“The Veiled Garvey: The Life and Times of Amy Jacques Garvey was one those books that set the stage of my academic career. I read the book years ago and continually find myself rehashing Dr. Taylor's arguments about feminist politics and Black nationalist movements.”

- Monique Liston
Greetings from the Chair

As chair of the Department of Africology at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I am grateful to be a part of a vibrant academic community in which undergraduate students, graduate students, faculty, and staff are doing important work in the academy and the community. Reflecting back on my first semester as department chair and looking ahead to the coming academic year, I’m particularly proud of all that is happening here, and wish to take this opportunity to share some of it with you.

Joining us for the 2014-2015 academic year are two outstanding visiting faculty members, Gladys Mitchell-Walthour and Ermitte St. Jacques. Dr. Mitchell-Walthour comes to us following a postdoctoral fellowship at Harvard’s Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies for her work on "Voting While Black in Brazil: Racial Identification, Racism, and Afro-Brazilian Political Behavior." Dr. St. Jacques joins us after a postdoctoral fellowship in Department of Anthropology at the University of Denver for her work on "Economic Mobility and the Transnational Practices of West Africans in Catalonia, Spain." They will be teaching courses this year on such topics as political movements, public policy, development, social institutions, migration, transnationality, identity, and diaspora. We also look forward to hosting talks by both visiting faculty members.

In September 2014, we welcomed our fifth cohort of doctoral students. We now have students at all stages of their doctoral work, from those who are taking their very first graduate courses to those who are ABD and working on their dissertations. In the past year, graduate students have achieved such milestones as successfully completing comprehensive exams and preliminary exams, writing and defending dissertation proposals, securing competitive fellowships and travel funding, publishing in peer-reviewed journals, presenting at conferences—including the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the National Council for Black Studies—and organizing the Africology Workshop Series, at which many students and faculty presented their research in progress. Our students also continue the strong tradition of African, African American, and African Diaspora Studies scholars who engage in community-based research and service to the community; for example, this year graduate students Anastacia Scott and Crystal Edwards, along with community partners Derrick “Baba” Rogers and Dr. Marcus L. Arrington, were granted a Community-University Partnership Grant for their Africology Now Youth Initiative (ANYI) which will provide academic support and mentorship to students at Milwaukee’s Transition High School. This is just one of many examples of the important work happening amongst our doctoral students.

Some of the events we have hosted, sponsored, or co-sponsored in 2014 include a Community Brainstorming Conference on the topic of Austerity Economics and Its impact on the Black Community; a popular panel entitled African American Men, Prisons, Families, Community, Fatherhood and Change in Wisconsin, which drew over seventy students and sixty-five community members; a talk and signing by Dr. Anika Wilson on her newly published work, Folklore, Gender and AIDS in Malawi: No Secret Under the Sun; the 2014 Latin American Film Series; the 2014 Milwaukee Film Festival screening of Finding Fela; the 2014 Global Health Day book talk on Medicine and the Saints: Science, Islam, and the Colonial Encounter in Morocco, 1877-1956 and screenings of A Walk to Beautiful and Dark Forest, Black Fly; Dr. Bruce Western’s keynote address at the Urban Studies 50th Anniversary Conference; and the celebration of the conferring of an honorary doctorate to Dr. Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Chair of African American Studies at Harvard University. We anticipate more exciting events in the coming academic year and hope you will join us! Please visit our website for information on upcoming events, as well as to read more about the work being done by our faculty and students, provide feedback, and give to the Department of Africology: uwm.edu/letsci/africology/

I am grateful to the students, faculty, staff, and community members who make the Department of Africology a meaningful and productive space of learning, growth, and service. We look forward to another great year ahead!
Remembering History: The Civil Rights Act of 1964

Crystal Ellis - first year doctoral student in the Department of Africology

This summer I had the honor of participating in an event celebrating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 organized by the United States Department of Civil Rights. By a competitive process, forty-two graduate, undergraduate and professional degree students were chosen from across the nation. The two day remembrance began on Tuesday, July 1st 2014, at the U.S. Department of Education in Washington D.C. Here we were greeted by Olegario D. Cantos VII, special counsel to the Assistant Secretary, who gave us an overview of the two day celebration. The first day consisted of a meet and greet with the other students, and six of the original Freedom Riders, whom we would join the following day in a symbolic Freedom Ride to Richmond Virginia. The Freedom Riders were: Dion Diamond, Rev. Reginald Green, John Moody, Joan Trumpauer Mulholland, Charles Person and Hank Thomas. The second day of the event began with an opening ceremony filled with student presentations, and speeches from the Civil Rights Freedom Riders, and several national and international press interviews.

The truly impacting aspect of this trip happened on the symbolic Freedom Ride from D.C. to Richmond, Virginia. As we rode with the Freedom Riders, they shared with us their experiences during those crucial moments. One of the riders, Hank Thomas, stated:

“....as the fire grew outside I had two options, either get off the bus to be beaten to death by the mob, or be consumed by the fire. I decided that it would be better to be taken by the fire”

I had the honor of being assigned to sit on the bus with John Moody and Hank Thomas, two riders who not only had a deep relationship with each other, but also had relationships with Stokely Carmichael, Malcolm X and The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. They shared with us their individual perception of the means these leaders went about and also proposed thought provoking questions to the group that stimulated debate on topics such as education, intergenerational miscommunications of racism, and the accessibility black people have in our society now and 50 years ago.

The event concluded when we were greeted at the Richmond Capitol Building by U.S. Senator Mark Warner, Virginia Gov. Terry McAuliffe. Both of whom, along with the six Freedom Riders gave speeches highlighting the significance of the moment, and the significant change that has occurred over the past 50 years.
The Economic Impact of Racial Prejudice on Blacks in the U.S.

Nolan Kopkin - Assistant Professor of Africology

In “Prejudice and Wages: An Empirical Assessment of Becker’s The Economics of Discrimination,” an oft-cited article in the Journal of Political Economy, Charles & Guryan (2008) empirically test the implications of Becker’s seminal theory. Becker’s theory of employer discrimination postulates that most employers are willing to hire a black employee, but racially prejudiced employers will unfairly seek to compensate themselves for their aversion to blacks by paying their black employees lower wages. Under this theory, black employees will be hired by the least-prejudiced employers within the local labor market and the equilibrium wage of blacks, at which full employment is achieved, will unjustly reflect the prejudice of the “marginal employer,” the least prejudiced employer by which a black worker is hired. One implication that stems from Becker’s description of how discriminatory behavior impacts black workers is that those labor markets where the “marginal employer” of blacks is relatively prejudiced will pay a lower wage to black employees than a labor market where the “marginal employer” is unprejudiced toward blacks, holding constant a worker’s skill level.

To test this implication, Charles & Guryan (2008) form an index of prejudicial attitudes using questions asked in the General Social Survey (GSS). The questions that they use to estimate how prejudiced each individual is towards blacks include questions such as whether respondents would vote for a black candidate for president, support laws against interracial marriage, object to sending their kids to a school with black students, or believe they should be able to segregate their neighborhoods by keeping blacks out if they so choose, among others. While they study a relatively older time period (1979-2002) in which racial prejudice is believed to be more widespread than in current day, Charles & Guryan (2008) find evidence that the average wage gap between black and white workers is quite responsive to the prejudice of the “marginal employer,” accounting for as much as one-quarter of the gap in wages between blacks and whites. In more recent research, I use this basic setup to show that the implications of racial prejudice towards blacks still today independently affect many other measures of black economic wellbeing above and beyond wages, such as the ability to start and maintain a business or the ability to get a home mortgage.

In presentations to scholars across the U.S. most have been shocked as to how widespread racial prejudice remains. Based on questions from the GSS, over one-quarter of non-blacks sampled in 2010 believed that they had the right to refuse to sell their home to blacks simply because of the color of their skin. Of those polled in the mid-1990s, about 15% of non-blacks believed that non-blacks have a God-given right to keep blacks out of their neighborhoods if they choose and that blacks should respect that right; in the 70s and early 80s, a similar number of people objected to a black family with the same income and education as them moving into their neighborhood. Even as late as the 1980s about 10% of non-blacks believed that black children should not be able to attend the same schools as non-blacks.

Additionally, polls from the mid-90s revealed that over 10% of non-blacks would not vote for a black president, even if he (or she?) were qualified for the job and represented their political ideals. Seemingly, President Obama has changed peoples’ thinking somewhat – the number stating they would not vote for a black candidate for president as of 2010 was less than 5%. Many of these other numbers have fallen slightly, although clearly further progress is necessary as presently about 10% of non-blacks believe that blacks have less in-born ability to learn and almost half of non-blacks believe that blacks that are in poverty are there because they lack motivation and willpower. It is quite unsettling that these people think – that these people believe – that blacks are of an inferior race.

As I show in a recent research paper, the implications of racial prejudice towards blacks is affecting the ability for blacks to open and maintain their own businesses. My estimates show that the size of the black-white self-employment gap is strongly related to the amount of prejudice within a local labor market holding constant many individual and state-specific characteristics such as education, labor market experience, and the fraction of the population that is black. The difference in racial prejudice between the least and most prejudiced regions within the U.S. causes a widening in the black-white self-employment gap by approximately 25%. The most likely reason for this gap is due to the inability for prospective black business owners to finance their businesses through loans, investments, etc. as evidenced by a plausibly larger gap between white-owned and black-owned businesses in industries with larger startup costs in the most prejudicial states. An interesting result arising from this discussion is that racial prejudice does not seem to impact the income of self-employed blacks that are able to overcome this obstacle, which provides evidence to suggest that self-employment may be a reasonable path through which blacks may avoid labor market discrimination although unfortunately possibly encountering lender discrimination in its place.

In a related study, I examine the relationship between prejudicial attitudes and black-white gaps in mortgage denial rates and show that denial rates among blacks for conventional mortgages are geographically correlated with racial prejudice holding constant applicant, loan, property, and neighborhood characteristics. This is quite a large problem as blacks are more likely to be denied conventional home mortgages in all 50 states and the District of Columbia, even after accounting for differences in income, loan size, etc. Racial prejudice can account for between 16%-53% of this gap depending on the degree of racial prejudice in each state. This can have severe consequences for creating racially segregated neighborhoods and causing large disparities in the quality of public schools attended in largely-black neighborhoods.

Continued on page 5
Fig. 1a The Average Prejudice Index across Census Divisions

Figure 1a shows the average prejudice index across each census division in the U.S. The error band on each bar represents the 95% confidence interval on the estimate of average prejudice in that census division. The East South Central division (AL, KY, MS, TN) is the most prejudiced, followed by the West South Central (AR, LA, OK, TX) and South Atlantic divisions (DE, DC, FL, GA, MD, NC, SC, VA, WV). The New England (CT, ME, MA, NH, RI, VT), Mountain (AZ, CO, ID, NM, MT, UT, NV, WY), and Pacific divisions (AK, CA, HI, OR, WA) are the least prejudiced.

Fig. 1b Average Prejudice and the Black-White Conventional Loan Denial Rate Gap

Figure 1b shows the best fitting line through a scatterplot of the black-white denial gap holding constant income, loan size, etc. as a function of the average prejudice of whites at the census division level.
Decolonizing Knowledge and Power: Summer School in Barcelona, Spain

Crystal Edwards and Anastacia Scott - fourth year doctoral students in the Department of Africology

Throughout our graduate coursework we have been introduced to multiple theoretical frameworks which seek to explain and address the fundamental issues faced by African descended people, on the continent and throughout the diaspora. Of the many theoretical frameworks explored, Dr. George Bargainer introduced many of the doctoral students to the Decolonial Project. Most recently popularized by Latin American scholars, the Decolonial Project or Decoloniality as a theoretical framework refers to a critical theoretical and epistemological framework that seeks to provide a critique of Eurocentrism from the perspective and lens of those who have historically been marginalized and oppressed, globally. Ultimately, this theory seeks to situate and privilege thinkers from the subaltern.

Decoloniality is premised on three fundamental principles: 1) the coloniality of power; 2) the coloniality of knowledge; and 3) the coloniality of being. The coloniality of power or ‘colonial power matrix’ refers to “the present world-system as a historical-structural heterogeneous totality” (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 217). Decolonial scholars add that the coloniality of power is,

an entanglement or...intersectionality of...global hierarchies of sexual, political, epistemic, economic, spiritual, linguistic and racial forms of domination and exploitation where the racial/ethnic hierarchy of the European/non-European divide transversally reconfigures all of the other global power structure. (Grosfoguel, 2007, p. 217)

The coloniality of knowledge—which proves to be among the most significant in the discussion of decolonial education—refers to the ways in knowledge from colonized subjects has been historically invisibilized. Moreover, this concept seeks to address the reality that as a result of coloniality, epistemologies, or ways of knowing, have been organized hierarchically. In this organization, Western knowledge is classified as being superior, universal, and objective; while subaltern epistemologies are inferior, irrational, primitive, and subjective (Maldonado Torres, 2007; Grosfoguel, 2007; Ndlovu-Gatsheni, 2013).

Lastly, the coloniality of being describes the ways that those deemed “other” are dehumanized and invisibilized. According to Maldonado Torres (2007),

The coloniality of Being indicates those aspects that produce exception from the order of Being; it is as it were, the product of the excess of Being that in order to maintain its integrity and inhibit the interruption by what lies beyond Being produces its contrary, not nothing, but a non-human or rather an inhuman world. (p 257)

Understanding the fundamental principles and the overall objective of the project, many of us began to consider the applicability of this theory to the purpose and goals of Africology in particular, and Black Studies in general. In an effort to further explore this theory and its liberatory potential, several graduate students participated in the annual, international summer school in Barcelona, Spain entitled “Decolonizing Knowledge and Power.” In this ten day, intensive summer institute, we had not only the opportunity to receive direct instruction and lectures from some of the leading scholars in their fields, but also had an opportunity to interact with scholars from around the world as we all grapple with the issues of global oppression and exploitation and the shared goal of liberation.

Ruthie Gilmore, Nelson Maldonado Torres, Ramon Grosfoguel, and Linda Alcoff—to name a few—aided students in exploring topics such as: Eurocentrism within universities specifically and epistemologies generally; methods of resistance; the decolonial turn; coloniality and colonialism; and feminism. Additionally, the scholars also aided students in further developing their individual research projects and overall liberatory efforts. Through late night discussion in the Plazas of Barcelona and group discussions among peers, many of us left this excellent learning opportunity fulfilled and rejuvenated both intellectually and personally.

Overall, we decided to write this piece to serve two purposes: 1) to provide an introduction/discussion of Decoloniality as a theoretical framework for consideration and 2) to inform other doctoral students of this exciting opportunity for individual and collective scholarly growth. For many of us, this was an opportunity to engage in discussions that stretch beyond the confines of the campus and even the confines of the United States.
There are many blogs and websites dedicated to the self-healing of Black women. And while helpful, bullet points and step by step instructions don’t always work when one is trying to figure out what self-healing is, the need for it in one’s life, and how powerful it can be. Blogs and websites, short and sweet, can’t do what a novel, short story or poem can do. And that is to tell a story that may be similar to the lived experiences of the reader—where the reader can see herself in the literature and in the life of a specific character or characters. It is in the unveling of the intricacies of a story that the transformative power of literature takes shape, that one can begin to “read” themselves into the pages, and that can begin to transform herself.

That’s the beauty of literature. Literature, good literature, can be descriptive and prescriptive. Transformative. I love literature from Black women writers. I see myself in the characters and I often get lost in their lives. And it is where I turn for self-healing how-to. Most importantly, since many Black women writers write about the intersectionality of oppression, I end up not only enjoying a good read, but I also gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and subtleties of oppression, and possible healthy responses. Reading about the lives of Black women and their condition as the writer sees it, and perhaps as the reader experiences it, can offer ways to address a distressing situation. For me, it is in the literature of Black women writers that we see self-healing practices demonstrated in the lives of Black women characters. The work of Octavia Butler best illustrates this point. She created work that was not only beautiful, but also didactic and healing when critically read.

Though science fiction, Butler’s characters parallel the realities of many Black women activists, and therefore the lives of the characters are revealing and can be a helpful tool as Black women activists figure out their own self-healing practices.

Octavia Butler, genius, literary giant, and self-identified hermit, best illustrated self-healing in the lives of Black women through her character creations, Black women characters who were similar and unalike in so many ways. However, the one trait they had in common was their ability to heal themselves, and their willingness to heal others in their communities. Whether that other person was a husband, a servant or a stranger, the women, Black and beautiful in Butler’s depiction of them, were concerned about the survival and well-being of themselves and the community in which they lived.

Take Anyanwu for instance, the early protagonist and mother of a new breed in Butler’s Patternist Series: she has the power to take on different shapes, change race and gender, and become any animal she wants. What’s even more interesting (as if that weren’t already), and inspiring about Anyanwu is her desire to use her powers to self-heal and heal those around her.

Also noteworthy is Lilith, from the Xenogenesis Trilogy, who is one of my favorite Butler characters. Tasked with waking up humans and teaching them survival skills, she is an example of a Black woman who self-heals from the trauma of being forced into a new world and who is responsible for teaching humans how to survive in the alien world created by the Oankali. Both of these characters illustrate how self-healing is a conscientious journey as they enter into hostile and oppressive environments where their choices are informed, but not determined, by their captors, Doro and the Oankali, respectively.

An analysis of self-healing is lacking in literary scholarship that focuses on the work of Black women writers. A possible reason is that classism and racism are viewed as more salient in the lives of Black people, and therefore more urgent topics to critically examine in literature. Another possibility is that Black women are viewed as strong and enduring, therefore self-healing is not seen as important. This image of a Black super woman who is strong and can take on everything is known as the Strong Black Woman script. Butler’s characters interrupt this script (the suppression of one’s desires and interest in order to meet the needs of everyone else) by using their varied powers to heal themselves first and then other folks. Indeed, much of the literature from Black women writers turn historical and problematic misrepresentations of Black women/womanhood on its head by instead showing characters who struggle through hardships, who are emotional and who know their boundaries.

The characters mentioned here provide a framework for me to envision what the lives of Black women activists can look like. Not perfect, but far from the self-sacrificial lives so many are expected to lead. Butler, a Black woman genius writer, created characters who provide examples of how Black women can do their difficult work, by first taking care of themselves.

As I live vicariously through the lives of characters who give birth to dolphins and have sex with freaky ooloi (third gendered Oankali) as they simultaneously navigate hostile environments, self-heal and take care of themselves, I am reminded that Black women, particularly Black women activists, have self-healing as their most powerful tool in fighting oppression. Because the truth that is often overlooked in reality, but highlighted in literature, is that there’s an ebb and flow in the lives of Black women that allow for both beauty and pain to sit together. Being a captive of Doro and having to figure out how to still thrive and create one’s idea of family and community, mirrors being subdued by classism and still finding ways to take time out to enjoy life and love as we all struggle towards self and community liberation.
On November 29, 2013 the global African community lost a great elder, K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau. A scholar to say the least, Dr. Fu-Kiau was a true warrior and defender of The African Way. As a prolific speaker and author Dr. Fu-Kiau shared throughout the diaspora his knowledge and guidance on governance, self-healing, and spiritual cosmology. His books, *Self Healing Power and Therapy* (2003), *Kindzi: The Kongo Art of Babysitting* (2000), *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo* (2001) and *Simba Simbi: Hold Up That Which Holds You Up* (2007) are but a glimpse into the depths of his critical and provoking scholarship. This article is written partly in tribute and partly sebayet (wisdom instructions). Upon the transition of each great elder, we should consciously review their canon of writings and speeches so that their wisdom does not transition with them. Here, I reflect on his text, *Mbongi: An African Traditional Political Institution* (2007). As a true master teacher, Dr. Fu-Kiau’s departure from this earthly realm is not loss but opportunity; an opportunity to revisit The Ground Rules of Intellectual Work and in the spirit of mekhet reinscribe instructions for our future generations.

Africana educational spaces should be mbongis. Mbongi, “a room without walls” or a convening space, is the term applied to the political system of the Bantu-Kongo communities in West Africa. This egalitarian system is operated by allowing everyone who is accessible to the community to voice their concerns to the community without mediation or bureaucracy (Fu-Kiau, 2007). To practice as a true mbongi, we can address three of the numerous major concerns that face our educational institutions. An egalitarian answer to police brutality will support a conscientious effort on behalf of the community to stand up for our right to live without enduring the psychological plague of revolutionary suicide. Our tangled history with racism and oppression have caused unproductive gender relations within our community; we need to practice egalitarian approaches to loving and living that support our women beyond the constructs of wife and mother. The mbongi can bring communities together for innovative representation that does not serve as a childbride to the Democratic Party like many organized representations do in the Black communities.

As we engage this text, we must be mindful of our purpose and intentions of reading such books. Let us remind ourselves of the Ground Rules for Intellectual Work[1]. The first ground rule requires that the researcher “be present”. This means that the researcher must fully understand the time and space which the study inhabits. Normally represented by the Ba-Kongo Cosmogram[1], “being present” requires a vertical and horizontal context for understanding. The vertical context requires knowledge of the current juxtaposition of the situation and its surrounding world. The horizontal context requires an understanding of the preceding history and the impact of the research on the future. All of this is a part of a cycle that is continually beginning and ending throughout the researcher’s study.

Recognizing the need to redefine and resituate the mbongi for Africana education fulfills the act of being present. This process is embodied by a conscious reflection of space and time. Upon Dr. Fu-Kiau’s transition, we should reflect on how his texts have been used as tools in the intellectual warfare in which Africana scholars must engage. As an institution, the mbongi sets the stage for how decisions are made within the community. I argue that our mbongi must be mindful of three current situations and how local mbongis respond to them: the assault on Black life in America defended by the militarization of police, inferior roles of women in our communities, and the shaping of American political realities that are tied to an inefficient and outdated two-party political system.

The second ground rule is to listen (*sedjem*) and inscribe (*seshi*). This rule directs the researcher to continuously read and write about the subject of interest. Through this repetition, the researcher achieves mastery of the topic. From repetition, comes improvisation. Improvisation is the ability to use the lessons learned from the content and adapt them towards present time and space. Dr. Fu-Kiau contributed to this step by leaving a legacy of work for us to use. It is our job to use his tools and continue to engage in the reading and writing process to further refine how are tools are working to improve Africana education. We must ask ourselves, how do we research, write and reflect on police brutality, gender consciousness and political engagement?
The final ground rule is “speak to after” (mekhet[6]). This concept suggests that all work done by the researcher will contribute to the intellectual genealogy that preceded the study by building on tradition and responsibility to continually develop a global Pan-African historical consciousness. Revisiting the writings of Dr. Fu-Kia for practical implementation in our educational spaces is practicingmekhet. It is here where we regenerate the cycle by claiming new space and time to build for the future.

The lesson we can take from the work of Dr. Fu-Kiau is that we have the power to heal, lead, and spiritually connect to build African institutions that are rooted in a Pan-African historical consciousness. Our redefinition should include the creation of egalitarian spaces that address our current political time of day, that are sustainable for the future, and that are connected to an ongoing process of reflection through The Ground Rules of Intellectual Work. Let us commit to redefining the mbongi for the future of African youth and their educational communities in honor of our beloved ancestor Dr. K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau!

[1] The Ba-Kongo Cosmogram represents the division of the earthly realm from the spiritual realm at a sacred point, “on the ground of the dead and under all-seeing God.” See African Cosmology of the Bantu-Congo (Fu-Kiau) or Flash of the Spirit (Thompson).

[2] Sedjem is the modern translation of the ancient Egyptian sdm, a verb meaning “to hear”. Literally, this concept expects the reader to hear the words that the read. For more information, see A Concise Dictionary of Middle Egyptian by Raymond Faulkner or Egyptian Grammar by Sir Alan Gardiner.

[3] Sesh is the modern translation of the ancient Egyptian sh, a verb meaning “to inscribe”. See Faulkner or Gardiner.

[4] Sep Tpy is the Kemetic term for repetition. See Faulkner or Gardiner.

[5] Hpr is the Kemetic term for improvisation. See Faulkner or Gardiner.

[6] Mekhet (need to clarify this information). See Faulkner or Gardiner.

Dr. K. Kia Bunseki Fu-Kiau
April 4, 1934 - November 29, 2013
Martin Luther King Jr.’s Full Employment Proposal: A Call for Action in the 21st Century

Jeffery Sommers - Associate Professor of Africology and Patrick Delices - second year doctoral student in the Department of Africology

*This article is dedicated to and was inspired by conversations in political economy with the late Professor of Africology, Winston Van Horne of the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee.

Fifty years ago in 1964 Martin Luther King Jr. was awarded the Nobel Prize for his leadership in the Civil Rights’ struggle. A half-century hence, the *de jure* restrictions on civil rights have mostly been excised (though with some disturbing recent attempts at repriming voter suppression), but the *de facto* reality of racial and economic discrimination remains. What King realized was that it would take more than opening the political system for all to realize his dream. In fact, King had another dream, and one, which he saw as essential to achieving the goals of his signature “I have a dream” speech to advance civil rights. That other dream was to see that *everyone* should have a right to a living-wage job.

King argued the "government [must] become an *employer of last resort*" (Kaboub, 2013). "We need an economic bill of rights. This would guarantee a job to all people who want to work and are able to work. It would mean creating certain public-service jobs" (King, 1968, p. 24). Moreover, for King, the United States was marked by an unjust and ethically questionable political economy as evidenced by the degree of poverty it tolerated. Therefore, King called for America to move toward a more equitable redistribution of its wealth and resources to correct its economic injustices, such as poverty and unemployment.

To that end, King (1967) argued for guaranteed incomes (universal basic income) to alleviate poverty, economic inequality, and joblessness in the United States. King (2010) states: “I am now convinced that the simplest approach will prove to be the most effective — the solution to poverty is to abolish it directly by a now widely discussed measure: the guaranteed income” (p. 171). Thus, for King, the solution was a straightforward one: “(2010):

We must create full employment or we must create incomes. People must be made consumers by one method or the other. Once they are placed in this position, we need to be concerned that the potential of the individual is not wasted. New forms of work that enhance the social good will have to be devised for those whom traditional jobs are not available (p. 172).

And this social good (the creation of full employment or incomes), according to King, could only come from the state: in this case, the United States government.

In short, for King, government responsibility went beyond merely setting rules, but extended to ensuring *outcomes*. King understood that the private sector alone could never create the needed full employment. King saw that: “At the present time, thousands of jobs a week are disappearing in the wake of automation and other production efficiency techniques” (Haley, 1965). Indeed, we faced such a crisis before in the early 20th century, when increasing efficiency and automation resulted in falling employment. This was only resolved by the government becoming a larger employer of workers, thus creating demand for more private employment through public spending. To that end Joseph Stiglitz (2011) argues that:

a modern economy requires collective action—it needs government to invest in infrastructure, education, and technology. The United States and the world have benefited greatly from government-sponsored research that led to the Internet, to advances in public health, and so on. But America has long suffered from an under-investment in infrastructure (look at the condition of our highways and bridges, our railroads and airports), in basic research, and in education at all levels (para 5).

King declared that the state must become an employer of last resort and saw job training as somewhere between useless to insufficient for the purpose of creating a full employment economy. As King (2010) argued: "training becomes a way of avoiding the issue of unemployment” (p. 208). “The orientation...should be *jobs first, training later*” (Ondaatje, 2010).

Unfortunately, Federal employment policy since after the New Deal has largely been the reverse. There is plenty of training, but few jobs for the chronically underemployed. Instead people are typically being trained for nonexistent jobs. Indeed, since the Great Crash of 2008, over 700,000 government jobs have been euthanized at a time when increased government employment has been desperately needed to make up for private sector employment shortfalls (Thoma, 2013).

Continued on page 11
King precisely understood the nature of both his day and our present. Training for non-existent jobs would not solve our employment problems. Education was important in order to climb the ladder of income mobility, but for many, it would decidedly not get them on the ladder itself. Today, with a tenuous American labor market lacking robust safety nets we see unprecedented poverty levels, with “20 percent of those in the bottom fifth would see their children in the bottom fifth” (Stiglitz, 2012, p. 18).

The vital role of American public education as it pertains to upward socio-economic mobility has been on the brink of collapse while “conservative and libertarian think tanks that have pushed the charter school movement have openly championed Milton Friedman’s oft-articulated ambition to replace public education and teachers unions with a [non-unionized] private, for-profit system. Because public schools are funded on a per-pupil basis, every time a charter school opens, resources leave the public school system, programs are cut, and teachers are laid off” (Jeter, 2009, p. 152). Ironically, this is happening just as people of color had begun making inroads into the public education sector as teachers.

The United States sits at a fork in the road of economic policy. It can follow the path charted by the ‘austrians,’ such as those in Wisconsin where their Governor is backed by Tea-Party and Libertarian activists (e.g., the Koch Brothers, et al.). It can allow itself to slip back into the turbulent waters on which many nations in between the world wars crashed on the shoals of austerity and drowned in extremist movements motivated by racial divisions. Or, alternatively it can invoke King’s economic ideas, where presently idled labor wasting away can instead work, build infrastructure, deliver social goods, and thrive in a living wage economy. This stark choice now sits before us. King would have asked us to choose the right path before we find ourselves too far down the wrong road to change course.

References


The mission of the Department of Africology is the inquiry into the cultures, societies, and political economies of peoples of African origin and descent. Africology as a discipline encompasses Africa and the African diaspora and researches societies across the globe. In research and teaching, the Department of Africology draws together knowledge of these communities and societies that spans generations and spatial divides in order to gain insights, to examine continuities and breaks, and to critique and generate theories.

Out of our mission comes a commitment to pedagogy and the development of critical thinking and new scholarship. Through our undergraduate courses, the major and the minor, we educate students in the best traditions of liberal arts within our disciplinary framework.

The department’s faculty command a range of expertise in areas of political economy, international studies, English, political inquiry, psychological and sociological inquiry, history, and folklore. Faculty members are engaged in innovative research, producing knowledge in many realms: comparative studies of women, black societies in the Americas and Africa, African and African-derived religions, folklore, family and marriage practices, economic and financial issues in underdeveloped areas, racial socialization, literary history and oral traditions, and class, ethnicity, nationalism and Pan-Africanism.