

PEDAGOGY BY NAME CALLING

by Bettie J. Durrah (Maria Fearing Fund)



Weaving appropriations that symbolically named and claimed the challenges faced by continental and diasporan women was front and center throughout the 3rd Biennial Consultation of African and African Diasporan Women in Religion and Theology. Using the theme, **“Say Her Name! Africana Women as Interpreters, Healers and Revolutionaries,”** a small band of women (approximately 30) gathered from July 10-15, 2016, on the campus of Spelman College, Atlanta, Georgia. Originally scheduled for Jamaica, the conference was moved to the campus of Spelman College where the chair of the sponsoring group, Daughters of the African Atlantic Fund, **Rosetta Ross**, is a faculty member. The gathering was mainly made up of women (many of whom were younger women) who are teaching, doing research, or studying in institutions of higher learning. Many of the women either have a Ph.D. or are working on the degree. Through rituals, body movement, book reviews, movie (“Daughters of the Dust”) drumming, poetic expressions, panel discussions, lectures, and digital activism, women expressed the rage, righteous indignation, as well as intellectual discourse that women are using to fully express themselves. Using tools of “intellectual midwifery,” primal conversations, scholarly work, etc., women connected the dots as they seek their own liberation in a sometimes hostile environment.

Several of the presenters used examples from women’s lives from their traditions (Ghana, Nigeria, Jamaica, Afro Latin, Brazil, and the United States) to illustrate through their witness and service that they were interpreters, healers and revolutionaries. Among the nuggets of wisdom heard included the following:

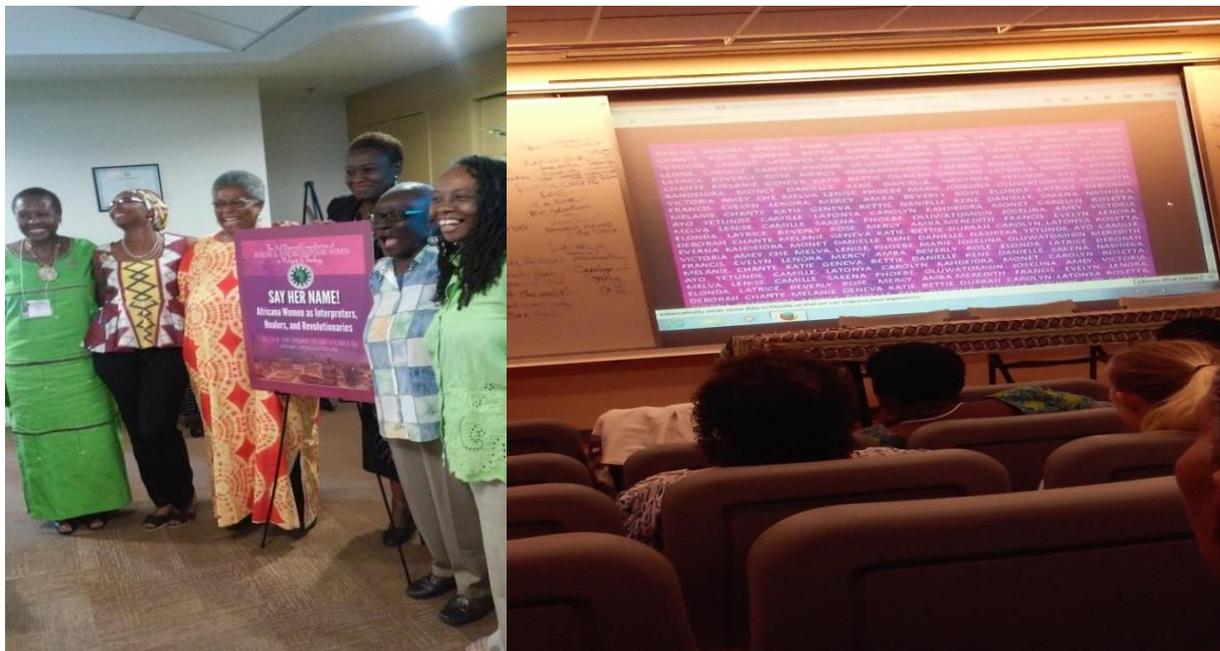
- *Our joy is our resistance.*
- *It is difficult to decolonize your mind.*
- *You must debunk the statement that “the Bible has never been used to support slavery.”*
- *“When they lie, they lie.” (Toni Morrison)*
- *“Black people are the capital upon which capitalism is built.” (Prathia Hall Winn)*
- *One way to dehumanize a person is to take away the name.*
- *Histories of enslavement are embedded in the logic of community formation.*

- *We heal by understanding.*
- *How do we tackle our souls to deal with our embodied rage?*
- *Leaders like Nannie (Queen Nanny, Caribbean history) have never died; they move to another.*
- *Women's story, if told and retold, becomes subversive.*
- *One may become sidelined, but not silenced.*
- *If you are not going to be a patriarch in a skirt, what will our model of leadership be?*
- *Privilege in a male-dominated society is dicey.*
- *What is more like a church than a church?*
- *In African "barnyards," find the values and essence of Christianity. They are also a place of deep spirituality.*
- *Our history, culture, situation, real circumstance must relate to what our theology is.*
- *If Caribbean theology is to be relevant, it must go to the barnyards.*
- *Rage and the persistence of it can take us to the places where we need Jesus.*
- *Strategies for change are not always easy. The first models are patriarchal, colonized models.*
- *We must, in turn, push to be seen.*
- *What we do to our bodies demonstrates to the world and what do our bodies remember?*
- *We are experts in our experience.*
- *Black feminism will flip the discourse or reset.*
- *"I have always had the sense of Armageddon." (Audre Lorde)*
- *For women who had been missionaries, their names were in the graveyard, but not in the books.*
- *She taught soap making, but also that they were human beings, and to interpret their lives in their own context.*
- *Are we still zoological estates?*
- *African women can be the sites of theological truths.*
- *To be a revolutionary is to say that there is enough for all.*
- *Co-existence is the only thing.*

The above nuggets of wisdom represent the written "takeaway" notes from this writer. No attempt has been made to tie them together for fear of misinterpretation of the feminist/womanist/expanding world view of these scholars who represented the spectrum from traditional religion in Africa, Brazil, Haiti to mainline Protestant faiths, and other faith communities.

Major presenters included the following:

- **Katie Geneva Cannon**, Annie Scales Rogers Professor of Christian Ethics, Union Presbyterian Seminary
- **Marjorie Lewis**, Immediate past president, United Theological College of the West Indies, Kingston, Jamaica.
- **Mercy Amba Oduyoye**, Director, Institute of Women in Religion and Culture, Trinity Theological Seminary, Legon, Ghana
- **Joselina da Silva**, Institute of Education, Federal Rural University, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- **Evelyn Parker**, Susanna Wesley Centennial Professor of Practical Theology and Associate Dean of Academic Affairs, Perkins School of Theology, Southern Methodist University, Dallas, Texas



Through a series of panels and other presentations, information was shared about the way African women are depicting in Nollywood Films, warrior women of Dahomey Religious/Cultural Practices of Yourba Women, Pentecostalism in Nigeria, Sandra Bland story, writings of Audre Lorde, Alice Walker, biblical women, and others. One day was spent in an excursion to the Oyotunji African Village, Sheldon, South Carolina.

Jacquelyn Grant, Callaway Professor of Systematic Theology, and Director of the Office of Black Women and Society, was able to attend the very last session of the conference when she talked about the 200th Year Celebration of the AME Church, in Philadelphia, from which she had just returned. During the consecration of the new bishops, a statement was read which affirmed the life and work of Jarena Lee (but not the ordination posthumously as women had supported) Jarena Lee was the first female preacher in the AME Church, and she was refused ordination by the founder, Richard Allen. Grant announced the election of one female bishop, Anne Henning-Byfield in the AME Church, and four women bishops in

the United Methodist Church. In responding to questions about the way forward for women, Jacqueline Grant suggested constructive thinking, and making sure that the principles go beyond the academy. She further suggested that interaction with the churches is what is needed.

Dr. Grant 's comments resonated with this writer who had participated in the entire conference, but found a cognitive dissonance between the groups interactions with "laywomen" missing and the theological/sociological truths that they espoused All the theology, ethics, anthropology, sociology, are for naught if sisters do not relate in practical ways to all.

Each participant was given a dress pin designed by Katie G. Cannon for this occasion. The intricate pattern of the design suggests the intricate relationships in which women find themselves.

Women must continue telling the stories of both named and unnamed women who were/are healers, interpreters and revolutionaries who help to change society. The Daughters of the African Atlantic Fund, Inc. will continue to lift up the names of women as they journey towards their next global gathering in Brazil in 2018.

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