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Black Studies and the “Ideology of Relevance”

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The late Professor Francis Abiola Irele (1936-2017) delivered an inaugural lecture at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria on November 22, 1982, which traditionally gave the lecturer an opportunity to intervene in a scholarly conversation; in other words, it had been a purely academic exercise. However, Irele confessed that the specific circumstances of a newly independent country such as Nigeria had impacted this academic ritual, thereby requiring the intellectual to assert the relevance of his or her discipline in the larger undertaking of national development:

A sense of social fact is therefore as necessary for us as for the politician and the administrator, perhaps in fact even more so, for in this environment, such hopes are invested in us as men of knowledge that our exercise of the academic calling must need to be informed by a lively sense for the future of our society, and it entails a concern for the practical effects of our efforts upon the real world in which we have our beings as individuals and citizens. It is only right therefore that

what Northrop Frye has identified as a ‘mythology of concern’ which serves as foundation for a contemporary morality of scholarship in the Western world should be formulated here in the more precise terms of an ideology of relevance.¹

I argue that this “ideology of relevance” could be said to underline the birth of Black Studies in African countries emerging from the colonial yoke in the 1960s. Black Studies came to age in Africa as a result of anticolonial struggles. The context of political militancy is a common feature that brings Black Studies in Africa and in the United States together. In the United States emerging from the struggle for civil rights, in African countries emerging from colonialism, Black Studies provided an opportunity to orchestrate an irruption of formerly oppressed peoples into the academic world.

What Irele refers to as the ideology of relevance becomes the meeting point between Black Studies and the quest for political emancipation and social emancipation. Black Studies, in the United States, operates in mostly white-controlled academic environments. In Africa as well, Black Studies challenged the hegemony of western-centric modalities of learning; however, it also emphasized the alignment of the African university with the demand of emancipation. In the next pages, I will briefly explore how these conditions of emergence ultimately account for the differences in the structuring of the field of Black Studies using the works of Kenyan writer and scholar Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o. Despite these particular conditions of possibilities, I argue that Black Studies, in the United States and in African universities confront the same test of “intellectual respectability.” The field is suspect within Eurocentric institutions of learning and research. In the concluding remarks, I suggest that black studies in Africa and in the United States have consistently been characterized by what Brent Edwards refers to as the “practice of diaspora.”²

Black Studies: The “Intellectual Respectability” Test

The Frederick Douglass Institute at the University of Rochester, in its establishment as well as its challenges, follows the narrative of the emergence of Black Studies. Its birth is the result of students’ demands and protests.³ The implied mandate is to further the narrative of emancipation. It could be said the Institute was charged to continue the work of Frederick Douglass and his fellow abolitionists. Students protests are symptomatic of the contested emergence of Black Studies. For example, at The Ohio State University, there is a department of African and African American Studies, formerly Black Studies. There’s also a Black Cultural Center, named after Frank Hale

Jr., a "visionary leader, a tireless mentor, and a civil rights crusader who fought to increase opportunities for minority students at The Ohio State University."⁴ The department and the Cultural Center are located on the main campus. The department also oversees an African American & African Studies Community Extension Center, located in a predominantly African American neighborhood. The ideology of relevance, therefore, sometimes comes in the form of seeking validation of Black Studies from black constituencies outside of the ivory tower.

As a junior faculty member fresh out of graduate school, I contributed a presentation in the Frederick Douglass Institute's work-in-progress series. As a literary scholar, I focused my presentation on the postcolonial imagination. I remember a question asked by Professor Karen Fields, the Institute's founding Director. She asked me how my work contributed to the development of the continent (Africa). I had never conceived of the relevance of the work I was doing outside of academic credentialing. While I deeply cared about the real lives of African peoples, I never considered my work as contributing to bringing pragmatic relief to the "wretched of earth."⁵ If anything, I chose literature because I wanted to be useless to policy makers. I was only at ease in the universe of fiction, poetry, and theater. And if there was any contribution whatsoever, I saw this not in pragmatic terms, but in the realm of the imagination.

When I was in middle school, I read Cameroonian writer Mongo Beti's novel *Ville cruelle (Cruel City)*.⁶ This novel inspired me to join the field of literary studies. Beti was an activist persecuted by the French and Cameroonian governments. He chose to live in exile to save his life. Beti, presented as the beacon of the committed writer, also stated that activism has nothing to do with the creative process. Activism—the ideology of relevance—was alien to literature. Beti took the precaution of relativizing the very notion of engagement. According to him, the engaged writer must demonstrate, "if need be, scandalously and with an uproar if not exhibitionism, his partnership in one of two of the existing camps, that of the dominant and that of the dominated."⁷ The writer's positioning in the arena of sociopolitical confrontations is situated; he goes on to say, "en dehors de la littérature proprement dite," "outside writing, properly speaking."⁸ So when I heard Professor Fields' question, I thought that the only honest answer was to state the uselessness of my discipline. I wanted to state that literature was not concerned with the development of the African continent, "properly speaking." However, I wanted to be respectful. Untenured faculty must be deferential. Survival depends on being humble. I did not really answer the question.

But in retrospect, Professor Fields was tasking me to recalibrate the relevance of my work with the urgency of development. In this sense, she was simply restating the ideology of community engagement that has been at the core of Black Studies from the very beginning. The emphatic proclamations on social engagement are the markers of the writer's political positioning. They create a scandal. They make the noise that draws attention to the writer who puts himself on display, who orchestrates a parade for his engagement. Black Studies follow a similar trajectory. The militant context of the birth of Black Studies reproduces the proclamations made by socially committed artists and writers. The tumultuous circumstances of its irruption in the academic house create a scandal. This scandalous birth would have significant repercussions in the debate surrounding Black Studies.

The documentary film *Agents of Change* (2016) chronicles the tumultuous birth of Black Studies, focusing on San José State University and Cornell University. The film seems to echo the claim that the civil rights movement was critical in the advent of Black Studies, made possible by the dramatic increase of Black students admitted to traditionally white colleges and universities in the 1960s: "In 1963, Cornell had 11,000 students. 23 were black. by 1969, Cornell had 250 black students."⁹ The civil rights movement inspired these students who would go on to make history as student activists at San José State University. The struggle for Black Studies could be construed as the higher education equivalent of *Brown v Board of Education*. Since this institution was in the community, its mandate should have been to serve that community and telling their stories. It is also significant that the Black Student Union that spearheaded the activism at San José could count the Third World Liberation Front as a powerful ally. The community support for the striking students appears to also indicate a linkage between demands for curricular changes, more diversity of the student body and faculty, and a broader societal agenda.

When researching the media coverage of the Nigerian internal conflict known as the Biafran War (1967-1970), I stumbled on a 1970 *Time* magazine article entitled "Black Studies: A Painful Birth." This short article advances the argument that "the new black studies programs are caught in a conflict over one basic issue: Should black studies stress academics or action? Should the work take place primarily inside the classroom or out in the community?"¹⁰ The inside-the classroom approach carries the stigma of being socially conservative, whereas community engagement may appear to be "too revolutionary."¹¹ Immersion in the community thus runs the risk of sacrificing the intellectual rigor that constitutes the very identity of the academic world. The

department of Black Studies at San José State University "emphasizes Malcom X more than Margaret Mead"; courses are coordinated with work in the black community.¹² Black students seem satisfied with this militancy. White students enrolled in black studies courses and the University administration suspect militant members of the Black Students Union of using the program as a "training ground for revolution."¹³ At issue here is intellectual credibility, an absolute requirement for accreditation in the academic world. The Harvard Afro-American Studies program appears to have passed the "intellectual respectability" test. However, black students at Harvard argue that the goal "should be to build up the black liberationist mentality and teach skills that can aid the cause."¹⁴ In this debate, Intellectual respectability emerges as a code-name for irrelevance, if one was to believe the "marvelous militancy" that brought Black Studies to life.¹⁵ Put differently, intellectual respectability sacrifices the relevance requirement in order to gain accreditation in the white-centric university.

A comparable example is provided by Michel Foucault, who, in his inaugural lesson at the Collège de France, meditates about the order of discourse. Foucault states that he would have preferred to enter the venerable institution incognito. The ritualization of beginnings, he argues, appears to be part of the disciplinary machine put in place to ensure the preservation of the "order of the discourse" against potential attempts to subvert it: "You should not be afraid of beginnings. We are here to show you that discourse belongs in the order of laws, that we have long been looking after its appearances, that a place has been made ready for it, a place that honours it but disarms it, and that if discourse may sometimes have some power, nevertheless, it is from us and us alone that it gets it."¹⁶ Intellectual respectability may thus come under what Foucault identifies as processes of *désinauguration* that include silence, commentary, politics. Foucault argues that the institution responds by "solemniz(ing) beginnings, surrounding them with a circle of attention and silence, and impos(ing) ritualized forms on them, as if to make them more recognizable from a distance."¹⁷ Therefore, by seeking to be intellectually credible, Black Studies may be exposing itself to the mighty power of discourse that could accept their presence while disarming any disruptive or transformative potential they may have.

Preston Wilcox, in an intervention entitled "Black Studies as an Academic Discipline: Toward a Definition" (1969) argues that an incredible "amount of ivory tower energy has been invested in proving that the only way Black Students can achieve is to deny any association with their own cultural heritage—and the historical inequities designed to destroy it."¹⁸ Wilcox, therefore, conceives Black Studies as an "instrument for the

development of the Black community."¹⁹ He theorizes an organic relationship between Black Studies and the struggle for black liberation:

The thrust for Black Studies Programs developed not on white colleges and campuses but at Selma, Birmingham and on the March on Washington. It was on the civil rights battlefield that Blacks learned that an appeal to the white conscience had to be replaced by an appeal to Black consciousness.²⁰

Wilcox effectively displaces the birth of Black Studies from the academic milieu to a militant battleground. He goes on to make the case that community-based credentialing remains critical in ensuring the integrity of the discipline: "Black Studies is an 'academic discipline' fully accredited within the Black world. It is that body of experience and knowledge that Blacks have had to summon in order to learn how to survive within a society that is stacked against them."²¹ If Selma, Birmingham and the March on Washington are the birthplaces of Black Studies, then the attempt to frame this field as "academic" is at best questionable, if not outright impossible.

Wilcox's pronouncements make a radical case for moving Black Studies out of the academic house. The irruption of black studies represents a disruption of the existing order of discourse. This disruptive intervention constitutes what we may characterize as the inaugural moment. It shocks. It gets the attention of whoever may be interested in the conservation or dislodgment of the existing order. It is scandalous, in the primitive meaning of this word. It is precisely because the new discipline is outrageous that it lends itself to the liabilities of what every scandal causes to the perceived offender. The scandalous may get the attention. However, it is discreditable. Black Studies disrupts the academic order of things. Black Studies is contested. Black Studies is perceived as scandalous. Black Studies, for all these very reasons, lacks the credibility of established disciplines. Black Studies is easily discreditable. It is significant that the semantic field of the adjective "scandalous" covers disreputable, outrageous, monstrous, criminal, disgraceful, improper.²² We may also speculate that the shock of disruption may allow sectors that consider the current order of things as deplorable or intolerable may lend support to the new kid on the block, so to speak. If this speculation could be provisionally granted some validity for the sake of our argument, it is fair to further hypothesize that these allies, strategic, occasional, or genuine are more likely to reside in an abject minority. It is more likely that the combination of these allies and the outside forces—namely the pressure from the civil rights and the changing racial and political calculus—were able to get Black Studies through the door of the American academy.

The next challenge could be formulated in these terms: how to stay? How to stay could also translate into a different formulation: how to acquire the credentials of a traditional (or conventional) discipline? I speculated earlier that the scandalous irruption of Black Studies into the American academic landscape renders it vulnerable to the accusation of being discreditable. How to stay in the hostile landscape would require from Black Studies to get the hostile forces to forget their scandalous entry. There is an obvious dilemma in this proposition. How to overcome the “discreditable” stigma? One obvious response to such a question would be to apply for naturalization in the field of conventional academic disciplines. The application process, in order to be successful, would require of advocates to convince the accredited disciplines—heretofore self-appointed guardians of the temple—that Black Studies are not inflicted with the discreditable stigma. In other words, advocates should bring forth the proof that Black Studies would not harm the reputation of the academic brand. In Africa—and to some extent in the spaces of the black diaspora, Black Studies did not necessarily apply for accreditation in western-styled institutions. Black Studies’ advocates did, as in the United States, challenge the hegemony of western-centric modalities of learning. However, they made a different demand: align the African university with the demand of political emancipation.

Black Studies in the African University

I would suggest that it is not up to Black Studies to apply for acceptance in the academic world. It is up to the entrenched forces of Eurocentric conservatism to consent to the existence of Black Studies. This consent would signify something more than a good will gesture that certifies Black Studies as an accredited discipline. This consent is more a recognition that Black Studies already exists, and that whether accepted or denied entrance, will continue to exist. Consenting in this case is more akin to recognizing reality. The challenge to this obsolete order of knowledge and learning help redefine the boundaries of Black Studies. Black Studies is not alone in their assignment to the abject status. In fact, they have company: Women Studies, American Studies, Gender and Sexuality Studies, Latinx Studies, Ethnic Studies, Disabilities Studies. Black Studies is a force of disorder.^{[23](#)}

The “Idea of Africa,” i.e. the Idea of a Pan-African Nation, first emerged in the Black Diaspora, and more precisely in the Caribbean and in the United States.^{[24](#)} It was a response to the globalized color line that was inflicting misery and suffering on black peoples, from the American South to apartheid South Africa by way of colonization in the rest of the African continent. The response to this globalized color line was the

emergence of a militant diasporic consciousness. This globalized diasporic consciousness was one of the cornerstones of Global Black Studies. In the African continent, the political good will of newly independent leaders would prove critical in the establishment of Black Studies. The symbolic patronage of new departments of African literature by African Presidents is a case in point.

On October 25, 1963, Kwame Nkrumah, the first President of Ghana, delivered a speech at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana. This speech is generally referred to as "The African Genius." For Nkrumah, African studies, under the influence of western universities, have yet to emerge from the yoke of "old style 'colonial studies,' colonial ideologies and mentalities:

Until recently the study of African history was regarded as a minor and marginal theme within the framework of imperial history. The study of African social institutions and cultures was subordinated in varying degrees to the effort to maintain the apparatus of colonial power. In British institutes of higher learning, for example, there was a tendency to look to social anthropologists to promote the kind of knowledge that would help to support the particular brand of colonial policy known as indirect rule.²⁵

Kwame A. Appiah acknowledges the western-centric configuration when he argues that the African university represents an "institution whose intellectual life is overwhelmingly constituted as Western." Postcolonial intellectuals who staff these western-centric institutions are part of the "comprador intelligentsia [that] mediates the trade in cultural commodities of world capitalism at the periphery."²⁶ If we go back to the ideology of relevance, the purpose of the Institute of African Studies should be to bring about "a new interpretation and a new assessment."²⁷ Such a redirection would eventually lead to a decolonization of knowledge production and dissemination. More than 50 years later, the Institute of African Studies sees itself as the foundation platform that insures "African-centered perspectives in all aspects of the production and dissemination of knowledge."²⁸ It fulfills this mission through an introductory, multidisciplinary course on Africa which all students of the University of Ghana are required to take. The course was "designed to ensure a sound basis for further inquiry and enlightened self-knowledge about Africa and its people among students who were more likely to take up leadership roles on the continent." The recurrent theme, in the case of Black Studies in the United States or African Studies in the continent, continues to be the repudiation of the ivory tower conception of knowledge. Knowledge almost always emerges in the cause of something that is outside of the

university: the community, the liberation of the continent. Black Studies emerges, therefore, as a space of decolonized knowledge that echoes or continues the political process of decolonization. Decolonizing the spaces of knowledge was, for these intellectuals who were sometimes veterans of the anticolonial struggle, a natural way to continue the fight for emancipation.

The Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana was established in 1961, three years after Ghana gained independence. Kwame Nkrumah personally presided over the inauguration of the Institute. In Cameroon, Professor Thomas Melone, one of the pioneer critics of Francophone African literature, founded the first Department of Negro-African literature at the University of Yaoundé. The "Negro" in "Negro-African" gestures to Negritude, the Francophone cultural renaissance movement born in Paris and heavily influenced by the Harlem Renaissance. In 1973, Melone convened a conference on the theme "The African Critic and His People As Producers of Civilization."²⁹ The keynote speaker was none other than Leopold Sedar Senghor, President of Senegal and one of founders of Négritude.³⁰ Senghor delivered his keynote on the campus of the University of Yaoundé, in the presence of the Cameroonian President. The participations of two presidents in a cultural event held at the University invites us to read the connection between the political liberation of the continent and the decolonization of the African university.

Ngugi argues that empire builders appreciated the critical importance of language in the configuration of the imagination. With this knowledge, they engineered a delinking of elites of colonized communities from their languages and literally deported their "minds in the languages of the imperial center."³¹ Whenever colonials faced resistance to this project, they "simply manufactured a new elite through a massive cultural surgery carried out in the theaters of the new schools and colleges."³² Colonial-era schools therefore became what Ngugi referred to as the "Europhone linguistic plantation."³³ The rise of the Europhone plantation sometimes literally came at the death of African-centered institutions of knowledge or even the promoters of emancipation from the colonial yoke.

In Dreams in a Time of War, the first installment of his memoirs, Ngugi tells the story of community-centered schools that provided an alternative to mission-led schools. The Kenyan Teachers College eventually became the preeminent embodiment of this recapturing of the African-centered institution of learning. It was designed to be an "African run, community-owned college," modeled on Hampton and Tuskegee,

historically-black schools in the U.S.³⁴ With its founders hoping that it would eventually evolve into Kenya University, the Kenya Teachers' College "was to become one of the biggest and most ambitious projects ever undertaken in colonial Kenya."³⁵ As such, it was perceived as a "counterweight" to the colonial and missionary project; committed to training "inspired intellectuals organically connected to the community, who would be traveling interpreters of the world to the people."³⁶ This is in 1938 in colonial Kenya. This kind of community-oriented education, as we have seen with the *Time* article, would dominate the birth of Black Studies in the United States in the late 1960s.

Earlier, I made the argument about the "discreditable" nature of Black Studies. In colonial Kenya, the Kenya Teachers' College would eventually be deemed "criminal" (one of the synonyms of "discreditable") by the colonial administration. The monstrous crime was its links with anticolonial resistance led by the Kikuyu Central Association, banned in 1941. Jomo Kenyatta, the anticolonial leader, would soon be arrested. The ban of the Kenya Teachers' College would follow. Ngugi describes this ban as a "practical and psychological assault on the African initiative for self-reliance."³⁷ The colonizer proceeds to turn the school into a slaughterhouse for anticolonial resisters: "But the biggest blow to the collective psyche occurred when the colonial state turned the college grounds and buildings into a prison camp where proponents of resistance to colonialism were hanged."³⁸ The Kenya Teachers' College, a community-inspired and supported institution, would have become the natural house of African and Black Studies. It was not only discredited or deemed scandalous to the colonial order of things; it was literally criminalized and destroyed by the colonial regime. The relevance of Black Studies in Africa could only be appreciated by taking stock of these conditions of emergence or disappearance of an African-centered institution of learning. Nkrumah would, in 1963, formally declare the Institute of African Studies open. The former anticolonial leader, now President of an independent nation, was, to some extent enacting the resurrection of the spirit of the Kenya Teachers' College.

In October 2013, I was in Ghana for the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Institute of the African Studies at the University of Ghana. Ngugi revealed that during the years he was effectively banned from Kenya, he travelled with a Ghanaian passport.³⁹ The fact that Ghanaian authorities gave him this passport could be interpreted as a recognition of his uncompromising advocacy for the "decolonizing of the [African] mind."⁴⁰ Ngugi was the keynote speaker at the conference. The conference was formally opened by the President of the Republic of Ghana, President

John Dramani Mahama, who took the Introduction to Africa course that is a requirement for all students at the University of Ghana.⁴¹ He quoted Ngugi's work extensively during his keynote lecture. Ngugi's project, I suspect, was and is to be an organic intellectual of the African people. Today, Ngugi would remind us, as he did in television interviews in Ghana, and as he has done for more than four decades, that African languages cannot afford to be relegated as electives in the African continent. Ngugi was simply restating the urgent need for the decolonization—or rather the Africanization—of African spaces of learning. This has been his lifetime vocation. This vocation speaks to the relevance of Black Studies in the African university.

In 1968, Ngugi and his colleagues mounted a revolt against the hegemony of British literature in the Department of English at the University of Nairobi.⁴² The hegemony of British literature also meant the erasure of African literatures. Ngugi later remarked that the title of his essay "On the Abolition of the English Department" (1972) was chosen to allude to the abolition of slavery in Europe and the Americas. It was also the recognition that colonial education was always a "massive cannon in the artillery of empire."⁴³ The military metaphor takes us back to the ideology of relevance. Ngugi and his colleagues argue that African writing, "with the sister connections in the Caribbean and the Afro-American literatures, has played an important role in the African renaissance."⁴⁴ The call to abolish the English department and the subsequent "establishment of a Department of African Literature and Languages" would create the conditions for investigating "possible areas of development and involvement" with "relevance to our situation."⁴⁵ The manifesto could be read as an anti-imperial gesture that seek to displace the ghosts of colonialism by reclaiming the center for Africans. It could also be interpreted a restoration of African creativity and entrepreneurship that was literally destroyed in colonial Kenya.

Students of black African Studies should consider the eradication of African agency that may have been the real force behind Ngugi's manifesto. Ngugi tells this story in *Dreams in a Time of War*, inviting us to witness the criminalization of anticolonial resistance, which took the form of the banning of the Kenya Teachers' College, the emblematic embodiment of African agency fueled by transnational black solidarity. The abolition of the English Department would therefore pave the way to the resurrection of the African-centered spirit of the Kenya Teachers' College. Shortly after the manifesto, Ngugi was arrested, thrown in jail and eventually exiled. Neocolonial forces crushed Ngugi's ambitious project of restoring the spirit of the community schools he attended. The advent of an African-centered order of discourse, in African-centered

institutions, was delayed. This was the story of Ngugi. This was the story of the "trials and tribulations of national consciousness."

This was also the story of the demise of the dream of African political emancipation. The triumph over colonialism led to the institutional irruption of black studies in African universities. However, this momentous victory would soon face a major setback, as Nigerian-born and Harvard scholar Biodun Jeyifo explains:

We must confront the historical dialectic of the professionalization of Africa literary study and the attendant crystallization of scholars and critics into the Nationalist and African schools. By doing so we can engage the great paradox surrounding the study of African literature today: historic decolonization having initially enabled the curricular legitimation of African literary study in African schools, the equally historic arrest of decolonization has swung the center of gravity from Africa to Europe and America.⁴⁶

This article, entitled "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory" was published in 1990. Jeyifo is telling the story of the demise of the black studies project that was about to take root in the African university. Almost thirty years after the publication of Jeyifo's article, Black Studies in and out of the African continent remain largely dependent on western institutions.

While Jeyifo's pessimistic outlook should be seriously considered, one could argue that the irruption of Black Studies in western-centric institutions of higher learning has fundamentally disrupted racialized imperial and colonial orders of knowledge. One of the unexpected outcomes of the shift of the center of African Studies to the West may actually be the realization of the diasporic mandate with which Nkrumah charged the Institute of African Studies in 1963. Nkrumah called for the study of Africa to be African-centered and be concerned with peoples of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean. The student of African studies should therefore seek to maintain close relations with scholars of the African Diaspora "so that there may be cross fertilization between Africa and those who have their roots in the African past."⁴⁷ Nkrumah, who happened to be quite literate in the world of the Black Diaspora, indicates here one of the features of Black Studies in Africa: transnationalism shaped by a diasporic consciousness. Nkrumah charges the Institute of African Studies with the Diasporic Literacy Mandate.⁴⁸

The birth of Black Studies was in part a consequence of the increased presence of black students in traditionally white-centered institutions of higher learning. In the

colonial situation in Africa, these institutions were staffed with European faculty teaching a white-centered curriculum. The student body was overwhelming African. The decolonization the infrastructure of producing and transmitting knowledge became an option after the achievement of political emancipation. Black Studies is the institutional space where diasporic literacy is taught. Black Studies constitutes the institutional space where diasporic literacy is a requirement. Black internationalism, in its Panafricanist iteration, was a critical factor in the advent of anticolonialism, black cultural renaissance movements such as Négritude, and the emergence of postcolonial African studies. The "practice of diaspora," to borrow from Brent Hayes Edwards's title, was a major force in the shaping of postcolonial African studies. Ultimately, the "practice of diaspora" embodies the activist spirit of black cultural production as well the "Idea of Africa" that seek to re-member the many black communities across the world. The black writer/singer/painter must be a freedom fighter. Black Studies becomes the institutional framework where black liberation movements, the black experience, and the artistic and intellectual production inspired by freedom struggles are at the center of intellectual inquiry. To speak of relevance may be redundant.

Footnotes

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8. Beti, "Un visage exemplaire," 121. [↵](#)
9. *Agents of Change*, directed by Frank Dawson and Abby Ginzberg (Kovno Communications / Social Action Media, 2016). [↵](#)
10. "Black Studies: A Painful Birth," *Time*, January 26, 1970, 50. [↵](#)
11. "Black Studies: A Painful Birth," 50. [↵](#)
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14. "Black Studies: A Painful Birth," 50. [↵](#)
15. Martin Luther King Jr. "I Have a Dream," Address Delivered at the March for Jobs and Freedom, Washington D.C., August 28, 1963, accessed March 8, 2020, <https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-papers/documents/i-have-dream-address-delivered-march-washington-jobs-and-freedom>. [↵](#)
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19. Wilcox, *Toward a Definition*, 6. [↵](#)
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21. Wilcox, *Toward a Definition*, 16. [↵](#)
22. "Scandalous," Google Dictionary, accessed March 20, 2020, <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=scandalous>. [↵](#)
23. I am making a reference to Maryse Condé's use of the force of disorder. Maryse Condé, "Order, Disorder, Freedom, and the West Indian Writer," in "50 Years of Yale French Studies, a Commemorative Anthology, Part 2: 1980-1998," special issue, *Yale French Studies* 97 (2000): 151-165. [↵](#)
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27. Nkrumah, "The African Genuis," vii. [↵](#)
28. Takyiwaa Manuh and Esi Sutherland-Addy, "Introduction" in *Africa in Contemporary Perspectives: A Textbook for Undergraduates Students*, ed. Takyiwaa Manuh and Esi Sutherland-Addy (Legon-Accra: Subsaharan Publishers, 2013), 1. [↵](#)
29. The Colloquium, "The African Critic and His People As Producers of Civilization," was organized in Yaoundé, Cameroon, from April 16 to 20, 1973. [↵](#)
30. Léopold Sedar Senghor (1906-2001), one the founders of the Negritude movement along with Martinican Aimé Césaire and French Guyanese Léon-Gontran Damas, served as the first President of Senegal from 1960 to 1980. [↵](#)
31. Ngugi Wa Thiongo, "Europhonism, Universities, and the Magic Fountain: The Future of African Literature and Scholarship," *Research in African Literatures* 31, no. 1 (Spring 2000), 3. [↵](#)
32. Ngugi, "Europhonism," 3. [↵](#)
33. Ngugi, *Something Torn and New*, 71. [↵](#)

34. Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Dreams in a Time of War: A Childhood Memoir* (New York: Anchor Books, 2011), 130. [↵](#)
35. Ngugi, *Dreams in a Time of War*, 131. [↵](#)
36. Ngugi, *Dreams in a Time of War*, 132. [↵](#)
37. Ngugi, *Dreams in a Time of War*, 166. [↵](#)
38. Ngugi, *Dreams in a Time of War*, 166. [↵](#)
39. Ngugi made this statement during his keynote address at the Conference "Revisiting the First international Congress of Africanists in a Globalized World". The Conference was held at the Institute of African Studies at the University of Ghana (October 24-26 2013). [↵](#)
40. Ngugi, *Decolonizing the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature* (Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1986). [↵](#)
41. John Dramani Mahama, *My First Coup d'État and Other Stories from the Lost Decades of Africa* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2012). [↵](#)
42. While the editors of *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* (see footnote 43 for full reference) credit Ngugi as the author of the chapter "On The Abolition of the English Department," the original text was a collective effort written by James Ngugi (now Ngugi Wa Thiongo), Henry Owuor-Anyumba, and Taban Lo Liyong on October 24, 1968. [↵](#)
43. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, "Introduction to Education," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1999), 425. [↵](#)
44. Ngugi Wa Thiongo, "On the Abolition of the English Department," in *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, eds. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (New York: Routledge, 1999), 439. [↵](#)
45. Ngugi, "On the Abolition of the English Department," 440, 439. [↵](#)
46. Biodun Jeyifo, "The Nature of Things: Arrested Decolonization and Critical Theory," *Research in African Literatures* 21, no.1 (Spring 1990): 40. [↵](#)
47. Nkrumah, "The African Genuis," vi-xiii. [↵](#)

48. On the conceptualization of diasporic literacy, see Vèvè A. Clark, "Developing Diasporic Literacy and Marasa Consciousness," in *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text*, ed. Hortense J. Spillers (New York: Routledge, 1991), 40-61. [↵](#)