

Africana-Melanated Womanism

Africana-Melanated Womanism:

In It Together

Edited by

Clenora Hudson (Weems)

**Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing**



Africana-Melanated Womanism: In It Together

Edited by Clenora Hudson (Weems)

This book first published 2022

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Copyright © 2022 by Clenora Hudson (Weems) and contributors

All rights for this book reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner.

ISBN (10): 1-5275-8564-6

ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-8564-5

To Our Heavenly Father; My Mother and Father (Mary and Mathew Pearson); My Daughter and Entire Family; My Mentor, Dr. Richard K. Barksdale; Friends; Colleagues and All Africana People. Special Tribute to Dr. Wilfred Samuels (1946-2020), my Co-author of *Toni Morrison* (1990); Noble Laureate, Toni Morrison (1931-2019)—“And the Legacy Lives On!”

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Foreword x
Dean Deborah Jackson, DMin

Preface xv
Clenora Hudson (Weems), PhD; Gretel Thornton, Dissertator

Introduction xix
Molefi Kete Asante, PhD

Part I: Theory: Africana-Melanated Womanism

The Significance of an Authentic Africana Womanism Paradigm:
Collectivity and Interconnectedness for Social Justice..... 2
Clenora Hudson (Weems), PhD

Contrastive Analysis of Africana Womanism, Black Feminism
and African Feminism 27
Ama Mazama, PhD

Africana Womanism as an Antidote to Mainstream Black Feminisms 43
Mark Christian, PhD

Part II: Securing Our Legacy and Mission via Africana Texts

Reclaiming Africana-Melanated Women: The Future of Africana
Family/The Power of the Media 59
Marquita M. Gammage, PhD

Our Children, Too, Need Models: A Letter to Aunt Daisy—
The Spirit of the Africana Womanist..... 80
Alice Faye Duncan

Africana Womanism: The Importance of Religion & Politics
in Africana Life 86
April C. E. Langley, PhD

Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison: Model Africana Womanist Literary Crusader for Social Justice	101
<i>Clenora Hudson (Weems), PhD</i>	
Part III: Moral Responsibility & Generational Wealth—An Africana Womanism Perspective	
Pre-Africana Womanist, Ida B. Wells-Barnett: Embodiment of Africana Womanism Principles	113
<i>Charles Williams, PhD; Hilda Booker Williams, EdD</i>	
From Public/Private Schools to the Academy: <i>Africana Womanism</i> —Interconnectivity and the Africana Family	128
<i>Tammy S. Taylor, Dissertator</i>	
Today’s Civil/Human Rights Movements: Africana Men & Women Together—Against Racism & Emmett Till Continuums in a 5-Step Solution	150
<i>Clenora Hudson (Weems), PhD</i>	
Social and Racial Justice in Teacher Education: An Africana Womanist Mandate.....	163
<i>Lasana D. Kazembe, PhD; Tamba O. Jackson, PhD</i>	
Call “Mama”: God, Family and the Un-Masked Authority of Black Motherhood	178
<i>Debra Walker King, PhD</i>	
Conclusion.....	201
<i>Clenora Hudson (Weems) and Veronica Adadevoh</i>	
Epilogue.....	205
<i>S. Renee Mitchell, EdD</i>	
Afterword	207
<i>James B. Stewart, PhD; Anne Steiner, PhD</i>	
Abstracts.....	211
About the Book.....	222

About the Editor and Contributors	223
Appendix (Africana-Melanated Womanism Sample Syllabus).....	225
Textbooks and Course Materials	227
Index.....	233
Praise for the Book	240

FOREWORD

DEAN DEBORAH JACKSON, DMIN

The year 2020 will be remembered in history as one of catastrophic events. COVID-19, a previously unknown and presently incurable novel virus, gripped the world, leaving millions infected and over 1 million dead, with national economies devastated in the United States alone. The economic impact of the pandemic at its peak reached an alarming unemployment percentage of millions. While initial immediate stock market losses were recovered, the disparity between “the haves” and “the have nots” increased. The wealthiest individuals saw their earnings and portfolios grow. The poorest found themselves unemployed or underemployed, and with insufficient relief, struggled just to survive.

2020 is also a year of racial reckoning. Amid an extremely polarized political climate, the stresses of our lives were taxed and stretched, as we watched marginalized people suffer. We witnessed escalating and renewed attacks on black and brown bodies at the hands of law enforcement with the shootings of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Rayshard Brooks, Daniel Prude, Sean Monterrosa, Justin Howell, Jamel Floyd, James Blake, and too many others whose stories remained untold. In response, people took to the streets worldwide, led often by younger generations, the millennials, who used social media as an effective and powerful tool for communication and mobilization. We also saw rage. For those most marginalized, it was the rage of an anger that had no outlet and no relief. Years of oppression burst forth, angry and raw. Rage was also on display by extremists and supremacists, who fanned and fomented hate, unable to accept the demographic shift that will leave the United States as a minority country in less than 30 years.

Is there a way out of the morass that has left us fractured, distressed and despairing? I believe that there is, and this way is found in the theory and praxis of Africana Womanism. Our times demand a way forward that is both healing and restorative. A focus is required that helps societies function inclusively and holistically to ensure that all are served, and none are left behind. As scholar, author, and leader, Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems) brilliantly demonstrates, Africana-Melanated Womanism

speaks to our most urgent needs as a society, and this work provides a necessary and instructive hope for such a time as this.

Africana Womanism is the antidote to our ills because it represents a model through which we can operate in the world, providing a grounded sense of self, an esteeming and nurturing sense of others, and an uplifting focus on the world that is restorative. First conceptualized and articulated by Hudson (Weems) over 30 years ago, the encompassing 18 characteristics of the **Africana Womanist** speak to:

- **Who she is** – Self Naming, Self-Defining, Spiritual, Whole.
- **How she functions** – Mothering, Family Centered, Nurturing, Genuine in Sisterhood, Male Compatible, Respectful of Elders.
- **How she is viewed** – Respected, Recognized, Strong, Authentic.
- **How she works in the world** – Flexible Role Player, Adaptable, Ambitious, In Concert with Male in the Liberation Struggle.

The approach is complete and holistic. Because the Africana Womanist is self-named and defined, she is secure in her sacredness and rooted in her sense of self. A world that is stressed and distressed gains a sense of calm and assurance in her because of her way of being. But do not mistake this for self-aggrandizement. Relationally, she is mothering and nurturing. She cares for her family, is inclusively considerate of men and women, and she respects others, particularly elders. These relational ways of being demonstrate the love of others as a primal concern, along with self, and provide a positive template for living in the world.

The Africana-Melanated Womanist is strong, yet authentic in her dealings for which she is recognized and respected. The respect that she commands provides her with the space and ability to function flexibly in the world. She can lead, but just as important, she can follow. She is adaptable, but ambitious for the causes in which she engages. And, because she is inclusive, she functions in concert with men in the struggle for liberation of her people. These generative characteristics garner value and as such, she is well regarded by others.

Collectively, these attributes are critically important. We are living in a society that has lost its footing, as our actions across spectrums are self-serving and exploitative. To break this cycle, we need the paradigm which can be found in the Africana Womanist, for she, like the woman described in *Proverbs* 31:10, “is worth far more than rubies.” Consider, for example, enslaved women of African descent in the United States. These women cared for the slave owner’s children and households with the kind of love and nurture they provided for their own, as they were, after all, children. During the Reconstruction Era/post enslavement, African

American women came together to promote expanded rights for African American men as well. In fact, Fredrick Douglass solicited their support, with the assistance of Frances Watkins Harper and Maria W. Stewart, and succeeded in securing Sojourner Truth, thereby contributing to the ratification of the 15th Amendment to the Constitution in 1870, giving Black men the right to vote. And Black women, too, jubilantly rejoiced at the celebration of this great achievement for African Americans on the whole, even as they remained somewhat disenfranchised as women. Through the twentieth-century, countless African American women whose names have been lost to history, sought to lift others as they climbed for better opportunities. From their example and work, they fostered a culture of care that saves communities. If we would only glean from their experiences, we would extrapolate a robust and working theory of Africana Womanism. If we would learn from their actions, we would understand the supporting praxis methodologies. Hudson (Weems), and the gifted scholars with whom she collaborated in putting forth this important volume, has succeed in crafted an ideal model for success.

This collection of writings first situates an Africana Womanist paradigm as expansive and all-encompassing contextually, superseding previous theories. Theoretically, feminism believed itself to serve as an inclusive framework to articulate the lived experiences of women. However, in practice, its application excluded the experiences of Africana women. Feminism also sought an independence from and exclusion of male participation that Africana Womanism does not promote. Womanism, a term and definition coined by Alice Walker in the Introduction to her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens*, sought to demonstrate greater inclusivity. However, to suggest that a “Womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender” is to offer a sub-optimized definition where the shortcomings of one construct are foisted on that which was to be expansive, thus, causing this new construct to similarly fall short. Africana Womanism supersedes these definitions because this construct lays the groundwork for an inclusive human interconnectedness that strives to overcome racial dominance for all, while unapologetically asserting the equality for Africana people. This is the theoretical foundation.

But how, then, do we live? This body of work secondly applies theoretical principles to exemplars, thereby demonstrating effective functioning in the world. We can look to leaders like Ida B. Wells-Barnett, the anti-lynching Crusader for Social Justice, to understand how her life models the Africana Womanist theory that has been codified for our good, as she represents an unmistakable embodiment of these prized characteristics. We also see the model of Africana-Melenated Womanism through the writings of Toni Morrison, Nobel Laureate and author of the

Pulitzer Prize-Winning novel, *Beloved*. She provided context to the story of Africana people so that the world could better understand the multifaceted experiences of a people with depth, history, and a future. These women, aligned with the characteristics of Africana Womanism, show us how to be in the world.

Then Hudson (Weems) and these notable scholars expand our understanding of a praxis model by applying the learnings to various relationships and contexts. Our children, for example, experience the Africana Womanist as “Mama”: a nurturer, provider, and protector. Her innate mothering abilities serve to shape the lives of the children in her care, ensuring their educational growth, instilling a love for God and others, and positioning them for success. Because she is a spiritual being, we experience the Africana Womanist as one with an unshakable faith in God. She sees in herself and others the divine actualization that results from being made in the image of God. As such, her faith enlivens her political stances to rail against oppression, and champion that which is just and right. Moreover, her faith demands equal sacrifice in our economic policies so that all could have what is needed and could then contribute to the well-being of the community in equitable ways.

But wanting to truly demonstrate that we are “In It Together,” Hudson (Weems) and others demonstrate the durability of this Africana-Melanated Womanist model by tackling topics that speak to our present moment. We need, for example, to understand the violence of Whiteness and how it too often seeks to champion its dominant and dominating role in the lives of black and brown people. By exposing this violence, society can be positioned to leverage the characteristics of Africana-Melanated Womanism to overcome “privilege” and realize the rich benefits of true cultural diversity. As Africana Womanism calls for authenticity, we also need to see and celebrate authentic reflections of Black lives in the arts so that they might supplant the erroneous and harmful tropes that continue to manifest in society and motivate harsh and hostile responses to black and brown bodies. And finally, we need to understand where we go from here by revisiting the ongoing struggle of Africana people for ultimate human survival, mourning the continuation of “the Emmett Till Continuum,” an identification designator coined by Dr. Hudson (Weems) in the 1990s, now referencing yet other brutal and senseless murders, like an Ahmaud Arbery and countless others, being prepared for how best to move forward.

Yes, 2020 will be remembered for its catastrophic events, but such occurrences have the power to help us seek innovations that dismantle oppressive systems and reconstruct ways of being for mutual benefit and societal good. It is with this hope that I embrace Africana-Melanated Womanism as a guiding model. Africana Womanism provides both the

rigorous theory and validated praxis that withstands the test of time, is applicable across contexts, informs our lived experiences, and enables us all to fully realize ultimate liberation. This is the promise of God and as we remain “in it together,” we will press on, as James Weldon Johnson “Lift Every Voice and Sing,” the National Black Anthem, call for, “till [our] victory is won!”

PREFACE

CLENORA HUDSON (WEEMS), PHD
AND GRETTEL THORNTON
(DISSERTATOR, AUBURN U)

The role of the Preface for a book is to share a somewhat personal backdrop of the author relative to the project. It gives life and texture to the subject, and, moreover, unveils the contributing factors that have brought the work to full fruition. This particular piece, written by both the editor of this book and her mentee, takes on a broader task, as it relates the commitment of the author and her chosen contributors in a collective initiative for both scholarship commonalities and for the growth and protection of the Africana community, thereby rendering a more complete story of the life of Africana people, in general, in their quest for eternal peace and freedom in a world that continues to deny them their rightful place in society.

Following the authors of the Foreword – written by **Dean Deborah Jackson**, who sets the tone and the mission; the Preface by **Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems)** and **Gretel Thornton**; and the Introduction, written by **Dr. Molefi Kete Asante**, conceptualizer of Afrocentricity, who explicates an overall African-centered perspective, necessary and thus, presented in all the chapters – this volume closes with the Epilogue, by **Dr. S. Renee Mitchell**, and the Afterword, by **Dr. James B. Stewart** and **Dr. Ann Steiner**, who collectively render their assessment, validating that Africana-Melanated Womanism is, indeed, a worthy and much-needed authentic paradigm for the salvation of the Africana community. All the chapter authors diligently crafted masterful contributions to this three-part-volume, exploring many thought-provoking questions on the dilemma of the entire Africana family, men, women, and children, from an authentic family-centered, Africana Womanism perspective. As they expound upon controversial issues, they focus on how the theory of Africana Womanism best addresses burning questions today, relative to their specific diverse areas of expertise, as historians, philosophers, social scientists, anthropologists, administrators, and literary critics. The following is an overview of issues we have collectively taken on for debate.

In Part I, the first three Africana scholars – **Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems)**, **Dr. Ama Mazama**, and **Dr. Mark Christian**, in their seminal chapters on the overarching theme – Theory: Africana-Melanated Womanism – lay down the foundation, wherein we witness their intellectual and private soul debates. Their primary mission is to distinguish between Africana Womanism and alternative female-based theories, keeping in mind at all times that the community and culture out of which they emerge represent a defining factor in identifying the most authentic paradigm for Africana people.

Part II, *Securing Our Legacy and Mission via Africana Texts*, offers important dialectics between Africana-Melanated Womanism and Feminisms, and by extension, Womanism, wherein interpretative, creative, and research-based readings of Africana texts are executed for deeper interpretations of life. This category explores the application of theory to texts, wherein, we observe the intellectual process of the following: **Dr. Marquita M. Gammage**, Black women stereotypes in the media; **Alice Faye Duncan**, Africana Womanist as model for our children; **Dr. April C.E. Langley**, an Africana Womanist perusal of the significance of religion and politics in African life; **Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems)**, presents Nobel Laureate Toni Morrison as Model Africana Womanist Literary Crusader for Social Justice. This was the 2021 Keynote Address for 50th Anniversary of African American Studies at the U of Iowa, where Africana Womanism was, in fact, birthed in 1988 during my 1st semester at my Alma Mater.

Finally, Part III, *Moral Responsibility and Generational Wealth*, gives us rich insights into the nature and experiences of a people profoundly endowed. It opens with a co-authored chapter by **Drs. Charles** and **Hilda Williams**, in a veneration of the model Africana Womanist Social Justice Crusader, Ida B. Wells-Barnett; **Tammy S. Taylor** follows with her position relative to merging the Public and Private Schools with the Academy (colleges and universities) wherein she highlights the interconnectivity of the Africana family on all fronts; **Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems)** offers a 5-Step Solution to End Racism, culminating in a true model case today of Generational Wealth for Blacks; **Dr. Lasana Kazembe**, and **Dean Tamba O. Jackson**, together, construct a pathway for our youths, our future leaders, who must have workable tools for mastering our new world. Finally, **Rev. Dr. Debra Walker King** takes us on a powerhouse, hallelujah sermon that ultimately leads to a glorious victory, a long-awaited moment wherein all could be right with the world, as God ordained that we rejoice and go forth.

If we seek real truth, we will have a deeper understanding of the physical and spiritual dynamics of both us and the other, so much so that we can leave with “the reasons why and the answers to and the people who

and the places where and the days when,” (Margaret Walker, “For My People,” qtd. in *Call and Response*, 1159). All is reflected in the Conclusion, co-authored by **Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems)** and **Veronica Adadevoh**, wherein we have a glimpse of how far we have come, up to the unlimited possibilities for Blacks today, who are long overdue true social justice. Herein lies invaluable information, reiterating the significance of Generational Wealth for Blacks, spelled out in solid details by a highly accomplished Black female businesswoman. Of course, the insightful endorsements by **Dr. Chike Akua**, **Laura Faith Kebede**, **Dr. Alveda King** & **Dr. Zifkile Makwavarara** confirm the value of this volume.

In the tradition of passing the legacy on to the next generation, I now pass the narrative to my mentee, **Gretel Thornton**, who will relate how she fits, as a doctoral student, into this overarching narrative of Africana people in search of answers, relative to who we really are, and what our role as teachers/professors and students need be for the ultimate salvation of our families and our future generations.

II. The Mentee:

When I first arrived at my prestigious rural southern university to begin my PhD journey, many women and men of all ethnicities were exclaiming to me that Black Feminism was my home, and that all I wanted to do, everything I wanted to be, and every conundrum that I had ruminated upon thus far could be instantaneously solved if I just pledged my allegiance to the Flag of United Black Feminism. While I questioned this, after a while, I had almost been converted. Still, I could not completely force myself to believe in a theory that did not support how I actually felt. I knew all that was stated to me about the comfort that would be allotted to me as a Black Feminist was a fallacy, that almost everything that they were rapping to me was flawed in a way that had been obscured by the constant reanimation of this theory that did not take into account the Black Male bodies that were piling up in the streets, prisons, graveyards, and schools. How could Black Feminism as my main paradigm or theoretical framework aid me as an educator, boldly confronted with the reality faced by countless Black males who were, are, and will be discarded from education and western society like socks with holes? How could I tailor my research to help me as a Black female educator to understand how Black males are perpetually vilified and treated as brutes in American classrooms? I asked myself these questions every time I witness the assassinations of Black males in classrooms, who, at some point, may be added among those countless Black male victims outside of the classroom. Under another tree that celebrates the wholistic contours of the Black family, I have, hence, decided to seek my shade,

comfort, and shelter. That other way of thinking is Africana Womanism, consisting of an interconnected unit including all of us, which naturally includes the plight of the Black male as a very important part of that family.

I had seen her picture (Dr. Clenora Hudson (Weems)) on the internet, the one who created this alternative paradigm, and revisited it many times throughout my years in undergrad. I kept seeing those eyes that spoke directly to me, until it got so bad that one day, I just had to email her, and just pray that she would respond. Well, I emailed her and heard nothing from her for five weeks. Maybe it was too long, I thought, as I went on and on, detailing my thoughts and experiences as a Black woman at a predominately white institution. Then, one day an email popped in my inbox, explaining to me how she had been busy working on her new book. Since that day I have felt at ease to look out the blight of African Americans from not this all-exclusory gender vantage point, but now, with a chance to view our various positionalities from 10,000 feet in the air view. Africana Womanism/Africana-Melenated Womanism offers us a chance to look down on us all, women, men, and children, and ponder ways to conceivably liberate us at last.

The book you are about to read was born from someone who has not followed the lead of others, but who struck up a new band and played a new song. My words are not to be mistaken as shade thrown at other Black women from other camps. They are not constructed to call out anyone. The words that I speak bring forth the notion that not all Black women lots are essential for all, assumed to be representing all. Understandably, there are others who view this world differently and I am simply telling you how it is for me as one of many: My heart, and my spirit, and my research have all found their home in a paradigm curated by a woman whom I am blessed to call my friend, my mentor, and my sister in the liberation struggle for all Africana people. As a young single mother from Atlanta, with four kids, it has taken me so long to find a place that I could feel comfortable with that does not make me forget about my male counterparts. Whether you love Black men and boys platonically or romantically, as members of the Black community, we must develop a way to ensure the survival of us all, not just our women and our girls, but our male cousins, uncles, brothers, friends, husbands, boyfriends, and Daddies. I can attest that Africana Womanism is the way to do that, to place the focus back on the Black family. We are together in this “thang”—Women, Men, and children! I thank Dr. Hudson (Weems) for another way of looking at our lives as a unit, interconnected as individuals with collective concerns about the survival of our people. And as we continue to deal with the varied issues in our lives as Africana people, we must prioritize race, class, and gender, truly Africana womanist in action.

INTRODUCTION

MOLEFI KETE ASANTE, PHD

It is possible for one to build a house without a blueprint; this is done often enough that we do not condemn people for doing so. However, to plan a project that will have consistency, uniformity, art, design, and positionality in relationship to other ideas, it is best to have a theory that provides a model for construction. This has been the idea behind or in front of the work of our most important intellectual leaders. They have tried to give us, after deep reflection on our condition, and situation, which is different, the necessary tools for designing our liberation. Clenora Hudson (Weems) has seen that it is essential that we not follow in the path of those who would lead us to our mental death. She has proclaimed by virtue of her deliberate search for a way forward through the fog, very useful highway markers for those who are seeking to reach the light. What this volume represents is a huge sign that there are now more people than we know who are on the path with her, following the patterns and models that she has given us in her provocative and enlightening books, articles and public presentations.

Clenora Hudson Weems has taken the bold step of bringing together an impressive array of intellectuals devoted to the idea of *Africana Womanism* that she pioneered in the 1980s as a powerful tool to explicate the relationship between African people with an emphasis on the black women and men in a way that was different from the role played by white feminists. In effect, Hudson (Weems) made several important advances. She gave us a way to theorize about the role of women and men in a way that modeled the African American culture. In fact, Hudson (Weems) provided a language of Afrocentric perspective to relationships, gender, and spheres of influence.

This work is a demonstration of her philosophy of complementarity because she has men and women writing and they are all pointing their works in the same direction. An idea founded upon the principle of African agency sits at the entrance to *Africana Womanism*. It is this idea that is being stood up each day as we reclaim our history and traditions and seek to connect our scholarship to the values and cultural inheritance we have been left. It is not that we seek to tear down, but rather to build up, and

sometimes that means that debris has to be removed. I am pleased that the editor has devoted her life to this issue.

Hudson (Weems) was influenced by her important interview and discussions with Toni Morrison, which was invaluable, as she and her co-author were invited to write the first full-length critical study of the works of the Nobel Laureate, Toni Morrison, in the mid 80s, published in 1990. Morrison was one of the first black women to publicly discuss what black women in general really think about the women's liberation movement in a 1971 article appearing in *The New York Times Magazine*. Taking Morrison, a step further, as an Afrocentrist, Hudson (Weems) knew that any answer to the issues of gender and sex had to deal with African culture. What Hudson (Weems) wanted to do and what she did was to explore how race and culture impact issues of gender. She has given us a paradigmatic turn that has used the lives of ordinary African women as the concrete basis for analysis and potentialities. It is not that African womanism is a branch of white women feminism, but rather that African womanism is itself an autonomous system of examining culture and gender. Black women are not white women, and the commonality of their sex does not dictate the way they see gender. It is possible that they may have similar ideas, but there is a long stretch between the way the mistress of the plantation saw gender and the working woman in the cotton fields saw gender and relationships.

All theoretical advances result when we have critically assessed how other theories operate in the arena of our subjects. In this volume Clenora Hudson (Weems), the leading and founding theorist of African Womanism, has demonstrated the important dimension of scholarship that has often been ignored. I call this the community relationship where scholars seeking to establish academic solidarity with each other and with the subject agree to participate in a common project. We have seen that many scholars in this volume have followed the leadership of Professor Hudson (Weems). I think this is true because she has openly sought to invite some of the most well-known scholars to write for this project.

There will be much interest in this work and students and professors will learn from the essays and analyses brought by scholars who are deeply involved in questions surrounding the discourses about women and men, about iconic female writers, matriarchy, resistance to patriarchy, and the elevation of reciprocity. This volume should be seen as a definitive statement of the African Womanism community of scholars; I salute Professor Hudson (Weems) and her cohort of intellectual compatriots.

PART I:
THEORY:
AFRICANA-MELANATED WOMANISM



“Africana-Melanated Womanism: I Got Your Back, Boo”

Don't you know by now, girl, we're all In It Together!
Family-Centrality--that's it; we're going nowhere without the other
That means the men, the women, and children, too,
Truly collectively working—"I got your back, Boo."

Racism means the violation of our constitutional rights,
Which creates on-going legal, and even physical fights.
This 1st priority for humankind is doing what it must do,
Echoing our 1st lady, Michelle—"I got your back, Boo."

Classism is the hoarding of financial privileges,
Privileges we must all have now in pursuit of happiness.
Without a piece of the financial pie, we're doomed to have a coup.
Remember--protect the other—"I got your back, Boo."

Sexism, the final abominable sin of female subjugation,
A battle we must wage right now to restore our family relations.
All forms of sin inevitably fall under 1 of the 3 offenses.
Africana Womanism, "I Got Your Back, Boo," corrects our common senses.

Clenora Hudson (Weems), PhD
Dedicated to All Africana Women, FEB 2009

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF AN AUTHENTIC
AFRICANA WOMANISM PARADIGM:
COLLECTIVITY AND INTERCONNECTEDNESS
FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

CLENORA HUDSON (WEEMS), PHD

The Importance of Africana Womanism to Africana Studies/Africology cannot be overstated. Among its many virtues is its role as an important corrective to the continuing tendency to marginalize the experiences of Africana women and minimize their roles as active agents in the ongoing liberation struggle. Consequently, Africana Womanism is enabling Africana Studies/Africology to realize its full potential as a guiding beacon in the global battle to claim the natural rights of *all* people of African descent. (Stewart and Mazama, Foreword in *Africana Womanism* xiii).

The above quotation offers an overriding assessment of the significance of Africana-Melanated Womanism – a terminological, rather than conceptual evolution of Africana Womanism – to Africana people, particularly in academia, as well as in the Africana community. The sentiments and assessments of Dr. James B. Stewart and Dr. Ama Mazama, co-authors of the Foreword to *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* Fifth Edition (Routledge 2019), represent the critical charge and recommendations of two well-established respected academicians, strongly endorsing the theory of Africana Womanism, based upon solid and sound research. These scholars, the former – Past President of The National Council for Black Studies, Professor emeritus and Vice Provost (ret.) at Penn State U, and the latter – Afrocentric Guadeloupe scholar, Associate Professor at Temple U, and managing editor of the *Journal of Black Studies*, both assess the theory of Africana Womanism.

In substantiating their position, the editors of a major Black Aesthetics Anthology, *Call and Response: The Riverside Anthology of The*

African American Literary Tradition, published by one of the nation's leading publishers, Houghton-Mifflin, assert the following endorsement:

The first African American woman intellectual to formulate a position on Africana womanism was Clenora Hudson-Weems, author of the 1993 groundbreaking study *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*. Taking the strong position that Black women should not pattern their liberation after Eurocentric feminism but after the historic and triumphant woman of African descent, Hudson-Weems has launched a new critical discourse in the Black Women's Literary Movement." (Patricia Hill, et al, *Call and Response*, 1811.)

Indeed, Africana Womanism is new and significantly different, thus, according to Dr. Delores P. Aldridge, the Grace T. Hamilton Professor of Sociology and founding Chair of the Department of African American Studies at Emory University,

Hudson-Weems' paradigm frames ideas about Africana women in an authentic way that differs from all other gender-based theories. Moreover, it demonstrates that women in Africana/Black Studies are critical thinkers . . . Her model, with its own label, has set forth to explain a given set of ideas. Both older and younger scholars can emulate such labeling by developing new models, laying claim to them as they position themselves to continue the tradition of African women as critical theorists (Aldridge, Foreword to *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* xii-xiii).

Much like Dr. Aldridge and the editors of *Call and Response*, Dr. Adele Newson-Horst's critique ultimately counters the established practice and mindset on the part of mainstream thought within the Academy. Perceptively, she concludes that

In the last few decades, feminism and Black feminism have gained such a stronghold in the Academy that the activities of most all of the important women writers have been stamped as feminist enterprises. While feminism provides a refreshing alternative to patriarchal hegemonic discourse, it is nevertheless inadequate to account for the numerous and varied works produced by Africana women. . . . the inherent contradiction, an ahistorical impulse, in defining a Black tradition and a theoretical and preoccupation as feminist, commands that a distinction be made between feminist impulses and feminism. (Newson-Horst 359)

Her statement came from her interpretation of "Mama Day: An Africana Womanist Reading" in *Contemporary Africana Theory, Thought and Action: A Guide to Africana Studies*. The literary critic challenges the pervasive propensity in the Academy to obtrude feminist theory upon

Africana literary texts. The problem here is that feminism as a theoretical concept represents practices and opinions that are generated from a Eurocentric reality that lacks the “lived” experiences of Africana people, as it was named and created by white women based upon their lives and needs. Because an authentic terminology designed for Africana women is also important, it is needed in order to make an authentic interpretation of the lives of Africana people. Therefore, while feminism, a female-centered concept, reflects the particular needs of white women who are primarily concerned with elevating themselves as equal to their male counterparts, Black women, on the other hand, are necessarily concerned about the destiny of their entire family, as men, women, and children are indisputable victims of racial injustices in a world of racial dominance. Thus, Africana Womanism, a family-centered concept that aims at empowering the entire Africana family, rather than the female-centered concept that centers its energy on female empowerment, has taken on the responsibility and duty of naming and defining Black women, two of 18 cornerstones of the Africana Womanism paradigm.

There is no need to look outside of ourselves to explicate our lives, which Dr. Hudson-Weems validates in a seminal chapter, “The African American Literary Tradition” in *The African American Experience* (2001). She contends that embracing feminism for Black women lacks rationale:

Most women outside and some inside academe have found the terminology problematic, since any and all brands of feminism see female empowerment as their collective priority. Alice Walker attempted to offer a solution to the dilemma with her label womanist. Unfortunately, her term and definition of womanist in the short introduction to her collection of essays, *In Search of Our Mother's Gardens: Womanist Prose* (1983) as “a black feminist or feminist of color . . . Womanist is to feminist as purple to lavender” was insufficient. (Hudson-Weems 135)

Rather than accept the theory of the dominant culture, “feminism,” Dr. Hudson-Weems initiates a more appropriate theoretical framework from which to interpret Black life, Africana Womanism, tailored to meet the demands of the Africana family via an authentic paradigm reflecting our everyday lives on all fronts. Naturally commanding the cooperation of the whole family for our ultimate liberation, here we stand, “In it together,” resolute against the unjust practices of racism. Since it is apparent here that Africana women require another term to define who they really are, as they are not easily persuaded to use a terminology and definition that are incompatible with their true selves, they object the unfamiliar, though they may not at that time have an alternative name/definition for themselves.

Demonstrating the global presence of Africana Womanism as an authentic Africana family-centered paradigm, wherein the collectivity of men and women is, indeed, salient, the theory shows its long-standing applicability to Africana people in Africa. This truth resounded at the First International Africana Womanism Conference, hosted by the U of Zimbabwe in 2010:

Dr. Itai Muhwati—then Chair of the Department of Literature and Languages, now Dean of Faculty—and his colleagues coordinated the grand event. Hundreds of presenters and attendees came from not only universities throughout the continent of Africa, including several universities throughout Zimbabwe, the U of South Africa and the U of Botswana, but from universities in the United States as well, including California State U-Dominguez Hills, the U of Oklahoma, Delaware State U, the U of Missouri, and so on. Moreover, participants outside of Academia were represented as well, such as the Honorable Joice Mujuru, Vice President of the Republic of Zimbabwe, who delivered the Opening Welcome. . . Men and women alike [came] to discuss our destiny as African people and what we needed to make our quest a reality. (Hudson-Weems, *Africana Paradigms* 6)

In 2012, an edited volume of select papers from the event was published.

Four years later, we witnessed a perceptive article by a South African journalist, Gracious Madondo, in *The Southern Times: The Newspaper for Southern Africa*, wherein she expounds on the question as to “Why Africa Relates to Africana Womanism.” Here, she highlights the male-female co-existence, dating back to pre-colonialism in Africa: “Unlike the Western rooted feminist approach to literature . . . Africana womanism speaks of male and female compatibility, where men and women co-exist together without conflict” (Madondo, 2018). She realizes that “the real cause of inequalities in Africa [is] colonialist patriarchal tendencies,” hence, concurring with Pan Africanist, Dr. Molefi Kete Asante (Madondo). Dr. Hudson-Weems’ analysis, too, goes back to African antiquity, thus, according to Dr. Asante in his Afterword to her second Africana womanism book, *Africana Womanist Literary Theory*, “Hudson’s Africana Womanist thought has the perfect approach to gender issues in Africa as compared to American Feminism.” (138). It should be here noted that Dr. Asante, who coined the term and refined the paradigm of *Afrocentricity*, makes a clear point that we as Africana people, too, have the right to name and define ourselves, as well as how we relate to each other. He further states that “Africana Womanism is a response to the need for collective definition and the re-creation of the authentic agenda that is the birthright of every living person” (138). As the first call for Africana Womanism, initiated by Dr. Hudson-Weems, had already appeared in *The*

Western Journal of Black Studies in “Cultural and Agenda Conflicts in Academia: Critical Issues for Africana Women’s Studies” (1989), Asante’s assertion renders a strong affirmation of what Africana Womanism offered. The on-going debates surrounding the call for an authentic paradigm for Africana women as writers and activists, indeed, validated the theory.

Africana Womanism, then, within the Afrocentric arena, makes its contributions to Afrocentric discourse via naming and defining Africana women according to their true nature and at the same time in explicating the importance of family centrality and positive male-female relationships for an “interconnected” existence and a collective pursuit for securing our birthright to abundance and happiness. According to Dr. Ama Mazama,

Clenora Hudson-Weems coined the term Africana Womanism in 1987 out of the realization of the total inadequacy of feminism and like theories (e.g. Black feminism, African womanism, or womanism) to grasp the reality of African women, let alone give us the means to change that reality. (400)

That reality includes the riff between Africana men and women, commonly called “the battle of the sexes,” historically inauthentic in Africa before the advent of colonialism. In going back to African antiquity, one knows that such a mind-set is non-Afrocentric, for men and women then shared responsibilities, including even powerful positions of leadership, i.e. kings and queens, while at the same time, enjoying and appreciating traditional roles in society, with designated responsibilities accordingly.

To further support this demand for authenticity for Africana people, I coordinated a number of panels for national conferences in the mid-80s, during the early stage of refining this theoretical construct, including some plenaries, which included a few males as well, which launched the heated debates about this critical need to name and define ourselves. These presentations during the inception of Africana Womanism as a paradigm commenced during the mid-eighties, up to the end of that decade. The venues for these exciting occasions for national Black organizations included Boston for The National Council for Black Studies Conference, and Philadelphia for The African Heritage Studies Association Conference in 1986; New Orleans for The College Language Association Convention, and even the National Women’s Studies Association Conference in Atlanta in 1987 at the historic Spellman College, and again for that organization the following year in 1988 at the U of Minnesota; also there was Detroit for Association for the Study of African American Life and History in 1988, and many more. I was also invited to speak on this subject at many colleges and universities throughout the country for their Black History Month, as well as Women’s History Month celebrations, including the University of Utah, Southern

Utah University, Indiana University, Winston-Salem State University, Texas Southern University, etc., all during the embryonic stage of *Africana Womanism*, even before its first book publication in 1993.

The receptivity of the new theory was, indeed, amazing, culminating in that first release, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* in 1993. That very next year, 1994, Dr. Maria Mootry reviewed the book for one of the major publications for Black studies, *The Western Journal of Black Studies*. It opened up with a powerful summation of the emotional experiences of *Africana* women, culminating in a powerful written acceptance of this authentic paradigm:

Rage, shame, guilt, anguish, indignation, celebration, affirmation—voices of *Africana* women have ranged up and down the arpeggios of emotion in response to racism, classism and sexism. Now comes a voice, cool and clear, rising above the chorus, offering not only lucid insights into the status of *Africana* women and their literature, but a blueprint to help us find a way out of confusion and despair. . . . The result, in the words of Professor Charles Hamilton, is ‘an intellectual triumph.’ (Mootry 244)

Research documents the fact that feminism was not intended to represent and interpret Black life, and thus, the magnitude of the vast totality of Black women lives was not, nor could it be accurately and totally addressed and/or recorded within the white feminist theoretical framework. And the term Black Feminism was clearly limited, as it was an obvious extension of feminism, notably reflected in the terminology itself. Perhaps due to this, more positive responses to *Africana Womanism* continued to grow. Dr. Delores P. Aldridge, the unprecedented two-term President of the National Council for Black Studies, who had supported *Africana Womanism* from its inception in the 80s, wrote a book jacket endorsement of the 1993 publication of the first *Africana Womanism* book, *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves*:

This work is unquestionably a pioneering effort whose time has come. It provides an exciting and fresh approach to understanding the tensions existing among the mainstream feminist, the Black feminist, the African feminist and the *Africana* womanist. (Aldridge, 1993)

Later in her co-edited volume, *Out of the Revolution: The Development of Africana Studies* (2000), with Dr. Carlene Young, Dr. Aldridge invited me to write a chapter for it, which I titled “*Africana Womanism: An Overview*.” In that publication, Dr. Aldridge’ seminal chapter, “Toward Integrating *Africana* Women into *Africana* Studies,” drew a comprehensive picture of the growing trend of the presence and the role of Black women in the evolution of the discipline of *Africana* Studies, wherein she asserted

that “it is from this perspective of Africana Womanism that this discourse is developed” (*Out of the Revolution* 193). Four years later, in the Foreword to Hudson-Weems’ *Africana Womanist Literary Theory*, she concluded her assessment of Hudson-Weems seminal work/theory as follows:

In this twenty-first century, no less than in ages past, the need will be great for scholars to provide paradigms and critical theories for understanding society and its various aspects or forms – historical, cultural, literary, social, and the like. Scholars such as Hudson-Weems will be listed among those who have made a difference in the conceptualization, development, and promotion of the discipline of Africana Studies. Just as (Aldridge, Foreword, *Africana Womanist Literary Theory* xiii).

Dr. April Langley, Chair of the African American Studies Program at the University of South Carolina, who specializes in early Black writers, Pre-Emancipation Proclamation women writers/orators/activists in particular, uses Africana Womanism as a tool of analysis in her approaches to early Black literary texts. For example, in her article, “Lucy Terry Prince: The Cultural and Literary Legacy of Africana Womanism,” appearing in a 2001 Special Issue on Africana Womanism in *The Western Journal of Black Studies*, for which I served as Guest Editor, she contended that

It is Africana Womanism as originated, developed, and outlined by Hudson-Weems that enables a reading which restores and revises the African origins of the early African American writing. . . . the import of this critical paradigm for the earliest Africana writers is essential for recuperating what is “African” in early African American literature. (Langley 158)

Dr. Daphne Ntiri, Professor and Director of Wayne State University, Another Chance, wrote a lengthy and informative Introduction to *Africana Womanism: Reclaiming Ourselves* in 1993. In assessing what she calls a “landmark pioneering treatise of Africana woman’s realities,” she closes with a very important quotation, headlined on the front-page cover story – “Beyond ‘Bra Burning’: [Africana] Womanism as alternative for the African Women,” which appeared in *The Nigerian Daily Times* Newspaper on July 27, 1992. In reporting on Women of Africa and the African Diaspora International Conference, this publication also served as an endorser of the concept and, moreover, as a contributor to the globalization of the movement/theory, fully presented in its coverage:

Personal and racial experiences . . . will be the factors responsible for the evolution of Africana Womanism. Therefore, legitimate concerns of the Africana Woman are issues to be addressed within the context of African

culture and history. Africana Womanists do not believe in “bra burning.” They believe in womanhood, the family and society (“Beyond Bra Burning,” 1992).

Africana men, too, strongly supported Africana Womanism, writing book endorsements, expressing their receptivity to the theory. For example, Dr. C. Eric Lincoln, Professor Emeritus of Duke University, asserted that

Hudson-Weems’ *Africana Womanism* sent unaccustomed shock waves through the domain of popular thinking about feminism and established her as a careful, independent thinker, unafraid to unsettle settled opinion. (inside jacket endorsement, 1993)

Dr. Talmadge Anderson, Chief Editor of *The Western Journal of Black Studies* and Professor at Washington State University, defined Africana Womanism as the embodiment of Black womanhood: “The work [*Africana Womanism*] captures the essence of the true meaning of black womanhood and resolves the classical debate relative to the prioritizing of race, class and sex in American society.” (Inside jacket blurb, 1993).

Dr. Charles V. Hamilton, Professor of Political Science at Columbia U, who co-authored *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (1967) with Stokley Carmichael, a.k.a. Kwame Touré, succinctly advised that “This work is, indeed, an intellectual triumph. It is a product that not only must be read, but more important, be studied.”

And finally, there was the book endorsement by Dr. Robert L. Harris, Jr., who reigned as Director of Africana Studies and Research Center at Cornell University before, during, and after the debut of *Africana Womanism*:

In the triple marginality of black women, race rises above class and gender in this remarkable book. With it, a reunion, a much-needed healing, a human philosophy emerges for men and women of African ancestry and ultimately for all caring men and women. (Inside jacket blurb, 1993)

Notably, Africana men and women came together as one in support of the concept, as represented in *Africana Womanism*. In the Fifth Edition of the 1993 classic, Dr. Hudson-Weems added the following:

The key to the true meaning of Africana Womanism is its mandate for inclusion of the whole family, men included, while highlighting also the very presence and role of the Africana Womanist in concert with her male companion in the ongoing cooperative struggle against racial dominance. Indeed, a cornerstone in the priorities of Africana Womanism, the race

factor is primary in the scheme of things—race, class and gender—and, thus, must be properly placed within our own historical and cultural matrix. (Hudson-Weems, *Africana Womanism* 98)

Prior to the term, Africana Womanism in the mid-1980s, there was no existing name given for a new methodology that specifically addressed that critical need for a separate terminology, which does not include one that piggy backs off someone else's name and definition. The only existing names assigned to Black women, theoretically speaking, were Black Feminism, African Feminism, and Womanism, all clearly connected to Feminism, representing a procrustean approach, used perhaps to fit the acceptable concept of feminism. Of course, eventually Black women grew tired of accepting an alien paradigm and making their position fit the basic theoretical constructs of an inauthentic paradigm, and thus, began to step up, boldly challenging what was out there:

While many other black women naively adopted feminism early on, because of the absence of an alternative and suitable framework for their individual needs as Africana women, more are reassessing the historical realities and the agenda for the modern feminist movement and have bravely stood firm in their outright rejection of it. (Hudson-Weems, "Africana Womanism" in *Out of the Revolution* 205)

Enthusiasm surrounded this paradigm, for the publication of its first book was only the beginning. Some 26 years after the 1st Edition in 1993, the reprint of that classic, the Fifth revised Edition, with a new section, Part III, with new chapters was released. (Routledge Press, 2019).

Below is a list of 32 Defining Quotes, representing only a few Black thinkers-activists, either anticipating or echoing this authentic persuasion, thus, suggesting a critical need for an Africana Womanism Paradigm. This can only be complete when Africana Womanists worldwide become fully aware of this theoretical construct with the realization that the theory was created with them and their families in mind: