

Culture and Recognition Thematic Session

3rd Session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent

The Second International Decade for People of African Descent: Addressing Systemic Racism, Reparatory Justice, and Sustainable Development

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I will begin by contextualizing myself with respect to the discussion of Culture and Recognition as related to People of African Descent. My first adolescent journey outside the United States was to spend two months living with an especially enlightened family in the culturally rich Bamoun Kingdom in Cameroon. There I learned a healthy Afrogenic worldview that compensated for the potential alienation of my Eurocentric education.

After more than a hundred more visits to most of the countries in Africa to do field research, lecture, and participate in intellectual and cultural events, plus many more voyages in the Global African Diaspora, my identity is that I am a Citizen of the African Diaspora with a U.S. passport as a result of a ship bringing enslaved Africans to what came to be called the Americas. No one asked my ancestors at which west Atlantic port they wished to disembark, nor by which Euro-colonial nationality they would like to be defined. Neither a complaint nor a value judgement, this is merely an historical fact.

African Descendants in the Americas all have similarly involuntary Euro-colonial identities, as is evident in the languages that define, unite and/or separate, us—Portuguese, English, Spanish, French, and Dutch, including their Creole, or Ebonics, versions. My focus here on the African Diaspora in the Americas is because that is where I have done most of my research, plus it is the area about which most information is available. I understand this hemispheric African Diaspora to include populations from Chile to Canada plus the islands of the Caribbean. As a result, I use the expression “the Americas” to include all of us. I do not use “America” to speak only of the United States.

To be able to talk about the Global nature of the African Diaspora, I have, as a cultural anthropologist, also done research and participated in intellectual and cultural events in the Mascarene Islands in the Indian Ocean, in India with the three major Afro-Indian populations collectively known as Siddis, in Turkey with an organized group of Afro-Turks, and on Melanesian islands in the South Pacific.

Recognition

The first of the three themes of the first United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent, 2015-2024, was Recognition, along with Justice and Development. The theme of Recognition was about recognizing and acknowledging the achievements and contributions to local and global civilization of People of African Descent.

Now in 2024, at the end of the first Decade and beginning of the second, it is apparent that a mere ten years was inadequate for accomplishing the challenging goal of attaining such recognition and appreciation of the achievements and cultural creations of People of African Descent after the centuries of the construction of their denial. The

goal of Recognition must be addressed with greater determination and clear intentionality during the Second Decade for People of African Descent.

This fact is acknowledged in the description of the thematic session on Culture and Recognition, which acknowledges qualities and contributions of People of African Descent, highlights problems stemming from their lack of recognition, and projects benefits to be derived from their being recognized. According to the description:

People of African descent have rich and diverse cultures. Their histories, movements, customs, traditions, spiritualities, arts, intellectual contributions and languages have had and continue to have a great impact on societies. However, people of African descent receive limited recognition for their cultural diversity and contributions to society.

Recognition is a way to celebrate the cultural wealth of Africans and of African descent communities; to foster the protection of their cultural heritages and their free expression; and to validate the substantial contributions of people of African descent to societies. This can help societies become more inclusive and [help] people of African descent build a positive sense of self and a sense of social belonging, which are essential elements for their psychological and emotional well-being.

Given that guiding premise, some essential issues to address are: What is the source of the problem? Why and how do people of African descent receive “limited recognition for their cultural diversity and contributions to society”? How is the problem manifest? And what are we doing and what are we going to do to resolve it?

Compulsory Mis-Education as a Problem

Education through formal schooling, in addition to conveying selected information to tell a specific narrative that is claimed to be true about the history and present of a given society, is also alleged to foster critical thinking rather than just learning to believe sometimes dubious presumed facts. This formal education is compulsory to guarantee that members of the society learn and become convinced of the veracity of a certain narrative, a specific version of the story that has been agreed upon by those who established the foundations of the system. This narrative, among other things, in addition to defining what is valid and valuable knowledge, and who can define it, also determines the roles and places of specific social groupings. Whereas critical thinking is encouraged within criteria compatible with the reigning narrative, critical thinking that is too critical and challenges the premises of the narrative and the data on which it is based, is discouraged, refuted, and may even be punished in various ways.

So, if people of African Descent have such rich and diverse cultures as the description of this panel contends, and have contributed so much to society, why are these qualities and contributions not better known, recognized, appreciated, even celebrated—first and foremost by People of African Descent, for whom discovering such usually denied positivity is a boon, and then by others?

The origin of the problem, about which we need to be clear, is the system of racialized enslavement of Africans and People of African Descent that was created and maintained by Europeans and Euro-descendants throughout the Atlantic World, and that was followed by the colonization of Africa and continued racialized oppression in the Americas. Using their superior weaponry and consequent capacity for violence, European and Euro-descendant enslavers exploited the bodies and brains of Africans

and their descendants to develop the new societies of the Americas. This system began more than five centuries ago and continues to determine belief and behavior today.

To justify their exploitation of the Africans they enslaved because these Africans had the knowledge and skills to develop new societies in what had been Indigenous territory, the enslavers created and perpetuated a narrative in which they defined these Africans and their descendants as inferior beings, ironically lacking the very same knowledge for which they were chosen to be enslaved.

The basis of the problem of the lack of recognition of the achievements and contributions of these Africans and People of African Descent is that we have been taught misrepresentations of the truth by national systems of compulsory education that are based on original structural inequalities. These misrepresentations have been, and continue to be, buttressed by mass media bombardment in increasingly subtle and sophisticated forms.

Together these two sources of information, or mis-information, built from the beginning into the structures of peri-Atlantic societies, which determine and reinforce a worldview that is both pervasive and perverse, support the systemic and systematic inequality foundational to all the societies of the Americas—and beyond, since European colonization and its narratives have affected and infected the whole world.

We must keep in mind the basic fact that the modern societies of the western hemisphere began about 500 years ago with the near genocide of the Indigenous inhabitants due to European diseases and brutal treatment, and the enslaving of Africans to replace them as a labor force by Europeans and Euro-Americans intent on colonizing new territory and enriching themselves. The institutions developed to foster

and maintain those initial human dynamics continue to be foundational to the current societies that evolved from them.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson, the “Father of Black History” who created Black History Week in 1926 that became Black History Month in 1986, identified the problem almost a century ago in his aptly titled 1933 study, The Mis-Education of the Negro. Detailing ways in which the U.S. educational system was deliberately designed to not teach African Americans positive and edifying truths of our history, but rather to promote the myth of white superiority, Woodson stated that, “If a race has no history, if it has no worthwhile tradition, it becomes negligible in the thought of the world, and it stands in danger of being eliminated.”¹

One cannot, of course, mis-educate “the Negro” while accurately educating others in the same national educational system. So as schools mis-educated “Negroes” about ourselves, minimizing our accomplishments and distorting our place in history, schools also mis-educated whites to be xenophobic.

From a different part of the world, but similar to Woodson, Milan Kundera wrote about the “deliberate historical erasure” imposed by the Soviet regime to control his people during its 1948 annexation of his former homeland of Czechoslovakia:

The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have someone write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long the nation

¹ Woodson, Carter G. Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1933.

will begin to forget what it is and what it was, the world around will forget even faster.²

And while teaching in the Graduate School of Education at the University of California at Berkeley, I did a study of educational media designed and selected to teach school children about Africa and the African Diaspora. My title, which doesn't really need commentary, was 'Tarzan in the Classroom': How 'Educational' Media Mythologize Africa and Mis-Educate Americans."³

Were we to know the truth about our history, People of African Descent could be proud of elements of our cultures of which others, who claim to be the definers of knowledge and truth, have taught us to be ashamed. We in the United States have been taught, for example, and have believed those who purported to define us, that we speak bad or broken English. Unfortunately, we have not learned that some of our words, expressions and grammatical structures are not English at all. They are rather continuities from the various African languages that have influenced the linguistic systems that our ancestors created in the Americas, and that often find echoes in more than one African Diasporan version of Euro-colonial languages. Such examples would provide us with better knowledge of our various African origins and, on that basis, of our commonalities with other People of African Descent.

² Kundera, Milan. *Book of Laughter and Forgetting*. NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1980.

³ Initially published in the *Journal of Negro Education* (Vol. 62, No. 1, Winter, 1993), the article was updated and republished as "Revisiting 'Tarzan in the Classroom': How 'Educational' Media Mythologize Africa and Mis-Educate Americans," in *Cartografias curriculares da diáspora africana na América Latina e no Caribe: experiências, abrangência e desafios*, (eds.) Ocoró Loango, Anny & de Jesus, Maria José. Curitiba, Brazil: Universidade Federal do Paraná & Associação de Pesquisadores/as Negros/as, APBN, 2021.

In 2015 at the beginning of the first Decade for People of African Descent, I had what I considered the modest aspiration that by its end we, at least those of us involved with institutions focusing on People of African Descent, and ideally others also, would know what we were talking about when we speak of "People of African Descent." I hoped we would have a clear sense of who and where the People of African Descent who constitute the African Diaspora in the Americas, and globally, are, what we have done and are doing now, and what we have contributed to global civilization. My goal was not met.

In February 2023, I spent time in Bolivia with Afro-Bolivian communities, and was surprised that when I mentioned that fact to several Afrodescendants in the U.S., they said, "I didn't know there were Afro-Bolivians." Whereas I am aware of the reasons for such a lack of knowledge, it is important to know, as a basic pan-American fact, that there is no nation in the Americas that does not have at least one organized Afrodescendent population, including some that have made significant contributions to their nations. This includes countries that are in denial, but in which telltale elements of Afrodescendent culture remain key to expressions of national identities. A most flagrant example is Argentina, which proclaims its Europeanness and denies the Africanity of its history and present. Yet the well-known national dance that characterizes Argentina, the Tango, has a name that comes from the Bantu language family of Central Africa.

Knowing ourselves in the African Diaspora through knowing each other

As people involved with an institution specifically concerned with the interests of People of African Descent, we especially need to know who and what we're talking about. I assume that our desire to know more about ourselves globally is a basis of why we are so involved. We need to know where People of African Descent are, what we have in

common, which of our characteristics are unique and why, and what are similar and different issues that concern our communities.

We also need to learn about and recognize our specific African origins, which have determined so much of our current behavior and so much of what we have in common. Otherwise we run the risk of attributing behaviors that are actually expressions of a sense of African agency to our being oppressed by others. We may see ourselves, disempoweringly, as oppressed minorities in our various nations, rather than celebrating our achievements and contributions, in spite of oppressive situations, as part of our being part of the People of the Global Majority.

Given the ways in which enslavers scattered African people throughout the Americas, it is quite reasonable that we might find, without knowing the specifics, people from our original African extended families in far-flung Diasporan communities distant from our own. The family name of my great grandmother was Congo, as is that of many of my U.S. cousins. So when I met people named Congo in Chota Valley in Ecuador, it felt natural to say, "Hola Primo/a." "Hey Cuz." I usually needed to explain that to people who didn't know their African history. And when I did, it made sense and pleased them.

Knowing other African Diasporan communities helps us know our own, as we serve as mirrors to each other. The obvious Africanity of some societies, for example, can elucidate the more subtle, or unknown or unacknowledged, Africanity of others. I only came to understand an aspect of U.S. African American Protestantism when I attended ceremonies for Orishas, Yoruba spiritual beings from West Africa, in Salvador da Bahia in Brazil. The U.S. had given me questions, but no answers. Nor did it give me possible sources of answers because the answers came from our African heritage, and we didn't recognize our Africanity—which was so obvious and acknowledged in Bahia.

It is also important for us to know the details of our specific national, regional, and even local narratives, so that we don't assume similarities when we need to contemplate differences. In Brazil, for example, until the consciousness-raising and activism of the MNU (Movimento Negro Unificado/United Black Movement) beginning in the late 1970s, many Afro-Brazilians believed the national narrative (or hype) that declared that Brazil was a "racial democracy" with none of the segregation and racial discrimination that flourished in the United States. As a result, some Afro-Brazilians did not understand the discriminatory treatment that they received, and now talk about when they "became Black," when they began to understand Brazilian racism and become consciously Black.

The idea of "becoming Black" is difficult for U.S. African Americans to understand, since we are born and stay Black. As a result of this evolution of Afro-Brazilian consciousness, about 57% of the population, who now speak of the "myth of racial democracy," have come to self-identify as Black. As a result, Brazil is the first nation of the African Diaspora in the Americas and the second Black nation in the world after Nigeria.

On the other end of the spectrum, Afrodescendants from South American communities with small populations, whose existence has been denied by both their governments and their co-nationals, have often been assumed to be Brazilian, so foreigners in their own countries. At home they have had to insist that they are Afro-Argentinean, Afro-Bolivian, Afro-Paraguayan, Afro-Chilean. These populations have fought to be recognized by their governments as distinctive groups and to be counted as such in national censuses.

A book I edited with Spanish-speaking Afro-South Americans composed of chapters providing analyses about their own communities, Conocimiento desde adentro: Los

afrosudamericanos hablan de sus pueblos y sus historias⁴ (Knowledge from the Inside: Afro-South Americans Speak of their People and their Stories), offers interesting comparisons that help African Diasporan societies understand each other.

Oscar Bilbao Lobaton of Peru⁵ spoke in his chapter of the negative influence on present-day Afro-Peruvians of the idea that “they gave us our freedom,” that their ancestors were passive in the face of enslavement. The truth, he asserted, was rather that most Afro-Peruvians had already liberated themselves before the government declared “emancipation.” So once the truth of this history was known, these self-emancipated Afro-Peruvians became models for their descendants as people who fought for their freedom, so as inspiring prototypes for present activists.

A parallel in the United States is the idea that African Americans were passive and did not revolt during the period of enslavement, as happened elsewhere in the Americas. A book that was required reading when I was in graduate school affirmed that African Americans had acquired passive “Sambo” personalities. Other required readings insisted that there were few revolts and even fewer maroon communities in the United States, which subsequent research has proven to be false. That assumption of passivity led to a dearth of research about expressions of resistance, and a perspective on U.S. African American history that was both disempowering and false.

⁴ Conocimiento desde adentro: Los afrosudamericanos hablan de sus pueblos y sus historias, Sheila S. Walker, Editor. Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, Kitabu Editora, 2018.

⁵ Bilbao Lobaton, Oswaldo. *Los afroperuanos: Retrospectiva y situación actual*, in Conocimiento desde adentro: Los afrosudamericanos hablan de sus pueblos y sus historias. Sheila S. Walker, Editor. Popayan, Colombia, Universidad del Cauca, 2012.

Also in Conocimiento desde adentro, Marta Salgado Henriquez from Chile⁶ wrote of “criaderos de negros,” breeding farms like those created in the Upper South of the United States after Africans were no longer legally imported to the nation beginning in 1808. Especially in Maryland and Virginia, when tobacco became less profitable, enslavers began to breed enslaved people like animals, to be “sold down the river,” an expression used casually by many people without giving a thought to its origin. They were often walked, chained together in coffles, hundreds of miles to the Lower South where cotton was king, and where the biggest market for enslaved Afrodescendants was on the Mississippi River in New Orleans. So phenomena that seem to be singular characteristics of specific Diasporic communities may instead suggest similarities of both facts and interpretations in others, and may also suggest directions for further research.

After Conocimiento desde adentro was translated from Spanish into Portuguese and published by the Afro-Brazilian Kitabu Editora, I was thrilled when several Afro-Brazilians told me how important the book had been to them by helping them know other African Diasporic communities to compare with their own. In addition, the theoretical and methodological perspectives of looking at their own communities desde adentro, from the inside, based on their own points of view rather than on those of others who arrogantly assumed the right to define them, had allowed them to finish masters and doctoral theses about their own culture.

Changing the Narrative and Shifting the Paradigm

⁶ Salgado Henriquez, Marta. *El legado africano en Chile*, in Conocimiento desde adentro: Los afrosudamericanos hablan de sus pueblos y sus historias. Sheila S. Walker, Editor. Popayan, Colombia, Universidad del Cauca, 2012.

I organized in 1996, as director of the Center for African and African American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin, an international conference on "The African Diaspora and the Modern World," focusing on the contributions of Africans and their descendants to the creation and development of the Americas. I invited to the conference more than sixty noted scholars and community leaders and artists from more than twenty countries in Africa, Europe, and South, Central and North America and the Caribbean. The results of their provocative presentations formed the basis of the volume I edited, African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas,⁷ and the companion documentary I produced, "Scattered Africa: Faces and Voices of the African Diaspora."⁸

Educator Dr. Jean Marie Robbins, viewing "Scattered Africa" in the period of heightened global consciousness of systemic inequities following the filmed police murder of George Floyd in 2020, said that a statement made by the conference keynote speaker, Dr. Charles H. Long, had provoked for her a "paradigm shift." The statement was, "Without understanding the Africans in the Atlantic World, you cannot have a clear understanding of what the modern world is."⁹

That statement led her to recognize the extent to which the contributions of Africans to the creation of the Americas, and African Descendants' achievements in spite of enslavement and continuing oppression, have been fundamental, and also ignored, minimized and distorted, in order to tell a whitewashed story of the Americas as a European and Euro-American creation.

⁷ Walker, Sheila S. African Roots/American Cultures: Africa in the Creation of the Americas, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001.

⁸ "Scattered Africa: Faces and Voices of the African Diaspora," Afrodiaspora, Inc., 2017 (2001).

⁹ Ibid.

Dr. Long asserted that a rewriting of the story of Africans in the Atlantic World and in the Americas is therefore essential to correct the falsehoods that we have been taught. Dr. Robbins also insisted that the kind of paradigm shift that she experienced, a radical reunderstanding of the reigning narrative, is essential if we want to know the true story of the Americas. The Concept Statement for this session on Culture and Recognition suggests, a quarter of a century after my conference, edited book, and documentary, that this paradigm-shifting information about the importance of Africans in the Atlantic World and the Americas has still not been recognized.

Recognition of Foundational Lies about Africans in the Americas

The three themes of the first International Decade for People of African Descent were Recognition, Justice, and Development. Recognition is the most fundamental and is foundational to the others. Recognition has also been the most neglected of the themes—by the United Nations, by member states, and by civil society institutions. Why? Because addressing the issue of Recognition honestly obligatorily changes the narrative about People of African Descent from the perspectives of both Afrodescendants and of others.

Changing the narrative by “recognizing” and acknowledging the truths of the Americas is key. Current narratives are based on a few fundamental lies that create a vertical, hierarchical, relationship between Africans and Afrodescendants and Europeans and Eurodescendants, with the latter at the top determining what constitutes valid knowledge and information, and how they will treat those they consider below them.

Compulsory educational systems have taught that Africans contributed nothing to the creation of the Americas. But documented demographic information indicates that most

of the people who created the foundations of the modern Americas were Africans and People of African Descent. Of 6.5 million people who crossed the Atlantic from Africa and Europe to the Americas during the first 300 years of the slightly more than 500 year history of the modern Americas, 5.5 million people were African. One million was European.¹⁰ That immense African majority must be considered when contemplating the foundation of the Americas. How can the Americas be a European creation if during the first three formative centuries, most of the humans who did this creating were Africans and African Descendants?

Another foundational lie was that Africans were brought to the Americas only to do the hard work imposed upon and presumably taught to them by their enslavers. They allegedly brought no knowledge or skills with them from Africa. That is patently absurd given that European colonizers wanted to build new societies that required skills and knowledge that they did not have. Most of the areas of enslavement in the Americas were tropical or subtropical, involving, for example, the cultivating of foodstuffs with which they were unfamiliar, and some of which have maintained their African identities in various parts of the Americas.

Many people are now saying that we need to “change the narrative” around People of African Descent, often without defining the specifics of what the narrative is and how it needs changing, and usually without offering specific solutions about what to change, to what to change it, and how to do so. Understanding comparatively the narratives of People of African Descent is essential to figuring out what needs changing and how. A major area in which a generalized narrative of the Americas needs changing is about labor.

¹⁰ Eltis, David (coord.) (2021). The TransAtlantic Slave Trade: A Database. <https://www.slavevoyages.org>.

Rather than the importation of an ignorant labor force, as too many others have maintained, and as too many African Descendants have believed, the enslaving of Africans should be more accurately viewed as a brain drain and a transfer of technology from Africa to the Americas. European and Euro-American enslavers had knowledge of which Africans had which knowledge, and named parts of the African coast in consequence, such as the "rice coast" and the "gold coast." U.S. plantation owners requested that captains of ships bringing enslaved people to their areas bring, for example, "rice negroes" who knew the complex technology involved in rice cultivation, which they did not know. Posters in Charleston, South Carolina and elsewhere announced the arrival and sale of "rice negroes."

In the 1400s, the Portuguese were involved in a legitimate trade with people on what they called "a costa da mina," the coast of mines, that later became the British Gold Coast colony. When they later "discovered" the gold of the Indigenous people of South America, the Portuguese began to enslave their former African trading partners to extract gold from the mines of the exterminated Indigenous South American populations. They called these African gold metallurgists "negros minas," "mining negroes." A saying in Ouro Preto in the state of Minas Gerais was that the presence of "Negros Minas" in gold mines brought "an almost magical luck for finding gold." I would suggest that these "Negros Minas" brought with them more technological knowledge than magic.

The UN General Assembly and the Brooklyn Adolescents

I felt honored when the United Nations Remember Slavery Programme invited me to deliver the Keynote Address to the General Assembly for the March 25, 2016

International Day of Remembrance of the Victims of Slavery and the Transatlantic Slave Trade. But the title I was given, "Remembering Slavery: Celebrating the Heritage and Culture of the African Diaspora and its Roots," was problematic. How could I so casually juxtapose the words "slavery" and "celebrating?"

Some adolescents from Brooklyn came to my rescue.

A few years earlier I had been invited to show at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn the documentary "Slave Routes: A Global Vision" that my colleague, Georges Collinet, and I had produced for UNESCO's Slave Route Project. The documentary is on the UN website. Brooklyn being Brooklyn, I assumed that the kids in the audience represented an ultimate cross-section of Africa and the African Diaspora.

After the showing I asked the audience for questions and comments. A young man spoke up. I wish I could find him to tell him how important his comment was to me.

"It looks like our teachers didn't tell us the whole story," he said. "They didn't teach us about so much of what you showed us."

"What did they leave out?" I asked, curious about what he might tell me.

"Like that we're not just in the United States. But that we're all over the Americas. Even all over the world. That we're in places we never think about. Like India, where Africans ruled over Indians. Why don't schools teach us the kinds of things you showed us in your film?"

His comments opened the way for his peers to jump in.

“Right. Why didn’t we learn that some Africans were enslaved for what they knew and for how smart they were?” another student asked. “Why were we taught that they were dumb and did mindless work on plantations and got whipped by people who owned them? Who wants that as our only image of our ancestors?”

“Yeah,” a third added. “Why doesn’t school teach us stuff that would make us proud of our ancestors and make other people respect us, like what you showed us in your film? They only teach us stuff that makes us ashamed to be descendants of people who were enslaved. It’s like they’re hiding the truth. They’re only teaching the bad parts and hiding the good parts of our story.”

With the Brooklyn adolescents in mind, I began my United Nations General Assembly Keynote by saying that to associate “remembering slavery” with “celebrating” seemed contradictory—unless we remember slavery differently. Unless we tell the story of slavery, and of the contemporary Global African Diaspora that resulted from it, in the more complete ways that current research makes not only possible but even imperative—assuming that our intention is to tell the truth.¹¹

To prepare for my keynote, I had read United Nations documents about the International Decade for People of African Descent, and I had found some of the premises troubling. The “Programme of Activities for the Decade” recommended, for example, insuring “that textbooks and other educational materials reflect historical facts accurately as they relate to past tragedies and atrocities.”¹²

¹¹ “Slave Routes: A Global Vision,” UN WEBtv.

¹² UN document — Program of Action for the UN Decade for People of African Descent

But the Brooklyn adolescents said there was already too much emphasis on “tragedies and atrocities,” and on victimization. There was not enough, they said, highlighting of the contributions and triumphs of People of African Descent.

It is obviously imperative to educate the descendants of both the enslaved and the enslavers about the horrors of slavery, because consequences of that system determine and explain much of today’s structural racism throughout the Atlantic world and beyond. But for educational materials to “reflect historical facts accurately,” they must, as the Brooklyn adolescents insisted, also, and especially, recognize the creativity, the accomplishments and the contributions of People of African Descent—in spite of the tragedies and atrocities. We should listen to the Brooklyn adolescents when we consider what to do to resolve the problem of the failure to recognize African and Afrodescendent culture and recognize contributions to global civilization.

What we have done

As a cultural anthropologist focusing on the Global African Diaspora, I produced a documentary based on images from my field research, “Familiar Faces/Unexpected Places: A Global African Diaspora.”¹³ It emphasized the demographics of the Americas and the brain drain and transfer of technology that Africans and their Descendants brought from Africa to the Americas. The documentary was shown as the 2018 Black History Month activity of the International Decade for People of African Descent, in collaboration with the Association for the Study of African American Life and History, at UN headquarters in New York. It was then sent around the world, with my subtitles in relevant languages, by the UN Remember Slavery Programme for showing at UN

¹³ “Familiar Faces/Unexpected Places: A Global African Diaspora” Afrodiaspora, Inc. 2018.

Information Centers in Africa, the Americas, Asia and the Pacific, and Europe. I have subsequently shown the documentary in many national and international venues.

The International Civil Society Working Group for the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent (ICSWG) showed the documentary to inform its members about the Diaspora on the occasion of the first United Nations Day of People of African Descent, August 31, 2022.

Acknowledging the global and polylingual nature of People of African Descent, the ICSWG showed the documentary on-line in the four languages in which it is subtitled, with a discussion in each, to audiences for which invitations to join were sent to Lusophone, Hispanophone, Francophone, and Anglophone Afrodescendent communities.

The ICSWG also showed an edited version of the documentary, with Spanish subtitles because we knew Spanish-speakers would be present at the showing, at the initial ICSWG side event at the second session of the Permanent Forum on People of African Descent in New York on May, 29, 2023.

Providing proper recognition to African and African Descendent tradition-keepers, artists, musicians . . .

The instructions for this panel spoke of the importance of providing proper recognition to African and African Descendent tradition-keepers, artists, musicians, writers etc., including the issue of cultural appropriation.

When I think of highly conscious culture bearers, whose art we can appreciate and from whom we can learn much, who might be invited to future fora such as this one, I inevitably think of Mateus Aleleuia from Cachoeira, Bahia, Brazil, who lived for years in Angola; as well as African American musician Rhiannon Giddens, who knows a great deal about the African roots of African American musics and their influences on what is considered U.S. music.

Giddens said of the white male country music establishment's rejection of singer Beyoncé's *Cowboy Carter* album, that they needed to learn about the African roots of their presumably white music. The banjo, a key instrument in the genre, came from West Africa, as even Thomas Jefferson, third president of the United States and enslaving drafter of the Declaration of Independence that declared liberty and justice for all, knew. Perhaps he learned that from Sally Hemmings, the enslaved Afrodescendent mother of all of his children, whom he did not free.

From the Caribbean coast of Colombia I would think of the Escuela Taller de Tambores de Cabildo de La Boquilla that not only preserves the musical culture of the region, but also teaches it to the children of La Boquilla as the basis of a community development project. To complete the Euro-colonial languages of the Americas, I think of AM4 from Francophone/Kweyolofone Martinique, that preserves the music/dance/song style of the Kweyol dance, Bele.

As musicians appeared at the last meeting of the Permanent Forum, perhaps the individuals and groups above could be invited to subsequent meetings to educate while entertaining.

Promoting Recognition during the Second International Decade for People of African Descent

Ten more years is a very short time in which to seek to resolve a problem that has been being exacerbated over several centuries. We must, however, act on various levels simultaneously and in various ways to find solutions for the failure to give proper recognition to the contributions of Africans and People of African Descent to their regions and to global civilization. We must include individual efforts as well as seeking the support of organizations and institutions from grassroots to international.

The exhortation for People of African Descent to create new narratives for our own benefit, to change false and disempowering narratives, and to teach them to others so they too can know the true stories of everyone so we can together affirm and act based on an accurate version of the narratives of the Americas, is not new.

Dr. Carter G. Woodson wrote of the issue in 1933, Bob Marley sang about it in "Redemption Song" in 1978 when he said, "Emancipate yourself from mental slavery; None but ourselves can free our minds," which was inspired by a similar statement from a speech by Marcus Garvey in 1930. And Jimmy Cliff sang of the consequences of the problem until it finds a solution in "Poor Slave" in 1973:

"The definition of a slave means ones that aren't free entirely; So a slave is still a slave If he can't think independently; Poor slave. Take the shackles off your body. Poor slave. Put the shackles on your mind."

We obviously can not wait for the United Nations to implement goals they declare are important. We must also pursue our own activities toward these ends, while continuing

to insist that the United Nations live up to its own words. The 2001 Durban Declaration, under the rubric, "Education and awareness-raising measures:

urges the United Nations, other appropriate international and regional organizations and States to redress the marginalization of Africa's contribution to world history and civilization by developing and implementing a specific and comprehensive programme of research, education and mass communication to disseminate widely a balanced and objective presentation of Africa's seminal and valuable contribution[s] to humanity.¹⁴

This exhortation, from the 2001 United National World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, still remains to be implemented. Promoting equal access to schooling, it also urges as a concrete action, the "Inclusion of the history and continuing contribution of Africans and people of African descent in education curricul[a]."

The curricula of educational institutions need to reflect an accurate portrayal of Africa and People of African Descent, of their histories and roles in society, and of their continuing contributions to everyday life. Since schooling is generally compulsory, a major way to change the narrative is to change the messages conveyed by schools. To accomplish this goal, it is essential to educate educators, as well as media influencers, to say nothing of ourselves. To educate educators we need interventions on the level of teacher training programs and institutions. Some of my goals for our second decade are:

¹⁴ Durban Declaration and Programme of Action, 2001, 57.

— to banish the word “slave” from our vocabularies and those of others, and with it the disempowering concepts that it includes, replacing it with “enslaved”.

—to make known, including to members of it, the existence and nature of the Global African Diaspora, including its similar and different African origins, and its obvious and unsuspected both cultural commonalities and unique features.

—to help Africans and African Diasporans understand the value of knowing and appreciating our relationships with each other.

—to help the communities of the African Diaspora know what their ancestors contributed to the creation of the Atlantic World, the Americas, and global civilization.

To work toward accomplishing these goals, we can begin by partnering with educational institutions to infuse positive information into school curricula at different levels. To begin with myself, before coming here I discussed with the executive director of a non-profit organization whose goal is to globalize teaching and learning in Washington, D.C., the idea of creating a curriculum about the Global African Diaspora for primary and secondary school teachers. Working with an organization that supports educational programs, but that is not hamstrung by school bureaucracies, will allow us the freedom to implement effective activities. We will use my edited volumes and documentary films among other teaching materials. We will figure out the best way to work with interested teachers and will create a pilot project to determine what works best, which we will then seek to replicate and institutionalize.

I urge others involved with the Permanent Forum for People of African Descent to begin similar initiatives, adapted to their own realities, and suggest that we compare notes

periodically to determine best practices. This body is an excellent one in which to implement such consciousness-raising and concrete activities.

I anticipate from you other participants feedback, collaboration in your own ways, and more proposals for how we can, in addition to continuing to urge the United Nations, in this case the Human Rights Commission, to propose methods for living up to the promise of the Durban Declaration.