

REVIEW ESSAY

Black Women’s Internationalism: A New Frontier in Intellectual History

Ashley D. Farmer*

History and African and African American Studies Departments, University of Texas-Austin

*Corresponding author. E-mail: adf@austin.utexas.edu

Keisha Blain and Tiffany Gill, eds., *To Turn the Whole World Over: Black Women and Internationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2019)

Published in Paris in 1928 under the leadership of Guadeloupean Maurice Satineau, the newspaper *La dépêche africaine* featured a mélange of African diasporic contributors from across the French colonies. Chief among them were the Afro-Martinican intellectuals and sisters Jane and Paulette Nardal. It was here that Jane Nardal published her now famous essay “Internationalisme noir,” introducing the idea of “black internationalism” into popular parlance. Nardal documented a new understanding of blackness and collectivity amid post-World War I globalization. Just as wartime had broken down barriers among Europeans and white Americans, so too had it fostered the “sentiment” among black people from the around the world that they “belong[ed] to one and the same race.”¹ Introducing and reifying terms such as “Afro Latino” and “African American” into French and English vernaculars, Nardal focused on black people’s efforts to rhetorically and ideologically link the African diaspora while also reconciling these new identities with the “ancient traditions” of Africa.² The result: one of the first efforts to define black internationalism as an ideology, worldview, and political practice in a moment in which black people the world over were trying to negotiate the modernizing world and their place in it.

As Nardal’s work offered rich and ideologically fertile ground, contemporaneous male writers and thinkers quickly usurped the ideas and lexicon of black internationalism. Her contemporaries—most notably Martinican writer Aimé Césaire and Senegalese poet and politician Léopold Senghor—gained global fame for their redefinition of black colonial subjectivity through what is now known as the Negritude movement. Moreover, they created a “conspicuously masculine genealogy of their critical consciousness” that credited black American Harlem Renaissance writers and intellectuals such as Langston Hughes, Claude McKay, and W. E. B. Du Bois as the movement’s intellectual progenitors.³ Despite her

¹Jane Nardal, “Internationalisme noire,” *La dépêche africaine*, 15 Feb. 1928, 5; T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis, 2002), 38–41.

²Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women*, 38–41.

³T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, “Femme Negritude, Jane Nardal, La Depêche africaine, and the Francophone New Negro,” *Souls* 2/4 (2020), 13–15.

indispensable role in providing the “intellectual and institutional infrastructure” (3) of black internationalism in the early twentieth century, Nardal was all but forgotten and her ideas appropriated.

The historiography has largely shored up this masculinist framing of black internationalism. Scholars of black history have always been preoccupied with when, how, and why black people forged connections with those outside their borders. Yet historians addressed this question with renewed vigor after the 1999 publication of Robin D. G. Kelley’s seminal article “But a Local Phase of the World Problem,” which inaugurated a new phase of scholarship focused on the connections among people across the African diaspora and their similarly positioned counterparts all over the globe.⁴ Since then, there has been a proliferation of histories aimed at identifying and analyzing black people’s efforts to forge international connections with others across the diaspora, to shape diplomacy, to challenge questions of citizenship and belonging, and to assert new identifications unencumbered by maps and borders. Black men—particularly those in the elite class—figure more prominently in these histories, casting conceptions and expressions of black internationalism through the lens of patriarchy. Just as Nardal was pushed aside in her day, so too have scholars sidelined black women in transnational histories, international relations, diplomatic histories, and studies of black internationalism writ large.

Moreover, as Michael O. West and Fanon Che Wilkins, editors of the seminal anthology *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution*, note, much of this history has been “an act of recuperation” of the “largely unheralded, story of black struggles” worldwide.⁵ In other words, the historiography of black internationalism has, in large part, been focused on documenting black people’s struggle to redefine themselves and reject oppression on the local, national, and global scales. Such studies chronicle everything from the anticolonial treatises of Negritude writers, to the “Back to Africa” movements of enslaved and freed people, to support for nationalist uprisings in Africa and Asia, and the like.⁶ The result of this approach is twofold. First, this trend has produced histories largely preoccupied with black people’s opposition to white cultural, social, and economic domination. Second, such stories of resistance leave readers with the impression that it was largely black men who dared defy nation-state borders and forge transnational solidarities to throw off the yoke of white oppression.

Recently, however, a robust line of scholarship has developed that demonstrates black women’s importance to black internationalism. Scholars such as Gerald Horne, Carole Boyce Davies, Erik S. McDuffie, Keisha N. Blain, Tracy Denean

⁴Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883–1950,” *Journal of American History* 86/3 (1999), 1045–77.

⁵Michael O. West and William G. Martin, “Contours of the Black International,” in Michael O. West and Fanon Che Wilkins, eds., *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International since the Age of Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 2009), 1–45, at 2.

⁶For examples of this scholarship see Carol Anderson, *Eyes off the Prize: The United Nations, and the African American Struggle for Human Rights, 1944–1955* (Cambridge, 2003); Minkah Makalani, *In the Cause of Freedom: Radical Black Internationalism from Harlem to London, 1917–1957* (Chapel Hill, 2011); James Meriwether, *Proudly We Can Be Africans: Black Americans and Africa, 1935–1961* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Seth Markel, *A Motorcycle on Hell Run: Tanzania, Black Power, and the Uncertain Future of Pan-Africanism, 1964–1974* (East Lansing, 2017).

Sharpley-Whiting, and Barbara Ransby, among others, have all published works that foreground black women's real and imagined transnational linkages and their efforts to band together to imagine new ideas of blackness, the nation-state, and citizenship.⁷ This vein of scholarship adeptly illustrates black women's long-standing theorizing and enacting of black internationalism across the globe and their centrality to the diverse and distinct forms of activism and political thought based on the linked fate of black people around the world. Collectively, these scholars' interventions are numerous. Most importantly, they have prompted a rethinking of masculinist characterizations of internationalist ideologies and activities and challenged the idea of black struggle as the defining feature of black internationalism. They have also generated new questions. Scholars are now asking, how should we understand black internationalism as an ideology? Where should we locate its origins and development? Should it be understood as both an ideology and a practice? How do women and gender mediate black internationalist thought and practice?

The essays in Blain and Gill's *To Turn the Whole World Over: Black Women and Internationalism* answer these questions substantively and creatively. The collection is *the first and only* anthology to examine the ways in which black women have engaged in and articulated black internationalism over the past two centuries. Not only does it include chapters on both well- and lesser-known black women organizers and thinkers but contributors also examine black internationalism from multiple vantage points and geographical locales and address cultural and political expressions of black women's transnational ideals. Most importantly, the volume does not "confine black internationalism to foreign policy agendas and political insurgencies." Rather, in diverse ways, the authors "captur[e] the shifting meanings, complexities, and varied articulations of the term" (4). In the process, the collection places black women "within the long and rich lineage of black women thinkers, doers, and creators represented by the Nardal sisters and others" (3).

Not content to be tethered to a single understanding of black internationalism that pivots on black struggle, the authors in this volume are expressly interested in offering new definitions of black internationalism as an ideology and contemplating how black women express the core tenets of this philosophy. As a result, *To Turn the Whole World Over* contributors shed light on productive methodologies and approaches for understanding black people's global, national, and political self-perception; the mobility of ideas about blackness and liberation; how global networks of intellectuals are forged; and what constitutes evidence of these ideas and actions. The contributors take black women seriously as progenitors of black thought across time, space, and historical fields. As a result, the volume not only

⁷Studies include, but are not limited to, Gerald Horne, *Race Woman: The Lives of Shirley Graham DuBois* (New York, 2000); Carol Boyce Davies, *Left of Karl Marx: The Political Life of Black Communist Claudia Jones* (Durham, NC, 2007); Keisha N. Blain, *Set the World on Fire: Black Nationalist Women and the Global Struggle for Black Freedom* (Philadelphia, 2018); Barbara Ransby, *Elslanda: The Large and Unconventional Life of Mrs. Paul Robeson* (New Haven, 2013); Erik S. McDuffie, *Sojourning for Freedom: Black Women, American Communism, and the Making of Black Left Feminism* (Durham, NC, 2011); and T. Denean Sharpley-Whiting, *Bricktop's Paris: African American Women in Paris between the Two World Wars* (Albany, 2015).

advances the study of black thought, but also asks readers to rethink the very idea of what constitutes the “international” and the primary actors that uphold and advance this ideal. Ultimately, the anthology offers a remapping and reimagining of both fields and serves as a guide for rethinking black women’s place in modern intellectual history.

* * *

Black internationalism advances intellectual history in that it offers key insights into understanding black people’s global political and social self-conception. Essays such as Tiffany N. Florvil’s “‘Distant Ties’: May Ayim’s Transnational Solidarity and Activism” demonstrate how black women’s internationalist thinking and organizing explain how they positioned themselves within local and global societies. Florvil uncovers how Ayim navigated and theorized her place as an Afro-German within a post-Holocaust Germany society that had “failed to expunge everyday racism” (75). Ayim, she argues, became a leader of a vibrant Afro-German community in the 1980s, cofounding the Initiative of Black Germans in Berlin and participating in feminist groups such as the Afro-German Women. Here, Ayim was able to carve out a space for Afro-Germans to combat everyday racism and learn more about their shared culture and history. She also forged connections with black women writers across the diaspora, most notably American poet and theorist Audre Lorde.

Florvil reveals how Ayim’s writings were a key site of black internationalist expression and theorizing. Ayim gained international acclaim for her poetry—especially through pieces such as “Afro-German I” and “Afro-German II,” in which she explained, explored, and validated black Germans’ lives and liberties. Ayim complemented her poetry with speeches and presentations dedicated to promoting “linkages and social transformation for herself and black Europeans” (87). Through works such as “My Pen Is My Sword: Racism and Resistance in Germany,” Ayim promoted a black, women-centered understanding of antiracism and liberation for Afro-German peoples. She presented this and other speeches and poems at multiple gatherings across Europe, simultaneously amplifying Afro-German people and making connections with other black writers around the world. In the process, Ayim not only chronicled the formation of a late twentieth-century Afro-German identity and community, but also played a key role in “the establishment of the modern Afro-German movement” (89).

Looking outward, Grace V. Leslie, in her analysis of their post-World War II formal and informal diplomatic engagement, reveals how black women organizers conceived of and presented themselves on the international stage. Examining a period dominated by black luminaries like W. E. B. Du Bois and Paul Robeson, Leslie foregrounds an often overlooked figure from this period: Mary McLeod Bethune and her leadership of the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW).

If historians focus on black women during this time, they typically explore radical black women organizers such as Claudia Jones or Eslanda Robeson—women who were ardent critics of the American nation-state during reconversion and the Cold War. In “‘United We Build a Free World’: The Internationalism of Mary McLeod Bethune and the National Council of Negro Women,” Leslie instead examines how Bethune navigated the “contentious divide between white women

internationalists, black men internationalists, centrists, radicals, and progressives, not to mention the Roosevelt administration,” in order to ensure that black women would not be left behind in diplomatic deal making (193). Through her diplomacy and jockeying for inclusion alongside other black male leaders, Bethune transformed national and international conceptions of black women and their place in postwar America.

Bethune, Leslie explains, focused her attention on the creation of the United Nations as a key site through which the late twentieth-century world would be built. Through a careful examination of her speeches at international conferences, Leslie reveals how Bethune and other members “spoke against colonialism and for human rights” while also promoting black women’s rights too. Determined that “Negro women w[ould] not go back to the kitchen” or be a “segregated force,” Leslie notes how Bethune acted as a “bridge to ensure that the multiple identities of women of color in the African diaspora were represented at the United Nations” (201–2). Bethune also extended the scope and reach of black women in America by championing their priorities at other meetings such as the Conference of Negro Leaders and by joining and attending the Women’s International Democratic Federation (WIDF)—a meeting of nearly a thousand centrist and leftist women dedicated to uplifting women’s rights globally. Leslie’s examination of Bethune inserts leading black women into histories of postwar international relations while also offering a meditation on their ideas about their rights and roles amid mid-twentieth-century geopolitical reordering.

Culture, as Nicole Anae shows, is also a key conduit through which we can understand black women’s “declarations of racial identity politics” (124). “‘They Will All Be My Color’: Nina Mae McKinney and Black Internationalism in 1930s Australia” covers McKinney—an actress who was “marginalized by Hollywood’s racial climate but reified internationally as a major talent”—and her travels to Australia (123). Anae deftly demonstrates how McKinney asserted another form of black internationalism through her public self-fashioning while touring internationally. As readers learn of McKinney’s statements while abroad, another conception of black internationalism develops: one that is not rooted in the radical impulses of black struggle and instead is guided by “modalities of black engagement in world affairs” (127).⁸ After all, Anae reminds readers, McKinney’s “very livelihood relied not only on the workings of capitalism and commercialism” but also on “colonialism and imperialism in a professional sense” (127). The actress’s internationalism was made possible by her position as an American actor and her proximity to Western ideas and modes of cultural production.

A central claim of this essay is that McKinney played a pioneering role in shaping global conceptions of black women and womanhood in the early twentieth century. As Anae shows, she astutely dominated “the discourse of black representation not simply by controlling what she is wearing” in public but also “by controlling the context in which she herself is *seen*” (132, original emphasis). By carefully crafting

⁸Here Anae is relying on definition of black internationalism as put forth by Jeffery M. Brown. See Jeffery M. Brown, “Black Internationalism: Embracing an Economic Paradigm,” *Michigan Journal of International Law* 23/4 (2002), 807–67.

her style and sound bites, McKinney not only redefined Australians' ideas about blackness and black Americans; she also challenged prevailing stereotypes of black women through her "proto-feminist" expressions of identity and critiques of "gender suppression" in Hollywood (130, 134). In sum, McKinney's travels indicated yet another conduit through which black American women developed and promulgated their own ideas about themselves outside the United States.

By assessing the internationalist practices of women like Ayim, Bethune, and McKinney, *To Turn the Whole World Over* contributors show how well- and lesser-known black women redefined themselves and their place within the global sphere. Readers see how poets, writers, and actresses sought to assert new and different political and social identities for black women and how they forged real and imagined connections with other people across the African diaspora. If a central component of black intellectual history is examining how black people conceptualized themselves amid myriad oppressive forces, then examining black women's efforts to define themselves in the international context and on the international stage can be a key conduit for this line of inquiry. Moreover, all of these contributions help further define the contours of black internationalism by offering new and generative approaches for identifying international actors and what constitutes internationalist practice. They also warn against interpretations of the philosophy that rely solely on black people's radicalism or reactions to racism.

* * *

Black women's internationalism also furthers the study of the circulation of ideas. Such an approach is especially productive when examining groups of people for whom educational access and mobility have always been limited. In "'Confraternity among All Dark Races': Mittie Maude Lena Gordon and the Practice of Black (Inter)Nationalism, 1932–1942," Keisha N. Blain illustrates how ideas about black liberation can catch fire even when black women never cross borders. Gordon was an avid follower of Marcus Garvey and his black nationalist organization, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). When the federal government deported Garvey in 1927, Gordon picked up the mantle, creating the Peace Movement of Ethiopia (PME) to mobilize poor and working-class black people around black nationalist principles and African emigration. Gordon gained widespread recognition as a movement leader when she started a "nation-wide emigration campaign and mailed a petition to President Franklin D. Roosevelt with an estimated four hundred thousand signatures of black Americans who were willing to leave the country" (171).

Gordon was one of the foremost advocates of black nationalism and emigration in the 1930s. However, she never set foot on foreign soil. She, like many black women in America, could not afford to travel abroad. Instead, Gordon practiced what Blain calls "grassroots internationalism"—or "efforts to engage in internationalist politics on a local level" and challenge "global racism, imperialism, and colonialism" from one's home base (172). Through Gordon, Blain shows that a lack of access and mobility did not preclude black women from participating in and promoting black internationalism. Readers learn that black women have articulated a linked fate with other black people the world over, fostered political connections

with other people of color, and promoted forms of liberation that defied existing nation-state formations, all from their living rooms, church pews, and women's groups. In other words, everyday black women's promotion and support of ideas about black liberation, nation-state formation, and peoplehood, Blain shows, sustained the idea and the practice far more than historians have acknowledged.

Yet those who traveled also had an impact. Central to a holistic understanding of black internationalism is examining the ways in which ideas about blackness and liberation circulate outside US borders and flow from Africa to the Americas. Here, again, volume contributors show that a focus on black women is productive. Julia Erin Wood's examination of women in the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and their travels to Africa expands US-centric histories of black internationalism and black intellectual history. In "What That Meant to Me': SNCC Women, the 1964 Guinea Trip, and Black Internationalism," Wood assesses the impact of Guinea on the vanguard of American civil rights organizers. In the early 1960s, black women such as Fannie Lou Hamer and Ruby Doris Smith Robinson worked with SNCC in a nationwide effort to promote black civil and voting rights. While successful, this activism took a toll on organizers and forced them to question the scope and purpose of their activism. SNCC organizers looked to rapidly decolonizing African countries, like Guinea, for inspiration. As Wood explains, "Guinea's act of standing up to a European colonial power ... proved deeply inspiring to many African Americans fighting for civil and human rights" (220–21).

Black entertainer Harry Belafonte funded the trip that reshaped SNCC organizers' ideas of blackness and liberation. Wood documents how the trip transformed Hamer, a Mississippi sharecropper, noting that it allowed her "to reconceptualize her African-ness as a positive inheritance and identity rather than a disgrace" and "changed things" for her as an activist (224). The trip altered other SNCC women when they "witness[ed] firsthand an all-black government, economy, and society" (223). They also found inspiration in Guinean women, who "were not trying to conform to Eurocentric beauty ideals," and in the political implications of free black nation-states (225). Smith Robinson, for example, left with new understandings of "diasporic alliances" and with the idea that "Pan-Africanism could be important within the United States" (226). Ultimately, Wood reveals how, through travel, African liberation leaders transformed black American activists' ideas of what was possible in the United States.

Dayo Gore offers yet another perspective of how international interfacing shaped the dissemination of ideas. Focusing on "long-distance runner" Victoria "Vicki" Garvin, Gore examines how black women strengthened international ties and ideals by entrenching themselves in communities abroad.⁹ Following Garvin's career as an activist expat in Ghana and China during the 1960s, Gore shows how her activism abroad was both an effort to foster global leftist solidarities and a "clear indictment

⁹The term "long-distance runner" refers to lifelong black women activists who "embraced a range of strategies" and "traversed a host of movements and invested in innovative coalition building." See Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis, and Komozi Woodard, "Introduction," in Gore, Theoharis, and Woodard, eds., *Want to Start a Revolution: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York, 2009), 1–42, at 4.

of US democracy” (239). Garvin, readers learn, worked as an English teacher while also connecting activist communities and causes through speeches, letters, and, at times, protests. She, like other black women, “liv[ed] in exile during a crucial moment of worldwide revolutionary struggle” and not only offered her organizing skills but also “lent [her] political reputation” to local causes in order strengthen ties among black activists and Third World revolutions (237). “A Common Rallying Call: Vicki Garvin in China and the Making of US Third World Solidarity Politics” shows how black women forged, formulated, and finagled global activist networks that were often “represented (if not made and sustained) by charismatic ‘great men’” (237).

Garvin had a unique opportunity to view other countries’ decolonization and revolutionary struggles firsthand. She was also well-connected to black leftist communities in America by virtue of her long-standing activist career. Gore shows how Garvin became a “vital part of the genealogy of black internationalism” through her correspondence with other activists inside and outside the United States and via her speeches that foregrounded oppressive and liberatory connections among black people and women across countries and political systems. Garvin also functioned as a representative of US black liberation movements abroad, assuring those in China and other countries that black Americans supported their antiracist and anti-imperialist aims. In sum, Garvin’s expat activism offered a window onto how transnational political networks worked outside major organizations and the United States. Moreover, Gore’s careful tracing of Garvin’s career pinpoints underappreciated sites of black women’s intellectualism in internationalist spaces while also indicating how black women fostered ideas of liberation and political connectivity around the globe.

The aforementioned essays advance understandings of black intellectualism through their study of black women’s diverse encounters with and expressions of internationalist ideas. Blain, Wood, and Gore complicate and further explicate how ideas travel within international communities. Far too often, black women, and black people more broadly, are not considered to be interlocutors or shapers of ideas about international relationships or geopolitics because they lacked the ability to travel, were not the primary leaders of organizations, or did not make news for their international exploits. Through their studies of the ways in which black women embedded themselves in grassroots intellectual communities and embraced ideas outside their country and comfort zones, these contributors show that black women constituted ideas about the world and kindled them at home and abroad throughout the twentieth century.

* * *

Political imagination is another primary modality of black internationalism. It is also fertile ground for the study of black thought. As Brandon R. Byrd shows, the act of reimagining and refashioning is both an individual and a collective project that has transformative potential for black Americans. In “‘We Are Negroes!’ The Haitian Zambo, Racial Spectacle, and the Performance of Black Women’s Internationalism, 1863–1877,” Byrd documents how Oneda Estelle Dubois transformed herself into Madame Parque by engaging in a “complex staging of black

identity and culture” and “position[ing] herself as the proper conduit of cultural memories about the Haitian Revolution” (16). While others may be focused on uncovering Dubois’s “true” story, Byrd insists that her importance—and her contribution to black internationalism—lies in how Parque used performance to position herself as an authority on “racism, black liberation struggles, and postemancipation strivings across time and space” (16). Living and touring in the Reconstruction-era United States, Parque’s performance shifted the focus away from black men and showed how women in this period “articulated global visions of black liberation” (32).

It was this reimagining of black women’s political and social subjugation across the African diaspora that drew people—both white and black—to Parque. Byrd illustrates how she crafted a new identity that connected her to Haiti by birth and made her a daughter of the diaspora by virtue of claiming that her father was an Amerindian from the Caribbean and her mother was from Madagascar. Armed with this new persona, she toured the country, using her concocted diasporic heritage as a conduit for raising support for black education, black self-determination, and the importance of black women to collective visions of black sovereignty and liberation. Parque’s crafting of a persona and connections to black people globally was successful in that it bolstered black people’s freedom dreams and connections with the diaspora. Ultimately, Byrd reveals the importance of treating the idealized and imaginative aspects of black internationalism with the same seriousness as more tangible forms of political expression.

Black women also reimagined global world orders through their travelogues. Annette K. Joseph-Gabriel analyzes the travels of activist intellectual Eslanda Robeson’s journey through “French and Belgian colonies in Central Africa in 1946” in “Feminist Networks and Diasporic Practices: Eslanda Robeson’s Travels in Africa.” Joseph-Gabriel dives into Robeson’s travelogue, *African Journey*, to ascertain how the activist forged international connections and analyses abroad and shared them with her networks at home. Ultimately, Joseph-Gabriel argues that Robeson adopted a male-dominated genre to assert the importance of black women across the diaspora and to “weave a narrative about diaspora that emphasize[d] anticolonial resistance” (41). She also reveals how black women’s travel diaries functioned as “an important yet understudied archive” for examining their political imaginations (39).

“What place would black people in the United States and Africa occupy in the modern world even as they struggled under the weight of imperialism?” (43). This is the question that Joseph-Gabriel asserts is at the heart of Robeson’s travelogue and ideas of black internationalism writ large. To be sure, Robeson’s response in *African Journey* reveals her effort to create new understandings of black liberation and peoplehood outside the confines of colonialism and imperialism. However, Joseph-Gabriel’s assessment of this text also shows how Robeson rethought and reimagined the modern world by “producing a counter-narrative to the dominant discourse on black inferiority” and “reject[ing] the idea of Africa as an ahistorical continent” (43–4). Robeson’s efforts to reimagine race, class, and gender hierarchies through travel had real political implications. She quickly found herself under surveillance of the French and British governments for publishing about the possibilities and potential of new a world order. During some of the “most crucial years of

black women's transnational activism" Robeson used her travels to proffer new, diasporically grounded ideas about liberation (52). She solidified and transformed international networks and infused them with liberatory promise.

Facing a reality that offers few tangible models of true liberation, black people around the globe have been united in their efforts to imagine new worlds both individually and collectively. These and other volume contributors aptly demonstrate that a crucial aspect of this theorizing was envisioning new geopolitical orders and nation-state borders and that black women were at the vanguard of such reimaginations. This volume begins with the premise that although black women differed in their expressions of black internationalism, they were united in their efforts to redefine black people's place and power in the world. These authors show us that women like Parque and Robeson may have created ideals that were "utopian or symbolic, but they were never apolitical."¹⁰ As such, a true investigation of intellectual history must include even the most idealized understandings of black liberation, unification, and diaspora.

* * *

In expanding ideas of black internationalism, *To Turn the Whole World Over* contributors also broaden readers' concept of what constitutes "an archive" and how to read it. In the case of Kim Gallon's examination of the *Chicago Defender*, this means revisiting older archives in new ways. Perhaps the best-known black periodical, the *Defender* was and remains the newspaper of record for chronicling black life—especially during the early twentieth century. When Gallon examines this collection, she finds evidence of black women's internationalism through the newspaper's "grand prize trip to Haiti for winners of a popularity contest" (55). Focusing on "the golden age of Haitian tourism" in the 1950s, Gallon explores how, through the back pages of the *Defender*, black women "forge[d] transnational networks" and "helped to shape black Pan-American business and interracial cooperation" (55). *Defender* editors attracted young black women for these contests and published winners' travelogues for their mass readership. The contests, Gallon shows, became important sites of cultural connection and political expectation. Prizewinners not only reported back on their experiences abroad; they also met with politicians and, eventually, the State Department, formalizing their roles as conduits between the Haitian and American governments.

This research foregrounds a new frontier of black internationalism—one defined by leisure and interpersonal connections. It also reinvents the black internationalism archive. Far too often, examinations of international relations in the black press have been confined to "hard news—the kinds of stories concerning crime, politics, and foreign affairs" (55). In "Black Women's Internationalism and the *Chicago Defender* during the 'Golden Age of Haitian Tourism,'" Gallon shows how such a definition of black internationalism begets limited conceptualizations of historical sources, causing many to overlook the fact that traditional archives often are

¹⁰ Ashley D. Farmer, *Remaking Black Power: How Black Women Transformed an Era* (Chapel Hill, 2017), 4.

brimming with important but overlooked expressions of internationalism and intellectualism.

If Gallon uncovers new dimensions of a well-worn archive, then Stephanie Beck Cohen asserts the centrality of material culture to the study of black internationalism. Examining the quilting practices of Liberian women in the 1820s, Cohen adeptly argues that, through their needlework, these women “visually constructed Liberian experiences internationally” and engaged in geopolitical relations (150). In “Stitched Networks: Liberian Quilters, Transatlantic Diplomacy, and Community,” Cohen reveals how women such as Martha Ricks, born into slavery in Tennessee, emigrated to Liberia in the 1830s and made international connections through her quilting, creating a piece called *Coffee Tree* for Queen Victoria that not only was part of the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago but also garnered her an audience with the British monarch. Readers learn of other examples of how quilts carried messages from Liberian women to other nation-states for centuries and see how black women used the private, domestic realm to insert themselves in public conversations about their place in international affairs and black nation-state building.

In asserting that “quilts are active objects” that shape “relationships between individuals, institutions, and audiences,” Cohen not only shows how black women corresponded through “text and textiles” but also expands the archive of diplomatic relations and black internationalism (151, 153). Echoing the claims of coauthors, who assert that black women have consistently been marginalized in histories of international relations, Cohen recognizes that black women have always had to interject themselves into these discussions in the forms and formats that were available to them and that material culture was a primary conduit through which they achieved this goal. To be sure, such sources have figured prominently in women’s history. However, few have used material culture as a pathway to better understand black women’s diplomatic overtures and, therefore, their ideas about geopolitics and international relations. As a result, Cohen’s approach offers a model for formulating an expansive archive of black thought.

Anne Donlon also uses material culture to assess black women’s international engagement in “Thyra Edwards’s Spanish Civil War Scrapbook: Black Women’s Internationalist Writing.” Donlon examines a scrapbook containing “clippings that document the twenty-one-city tour that Edwards and African American nurse Salaria Kea undertook to raise money to send an ambulance, medical supplies, and food to Republican Spain in the 1930s” to uncover how black women supported the Spanish Civil War (101). The rise of fascism in Spain brought a special kind of dread for black people. They had already witnessed how Ethiopia—the real and imagined site of black nationhood—felled to fascism when Benito Mussolini invaded it in 1935. Fearing the same fate, black Americans volunteered as soldiers. Others, including Edwards and Kea, raised funds for medical support. Sure that efforts of material solidarity would be erased, the two women documented their activism through scrapbooking, leaving a concrete and versatile record of their engagement with international events, causes, and ideas.

As Donlon and others note, black people often created scrapbooks “to record both histories neglected by scholars and educators and those missing from history textbooks” (103). Their prognostications were correct. Black women like Edwards

and Kea have been largely overlooked in histories of black internationalism—in part due to the fact that they did not appear in “traditional” archives. However, by engaging deeply and purposely in Edwards’s scrapbook, Donlon transforms what is often considered a private, autobiographical collection into a vast and complex set of sources, thereby widening the frame of what constitutes “the internationalist archive” and evidence of black women’s internationalism.

Indeed, a key contribution of *To Turn the Whole World Over* authors is their confirmation of abundant source material of black internationalism—particularly in relation to black women. Donlon and Cohen, among others, find black women’s expressions of internationalism embedded in quilts and in scrapbook entries. In doing so, they not only refute claims about archival lack that underscore the male-dominated historiography, but also broaden the archive of black women’s intellectualism through a study of their international engagement. Such studies prove that a paucity of sources on black women’s internationalism is never the issue—rather it is historians’ truncated definitions of what constitutes evidence that blinds us to the vast black internationalist documentation that exists.

* * *

Whether it be analyzing the conciliatory advances of black women quilters, the self-fashioning of women like Madame Parquet, or those like Vicki Garvin who lived, worked, and organized abroad, *To Turn the Whole World Over* contributors make it clear that black women were part of every period of world history, geopolitics, international relations, and nation-state formation. These essays convincingly show that black women from all walks of life were not simply passive bystanders or pawns in games of statecraft. They were active and engaged citizens and intellectuals who inserted their needs, goals, and visions of freedom into a range of international debates and decisions. In the process, they developed and documented their efforts to imagine worlds where black people—and black women in particular—were not confined by subjugated understandings of blackness, globalization, and peoplehood. They also left a clear record of their understandings of the world and their visions for how it could be more just. *To Turn the Whole World Over* reveals an ample and underexplored archive of black women’s internationalist engagement.

It is *precisely because* black women were so central to developing the world as we know it today that we cannot deny their centrality to our current understandings of freedom, citizenship, nations, notions of belonging, and international solidarities. In order to accurately document and historicize ideas about the self, peoplehood, and world formations, historians cannot and should not ignore black women’s contributions to the formation of these concepts. *To Turn the Whole World Over* shows that there is ample evidence of black women’s goals and ideals—scholars only need to let go of their traditional understandings of who is a thinker and a theorist and what ideas get taken up in intellectual histories of internationalism. More than simply offering a road map for developing more accurate and inclusive histories, *To Turn the Whole World Over* contributors prove that centering black women’s ideas and expressions of black internationalism is generative for rethinking the field of modern intellectual history and the archival practices that undergird it.

Indeed, the contributors' dynamic and revisionist histories point to new avenues for creating capacious studies of black intellectualism and internationalism. For example, how might our understandings of international cooperation and diplomacy be transformed if we shifted the focus of intellectual biographies away from heads of state and toward some of the women in this volume? Or if we organized academic conferences around the international networks that women like Vicki Garvin and May Ayim created rather than traditional "schools" of thought? How might we rethink the history of modern nation-states if we located its founding ideas among the enslaved? And what new intellectual histories of borderlands and immigration would develop if we followed Gallon's and Donlon's methods of searching for the snippets of scrapbooks and tour schedules rather than in state papers? To be sure, historians of black intellectual history have long been employing these capacious visions of intellectual history and archival practice.¹¹ The contributors to this volume work in this tradition while also extending its best elements to transform conversations about ideas, their circulation, and their conservation.

This anthology also reveals the centrality of intellectual history today and in the future. As Michael O. West explains in the Afterword, the essays "make for a useable past, forming a bedrock for understanding subsequent developments in the US black liberation struggles" and other contemporaneous international political formations and solidarities (269). In other words, the contributors' assessments of black women's internationalism helps us understand the rise of Black Lives Matter (BLM)—a movement started by three black women and that foregrounds black people's exclusion from the conceptions and protections of the nation-state. Equally important, however, the essays also offer the historical context that helps readers comprehend why BLM chapters have also popped up all over the globe. In the same vein, examining marginal state actors' internationalism, solidarities, and diplomacy offers similar promise for helping scholars assess how current conceptualizations of peoples, borders, prejudice, and justice take hold.

In a moment when black women are lauded as the "saviors" of democracy, the paragons of democratic ideals, and the embodiment of political possibility, *To Turn the Whole World Over* shows that they have played this role for centuries. It also indicates that the study of their ideas and expressions of democracy, solidarity, and modernity can help intellectual historians play a leading role in contextualizing current events. Since Nardal, black women have been the philosophical epicenter and vanguard of black internationalism. It is time we treat their ideas about the world—past, present, and prophetic—with the seriousness and analytical rigor they deserve.

¹¹For an excellent summary of the field see Brandon R. Byrd, "The Rise of African American Intellectual History," *Modern Intellectual History* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1479244320000219>. For an edition of recent trends in black intellectual history see Keisha N. Blain, Christopher Cameron, and Ashley D. Farmer, eds., *New Perspectives on the Black Intellectual Tradition* (Evanston: 2018).