Foreword

Towards an Understanding of Africology is an impressive extension of Dr. Victor Okafor's ongoing project of explicating the contours and liberatory potential of the discipline. Indeed, the book makes a solid case that Africology offers "a new interpretation of interdisciplinarity" that enables scholars and practitioners to envision a world devoid of the racist underbelly that continues to despoil human progress. The new chapters contribute significantly to the expansive, liberating potential of Africology as a guide to the formulation of human-centered values and public policies.

The growing prevalence of Africology as a descriptor of the enterprise, also known as "Black Studies," "African American Studies," "Africana Studies," "African World Studies," and so on, is an indicator of the growing recognition of the limitations of traditional labels and descriptors. The late Dr. Winston Van Horne first proposed the term "Africology" during his tenure as Chair of the Department of African American Studies at the University of Wisconsin at Milwaukee. The department's name was formally changed in 1994 to the Department of Africology. Subsequently, several other units have wholly or partially adopted this nomenclature. Okafor defends his preference for this appellation throughout the book, especially in the chapter where he declares, "Africology, as a nomenclatural alternative, exudes a more inclusive, institutional and aesthetic appeal, and thus, seems much more marketable and much more capable of debunking an erroneous notion that African American Studies exists for the consumption of only black students."

Okafor traces the intellectual and experiential trajectories that have culminated in the current profile of Africology in Chapters 1 to 6. The African origins of human civilization are explored in Chapter 1, as well as ancient sites noted for impressive achievements, including Kemet (Ancient Egypt), Nubia, Axum, the Ghana Empire, the Mali Empire, and the Songhai Empire. The tragic histories of the slave trade and the slavery regime are chronicled in Chapter 3. Okafor aptly observes, "African American epic struggles have had an overall salutary impact of expanding the democratic space and giving freedom a concrete meaning in the United States, and also serving as a metaphor for battles fought by other human communities, within and outside this country, for their own freedom and for legal recognition of their own entitlement to equal rights in the sociopolitical arena." Chapter 4 discusses resistance and the final defeat of chattel slavery.

Chapter 5 traces the history of the African American freedom struggle from the end of the Civil War through the modern Civil Rights Movement. Significantly, Okafor also examines the struggle against colonialism in Africa in this chapter, emphasizing the shared kinship and parallel liberation struggles facing people of African descent in Africa and the United States. More generally, Okafor embraces the view that Africological studies should cover diasporic and continental Africa.

The proximate roots of the contemporary Black Studies (Africology) movement constitute the subject matter of Chapter 6. Here, Okafor reminds readers, "Although the first Black Studies department in the United States was established in 1968, its arrival within the second half of the 20th century represented the culmination of an intellectual struggle for inclusion and correctives that dates back to the 18th century." A list of institutions currently offering PhD programs in the discipline is included in this chapter.

Chapter 10 begins the in-depth examination of the discipline of Africology, with Okafor foregrounding what he describes as "Temple's doctoral program's success in resolving a long-standing question, namely, is African American Studies or Africology a discipline based upon a coherent program of study or simply an unstructured collection of credit courses about African people?" Indeed, Okafor relies extensively in Chapters 11 and 12 on the writings of Dr. Molefi Asante, Dr. Clement

T. Keto, Dr. Dona Marimba Ani, Dr. Maulana Karenga, and Dr. Festus Ugboaja Ohaegbulam to explicate the foundations, vision, research protocols, and policy guidance attributable to Africology. Chapter 11 covers what are described as three periods in the development of contemporary Africology: 1789–1968, 1968–1988, and 1988–present. This is supported by a useful listing in Chapter 12 of important monographs that have informed the development of contemporary Africology, and there is a detailed discussion in Chapter 7 of the complexities of choosing a commonly accepted name for the discipline. At various points, Okafor takes on various critics, with an entire chapter (15) devoted to Anthony Appiah's monograph, *In My Father's House*.

The centrality of articulating contemporary Africological values through informed interrogation of classical African civilizations is foregrounded in Chapter 2, described as providing "an Africological examination of the central thesis of Cheikh Anta Diop's *The African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* that 'Ancient Egypt was a [Black] civilization." Subsequent chapters (13, 14, and 16), present Africological analyses of the lives, writings, and praxis of other major figures deemed to provide distinctive ideological, political, and policy guidance, that is, W. E. B. Du Bois, Carter G. Woodson, and Malcolm X.

Chapter 8 lays the groundwork for addressing contemporary challenges facing Africological scholars as well as difficulties associated with efforts to use Africology to advance the liberation of people of African descent. The chapter is entitled "The Afrocentric/African-Centered Paradigm: An In-depth Examination of Its Philosophical and Pragmatic Implications," and here, Okafor aptly opines, "One of the distinguishing marks of serious Africological scholarship is its manifest repudiation of theory-formulation for its own sake. Thus, the dominant tendency is to gear theory-formulation and research towards possible and practical answers to human problems of the day."

This research strategy is applied in subsequent chapters that explore various issues including high-profile police killings of Black males and females (Chapter 17), the implications of the Obama election victories (Chapter 20), and the need for new policy directions to address critical problems such as economic disparities, mass incarceration, and family stability (Chapter 21). The myriad of ideological approaches that are available to address these and other problems are described in Chapter 19 along with important political milestones achieved before the Obama presidency. Okafor identifies various persisting and emerging barriers to the implementation of Africologically informed human-centered policies such as shifting views of racism reflected, in part, by ongoing efforts to neuter affirmative action policies.

Perhaps the exposure of students from all backgrounds to the discipline of Africology through courses using *Towards an Understanding of Africology* as a primary or secondary text can increase the likelihood of successful implementation of Africology-friendly public policies at some point in the future. In the meantime, there is no question that students and faculty will be well served at present by a detailed study of this text. Notably, the continuing debate regarding the merits for students of studying Africology is addressed in detail in Chapter 8. Okafor concludes that "Black Studies or Africological education generates a variety of career options and also forms the basis for graduate education in different areas of the social sciences and humanities, including graduate studies in Africology." The usefulness of this text is significantly enhanced by the lucid study questions at the end of each chapter and also by specific examples of how an authentic global curriculum has been introduced at Okafor's home institution of Eastern Michigan University.

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