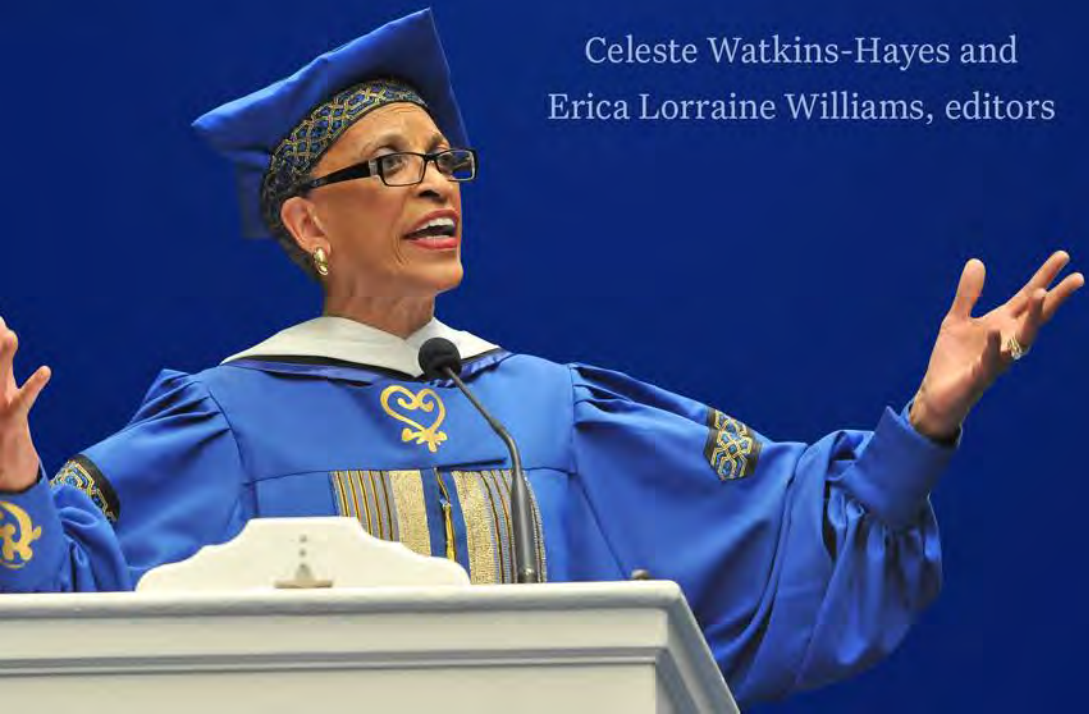
Speechifying

THE WORDS AND LEGACY OF JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE

Johnnetta Betsch Cole

Celeste Watkins-Hayes and
Erica Lorraine Williams, editors



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verb: *the African and Black diasporic oral tradition and art of delivering speeches rooted in justice to galvanize and inspire change*.

Note: While dictionary definitions of this word often have derogatory connotations (i.e., to harangue or pontificate using tedious or self-important language), we offer a definition of speechifying as an African and Black diasporic oral tradition that embraces the power of language to establish intimacy with, and inspire action among, a broad range of audiences.

Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole's speechifying draws upon personal narratives, Black historical legacies, and storytelling to impart important lessons to her listeners.

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EDITORS' PREFACE

CELESTE WATKINS-HAYES AND ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS

Speeches are artifacts that capture a particular moment in time. As such, they are an important part of the archive. When Williams visited the Johnnetta B. Cole Collection at the Spelman College Archives, she found speeches written on notecards and others typed up with handwritten notes in the margins. One notable find from the archives was a 1957 article from the *Oberlin Review* about Johnnetta Betsch winning the first-place prize of $54 at the Civic League Oratorical Contest at Western Reserve University. She was then a senior in college and the first college student to place in this contest since 1950. Her speech was called "Ghana, The Goal of Africa." She also won the Class of 1915 Public Speaking Contest and Debate Contest. Thus, we see the early emergence of Cole's prowess as a public speaker.

Archives offer an opportunity to witness one's development, ideas, and shifts in thinking over time. Archives capture the little moments, mementos, and artifacts that reveal the different steps and experiences that have helped a person construct their life. The selected speeches showcase Cole's intellect, wisdom, activism, creativity, and trailblazing roles as a college president, scholar, and museum director.

Thinking of speeches as an artifact has guided many of our editorial decisions. We thought it important to preserve each speech—to some extent—in its original form, rather than revise and update it with language that has evolved politically. While we chose to edit speeches for clarity, grammatical flow, and formatting to enhance readability, we did not revise them from our

contemporary lens to account for evolutions in language. For instance, we did not change "My Sisters and Brothers All" to "My Siblings" or change "transgendered" to "transgender," even though today Cole would opt for more inclusive language. We did not change "Latino" or "Latina" to "Latinx" because it would have felt odd and inauthentic to do so for the time period in which the speech was given. The one exception to this guiding principle was that we created speech titles for some untitled speeches to better help the reader navigate the book.

Thinking of speeches as capturing particular moments in time also helps us remember that what we know about events and people are framed within that moment. For instance, there are certain things, people, or events mentioned in speeches that have not "aged well." One notable example includes references to Bill Cosby. While Cosby's large financial gift to Spelman was one of the great accomplishments of Cole's presidency, the fact that he would later face allegations of rape, drug-facilitated sexual assault, sexual battery, and other sexual misconduct from over sixty women has arguably cast a negative shadow on this part of her legacy.[1] However, we chose not to remove mentions of Cosby's name from the speeches or interviews because it is a part of the archive.

There may be references in a speech that made sense in 1996 but would be anachronistic and out of touch in 2023. Nonetheless, regardless of the time or the place, what we know for sure is that Johnnetta Betsch Cole has sought to place the best interests of Black women and humankind at the heart of her efforts. A deep love of people, fairness, equity, and justice is the continuous thread that travels throughout her body of work. Even her use of the language, "My Sisters and Brothers All," was fundamentally about unification. It was about truly *seeing* people. As language and politics have changed over time, these core principles have persisted.

Speechifying is an integral part of oral traditions that have been vital to African diasporic and Black communities around the world for centuries, from the African *griot*[2] to *krik krak* storytelling in Haiti (Danticat 1995). While dictionary definitions of the word "speechifying" often have derogatory connotations (i.e., to harangue with tedious or self-important information), we offer a definition of speechifying as an oral tradition that embraces the power of language to establish intimacy with and inspire action among a broad range of audiences. This is all the more significant when we consider the struggles for literacy that have plagued African diaspora populations who have been denied educational opportunities for generations. We think of Black orality as a tool

for accessibility. Whether one is extremely learned or illiterate, one can connect to *speechifying*. That is probably part of the appeal of institutions like the Black church.

Speechifying enables Cole to speak to very diverse audiences, not just in terms of racial diversity but also class diversity within Black communities. While the written word may reach only a certain segment of the population, speechifying is more widely accessible to a larger audience.

Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole's speechifying draws upon personal narratives, Black historical legacies, and storytelling to impart important lessons to her listeners. As you read these speeches, you may notice the range of audiences that Cole has addressed over time. This is a testament to the accessibility of her speechifying. How many anthropologists or sociologists have been invited to give a speech at the Duke Ellington School of the Arts, Goldman Sachs, and the Congressional Black Caucus? Through speechifying, Cole has reached corporate, philanthropic, academic, government, and museum audiences. This reveals that Cole can be legible to so many different groups in so many different ways, while at the same time being 100 percent herself. That legibility allows her to move with ease and grace from the highest echelons of corporate America to small community-based organizations with shoestring budgets. She uses anthropology, the discipline in which she earned her doctoral degree, to offer lessons that are accessible to those who may or may not be familiar with the field in order to enhance diversity, equity, and inclusion in the service of forging deeper connections across humanity.

We encourage readers to engage these speeches through a lens of retrospection. We highlight the dates of speeches in the chapter framings and the speech titles, so readers can always situate themselves in that particular period. This book can serve as an important resource or tool for educators, who can engage students around its lessons, as well as the politics of language and legacy.

Now, for a roadmap to help you navigate your way through this book: before getting to the speeches, we have a few documents to help situate Cole, her accomplishments and legacy, and the art of speechifying. There is a brief introductory letter from Johnnetta Betsch Cole herself, followed by a career timeline. After that, there are two interviews with Cole that offer more details about her career trajectory. The first was conducted by Williams at Spelman College in June 2018 and later published in *Feminist Anthropology* (2020). The second, conducted by Watkins-Hayes in July 2018, focuses on the art of speechifying. Following that, we move into the speeches.

NOTES

1. Cosby was convicted by a jury of three counts of aggravated indecent assault in 2018. The Pennsylvania Supreme Court overturned his conviction on the grounds that he had an agreement with a previous prosecutor that should have prevented him from being charged, and he was released in 2021 (see Savage 2021).

2. In West African cultures, griots are historians and storytellers who preserve the history, genealogies, and oral traditions of their people (see Gates 1989).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project began when Allecia Alexander Harley, a Spelman College alumna, contacted Watkins-Hayes and asked, "Where is the book of Dr. Cole's speeches?" They soon realized that it didn't exist! Watkins-Hayes then reached out to Cole, who sent several boxes of her speeches. Graduate student research assistants at Northwestern University, where Watkins-Hayes was on the faculty at the time, went through the process of reading, scanning, and thematically organizing the speeches. When Williams heard Watkins-Hayes mention this book project while speaking at Spelman, she expressed her interest in collaborating, since she had explored Cole's personal papers in the Spelman College Archives. Watkins-Hayes's mentee and colleague Dr. Dominique Adams-Santos joined the project to help coordinate and support our efforts, and we then had the right team in place to carry out this momentous project. As we met with Cole over video calls, categorizing the speeches and ranking them in terms of priority for inclusion in the book, we deepened our understanding of how these texts have served as a critical medium to map a life of enormous service.

We therefore owe a debt of gratitude to Ms. Harley because her question sparked this book project. We would also like to thank Spelman College archivist Holly Smith for her excellent and meticulous work helping us identify photos for this manuscript, which beautifully capture decades of Cole's work. Holly welcomed the original versions of Dr. Cole's speeches for inclusion into the Spelman Archives, and we are thrilled that they now have a permanent home in the historical record at Spelman.

We also want to express our deep appreciation to the journals *Feminist Anthropology* and *Sage: A Scholarly Journal on Black Women* for allowing us to reprint the interviews conducted by Erica L. Williams and Paula Giddings, respectively. We thank author and Spelman alumna Tayari Jones for her helpful insights into the manuscript as well as Julian Glover, who worked on the project as a graduate student at Northwestern University. A special thanks to freelance editor Rose Ernst for her extremely helpful insights on the manuscript. We want to thank Dr. E. Patrick Johnson for his strong support of the book as we sought a publisher and the team at Duke University Press for their extraordinary work, support, and encouragement. Editor extraordinaire Courtney Berger understood the vision of the project from the start and has been tireless in her support of this book. We also thank Lisa Lawley at Duke University Press, John Donohue and Sally Quinn at Westchester Publishing Services, and our anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments, critiques, and suggestions.

We also owe a very special thanks to Dr. Adams-Santos. She began working on this project as a graduate research assistant and then became the project's chief coordinator: diligently calling us together for meetings, facilitating our discussions about speech selection, and providing brilliant editorial advice on the book. The completion and quality of this book is due in no small part to her efforts, and we are eternally grateful.

Lastly, we want to thank our families, who provided steadfast support as we completed this project. Mr. James "JD" Staton, Dr. Cole's husband, graciously helped Dr. Cole assemble and organize her speeches and mailed them by the boxful to Watkins-Hayes. We also want to offer our appreciation to Dr. Cole's son, Mr. Aaron Cole, who provided editorial support through his very thoughtful comments on the manuscript.

TIMELINE OF DR. JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE'S LIFE AND CAREER

1936	Born October 19, 1936, in Jacksonville, Florida
1952	Enrolled at Fisk University's Basic College at the age of fifteen
1953	Transferred to Oberlin College
1957	Completed BA in sociology at Oberlin College
1959	Completed MA in anthropology at Northwestern University
1960–1962	Conducted dissertation field research in Liberia, West Africa
1962–1970	Served as assistant professor of anthropology at Washington State University
1967	Earned PhD in Anthropology from Northwestern University
1969–1970	Served as founding director of the Black Studies program at Washington State
1970–1983	Served as professor at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst W. E. B Du Bois Department of Afro-American Studies, Anthropology, and Women's Studies
1980	Elected president of the Association of Black Anthropologists

1981–1983	Served as provost for undergraduate education at UMass Amherst
1982	Published *Anthropology for the Eighties: Introductory Readings*
1983–1987	Served as Russell Sage Professor in Anthropology at Hunter College and as Director of Women's Studies and Director of Latin American and Caribbean Studies at the City University of New York
1986	Appointed visiting professor of Women's Studies at Oberlin College
1986	Published *All American Women: Lines That Divide, Ties That Bind*
1987–1997	Served as the first Black woman president of Spelman College
1988	Published *Anthropology for the Nineties*
1988	Received the Candace Award from the National Coalition for 100 Black Women
1990	Appointed a founding member of President George H. W. Bush's Thousand Points of Light Foundation Board
1991	Received the Achievement Award from the American Association of University Women
1991	Named Outstanding Citizen of the State of Georgia
1991	Received the Northwestern University Alumni Merit Award
1991	Received *Glamour* magazine Woman of the Year Award
1992–1993	Appointed to President Bill Clinton's transition team as Cluster Coordinator for Education, Labor, Arts, and Humanities
1992–1996	Worked on the Atlanta Project, an initiative launched by President Jimmy Carter and the Carter Center to create a coordinated effort to assist disadvantaged families in the Atlanta area
1993	Received the American Anthropological Association Distinguished Service Award

1993	Published *Conversations: Straight Talk with America's Sister President*
1995	Received the NAACP Pathway to Excellence Award
1996	Received the Mayor's Proclamation designating May 17 as Dr. Johnnetta B. Cole Day in the City of Atlanta
1996	Received honorary membership in Phi Beta Kappa from Yale University
1997	Published *Dream the Boldest Dreams and Other Lessons of Life*
1997	Retired as president emerita of Spelman College
1998	Received the Dorothy I. Height Dream Maker Award from the National Council of Negro Women
1998	Inducted into the American Academy of Arts and Sciences
1998	Received the Eleanor Roosevelt Foundation Education Achievement Award from the Women's National Democratic Club
1998	Received the TransAfrica Forum Global Public Service Award
1998–1999	Appointed to President Bill Clinton's Commission on the Celebration of Women in American History
1998–2001	Appointed Presidential Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, Women's Studies, and African American Studies at Emory University
1999	Appointed to Georgia governor Roy Barnes's Commission on Education Reform
1999	Received the Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metro Atlanta Legacy Award
1999	Received the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal
1999	Received the Radcliffe College Medal from the Alumnae Association
1999	Received the President's Medal from Hunter College
2001	Received the Alexis de Tocqueville Award for Community Service from United Way of America

2002	Received the Women of Courage and Strength Award from *American Legacy* magazine
2002	Received the Women Who Make a Difference Award from the National Council for Research on Women
2002–2007	Served as president of Bennett College for Women
2003	Published *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities* (with Beverly Guy-Sheftall)
2004	Appointed chair of the Johnnetta B. Cole Global Diversity and Inclusion Institute at Bennett College
2004	Received the Joseph Prize for Human Rights from the Anti-Defamation League
2004–2006	Served as chair of the Board of Trustees of United Way of America; first African American chair of the board
2006	Received the Lenore and George W. Romney Citizen Volunteer Award from the Points of Light Foundation
2006	Building at Spelman College is named the Johnnetta B. Cole Living and Learning Center
2006–2008	Appointed to Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's Committee on Transformational Diplomacy
2007	Retired from presidency of Bennett College for Women and appointed president emerita
2008	Invited to deliver the 2008 Distinguished Lecture for the American Anthropological Association
2009	Received the Human Rights Campaign National Ally of Equality Award
2009	Published *I Am Your Sister: Published and Unpublished Writings of Audre Lorde* (with Rudolph Byrd and Beverly Guy-Sheftall)
2009–2017	Served as director of the Smithsonian Institution for the National Museum of African Art

2013	Received the Alston-Jones International Civil and Human Rights Award from the International Civil Rights Center and Museum
2015	Received the BET Honors Award for Education
2017	Received the Asa G. Hilliard Model of Excellence Award
2017	Received the Award for Distinguished Service to Museums from the American Alliance of Museums

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Prologue

Dear Reader,

I am grateful that you have an interest in this book, as it has a title that might easily discourage you from wanting to read it. After all, speechifying is a noun that is defined as "the making of speeches in a tedious or pompous way." Let me be clear. Being tedious or pompous is not on the list of ways that I want my speeches to be described.

Speechifying is used in the title of this book in the way that, in African American colloquial speech, words are sometimes used to stress that the speaker wants to lift up an antonym. For example, "bad" is sometimes used to mean that something or somebody is truly "good." Colloquial Black English also uses words to create an image that is the antithesis of what is meant. For example, saying that something is "the bomb" is not to say that something is destructive. And many words in English have meanings now that are quite different from when they were first used. For example, in the 1300s, "awful" meant something that was awe inspiring, worthy of admiration and respect.

One of my sons started using the word "speechifying" in a positive way to refer to how I give speeches. I liked the sound of the word and began using it with a commitment to myself to do everything possible to make my speeches the opposite of being tedious and pompous.

The first speech that I remember giving was in the 1940s at Mt. Olive AME Church, where everyone in my family worshiped. My father and grandfather

were deacons of that church. My mother was the organist, pianist, and director of all of the choirs. And A. L. Lewis, my great grandfather who was known as Jacksonville's most prominent Black citizen, was the superintendent of the Sunday school.

Along with all of the other children in that Sunday school, I was given a speech to memorize in preparation for a children's program on Easter Sunday. For that special day, my sister and I were dressed in matching yellow dresses, our hair in Shirley Temple curls, and we each had a big yellow bow in our hair.

I remember being nervous about giving my speech, but I was also excited to have the spotlight on me. When my turn came to say what I had memorized and practiced for two weeks, I carefully pinched each side of my dress and did a curtsy the way I and all of the Sunday school girls had been taught to do. Seeing that all eyes of the grown-ups were on me, I took a deep breath and then I said: "Whatcha looking at me so hard for? I didn't come to stay; I just came to tell you that today is Easter day." And then I did another curtsy to bookend my performance. The loud applause of the adults mixed with laughter let me know that my speech was well received. In our car on the way home from church, my parents assured me that I did an excellent job in reciting my speech, and they assured my sister that her piano performance was also excellent.

On an occasion when I shared this story with Dr. Maya Angelou, the well-known poet whom I was privileged to know, she reminded me that during Jim Crow days, in most Black churches, there was someone we might call "the culture lady." While Black children could not go to plays, concerts, and museums that were "for whites only," the culture lady in Black churches worked with youngsters to create their own cultural events.

I hope that any speech that I give is informative and inspiring, and I always do a critique of every speech after I have given it. The speech that I wish I could change was given many years ago when I was a senior at Oberlin College and a member of the debate team. The year was 1957, and there were celebrations around the world of Ghana's independence from Britain's colonial rule. I was among Oberlin's "star" debaters, and it was my assignment to give the closing speech. I do not recall the exact words that I used, but I can't forget that after I gave an impassioned speech about Ghana's independence, I said that I mourned the fact that I might not live to see the end of apartheid in South Africa. How could I have felt such pessimism about the ability of a movement led by Nelson Mandela to end that profoundly racist system?

Over the years, as I have sought to become more and more effective in the art of speechifying, I have learned to use certain phrases and employ certain techniques. For example, I often begin a speech with words that I hope will quickly

connect me with my audience. The words are: "My Sisters and Brothers All." If I am speaking to an African American audience, there is no need to explain why I am using those terms. My audience will be aware that such kinship terms are repeatedly used in Black churches, at political gatherings, and in any situation where the speaker wishes to acknowledge or establish a closeness with an African American individual or group.

On the topic of kinship, many of the speeches in this book were delivered under the name Johnnetta B. Cole. In more recent times, I began referring to myself as Johnnetta Betsch Cole. Let me explain why. When I divorced, I made the conscious decision that I wanted to share a name with the three sons I birthed, so I did not drop "Cole." A number of years later, I made the decision to spell out my maiden name, Betsch, because, in doing so, I am repeatedly connecting to the paternal side of my family, a part of my heritage that was a bit overshadowed by the famous figures on my maternal side. To know ourselves fully, we must connect with our full stories.

Using the name Johnnetta Betsch Cole is one way that I connect with my full story.

I have also learned that beginning a speech by addressing the audience as "My Sisters and Brothers All" is also an effective way to connect with an audience of predominantly white people. In that case, I follow my greeting by saying that I am sure many in the audience are wondering why I am addressing them in kinship terms. And then I indicate that anthropology and common sense have taught me that kinship is not only about relationships based on common ancestry (descent) or marriage (affinity). Kinship is also about shared beliefs and shared values, and I indicate the specific belief or value that is relevant to a particular audience. For example, I will say that I assume that all in the audience value the beauty and power of the visual arts, just as I do. Or I might say that I am sure that everyone in the audience values a liberal arts education as I do. Or I am sure that everyone in the audience believes, as I do, that we all have a role to play in the ongoing struggle for greater justice and equity in our country and our world.

But we must also face an uncomfortable truth: I write this letter in a time of deep political and cultural division and unsettling tension. The assumptions of a common vision for our world that have grounded my utterances of "My Sisters and Brothers All" have been under assault, and at times the phrase has felt more aspirational than actual. However, unlike that Oberlin College debate student who did not believe she would live to see the fall of apartheid, I hold strong hope and unwavering faith that we will continue to move in a direction that reflects the promise of our common humanity.

A few years ago, I was invited to speak at an organization that advocates for the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning individuals. I began my talk by saying: "Good Morning, My Sisters and Brothers All." When I completed my talk and opened up for questions and comments, one individual very carefully, but definitively, let me know that the language I used in opening my talk excludes gender-fluid individuals. From that day forward, I began my speeches in a more inclusive way by saying, "My Sisters, My Brothers, My Siblings All." While speechifying is about sharing a message, the lessons are bidirectional.

Just as I begin many of my speeches in the same way, I usually end them with a story or the inspiring words of heroes and sheroes from diverse communities. The story that I tell captures the main point or points I have addressed. As you read the speeches in this book, you will find ones that end with my favorite stories: the story about the old lady and the bird, the story of a girl throwing a starfish back into the ocean, and a story about Sojourner Truth.

On several occasions, I have met people in an airport or some other location who thank me for the speech I gave at their commencement. When I ask if the individual can remember anything about my speech, the response is some version of "I remember the story you told at the end of your speech." That works for me because the story at the end of one of my speeches captures the main point or points that I want the audience to remember.

When I am speechifying, I often draw on the words of heroes and sheroes from diverse communities. I am particularly drawn to quoting the words of Dr. Maya Angelou and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., of Helen Keller[1] and Rabbi Hillel, of Wilma Mankiller[2] and Cesar Chavez,[3] of Joy Harjo[4] and Gautama Buddha. There is an excellent chance that people listening to my speechifying will remember the words of these women and men long after they have forgotten my words.

I use African proverbs in my speeches because they are short and memorable ways to make a point. Among my favorites are these: "When women lead, streams run uphill"; "When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion"; "In a crisis, the wise build bridges, the foolish build dams"; "If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together."

In my speeches, there is always a call to action. Why else would one engage in speechifying? A call to action, known as a "CTA" in the world of marketing, should clearly indicate what action to take and how to take it. In my speeches, I aim to indicate what should be done about the issue or problem I am addressing, and then I do my best to motivate people in the audience to take action. When I am speechifying, I often draw on my own experiences. In a speech in which I am

addressing systemic racism, systemic sexism, and other systems of inequality, I find it helpful to share experiences from my own life as I grew up during the Jim Crow days in Jacksonville, Florida. When I am speechifying about issues and challenges in the world of education, I have found it useful and effective to cite some of my own experiences as a professor and as a college president.

Dear reader, as I bring closure to this message to you, I want to make this last point. Speechifying at its best is a well-told story. And I thank you for listening to my story. As the African proverb tells us, "*Until the lion [and I add lioness] tell their stories, the tale of the hunt will always glorify the hunter*."

Onward!

—Johnnetta Betsch Cole

NOTES

1. Helen Keller (June 27, 1880–June 1, 1968) was an author and disability rights activist.

2. Wilma Mankiller (1945–2010) was an activist and social worker who was the first female principal chief of the Cherokee Nation.

3. Cesar Chavez (1927–1993) was an organizer of migrant American farmworkers and a cofounder with Dolores Huerta of the National Farm Workers Association in 1962.

4. Joy Harjo (1951–) is a member of the Mvskoke/Creek Nation. She was the first Native American to be poet laureate of the United States, to which she was appointed in 2019.

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Interview 1

THE PRACTICAL ETHICS OF JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE

The Life of a Black Feminist Anthropologist

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS

In summer 2018 I was honored to interview legendary Black feminist shero anthropologist extraordinaire Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole. Our conversation took place at the annual Democratizing Knowledge Summer Institute, held at Spelman College.[1] The goal of these summer institutes is to bring together scholar-activists from the humanities and social sciences to examine the state of US higher education, engage with community organizations, and work on collaborative strategies for creating a more just academy and building new kinds of publics. Our conversation offers an opportunity for readers to reflect on the insights and wisdom Cole has to offer a new generation of engaged Black feminist anthropologists in a time of increasing neoliberalization and corporatization of the academy.

Johnnetta Betsch Cole is one of the most prominent Black anthropologists of our time. Her illustrious career and remarkable accomplishments capture what it means to be a scholar-activist and public intellectual. In 1967, Cole was one of only eight African American women to have earned a PhD in anthropology (Bolles 2001). At Northwestern University she studied under Melville Herskovits,

a trailblazer in studies of the African diaspora and a gatekeeper who sometimes discouraged Black anthropologists from doing research in Africa.[2] Cole has conducted research in Liberia, Cuba, Haiti, and the United States. She was part of the first all-Black delegation to Cuba, sponsored by the *Black Scholar*, where she studied the impact of the Cuban Revolution on racism (Yelvington 2003). She has taught at many universities, including Washington State University, the University of Massachusetts Amherst, Hunter College, and Emory University. As a junior faculty member at Washington State University, she cofounded one of the first Black studies departments in the country. She served as the director of the Latin American and Caribbean studies program at Hunter College, and as president of Spelman College from 1987 to 1997. Notably, she was the first Black woman, the first scholar, and the first single mother to ever serve in this capacity (Collins 1987; McHenry 1987).[3]

Johnnetta Betsch Cole has had an illustrious career with many notable accomplishments and contributions to the academy, philanthropy, and civil society. She has authored or edited several books, including *All American Women: Lines That Divide, Ties That Bind* (1986); *Anthropology for the Nineties: Introductory Readings* (1988); *Conversations: Straight Talk with America's Sister President* (1994); and *Dream the Boldest Dreams: And Other Lessons of Life* (1997). She coedited *Gender Talk: The Struggle for Women's Equality in African American Communities* with Beverly Guy-Sheftall (2003). In 2001, she retired as Presidential Distinguished Professor of Anthropology, Women's Studies, and African American Studies at Emory University. She went on to serve as president of Bennett College from 2002 to 2007, and then as director of the Smithsonian's National Museum of African Art for eight years. She was integral to raising the museum's profile as the nation's premier museum focusing on the visual arts of Africa through groundbreaking exhibitions and educational programs. Cole has also received sixty-eight honorary degrees and is the recipient of numerous awards, including the 2015 BET Honors Award for Education (Barnes 2018), the TransAfrica Forum Global Public Service Award, the Radcliffe Medal, and the Eleanor Roosevelt Val-Kill Medal, to name a few.[4] She is a fellow of the American Anthropological Association and the American Academy of Arts and Sciences.

The following candid conversation is a testament to Cole's Black feminist praxis—to her commitment to "living a feminist life" (Ahmed 2017). It reveals how her myriad life experiences—her praxis as a scholar, a mentor, a mother, a descendant of notable ancestors, an institution builder, and more—have shaped her practical ethics. Cole's personal and professional journeys show us how to enact and uphold feminist practices in kinship, mentoring, research,

relationship building, and institution building. As Sara Ahmed states, "To live a feminist life is to make everything into something that is questionable" (2017, 2). That is certainly what Cole has done from her earliest days.

In this conversation, I serve as both interviewer and curator, weaving together critical commentary, analysis, and contextualization with key excerpts from the interview transcript. Interviews with Cole have appeared in *Voices: A Publication of the Association for Feminist Anthropology* (Heyward-Rotimi 1998) and *Current Anthropology* (Yelvington 2003); and a recent biographical chapter about her by Riché Daniel Barnes (2018) appears in *The Second Generation of African American Pioneers in Anthropology*. However, this conversation also draws on her personal papers, housed in the Spelman College Archives, to help us understand how her perspective as a Black feminist anthropologist shaped her scholarly and public career.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: Good evening, everyone. It is an honor to be here tonight and to be in conversation with one of my sheroes—Johnnetta Betsch Cole. Thank you so much, Dr. Cole, for being here and for engaging in this conversation with us.

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: Thank you.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: You credit anthropology with being an effective tool against ethnocentrism and describe how you have used the tools of the discipline in your administrative roles, but at the same time you have challenged mainstream anthropology and the visible lack of diversity within the discipline. Can you speak more about how anthropology informs your scholarly identity and your engagement with and critiques of the field?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: I barely graduated from Oberlin College before I was at Northwestern studying anthropology. But it didn't take me long to figure out that this discipline that defines itself as the broadest of them all—we almost get too full of ourselves about this—we study the human condition, everything about it. But I kept thinking that there were some human conditions that weren't getting the right kind of attention. So, anthropology, as broad as it was, was not sufficient for me. And so, I began first in the field of Black studies. . . . I woke up one day and said, "This is Black studies, but where are the women?" That led to a discovery of women's studies. And it would not surprise you to know that one day I woke up and said, "Where are the women of color?" and so it's been an extraordinary struggle to really find a place in the academy

that genuinely studies the human condition, not in the interest of people watching, but in the interest of contributing in some way to the transformation of human conditions. So, I still am an anthropologist. . . . I wear a set of lenses . . . that do represent how an anthropologist looks at the world. . . . I remember Beverly Guy-Sheftall called for the academy to stop being centered in the three Ws, Western, white, and womanless.[5] That's our ongoing struggle in this academy. I guess you could even say that's what democratizing knowledge is all about.

Cole reflects on her journey through various fields and disciplines, in searching for a meaningful "home" that could satisfy her desire to study the human condition and challenge the inequalities and injustice therein. In an undated speech, Cole describes anthropology as a "greedy discipline" that incorporates many others.[6] She draws on the tools of anthropology to contemplate continuity and change in institutions, saying, "I tend to look at problems in ways that I think are very, very much in the anthropological tradition . . . one appreciates the tradition, but second, one also at least raises the possibility that there are different ways of doing the same thing" (McHenry 1987, 99). In the classic essay, "Seeking the Ancestors: Forging a Black Feminist Tradition in Anthropology," A. Lynn Bolles states that Black women who studied anthropology between 1915 and the 1950s saw it as a "tool to locate the sources of inequality, and . . . as a place where one could participate in finding the 'cure'" (2001, 27). To be sure, Cole transitioned between various fields and disciplines to find that place where her commitment to values of social justice could flourish. She teaches us that sometimes one may have to craft and create that space for oneself.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: We've had a lot of conversations around social justice and scholar-activism in the Democratizing Knowledge Summer Institute this week. When President Bill Clinton was considering appointing you as secretary of education in the early 1990s, you were a victim of "red baiting," when conservative groups learned of your research and activism in Cuba.[7] Today, scholars who express solidarity with the Palestinian struggle are "blacklisted" and put on websites like Canary Mission.[8] What lessons can you share with scholars about how to deal with the challenges of engaging in social justice–oriented scholar-activism and collaboration in the academy?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: Almost from the beginning . . . of my life in the academy, I saw the role of education as one to help folk better

understand the world. Simple—who couldn't agree with that? But, secondly, to help folk understand their responsibility to help to change the world. So, when you begin there, then activism is what you do. I mean, how else are you gonna change the world? I know it was many, many, many years later, after becoming a young professor, that I had the unusual honor and privilege of really getting to know Audre Lorde.[9] But I think intuitively from my earliest days in the professoriate, I knew that my silence wasn't gonna save me, and it wasn't gonna save anybody else either. So the first position that I ever held in the academy had activism all intimately entangled with it. Here I am at Washington State University in Pullman, Washington, in 1963. I came back from Liberia doing fieldwork in 1962.[10] I'm going to jail with my students. We're marching up and down, demanding more presence of Black students on our campus.

Helping found a Black studies program was simply an extension of the activism. The activism was simply in cahoots with the scholarship. . . . I began as an activist professor. And I never gave that up.

You do ask how the activism that I experienced in helping to start that program or the activism in spending thirteen years at the University of Massachusetts and launching the first teaching program in a women's prison, how that kind of activism—all the stuff we did on UMass campus out of a place called Africa House—how all that differs from today. . . . My period of activism happened within the context of fairly large, coordinated movements. We call [them] the civil rights movement, the women's movement, the peace movement. And while we are clearly in an era of #BlackLivesMatter, of #MeToo, of #NeverAgain, correct me if I'm off base here, that these are not movements of the same size. Secondly, I really believe that when racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, all forms of Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, and ageism come around again with a form of state sanction, it creates a very different atmosphere for activism. So those are the two differences I would say. Let me edit myself. I grew up in an era when there were state-sanctioned systems of inequality, but we did go through a period when that did not seem to be publicly the case. We're in a period now when it does seem to be the case.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: What kinds of experiences have you had with community-engagement projects in surrounding communities of the institutions at which you have taught?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: I go back to what I could call my first community-based project being supporting the Black Panthers' free breakfast

program. I have to tell you the other day I was at a meeting of the American Alliance of Museums and there was Ericka Huggins.[11] You can imagine the moment we had. Because that's my era. As a young professor, that's what I did on Saturday mornings. As a young mother, I will never forget the day that David Kamal Betsch Cole said to me as I rushed him to get ready—we were needing to go to another march against the Vietnam War—and David, this little bitty tot, said, "Mommy, I got a great idea: Why don't we get a big net and we can catch the war and we don't have to march anymore!" So when I think of community engagement . . . being a consistent participant in those marches and teach-ins and demonstrations was very much a part of my life. I taught at UMass for thirteen years with extraordinary faculty. . . . One of the things I did was to teach both in the maximum-security prison for men . . . and the prison for women in Framingham.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: How did you manage to juggle all those roles—being a professor, a mother, and involved in community-engagement projects—how did you maintain self-care and well-being?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: I remember when I first came to Spelman, Mary Catherine Bateson came the week after I just arrived.[12] She was writing *Composing a Life* and interviewed me for that book. I remember sitting with Catherine and she was posing a question about how women manage to juggle all these balls and nothing seems to fall. And I said, "You know what, Catherine, I think I've got a better metaphor—I think we womenfolk at our best practice improvisation." And it stuck. It's in *Composing a Life*. This I know. It ain't easy.

But now I've gotta tell something on myself. I was at a dinner that followed a board meeting at Bennett College and almost all of the board members who attended that dinner were women. And this man that I was dating was also there by the name of James Staton. We were kvetching about what we called the double shift. We finally get home. We just put in a lot of work. Now get the children to do their homework, put in a load of washing, answer somebody's question—"Have you seen my socks?" as if you have some kind of special homing device for socks—you call the hospital to see how Aunt Bertha is doing, and you know you just say, "Whew!" And one of the board members said, "These men just don't get it." And this man that I eventually married said, "Oh, I get it. That's exactly what I have done as I began to raise my son as a single father." . . . I think it's important to remember that some men . . . understand what

it is to have a second shift. . . . So in partnering relationships of whatever combination of genders and gender identities, if folks don't get that collaboration is essential, they don't have the right to be in that relationship. Improvising is what one does.

But I think there's something else that's the key: the key is sisterhood. Being able to call up somebody who may not be a parent, never wanted to be, but is willing to listen to your story about the challenges of being a parent. It's—and this is where I think feminism comes in—it's not just sisterhood. . . . And so, I would say that much of my ability to play all of these roles is probably a combination of just pure grit, a whole lot of good sisterly support, and the marvels of feminism.

These excerpts show us that from very early in her career, Cole was already establishing herself as a model of an engaged, activist anthropologist before this concept had even taken root in the discipline. She shows us what it looks like to be a whole person, enmeshed in the activist struggles of our time, raising children to be immersed in social justice activism as well. Her reflection on "the marvels of feminism" demonstrates how to live a feminist life (Ahmed 2017). Before Sara Ahmed pointed out that "feminism needs to be everywhere" and encouraged us to "build feminist dwellings" (2), Cole was already illustrating precisely how to do this.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: Can you share any insights with us about how you have had the courage to make various career transitions both within and beyond the academy?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: Well, I'd love to tell a story. I was living in Atlanta, and I had gone to Washington for a meeting of the scholarly advisory committee for the new museum—the National Museum of African Art. So we had started this process many years ago and I was privileged to be on this committee that was chaired by John Hope Franklin.[13] With amazing folks—we were a pretty righteous band of folk, offering comments, criticism, ideas. So I come back to Atlanta from that meeting and I get a call from the second person in charge of the whole Smithsonian (Dr. Richard Kurin).[14]

He says to me, "We are looking for a new director of the National Museum of African Art," and I gave him a few names.

I flippantly said, "Why does it have to be a national museum in Washington? Move it to Atlanta and I'll do it."

So he said, "Ah ha! You figured out why I was calling. We want you to apply."

I started laughing. I said, "this is the funniest thing I've heard all week! . . . I'm an anthropologist. I don't have a PhD in art history! Yeah, over the course of my life I've actually been a cocurator twice, but I'm not really a curator. You must be kidding!"

He said, "No, I'm serious."

So just to get him off the phone I said, "I'm about to go to Mexico with Beverly [Guy-Sheftall] to finish *Gender Talk*, I'll call you when I get back."

I called my husband, James Staton. I said, "JD, sit down, you're gonna have a good laugh. I've been invited to be a candidate to join the Smithsonian as the director of the National Museum of African Art—isn't that a hoot?"

He said, "No, it's not a hoot, it's got your name all over it!" He then reminded me that at a dinner that we hosted at our new place right at the end of the year, I said, "Let's go around the table and say in the next year what are you going to do that will tickle your heart, that will make you feel good? And don't say lose weight because you said that last year and you didn't do it!" He reminded me that I said, "I think I'll go to the High Museum, take a course and become a docent, and maybe I'll go back to school and get a PhD in art history."

So I decided, Why not? I actually put my name in.

And then I panicked. I called up Richard and I said, "Richard, I'm withdrawing from the search."

He said, "What? In two days, we're going to appoint you!"

I said, "Well I'm sorry, I'm withdrawing."

He said, "Would you at least tell me why?"

"I almost feel like a fake. I don't know enough. I'm not an art historian."

He said, "Listen, before you do this, at least have a conversation with the secretary."

Now you'll love this. . . . The head of the Smithsonian—nineteen museums, nine research centers, and the National Zoo—is called the secretary, and they've all been men. So, I called the secretary, Wayne Clough, retired president from the Georgia Institute of Technology.[15] I had known Wayne when I was here at Spelman. So I just kept trying to convince this man that I had to withdraw. Finally, I said, "I'm going to repeat it again, Wayne, I cannot continue in this search because I'm not an art historian."

He said, "We don't need another art historian. We're looking for an exceptional leader."

So I did it.

Now I took a long time to tell that story and let me tell you why. Because I think that so often—particularly those of us who are from underrepresented communities—we misjudge our abilities. Let me tell you, a whole lot of straight white men are doing things that they don't know how to do. So I took the job and it was incredible. One thing I remember so strongly about those eight years was finding a way to use African art to be an activist around all the things that I've always cared about. One of the things that was incredibly important was for us to say, "Where are the women artists? Where are the African artists of the LGBTQ communities?"

So, two messages that I hope you pull out of this rambling here. One, don't sell yourself too short. There are things that we can learn to do, especially when we have a fundamental academic grounding, and we have a passion for knowledge and a better world. And two, . . . regardless of what field you're in, what courses you're teaching, what books you're writing, at some point you're going to still come back to questions of inequality, of lack of access, of the absence of diversity, and the fundamental need for social justice.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: I saw a clip of an interview with you from the PBS [Public Broadcasting System] documentary series *Makers: Women Who Make America* (Goodman et al. 2013) where you said that you decided not to go to any meetings without bringing a younger woman with you. Can you talk some more about your role as a mentor?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: First of all, you have no choice. If you ever get anywhere in life, you didn't get there on your own. . . . You got there because other folk helped you get there. So this is first of all responsibility. We call it pay back, pay it forward, I don't care what you call it. You just owe this. It is not just owing it. There's such joy . . . in mentoring. . . . It's really grounding in a fundamental human notion the anthropologists talk about—it's called reciprocity. . . . One of the things that happens now if you are as old as I am and still engaged in many, many mentoring relationships is that your generation, because of technology, just has such a way of looking at the world and moving through the world that it really does instruct—it teaches me. How can one not be a mentor?

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: If you could change anything about how you managed your career in the academy, what might that be?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: I think I would be more courageous than I have been. More bodacious. More outspoken.

ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: Of all the things that you've done, what has been the most rewarding and fulfilling for you?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: Well, how about if I say among the most fulfilling? That's a tough one. I'm gonna say raising feminist sons, having wonderful sisterly relationships, [and] causing trouble.

Johnnetta Betsch Cole's journey to becoming the director of the National Museum of African Art teaches us that even someone as esteemed as Cole can suffer from impostor syndrome. She shows us that having a community of supporters is vital—whether a life partner or close friends—who can reflect your values back to you and remind you of forgotten goals and dreams.

Following our interview, there was a question-and-answer (Q&A) period with the audience. In response to one question, she elaborated on her point about raising feminist sons.

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: I think I should have been a little more modest when I said I raised feminist sons. I probably should have said I did my best. But you know, feminism first of all is not counted on the chromosome. Therefore, it is possible for any human being to be a feminist. It is learned. . . . Raising sons . . . to think through a different set of assumptions, to challenge what seems so obvious in daily life, is more than a notion. . . . I think the easiest way for us to raise feminist sons is to be feminists so that we are exhibiting the behavior that we ask them to embrace.

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ERICA LORRAINE WILLIAMS: What are you up to now? And what does retirement look like for you?

JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: I'm eighty-one. So you'd think by now I would have learned a number of things, including how to retire. But obviously I haven't. I have failed miserably at it at least four times. And I'm not sure that I ever will, if by that one means that you just are without systematic responsibilities that are meaningful. What I do know is that it would be a good idea for me to do less and so . . . I am actually taking a step toward the possibility that will never come through retirement. When I left the National Museum of African Art on March 31, 2017—and I danced

my way out of that museum—it was a wonderful celebration! And then I retired for an entire month. My husband and I went on an old-fashioned road trip. We drove to his hometown in North Carolina and my hometown in Florida. And then on May 1, I began working full time again. I joined a consulting firm called Cook Ross, founded in 1989. It is a firm that does work around issues of diversity, equity, accessibility, and inclusion.[16] I work in a place that looks like the world. . . . We often joke that of the forty folks who work in this office we can only find two straight white guys. That's an amazing collection of human beings. For a year I served as a principal consultant working with corporate folk and higher education folk, and I helped start our work in the world of art museums and cultural institutions. This year I reconfigured my work so that now I only work on projects as opposed to full time.

And—this is something I just really like to share because it makes Thomas Wolfe wrong—who said you can't go home again? I am gonna go home again. We're moving to Florida. And not just to Florida, but to the beach that my great-grandfather founded in 1935. His name was Abraham Lincoln . . . Lewis . . . [*laughter*]. Abraham Lincoln Lewis, with six other Black men, founded the first insurance company in the state of Florida, and he went on to become the first Black millionaire in Florida.[17] In 1935, he withdrew money from the pension bureau of the insurance company and bought this pristine stretch of beach on the Atlantic Ocean. Obviously, in 1935, Black people couldn't go to white people's beaches. . . . He said, "We're founding this beach because Black people need recreation without humiliation." So that beach was literally saved by my incredibly eccentric sister, who bore the name of the "Beach Lady" as developers tried to buy up the beach in recent years ("MaVynee 'Beach Lady' Betsch" n.d.).[18] That beach is still predominantly in the hands of Black people.

I'm gonna end by telling a story of that beach and of Abraham Lincoln Lewis. . . . There's been an enormous amount of information written about my family on the maternal side, including by anthropologists and archeologists. . . . And here, very quickly, is a story.

A young Wolof girl somewhere between the ages of thirteen and fifteen by the name of Anta Madjiguène Ndiaye was captured, taken to Goree Island on the coast of West Africa—Senegal.

Anyone been to Gorée Island and stood in the Door of No Return? . . . It will chill your blood.

I stood in that door, knowing that Anta Madjiguène Ndiaye had, in shackles, gone through that door onto a ship.

She's taken off of that ship in Havana, Cuba, and put on the auction block.

And a very strange British slave owner by the name of Zephaniah Kingsley, who had written such things as "slavery is a decent institution but slaves must be treated humanely," saw Anta Madjiguène Ndiaye, fell in love with her, and decided to marry her.

He was a little off.

This was during the period of Spanish possession when one didn't marry an enslaved woman. But Zephaniah Kingsley studied Wolof until he married her by Wolof custom. He brought her back to [his] plantation, which is now under the guardianship of the National Park Service.

Here's a part of the story I'm not proud of. Anta Madjiguène Ndiaye became wealthy and owned a few human beings herself.

We gotta tell all these stories. We can't tell half of the story.

So today the Kingsley Plantation is under the guardianship of the National Park Service. Every year, all of us who are Kingsley descendants—and we look like the rainbow—come back to the plantation.

Here's the genealogy. My great-great-grandfather, Abraham Lincoln Lewis, married the great-granddaughter of Anta Madjiguène Ndiaye Kingsley and Zephaniah Kingsley. Her name was Mary Salas.[19]

Now I have told that story for a reason. I am convinced that in the academy and in American life until we are willing not just to read about but to understand enslavement, we will never deal with racism. We just will not be able to do it. Why is it that we cannot have truly courageous meaningful conversations about race and about gender, and about sexuality and gender identity and all the rest of these attributes that are simply expressions of human diversity?

This moment in the interview is another testament to Cole's commitment to living a feminist life, with all its risks, rewards, and challenges. While she recognizes her privileged background as someone who can trace her ancestry further back than many African Americans and as the descendant of generational wealth- and slave-holding ancestors, she still acknowledges the importance of reckoning with the legacies of enslavement. Moreover, she takes this sentiment a step further and extends it to a reflection on the need to have meaningful conversations about racism, sexism, sexuality, and other "expressions of human diversity." The discussion of her numerous failed attempts at

retirement shows how she has crafted a life where she has been able to move through very different spaces and types of work in a strategic way that embraces her autonomy and desire to be engaged in meaningful work where she can set her own terms.

During the Q&A period, one audience member asked about dealing with the violences enacted in the academy, and how she would encourage young scholars to stay in the academy. Cole's response was quite compelling:

> JOHNNETTA BETSCH COLE: My only response has to be, "Where else are you going? Where do you think it will be safer, better, more rewarding in the deepest sense of what a human being can experience?" It is not so often, it is not a pretty place—the academy and the reason it's not. My view is that two things exist: the reality of inequality and the idea that we are above all of that stuff that's out there in the corporate world—that the academy is better. When the very systems of inequality that plague the larger society plague the academy. So, my only answer is: if you leave, I don't know where you're going. And the other response, of course, is since there's no particularly better place to go, you might as well just stay right where you are and see what you can do to make it a little bit better. We have to tell each other this every now and then and keep saying it until we believe it.

Having worked in many different types of institutions herself, Cole teaches us that the grass is not always greener on the other side.

Cole ended the conversation by sharing a few of her favorite African proverbs:

"When women lead, streams run uphill."

"No matter how long and dark the night is, dawn is going to break."

"If you want to go fast, go alone; if you want to go far, go together."

The first proverb is incredibly poignant. It invokes the power of women's activism and social movements throughout the African diaspora. When women lead, they make things happen that seem impossible—like a stream defying gravity to flow uphill. The second proverb reminds me of the popular refrain in African American Christian tradition that "trouble don't last always." It offers a sense of optimism even in the face of difficult and challenging situations. The third proverb emphasizes quality over quantity and collectivity over individuality. The notion of going far with a group suggests longevity and sustainability, which is worth more than mere speed in getting to the destination. Cole also shared that she is in the process of writing a children's book of African proverbs.[20]

Conclusion

According to Irma McClaurin's (2001) canonical text, Black feminist anthropology draws on Black intellectual thought and feminism to create a theory, methodology, and praxis that centers the experiences of Black women around the world. Not only is Black feminist anthropology deeply committed to scholar-activism, public intellectualism, vindicationism, and decolonizing the discipline, it also foregrounds the contributions of Black women anthropologists who have often been marginalized from the canon. On a personal note, I came to anthropology through the work of Black women anthropologists like Zora Neale Hurston, Katherine Dunham, Pearl Primus, and others. At some point along my journey, I came across a beautiful quote by Cole: "To be a Black feminist anthropologist means to bring into one's inquiry about the human condition, an analysis that is informed by a sense of the importance of 'race' and of gender. And it means to participate in some way in the struggle against racism, sexism and all other systems of inequality" (Heyward-Rotimi 1998, 4).

These words have guided me as I have navigated my way through anthropology and the academy. However, in the same interview with a Spelman alumna, Cole pointed out the ironic situation in which "Spelman students, like many students of color found feminist anthropology engaging, important, and convincing when it was not defined as feminist" (Heyward-Rotimi 1998, 5).

Sara Ahmed writes that "to work as a feminist often means trying to transform the organizations that employ us" (2017, 89). Cole has been doing this important work for decades. In a 1987 *Essence* magazine article, Paula Giddings (1987) asked Cole, "What will the Spelman campus be like in the year 2010?" Her response was prescient: "There will be an archive that houses the papers of distinguished Afro-American women as well as other scholars throughout the world. Spelman students . . . will have a familiarity with the world. They will know what a young Japanese woman of roughly the same age is about. They will be familiar with what's going on in South America. And they will not be at all surprised to hear someone talking about English-speaking Black people on the Atlantic coast of Nicaragua—they will already know about them." It seems that Cole was able to predict the future because this is the Spelman College that I know and love! To be sure, Cole has cemented her legacy as a trailblazer, leader, thinker, and model for the field. In a 1987 interview published in *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, she stated: "One of these days, somebody is going to have to figure out how to get rid of racism and sexism—and that's an intellectual's job" (Bernstein 1987, 53). As a public intellectual, Cole has been "interested in communicating in large circles with stuff that an-

thropology can teach" (Yelvington 2003, 287). The path that Cole has charted in her career since earning her PhD in 1967 illustrates Ahmed's point that "feminist theory is what we do when we live our lives in a feminist way" (2017, 11). What are we doing to ensure we also live our lives in a feminist way?

NOTES

This chapter appeared in a somewhat different form as Erica L. Williams, "The Practical Ethics of Johnnetta Betsch Cole: The Life of a Black Feminist Anthropologist," *Feminist Anthropology* 1, no. 1 (May 2020): 118–28.

1. The DK Summer Institute was the third in a series organized by the Democratizing Knowledge team, which consisted of Chandra Talpade Mohanty and Linda Carty at Syracuse University, Sherri-Ann Butterfield at Rutgers University–Newark, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall and Erica L. Williams at Spelman College. The first DK Summer Institute took place at Syracuse University in 2016, and the second one took place at Rutgers University–Newark in 2017.

2. This is presented in the documentary film *Herskovits at the Heart of Blackness*, directed by Christine Herbes-Sommers, Llewelyn Smith, and Vincent Brown (2009), as well as in the Yelvington interview (2003).

3. Founded in 1881, Spelman College had four white female presidents and two Black male presidents before Cole: Sophia B. Packard, Harriet E. Giles, Lucy Hale Tapley, Florence M. Read, Albert E. Manley, and Donald M. Stewart. According to Susan McHenry (1987), none of the white female presidents had doctorates. The two male presidents had doctorates but were fundamentally administrators. In a *New York Times* article (Collins 1987), Cole even described herself as not a "safe choice" for president since she was a divorced woman with progressive politics.

4. Other awards include the Barnard Medal, the Alexis de Tocqueville Award for Community Service from United Way of America, the Joseph Prize for Human Rights presented by the Anti-Defamation League, the Uncommon Height Award from the National Council of Negro Women, the John W. Gardner Leadership Award from the Independent Sector, and the Lenore and George W. Romney Citizen Volunteer Award from the Points of Light Foundation. In November 2018 she was appointed national chair and seventh president of the National Council of Negro Women (Levitan 2018).

5. Spelman College Archives, Box 7.

6. Spelman College Archives, Box 7.

7. Cole worked with the Venceremos Brigades (Dizard 1988).

8. According to Jewish Voices for Peace, Canary Mission is "a malicious website that seeks to vilify principled activists for Palestinian human rights with targeted campaigns of misinformation, bigotry and slander."

9. Audre Lorde (1934–92) was a Black lesbian poet and mother who published several collections of poetry as well as a novel and prose.

10. In another part of the interview, Cole describes how in 1937 her great-grandfather, Abraham Lincoln Lewis, traveled on a steamer to Egypt with his second wife. Thus, she grew up "with an atypically positive notion about the continent of Africa." She

also describes going to Liberia for her fieldwork as a "profoundly important and unsettling experience because . . . enslaved people from Liberia brought to the US went back to Liberia and set themselves up in positions of privilege and power vis-à-vis those who had never had the experience of being enslaved in the US. So that two-year period was one that forced me, as someone who had been victimized by racism, to acknowledge that all people have the ability to victimize."

11. Ericka Huggins joined the Black Panther Party at eighteen years of age and became a leading member of the Los Angeles chapter along with her husband, John Huggins. In 1969, her husband was killed shortly after the birth of their daughter. She also led the Black Panther Party chapter in New Haven, CT. She was a political prisoner and went on to become an educator, poet, and human rights activist.

12. Bateson is an anthropologist and the daughter of Margaret Mead and Gregory Bateson.

13. John Hope Franklin (1915–2009) was a distinguished historian who earned his PhD from Harvard University in 1941. He taught at Duke University, Howard University, and the University of Chicago.

14. Richard Kurin is an anthropologist with a doctorate from the University of Chicago who specializes in the study of South Asia. He is the Smithsonian Distinguished Scholar and Ambassador-at-Large.

15. Wayne Clough is a civil engineer who served as president of the Georgia Institute of Technology from 1994 to 2008 and was the twelfth secretary of the Smithsonian Institution.

16. Founded by Howard Ross and Dottie Cook in 1989, Cook Ross, now known as Be Equitable, "is a full service consulting firm with 32 years of experience addressing the most challenging issues facing organizations in the areas of inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility."

17. Cole writes about her prominent family in "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?" in *Conversations: Straight Talk with America's Sister President* (1994).

18. Cole also writes about her sister in "Will the Circle Be Unbroken?," in *Conversations*, 14–15. Her sister is profiled in the *Smithsonian* magazine article "Beach Lady" by Russ Rymer (2003) and in the biographical entry "MaVynee 'Beach Lady' Betsch" (n.d.) on the History Makers website. In the Q&A portion of the conversation, Cole elaborated on her sister:

> You also asked about my sister, the only blood sister that I have. Well first of all she was a sight to behold. In her first rendition of life she was a double major in voice and piano at Oberlin College, an incredibly gifted musician. She went off to Paris and studied with a renowned African American musician. She ended up singing lead roles in German state opera. And when she came back to the US, I don't know all that went on in Germany, but she obviously went through some very serious emotional challenges. So, my sister comes back and moves to the beach, grows her dreadlocks—she was six feet tall and she had one dreadlock from the top of her head to her feet. And on that dreadlock were more buttons than you can imagine. When she passed away, the major environmentalist organizations made beautiful gestures—one sent a huge basket of butterflies,

which we released on the beach. There is a white whale named for my sister. For a long time I kept her answering machine. She lived on the beach despite everything I tried to do to get her to stop literally sleeping on the beach, and I finally did get her to move into a structure. So, she had an answering machine and you would call and it would say "Hello. This is the beach lady. I'm sorry I'm not here. I'm probably on the beach, where I have turned into a butterfly." My sister had a love affair with the environment. And while there were these very creative expressions of it, she was very serious about environmentalism as a Black woman's issue. And the extent to which it is no accident where the most pollution takes place.

19. A February 12, 2020, Facebook post on the Gullah Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor National Heritage Area page documented this story, and references an article by Daniel Schaeffer, "Anna Madgigine Jai Kingsley: African Princess, Florida Slave, Plantation Slaveowner." See also Schaeffer 2018. As the descendant of the Kingsleys, Cole was invited by the National Park Service to give a keynote speech on February 15, 2020.

20. In the interview, Cole mentioned that she was in the process of publishing a children's book of African proverbs with a Lebanese illustrator and friend, Nelda Lateef. The book, *African Proverbs for all Ages*, was published in 2021.