A Companion to African-American Philosophy

Edited by

Tommy L. Lott
and
John P. Pittman
“Philosophers Tommy L. Lott and John P. Pittman are to be highly commended for a text that captures the existential urgency, vibrancy, and durability of African-American/Africana philosophical thought. This philosophical tradition forms dynamic sites of knowledge production, critique, and clarification that is highly relevant to the emancipationist world-making of a people whose theories must prove actionable, in the form of concrete liberation.”

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Anita L. Allen is Professor of Law at the University of Pennsylvania School of Law, where she teaches Privacy Law, Legal Philosophy, Bioethics, and Torts. Her numerous articles are published in philosophy and law journals. She is author of Uneasy Access: Privacy for Women in A Free Society. Allen received her Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Michigan and her law degree from Harvard University.

Bernard R. Boxill is Professor of Philosophy at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. His articles are widely published in journals and anthologies. He is author of Blacks and Social Justice and editor of Race and Racism.

Patricia Hill Collins is Charles Phelps Taft Professor of Sociology in the Department of African American Studies at the University of Cincinnati. She is author of Fighting Words: Black Women and the Search for Justice and Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment.

Angela Y. Davis is Professor of Philosophy in the History of Consciousness Program at the University of California, Santa Cruz and has an appointment to a University of California Presidential Chair in African American and Feminist Studies. She is author of Angela Davis: An Autobiography; Women Race and Class; Women, Culture and Politics; and Blues Legacies and Black Feminism.

Annette Dula co-edited with Sara Goering “It Just Ain’t Fair”: The Ethics of Health Care for African Americans. She has published articles on race and health care policy for the Hastings Center.

Gerald Early is Director of the International Writers Center and Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis. He is currently a research fellow at the National Humanities Center in North Carolina. He is author of Tuxedo Junction and The Culture of Bruising: Essays on Prizefighting. He is editor of Speech and Power and Lure and Loathing.

David Theo Goldberg is Director of the Humanities Research Institute, University of California and Professor of African American Studies and Criminology, Law and Society at University of California, Irvine. He is author of The Racial State; Racist Culture:

Lewis R. Gordon is Chair of Africana Studies and Professor of Africana Studies and Modern Culture and Media at Brown University. He is author of numerous articles and books, including: Bad Faith and Anti-Black Racism; Fanon and the Crisis of European Man: An Essay on Philosophy and the Human Sciences; Her Majesty’s Other Children: Philosophical Sketches of Racism from a Neocolonial Age and Existential Africana: Understanding African Existential Thought. He is editor of Existence in Black: An Anthology of Black Existential Philosophy and coeditor of Fanon: A Critical Reader.

Leonard Harris is Professor of Philosophy at Purdue University. He is editor of Children in Chaos: A Philosophy for Children Experience; The Philosophy of Alain Locke: Harlem Renaissance and Beyond; Philosophy Born of Struggle: Afro-American Philosophy from 1917; Racism, and The Critical Pragmatism of Alain Locke and co-editor of American Philosophies; Exploitation and Exclusion: Race and Class. He is founder of the Alain Locke Society and the Philosophy Born of Struggle Association.

Luke C. Harris is Chair of the Political Science Department at Vassar College. He has published and teaches about questions of equality. He is a co-founder of the African American Policy Forum, a black feminist think tank.

Trudier Harris-Lopez is J. Carlyle Sitterson Professor of English at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. She is author, editor and co-editor of twenty volumes, including The Literature of the American South: A Norton Anthology, Exorcising Blackness: Historical and Literary Lynching and Burning Rituals, Selected Works of Ida B. Wells-Barnett, and her most recent book, Saints, Sinners, Saviors: Strong Black Women in African American Literature.

Paget Henry is Associate Professor of Sociology and Afro-American Studies at Brown University. He is author of Peripheral Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Antigua and Caliban’s Reason and co-editor of C. L. R. James’s Caribbean. He is also editor of The C. L. R. James Journal.


Ronald A. T. Judy is Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh, where he teaches courses related to the fields of American literature and culture, African literature, Arab literature, contemporary Islamic thought, global English studies and litera-
ture. He has been a Fulbright Fellow at the Institut Bourguiba des Langues Vivantes, Université de Tunis I. He is author of (Dis)forming the American Canon: The Vernacular of African Arabic American Slave Narrative. He is editor of a special edition of boundary 2 on Sociology Hesitant: W. E. B. Du Bois’s Dynamic Thinking. He is currently completing a book project tentatively titled, The Last Negro or the Destruction of Categorical Thought: An Experiment in Hyperbolic Thinking.

**Frank M. Kirkland** is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Hunter College and the Graduate Center, both at the City University of New York. He is editor of the volume Phenomenology: East and West. He co-edited with Bill E. Lawson Frederic Douglass: A Critical Reader. He is currently writing a book provisionally titled Hegel and Husserl: Idealist Meditations.

**Bill E. Lawson** is Professor of Philosophy at Michigan State University where he teaches courses on social and political philosophy. He is co-author of Between Slavery and Freedom: Philosophy and American Slavery, editor of The Underclass Question, and co-editor of Frederic Douglass: A Critical Reader.

**Tommy L. Lott** is Professor of Philosophy at San Jose State University. He is author of The Invention of Race: Black Culture and the Politics of Representation and Like Rum in the Punch: Alain Locke and the Theory of African-American Culture. He is editor of Subjugation and Bondage: Critical Essays on Slavery and Social Philosophy and African-American Philosophy: Selected Readings. He is co-editor of The Idea of Race and Philosophers on Race: A Critical Reader.

**Howard McGary** is Professor of Philosophy at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey in New Brunswick where he teaches courses on African-American philosophy and social and political philosophy. He has published numerous articles and is author of Race and Social Justice and co-author of Between Slavery and Freedom: Philosophy and American Slavery.

**Charles W. Mills** is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Illinois at Chicago and a University Scholar at UIC. He is the author of numerous articles, as well as two books, The Racial Contract and Blackness Visible: Essays on Philosophy and Race. He is working on a third book, tentatively titled Red Shift: From Critical Class Theory to Critical Race Theory.

**Michele Moody-Adams** is Hutchinson Professor of Ethics and Public Life and Professor of Philosophy at Cornell University. She has published numerous articles in journals and anthologies. She is author of Fieldwork in Familiar Places: Morality, Culture, and Philosophy.

**Albert G. Mosley** is Professor of Philosophy at Smith College. He is editor of African Philosophy: Selected Readings. He is co-author of Affirmative Action: Social Justice or Unfair Preference? and An Introduction to Logic: From Everyday Life to Formal Systems.

**Lucius T. Outlaw, Jr.** formerly T. Wistar Brown Professor of Philosophy at Haverford College, is Professor of Philosophy and Director of the African-American Studies Program at Vanderbilt University where he teaches and engages in research devoted to

**John P. Pittman** teaches philosophy at John Jay College of Criminal Justice at the City University of New York. He is editor of *African-American Perspectives and Philosophical Traditions*. He is Associate Editor of *Philosophia Africana*, a journal devoted to the analysis of philosophy and issues in Africa and the black diaspora.

**Thaddeus Pope** formerly served as a Judicial Law Clerk to the Honorable John L. Coffey in the United States Court of Appeals for the 7th Circuit. His publications include articles on the Miranda rule, airline passenger security, smoker’s choice, and the death sentence. He practices law in Beverly Hills, California.

**T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting** is Professor of Africana Studies and Romance Languages and Chair of Africana Studies at Hamilton College. She has been awarded fellowships from the Camargo Foundation in Cassis, France, the Rockefeller Foundation in Bellagio, Italy and the George A. and Eliza Howard Foundation. She is author of *Sexualized Savages, Primal Fears, and Primitive Narratives in French and Frantz Fanon: Conflicts and Feminisms* and co-editor of *The Black Feminist Reader, Spoils of War: Women of Color, Cultures, and Revolutions* and *Fanon: A Critical Reader*. Her most recent book is *Negritude Women: Race Women, Race Consciousness, Race Literature*.

**Richard Shusterman** is Chair of Philosophy at Temple University. Editor of *Analytic Aesthetics* and *Bourdieu: A Critical Reader*, he is also author of *The Object of Literary Criticism, T. S. Eliot and the Philosophy of Criticism, Pragmatist Aesthetics, Practicing Philosophy, Performing Live*, and *Surface and Depth*. He has held senior NEH and Fulbright Fellowships.

**Lorenzo C. Simpson** is Professor of Philosophy at the State University of New York at Stony Brook. He has published articles on hermeneutics, critical theory, philosophy of science, and African-American philosophy in journals and anthologies. He is author of *The Unfinished Project: Towards a Postmetaphysical Humanism* and *Technology, Time and the Conversations of Modernity*. He is also an aspiring jazz saxophonist.

**Hortense J. Spillers** is the Frederick J. Whiton Professor of English at Cornell University where she teaches courses in African-American and American literature. Recently, she was a visiting professor in cultural studies at the John F. Kennedy Institute, the Free University, Berlin. She is editor of *Comparative American Identities: Race, Sex, and Nationality in the Modern Text* and co-edited with Marjorie Pryse *Conjuring: Black Women, Fiction, and Literary Tradition, Black, White and in Color: Essays on Literature and Color*, a collection of her essays will be published in 2003 by the University of Chicago Press.

**Clyde R. Taylor** is Professor of Interdisciplinary Studies at the Gallatin School and in Africana Studies at New York University. His numerous articles on black cinema and culture are widely published in journals and anthologies. He is author of *The Mask of
Art: Breaking the Aesthetic Contract and editor of Vietnam and Black America. He wrote the script for Midnight Ramble, a documentary about early independent black cinema.

Laurence M. Thomas is Professor in the Departments of Philosophy and Political Science, and a member of the Judaic Studies Program at Syracuse University. His numerous essays on moral and social issues have been widely published in journals andanthologies. He is author of Living Morally and Vessels of Evil: American Slavery and the Holocaust and co-author of Sexual Orientation and Human Rights.

Rudolph V. Vanterpool is Professor of Philosophy and Chair of the department at California State University – Dominguez Hills, where he teaches a variety of courses on moral and legal philosophy. His publications include articles on aesthetics, political philosophy, and African-American philosophy.

Cornel West is the Alphonse Fletcher, Jr. University Professor at Harvard University teaching in Afro-American Studies and Philosophy of Religion. He has numerous articles and books, including: Race Matters, Keeping Faith: Philosophy and Race in America, Prophesy Deliverance! An Afro-American Revolutionary Christianity, The Ethical Dimensions of Marxist Thought, and The American Evasion of Philosophy: A Genealogy of Pragmatism.

Naomi Zack is Professor of Philosophy at the University of Oregon. She is author of Bachelors of Science: Seventeenth-Century Identity, Thinking about Race, and Race and Mixed Race. She is editor of American Mixed Race, Race/Sex, Women of Color in Philosophy and co-editor of Race, Class, Gender, and Sexuality. Her most recent book is Philosophy of Science and Race.
Preface

African-American philosophy has only recently been established in the institutions of the philosophical world. The American Philosophical Association’s Committee on the Status of Blacks in the Profession was created during the 1970s to deal with issues arising from the new, and growing, population of black philosophers. There are many who still proclaim that “Philosophy is philosophy, whether done by women, blacks, or white men.” But it is also widely – and justly – acknowledged that this bare identity is in need of supplementation. Philosophical inquiry must confront the social realities of race and fruitfully develop the insights latent in the collective experience of black folk. Contemporary African-American philosophy emerged at a specific political moment in the 1960s to vie for recognition in the discipline, and is now an academic specialization that constitutes an evolving socio-historical reality.

It was the social movements of black people themselves – from Garveyism and the Harlem Renaissance to the Civil Rights movement and its more radical progeny – that compelled social change and forced the larger American society’s grudging acknowledgment of the deep historical racial injustices. Out of the tumult of the 1960s African-American philosophers began to focus on some of the ideas expressed in this volume. Indeed, the advent of Black Studies in the academy is concurrent with the development of African-American philosophy as a field of inquiry. Without the 1960s political movements, however, Black Studies would not have been established. Hence, political activism gave Black Studies, and African-American philosophy, its initial momentum and reason for being, its ideological coloring, practical aims, and its first recruits.

Given the social reality that motivates the African-American orientation to philosophy, many of the anti-historical illusions of mainstream philosophy are less salient. As the articles in this volume attest, African-American philosophy is thoroughly interdisciplinary with a large, but not exclusive, focus on social, political, moral, and cultural issues. While the full sweep of African-American philosophic thought, including that which is devoted to standard topics in metaphysics and epistemology, cannot be represented in a single volume, we have attempted to make this volume representative of the major areas of current research, without attempting to be exhaustive. There are many African-American philosophers working in philosophy of language, the history