

“Weaving the Diasporic Matrix: the Legacy of Black Women in the Americas”

The rise to power of Afrodescendant women has been a powerful force for change in the Americas. For several centuries, these representatives of the Diaspora fought for their freedom, the right to vote, equity in the workplace, and then worked to improve the socio-economic, cultural and civic condition of their communities. By contributing to the gradual transformation of the nation, they have entered the field of political representation and action. Despite adversity, this union has risen to the challenge of "revolutionary humanism" (Lee, 2015) by weaving an inclusive web integrating other women into the matrix of power. Numerous examples of activism and solidarity thus dot the colonial and postcolonial history of the Americas and reveal the power of this chain of transmission linking Africa to the Greater Caribbean and continental America.

The beginnings of female Afro-diasporic agentivity were first manifested during the anti-slavery struggles. Among the names of the most famous heroines, we can mention, in a non-exhaustive way, those of the Angolan queen Nzinga Mbande, fierce opponent of the Portuguese slave traders, Victoria "Toya" Montou, ally of Dessalines during the Haitian revolution, Queen Nanny, national symbol of the Maroon resistance in Jamaica, Lumina Sophie and the mulatto Solitude, who were very involved in the insurrections declared in Martinique and Guadeloupe, or Harriet Tubman who fought all her life to offer freedom to the fugitive slaves in North America, Sojourner Truth and, closer to us, Rosa Parks and Angela Davis. This list, which could go on and on, highlights the exemplary nature of the struggle for freedom and dignity waged by Afro-descendants both on African soil and in the nations of America. While they could not single-handedly overthrow the biopolitical system of the "New World" (Kamugisha, 2019: 166-200), all of these women worked directly, and significantly, to defend the rights and interests of their communities. In doing so, they have earned their credentials by showing that it is always possible to make the best of adversity by weaving a matrix of solidarity and self-determination with the Diaspora.

It is no coincidence that a century after Britain abolished slavery in 1933, Mary McLeod Bethune created the Black Cabinet, formerly the Federal Council on Black Affairs, one of whose major accomplishments was to create employment opportunities for African Americans at a time when they had little access to them. More recently, in 2005, Condoleezza Rice, Secretary of State under the Bush administration, or Loretta Lynch, Attorney General under the Obama administration, have made members of their ethnic community proud. The influence of Michelle Obama, First Lady of the United States, cannot be overlooked, as her career has been a model of professional strength and competence, and she has enhanced her credibility alongside her husband, Barack. The election of Joe Biden as President of the United States also seems to have played a catalytic role in the succession of appointments of black women to positions of power. We think first of all of the Vice President of the United States, Kamala Harris, of Indian mother and Jamaican father, to whom the Cuban-American artist Maria-Magdalena Campos-Pons dedicated her performance *When we gather*, but also of the Martinican Karine Jean-Pierre, spokesperson at the White House, or of Ketanji Onyika Brown Jackson, the first black woman to be appointed as an associate justice at the Supreme Court in 2022.

In the field of diasporic identities, culture and politics are intimately linked (Hall, 1990). Such affinities often echo the issues of artists and writers committed to black female agency, as demonstrated by North American visual artist Kara Walker and Jamaican photographer-performer Renee Cox, through their radical explorations of race, gender, and sexuality, or illustrious novelists such as Jamaica Kincaid, Edwige Danticat, Maryse Condé, and Simone Schwartz-Bart, among many others, all of whom come from the Caribbean/American diaspora.

The field of arts and literature seems particularly conducive to generating such connections, as evidenced by the proliferation of publications that have appeared over the past two decades (Francis, 2016; Altamini et alii; 2018, Celestine, 2020; etc.) in which there are numerous examples of solidarity, even partnership, between authors of different nationalities. While such advances have been made mainly since the 1950s, we would like to emphasize the anteriority of sorority traditions such as the tangible heritage of patchwork through which solidarities of all kinds were woven as early as the 19th century in North America, in order to preserve the memory of the decolonial bond and emancipatory struggles in the Americas, will be emphasized.

Special attention to the signs of diasporic solidarity assembled over the years will therefore be able to be given to such junctions. It will undoubtedly form the touchstone of a future intellectual edifice whose theoretical and pragmatic foundations enter into a projective dynamic. To this end, panelists may wish to consider the following problematic avenues to develop their questioning: How did these Black women rise to such positions?

What sacrifices did they make to achieve them?

What are the nature and dynamics of the bond between them?

In their extension, our conference proposes to analyze the fascinating journey of these black women, in order to understand how they managed to climb the ladder of a society often hostile to their ascension, but whose codes they knew how to master in order to better conquer it.

Proposals for contributions, about twenty minutes long, must be sent in the form of an abstract (400 words maximum) to Dr. Nathalie Bouchaut and Mr. Yannick André **by November 10, 2022**. Notification of acceptance will be sent to contributors on **November 25, 2022**. The conference will be held at the University of the West Indies, Pôle Guadeloupe on **Tuesday February 14, 2023**, in honor of Black History Month. For further information, please send your requests to:

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