

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>Joseph E. Holloway. *Africanisms in American Culture*. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), xviii-xx.

<sup>2</sup>Halford H. Fairchild. "Black, Negro, or Afro-American? The Differences are Crucial!", *Journal of Black Studies* 16 (Sept. 1985): 47-55; K. Sue Jewell. "Will the Real Black, Afro-American, Mixed, Colored, Negro Please Stand Up? Impact of the Black Social Movement, Twenty Years Later," *Journal of Black Studies* 16 (Sept. 1985): 57-75; Also see Alfred Yankauer. "Hispanic/Latino--What's in a Name?", *American Journal of Public Health* 77, No. 1 (January 1987): 15-17; Aida Hurtado and Carlos H. Arce. "Mexicans, Chicanos, Mexican Americans, or Pochos . . . que somos? The Impact of Language and Nativity on Ethnic Labeling," *Aztlan* 17, 1 (Spring 1986): 103-130; Halford H. Fairchild and Joy Asamen Cozens. "Chicano, Hispanic, or Mexican American: What's in a Name?", *Hispanic Journal of Behavioral Sciences* 3, 2 (1981): 191-198 for a similar perspective of another ethnic group's label identification change movement.

<sup>3</sup>"African-American or Black: What's in a Name? Prominent Blacks and/or African-Americans Express their Views," *Ebony* 44, 9 (July 1989): 76.

<sup>4</sup>*Ebony*, 76, 78, 80.

<sup>5</sup>Fairchild, (Sept. 1985) 54.

<sup>6</sup>Fairchild, 53, stated Garvey campaigned for the adoption of the term "negro" rather than "black" for he felt it connoted more dignity and respect.

<sup>7</sup>In fact, one can see in *Ebony* (July 1989) the ambivalence of various black leaders on whether to acknowledge the use of the terms "Black" or "African American," others as well have questioned usage, e.g., U.S. Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, *New York Times* (Oct. 16, 1989); Martin Kilson. "What is Africa to Me" Dilemmas of Transnational Ethnicity," *Dissent* 31 (Fall 1984): 433-440.

## Critique

In "'Black' or 'African American': What's in a Name?" Johnny Washington reminds us that the debate on the

appropriate name for Americans of African descent has been ongoing, with varying degrees of intensity, for a long time. In illustrating the ancientness of the debate, he referred to precedents of the current irruption. He observed that "Booker T. Washington advanced the ethnic identity debate" in the 1890s. He also pointed to twentieth century contributions to the labelling crisis by W. E. B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, Alain Locke, and Stokely Carmichael. Yet, neither the debate nor the labels themselves are the core concern for Washington's article. Rather, with emphasis on Locke's concept of race in a social culture context and C. I. Lewis's thesis on linguistic and sense meaning, philosophy and linguistics are the primary concerns of the article. The debate and the labels serve as incidental pegs for the analysis. Though still in the exploratory stage, the author's juxtaposing of the debate against linguistic and philosophical theories is both interesting and illustrative.

Washington's article can be viewed as an entreaty for historians and social scientists to explore labelling of Africans in the diaspora, though the discussion is limited to the United States. He underscores a void in American social history. A number of popular cultural interpreters have addressed changes in the labels used to identify people of African descent in the United States. Few scholars have paid serious attention to the evolution, however. As a result of both the approach of popular observers and the neglect by serious scholars, the examination of the debate remains almost virginal.

Ethnic labels, as Washington and Locke suggest, are more than applying appellations to groups. Ethnic consciousness, ethnic debasement, time, nationalism, events, and group size are some of the determinants which might influence the adoption of an ethnic label. Few participants of the current debate acknowledge that black and African were among labels used by European colonists in seventeenth century Virginia and New England to identify Africans and individuals of African descent. As identifying labels, African, Negro, and Colored gained currency and predominated for a time because of their use by the dominant society. Some other predominant names, including Colored, Afro-American, Black and African American, rose to primacy because of the insistence of the named group. Scholars who accept the challenge to venture beyond Washington's exploratory exposition to conduct more extensive investigations of ethnic titles in American society provided by Washington must work from the vantage point that competing labels have been applied to blacks in the United States beginning with the arrival of the Africans and continuing

throughout the history of the nation. Such scholars might also reconsider his assertion that the parallel use of Black, Negro, Colored, and African American is "in itself" evidence of a "self-contradictory attitude within the black community on this name or ethnic identity question."

They might also address time as a factor in the debate. When did the debate begin if Washington's conclusion that Booker T. Washington heightened the ethnic designation discussion in the closing decade of the nineteenth century is correct? What caused the debate to start? The inclusion of the time factor should lead to other considerations, including the nature of the debate, its participants, and the economic, social and political environments which conditioned the debate's directions as well as provide possible explanations for the rise, fall, success, and failure of different labels. Washington is on solid ground in inferring that Locke's "New Negro," was designed to make manifest the arrival of a new more socially self-secured Afro-American. "New Negro" failed to gain wide-spread acceptance, however. Perhaps it failed because its appeal was much too limited as has been said for the movement which was associated with the term. Or then again it failed because the term connoted a new militancy which repulsed many blacks as well as many whites. If the latter is true, then, indirectly, Washington might have provided a basis to explain the generational acceptance of the term black.

In short the topic is ripe for the use of models and theories of social and political change. Thus, for example, an examination of the debate in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries would not only substantiate Washington's observation on the Sage of Tuskegee, his philosophy of accommodation and self-help, and his promotion of "Afro-American" or the emergence of DuBois and Monroe Trotter and other champions of "Colored," but also probe into the philosophy of Bishop Henry McNeil Turner of the African Methodist Episcopal church who called on "Negroes" to immigrate to Africa. Reference to societal environmental factors could lead to the positing of hypotheses on the acceptance of new names and the discarding of old.

The article also begs for devoting greater scholarly attention to connections between native African Americans and blacks from elsewhere in the diaspora. It evokes thoughts of the core premise of the philosophy of Negritude: that the stamp of Africa remains in its children wherever they might venture and regardless of the generations abroad. Stokely Carmichael and Marcus Garvey, among those cited by Washington, originated in

the diaspora. In the United States both lived among sizeable concentrations of West Indians. Garvey, who came to the United States as an adult and who spent only a rather short time in this country, regarded countries and territories with sizeable numbers of people of African descent to be his stage and such people to be his subjects. It has been theorized that Garvey's consciousness was consistent with the assertiveness found in many immigrants. He just happened to be black. Thus his occasional use of "black," and his simultaneous incorporation of Negro into the title of his primary association and black into a number of its subsidiary organizations could have been free of any significance apart from the philosophy which had driven him into action. Carmichael, now Kwame Toure as Washington reminded us, lives in Guinea where he has spent most of the past decade. Washington credits him, in his personal evolution from Negro to Black to African American, with crossing psychological barriers more noted predecessors, including DuBois, Garvey and Locke, were unable or unwilling to surmount. Long conscious that personal and societal factors are involved in how people identify themselves, Carmichael who popularized "black power" and who now styles himself to be an African might want to modify his dictum that "inside every Negro there is a potential black" person, which he stated almost three decades ago. Washington and others should continue to explore ideas and possibilities which flow from "'Black' or 'African American': What's in a Name?"

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