



FADS

Frontiers of African Diaspora Studies

FADS, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2026, pp.8-13.

Print ISSN: 3107-1805; Online ISSN: 3107-1813

Journal homepage: <https://www.fadsjournal.com>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.64058/FADS.26.01.02relet>



Reconfiguring the Epistemological Landscape: The Cross-Cultural Turn and Human Flourishing in African Diaspora Studies

Carolyn Calloway-Thomas

Abstract: This inaugural editorial in *Frontiers of African Diaspora Studies* journal highlights the impetus for the beginning of the discipline of Africana Studies, its impact, and promise for the future. The piece discusses the significance of Frontiers, China's inaugural academic journal. Using a global platform, the journal is dedicated to publishing excellent, rich articles that provide a framework for understanding what happens when we view diasporic Africa through the intellectual cartography of China and other places, and beyond essentialism. The author argues further that Frontiers ushers in new and different epistemic ways of examining the consequences of African exile and homeland through a more spacious aperture, featuring articles that are written from diverse perspectives such as poetics, history, culture, communication, music, literature, sociology, and other forms of human expression.

Keywords: African American Studies, Africana Studies, exile, Diaspora, culture, language, geography

Author Biography: Carolyn Calloway-Thomas (corresponding author), Ph.D.; Professor and Director of Graduate Studies; Department of African American and African Diaspora Studies, Indiana University Bloomington, Indiana USA; Intercultural Communication Competence (ICC) Advisory Expert; World Council on Intercultural and Global Competence; Past President, World Communication Association and International Editor-in-Chief of *Frontiers of African Diaspora Studies*; Distinguished Research Fellow at the Institute of African

and Afro-Diaspora Studies at the University of Electronic Science and Technology of China. E-mail: calloway@iu.edu.

题目：重塑认识论图景：非洲流散研究中的跨文化转向与人类福祉

摘要：《非洲流散研究前沿》创刊社论梳理了非洲研究学科创立的动因、发展影响与未来展望。本文阐释了这本中国首份非洲流散研究学术期刊的创刊意义。该期刊立足全球视野，致力于刊发优质、内容详实的学术论文，构建全新研究框架：跳出本质主义思维，依托中国及世界各地的知识图谱，解读非洲流散现象。作者进一步提出，《非洲流散研究前沿》以更开阔的研究视角，开创了审视非洲流亡与故土议题的全新认知范式。期刊收录的文章兼具多元研究维度，涵盖诗学、历史学、文化学、传播学、音乐、文学、社会学及其他人类文化表达领域。

关键词：非裔美国人研究；非洲研究；流亡；流散；文化；语言；地理

作者介绍：卡洛琳·卡洛威-托马斯（通讯作者），博士，美国印第安纳大学伯明顿校区美国非裔与非洲流散研究系教授、博士生导师、研究生部主任；前世界传播学会主席、世界跨文化与全球能力理事会跨文化沟通能力顾问，担任《非洲流散研究前沿》国际主编和电子科技大学外语学院非洲及非洲流散研究所特聘研究员。电子邮箱：calloway@iu.edu

On November 6, 1968, students at San Francisco State College protested the dominance of Western-centric culture, curriculums, histories, heritages, theories, and contributions. They shouted, “On Strike, Shut it Down,” (San Francisco State University, “Our History”). And on March 21, 1969, the rallying cry for intellectual justice ended with the creation of America’s first Black Studies program. The thoughts, ideas, and beliefs of the protesters over time transformed the very nature of how we view African Americans and Africans in the diaspora (Shaka, October 2012). In a search for spaciousness of ideas, students who rallied at San Francisco State College (now San Francisco State University) created a paradigm shift! Paradigm shifts occur with the introduction of new story-making ways of experiencing the world, as well as a “shift of vision.”

Thomas S. Kuhn (1962), in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, in commenting on the nature of paradigm-based shifts, argues, “The emergence of a paradigm affects the structure of the group that practices in the field” (p. 18). Although Kuhn’s observations apply more specifically to scientific revolutions, they are keenly applicable to what happened at San Francisco State College. Kuhn states further about how crises galvanize minds, when he writes, “as the crisis deepens,” “many individuals commit themselves to some concrete proposal for the reconstruction of society in a new institutional framework” (Kuhn, 1962, p. 93). Of course, I am not arguing that what happened at San Francisco State College totally “reconstructed” society, with the creation of an Africana Studies department. But I am arguing, forthrightly, that students played a vital role in focusing attention on the cumulative effects of societal structures on how individuals perceive African diasporic cultures. The students’ new conceptual views helped turn the United States and universities toward other paradigm choices and modes of thinking and being.

That single, significant moment in history also coincided with the Civil Rights Movement in the United States, led by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who stood in front of the Lincoln memorial on August 23, 1963, and proclaimed, “I have a dream.” Sensibly, King’s speech also crystallized the Black movement toward justice, equality, and truth, acting as a powerful tributary that transformed the way we view human behavior. King’s speech and the Civil Rights Movement also magnified the conditions necessary to change ideas related to power and exclusion impactfully. Synergistically, students at San Francisco State College also created a powerful pathway for understanding and transforming human circumstances.

Consequently, a major, radical shift came into existence! With a new burst of energy and intellectual excitement, African American scholars and others began to expand notions of representation, identity, structures of social formation, and expressive domains, leaving behind, what Cornel West terms, “discursive exclusion,” the idea of “relegating discourse on black beauty, culture and intelligence to “silence” (West, p. 91). West’s theorizing also was a strategic moment, which called into question, “controlling metaphors, notions, categories, and norms that shape the predominant conceptions of truth and knowledge in the modern West” (West, p. 93).

The creation of the Journal, *Frontiers of African Diaspora Studies*, with conviction and passion, exhorts us to widen the scholarly lens further by offering opportunities for sharing invaluable insights into the ideas that shape “Global Africa,” with an emphasis on Sino-Western perspectives. Moreover, in a search for a spaciousness of ideas, Journal *Frontiers*, as well as students who rallied at San Francisco State College, raise pivotal, generative questions that go to the heart of intellectual inquiry. Among the vital ones are: Where is the center that holds African and Chinese-centric ideas together? Who gets to say and write what, when, and how about cultures and human existence? How should scholars and practitioners grapple with African-Sino experiences and cultures? How long should Africans and others gaze at themselves from the center and standards of European culture? And are there other ways of understanding reality?

A striking, useful answer came from the world’s leading Afrocentric theorist, Dr. Molefi Asante, who established the world’s first Black Studies program in 1998, at Temple University in Philadelphia in the United States, where founders signed the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776. In 2026, as Americans celebrate their one hundred and fifty years of freedom from England, it should not go unnoticed that Dr. Asante established the first doctoral program in Philadelphia, in the same city that gave birth to the Declaration of Independence. It is also the same place where Caesar Rodney, of Delaware, rode 80 miles on horseback, in a fierce thunderstorm, and with cancer, so he could cast a deciding vote on the Declaration’s existence (Gorsuch & Nitze, 2026).

The point is that fervor and commitments matter hugely when scholars and other mission-driven individuals and institutions embark upon projects of substance and significance. Such is the case with *Frontiers*, which aims to create and produce knowledge from dual and multiple perspectives centered on a more expansive experiential and intellectual mapping of Africans in the diaspora. According to Dr. Asante,

and now Journal *Frontiers*, there are diverse ways of studying and looking at the world. There are Afrocentric perspectives, China-centric perspectives, and Eurocentric perspectives, and all are necessary to make human beings “being human being” flourish, to echo Dr. Asante.

Renowned Austrian economist and Nobel laureate, Dr. Frederick Hayek, makes a similar point, but in a unique way, when he writes, “Civilization rests on the fact that we all benefit from knowledge we do not possess” (1982, p.15). *Frontiers of African Diaspora Studies* is extending the geography of ideas by using Sino-Western views on literature, history, culture, and poetics, to augment our understanding of the Atlantic Slave trade and its consequences. We see this as a wonderful way to expand intellectual ideas in a complex and various world.

Moreover, this is what is rich, enriching, and splendid about *Frontiers*. By enlarging the scholarly aperture, we are dedicated to adding more engaging research, knowledge, and studies to how one can look at the world. Our purpose is to publish excellent, thought-provoking articles that look at the literary, philosophical and cultural domains of the African diaspora based on “African aspirations, visions, and concepts” and their intersections with “new diaspora studies,” while not being dismissive of other ways of being and doing that contribute to human flourishing. We also envision increasing the number of individuals worldwide who can be reached by other intercultural and empathetic stories. And the world should be better for it. After all, we are all story makers, and storytelling provides humans with ways of living well, framed by different geographies, viewpoints, landscapes, rivers, trees, and identities (Ashton, 2026). To progress comprehensively and openly, we need to know more about not just what happened in Europe, but also about the intellectual and cultural complexities of Africans and Chinese in the diaspora.

Our purposes are multiple. First, we seek to emphasize the intersection of Chinese scholarship and Africa and African diasporic peoples, within local and global contexts. The second purpose of *Frontiers* is to highlight how theorizing about language, communication, ethnicity and culture, is spacious; it does not monopolize a single geographic space. Rather, the journal invites concepts, ideas, and ways of thinking that are multiple in perspective, with a stress on understanding what happens, using Paul Gilroy’s (1993) metaphor of the “Black Atlantic,” where many portals, entry points, and critiques exist within the infrastructure of thought. Impactful story and meaning-making modes of analysis and synthesis emerge when different tools and orders of relevance and significance are employed.

This means, then, that when Chinese scholarship is interwoven within the African diaspora, one should see and appreciate different nodal points of intellectual inquiry. One can move freely around the world as creators and gatherers of exquisite ideas from poetics, literature, history, music, anthropology, sociology, and other disciplines to understand other realities, drawing on both localized and globalized habits of mind.

Third, journal *Frontiers* invites scholars to imagine a spacious landscape where critical and reflective analyses can flow from China, the United States, Europe, Oceania, Australia, India, and other places, untrammelled. We are keenly dedicated to knowledge generation to improve human skills and, crucially, to

providing a bold new publication for thinking through the myriads of problems that confront humankind from climate change to violence to issues of peace and justice. The United Nations' 2024 and 2025 agendas for change include conflict and geopolitical divisions, rising inequalities and artificial intelligence, as current and future, seasons of urgency (United Nations, 2024 & 2025). These, and other emphases, extend into dialogic forms of creativity in the cumulative acquisition of knowledge.

But what, you may ask, is the symbiotic relationship between Journal *Frontiers* and the agenda of the United Nations? The answer is that we also need collective imaginations and beautiful energies that are directed towards human flourishing and away from conflict, separation, and division. Johan Norberg, in his work, *Open: The Story of Human Progress* (2020), argues that sapiens are “traders by nature. We constantly exchange know-how, favors and goods with others, so that we can accomplish more than we could if we were limited to our own talents and experiences” (p.3). Knowledge is indeed built on the “exchange, criticism, and accumulation of knowledge, and to technology, which is the application of science to solve practical problems,” despite the huge, sometimes troubling challenges of artificial intelligence and ChatGPT (Norberg, 2020, p. 3). Our journal is designed to capture the interweaving of ideas capaciously that lead to the openness of ideas, concepts, and methodologies that help make cooperation with others possible. Ideas unaddressed and ignored can prevent scholars and practitioners from managing the many challenges that confront the world. It is important to understand the world because ideas have consequences. Compelling consequences lead to human flourishing by creating new ways of theorizing about Sino-Western thought. In this meaningful way, innovative ideas are not left on the metaphoric filmic cutting room floor, but rather extended to vigorous intellectual excursions leading somewhere else—to villages, hamlets, towns, and cities in a highly globalized world.

By drilling deeper into the prevailing constitutive moments that are embedded within the material and expressive conditionality of human beings, to echo what Guattari and Deleuze (1982) term “Rhizomatic thinking,” we just might be able to look at orders of meaning differently, with significant stress on habituating the mind toward encounters that also flow from the global South. Again, evoking Hayek's moving rendition of the significance of the distribution and circulation of knowledge and free intellectual inquiry, we see Journal *Frontiers* as corollary, not ancillary, to other modes of thinking and being. Such inquiry, we argue, is a chief means of progressing and seeking solutions to global problems—extending from the theoretical to praxis, or the practical arts and sciences, with an emphasis also on human relations.

As I note in my 2024 piece, “Theorizing a Black Imperative for Human Flourishing: A Typology of Attention (ToA)” “As part of the African philosophical tradition, we cannot exist without modes of discovery, and we cannot begin to understand things such as identity, human relations, education, cooperation, thoughtfulness, and empathy without a knowledge base” (Calloway-Thomas, 2024).

Ashton (2026) and poet Pauli Murray of *Dark Testament*, both remind us that our first fires in villages and hamlets around the world, created the earliest audiences for spoken stories. And here we are, in 2026,

extending to a new audience and a new generation, the idea that intellectual journeys should be comprised of diverse stories that are open, invitational, and impactful. Journal *Frontiers* helps us to travel up the metaphorical Yangtze, Nile, Liao, Zambesi, and other intercultural rivers with humane significance.

We invite you to join us!

Funding: This work received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

ORCID

Carolyn Calloway-Thomas ^{ID} <https://orcid.org/0009-0002-9263-8804>

References

- Asante, M. (1987). *The afrocentric idea*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Ashton, K. (2026). *The story of stories: The million-year history of a uniquely human art*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Calloway-Thomas, C. (2024). "Theorizing a Black Imperative for Human Flourishing: A Typology of Attention (ToA)." In Kehbama Langmia (Ed.). *Black communication theory*, volume 2. Palgrave McMillian, pp. 213-246.
- Gilroy, P. (1993). *The black atlantic: Modernity and double consciousness*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Gorsuch, N. & Janie Nitze (2026). *Heroes of 1776: The story of the declaration of independence*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers.
- Guattari, F. & Gillis Deleuze (1987). *A thousand plateaus: Capitalism and schizophrenia*. Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.
- Hayek, F. A. (1982). *Law, legislation, and liberty: A new statement of the liberal principles of justice and political economy*. London: Routledge.
- Kuhn, T.S. (1962). *The structure of scientific revolutions (2nd edition)*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. San Francisco State University, "Our History" (ethnic.studies.sfsu.edu/history).
- Shaka, O. (October 2012). "African Studies Department: San Francisco State University." *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, (5, no 7), pp. 13-33.
- United Nations (July 2023). "Our Common Agenda Policy Brief 9: A New Agenda for Peace."
- United Nations (September 2024). "Summit of the Future Outcomes Documents. Pact for the Future, Global Digital Compact and Declaration on Future Generations."
- West, C. (2002). "A Genealogy of Modern Racism." In Philomena Essed and David Theo Goldberg (Eds.). *Race critical theories*. New York: Blackwell Publishing.

(责任编辑: 周英莉)