

From Black History to Diasporan History: Brazilian Abolition in Afro-Atlantic Context

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Abstract: This article examines the construction and use of a diasporan framework for analyzing Afro-Atlantic history during the postabolition era. It summarizes the findings of the author's research on the first fifty years after the end of slavery in Brazil (1888–1938). The use of a diasporan framework illuminates patterns, otherwise obscured by traditional monographic approaches, that can be compared with other Afro-Atlantic communities.

Résumé: Cet article examine la construction et l'utilisation d'une structure diasporique pour analyser l'histoire afro-atlantique pendant l'ère suivant l'abolition de l'esclavage. Il résume les résultats des recherches de l'auteur portant sur les cinquante premières années suivant la fin de l'esclavage au Brésil (1888–1938). L'utilisation d'une base diasporique a permis de clarifier des schémas autrement obscurcis par les approches monographiques traditionnelles comparables à d'autres communautés afro-atlantiques.

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Introduction

For this special issue of the *African Studies Review*, I was asked to explain how I used a diasporan framework for a ten-year research project on the aftermath of Brazilian abolition. That research began when I was a graduate student, first at Howard University and later at Johns Hopkins University, where I participated in the Program in Atlantic History, Culture and Society. The project culminated in a book entitled *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (1998), which contains the complete comparative study described in this article. The diasporan framework outlined here is abstracted from a paper entitled “Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse,” presented at the 1999 meeting of the American Historical Association, and soon to be published in the journal *Diaspora*.

Defining Diaspora and Diasporan Studies

At its simplest, a diaspora may be understood as the dispersion of a people from their original homeland. As transportation and communications technologies have improved throughout the twentieth century, and fewer and fewer people find themselves living in the land of their ancestors, the concept of diaspora is growing in popularity to explain the phenomenon of living in what may persistently be labeled as a “foreign” land. However, not every movement is a diaspora.

To date, scholars have generally attempted to define diaspora by observing the characteristics of single diasporas and using them as a checklist (Safran 1991:83; Cohen 1996:515; Chaliand & Rageau 1995:xiv–xvii). If, for example, the African diaspora was formed because of slavery, then forced dispersal was considered one of the defining characteristics of diaspora.¹ The problem with this approach is that the definitions change with every diasporan group. Nonetheless, there are several basic characteristics that appear to be common to all diasporas. First, the departing group has two or more destinations, creating, instead of a bipolarity, the scattering implicit in the very term *diaspora*, which shares the *spr* root from the Greek word *diaspeirein* (to “scatter”) with words like *disperse* and *sperm* (Tölölyan 1996:9). Second, there must be some relationship to the homeland, whether or not it continues to exist after the diasporization. Third, there must exist a collective common identity within the diasporan group. Finally, the diaspora must exist over two or more generations. A group that meets the first three criteria, but which is able to return within a single generation, may more accurately be described as temporary exiles.

While a basic checklist of the characteristics of diasporas is useful, it fails to provide scholars with a methodology for studying the processes of diaspora. The work of establishing the defining criteria for diasporas focus-

es the attention of the diasporan scholar on the observation and labeling of groups. The application of diasporan methodology is a quite different process, designed to illuminate the unique social dynamics of diasporas.

It is impossible to apply a single template for the study of a diaspora, because even within a diaspora individuals have multiple identities that change over time and in accordance with the sociopolitical context. The African diaspora provides an excellent example of the challenge at hand. As noted recently by Colin Palmer, the African diaspora conceivably extends to all human migrations from our species' African homeland, if one uses the simple definition of dispersal (1998:1). Even if we focus only on the modern era, there are at least three major branches of the contemporary African diaspora: the Afro-Atlantic (dispersed via the trans-Atlantic slave trade), the Afro-Asian (dispersed via the Indian Ocean slave trade), and the African national (*émigrés* from the continent to other parts of the world). Yet the reality of human experience further subdivides and complicates these large categories, as illustrated by the following example:

If an African descendant is born in Jamaica, he or she is obviously part of the African diaspora. If that person subsequently moves to England, they then join a Caribbean diaspora in England, while still part of the African diaspora. How, then, does this Jamaican immigrant relate to the continental Africans resident in England, themselves also part of an African diaspora? Is there not also a Jamaican diaspora in England, the United States, Canada and elsewhere? How does this late twentieth century Jamaican diaspora connect with earlier migrations of Jamaicans to Panama, Costa Rica and Cuba? To fix this person's identity as part of an undifferentiated African diaspora does not necessarily allow for the complexity of multiple identities, the salience of which at any given time is conditioned by sociopolitical exigencies. Nor can such an individual be exclusively considered part of a Caribbean, or even Jamaican, diaspora. Conceptualizations of diaspora must be able to accommodate the reality of multiple identities and phases of diasporization over time. (Butler 1999)

Because of these complexities, I suggest that diasporan study be defined not by the group itself, but by the types of research questions asked. These questions explore the phenomenon of diaspora, and allow for the comparative study of different diasporas to each other. I have divided these into five dimensions of diasporan study: (1) reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; (2) relationship with homeland; (3) relationship with hostland(s); (4) interrelationships within diasporan group; (5) comparative studies of different diasporas. This is a generic approach to diasporan studies that may be used for any diasporan group, regardless of size, as long as it meets the general defining criteria. When applied to the study of African diaspora communities, it differs from a more generalized concept of black studies in its specific focus on the diasporan group as subject, its shared history, and the sociopolitical forces that shape its development. The vital

work of earlier scholars in recovering the histories of African peoples and including them in the academic canon has created a rich body of empirical research that now serves as a basis for advances in theory and epistemology.

This article outlines a diasporan analytical framework developed for use in a long-term research project on the end of slavery in Brazil, the largest slaveholding nation in the Americas and the last to enact abolition.² The objective of the project was not to examine abolition in the Brazilian or Latin American context, but rather to understand the power dynamics of this transitional era throughout the Afro-Atlantic diaspora. It was therefore necessary to bridge the traditional geographic subfields of Latin America, the United States, and the Caribbean within the discipline of history. As a diasporan study, it was focused on a facet of the relationship between the diaspora and its hostlands, using Brazil as a case study for highlighting issues common to the entire Afro-Atlantic diaspora.

The basic premise of the study is that Atlantic slavery had created a set of relationships in which one segment of society decided the position and function of another. The participating European nations financed the wholesale transfer of Africans to the Americas and the Caribbean as a subservient labor force in order to create wealth for others. It was only through constant pressure and resistance that Africans and their descendants carved out a role for themselves that transcended the boundaries of brute labor.

Abolition was a historical watershed that ended the forced presence of African peoples in the Americas. Theoretically, it gave African descendants the option of remaining in the American and Caribbean nations in which most had been born, or “returning” to an Africa that had irrevocably been transformed by slavery and colonialism. Realistically, very few could even dream of return, leaving them only the option of accepting their citizenship in their countries of residence. The terms of that citizenship, however, were not universally mandated by elites. Continuing in the long-standing tradition of resistance, African descendants battled efforts to place limits on their newly acquired freedom.

After abolition, elites throughout the hemisphere tried their best to shift the economic arrangements of labor while preserving the prerogatives they had enjoyed under slavery. The idea that governments and employers could dictate the lives and labor of African descendants remained deeply ingrained, and was often included in the very laws of emancipation. Brazil, like Cuba, Puerto Rico, and many British Caribbean colonies, delayed abolition by passing transitional measures that granted severely limited “freedom.” For example, an 1885 Brazilian law freeing slaves over sixty granted masters “the use of the services of the *freed* slave for five years” and prohibited freedpersons from moving out of their municipalities of residence for five years under penalty of arrest (Saraiva-Cotegipe Law of 1885, emphasis added). Especially concerned with maintaining their profit levels, former slaveholders, supported to varying degrees by local governments, used both

formal and informal measures to keep freedpersons in the productive roles they had exercised as slaves (Klein & Engerman 1985:255–69; Scarano 1989:51–84; Foner 1983:10–28).

Abolition in the Afro-Atlantic world is often confused with freedom. In the words of one Cuban planter in 1873, “the word abolition should be only a myth, dust to throw in the eyes of those . . . who want to force themselves into our affairs” (Scott 1985:112). Regardless of how it occurred, the end of slavery was not a revolutionary act changing the basic relations of power and property (with the important exception of Haiti). It did not automatically remove the barriers that held freedpersons in their class positions. Around the hemisphere, both formal legislation and informal socio-cultural practices were oriented toward the maintenance of elite prerogatives enjoyed under slavery. This served to handicap freedpersons in their pursuit of higher socioeconomic echelons, pressuring them instead into disadvantageous positions in free society.³

Abolition is more accurately viewed as a dynamic transitional period in which both freedpersons and elites struggled to secure powers and prerogatives during a time in which new rules remained to be negotiated. Despite their best efforts, elites were unable to completely dictate the new roles of African descendants in American societies. The postabolition era was marked by multiple challenges against the limits placed on freedoms conferred. The choices made by all participants during this period were to shape the nature of race relations throughout the twentieth century.

With Afro-Atlantic abolition the focus of this research project, a diasporan framework was the most appropriate. Conceptual frameworks are simply tools that can be interchanged as needed depending on the project at hand. In this case, the choice of a diasporan framework meant that certain features of the abolition experience would be highlighted while others, certainly important in other types of histories, would be marginalized. For example, elites were not the subjects of study. In order to concentrate on the internal structure and dynamics of the Afro-Brazilian population, the discussion of elites was a brief overview focused on how they affected the lives of Afro-Brazilians. In addition, events of national importance that only minimally touched the Afro-Brazilian community were peripheral to the project. On the other hand, factors such as the evolution of identity, the rise of distinct internal communities, and articulations of political ideology were at the heart of the study and received detailed attention.

Brazilian Abolition, Diasporan Context

This study examined the apparently different trajectories of two Afro-Brazilian urban communities: São Paulo, capital of the state of the same name, and Salvador, capital of the state of Bahia. São Paulo was the site of the first Afro-Brazilian political advocacy groups, a vocal black press, and

the headquarters of Brazil's only national black political party, the Brazilian Black Front (Frente Negra Brasileira, 1931–37). They had also embraced a new political identity as “blacks” (*negros*), rejecting both the term's negative connotations as well as the Brazilian linguistic convention distinguishing “blacks” (*pretos*) from “browns” (*pardos*). Despite the vigor of this early black consciousness movement, which extended throughout the surrounding states, it failed to take hold in Salvador and northeastern Brazil. There, African descendants made up the majority of the population, in contrast to an average of approximately 10 percent in the city of São Paulo. In fact, there seemed to be no significant political activity in the city of Salvador during the postabolition years. Given the hypothesis that African descendants took an active role in resisting their continued disadvantages after slavery, the research aimed at exploring Salvador's unexplained silence.

A full explanation of the many forces at play is beyond the scope of this article, but the general conclusions can be summarized briefly. Within the very narrow framework of Afro-Atlantic abolition, the central political issue facing African descendants as slavery ended was their future relationship with their hostland. This established a spectrum of options for self-determination ranging from integrationism to separatism (Butler 1998:59–66, 219–23). While all communities encompassed the full range of choices at both the individual and collective levels, closer examination revealed identifiable patterns for certain segments of African-descended communities.

The integration-separatism spectrum may be grouped into three broad categories. The first, integrationist, aims at becoming part of the society on an equitable basis. I consider assimilation (becoming similar to) as merely one of several means to integration. The second, alternative integrationist, seeks also to become part of mainstream society but does so by changing the mechanisms of exclusion, specifically, the racial barriers preventing equitable participation. Finally, the separatist orientation views the mainstream society as hostile and attempts to limit contact, although most separatist traditions affirm the legal rights and protections of citizens.

The choices of individuals and collectives along the integration-separatism spectrum are influenced by a number of factors. Individuals, for example, experience discrimination differently based on their possession of certain keys of access and upward mobility. If a given society privileges wealth and light skin color, the daily interactions and experiences of a person with those attributes will be different from those of another individual who does not have them. By definition, a person already similar in many ways to the mainstream society will find it easier to follow an assimilationist path toward integration. Within Afro-American cultures, where skin color was a primary determinant of ethnicity, “passing” became a common expression of this phenomenon. However, it is vitally important to recognize the role of personal choice in this regard. One of the most vocal leaders of the early black consciousness movement in Brazil, José Correia Leite,

was the child of a white father. He could have used his light skin to distance himself from the black community. Yet he was among the first to champion the use of the word *negro* to destroy the linguistic barrier distinguishing between light- and dark-skinned blacks as two different ethnicities.

A second factor influencing tendencies in Afro-Atlantic communities toward either separatism or integrationism is the existence of alternatives to the mainstream society. By this I mean a separate and distinct black "world" giving people other options for meeting their day-to-day needs at all levels—spiritual, aesthetic, economic, psychological, emotional, judicial, and political. Separatism, in this sense, is a means for restoring a sense of personal dignity and self-worth in societies founded in slavery and nurtured on racism and prejudice. Not only have such communities existed in Afro-Atlantic history, their role has been of vital importance.

There are two basic types of these separate black worlds. The first is the parallel community, in which the institutions of the mainstream society are reproduced within the black community. They generally arise in response to exclusion, including informal types of segregation. Jim Crow laws in the United States led to an institutionally diverse black community in the early twentieth century, with black banks, transportation systems, entertainment and social industries, and political organizations. In the Brazilian case studies, for example, young people of color found themselves excluded from the dances given by the private clubs of the Italians, Germans, and other immigrants. Rather than insisting on entering such dances, they instead created their own social clubs, which in turn gave rise to a black social press that later became politicized (Butler 1998:78–128). The clubs sponsored other activities from which blacks were barred by segregation, such as soccer teams. However, since parallel institutions duplicate those in the mainstream, generally with far more limited resources, they tend to disappear once segregation is lifted. Thus the numerous black soccer teams eventually disbanded after white social clubs began hiring black players. In some cases, parallel institutions may provide similar services while also including an alternative cultural dimension, causing people to seek them out even after access is granted to mainstream options. Hair care for men and women is often a cultural phenomenon in black communities and continues to exist long after desegregation of the personal service industry.

The alternative community differs from the parallel community in that it offers an alternative worldview and value system, generally valorizing attributes that are considered detriments in the mainstream. The Afro-Brazilian religious communities of *candomblé* in Bahia embodied this tradition. The founding priestess of one of the principal *candomblé* communities, Mãe Aninha, consciously created a distinct black world where clothing was different, Yoruba was the official language, and an African set of customs had to be observed (Butler 1998:199–201; dos Santos 1962). Because of its different set of values, an impoverished older black woman could immediately become a venerated queen merely by crossing the threshold.

Such alternative communities have existed in varying degrees throughout the Afro-Atlantic. The early Rastafarian community of Pinnacle in Jamaica offers another example of this tradition (Barrett 1988:84). Yet it is rare to find autonomous alternative *communities* supported by a range of institutions, despite the fact that there are many alternative traditions and practices. Certain factors appear to be necessary for the development of alternative communities. While further empirical research is needed, a tradition of established maroon communities appears to be essential. Both the candomblé community of Mãe Aninha (Axé Opô Afonjá) and Pinnacle were created on the site of former maroon strongholds and within strong traditions of marronage. Ethnic history may also play a role insofar as concentrations of African nationalities during the slave trade could have led to the preservation of a distinct cohesive set of traditions, albeit by descendants of a variety of nations. This, in fact, was the case with the preservation of candomblé in Bahia. Early in the nineteenth century, the last major African influx was overwhelmingly from the Bight of Benin, from which the Yoruba-based candomblé stems. By the end of the century, with the trade ended, the African population was dying out, but its traditions were being preserved and adapted by the Brazilian-born descendants of numerous backgrounds. Mãe Aninha herself, an ardent defender of Yoruba language and culture, was the child of non-Yoruba parents.

One of the initial questions in my research was why the Brazilian Black Front, so successful in São Paulo's minority black population, failed to win wide support in the larger black community of Salvador. What I realized was that my construction of "blackness," based on my United States perspective, was not universally shared around the Afro-Atlantic diaspora. In São Paulo, the racial identity of blackness was quite pronounced in the most vocal sectors of the Afro-Brazilian community because it was the pivotal basis of their exclusion. This was the sector I had identified as "alternative integrationist." Members of black social clubs and political organizations, they declared themselves "Brazilians as worthy as any other," and attacked racial discrimination as a basis for excluding citizens from full parity in society. The first article of the Brazilian Black Front's statutes is a virtual manifesto of alternative integrationism: "The Frente Negra Brasileira is herein founded in this city of São Paulo to foster the political and social unification of the Black People of this Nation, for the affirmation of the historic rights of same, by virtue of their moral and material activity in the past, and to demand their social and political rights in the Brazilian Community" (*Diário Oficial* 1931). This articulation demands changes in the rules of membership in the mainstream community—in this case, organizing an interest group discriminated by race to force such entrée. It is also important to note that race-based discrimination was the most visible form of discrimination against African descendants in São Paulo.

In contrast, discrimination in Salvador, where most of the population had some African ancestry, played out most notably along cultural lines. A

history of African slave revolts had led to an anti-African backlash, outlawing African music, religion, dance, and language and generally marginalizing African culture. Yet the vibrant Afro-Bahian culture emerged repeatedly in public and private sites of popular culture despite sometimes vicious tactics of repression. Clandestine police squads routinely raided religious gatherings, imprisoning priests and confiscating sacred objects. Intense criticism targeted public festivals such as the feasts of major Catholic saints and Carnival, where African-inspired music and dance prevailed. There was rising concern that Salvador was moving away from a European ideal, as expressed in letters to the editors of the city's daily newspapers around the turn of the twentieth century. "Once again, we remind the police of the necessity, in the name of civilization and to the credit of Bahia, to put a stop to these degrading parades of an entirely African character," complained one letter (*Jornal* 1902). Another feared that "if someone from outside were to judge Bahia by its Carnival, they could not help but place it on a par with Africa. Note that, to our shame, lodging here is a commission of Austrian intellectuals, who are . . . registering these facts to divulge in the cultured European press . . ." (*Jornal* 1903). The problem for Bahian elites was summed up by Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, author of one of the first studies on Afro-Bahian culture: "We consider the predominance of the black race harmful to our nationality, their intolerable influence prejudicial in all cases to the progress and culture of our people" (Rodrigues 1932). Afro-Bahian resistance was therefore directed at the most blatant form of repression which, unlike in São Paulo, was cultural in its orientation.

These two different realities in São Paulo and Salvador led to the defense and assertion of racial identity in the former, and cultural identity in the latter. A theoretical framework for understanding postabolition in the Afro-Atlantic diaspora offers some possible explanations for this outcome. Whereas the civil status of slavery had served as a rationale for marginalizing segments of the population, after abolition the basis of discrimination became more broadly directed toward the general group to which freedpersons belonged. In effect, these new categories of exclusion were the foundations of interest groups with a common cause. Both communities coalesced around these identities of discrimination, using them as the foundation for new solidarities. In São Paulo, the identity of blackness (*negritude*) unified blacks and browns. In Salvador, Africanity took on new meaning as well. Although the elites expected African culture to die out with the African-born population, thus allowing them to set European standards for Bahian culture, they were surprised (and alarmed) to learn that the Brazilian-born were embracing African traditions. The generic "African" cultural umbrella served as a bridge across previously distinct African cultural traditions (known in Bahia as *nações*). These two traditions of self-identification increasingly converged and informed each other throughout the twentieth century so that when a second national black

consciousness movement emerged after the political opening of the 1970s, both racial and cultural affirmations of identity were critical components of the new consciousness. The trajectories by which each emerged hold important keys to postabolition responses in Afro-Atlantic diasporan communities.

The purpose of frameworks is to help identify patterns. In this case, the diasporan framework revealed new possibilities for interpreting the postabolition history of African descendants in other countries besides Brazil. Afro-Cuban history offers a clear example of new issues raised by shifting frameworks. Cuba ended slavery in 1886 during its era of independence wars and after an attempt at a transitional period of apprenticeship for freedpersons (Scott 1985). Afro-Cuban historiography highlights the role earlier in the century of *cabildos*, mutual aid collectives uniting Africans of similar cultural backgrounds. A major slave revolt in 1844 was followed by intense anti-African sentiment and repression, much like that which occurred in Salvador after its Muslim-led slave conspiracy of 1835. As the Catholic Church increasingly coopted the *cabildos*, the next significant type of Afro-Cuban institution to appear on the historical scene was the *sociedad de color* (Howard 1992:151–67). Unlike the *cabildos*, which preserved specific African cultural traditions, the *sociedades de color* were panethnic, basing membership on African ancestry in general, and hence using a “race”-based self-identification as people “of color.” These collectives eventually gave rise to an activist sector which, in turn, created an umbrella organization, a political newspaper, and a national party of color.⁴ The framework for postabolition studies suggests new ways for analyzing the Afro-Cuban case, with a closer look at such factors as region and class in order to understand the diverse sectors of the larger Afro-Cuban population. If, indeed, they fit the patterns noted in Brazil, *cabildos* and *sociedades de color* would have emerged from quite different Afro-Cuban communities. Given the orientation of the *sociedades de color* toward alternative integrationism, there remains the possibility of unexplored separatist traditions that may have developed out of the former *cabildo* membership. Certainly, the religious communities such as the adherents of *santería*, *Lucumí*, and the *Abakuá* maintain distinct psychosocial spaces that fall within the description of alternative societies.⁵ These are issues that remain to be tested with detailed empirical research.

The case for revisiting postabolition in Cuba highlights how, by shifting frameworks, new research questions can emerge. It also illustrates how empirical research on one country can serve to illuminate issues common throughout the diaspora by employing a diasporan framework. At a more basic level, simply viewing abolition as a pan-diasporan phenomenon immediately recasts the history of abolition in any single country. In the United States, for example, abolition is typically taught within a template of standard historical references to Harriet Tubman, the Underground Railroad, the abolitionist movement, Frederick Douglass, the Civil War, and

the Emancipation Proclamation. The diasporan perspective first looks at the United States experience in the broader context of the Americas and the Caribbean, and second, it considers abolition as a decades-long transitional era rather than a single legislative act. Debt peonage of southern sharecroppers, for example, would be compared to other practices keeping black peasants tied to the land around the Afro-Atlantic, prohibiting them from entering more lucrative sectors of the economy. Such a reconsideration of the mechanisms of manipulation used against people of African descent after abolition, along with an analysis of their responses, helps explain the persistence of racial inequalities into the twenty-first century.⁶ For this reason, it is important to test alternatives to traditional narratives of Afro-American experience, and to encourage the development of these alternatives by both graduate students and professional scholars.

The “Gramsci Problem”

All too often, graduate schools swamp students with the literature of their disciplinary fields to the neglect of the philosophical component of the Ph.D. that all humanities and social science scholars share. Thus, when students embark on major research projects, professors typically recommend theoretical frameworks suitable to the topic rather than encouraging students to develop their own. While in many cases this is perfectly appropriate, there is a pressing need for epistemological development within African diaspora studies and diasporan studies in general. It is therefore important to encourage the exploration of new theoretical approaches to African diaspora history wherever possible.

I encountered this problem in graduate school when it became apparent that the political role of culture and identity was going to be of central importance in the research. Professors and colleagues repeatedly suggested that I consult the work of Antonio Gramsci, who wrote about the political uses of identity by both elites and disempowered groups, and the intersection of cultural power with other forms of social leverage.⁷ While this body of theory clearly related to the Brazilian case and was ultimately useful in resolving some of the conceptual problems, I repeatedly felt that it was drawing me away from the heart of the issues I wished to explore. Gramsci, after all, was working out his own problems raised by the responses of Italian peasants to economic and political reorganizations and the rise of an active Communist movement. His was a theoretical framework to help organize and analyze those specific issues, even though they had resonance for other sociohistorical situations. I felt it was equally necessary to shape a theoretical framework based on the unique experiences of the Afro-Atlantic diaspora during the postabolition era.

What I personally labeled “the Gramsci problem” was the application of theories that were based on empirical research on other cultures to

African and African diaspora studies. In my experience with Gramscian theory, while much of his work was applicable to my case studies, I found that a wholesale implementation of his framework was inappropriate. The Afro-Atlantic diaspora merits specific theoretical attention to its collective political history, as has been the case with theories of resistance cultures and cultural change.

The point here is not to criticize professors who recommend theoretical frameworks to their students. Rather, it is to stress the need to develop conceptual constructs that address the specific concerns of African diaspora studies. Models derived from the other historical experiences do not necessarily fit as neatly and therefore lack the specificity required for us to hone our understanding of the African diaspora experience.

Conclusion

While it is impossible within the constraints of the present article to detail fully the intricacies of work developed over ten years, my intention has been to suggest ways to develop and use new perspectives on the African diaspora experience. Diasporan research is as much about a research orientation as it is about the communities being studied. Not every diasporan study need be an exhaustive comparison of multiple cases. Much recent diasporan scholarship sets single-country studies within templates common throughout the entire Afro-Atlantic world, thus allowing for comparative perspectives.⁸

The diasporan viewpoint itself is not new. It has certainly existed as long as Africans have been in diaspora, and the study of the Afro-Atlantic as a discrete unit of analysis has been nurtured in academia since the pioneering work of Melville Herskovits, Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, and others. What *is* new is the wealth of empirical research now available on distinct African diaspora cultures, the legacy of the support for black studies in the 1970s and 1980s. That empirical work can now serve as a basis for the development of an epistemology for African diaspora studies.

One of the critical constraints on new research has been diminishing financial and institutional support. Universities that now cover “black” subjects in traditional disciplines are increasingly dismantling degree-granting black/Africana studies departments in favor of interdisciplinary programs. Not only does this prohibit autonomy in hiring black studies faculty, the lack of intellectual centers such as these also inhibits the development of new theoretical and research trends in the growing fields of diasporan studies and world history.⁹ Additionally, research funds for non-U.S. diasporan history are severely limited.

Scholars of the African diaspora are heirs to a rich intellectual and historical legacy. To the extent that we are able to contribute to the field by honing theory and methodology, we can honor that tradition and enhance

scholarly analysis, not just for the peoples of the African diaspora, but (also in the tradition of black studies) for the study of the human condition at large.

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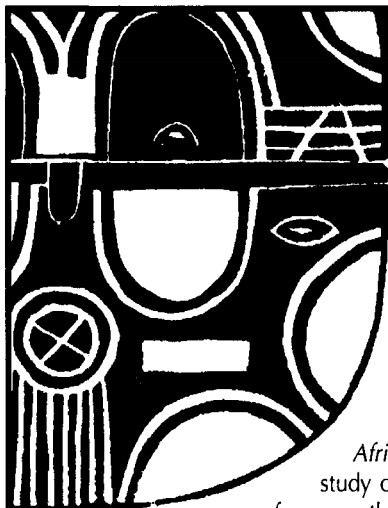
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Notes

1. George Shepperson raised this problem at the first African Diaspora Studies Institute held at Howard University, stressing the need to differentiate types of dispersal. "Without such a realization," he wrote, "the expression 'African diaspora' may be doomed to the study of enforced dispersal only—to slavery" (1982:51).
2. After intermediate measures freeing different categories of slaves (children of slave mothers in 1871, slaves aged sixty and over in 1885), total abolition was enacted on May 13, 1888.
3. See, for example, Bolland (1981:591–619) and Rodney (1981:31–59).
4. On postabolition in Cuba, see Helg (1995). A recent work on the politics of culture in postabolition Cuba is Moore (1997).
5. On the diasporization of Yoruba culture and the evolution of Santería in Cuba and the United States, see Brandon (1993).
6. This has yet to be acknowledged in the canon of numerous academic discourses. Charles Tilly (1990), writing about the period during which blacks became outnumbered by white immigration and were eventually displaced from their traditional occupations, comments that "for reasons no one seems to understand, they were unable to establish new monopolies" (emphasis added).
7. See, for example, Hoare & Smith (1971) and Adamson (1980). Michael George Hanchard (1994) applies Gramscian theory to the study of Afro-Brazilian activism for a later period.
8. Michael A. Gomez (1998) exemplifies this trend.
9. Recently new programs with diasporan focus have been implemented at Flori-

da International University, Michigan State University, and the University of Texas at Austin. Other disciplinary departments, such as the graduate history department at Howard University, have increasingly encouraged diasporan study. In addition, interdisciplinary initiatives such as the Black Atlantic Program at Rutgers University are providing new space for dialogue among diasporan scholars.



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