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Introduction

Black Pioneers in Communication Research unabashedly celebrates both Africana scholarship and Black scholars. Of necessity, it calls to question a perennial matter it does not explicitly discuss—the politics of mainstream intellectualism. One of the book’s primary functions is to interrogate the center of mainstream academic scholarship while also providing a nuanced pedagogical tool by discussing the lives and careers of pioneering scholars in communication research. The idea of a center suggests a place of focus, a foundational point of significance, or a pivotal location. Since the late 1960s, Black scholars and their scholarship have been an influential part of the center of communication inquiry, but have seldom been fully acknowledged and integrated in basic communication theory textbooks and refereed, scholarly writings in communication. The pioneering works of Hallie Quinn Brown, Stuart Hall, Molefi Asante, Donald Bogle, Orlando Taylor, Marsha Houston, and others featured here are indisputably central to the field of communication. However, these pioneers have been recognized primarily within international and interdisciplinary arenas such as Black Diasporic studies, cultural studies, ethnic studies, history, women’s studies, and communication sciences and disorders at the expense of overstating the center in mainstream communication research during the past 30 or more years. Two primary objectives of this book are to honor 11 pioneering Black scholars and their scholarship by showcasing their lives and careers and to demonstrate that a significant portion of what we know about culture and communication has been influenced by these individuals.

Although it is clear that Africana scholars (and their scholarship) have historically been largely ignored as major figures central to the field of communication, their works are becoming increasingly well received among a growing contingent of up-and-coming communication researchers interested in the study of culture. These pioneers continue to be heralded among generations of Black communication scholars.

With this recovery of Black intellectualism in communication research, there is also recognition of a long-standing transcendent quality to Black communication thought. A very large segment of it has historically developed a holistic, self-reflective cultural standpoint that has grappled with the Europeanized binaries of mind/body, self/object, individualism/collectivism, and Black/White, as well as the trialetics of mind/body/soul, symbol/referent/reference, and message/sender/receiver. As you will witness while reading Black Pioneers in Communication Research, there is always an active, political, and intellectual act of inverting paradigms. For example, Stuart Hall not only subscribes to the postmodern notion of agency but also invokes a critical communication theory of articulation, which requires that we interrogate the language we use to constrain discursive realities. Similarly, it was Hallie Quinn Brown who spoke of the potential for emancipation via rhetoric and elocution at a time when rhetoric’s function was primarily conceived within a tripartite paradigm of deliberative, forensic, and epideictic speech. Brown extended the meaning of deliberative speech to illumine class and labor struggles, social uplift, and basic public political participation. Rather than simply maintaining the broad interest in rhetorical education as a discipline of performance, Brown fought for cultural and linguistic inclusiveness. Another example can be found in the works of Molefi Kete Asante, Jack Daniel, and Melbourne Cummings: Each proposed that call-and-response was a constitutive feature of discursive experiences and the Black oral tradition. As Asante explained, it is odd to think of the speech act as being solely comprised of a speaker, text, and inoculated audience when there is so much more interactivity in the Black oral traditions in churches and elsewhere within Black discursive experiences. These prescient paradigm shifts have been overlooked far too often as critical junctures in our scholarship. It is
incumbent upon us as scholars to insist upon intellectual inclusiveness and to insist that multiple voices be heard lest we re-energize the circuitry of uncritical thinking and moral degeneracy that is so often criticized in our own principled writings.

Beyond the act of recovering pioneering works by Black communication scholars, *Black Pioneers in Communication Research* also provides a pedagogical tool. The act of introducing scholars via a biographical method is in and of itself a bold and not very popular but important critical-interpretive move. As teachers and intellectuals, we are too often unequipped to convey the origins and significance of foundational conceptual models to our students. One practical function of *Black Pioneers in Communication Research* is to facilitate understanding of key concepts—Afrocentricity (Molefi Asante), the pantheon of Black filmic images such as the mammy and mulatto (Donald Bogle), the TrEE model (Oscar Gandy), articulation theory (Stuart Hall), and guilt provocation (Dorthy Pennington)—by not only identifying the progenitor but also by offering a glance into his or her personal and academic backgrounds that undoubtedly gave rise to the mind-set that produced the paradigm. Any time you see an excerpt without a citation, it is a direct quote taken from an interview with that pioneer.

*Black Pioneers in Communication Research* shows how the sociohistorical context in which these writers lived aided in the development of the concepts. This pedagogical and organizing approach to the material thus adds another dimension to how this book can be used to teach communication theory and research. It goes beyond advising students that everything is a potential study waiting to be written and published. It also teaches them that their identities are necessarily enwrapped and implicated in the way they articulate their ideas; it introduces them to another way of becoming familiar with extant research and embarking on studies of their own. One example in the book is Stuart Hall, considered by many to be a cofounder of British cultural studies. *Black Pioneers in Communication Research* traces his life and career and shows how the context conditioned his scholarship. We also talk about how Hall's own indigenous third world cultural identity as a native of Kingston, Jamaica, shaped how he saw colonialist relations and the contradictory human impulses to discuss the real, authentic pains and frustrations of their struggles through a phony, socially manufactured means: mass media entertainment. This mapping of Hall's life, career, ideological influences, and conceptual approach provides rich detail rarely seen in academic texts. Consequently, this book is ideal for instructors of undergraduate and graduate courses in communication, Black Studies, ethnic studies, cultural (media) studies, film, mass media, theatre, and performance, as well as ones that touch upon the worldviews of Africana intellectuals and everyday Africana citizens throughout the Diaspora.

**Emergence and Significance of the Book**

Besides the need to illumine the centrality of Africana scholars and scholarship within the field of communication, the impetus for a book with this focus and approach came from a friend and colleague at Penn State University: criminologist Shaun Gabbidon. In his book, *African American Criminological Thought*, he and his coauthor Helen Taylor Greene presented the backgrounds, lives, and career histories of 10 leading African American scholars of criminology. (Incidentally, the layout of *Black Pioneers in Communication Research* emulates the one found in *African American Criminological Thought.*) Shaun Gabbidon encouraged us to seriously consider pursuing a project similar to his but related to communication pioneers. To assess the interest in such a volume within the field of communication, we solicited the help of two colleagues, Carlos Morrison and Trina Wright, who assisted in the distribution of a survey to members of the National Communication Association's Black Caucus and African
American Communication and Culture Division. After receiving almost 50 completed surveys, we perused the list of recommended scholars, looking particularly for recurrent names. Because there was no limit to the number of scholars that any survey participant could mention, the list of nominees, or identified “pioneers,” exceeded 50 names. After we identified the 20 most frequently mentioned names, we pared the list down to a manageable number, which we decided would be 16. The project began in 2000. Because of attrition, personal circumstances of the pioneers that prevented interviews, and an imbalance of men and women, we ended up with 12 pioneers, one of whom dropped out late in the process. Because we had already completed all the interviews, transcribed the interviews, and begun writing the chapters, we decided to go with the 11 remaining pioneers rather than initiate another interview and start the process all over again for one more individual.

*Black Pioneers in Communication Research* has a companion volume, which began at the same time and was published by Sage: *African American Communication and Identities: Essential Readings* (2004). It provides a set of reprinted articles from more than two dozen Black communication scholars.

The most difficult task in writing the book you hold in your hands was selecting who would be showcased. The relative absence of mainstream appreciation and discussion of African American communication research can easily lead one to presume that Blacks have contributed little to nothing to the field. Quite to the contrary, many scholars could have been included in a volume like this one. However, after reviewing books that included 100 miniature biographies on “influential people,” it became clear that such volumes are diluted versions of the current project. They commit the disservice of discussing someone’s entire life in two to four pages, which not only limits the use of the materials by readers but also seems a bit insulting to those whose lives are chronicled. Rather than take that route, we chose to do in-depth examinations of each person’s life. There is only one pioneer showcased in this book who is deceased: Hallie Quinn Brown. We conducted interviews with the remaining pioneers (with the exception of Stuart Hall because of personal reasons), wrote the chapters about their lives, and let the pioneers read the chapters and make modifications if they chose to do so. Consequently, this book is a true tribute to each of them.

*Black Pioneers in Communication Research* is important for several reasons. It is the first of its kind in the field of communication. There have been biocritical sourcebooks on rhetors who lived centuries ago, but there has never been a book that exclusively chronicled the lives of both historical and contemporary communication scholars who laid the foundation for several areas of endeavor within the field of communication and beyond. This book is also important because it is a systematic exploration of early contributions to several areas of disciplinary inquiry: intercultural and international communication, interpersonal communication, Black women’s gendered communication, media images and representation, critical cultural studies, language and culture research, Black rhetoric, nonverbal communication, communication sciences and disorders, and performance studies. Finally, this book is significant because it offers a resource for students and faculty interested in African American scholarship.

**Purpose and Rationale**

The title, *Black Pioneers in Communication Research*, signifies two things. First, not everyone in the volume is African American (Stuart Hall is Caribbean). Second, the pioneers are not included only for their service or leadership endeavors within professional associations, although almost all of them have contributed quite significantly in this regard. This is a book about contributions to communication research, which does not mean that every person...
presented here is highly prolific. The mere quantity of work does not bespeak the quality of the contribution. It is important to say this because there is a general presumption that African American scholars have merely presented convention papers or haphazard interdisciplinary scholarship over the years rather than scholarship worthy of citation and use within mainstream empirical and conceptual-theoretic communication studies. It is difficult to interpret the exclusion of African American research in any other way. Although professors may feel compelled to adopt this book for courses related to African American communication and ethnic studies, or as a supplement to communication theory, there may also be an interest in having students read this text to better understand the emergence of the performance ethnography work of Joni Jones or the gender and interpersonal communication research of Marsha Houston, for example.

Layout of the Book and Reason for Inclusion

*Black Pioneers in Communication Research* is organized into 11 alphabetized chapters titled with the names of each of the pioneers: Molefi Kete Asante, Donald E. Bogle, Hallie Quinn Brown, Melbourne S. Cummings, Jack L. Daniel, Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., Stuart Hall, Marsha Houston, Joni L. Jones, Dorthy L. Pennington, and Orlando L. Taylor. Each chapter includes a photo; an introduction; sections covering the pioneer’s personal background, academic background, and experience; contributions to the field of communication (sometimes noting outstanding leadership contributions) and contributions to communication theory and research; a conclusion; references, further readings; and a timeline. This easy-to-follow and consistent chronological approach across all the chapters facilitates the reading of and access to various dimensions of the scholars’ lives and careers.

It is perhaps a reasonable question to ask why these scholars, in particular, are included in this book beyond the two reasons given thus far: they were peer-selected, and it is generally better to do an in-depth examination of a few scholars than a survey of many. We approached this issue by including here a brief overview of some noteworthy contributions that each scholar has made to the field of communication to provide you with a glimpse of their prodigious works. The synopses of each pioneer’s contributions are presented here in alphabetical order, which is the way each pioneer appears in the book.

Molefi Kete Asante has been identified by the *Utne Reader* and the *Chronicle of Higher Education* as one of the “100 most influential thinkers in America,” and he is one of the most prolific scholars in the world. Asante is the “father of Afrocentricity,” and numerous citations of his work in communication are evidence that he has undoubtedly influenced much of the research on Africana communication experiences. He is internationally renowned, and his work is cited in at least 20 disciplines, although it is probably reasonable to argue that his greatest impact has been in Africana studies. Asante is also the founding chair of the first doctoral program in African and African American studies.

Donald E. Bogle's contributions to communication are primarily in mass media, particularly in film and television. He has written most extensively about the history of Black images and representation in film and TV, and each volume has been enormous in size and importance. When people think of stereotypical Black images and representations, they think almost immediately of the mammy, coon, mulatto, buck, and tom images. Bogle has been almost solely responsible for introducing these images to mainstream mass media scholars and everyday citizens via his books, articles, documentaries, and expert interviews.

Hallie Quinn Brown was an unsung scholar who lived almost 100 years—from 1850 to 1949.
Before the field of communication existed as it does today, she studied at the Boston school of oratory and subsequently became a professor of elocution and an orator in her own right. She taught and advocated an "embodied rhetoric," in which rhetors were more than speakers espousing ideas via a well-structured conceptual edifice. Brown was an activist who believed in morally upright, principled, and transformative speech. She wrote seven books during her lifetime and promoted public political participation via her pedagogy.

Many people have become acquainted with Melbourne S. Cummings through her passionate dedication to the National Communication Association, among other academic societies. She has also made important contributions to communication inquiry through her work on famous Black rhetoricians and leaders such as Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mary McLeod Bethune, and Andrew Young. Despite her line of inquiry in rhetorical studies, Cummings is perhaps most known for her work in media and communication development. Her 1988 article on the changing image of Blacks in television traced a few patterns of Black images in televised sitcoms such as 227, The Jeffersons, and Good Times. Almost seven years later, she edited (with Orlando Taylor and Lyndrey Niles) a collection of original essays about communication development initiatives, strategies, and approaches. It is in that book that the nuanced conceptual work of Oscar Gandy was showcased with the debut of his TrEE model, which we will discuss momentarily.

Jack L. Daniel is known widely for his disciplinary leadership and service, most especially for cofounding the Black Caucus of the National Communication Association, which boasts the largest contingency of Black scholars in the field of communication. His contributions to communication research are also impressive. Daniel's early work related to communication among poor people was one of the earliest communication studies of class in the field, and it became the catalyst for his lifelong critical work concerning oppressed groups, particularly African Americans. He is most famous for his collaboration with Geneva Smitherman-Donaldson on “How I Got Over: Communication Dynamics in the Black Community,” which represented a line of research regarding the linguistic carryovers and “deep structures” resident in the Black oral tradition.

Oscar H. Gandy, Jr., the Herbert I. Schiller Term Chair at Annenberg (East) School for Communication, has a very interesting background as a writer, producer, and director of public access television programs. He is also a prolific scholar whose research spans studies of racial market segmentation, discrimination in information technology, and media privacy and surveillance. Each of these topics, influenced by Gandy’s background in sociology, economics, and communication behavior, intersects his work on institutional agenda-setting, public policy, and the submergence of consumer interests. Besides his considerable published scholarship in these areas, Gandy is probably most noted for his TrEE (Transformation, Effectiveness, and Efficiency) model. Gandy argued that for imports (such as technology, food, and resources) to developing nations to be efficient and effective, there must also be some consideration of the transformative potential of these imports.

Stuart Hall, a retired but still-towering scholar in cultural studies, has had monumental significance to the British cultural studies movement. Although he is and always will be known as one of the defining thinkers in cultural studies, Hall is scantly explored in communication research. His work is foundational to the field: As one of the earliest critical studies scholars, Hall has made a mark as an individual who has given cultural studies much of its argot while grappling with ways to explore the confluence of media, Marxist ideology, Diasporic identities, and culture. Within his impressive body of work, Hall introduced a theory known as articulation, which was described earlier.
Marsha Houston (previously Marsha Stanback) is an interpersonal communication scholar whose early work explored asymmetrical relationships among interracial interactants. She was particularly concerned with the kinds of communication strategies employed among individuals with conspicuously different levels of power in a given relationship. This initial line of research led to Houston’s continued interest in how varied social cognitions among interracial interactants leads to assumptions about attitudes and behaviors. For the last decade or so, Houston has concentrated primarily on Black feminist studies, and this is certainly where she has made her biggest mark in the field of communication.

Joni L. Jones, who has a doctorate in educational theatre, is a performance ethnographer and scholar who merges production, performance, and praxis in her work. She has written extensively about improvisation as a performance strategy. As with all performance studies, Jones boldly requires that students understand performance as an embodied practice. There is no mind/body split; instead, a duality is intertextually lived and simultaneously affected by everyday experience. Jones is a leading performance ethnographer in communication and continues to work in theatre, communication, and Africana studies.

Dorthy L. Pennington, like Jack Daniel and several others, is a founding member of the National Communication Association's Black Caucus. Her work has been instrumental in explicating time orientations with respect to African Americans. Pennington is perhaps most noted for this early work—in addition to her research on guilt provocation (discussed earlier). Pennington is one of the forerunners in interracial communication. When Arthur Smith (now known as Molefi Asante) was writing books on interracial communication, Pennington was also exploring the interracial epistemes that interrupt otherwise successful interracial relations.

Amazingly, Orlando L. Taylor wrote his magnum opus—an article about aphasia (the loss of capacity to use words because of brain damage)—by the age of 35. It was from his grant work on aphasia that Taylor published a series of articles linking speech with neurology, and this work became frequently cited. This fascinating research on brain trauma had direct and immediate practical implications, not only for speech capacity but also for memory deficits, language decoding, and loss of language acquisition.

As you can surmise from these brief summaries of their works, the pioneers discussed in Black Pioneers in Communication Research are more than deserving of placement in this volume, and, more importantly, acknowledgment and valuation in mainstream intellectual discourse within communication studies and beyond.

A Few Concluding Remarks

Even though our initial intention was to provide a volume evenly composed of Black women and men and to demonstrate the significant impact that Black scholars have had on mainstream scholarly communication discourse, Black Pioneers in Communication Research still does not represent a comprehensive collection. To do so, it would have to include scholars such as Carolyn Calloway-Thomas, Cecil Blake, Brenda J. Allen, Deborah Atwater, Thurmon Garner, Janette Dates, William Barlow, Fela Sowande, Mark McPhail, D. Soyini Madison, John Baugh, Bishetta Merritt, Sidney Ribeau, Karla Scott, Katherine Hendrix, Jeffrey Woodyard, Olga Davis, Eric Watts, and others. It might also include interdisciplinary scholars such as Carter G. Woodson (historian), Geneva Smitherman (sociolinguist), Aaron Gresson (educational theorist and sociologist), Herman Gray (sociologist), and many others. Of course, a volume of that magnitude would be huge and exceed reasonable publisher constraints.
Beyond the daunting task of selecting the pioneers of communication research among many likely candidates, we also had our share of challenges in the writing of this book. We had a couple of scholars in mind that would have been included, but because of unforeseeable circumstances, they chose not to be involved. In some cases, the pioneers did not authorize personal details and circumstances revealed during interviews. Because of our respect for their wishes and their personal lives, we chose to honor their requests and omit what we initially thought were very pertinent and useful items of information. One consequence of that decision is that there is no clear sense of when every pioneer was born. In some cases, there is scant information about a pioneer's familial or personal relationships, so some chapters ended up being shorter than others. Readers might get the impression that we did not fully consider the personal lives of every pioneer, or that our writing showed bias toward one set of scholars over others because we did not write as extensively or intensively about a given part of their lives. We tried to be balanced and fair, and we can assure you that any imbalanced treatments of or perceived improprieties related to any pioneer's life were not intentional. We sometimes felt loss of control over those dimensions of the project. These challenges of writing the manuscript resulted in the book taking much longer to bring to production than we ever anticipated because of the multiple drafts, rewrites, and omissions within some of the chapters. Nonetheless, we are pleased with the final product and confident that you will also be pleased with the result.

An undeniable facet of Black intellectual life is that Black scholars and Black scholarship have been persistently exposed to a narrowly defined, jingoistic, and self-absorbed—mostly White male—intellectual center. Yet a small but indefatigable legion of communication scholars has devoted itself to correcting the lenses through which the center has been examined—to rescue this other piece of the center from invisibility. When it is suggested that there are classical approaches to rhetoric, language, or communication, we must not think only of Europeans. There are other equally transformative and significant legacies to be considered. *Black Pioneers in Communication Research* demonstrates that, but also it exemplifies a critical and biographical approach to both teaching and writing about communication theories. This is a new beginning. Black scholars and Black scholarship no longer ought to claim a position at the margins when it is so clearly evident that we have always been at the center!

- communication research
- the black scholar
- Asante
- African Americans
- Stuart Hall
- interracial communication
- caucuses

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