

Full Circle: Engaging African Diaspora Discourse and Dialogue

by
guest editor

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Life had gone full circle, as last year I returned to my alma mater the University of Pittsburgh as a scholar to present a paper at the inaugural DuBois-Nkrumah-Dunham conference. In the audience now sat my former professors, who intently listened to my paper, “Politics of Information, Knowledge, and Transformation in Africa and Its Diaspora,” which examined the struggle for the liberation of African cultural identities and symbols through information service delivery in Africa and throughout its Diaspora, appearing in *Information Equality, Africa, Newsletter of the Progressive African Library and Information Activists’ Group--PALIACT* (no. 2, December 2006). This issue of *JPAS* in-part derives from those discussions following the momentous gathering of elders at the inaugural DuBois-Nkrumah-Dunham conference of the Africana Studies Department at the University of Pittsburgh, held March 31-April 1, 2006 at the Wyndham Garden Hotel.

The issue speaks to cultural identities and symbols in Africa and throughout the Diaspora. I provide a biography of our featured artist and author Chinua Achebe. Barbara Ellington interviews Chinua Achebe in Jamaica on the 200th anniversary of the end of forced mid Atlantic passage to the Caribbean. In “Patriarchal Symbolic Order” Clara Momanyi outlines the powerful literary tradition of the Waswahili in east Africa. Amadu Jacky Kaba, who presented his paper “The Two West Africas: the Two Historical Phases of the West African Brain Drain,” at the inaugural DuBois—Nkrumah—Dunham conference examines two historical phases of the brain drain throughout the history of West Africa, leading to the region’s underdevelopment; Benita Johnson, who also presented her paper at the conference fleshes out the significant role played by African Americans in the development and formation of American foreign policy between 1919 and 1944.

David T. Miller provides a review of *Last Grave at Dimbaza*, the recently re-mastered 1973 documentary was filmed clandestinely in South Africa and smuggled out of the country because of its critical assessment of apartheid; and *Profit and Nothing But*, a documentary about the emerging global economy and how the capitalist system is responsible for the misery of the world's "wretched of the earth". Continuing, as a bonus we have a recent testimony by Luis Gilberto Murillo-Urrutia before the House Committee on Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on the Western Hemisphere hearing on "U.S. – Colombia Relations" held in Washington, D.C. focused on armed conflict recent political trends, Afro-Colombians, armed conflict, and the environmental and natural resources of Colombia.

And juxtaposing, the above, we also have discourse and dialogue on the historical and contemporary aspects of Liberia and Sierra Leone as a theatre of a cultural, social and economic evolution; a review of political campaign strategies employed by or via Kwame Nkrumah; insights into Benin traditional methods of disease prevention, and a book review on American Africans in Ghana during the Civil Rights era. And finally, I've included my tribute to William Hunter Dammond (1873-1956), the first African American graduate of the University of Pittsburgh which corrects a longstanding error in the official University of Pittsburgh history that listed John Coverdale Gilmer as the first African American graduate of the Western University of Pennsylvania (now the University of Pittsburgh) with a bachelor of arts in 1897. However, William Hunter Dammond graduated four years earlier with a degree in civil engineering (with honors) in June 1893. Thus, the University of Pittsburgh official history now stands corrected, and now records William Hunter Dammond as the first African American graduate, demonstrating that those who hold the quill in their hand have the power to reshape history.

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