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TAKING THE PLUNGE AND SEIZING THE TIME—AGAIN

Below is a slightly modified statement I prepared for the AAA AnthroSource Steering Committee. In many respects, it was a collective effort because many of the ideas were generated at our meeting of contributing editors, held at Duke in January of 2005. The AnthroSource steering committee is the body that evaluates which journals it wants included in the AAA's on-line portal. While some of our historical content is currently available on AnthroSource, our current volumes are not. All of our current journals are available through ProQuest with no cost to the ABA. Actually, by having *TA* licensed through ProQuest, we generate a small stream of revenue. Nevertheless, to be considered for AnthroSource, the steering committee put us through a fairly rigorous peer review process, and we were asked to demonstrate how we planned to address the issues that had prohibited timely publication of *TA* in the past. From my perspective, the AAA was more interested in our journal coming out on time than maintaining a high level of critical discourse and standard of scholarship. The editors and contributors remain committed to maintaining a high level of critical dialogue and standards of scholarship, as well; we will do our best to come out on time. I am happy to report that we got approval from the AnthroSource Steering Committee and will be included in 2007—the very year I hand over the editorship of *TA*. We will come up with a plan to have volumes 12, 13, and 14 included in the portal somehow (these volumes are not considered historical content nor scheduled for AnthroSource). As for the cover art, it is an image of my five-year-old daughter's shoes—poolside at our local YMCA. Although it is open for interpretation, it sort of evokes a whimsical and experimental moment for *TA*. For me, it is also significant. Our daughter's name is Yaa Baker, and she is learning how to swim. Despite the fact that this is a very difficult skill to master, every Saturday morning she enthusiastically slips off her shoes to plunge into the deep end. This is the first time I have edited a journal, and I sort of feel like I am slipping off my shoes to plunge into the deep end with the same enthusiasm. She *is* learning to swim. It takes practice, time, good coaches, and people to support the learning experience. I am learning quite a bit from her.

SEIZING THE TIME—AGAIN (STATEMENT PREPARED FOR THE ANTHROSOURCE STEERING COMMITTEE, SUBMITTED FEBRUARY 2005)

In 1990, Arthur K. Spears edited the first volume of *Transforming Anthropology* and Faye V. Harrison served as the President of the Association of Black Anthropologists (ABA). Harrison, whose vision it was to launch such a journal, wrote a moving essay in that inaugural issue. She explained that “in *TA* we now have the makings of a publication outlet that can potentially map new and alternative perspectives onto the anthropological canon. *Transforming Anthropology* can potentially diversify and stretch the limits of the canon, and, hence, move us forward in our protracted efforts to transform both our discipline and our world” (Harrison 1990:11).

President Harrison noted, however, that the organization was at an important threshold and explained “whether or not we actually cross over, depends upon our collective will, motivation, and ability to seize the time” (Harrison 1990:11). Always gracious, she concluded by saluting her friend and mentor St. Clair Drake, symbolically gesturing that her generation was ready to take the mantle of leadership. And so they did. Michael Blakey, Brackette Williams, Janis Hutchinson, Arthur Spears, Pem Buck, Leith Mullings, Charles Carnegie, Cheryl Rodriguez, Willie Baber, Annie Barnes, Drexel Woodson, A. Lynn Bolles, Ted Gordon, Tony Whitehead, Patricia Guthrie, and so many others indeed provided invaluable leadership and in important ways “integrated” the American Anthropological Association and the highest reaches of the academy. This was the first generation of Black anthropologists who could thrive and contribute to the discipline as anthropologists, not just as “Black” anthropologists. Their overwhelming success enabled scholars like me and my cohort to simply *presume* that we would have leadership roles to play, books to write, and secure and stable employment, and that we would participate fully within the anthropological enterprise. While battles remain hard fought and racism still looms large, our presumptions were largely correct, and we are forever indebted to that cohort for decimating the barriers that denied people of color full participation within the academy.

Like so many Black institutions, publications, and organizations, the ABA was founded and organized in 1970 so that Black folk could have a place of their own, exercise agency, and organize together and with their sisters and brothers across the color line to impact change. By the 1990s, times were heady for Black anthropologists, Yolanda Moses, Johnetta B. Cole, Carolyn Martin Shaw, Niara Sudarkasa, and Claudia Mitchell-Kernan were each serving their respective institutions as presidents or top administrators while others like Michele Rolph Trouillot, Brackette Williams, Lorand Matory, Leith Mullings, H. Enoch Page, and Sheila Walker populated graduate reading lists from coast to coast. By the late 1990s, there was seemingly no need to have a place of our own. On the surface at least, it was beginning to look as though African American anthropologists were fairly well represented throughout the AAA administrative structures and within its flagship journals. Like the NAACP, the Urban League, and countless other civil rights organizations, the ABA and *Transforming Anthropology* are now forced to reinvent themselves. I see both the ABA and *Transforming Anthropology* at another threshold as I take over as the fourth editor. My predecessors include Arthur Spears, Brackette Williams, and Irma McClaurin. Each has sacrificed untold hours and suffered countless headaches, and despite extremely limited support, they kept *TA* a vibrant and exciting journal. These editors ensured that it hewed closely to its mission of publishing intellectually exciting yet critical analysis aimed at social change. In addition, they ensured that the journal remained committed to interdisciplinary research while continuing to publish within the four fields.

Throughout its history, *TA*'s provocative book reviews have been consistently strong, and they have anchored the journal's success over the years. Drexel G. Woodson has provided both intellectual guidance and organizational leadership in this arena. He has been the glue that has kept this journal together. Although his formal role has been that of longtime book review editor—always delivering the highest-quality book reviews—he has been much more. He has consistently served each editor with wise counsel and a steady hand. He has also been able to develop a substantial backlog of book reviews and procure support from the University of Arizona.

Transforming Anthropology has always produced interesting, provocative, and critical research, commentary, and reports. Many of our special issues remain popular on syllabi, and we enjoy a loyal and faithful following that pores over every issue. In fact, we have more subscribers who are neither libraries nor AAA members than all of the AAA publications put together. But as was the case with my predecessors, the journal

currently receives very little material support, suffers from a paucity of high-quality submissions, and has virtually no backlog. For a variety of complex and crosscutting reasons, the journal has not always come out in a timely fashion. With so many competing demands for faculty members' time and a perpetual lack of staff support for the journal, there are actually good reasons why this has been the case with *Transforming Anthropology*.

I have accepted this challenge and believe that we have a new cohort of anthropologists who are ready to recommit to the journal and literally take it to the next level. Although that threshold looks like a rather large hurdle in my mind's eye, I see the new relationship between UC Press, the AAA, and AnthroSource as a real incentive and opportunity to motivate scholars to infuse the journal with critical research and participate in its transformation, and Duke University is the right place to do it.

Over the last three years, Duke University has hired John L. Jackson, Jr., Deborah A. Thomas, and Bayo Holsey. All three have committed to help shoulder some of the editorial responsibilities. In fact, John and Deb currently serve as associate editors, and Bayo as a contributing editor. This means for the first time in *TA*'s history, an entire editorial team is at one university. Between the faculty and students in Women's Studies, Cultural Anthropology, and African and African American Studies at Duke, we have many supporters and future contributors. In addition, we have secured office space for the journal within the John Hope Franklin Center and some financial support from the African and African American Studies Program, and once a year we are allocated a research assistant from among our graduate students in the Department of Cultural Anthropology. Although I would like some sort of regular staff support or a reduction in my teaching load, I am delighted and excited about the support we have generated, and even more excited about the enthusiasm we have received across campus. With help from John Jackson and Deborah Thomas, we have assembled a group of contributing editors, reworked the mission statement, and generated a small backlog. The contributing editors have already met and addressed what we see as our greatest challenge: to ensure that *Transforming Anthropology* comes out on time while maintaining the high standard of academic excellence and critical analysis we have enjoyed in the past. We have addressed some of the structural weak points of the journal and have come up with novel ways to recruit, solicit, and organize submissions.

1. **Assemble a Group of Committed and Enthusiastic Contributing Editors.** We have recently appointed

fifteen contributing editors, while shifting the current editorial board to the role of an advisory board. The former editorial board was illustrious, and we feel that they would best serve the journal in an advisory capacity. The new collective of contributing editors will serve as the working editorial board. Although some are long-established scholars, most are recently established scholars who are producing some of the most provocative and exciting research in the country. These editors will serve a two-year term and will be our initial resource for peer reviewing, contributing articles, and finding reviewers. They are required to peer review two articles or contribute or recruit one article per year. I hope that organizing this collective will solidify a sense of intellectual community among a new cohort of scholars while strengthening the lines of communication between scholars who are committed to theoretically sophisticated explorations of race, culture, gender, class, and issues that impact Africans within the diaspora. There are seven of us who live or work in the so-called “research triangle,” and we have already met once and plan to meet once a semester to review where we are, take stock, and come up with new ways to strengthen the journal. Although most of our work will be done electronically, we also plan to hold meetings at the annual AAA conference as well as one of the smaller section conferences during the spring. Employing a group of contributing editors is an entirely new approach for *TA*, and so far, it has been extremely productive.

2. **Recruiting Articles.** In order to take some of the burden off of the editor, we are asking each contributing editor who recruits an article to act sort of like the editor for that particular article—identifying peer reviewers, soliciting the reviews, and reminding the parties to keep on a tight timeline. We are asking recruiters to basically shepherd “their” articles through the editorial process while working in partnership with the editorial offices at Duke.
3. **Going Serial with Special Topics.** One of the greatest assets of *TA* has been our guest-edited volumes, where an individual scholar with particular expertise gathers a group of scholars together to write articles around a topic. It is often difficult and time-consuming to bring together a complete volume. We are now asking editors to run their articles as a series on a special topic. Special-topic sections will cluster a series of articles or other kinds of essays under a single rubric or theme. Series editors also have the option of running themes across several issues, which has the potential of generating an interesting and ongoing dialogue. Robert L. Adams Jr. inaugurates the first series in this volume.

4. **Call and Response.** Another approach to generate exciting scholarship, dialogue, and participation is the new section we initiated titled “Call and Response.” What we plan to do is have scholars respond publicly to another author’s submission. Like a more informal version of *Current Anthropology*, we will invite people to engage in a cordial and informative discussion. For example, in this issue Lesley Gill’s report to the AAA Human Rights Committee detailing Coca-Cola’s unseemly labor practices serves as the call, while Robin Kirk, who has worked extensively on Colombia’s human rights abuses, issues the response. I hope that this section can serve as a dialogic space. We feel that this will be an exciting feature that will generate substantial buzz inside and outside of the ABA and *TA*’s traditional readership.
5. **Other Innovative Formats.** In order to continue our emphasis on generating dialogue among scholars and across issues, we have agreed to solicit and publish additional kinds of material that further examines the themes we explore, such as interviews with activists and arts practitioners, dialogues between anthropologists on particular topics, and creative nonfiction. We have also decided to include more artwork, and we have appointed anthropologist Stanford Carpenter (comic book artist, critic, and visual theorist) as our art editor to work toward this end. From the beginning, *TA* has always experimented with innovative formats. If one looks at some of the very first volumes, there are examples of poetry, course syllabi, interviews, and other genres.
6. **Edited and Typeset by UC Press.** The ABA has made a strategic investment in the journal by opting to pay the Journals Division of University of California Press to typeset, copyedit, and publish the journal. Although the hefty expenses are difficult for a relatively small unit to shoulder, the editors believe that partnering with the press will allow the editorial offices here at Duke to focus on acquisitions and development, while letting the seasoned professionals handle the copyediting and production. This division of labor makes sense financially and strategically. Frankly, we had no choice. Every member journal of AnthroSource must be published by UC Press because the “tagging” and “coding” involved in the production process enhances the features of AnthroSource.

I realize that virtually the entire ABA budget is allocated for this one journal, but this fact underlines the various stakes involved for all of the stakeholders, including the AAA. I don’t want to raise the specter of failure, but I do want to emphasize that the central administration of the AAA is a stakeholder too.

There was considerable reservation among the various constituencies within the AAA about the wisdom of generating a business relationship with UC Press and the launching of AnthroSource. The membership of the ABA had a long discussion at its 2003 business meeting regarding the added value of establishing an expensive relationship with UC Press and AnthroSource. The discussion highlighted the fact that *TA* already has a rather robust online presence as a result of being a member journal of ProQuest—the world's leading multidisciplinary information resource. Despite the fact that ProQuest produces full-text access, offers sophisticated search capabilities, and costs the ABA nothing, a consensus emerged at the 2003 meeting that turned on the fact that “we are anthropologists, and we want our journal alongside others in our discipline-specific online database.” There was a collective decision to move forward and forge a relationship with UC Press and make a bid to be included in AnthroSource. The decision was made in good faith with the understanding that the AnthroSource model was sound, not only for the big flagship journals but also for the smaller niche journals.

If, in fact, we can turn *TA* around and fulfill our obligations to our members, UC Press, and the AAA, yet the journal financially encumbers the ABA to the point that our fund balances are not maintained at a sustainable or acceptable level, then the failure will rest squarely on the shoulders of the AAA as an organization. The initial vision for AnthroSource was pitched in a way that claimed that these new relationships would not produce a financial hardship for extant units. If we don't turn it around, and I fail to meet my obligations as editor, the failure will rest squarely on my shoulders. The only scenario, however, that I will even consider tenable is *TA* working in close partnership with the AnthroSource steering committee to ensure and enable that our journal takes advantage of these opportunities and succeeds. My main point is that I am humbled by the responsibility of serving as the editor of *TA*, and if I do my part, the ABA should hold the AAA Executive Board and its steering committee accountable if the financial model employed cripples our unit.

7. Manuscript Flow System. One of the critical success factors for the journal will be our participation in the manuscript flow system. I can't emphasize enough that being able to have access to this platform will enable *Transforming Anthropology* to be more efficient, cost-effective, and productive. The fact that *TA* does not have a dedicated staff person means that automating some of the tasks, having a central server where the documents reside, and having quick and efficient ways to manage the

manuscript flow will simply increase productivity and efficiency and enable our journal to come out on time. Although this is a new technology for AAA journals, I think that it will be important for it to be simultaneously rolled out to both large and small journals. *TA* has volunteered to be an early adopter and help work through the inevitable bugs and learning curve. More importantly, I would be glad to help promote its use among other journal editors.

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We have begun the process of implementing some of these initiatives and organized a team of dedicated scholars who are committed to *TA*, understand its historical legacy, and are ready to move it to new horizons with new partnerships with the University of California Press and Duke University and a renewed relationship with the American Anthropological Association. As Faye Harrison suggested fifteen years ago, we are at an important threshold, and it “depends upon our collective will, motivation, and ability to seize the time.” She was downright prophetic about “seizing the time,” which in all of our lives is such a precious commodity, but she also meant seizing the moment, and I hope we can all just make the time to seize the moment.

REFERENCE CITED

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