond the ability of the observer to rationalize in terms of expectations, or an intrusive awareness beyond the observer's ability to deny, or our inability to find what we are looking for.
7. "Ex Africa semper aliquid novi!" (Something new always comes out of Africa!)—Pliny the Elder (C.E. 23–79). Google yields nearly sixteen million references to the phrase. For its predictably intricate genealogy, see Feinberg and Solodow (2002).
8. The numbers are calculatedly not statistically verifiable.

9. By the compound interest "rule of 70" (i.e., 70 divided by the rate of return on an investment gives the number of years needed to double its initial value), 10 percent increments every seven years—or the approximate length of a graduate student generation—should halve the initial degree of self-satisfied smugness in approximately seven such generations, or about fifty years. By this guesstimation, African Studies is currently at a definitive 50/50 tipping point. Thus these remarks to alert the new generation who will cross the watershed to do what I think they have the opportunity to accomplish. Popular culture, obviously, will be brought along a bit more slowly.
10. Although most of these "grandparents" were men, I am aware of at least two women, Gwendolyn Carter and Ruth Schacter Morganthau, both political scientists, who were among the initial members of the ASA. Women were much more prominent among British social anthropologists; see Moore (1994). A journalist and writer, Emily Hahn (1933) was also among the few American women writing about Africa.
11. See the first ten years of the *Journal of African History* (1960–70); see also *History in Africa* (1974–).
12. A different question from the slippage from the methodological standards of the discipline, as historians grasped at the few documents on Africa that they could find, sometimes uncritically; see the journal *History in Africa* (1974–); also see Heintze and Jones (1987).
13. Passing public remark at "Pre-colonial History in a Post-Colonial Age: Past and Present in African History" (45th anniversary conference, African Studies Program and Department of History, University of Wisconsin-Madison, March 11–13, 2005).
14. The logic of Lévi-Straussian structuralism was thoroughly parallel in its quest to reconcile the apparent folly of metaphor and language with a universal (and very French) human logic; see Lévi-Strauss (1962). For a critique, see Vansina (1974).
15. What became the "Afrocentric" movement of the 1980s most systematized this approach, integrating the accent of the early Afro-diaspora historians like W.E.B. Du Bois (1915) on antiquity and precedence in modern European modes, at a time when the principal thrust of academic African studies was straining to define uniquely "African" voices. Cheikh Anta Diop's (1955; also 1960) manifesto appeared in the year of African political independence (and the launching of major academic voices in Europe). This is not the place to trace the subsequent discussions, though they are central to the intellectual history of African studies; for a key moment, see Mokhtar (1981). A current statement from the U.S. school is Asante (2007). A later alternative to seeking anticipations of modern Europe in ancient Africa was to reverse the parallels around an appreciation of distinctive strengths attributed to Africa and to historicize Europe's resemblance to those before the Enlightenment; see Thornton (1998).

    Few will be unfamiliar with the politicization of Bernal's (1987) later quite philological *Black Athena*. Among the high points of the subsequent agitated controversy are Lefkowitz and Rogers (1996); Berlinerblau (1999); and Bernal (2001).
16. Salman 2004 has felicitously termed the principle the "reversibility of comparisons."
17. James C. Scott has focused clearly on *the Hidden Transcripts* (1990b) of non-

modern polities, in which humble people act, positively and efficaciously, but mostly privately, with *Weapons of the Weak* (1985) and avoid moral *Domination [with] the Arts of Resistance* (1990a), until they emerge violently on the public stage of politics when authorities of unquestioned legitimacy in an accepted *Moral Economy of the Peasant* (1976) fail to live up to their side of an implicit pairing of mutual responsibilities. See also Scott (1998).

18. I have translated *Ujamaa* as *togetherness*, although the literal meaning of the word is "extended family"; see Stoger-Eising (2000).
19. The era of the writing of Genovese (1974).
20. One needs look no further than the recent winners of the ASA Herskovits Award, or at the omni-poly-disciplinarity, hence widely appreciated in Africa, of the work of this year's Distinguished Africanist. It is as though the "interdisciplinarity" in the narrowly methodological sense of the formative years of the discipline has gradually matured to a now-dawning epistemological maturity. Many Herskovits winners have moved beyond the methodologically interdisciplinary tours de force of the early years of the field to conceptually rich integration, including Nancy Rose Hunt (2000), Karin Barber (2001), J. D. Y. Peel (2002), Judith Carney (2002), Diana Wylie (2002), Joseph Inikori (2003), Allen F. Roberts and Mary Nooter Roberts (2004), Adam Ashforth (2005), Jan Vansina (2005), and J. Lorand Matory (2006).
21. Islam establishes a fiercely competitive environment comparable to that of modernity; monotheism and its singularizing derivatives, monarchy and modernity, are the broader contrast with the multiplicity and diversity that I am here contrasting as "African." In the spirit of the latter, I am not using this contrast to imply the reified absolutes of modernity, long the targets of valid critiques on those grounds. Rather I acknowledge—even embrace—the manifold variants and particularities of the West/Africa contrast in which I have phrased this essay.
22. In the United States, "Atlanticizing American history," the current buzz-word in the field, so far usually means "Americanizing Atlantic history"; however, given the incremental nature of all significant change, the specialists in this field will have to find their own ways, step by partial step; it is logically impossible to develop genuine engaged multiplicity entirely from internal sources. Africanists of Western backgrounds, including Western-trained Africans, have the advantage of starting from a multiplistic (at least double) axis. See Miller (2004); Bender (2002); Cañizares-Esguerra (2007). On European history's expansion to include the "colonial experience" as part of the "national" experiences, see Jasanoff (2005); Drayton (2000).
23. Only a direct intellectual heir to the German philosophers of the profound possibilities sensed in "history," as it was proclaimed against theism in the nineteenth century, would experience the humanistic potential of the discipline as "limiting."
24. I am moved to wonder on this occasion why the fact that we historians study change sometimes seems to relieve us of responsibility for practicing it.
25. Afrocentrism originated in the late-colonial era, whose ragged edges of rage were accurately articulated by Fanon.
26. Which other intellectual currents academia experienced in the form of the Marxist inclinations of the 1970s; the paradigm of careful conceptualization in this tone remains Rodney (1972).
27. http://africanstudies.org/COLLOQUIUMON.html

28. http://www.africanstudies.org/asa_guidelines2005.html
29. http://www.africanstudies.org/2006ProgramThemeMasterDocument.pdf
30. Beyond CODRESIA and the disciplinary professional organizations in Africa, Africa-Europe Group for Interdisciplinary Studies (AEGIS), the Canadian Association for African Studies/Association Canadienne des Études Africaines, and other national associations around the world.
31. Deng (in press) points out that communal conflicts tend to turn genocidal because they are envisaged as a zero-sum game.
32. Collaboration of this complementing and balanced sort inspires the Southern Africa-Virginia Networks and Associations (SAVANA) (http://www.uvacres.org/inst_partner_ page.php?id=1) project at the University of Virginia.
33. The word *glocal* was coined by John O. Voll, associate director of the Prince Alwaleed Bin Talal Center for Muslim-Christian Understanding, Georgetown University, in an unpublished paper.
34. I have long been inspired by a series of papers given at an annual meeting of the ASA more than ten years ago, some of which eventually appeared in print as Guyer et al. (1995).
35. Brown is the first Africanist to have co-chaired the AHA program committee, and the program of the 119th annual meeting (Atlanta, 2007) showed the enriching effects of her efforts. See http://www.historians.org/annual/2007/program/index.cfm.