

African American Women Scholars and International Research: Dr. Anna Julia Cooper's Legacy of Study Abroad

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Introduction

In previous issues, *Frontiers* authors have illuminated discussions of race in study abroad (W.E.B. Du Bois in Germany for example) as well as gender issues (women's experiences in Costa Rica).¹ In this paper, I present a little-known but detailed history of Black women's tradition of study abroad. Specifically, I situate Dr. Anna Julia Cooper within the landscape of historic African American students who studied in Japan, Germany, Jamaica, England, Italy, Haiti, India, West Africa, and Thailand, in addition to France. The story of Cooper's intellectual production is especially intriguing because at a time when Black women were just beginning to pursue doctorates in the United States, Anna Cooper chose to earn her Ph.D. from the Sorbonne in Paris. In this article, I demonstrate that her research agenda and institutional choice reflected a popular trend of Black academics to construct their scholarly identities with an international foundation. The intersection of race, gender, nationality, language, and culture are critical areas of inquiry from which to study higher education. This research informs the increasing interest in Black women's scholastic history but also inspires questions regarding how cultural identity impacts research agendas and study abroad experiences for all American students. Further, by illuminating past trends in study abroad, this work is also useful for contemporary educators who teach in international courses. As an example of this utility, I demonstrate how my interest in Anna Cooper resulted in a study abroad course, "African Americans in Paris," that allowed U.S. students to explore the intersection of race, gender, and travel from their own disciplinary interests.

There is a long legacy of African Americans traveling abroad and given the added difficulty of international travel for women, the intersection of race and gender provides a unique position from which to explore this history. Given the international, political, economic, and cultural lineage inherent in creating

the African Diaspora, a sustained tradition of world travel by Black Americans should not be at all surprising. In the mid-1700s, the Haitian-born, New Orleans resident Jean Baptiste Pointe du Sable was educated in Paris; he then moved to Illinois and founded the outpost that eventually became the city of Chicago. In New Orleans, there was an active group of free people of color who organized for education and, given the ties of Louisiana to France, naturally some in the group were educated in Paris. From the development of the United States to the post-Civil War period of national reconstruction, Africans in the Americas traveled to Europe regularly. By the mid-1920s, an increasing number of men and women in the U.S. were taking advantage of the post-WWI opportunity to advance their education even as Harlem impacted cultural trends around the world. This educational and intellectual history traces the content and scope of Black women's international research interests with the backdrop of popularized American higher education and the rich story of cultural trade between nations.²

Publications about Black women's intellectual production and women like Anna Julia Cooper are still in early stages of development. Before 1984, very little writing existed by or about African American women as academics and any focus on their learning experiences highlighted their vocational or elementary teaching careers. The gradual development of a critical mass of Black women professors in the 1960s and 1970s paved the way for a relative boom of scholarship in the 1980s. Still, not enough exists on the subject of the Black collegiate experience, and the international realm is part of the necessary work that must be done, especially since many notable African American scholars—men and women—studied abroad, including W.E.B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, Jessie Fauset, and Angela Davis.³

As an entry point to the discussion, I outline Black scholars' international studies. I then present Anna Julia Cooper's education and show how her research traversed national and international space in fascinating ways. Next, I move outward to show how international foci can be found in many African American women's research interests. This analysis reveals that a significant number of Black scholars have studied abroad in a range of geographic locations, and Paris was especially popular given the relative freedom Black Americans experienced there. In addition, readers will receive a sample of how contemporary students with a wide range of disciplinary interests can engage and apply this history. I end by observing Cooper's significance as an African American woman academic and outline implications for Black women's thought on research in the global Ivory Tower.

Black Scholars Abroad

The first (recognized) African American woman to be granted a college degree was Lucy Stanton Sessions at Oberlin College in Ohio (1850). Oberlin was one of the only institutions in the antebellum era that educated Black, white, and Native American scholars together. Stanton's family were prominent abolitionists in the state. Ironically, one of the earliest international students at Oberlin, Sarah Magru Kinson, did so as a result of the slave trade and happened to room with Lucy Stanton while at Oberlin. Sarah Kinson was representative of those exceptions who chose to pursue college studies despite their former status as slaves. One of the millions stolen from Africa, Sarah was aboard the *Amistad* schooner during the 1839 rebellion. After the famous 1841 U.S. Supreme Court case, Sarah returned to Freetown, Sierra Leone, West Africa. After five years in Africa, she ventured to the United States at age fourteen to attend Oberlin College. After she studied at Oberlin (1846–November 1849), she again returned to Africa as a missionary for the American Missionary Association. Sarah was a prolific letter writer to her benefactors, reporting about her learning process, aspirations, and perceptions of educational missionary work. Hers was but one of many remarkable stories about the twists and turns that took place in Black women's lives during this time.⁴

The early American curriculum was segregated by gender, and the first Black woman to go beyond the "ladies' course" to earn a B.A. (a "bachelor's degree" for the "gentleman's course") was Mary Jane Patterson in 1862. By the end of the American Civil War, only three Black women earned the B.A. degree, though over African-Americans 100 had earned degrees at Oberlin by that time. By 1910, there were a little over 250 Black women college graduates and over 2,000 Black men graduates. Black scholars first gained access to education in the northern and mid-western states, but after the Civil War the development of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) drew them to the South. Opportunities for graduate studies in the South were non-existent, and Black students then attended northern schools, especially Harvard, Columbia, the University of Pennsylvania, and the University of Chicago.

Black women who attended colleges between the 1850s and 1950s did not always suffer the mob violence that would plague Black students in the 1960s and 1970s desegregation efforts. Yet integrated school experiences in the United States revealed an undercurrent of race antagonism as well as cases of overt hostility, like that of Edmonia Lewis, who entered Oberlin in 1859. Lewis, of African American and Chippewa heritage, suffered a series of physical attacks by fellow students who accused her of poisoning two White female

classmates and of stealing art supplies. Both charges were racially motivated and were proven false, but after she was beaten up by White students (who were not punished), Lewis ultimately was denied the right to graduate. Though not all incidents at Predominantly White Institutions (PWIs) in the 19th century were this severe, Black students were subject to racism by students, staff, and faculty, or by institutional policies that regulated curriculum, housing, meals, and social interaction. Lewis, like many students after her, chose to move overseas where she would have a better chance to learn in a supportive environment. After moving to Boston for a couple of years, she left the U.S. to live in Italy where she became a renowned sculptress. Though she returned to attend gallery showings in New York, Chicago, and San Francisco, she did not return to the U.S. to live. Edmonia Lewis is but one story of the type of opportunities that Black students sought in the Old World.⁵

Early memoirs of Black women educators provide fascinating travelogues. For example, in 1902, Fanny Jackson Coppin (Oberlin College, B.A.1865) visited London for missionary training and South Africa to teach with her husband Levi in the A.M.E Church missionaries. Mary Church Terrell (Oberlin College, B.A. 1884, M.A. 1888), studied in France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and England for two years after her college graduation and after marrying, she continued to travel for pleasure. Terrell also traveled to participate in international activism around peace and women's rights. Lena Morton (University of Cincinnati, B.A. 1923, M.A. 1925; Western Reserve, Ph.D.,1947), attended a summer session at the University of London in 1956 and travelled throughout Europe.

Flemmie Kittrell (Hampton University, B.S. 1928; Cornell University, M.S. 1930, Ph.D. 1936) researched nutrition practices in West Africa, India, Japan, Hawaii, and Thailand. Though her dissertation focused on infant feeding practices in North Carolina, she traveled widely to do comparative surveys. When Black women traveled abroad to study, their professional development in later years often retained an international character. For example, Dr. Kittrell headed the Home Economics program at Howard University and also helped to set up the College of Home Economics at Baroda University in India. Zora Neale Hurston (Barnard College, B.A. 1928) is most recognized as a novelist, yet before penning her prizewinning novel *Their Eyes Were Watching God* (1937), she conducted field research in Haiti and Jamaica while taking graduate courses in anthropology under Franz Boas at Columbia University. Also in anthropology, Katherine Dunham pioneered international dance studies at the University of Chicago, while conducting research in Haiti and several other Caribbean countries. After working with Melville Hertzkovitz from Northwestern University

and earning a Guggenheim Fellowship, Dunham wrote her master's thesis (for a degree at University of Chicago, 1938), "Dances of Haiti: Their Social Organization, Classification, Form, and Function," which was subsequently published in French and Spanish. These are just a few examples of how African American women consumed, created, and exchanged knowledge, long before the United States saw fit to make segregated schools illegal in 1954.⁶

In 1865, Patrick Healy became the first African American to earn a Ph.D.; the degree was not yet available in the United States, so he studied in Belgium. His father, Michael Healy, was an Irish planter in Georgia who purchased Mary Eliza (Patrick's mother), who was enslaved. They had four children, including Patrick who, after obtaining an extensive education abroad, returned to be president of Georgetown University (1874–1882). W. E. B. Du Bois studied in Berlin and as historian Derrick Alridge notes, the experience deeply impacted Du Bois' educational philosophies throughout his long and illustrious career. By 1943, 19 doctoral degrees were conferred to African Americans who studied outside of the United States. Black scholars pursued Ph.D.s at 14 different institutions including the universities of Edinburg (Scotland), Vienna (Austria), Bonn (Germany) Dijon (London), Laval and Toronto (Canada), Toulouse (France). The University of Paris awarded two doctorates, one to Mercer Cook and one to Anna Julia Cooper. By the 1920s, Paris was by far the most popular place to study. Cooper's work reveals an intriguing intersection of cultural identity, geography, and academic interest that build on the fascinating histories of early African American experiences with study abroad.⁷

Dr. Anna Julia Cooper

Anna Julia Haywood (who lived to be 105 years old), was born enslaved in Raleigh, North Carolina in approximately 1858. In 1868, she began school at St. Augustine's Normal School and Collegiate Institute (founded 1867) in Raleigh. She completed studies there in 1881. In 1877, Anna married George Cooper; the marriage license indicated that she was nineteen at the time. Mr. Cooper died only two years later and she never remarried. In July 1881, Anna Cooper applied to Oberlin College, and in 1884, she graduated with a B.S., specializing in mathematics. After graduation from Oberlin, she taught college courses at Wilberforce in Ohio for the 1884 school year, and in 1885, she returned to St. Augustine's, her alma mater, as a teacher. In 1888, Cooper was awarded an M.A. for mathematics from Oberlin based on her college teaching at Wilberforce. She then moved to Washington, D.C. to teach at M Street High School, located in the northwest part of the city, relatively close to Howard University.⁸

In 1901, she was appointed principal of M Street, where she led students to great academic achievements, including admission to prestigious colleges such as Yale and Harvard. Her dismissal from duties in 1906 cut short her initial D.C. career and reflected the politicized atmosphere of public education—for Black students in segregated schools, vocational education was mandated over liberal arts. It has been the subject of some discussion that Cooper happened to be fired soon after a visit to the school from Booker T. Washington, the national figurehead for vocational training. From 1906 until 1910, Cooper chaired the Department of Romance Languages at Lincoln University in Missouri. After Lincoln, she returned to M Street (renamed Dunbar High School in 1916) as a teacher, not as principal. She worked there until her retirement in 1930. After leaving Dunbar, she assumed the presidency of Frelinghuysen University in Washington, D.C. (founded 1905), a school for working adults, where she stayed until her retirement in 1941. She taught for over seventy years and continued to write and publish into her early nineties.

At the age of 66, Anna Cooper completed her dissertation entitled, “L’Attitude de la France a L’Egard de L’Esclavage: Pedant La Revolution,” about French attitudes toward slavery during the Haitian Revolution. The dissertation was written in French for the Ph.D. at the Sorbonne, University of Paris. Interestingly, Cooper’s undergraduate major in mathematics eventually gave way to graduate studies in language, but she expressed “sheer joy” in the process of lifelong learning and kept math and Latin as her passions, even as French and history became her academic specialization. In addition to her 1892 social critique, *Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* and the 1925 dissertation, Cooper translated *Le Pelerinage de Charlemagne* (1925). She worked on the epic poem about the ninth-century ruler Charlemagne, converting the text from Old French to Middle French as a proposed doctoral thesis. She finished the piece at the same time as completing her dissertation, not for Sorbonne credit but rather for her own scholarly ambition. In *Anna Julia Cooper, Visionary Black Feminist* (2007), scholar Vivian May provides in depth analysis of Cooper’s dissertation, the Charlemagne translation as well as lesser-known essays. What emerges from my own reading in *Black Women in the Ivory Tower, 1850–1954: An Intellectual History* (2007) and May’s book is that Cooper was a life-long student and a practitioner of what I call adaptive learning: she was a life-long learner who engaged in joy-filled study, research with policy implications, cultural and critical theorizing, pedagogy of excellence, and various means of social justice.⁹

Cooper's purpose for translating the *Charlemagne* text, she asserted, was to pay homage to the Oberlin tutors who had taught her French and "to do a favor to American students by facilitating the study of an important and rather rare text." The rendition was deemed a substantial scholarly contribution and received positive reviews in Paris. Nevertheless, Cooper had difficulty getting a press to publish the work in the United States because university officials routinely denied the significance of work by Black women—while recognizing its academic value, they chose not to support it. In historical perspective, Charlemagne was at once a champion of common education and a ruthless imperialist. He serves as an ironic metaphor for rulers in the empire of American higher education who encouraged Cooper to learn the French language but refused to grant her legitimacy in their kingdom.¹⁰

Though not much was made of Cooper's doctoral accomplishment in terms of pay increase, promotion, or scholarly credibility, she was widely supported in D.C., and was part of a thriving scholarly community. Cooper was not alone among African Americans in the benefit she received from the international post-World War I education boom: in 1925, the year she graduated from the Sorbonne, Mercer Cook (Amherst College), John Matheus (Columbia University), and Jessie Fauset (Cornell University; University of Pennsylvania) were all studying and writing in France. Cooper's memoir of her graduate studies abroad tells how the doctorate, what she called the "third step," came at the end of a long but fruitful journey and she discussed her school experiences with triumphant imagery.¹¹

Cooper's first international voyage came when she spoke at the first Pan-African Congress in London, but she began her formal study abroad in 1911 and worked four consecutive summers in Paris researching her topic at the *Guilde Internationale*, *Bibliothèque Militaire*, and the France National Archives. Under threat of losing her position at Dunbar, she completed the dissertation manuscript in time for defense and, when she arrived in Paris, "burned out a devastating number of candles" making extensive adjustments and corrections to her manuscript. She wrote the dissertation in French, but her American-manufactured typewriter did not have French accents, so she punctuated the entire copy by hand. She worked in less than ideal conditions: electricity was not installed in the apartment she rented in France, so she had neither adequate heat nor light. Amazingly, she made it through the bureaucratic university process even though her communication with Sorbonne administrators and committee took place in French.¹²

In her dissertation, Cooper argued that the cause of France's downfall was greed, then presented clashing ideologies between the "Friends of the Blacks" and the power mongers who advocated enslavement during the revolutionary era of

Haiti (1791–1804) and France (1789–1799). Cooper's personal history as someone enslaved certainly influenced her scholarly interest in international power struggles over race, economic development, and attitudes influencing dehumanization of Africans in the Diaspora.¹³ To top all, she faced a formidable final battle because Celestin Bouglé, one of her committee members, forcefully opposed her thesis *and* her philosophical framework. For her dissertation defense, she quickly had to decide what to change, what to keep, and how to rationalize her findings to a native French-speaking senior scholar with whom she fundamentally disagreed:

I had but one short week to think it through. Besides and more emphatically I was frankly afraid of Bouglé. My French ear seemed duller than ever when he spoke and my tongue stupidly stuck in my throat. Madame told me that he was Breton which explained his variation from the more accustomed Parisian. But to make matters worse, I found myself on the opposite side in some pronouncements from his own thesis in *Égalité*, and when I gave out my opinion to Madame she said: "That will not help you. Bouglé is atheist."¹⁴

Cooper was on opposite sides of the table from her committee members in both social standing and in social thought. Underneath Cooper's controversial content about French slaveholders and abolitionists, her philosophical framework directly challenged Bouglé's: he claimed that the rights of man were an invention of Nordic man and therefore granted by man; she countered that the rights of man were granted by God and could be neither granted nor taken away by mere humans. Despite these challenges, on March 23, 1925, she successfully defended the dissertation that she had so diligently researched and carefully written and championed her beliefs of freedom, race, nationality, and Divine origins of human rights.¹⁵

When Cooper reflected on her defense twenty years later, in a memoir titled "The Third Step" (1945), she remembered the process fondly, despite the tension and ideological dispute. After discussion with her committee and defense of her thesis ensued, the chairman advised textual changes and challenged her view about the participation of the Mulattoes of Haiti. He argued that they did not feel nearly the solidarity with the Blacks that she supposed and that the three classes, Black, Mulatto, and White were more complex than she represented. She noted his objection and made the required changes in her manuscript. Overall, she recalled benefiting greatly from the process:

To me this discussion was both significant and informative. I realized, not unpleasantly that a *soutenance* was not a test [or] "exam" to be prepared for by cramming and cribbing the night before and brazened through by bluff and bluster the morning after by way of securing a "passing" mark.

.... Rather and most emphatically a *soutenance* “sustaining,” supporting, defending if need be, an original intellectual effort that has already been passed on by competent judges as worthy a place in the treasure house of thought, affords for the public a unique opportunity to listen in on this measuring of one’s thought by the yard stick of great thinkers, both giving and receiving inspiration and stimulus from the contact.¹⁶

Cooper wrote that, though Bouglé took exception to her activist tone—which he called “partisan pleading”—she passed her defense with his grudging approval and apparent respect.

Like Frederick Douglass, Anna Cooper was born enslaved in the United States. Also like Douglass, Cooper was drawn to France’s promise of *liberté, égalité, fraternité*. Many other American scholars were similarly infatuated by the offerings of Europe in general and Paris in particular.

Cooper in Context: Black Women’s Intellectual Production and Questions of National Identity

The intersection of Cooper’s social status, historic position, and intellectual production speaks to many concepts with which recent scholarship is concerned. For example, the 2006 American Studies Association annual conference theme involved “cultural exchange” and “transnationalism,” themes that represent an ever-present tension between national and international relationship in the American scholar’s experience. Given Cooper’s cultural identity and the deepening interest in the complexity of social location, contemporary scholars can investigate her insights and theoretical frameworks for a comparative look at how identity and education intersect. Those who desire to diversify higher education will find her work especially useful for its example that wider access to education can produce thoughtful, compelling, and socially significant results. Further, this work addresses questions of how national history interacts with international history, especially given Black women’s intriguing but largely invisible academic position.¹⁷

With varying explicitness, Black women scholars of the past have addressed issues facing Black women. Particularly, their research addressed ideas of morality, power, and autonomy, all inherent in Black women’s struggle to gain access to higher education and to maintain their cultural identity in light of their scholarly ambitions. This struggle for empowerment was apparent in Anna Cooper’s writing between the 1890s and 1950s, but was also present in the publications of most Black women writers.¹⁸

Building on the claims of Maria Stewart, Frances Harper, and Sojourner Truth, Cooper articulated the “particularity” of Black women’s position. She challenged Black women’s subjugation and argued for powers of self-definition and self-determination. In “Status of Women in America” (1892), she wrote:

The colored woman of today occupies, one may say, a unique position in this country. In a period itself transitional and unsettled, her status seems one of the least ascertainable and definitive of all the forces which make for our civilization. She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both.¹⁹

This essay, as well as “Our Raison d’Être” (1892), “Womanhood: A Vital Element in the Regeneration and Progress of the Race” (1886), “The Higher Education of Women” (1890–91), and “Woman vs. the Indian” (1891–92), revealed Cooper’s dedication to understanding Black women’s position and to add “this little voice to the chorus.”²⁰

Because Black women occupied this “unique” space, Cooper argued, they possessed a heightened capacity to challenge racial and gendered disparities: “Delicately sensitive at every pore to social atmospheric conditions, her calorimeter may well be studied in the interest of accuracy and fairness in diagnosing what is often conceded to be a ‘puzzling’ case.” To judge the trueness of American democracy or figure the viability of a proposed solution to disparities or inequities, ask a Black woman. As university research became increasingly employed to rationalize and maintain social inequity, Cooper argued for a subjective and critical approach, from the perspective of the marginalized, to measure the relevance and reliability of knowledge claims. Cooper’s research on Black women in higher education was especially valuable in assessing democracy in the United States at the turn of the twentieth century and her explicit reference to the international dynamic shows her reflections on America were most definitively situated in a global context long before her 1925 dissertation.²¹

Before the establishment of the United States as a nation and international power, Black women contributed to the public narrative. Writers emerged as exemplars of Black women’s dedication to learning and literature production. Lucy Terry (1746), Phyllis Wheatley (1773), Mary Prince (1831), Maria Stewart (1832), Elleanor Eldridge (1838), Ann Plato (1841), Zilpha Elaw (1846), Hanna Craft (c. 1850), Frances E. W. Harper (1851), and Harriet Jacobs (1861) are but a few of the early Black women poets, dramatists, novelists, elocutionists, activists, and autobiographers who asserted themselves in the social contract as civic participants by penning their own stories. They did not need to obtain a degree to write. Their production, in any genre, contained

an element of research, creative narrative, and critical social science worthy of acclaim if not degree. American society did not acknowledge these scholars as “educated”; recognition as learned ladies was withheld. But some Black women like Cooper did pursue formal education and advanced degrees despite barriers of legal discrimination and social prejudice (including myths of Black and female intellectual inferiority). When Black women did pursue formal education, they often publicly commented on national identity as much as cultural identity.²²

Anna Julia Cooper (1890), W.E.B. Du Bois (1900 and 1910), Charles Johnson (1938), and Harold Greene (1946) all have made significant contributions to research on African Americans in higher education. These studies show that although Black women had a significant advantage in educational attainment by the 1920s, they had little access to graduate studies and faculty positions, the arenas where most academic research and writing is produced. Despite the many barriers to graduate studies, Black women began to earn doctoral degrees in 1921; from the beginning, their research interests were grounded in comparative international issues of culture and social critique.²³

A “Third Step” ...Toward Europe: The First Black Women Ph.D.s

The first three Black women who earned doctoral degrees all did so in 1921. Their fields varied—English philology, German, and economics—but their findings all exemplified complex negotiations of their identities as both Black women and international scholars. As with previous writers, collegiate Black women injected their cultural mores into disciplinary epistemology and contributed sophisticated, practical knowledge.²⁴

Before 1954, the majority of women pursuing doctorates, the “third step,” did so in education. It is interesting, then, that none of the three 1921 scholars earned their degrees in education. This was because the field of education was in early stages of development: Harvard granted the nation’s first Ph.D. in education in 1920.²⁵

The first three Black women doctorates—Eva B. Dykes (Radcliffe College), Georgiana R. Simpson (University of Chicago), and Sadie T. Mossell Alexander (University of Pennsylvania)—wrote dissertations that varied greatly in length, content, and structure. Their approaches and conclusions both complemented and contradicted each other. Each manuscript held broader implications for African Americans and women. Expanded opportunity created by World War I explains the granting of three degrees in the same year and may also have

impacted the international focus of these early scholars. The phenomenon of three degrees being granted in one year at different institutions and in different disciplines allows for fascinating comparisons, especially given that two of the three dissertations focused on European scholars.²⁶

Eva Dykes, in English philology, wrote an in-depth analysis tracing English writer Alexander Pope's (1688–1744) rise and fall in popularity in the United States. Of the first dissertations, Dykes's was the most abstracted from her identity. Not once in 644 pages did she mention the status of African American women as such. Nor did she use her findings about Pope to state how his work exemplified a sympathetic position to those Africans enslaved during the tenure of his popularity. She simply did literary and linguistic analysis. First, Dykes identified characteristics of Pope's writing style, form, and voice. She then placed Pope in his European context, detailing his stature as a writer and esteemed reputation as a translator in England. She argued that by tracing personal letters, New England newspapers, magazines, travel diaries, or popular and obscure poetry, one could clearly recognize that Pope's influence in the emerging United States was far wider than had been previously acknowledged. Many—including Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, and Noah Webster, students, poets and journalists alike—quoted, cited, or copied Pope, though after the early 1800s, they did not overtly credit him. She indicated that in the Revolutionary era, American identity formation was a death knell to all things English, including English literature. She concluded that though American literature evolved swiftly with a style of its own, it did not cease to pay homage, even if only silently, to the voice and form that Pope perfected.²⁷

In the second dissertation, Georgiana Simpson, in Germanics, explored philosopher Johann von Herder's (1744–1803) interpretations of *das Volk* (the people) as both a national and racial category. Simpson's dissertation, "Herder's Conception of 'das Volk,'" was—like Dykes's work—an analysis of language and ideas. The noticeable difference was that instead of focusing on linguistics, Simpson dove into philosophy. Simpson's analysis of Herder rested on the contentious role of *das Volk*. She explored themes such as Romantic notions of "low" common culture and the alleged innate creativity of the masses, and she investigated claims of "primitive" artistic ability. Simpson outlined Herder's argument that common people were the highest representation of freedom, art, and culture; and she explained his ideas that "common" expressions reflected basic utterances that were closer to nature than those of the aristocratic "cultured" class.²⁸

She began the 59-page dissertation by exploring definitions of "the people" and displayed her mastery in language, especially Old English, Old German,

Latin, and Greek as she provided an etymology of *Volk*. She analyzed power dynamics between social classes, delineating the two senses in which Herder used the term *Volk*: (1) a nation as a group bound by blood or race, and (2) a nation that does not suffer what he considered the “deteriorating” effects of “civilization.” She translated his characterization of individual and group identities and demonstrated how he favored less processed “primitive” dance, community stories, literature, and music as “pure” exotic expression. She then contextualized Herder’s work within eighteenth-century English, French, Spanish, and German philosophy. She used Rousseau’s social contract to connect Herder’s individual and group identity to the state. She concluded by showing how Herder’s conception of *das Volk* was instructive because he recognized the power, potential, and beauty of the masses—the common people—who, in his estimation, were closer than the ruling class to spontaneous and compassionate humanity. Simpson claimed that Herder celebrated the common people; she thereby vindicated her own race and gender, which were both portrayed (usually in a disparaging manner) as closer to nature than the more “civil” White and male citizens.²⁹

In economics, Sadie T. Mossell Alexander queried the financial systems of one hundred Black participants in the northern, urban Great Migration to study the status of the Black family. She then made suggestions on how they might secure a better fiscal future. Alexander disagreed with Simpson about the value of common folk; she argued that only by ascending to the middle-class would African Americans gain respect. Each scholar sought to interpret some aspect of African American and women’s experience, though in markedly different ways. Alexander’s dissertation was not international in nature; rather, she traced national movement of people, resources, and culture. However, like Dykes (who traveled to Switzerland later in life) and Simpson (who studied abroad in Germany), Alexander did venture abroad in her professional career—a lot. Her travel diaries, housed at the University of Pennsylvania, show records of her trips to Haiti and other Caribbean islands, England, Germany, Hawaii, India, Israel, South America (multiple countries), Japan, and China. After earning her Ph.D. Sadie also earned a law degree and, with her husband Raymond Pace Alexander (a Harvard trained lawyer) built a very successful practice, so they could afford to travel extensively. Sadie Alexander was also a member of the International Committee of Social Work and Chair of the Commission on Human Relations, so her international academic interests translated into practice for human rights and social justice—part of her travels happened under the auspices of the U.S. State Department.³⁰

The convergence and divergence in conclusions between the scholarly inquiries of Dykes, Simpson, and Alexander reflect larger disagreements on the meaning, significance, and purpose of higher education. America has never been in agreement on what college should prepare one to do or be. For African American women, the clash of values inherent in their roles as activist and as researcher demonstrated these tensions in academic purposes and institutional goals. What was consistent was their understanding that international studies and travel were part of an erudite life of the mind and part of a purposeful life of the heart and hand as well. For American Studies scholars today, Black women's academic history serves as a germane area from which to ask and answer questions about national scholarship, educational purpose and international identities of intellect.

Attraction to the City of Light

It is widely known that African Americans visited, lived, and worked in Paris for many reasons over a long span of time. At different times in history, for different reasons, Paris was a haven for Black scholars. Many came to study art and quite a few came to study at the Sorbonne. Yet, scholars were only one type of African American who came to Paris. Some came as private persons (such as Sally Hemings, who was enslaved by Thomas Jefferson, or the Black soldiers during WWI), but the vast majority of Black Americans in Paris were culture bearers: artists, dancers, singers, musicians, and writers who developed a fruitful and creative exchange of art and life.

Many culture bearers sought in Europe the recognition of their art not available to Blacks in America. From the famous dancers—Josephine Baker (1920s) to Alvin Ailey (1960s); from the Fisk Jubilee Singers (1927) and Billy Holiday (1958) to Nina Simone (1970s) and Jill Scott (2007); from the WWI soldiers who brought jazz Montmartre, Louis Armstrong (1930s) and Miles Davis (1949) to today's continued sojourns by Herbie Hancock (1980s) and Chuck D with Public Enemy who brought hip hop and rap to Europe (1990s), Black American art and music has been one of many parts of the African Diaspora to enrich European culture. This cultural context is a vital and vibrant starting point from which to better understand the draw of African Americans to the City of Light.³¹

In addition to the traditional course options, writer's conferences have provided an outstanding venue to mix art and scholarship; the Sorbonne and various Parisian bookstores have hosted scholars that have literally changed the landscape of arts and letters. Bob Swaim's film *The First Assembly of Black*

Writers and Artists: Paris, September 1956 captures the connection of Black men political culture bearers from Africa, the Caribbean, and the Americas that brought together a range of geniuses from Leopold Senghor and Aimé Césaire to James Baldwin, Richard Wright, Franz Fanon, and Horace Mann Bond. There is one recent and very salient example which shows the longstanding and enduring flexibility that African American scholars have enjoyed in Paris: in 2006, Pulitzer Prize winning author Toni Morrison (who has taught traditional classes at College de France), hosted a Poetry Slam at the Louvre! This history of Black travelers is not simply a laundry list of names; it is an opportunity to teach contemporary students history by following in the footsteps of past travelers. I used this method of teaching when I offered a study abroad course in Paris during the Spring Break week of Spring 2007.³²

Application of Historical Research: "African Americans in Paris" Study Abroad Course

I became intrigued with Anna Julia Cooper in 1997 when I first read her essay "Higher Education of Women." Her work comprised a central part of my graduate research and in November 2003, with the support of my home departments and the University of Florida Paris Research Center (PRC), I followed Dr. Cooper's trail to the Sorbonne to locate more information about her work. I sat in the room where she defended her dissertation and saw firsthand the high ceilings, imposing artwork, and magnificent wooden construction that she described in her memoir. I traced her steps from the university to 4 Rue Rollin where she lived in 1925, only to discover that it is located down the lane from 17 rue de Cardinal Lemoine, the flat where Ernest Hemingway lived in 1922. In addition to these experiences, I saw a multitude of other important sites and gathered invaluable resources from Ricki Stevenson (founder of Black Paris Tours).³³ Also in 2003, I met with Michel Fabre and his wife Genevieve Fabre, authors of many essential works of African American literary analysis, especially the classic *From Harlem to Paris*. My search for documents resulted in a web-collaboration with Sorbonne scholars documenting Black Americans in Jazz-Age Paris. Building on my interest in Cooper and stories of other persons that I had encountered while there, I constructed a comprehensive historical portrait about African Americans in Paris in order to better understand her visit; compiling disparate sources, I ended up with a list of over 200 names!³⁴

I designed a course around my collected findings and in Spring 2007, I taught a study abroad course, "African Americans in Paris" based on this

research. With fifteen students, I visited areas in Paris where African Americans had gone and enriched my understanding of the many conditions under which people traveled and the many possible lessons learned.³⁵

Reflections on Teaching the Course

For me, the “African Americans in Paris” course was an amazing experience; traveling to Paris to teach and learn was even more rewarding than my initial trip for independent research. As a class, the locations we visited including the following sections of Paris: the Ninth *arrondissement* (Black Montmartre, Club Scene, Grand Hotel, Hotel Scribe), the Fifth and Sixth *arrondissements* (La Coupole and Le Select, **Présence Africaine Bookstore**, and La Sorbonne), Eighth and Seventeenth *arrondissements* (Arc de Triomphe, Josephine Baker’s theater), and the First *arrondissement* (Jefferson’s flat & Louvre). Guest speakers included Daniel Maximin (author, *Lone Sun*), Jake Lamar (author, *Rendezvous 18th*), Dr. Marie-Madeleine Martinet (Sorbonne Professor and head of the “Virtual Montmartre” project), and Bob Swaim (filmmaker, 1956 Congress of Black Artists and Writers).

Of course we saw the Eiffel Tower like all who visit Paris, but thanks to our many gracious hosts, guided preparatory reading, and a fine-tuned itinerary powered by the excellent PRC staff, we also had access to Josephine Baker’s suite at the Hotel Scribe; the Amphithéâtre Descartes where Leopold Senghor, Aimé Cesaire, and Jacques Alexis convened the 1956 Artists and Writers Congress; the gold-filled Grand Hotel ballroom where Du Bois led the 1919 Pan-African Congress; and, of course, the Amphithéâtre Richelieu where Anna Cooper defended her dissertation. There were instances of connected learning—for example, some Haitian and Jamaican students were deeply touched by Daniel Maximin’s insightful comments about the importance of their critical Caribbean cultural awareness in a transnational context. We experienced moments of profound emotion—like when four Black women students and I stood in the lobby of the Hôtel Langeac and stared silently at Jefferson’s huge portrait, wondering about his “relationship” with Sally in and beyond Paris. The facilitation by the UF Paris Research Center was central to the success of the course and provide a paradigm of how campus study abroad centers can offer professors in every discipline a limitless opportunity for richly textured experiential pedagogy.

Students were required to write final papers based on their experiences as well as the reading. Generally, the lectures and the reading materials explained that there were many reasons why Black Americans went to Paris, some for

artistic development and some for a broader perception of freedom. Some went for war and stayed for the culture. Some, like James Baldwin, went for culture and found (like the U.S. migration Blacks seeking freedom in the North), that that not even freedom abroad could fully meet their expectations. These reasons for travel changed with the larger international political structures, but from the 1800s to the new millennium, study abroad played a significant role in African Americans' academic life. Many writers have observed that not all Blacks in Paris have the same status; a United States passport often—but not always—guarantees a measure of *liberté, égalité, fraternité* not extended to Africans...especially not offered to Algerians. James Baldwin (*The Price of the Ticket*, 1948–1985), Angela Davis (*Autobiography*, 1974), and Shay Youngblood (*Black Girl in Paris*, 2001) have all commented on this disparity; however, my students also observed that the international and cosmopolitan nature of Paris offered a palpable interracial mixing that was just not present (or at least not acknowledged) in the United States. In addition to these first three guiding questions for the course, the students viewed Paris from their chosen academic disciplines. They produced final papers for the course that focused on African Americans in Paris but viewed the course materials, their experiences, and additional research from the vantage of literature, health, art history, and law. The result was a powerful combination of historical, theoretical, and applied learning that illuminated the experiences of Black men and women in a way that was relevant to a range of students' academic disciplines.

As this course description demonstrates, the study of Dr. Cooper moved from my theoretical research on Black women's academic identities to an applied, on-location class about international study. Growing up as a military child who traveled widely and lived in Germany for three years at the age of seven, I was inspired, and felt comfortable venturing to places like Mexico, Brazil, Canada, England, Paris, and Tanzania. Thus, I am invested in learning how other African American women scholars have traversed the globe. For me, it is imperative to use knowledge of past scholarship to break the myths of intellectual inferiority as much as the myths of an oversimplified U.S. nationality. Currently muchscholarly debate about "diversity" assumes that minority students are less qualified or capable of learning based on lower standardized test scores. The nuanced history presented here reflects student traditions steeped in the ability of Black students consonant of their complex transnational histories to experience a meaningful college course of study in dynamic international settings. As many have noted, narrowly designed standardized tests and "objective" national exams cannot measure the whole of

students' capacity to learn...they should therefore not be used to limit students' opportunity to attend educational institutions. Anna Cooper never took the GRE and she was arguably more educated than many who consider that exam an adequate measure of advanced learning. This history of Black women's study abroad can assist in removing barriers to educational opportunities that still exist for many Black and women students. This is exactly what Anna Cooper's life work demanded.

Conclusion: Race, Gender, and Learning across Nations

Educational researchers must talk specifically about curricular objectives, learning outcomes, academic meaning, and collegiate trends within a national setting; however, discussions of national academic identity without historical perspective and international contexts will be incomplete. This article uses Dr. Anna Julia Cooper's scholarship to encourage dialogue about African American scholastic history. I argue that American scholarship and experience, including Black American scholarship and experience, has always had an essential element of international exchange that current study abroad programs can utilize and build upon. By recognizing past scholars' complex relationships with global research, we can clearly see that knowledge of larger issues (beyond the U.S.) impacts, shapes, and is shaped by issues within the U.S. academy.

Cooper's life and work clearly demonstrate how the international landscape impacts national narratives. Born enslaved and therefore interrogating the moral, political, and economic transnational contexts of Black slavery from an insider perspective, she engaged in groundbreaking research (through location of her degree and her academic subject area). Her work had a profound and positive impact on those of us who followed her. Ultimately, Cooper produced research that both investigated *and* combated racial and gendered oppression. In addition to demonstrating that Black women could complete doctoral research and were (despite widespread rhetoric to the contrary) capable of stretching the collective human mind, Cooper used her degree to increase educational opportunity for marginalized populations in the United States. Through my investigation of the past, I apply Cooper's story and scholarship for similar purposes. Black women's positions are indeed "particular" and so these stories enrich the "treasure house of thought."

Paris is a rich source of this legacy, but not the only valuable resource. As exemplified by Fanny Coppin, Sadie T. Mossell Alexander, and Flenmie Kittrell, it is important to move beyond U.S. and European contexts to

adequately measure Black women's educational experiences and today's student educational possibilities. Beyond considering African American women's history, we must acknowledge and engage Black women intellectuals who are producing useful knowledge all over the world.

Toward this end, I have sought to move my own research beyond Europe into Africa. In an article titled, "Gender and Research in the African University," I situate 2004 Nobel Prize winning scholar Dr. Wangari Maathai's environmental *Green Belt Movement* (1985, 2004) and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf' political critique of *Women, War, and Peace* (2002) within a larger African women's scholarly agenda. African gendered research (work by and about African women) can help the global academy to fulfill Dr. Maathai's mandate that we "improve the quality of life" for those most disenfranchised, worldwide. In Spring 2006, I team taught, "Interdisciplinary Perspectives of Women," at the University of Florida with Dr. Rose Mwaipopo, an associate professor sociologist from the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM). Then, for a month during the summer of 2006, I lived in the Research Flats at the UDSM in Tanzania where I was a visiting researcher. I was granted access to the East Africana Collection (EAC) at the UDSM library, which houses theses and dissertations. Through UDSM library, I was also granted access to the Association of African Universities' DATAD dissertation database. This work broadened my relationship with Dr. Rose and other UDSM African women scholars and contextualized my work on African American women's scholarly production in the U.S.³⁶

I had three research goals for my work in Tanzania:

1. Decipher how many and in what fields women have obtained doctoral degrees from the University of Dar es Salaam (UDSM)
2. Situate UDSM's women researchers within the broader range of African scholarship
3. Consider thematic details and gender dynamics of African women scholars' academic production

This research is part of a larger effort to investigate, claim, and recognize the participation of Black women scholars worldwide.

Given the particular social location of Black women in every nation—a subjugated status based on multiple oppressions—I argue (as Dr. Cooper argued) that Black women's position offers a unique standpoint from which to analyze and effectively address human problems: we are "delicately sensitive to social atmospheric conditions" indeed. In my research, I posit the existence of a *standpoint social contract* and demonstrate that Black women reside at the intersection of Rousseau's *Social Contract* (1762), Carole Pateman's *Sexual Contract* (1988), and

Charles Mills' *Racial Contract* (1991). I use standpoint social contract, influenced by—but not confined to—Patricia Hill Collins' *Black Feminist Thought* (1991), and connect cultural identity to every individual's relationship with institutions, states, and nations. As John Dewey stated (1938), experience impacts education; based on my research on Black women's intellectual production, it is clear that cultural identity impacts experience and therefore impacts educational attainment and intellectual production. Therefore, given the position of Black women internationally, because of their cultural identity, education, and intellectual production, Black women academics can offer uniquely informed scholarship and provide much-needed academic and intellectual leadership.³⁷

Women like Dr. Wangari Maathai, the first African woman to win a Pulitzer Prize (Kenya), and Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, the first African woman President of an African country (Liberia) represent a growing number of Black women leaders, who are formally educated and effective at national and international service. Dr. Cooper was but one of a multitude of African women in the Diaspora who must be consulted in order to move the Global Ivory Tower toward the heights that education and intellectual exchanges are capable of reaching.³⁸

The world can, and must, benefit from the scholarship of Black women. Dr. Cooper's extraordinary sojourn to the Sorbonne can help us all find an entry point into a mutually beneficial process of developing an intellectual democracy. Traveling abroad is an essential element of college and university studies. In uncharted academic territory, Black women's educational history provides a new, intriguing map to advance exploration of global studies and enrichment of human ideas.

Author's Note

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