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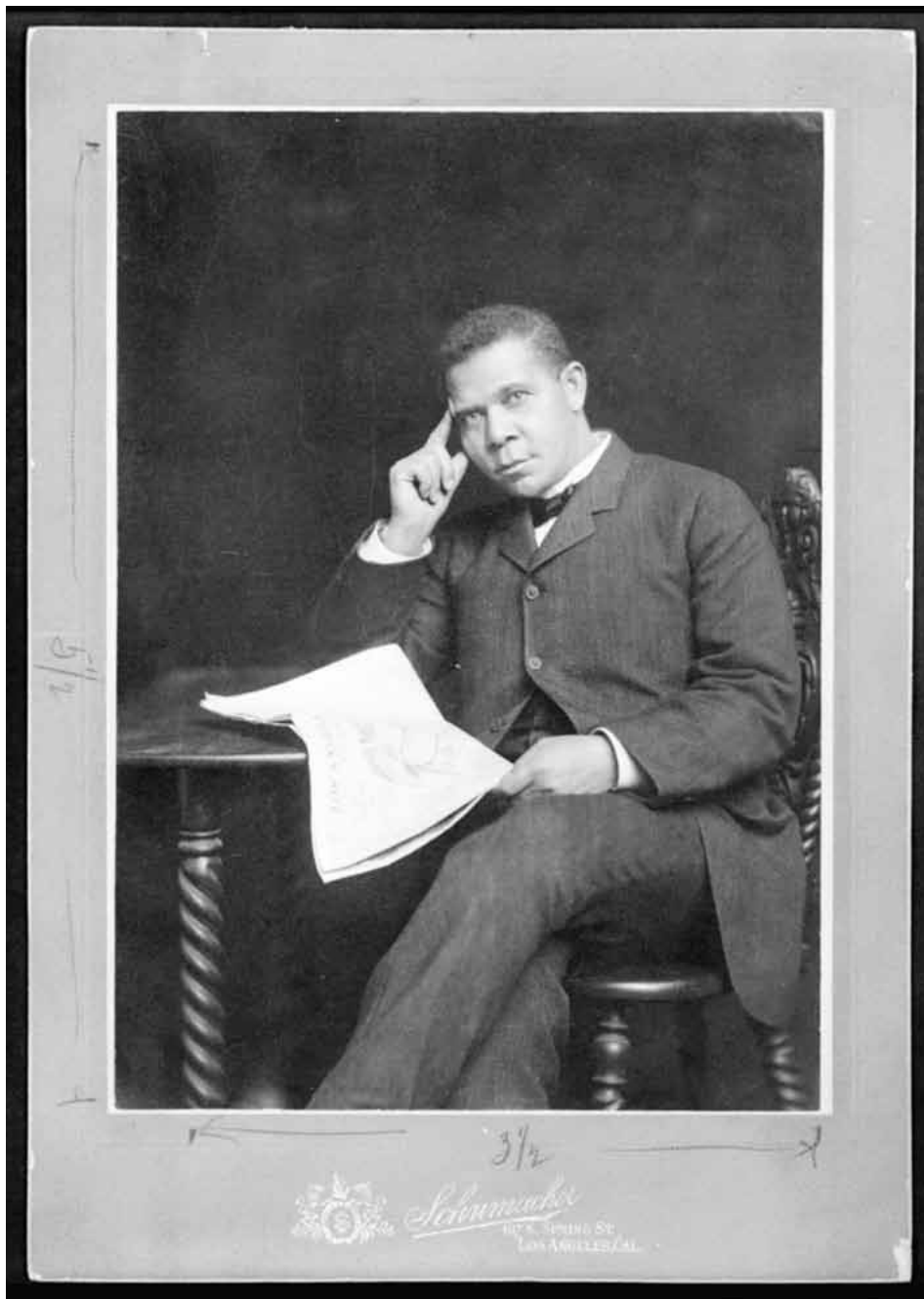
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**Booker T. Washington**  
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# EDITORIAL FOREWORD

## *On the Value of History and Culture*

AKEL ISMAIL KAHERA, Ph.D.

*History belongs above all to the [woman] man of deeds and power, to [her] him who fights a great fight, who needs models, teachers, comforters and cannot find them among his contemporaries.*

*Untimely Meditations*—Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, 1844-1900

Whether Nietzsche’s teachings bring happiness or resignation, virtue or atonement, we may never be able to agree, but we are unanimous about the proposition that history matters! In thinking further about Nietzsche’s teachings two terms come to mind: Dysnomia and Catharsis. In medical terms Dysnomia affects speech, writing and our memory; in cultural/historical terms, it is a ‘disorder’ an unbalanced social policy, which allows some elements of society to become too dominant. Simply, Dysnomia can affect the way we value history and culture, such that the normative view of the world is circumscribed in an overt if not blatant radicalization of history. In other words a normative condition thus becomes imbedded in a framework that locates the construction of one’s identity in a static space and time. On the other hand the term Catharsis--which is borrowed from psychiatry--means the purging of one’s emotions or the relieving of emotional tensions, especially through art, architecture, theatre, poetry or music etc. I employ the term Catharsis because it is an antidote to Dysnomia, and because it speaks to the essential relationship of people to the built environment, to culture, language and history, freeing them from the imbalance of power within these relationships, and freeing their emotions of hatred and terror. A wealth of discursive knowledge comes alive in this issue of the *Journal of History & Culture*, which gladly acknowledges the contributions of five essays that inform our Weltanschauung. Sheryl Tucker deVazquez’s “Piecing together Place: The Quilts of the Gees Bend” highlights the local legacy of the quilting tradition among African-American women of rural Alabama, with a narrative that informs, how they come into being, where memory, provisional shelter, aesthetic desire, and local circumstances (physical, cultural, social) intersect. By highlighting striking similarities to abstract modern art, the quilts have been likened by art critics to artists ranging from Albers to Rothko. In addition as a design source and as a literary metaphor Tucker de Vazquez introduces a critique based on themes of aesthetic and literary analysis that are closely linked to the writings of Toni Morrison, Martin Heidegger, Edward Said, et.al.

Recognizing the need to enrich and preserve our repository of oral history especially of Prairie View A&M Alumni we feature Arthuryne J. Welch-Taylor “Miss Prairie View 1934-35”, a 1937 alumna, in her own words. One definition tells us that oral history is the recording, preservation and interpretation of historical information, based on the personal experiences and opinions of the speaker. I suspect there is a far deeper reason to record shared experiences: lest we forget. The words “lest we forget”, is a popular warning about the perils of hubris and the inevitable decline of the powerful. Oral history is crucial to the revivification of knowledge, and indeed self-empowerment; it is a legitimate proposition, which offers an alternative to the transformation of distressed memories.

Dr. Zain Abdullah’s essay “Culture, Community and the Politics of Muslim Space”, concerns itself with our understanding of time, space and motion as evidenced in the urban cultural milieu of Harlem today. But primarily his essay explores the Diaspora of many West Africans who now call Harlem ‘home’. In this group’s relationship to the built environment lies many social and cultural patterns of their development and their capacity to assimilate, formulate and transmit knowledge to through material culture and urban ceremonies. The essay focuses on the rapid migration and settlement of a Diaspora community, but above all it presents us with an in-depth study of the experiences and activities of people via an outward display of traditional clothing designs, masjids (mosques), and ethnic businesses that create a new sense of community and the altering of the urban genre.

On the most basic level education sanctions the values and perception of the community and it is constrained by a specific understanding of doctrinal ideas, ethnic and linguistic relationships. Dr. Necia Desiree Harkless’s essay “The Value Of Education And The Awareness Of Diversity And Culture”, focuses on two crucial points: first, public education and its goal to combat ignorance and secondly, the ability to fulfill the vision of a community and an institution, to promote knowledge as a principal aspect of human existence. These two crucial points may easily define the phenomenon under study as a relationship of truth and value in Foucaultian terms: power/knowledge.

It has been argued, “Art is not created ex-nihilo”. This thesis is explored in the final essay, which explores the work of Sinan and Palladio. Both architects were engaged in a lasting search for an aesthetic language firmly grounded in order, space and form. However, Sinan and Palladio were also influenced by Byzantine and Roman building traditions, the projects they completed in the period 1540-1580 reflect an architectural style, which was unmistakably a part of the political, social and cultural Renaissance and Ottoman milieu. The problem here is to understand not only how competing visions of space and social life co-exist, but also how they are invested with

parallel virtues. More broadly the problem is to understand that the concept of order, space and form is driven by dual impulses: commitment and disengagement.

When Alexis de Tocqueville wrote about American democracy in the 1830s, he took great pains to highlight the importance of religion in the development of democracy. Alexis de Tocqueville spoke repeatedly of the condition of ‘equality’. In response to urban life Diaspora communities exhibit three qualities of inclusion: differentiation, integration and transcendence. Nowhere is this observation more true than in urban settings where the image of the city (New York City for example) is being transformed on a daily basis with new layers of cultural and religious diversity added to the fabric of the city. With the human population of the world approaching six billion, caring for one’s cultural legacy is most important, the value of history and culture must continue to remain at the forefront of who we are and specifically it must continue to promote rather than impede human participation and development especially for folks who have been disenfranchised. When we consider the divergent paths taken in the essays discussed in this issue it is clear that the subject of history and culture is undeniably complex. Undoubtedly the complexity informs many forms of ethno-centric representations conceived through communal relationships and in the study of specific aesthetic genres. *Dysnomia and Catharsis* is one example of the complexity that represent two kinds of *Weltanschauung*, or worldviews: the first upon viewing order protests it, which in turn creates disorder; the second upon encountering disorder makes every effort to create order.

# PIECING TOGETHER PLACE: THE QUILTS OF GEES BEND

SHERYL TUCKER DEVASQUEZ

## Abstract

*Since their 2000 debut in New York City, the quilts produced (over four generations) by a tiny community of African-American women in rural Alabama have been lauded by art critics as modern masterpieces. Striking in their similarities to abstract modern art, the quilts have been likened by art critics to artists ranging from Albers to Rothko. This article explores the quilts as a “stand-in” for architecture, in that, like the yard-art assemblages of African-Americans, they come into being where memory, provisional shelter, aesthetic desire, and local circumstances - physical//cultural/social - intersect.*

*Utilizing a process of collage and informed by an improvisational impulse, the quilts, in a very Heideggerian sense, “gather the world” of the African-American which was violently shredded by the rupture of enslavement. As with Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* that breaks with traditional narrative form to collage the horrific “rememories”<sup>1</sup> of her main characters, and as with Romare Bearden’s photomontages assembled from the shards of Black images, the pieced together landscape of the quilt, is a powerful, poetic representation of the ongoing “struggle with chaos” that is uniquely African-American.*

*[Described by Picasso, the displaced object] in African-American terms, is first and foremost the displaced African body we are displaced in that we were taken from Africa, and we are misplaced in that have been put in a place, both literally and figuratively, that does not acknowledge the full, complex dimensions of our existence. Quilts particularly embody the simultaneous continuity and chaos that characterize African-American history by trying to knit together the fragmentation that forms its core and the paradox of fragmentation as a center, quilting is a motif for a creative response to that history.<sup>2</sup>*

Elizabeth Alexander in “*The Genius of Romare Bearden*”

*When slavery has torn apart one’s heritage, when the past is more real than the present, when the rage of a dead baby can literally rock a house, then the traditional novel is no longer an adequate instrument. And so Pulitzer Prize-winner *Beloved* is written in bits and images, smashed like a mirror on the floor and left for the reader to put together. The characters in *Beloved* are each trying to work through a painful memories of the past in order to build a future.<sup>3</sup>*

Erica Bauermeister in *500 Great Books by Women*

Displaced, disoriented and enslaved, over the course of three hundred years, groups of Africans found themselves on American soil in an existential wilderness. Cultural critic, Elizabeth Alexander argues that this displacement and the resulting fragmentation of personal and collective identities that was necessary to meld together as one people the varieties and complexities of Africans (and then integrate themselves into an unhomely<sup>4</sup> landscape) is the source of the African-American's creative power of the "Middle Passage."<sup>5</sup> The fragmented and re-assembled images of Romare Bearden and its closest relative - the African-American quilt - are formal, aesthetic manifestations of the inherently conflicting circumstances out of which the African-American was born. In the violence of slavery, whole African and then African-American families, communities and cultures were fragmented and scattered across the American South. As with the origins of the Afro-American history, the quilts begin in acts of violence: ripping, shredding and tearing apart of what was intact. These dynamic assemblages of quilt and collage stand in for an African-American consciousness that pieced together fragments from multiple sources to make comprehensible and cohesive what would otherwise been a fractured and chaotic existential landscape. From a tiny, isolated community (fig. 1) in the heart of Alabama's Black Belt have emerged what New York times art critic, Michael Kimmelman has deemed "some of the most miraculous works of modern art America has produced" - *The Quilts of Gees Bend*.<sup>6</sup> Since their debut in 2000, the quilts been exhibited in museums from the Whitney to the de Young and have been likened to artists ranging from Albers to Rothko. Pieced together over four generations from strips of discarded clothing, the quilts made by the African-American women of Gees Bend, Alabama, encapsulate the creative power of the "Middle Passage."<sup>7</sup>

### **An Art of Circumstances**

*"For many African-American artists, art objects are often dressed within the accouterments of the ordinary, the discarded and the abandoned."*<sup>8</sup>

Sheryl Tucker de Vazquez, Sites of Memory

Possessing a powerful sense of place, Gees Bend is defined by the heavily treed edges of a "hairpin turn"<sup>9</sup> in the Alabama River. Surrounded on three sides by water, the tiny, impoverished community of only about seven hundred people functions in many respects as an island - specifically, as the Gullah islands off the coast of Georgia have - where the language and customs of the Africans who arrived there on slave ships survived intact well into the twentieth century. (fig 1) For the slaves who inhabited and cultivated Gees Bend since the early 1800s, the river-



**Figure 1**

*Gees Bend Ferry Entrance from Camden, Alabama  
(Courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 2**

*Hand painted sign for The Quilts of Gees Bend Collective  
(Courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 3**

*Quilt Design Graphics periodically punctuate the  
landscape of Gees Bend (Courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 4**

*Quilt Sample from Gees Bend Quilt Collective  
(Courtesy of the author)*

bounded bulb of land provided a space of enclosure and incubation that allowed African-influenced traditions to survive and flourish.

Just prior to Martin Luther King's second Selma march, he came to Gees Bend to preach. Many of the Gees Bend women participated in the Selma march and were subsequently jailed. In additional retribution, local whites from Camden banded together to shut the ferry down because, in the words of the sheriff, they [the residents of Gees Bend] "forgot they were black."<sup>10</sup> The same river that nurtured Black creativity was now used as a physical barrier to isolate the Gees Benders who wanted to register to vote in the county seat of Camden - fifteen minutes away by ferry, but an hour away by unpaved back roads. Isolated by the river, the shutdown of ferry service necessitated an hour-long drive to Camden. During a time when only two Gees Bend residents owned cars, the ferry shutdown had the desired effect. Ferry service to Gees Bend was not restored until 2006.

William Arnett, the art historian who in the late 1990s "discovered" the enclave of quilts, describes them as an "art of limitations"<sup>11</sup> or, in the words of African-American self-taught artist Jessie Lott, an "art of circumstances - an art that emerged from the convergence of financial lack and the ability, with divine insight, to see what God has put in front of you."<sup>12</sup> Art is the vehicle of revelation. The quilts are indeed, an extension of a broader African-American aesthetic of improvisation that embraces collage, recycling and vernacular yard art assemblages. (figs 2,3) This is an aesthetic derived from "making do" and finding the beauty held within the discarded and abandoned. This tradition of making whole again what was thrown away is underpinned with an African-American Christian belief system that says that faith transcends adversity. Overlaying African-American with Jewish historical accounts, quilter Mary Lee Bendolph describes her transformation of old clothes to make quilts in terms of the Israelites deliverance from Pharaoh. She explains, "First we was in Egypt and we came through the Red Sea. The old things are a reminder of the Red Sea, away back in time; they remind you of where you have been and where the Lord have brought you from. So you want to keep it. Take what the Lord done bless us with and use it. And continue to bless."<sup>13</sup>

The displaced element, taken from one context and put into another, gains new meaning, new definition and wholeness while still retaining traces of its otherness in the new context. The transformation, through divine inspiration, redeems what had been abandoned by the world, and in doing so, redefines its restorer. Rick Lowe, founder of the Public Art Project, Project Row Houses in Houston, Texas, puts it this way, "One cannot be a victim while participating in the creative act."<sup>14</sup> Spanning the realm between art, faith and everyday life, the quilts act as visual prayers or meditations. Singing songs of praise is so much a part of the quilting process, that the quilters

often accompany opening night of their exhibitions with choral performances of spirituals and hymns.

The Gees Bend quilt compositions share in common unsettling color contrasts, instability, asymmetry, syncopation, and unexpected juxtapositions. Formed predominately from geometric shapes of small rectangles, squares and lines, the Gees Bend quilts are highly abstract and even architectural. (figs 4,5,6,7) To viewers steeped in the traditions of modern art, the resemblance to the modern masters of Diebenkorn, Rothko, and Albers is uncanny. But this comparison is problematic because of radically differing sources of historic development. As highly original works of art, the quilts deserve to be considered and understood through the intentions and point of view of their makers and within the context of their creation. Although the precise origins of the quilts have yet to be completely sorted out by art historians, many now theorize that the quilts are possibly off-shoots of the Mande and Mande-influenced tradition of narrow strip woven cloths that were made dynamic by the suspension of expected patterns. According to Robert Farris Thompson, the Mande method of weaving spread from Mande via traders to the West African coast and subsequently to various groups of enslaved Africans who were eventually shipped to America. This unique tradition of weaving was not found in either Europe or the Middle East. Mande-influenced strip weaving in which narrow strips of cloth, sometimes as many as one hundred were sewn together to make larger pieces of cloth ornaments, were a crucial precursor to the African-American quilt.<sup>15</sup> Like the Gees Bend quilts, Mande textiles also show a preference for dissonant clashing of highly saturated colors and unexpected rhythms in the overall compositions. Thompson points out that the strip-cloth quilts of the African-American South are not pure African textiles but rather productions that allude to the basic structure of cloth that date back to the ninth century.

### Improvisation

*Art celebrates a victory...it involves conquering and redeeming both the beauty and sullenness of the past...it proclaims that black people have survived in spite of everything.*<sup>16</sup>

Romare Bearden, quoted in *Collage of Memories*

While African textiles were woven from raw materials, the African-American quilt was made from discarded garments that were deconstructed and then re-presented in a different form. This is a critical moment in the creative process, because it is out of an imaginative and improvisational re-thinking of “brokenness” that the power of the African-American creative genius arises. In her essay “The Genius of Romare Bearden,” Alexander



**Figure 5**

*Quilt Sample from Gees Bend Quilt Collective*



**Figure 6**

*Quilt Sample from Gees Bend Quilt Collective*



**Figure 7**

*Quilt Design Graphics periodically punctuate the landscape of Gees Bend*



**Figure 9**

*The Quilts of Gees Bend Collective Work Space*



**Figure 8**

*Quilt Sample from Gees Bend Quilt Collective*

*\*All images courtesy of the author*

tells us that the collages of Romare Bearden, like the African-American quilt, reflect the frenetic landscape of the African-American collective history. Fragmentation is integral to the aesthetic of quilt, collage and the history of the African-American experience.

Utilizing deconstruction and re-presentation of Cubism, Bearden's black and white photomontages bring Cubism full circle with its depiction of African-American life. Quilt and collage embody a re-imagining of a fragmented individual and collective African-American self that counters the flattened dominant cultural view of sameness. Operating outside the normal parameters of Cubism, Bearden addresses a specific subject - the African-American experience. In Bearden's work, shards of black images are taken out of context from a multiplicity of sources and then reconstructed to present the richness and complexity of African-American life. The world of the African-American comes into the view of the dominant gaze only because it is rendered strange and unstable by its changed context. The often jarring and unexpected juxtapositions of fragments in Bearden's everyday scenes of domesticity and street-life are rendered uncanny to reflect the "otherness" of the Black experience in America. In collage and quilt, this strangeness of circumstances is harnessed to make a potent space of dwelling. Tenuously balancing order and dis-order, these works are held together with an improvisational, visual sampling and mixing that link the quilts to the whole range of African-American aesthetic expression from hip-hop to jazz - an improvisational aesthetic impulse that art historian Robert Farris Thompson calls "*The Flash of the Spirit*."<sup>17</sup>

Moving through the ordinary and everyday realm of domesticity, the Gees Bend women created visually stunning works that can move effortlessly from museum walls to bed or floor. But beyond simple bed covering, the quilts shelter on a number of levels - as cloak, sleeping pallet and even wall coverings (supplementing un-insulated walls during the cold weather months). Hung vertically, the sheer size of the quilts gives them an architectural presence that invests the dwelling space with the aesthetic values, traditions, and memories of its occupants. In *Being and Time*, Heidegger writes that the role of architecture is to provide orientation in space and identification with the specific character of a place.<sup>18</sup> The quilts, providing not only physical shelter, but also a place of existential dwelling, fulfill this role. Heidegger's notion of orientation within physical place/space is extended to psychological space/circumstances. In a world that did not recognize the full, range of complexities that made up the African-American existence, the quilts provided a foothold - a visual landscape where the rich interior landscape of its maker and the outer world (as expressed in clothing) are integrated into a holistic landscape. Spread out horizontally, the quilts suggest a territory in which a tenuous order and discipline has been literally pieced together out of the chaos and rupture brought on by the "Middle Passage."<sup>19</sup> Moving one's hand across the quilted landscape, the cloth pieces

stand in for the body and its lived history. Out of the wilderness of slavery and then tenant farming, the Gees Bend quilters cultivated a space of existential dwelling.

Through the ongoing process of choosing, the quilter re-maps history - a non-linear, field condition of improvisation and possibility. In this field condition various points in time are presented simultaneously in a holistic topography of time and place. This non-linear field echoes Heidegger's sense of time as not a continuous flow of present to present, but rather a unified whole in which past, present and future are but different aspects of a whole. Heidegger suggests that that our personal and collective histories (our having been-ness) continuously "project towards" one's future.<sup>20</sup> Through one's specific personal and collective history one can access a multiplicity of possibilities. But this future is not forever bound to one's past - through free (or creative) action - what Heidegger called resoluteness - one can choose the 'fact of one's existence' and in doing so, alter one's future. For the Gee's Bend women, Heidegger's "moment of vision" and act of choosing is manifest in their quilts. This time of choosing from (in Greek, Kairos or right moment) is what Heidegger called "the moment of vision." In Christian belief, Kairos was the fulfillment or redemption of time with the birth and death of Christ. At this critical moment of vision, through one's "free action" or act of choosing, one can re-shape himself in his own image. While Heidegger did not reference any deity, for the Gees Bend women, the "moment of action" is inextricably linked and only possible through their Christian faith. The quilts are acts of co-creation with God. Quilter Mary Bendolph articulates it this way, "When you sitting there quilting the quilt, your mind be on the Lord and your quilting. You want it to come out right. You sit there and sing, groans, a little hymn or something, and then you sing and pray. Irene Williams expands on Bendolph's words, "The Lord is with them all. The face of the Lord, the quilts I've pieced, the good Lord is with them. Sure is."<sup>21</sup> The quilters claim and "redeem the beauty and the sullenness of the past"<sup>22</sup> in their own image and in doing so re-cast their futures.

*Denver picked at her fingernails. 'If it's still there, waiting, that must mean that nothing ever dies.' Sethe looked right in Denver's face. 'Nothing ever does,' she said.*<sup>23</sup>

Toni Morrison in *Beloved*

*Actually, fragmentation and indeterminacy in the narrative thread call for an active and creative participation on the part of the reader / audience, and the interaction between the storyteller and audience are fused in the process. The fusion of fragments is brought about by the interaction between the storyteller and*

*the audience. In a very postmodern way, the audience must fill in the gaps, holes, silences, elucidate the many absences, and cope with the unstable, fragmented, indeterminate and sometimes chaotic fictional cosmos.*<sup>24</sup>

On *Beloved*, Graciela Moreira-Slepoy

Like the Gees Bend quilts, Toni Morrison's novel *Beloved* embodies the fragmented consciousness of African-American: The narrative is structured through the fractured "rememories" of its' main characters who have literally pieced together a life in Ohio in the aftermath of slavery. However the characters are not free. Broken and fractured by the experience of enslavement, they are each haunted by a past that is revealed over time in a non-linear matrix of "bits and pieces." Breaking with linear time of the traditional novel, *Beloved* allows the reader not to merely read about the enslavement of the African-American, but to experience its horror through the fractured memories of its main characters - Seth, Paul D., Beloved, and Baby Suggs. The fragmented remembrances of its characters allow for an open-endedness or indeterminacy that must be filled out by the reader - this is the position of opportunity - Heidegger's "moment of vision." Morrison gives this "moment of vision" a spatiality - making the past inhabitable in the present. Through memory, the characters' work through their brokenness by reencountering the past. Gurleen Grewal writes in *Circles of Sorrow, Lines of Struggle*, that "organized by fragments coming together, the novel is about healing the self and uniting the traumatized individual and the community. The narrative represents fragmented bodies, psyches, stories, and memories gradually becoming whole through telling." Morrison tells us that memories [like quilts] may be stored away and forgotten, "but they never die."<sup>25</sup>

Like Seth's wedding dress made from bits and pieces of different cloth in *Beloved*, the Gees Bend quilts represent the interior lives and histories of their makers. Gees Bend quilter Annie May Young recounts, "My daddy plowed the fields in those overalls, and I chopped cotton in that dress."<sup>26</sup> Lucy Mingo articulates the underlying meaning in this way, "It looks like they have songs to them. You could tell stories about this piece, you could tell stories about that piece." They have songs to them.<sup>27</sup> This is particularly evident in the work-clothes quilts made from blue, gray, and beige denims. Using only blue gray bands of faded, worn denims, Lutisha Pettway's denim quilt, (circa 1950), transforms lives of hardship into a poetry of muted tones. Worn and faded, the legs of work pants are re-assembled in nine long fabric strips, each of which is made up of smaller sized pieces of material. Soft blue-gray in color and punctuated by deeper patches of blue where back pockets have been removed, the quilt exudes the ethereal, painterly quality reminiscent of Diebenkorn and Rothko. Haunting and otherworldly, the collage of fabric pieces speaks to a weariness of the world.

More potent in their presence than photographs, the fragments of cloth recall lived experiences as things or “re-memories.” The quilters, like in *Beloved’s* Seth, Paul D. Beloved, and Baby Shuggs work through their own salvation - by working through their past to create, in the words of Morrison, “a livable life” in the present and the future. From these characters, we learn that the past, if not dealt with, can become a destructive force in the present and future. Through the collage of the quilt, the histories and memories are reformed and combined to become a whole, while allowing for a multiplicity of narratives. Through the creative power of the imagination, novel, collage and quilt gather the brokenness of the African-American experience in a collective self-portrait without a singular narrative. In the African-American tradition of call and response, the accumulation of individual histories and identities contained within the quilts form a communal memory out of which the individual may piece together a past, present and future.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Combining remember and memory in *Beloved*, writer Toni Morrison coins the term *rememory* to describe the recalling a memory either physically or mentally. Morrison uses memory as a noun rather than as a verb. This device supports the idea of memories becoming a physical people, places or things.
- <sup>2</sup> Elizabeth Alexander, “The Genius of Romare Bearden,” *Power and Possibility: Essays, Reviews and Interviews* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2007) 40.
- <sup>3</sup> Erica Bauermeister, Jess Larsen and Holly, “Beloved,” *500 Great Books by Women* Smith, (New York: Penguin Group, 1994) 310.
- <sup>4</sup> The term unheimely is derived from the German word for uncanny, *das Unheimliche*, which translated literally means unheimely. This word was coined by Sigmund Freud to describe the aesthetic estrangement from and general anxiety in the modern world.
- <sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Alexander, “The Genius of Romare Bearden,” *Power and Possibility Essays, Reviews and Interviews*, (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, Michigan 2007) 35.
- <sup>6</sup> Michael Kimmelman, “Art Review; Jazzy Geometry, Cool Quilters,” review of *The Quilts of Gees Bend* by the Gees Bend Quilters Collective, *New York Times*, November 29, 2002, 29.
- <sup>7</sup> Elizabeth Alexander, “The Genius of Romare Bearden,” in *Power and Possibility Essays, Reviews and Interviews* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: The University of Michigan Press, 2007).
- <sup>8</sup> Sheryl Tucker de Vazquez, “African-American Art and Architecture: A Theology of Art of Life, Death and Transformation,” *Sites of Memory, Perspectives on Architecture and Race*, ed. Craig Barton (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001) 158.
- <sup>9</sup> William Arnett, “Gees Bend: *The Architecture of the Quilt*,” *The Architecture of the Quilt*, eds. Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubbs, Eugene W. Metcalf Jr., (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books 2006) 15.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* 32
- <sup>12</sup> Based on interview by Sheryl Tucker de Vazquez in “African-American Art and Architecture: A Theology of Art of Life, Death and Transformation,” *Sites of Memory, Perspectives on Architecture and Race* ed. Craig Barton, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001) 159.
- <sup>13</sup> William Arnett, “Gees Bend: The Architecture of the Quilt,” *The Architecture of the Quilt*, eds. Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubbs, Eugene W. Metcalf Jr., (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books 2006) 75.
- <sup>14</sup> from interview by Sheryl Tucker de Vazquez in “African-American Art and Architecture: A Theology of Art of Life, Death and Transformation *Sites of Memory, Perspectives on Architecture and Race*, ed. Craig Barton, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2001) 164.
- <sup>15</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, “Round Houses and Rhythimized Textiles,” *Flash of the Spirit, African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Vintage Books: 1984) 193-195.
- <sup>16</sup> Jan Greenberg, Romare Bearden, *Collage of Memories* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. New York) 34.
- <sup>17</sup> Robert Farris Thompson, in “Round Houses and Rhythimized Textiles,” *Flash of the Spirit, African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*,

(New York: Vintage Books, 1984) 193-195.

<sup>18</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: State University of New York Press 1996), 296, 339, 383.

<sup>19</sup> Elisabeth Alexander and other cultural critics use the term “Middle Passage” to describe the enslavement and transport of Africans to the Americas, which Alexander argues is the genesis of the African-American “creative genius.”

<sup>20</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time* (New York: State University of New York Press 1996), 296, 339, 383.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard L. Herman, “Architectural Definitions,” *The Architecture of the Quilt*, eds. Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubbs, Eugene W. Metcalf Jr. (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books 2006) 75.

<sup>22</sup> William Arnett, “Gees Bend: *The Architecture of the Quilt*,” *The Architecture of the Quilt*, eds. Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubbs, Eugene W. Metcalf Jr. (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books 2006) .

<sup>23</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Penguin Group, 1987) 36.

<sup>24</sup> Graciela Moreira-Slepoy, “Toni Morrison’s *Beloved*: Reconstructing the Past through Storytelling and Private Narratives,” [www.postscriptum.org](http://www.postscriptum.org) (n° 2, 2003) paragraph 11.

<sup>25</sup> Toni Morrison in *Beloved* suggest in the dialogue between Denver and Sethe that nothing ever dies [including the memories brought given a presence through the Quilts of Gees Bend]. Toni Morrison, *Beloved*, (New York: Penguin Group, 1987) 36.

<sup>26</sup> Joanne Cubbs, “A History of the Work-Clothes Quilt,” *The Architecture of the Quilt*, eds. Paul Arnett, Joanne Cubbs, Eugene W. Metcalf Jr., (Atlanta, GA: Tinwood Books, 2006) 73.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* 78.

# AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF ARTHURNE J. WELCH-TAYLOR

ALUMNA, CLASS OF 1937

I was the fourth of six children born on March 11, 1917 to Richard T. and J. Augusta Andrews in the Third Ward in Houston, Texas. I was not born in a traditional hospital, but delivered by a mid-wife at home in our two story white frame house. As long as I can remember, I have enjoyed being around and listening to the wisdom of the older generation. Hence, I was among the fortunate African Americans that excelled and learned from dedicated teachers in the segregated public schools in both Houston and Dallas, Texas. I fondly remember many of my teachers at Douglas Elementary School as well as Jack Yates High School in Houston. When I was 11 years old our family moved to Dallas. There I attended Booker T. Washington High School and graduated as salutatorian. Two memorable highlights of my high school years were being the pianist for the high school chorus and a member of the oratorical society winning a first place 14K gold pendant. Another interest was learning different forms of needlework. Because of this, I pursued Home Economics as my major at Prairie View A. & M. College in Texas.

Prairie View, TX, is located 50 miles from Houston. The Southern Pacific Railway train and the Greyhound Bus stopped at the “flag stop” station located about a mile from the campus. Other than traveling to and from the college, this one-mile dirt road was off-limits to students. These four years, were fun years however, space will not permit an account of my varied activities. One of my fondest memories was looking forward to buying a double dip ice cream cone for 5 cents after receiving my \$1 monthly allowance from home. I received many awards; however, the one I most coveted was being chosen by my fellow classmates as “Miss Prairie View” in 1934-35 (prior to this year, the title was Miss Panther). It was the first time an underclassman was chosen. After graduating cum laude in 1937, I remained on campus and accepted the position in the Registrars Office as a transcript and record clerk. I remained there for two years before taking the position as a Home Demonstration Agent in San Augustine, TX. San Augustine is the oldest county in Texas, and back then the residents’ major mode of transportation was horses that they staked on the town square. The president of Langston University (Oklahoma) rescued me to become his administrative assistant.

While working at Langston University I met a tall, handsome, and charismatic man that I fell in love with and married in 1941, named James Aravian Welch. The two of us left Langston to teach during the summer months

of “cotton-picking” season in Grandfield, OK. I taught grades 1-3 and my husband taught grades 4-6. At the end of the summer, my husband was appointed interim business manager and we returned to Langston. During this time, our first child was born and we were blessed with a baby girl. We named her Melvadeen and as long as I can remember she wanted to be a psychologist. She worked as a librarian for many years before earning a Master’s Degree in Counseling from Johns Hopkins University. She retired as a school counselor with the Baltimore Public Schools. Two years later we moved to Jackson, MS. In Jackson, my husband served as Interim Business Manager at Jackson State College, where I was a secretary for two years. It was here that we experienced the joy of our first son. We named him James, Jr., a Morehouse business graduate who was always intrigued by finance. He followed his dream and retired as a broker and now works as an investment consultant, teaches spin classes, is an avid golfer and helps sponsor leadership golf camps for youth. Some of these high school students are awarded college scholarships. In 1945, we moved onto the campus of Tennessee A & I State College in Nashville, TN, where my husband was hired as the youngest college African American business manager. For one year, I taught the 5th grade in the Nashville Public School System and during that year we were overjoyed to have another son. Reginald was the name given to our second son who always had a facility with and love for the written word. He worked briefly as a reporter for the Nashville Tennessean, making him one of the first African American reporters for a major daily newspaper in the south. He retired from the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission as the Director of Communications. His health and fitness regimen through the years is an inspiration to his nephews.

In June of 1949, my husband and a student were killed in a tragic bus accident when returning home from a college band engagement in Alabama. I was 6 months pregnant with my fourth child. It therefore was imperative for me to continue my educational studies in order to adequately provide for my family. In the midst of this tragedy, joy entered my life again with my third son, Robert. As a youngster he was always building model airplanes and cars and won several trophies competing with kids older than he. He was an adjunct professor at the University of Texas and Prairie View A & M University in the Schools of Architecture. As owner of Jelani Design & Associates he has designed and patented numerous consumer electronic products and interior designs for executive aircraft and buses. His clients include major corporations, heads of state and entertainers.

I studied and obtained a M.S. degree in Elementary Education in 1953 while serving as Assistant Director of the Placement Bureau at Tennessee State University. In 1959-60 I was awarded a Southern Education Foundation scholarship to pursue an EdS degree in Elementary Supervision at George Peabody College, now merged with Vanderbilt University in Nashville. My mother and sister graciously agreed to take care of my sons in order for me

to take advantage of this great opportunity. Upon graduation I was offered and accepted the position as an assistant professor in the Department of Administration, Curriculum and Instruction at Tennessee A & I State University. I pursued additional studies in Language Arts at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL. During the summers of 1963 and 1964 I was a visiting professor of Education at Texas Southern University in Houston and Prairie View State University, respectively.

In 1969 I moved to Washington, DC, to accept a position as an associate professor in the Dept. of General Studies at Washington Technical Institute (now the University of DC). I was fortunate to meet a wonderful man whom I later married, named Henry L. Taylor, Sr., PhD. He was the Civil Rights Coordinator in the United States Department of Agriculture, Department of Rural Electrification Administration. My last place of employment was at the National Education Association in the School Finance Division as Research Specialist from 1970-1986. After sixteen years, I looked forward to retirement so I could be free to enjoy my life without an every day schedule and continue to travel at leisure. The word “work” became a dirty word and when presented a one-year advance bonus and early retirement, I happily accepted.

Since retirement I have traveled extensively both domestically and internationally with my sister and family. I have had the good fortune to visit many countries in six of the seven continents. South Africa, the Holy Land, Greece, seeing the Great Wall of China and the Panama Canal will long be remembered. It was shortly after our visit to the Panama Canal that it was granted independence from the United States. I recently returned from touring Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. My volunteer activities are many and varied. In my quiet moments as I look back over these 90 plus years, I try to find hope for the tomorrows of our youth and especially for my daughter, three sons, one granddaughter, four grandsons, two great grandsons and one great granddaughter whom I pray for daily. Fortunately all my grandchildren are enjoying careers including a vice-president and lending manager of a major bank, auditor, neurosurgeon, martial arts studio owner and night manager of a fitness center.

As the world continues to change, I am ever grateful that my family did not have to experience discrimination as I did when authorities at Northwestern University refused my admittance in the college dormitory, or being asked to leave via the kitchen door from a restaurant while attending a class breakfast as a graduate student at Peabody College or turned away from a non African American hospital after an automobile accident. Racism was harsh during the years we were locked out of the mainstream but it managed to make me stronger and more determined.

Although I grew up in a segregated community during the years of the Great Depression, my parents, teachers and other “Negro” adults created a community that was full of activities. These activities included regular



**Figure 1**

*Arthurayne J. Welch-Taylor*  
(Image courtesy of Arthurayne J. Welch)



**Figure 2**

*Arthurayne J. Welch-Taylor*  
(Image courtesy of Arthurayne J. Welch)



**Figure 3**

*Welch Family Photo (Seated from bottom left to right) James and Reginald (Standing from left to right) Robert and Melvadeen*  
(Image courtesy of Arthurayne J. Welch)



**Figure 4**

*2009 Visit to Dubai. Welch-Taylor, Sister Carol and daughter, Melvadeen (center)*  
(Image courtesy of Arthurayne J. Welch)

church programs, YWCA membership, social clubs and well-chaperoned school and Saturday night dances. I can vividly remember my parents taking our family to symphony orchestra concerts, the park, and family outings. Every Sunday our parents loaded us up in what was referred to as “the gospel chariot” to attend Sunday school, morning worship and in the afternoon the Baptist Young People’s Union (BYPU). We sometimes speak of the “good old days” when people were concerned about their neighbors. How I wish we would become more community and civic oriented and engage in organizations to break down the disparities in education, health, wealth and opportunities. I still have hope that the next generation will accomplish this.

# CULTURE, COMMUNITY AND THE POLITICS OF MUSLIM SPACE

ZAIN ABDULLAH, PH.D.

## Abstract

*In the late 1980s, the area on and around 116th Street in Harlem was severely plagued by vacant storefronts, drug activity and crime. With the rapid migration and settlement of West African Muslims into New York City, outward displays of traditional clothing designs, masjids (mosques), and ethnic businesses created a new sense of community and altered the local public sphere. This article explores the politics of Muslim space, by which I mean the bodily activity or built environment that signify and sustain Muslim identity, and how African immigrants deploy culture as a resource in the construction of community life in Harlem.*

When Amadou Diallo was killed in a hail of bullets shot by four New York City police officers, a New York Times article revealed that his Guinean countrymen feared losing not only their life to police brutality, but also feared losing their “culture” to assimilation.<sup>1</sup> For many, the destruction of one’s customs constitutes a social death, a fate far worse than the demise of a single individual.<sup>2</sup> To preserve their values and cultural practices, African immigrants engage in the “invention of tradition,” in the language of Eric Hobsbaum, seeking to create traditions and institutions that sustain their sense of community in urban spaces like New York.<sup>3</sup> The media blitz also revealed that Diallo belonged to a large and expanding West African Muslim population. Unlike most African migrants arriving in the mid-sixties who spoke English and had Christian leanings, this new wave is predominately French-speaking and Muslim.<sup>4</sup> This distinction, however, says little about the cultural complexity of this new population, which comprises both a range of African languages (spoken along with French) and religious orientations.

While these immigrant populations are rapidly increasing in cities like Houston, Atlanta, and Los Angeles, New York has been an initial point of entry, and their Islamic practices have created a new “Black Mecca” of sorts.<sup>5</sup> Most are Wolof, Fulani, Malinke or Dyoula speakers from Senegal, Guinea and Côte d’Ivoire, with an expanding Bambara population from Mali. Somali Muslims from East Africa are also present but less numerous, among a smaller number of Muslims from Arab-speaking countries. Longtime African-American Muslims practice versions

of both traditional and less conventional Islam, against a backdrop of Black churches and Afrocentric venues. In his *Black Pilgrimage to Islam*, Robert Dannin chronicles some of this history for African-American, Sunni (orthodox) Muslims. And my recent work, *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem*, provides a contemporary look at West African Muslims who are attempting to navigate this religious and cultural landscape.<sup>6</sup> But what does it mean to preserve one's traditions or forge community ties in such a dense environment? And what role does culture play in all of this?

The Arabic inscribed on many West African masjid awnings, for instance, does more than identify them as Islamic places of worship. More so, the Arabic signage equally symbolizes their unique presence among Muslim communities in locales such as Harlem as well as the larger Muslim world. But it is their African routine (the African products sold near the masjid entrance, the African languages spoken before and after services, the ethnic attire worn to prayers) that allows us to understand how culture is linked to the built form and how communities actively conceptualize the space they occupy (Figure 1). In fact, this spatial behavior signifies a new kind of engagement with the pre-existing material world of Harlem. By converting storefronts and old commercial outlets into “venues of the spirits,” as Robert A. Orsi writes, religious migrants “dramatically re-placed themselves on cityscapes that had been explicitly designed to exclude them or to render them invisible or docile.”<sup>7</sup>

In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre argues that people from Muslim and less-developed countries “are seeking to slow down industrialization so as to preserve their traditional homes, customs and representational spaces from the buffeting of industrial space and industrial representations of space.”<sup>8</sup> In a similar vein, Africans in Harlem create a Muslim space that helps prevent the loss of their identities. But what impact does this have on the wider community? In his work on the prison system, Michel Foucault reminds us of how architectural structures can act as a means of control, particularly for members within a community, and become a symbol of domination for outsiders.<sup>9</sup> And while some residents welcome the site of African masjids and businesses, others view these structures with scorn and contempt.

Beginning in the early 1990s, the arrival of over 100,000 Africans to New York has led residents to dub Harlem “Little Africa” or “Africatown.”<sup>10</sup> There has even been a street sign hung at a major intersection in downtown Harlem that reads “African Square” (Figure 2).<sup>11</sup> Other regions have been named by Africans themselves such as, “Fouta Town”—a term indicating a heavy Muslim Fulani settlement.<sup>12</sup> In 2003, my formal mapping of the area revealed that there were over seventy-five African businesses and institutions (including five African masjids) in



**Figure 1**

*Masjid Aqsa Awning with African Women selling products by curb  
Photo © Zain Abdullah 2006  
(Image courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 2**

*African Square Sign © Zain Abdullah 2007  
(Image courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 4**

*African Muslim clothing performance amid deli and liquor stores in public space © Zain Abdullah 2007  
(Image courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 5**

*African women publicly marching in Islamic dress in Harlem as spectators watch © Zain Abdullah 2007  
(Image courtesy of the author)*

the vicinity of 116th Street alone.<sup>13</sup> Masjids and other “sacred sites,” Louis P. Nelson writes, “rouse in adherents a sense of belonging, and they do so by reminding the individual of their place in a body of social relationships.”<sup>14</sup> By occupying vacant buildings and setting up their own institutions, West African Muslims have infused their presence into the urban landscape of Harlem. This article explores this Muslim space, by which I mean both the bodily activity and built environment that signify and sustain a Muslim identity, and how African immigrants in New York City deploy their “culture” as a means for maintaining a sense of community.

### **Embodied Space**

This discussion on Muslim space must begin with how African bodies constitute the initial markers of culture and community. In New York Masjid, Jerrilynn D. Dodds discovered that while Muslim communities in New York raise funds to build better facilities, the masjid “architecture means nothing.”<sup>15</sup> This is certainly not to suggest that the structure and aesthetic design of masjids are unimportant. But unlike many churches, where images and decorative elements can encourage spiritual practice, the masjid abstains from interfering in religious acts, embodying each adherent as an individual site for divine encounter. For this reason, Setha M. Low, in her discussion on masjids in the cities of medieval Spain, quotes John Brookes saying that “[t]he traditional Islamic concern is primarily for the feel of space within [...]. The result is an internal architecture, inseparable from the fabric of the city, less concerned with buildings in space, more with space itself.”<sup>16</sup> In this sense, Africans themselves embody Muslim space and engage the public arena as markers of an Islamic culture and community.

Because Westerners tend to view Islam as an Arab religion, many are oblivious to the Muslim identity of African immigrants. But few can miss the flutter of African robes or wide-sleeved, boubous with tasseled hats or gele head wraps as African Muslims stroll along New York streets. This sartorial practice both asserts Muslim presence and transforms public space. “[T]he practice of walking in the city is a matter of telling one’s own spatial stories,” Fran Tonkiss argues, “drawing on a mobile and private language of the streets.”<sup>17</sup> This spatial behavior, Tonkiss goes on to say, “highlights the interplay between social relations, material forms and subjective positions in the city.”<sup>18</sup> It also helps to mark social boundaries and allows newcomers, who may be in dispute with residents about community borders, to establish their own parameters.<sup>19</sup>

In a way similar to Pierre Bourdieu’s discourse on the multidimensionality of space, the world these new immigrants construct is heavily nuanced.<sup>20</sup> Many African Muslims view the public wearing of traditional clothing as a religious act. For outsiders, however, this attire clearly identifies them as African but not necessarily as Muslim.

Still, African clothing is defined by what it does rather than what it is. Doran H. Ross, for example, argues that the kente cloth of Ghana was “made for movement” and was meant to be “danced.”<sup>21</sup> And when the athan or call to prayer sounds in Harlem, Ivorian Muslims and others dressed in flowing, Islamic robes rush to pray in nearby African masjids. Not only is the ethnic dress indicative of their Islamic affiliation and respective countries, but, when combined with the movement of responding to the call to prayer in this new setting, the clothing contributes to a performance of Muslim identity, publically establishing a direct correlation between the African community and their Islamic activities. That is to say, Western residents are typically unable to recognize the religious or Islamic underpinnings of African clothing in Harlem. But the politics of space, as Fran Tonkiss writes, is based on how “individuals exercise their spatial rights while negotiating the spatial claims of others.”<sup>22</sup> In *Visibly Muslim*, Emma Tarlo asserts that “regional clothing traditions around the world are themselves in a state of flux and have long been caught up in complex histories of colonization, fashion, and reform.”<sup>23</sup> All this suggests that bodily adornment stakes a unique claim on space and, given the combined performance by African immigrants of donning cultural/religious dress while engaging in Islamic practices, it also establishes the contours of a new Muslim presence in New York City (Figure 3).

For West African Muslim women, their traditional wear can be read differently by insiders and outsiders. In her work on Islam in secular spaces, Jocelyne Cesari writes about how a European official “declared that in Islam the veil was a political symbol of female submission rather than an actual religious requirement.”<sup>24</sup> However, just as boubou clothing can signify more than African identity by the way it embodies Muslimness as well, any intransigent views that ossify the hijab as a symbol of oppression misses the subtle ways this Muslim head covering marks a community of sisterhood and female empowerment. The Islamic clothes African Muslim women embody can delineate where one community begins and another ends. Moreover, their distinctive dress and headgear underscore a womanly bond, and a sense of belonging is forged even among strangers because their sartorial practice infuses space with an Islamic sensibility (Figure 4).<sup>25</sup>

As space markers, their African and Black identities are likewise apparent in this same costuming. Moreover, the Muslim space this community constructs is shot through with several African ethnicities. While the Senegalese may follow their own ethnic style of dress, one that indicates a composite of African and Islamic forms, the Malinke adheres to a somewhat different arrangement. Furthermore, Mandingos differ in how they wear their clothing from the Fulani, who can be distinguished from the Hausa or Bambara and so on. At the same time, this ethnic differentiation is changing, as African immigrants are realizing that their separate ethnicities matter little in a country



**Figure 5**

*Impressive structure of Masjid Malcolm Shabazz*

© Zain Abdullah 2006

*(Image courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 6**

*The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood's awning with red-black-and-green emblem above Arabic inscription*

© Zain Abdullah 2010

*(Image courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 7**

*The mosaic design of the Islamic Cultural Center of NY*

© Zain Abdullah 2008

*(Image courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 8**

*Futa Islamic Center*

© Zain Abdullah 2010

*(Image courtesy of the author)*

that characterizes them simply as “Black.” Meanwhile, African-Americans, adopting African style clothing as a way to reclaim their heritage, are creating overlapping spatial identities. African Muslim clothing practices, then, signify a major way they spatialize their cultural concerns and mark the public arena as Muslim space. Still, the sacred spaces of masjids reflect another important aspect of identity construction, and they often erect social boundaries few outsiders care to cross.

### **Masjid Space**

Until recently, most Muslim immigrants relegated religious activities to the inner sanctum of home-style, Quranic study circles and nondescript places of worship, such as a room or basement within a private home or unmarked storefronts. As Pnina Werbner writes of Muslim immigrants in the UK, Islamic practices were “confined within fortresses of privacy, [...] and these fortresses protected immigrants from external hostility.”<sup>26</sup> The outward visibility of contemporary masjids, however, brings the Muslim community face-to-face with the society at-large. This gives the sacredness of masjids a public character. In *Deconstructing the American Mosque*, Akel Ismail Kahera has argued that “the American urban mosque is a public place that must respond to social and cultural as well as religious needs.”<sup>27</sup> But how does such a private place, a site reserved for devoted practitioners, enact such a public character?

Masjid Malcolm Shabazz, for example, is a huge three-story corner building on 116th and Lenox Avenue (now Malcolm X Boulevard) in Harlem. Because it towers over the residential and commercial buildings in the area, its overpowering structure—like that of cathedrals—was meant to produce a sense of awe and grandeur for Muslims and other community members.<sup>28</sup> Its massive green dome and arched panel windows were designed to draw attention, symbolizing an alternative religious experience and a very different lifestyle for outsiders (Figure 5). The eastern motif also serves to culturally link its African-American members to the larger Muslim world. Despite strained relations with African immigrants, however, Masjid Shabazz has begun a shift away from an Asian or Arab design and now favors an African aesthetic. Jerrilynn D. Dodds cites Imam Kareem at Masjid Shabazz as saying, “This dome has served us well, but we are thinking that in our next mosque we might turn to West-African Islamic architectural style.”<sup>29</sup> As African-American Muslims at Masjid Shabazz look to visually assert their African heritage in the masjid’s next design, any structural alteration will obviously impact Harlem’s spatial and cultural dynamics, and likely change public perception of Masjid Shabazz’s identity in the community. The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood (MIB), an African-American Muslim community space on the corner of St. Nicholas and 113th, is

housed in a community-based brownstone resembling many other buildings on the block. The Islamic signage, however, marked with a red-black-and-green, Black nationalist emblem, reveals the race-consciousness MIB has historically shared with the larger community (Figure 6). Unlike Masjid Shabazz, the style and structure of MIB reflects a different relationship with the neighborhood. Rather than overwhelm the public arena, it punctuates the space with an Afro-Islamic aesthetic.

On Third Avenue between East 96th and 97th, the Islamic Cultural Center of New York (ICCNy) is less imposing. Despite its rich modern structure and Arabesque design, the edifice is dwarfed by the many high-rise apartment buildings surrounding it. And because it is situated in a high-rent district, its more working- to middle-class congregation typically resides in other areas. In contrast to Masjid Shabazz, whose members live in the area and share a common racial makeup and class status with their area neighbors, the Muslim community at ICCNY is heterogeneous and originates from all over the Muslim world. The socio-cultural significance of ICCNY, however, differs from most masjids in New York City. “Religion,” Nilüfer Göle argues in her work on Islam in public space, “provides an autonomous and alternative space for collective self-definition of Muslims in their critical encounter with modernity.”<sup>30</sup> And given its mosaic design, its modern structure, and multicultural population (e.g., an array of ethnic dresses, foreign sounds, and exotic scents), ICCNY accents the Upper East Side with a cosmopolitan flair, a presence that complements the community’s bohemian lifestyle rather than competes with it (Figure 7).

In Harlem, Masjid Aqsa, which is located on 8th Avenue near W116th, Masjid Salaam on W116th near 7th, which closed by the end of 2007, and the Futa Islamic Center on 8th near W137th, collectively present a very different case. Because these West African Muslims are typically multiethnic, entrepreneurial and working-class, their masjids blend quite evenly into Harlem’s commercial district. In fact, because a number of African immigrants attending these places of worship may be undocumented, the unassuming character of the masjids brings less attention while, at the same time, affording worshippers a vital link to the Islamic community. Still, this is not to suggest that these masjids are any less visible. The five daily prayers, ongoing cultural events, and lightweight vending give the area a distinctive quality. The Futa Islamic Center is similar to MIB in that it hosts a community that is primarily of the same ethnicity, since the majority of Futa’s members are from Guinea. Masjids Aqsa and Salaam, however, cater to a diverse group and their signs represent this universal posture. As a title, *aqsa* is an Arabic reference to the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, the third holiest site in Islam, and *salaam* connotes “peace,” a general greeting among all Muslims and a divine attribute of God in Islam. Using more common titles for their masjids, rather than any ethnic affiliation, is clearly emblematic of the diverse populations (who possess an array of cultural practices) attending



**Figure 9**

*Thousands from the Murid Sufi order march in the Bamba Day Parade to make a public display of their culture and community © Zain Abdullah 2007  
(Image courtesy of the author)*



**Figure 10**

*The office of the Senegalese Association of America next to a Senegalese 99¢ store on 116th Street near 7th Avenue © Zain Abdullah 2010  
(Image courtesy of the author)*

these sites and the politics of responding to their needs in a complex commercial area (Figure 8).

On the corner of Edgecombe Avenue and 137th, Masjid Touba, under the auspices of the group's House of Islam, is a reference to the holy city of this community's Sufi order in Senegal, and it occupies a different place in Harlem overall. As African Muslims at Touba, the majority of its members adhere to the principles of a Sufi order or what is termed Sufism, which comprises a specific set of spiritual practices designed to increase Muslim faith. There are many branches of Sufism (Islamic mysticism) in Islam, but the path (tariqa) members of Masjid Touba follow is called Muridiyya. Cheikh Amadou Bamba, the group's founder, also founded the city of Touba in 1887, and, besides the masjid, many may adopt the name for their businesses as well.<sup>31</sup> While Masjid Touba is a large, four-story corner building, it maintains a residential demeanor, since there is no sign posted on the outside except on special occasions. The only hint that the building is a masjid is the communal activity that hums around it for weekly, Friday jum'ah prayers or during religious events and holidays, when hundreds of celebrants fill the street wearing their best multicolored African attire. Of course, one must keep in mind that residential areas may keep strict codes preventing their building's use for ecclesiastical or business purposes.

Unlike the masjids in commercial areas, the location and physical presence of Masjid Touba underscores how the community embeds itself into the social life of the neighborhood. On holidays like eid al-adha, the festival of sacrifice following the hajj or annual pilgrimage, Murids (followers of the Muridiyya Sufi order) visit neighbors offering food charity. At the same time, the needs of the community at Masjid Touba are less public than private. The annual Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day Parade, however, captivates the city and makes the cultural and religious presence of the Senegalese Muslims all too visible.<sup>32</sup> Besides this, their *L'Association des Sénégalais d'Amérique* (Senegalese Association of America), on 116th near 7th Avenue operates daily and works to better relations between Murids and the neighborhood community (Figures 9 - 10). Altogether, the range and scope of masjids in urban America reflect a very complex cultural arena. The African Muslim's engagement with their masjids creates a Muslim space and alters the urban terrain. Still, these masjids do not operate in isolation. They are intimately linked to other social, cultural and economic structures.

### **Built Space**

The masjids and the Muslim businesses surrounding them are closely connected. Throughout the day, when the athan is heard coming from the masjids, shop owners, workers and association members in the vicinity routinely slip in and out. Others, unable to leave, make prayers insides their shops, reemerging after fifteen minutes

to find customers waiting at their glass doors. One might also find a woman in hijab making thiker, reciting God's praises, or prayerfully prostrating behind the counter. In these and other ways, the African masjids and their businesses maintain a symbiotic relationship. Yet, by the same token, the African-owned variety stores, boutiques, and restaurants create a built space that speaks to their cultural values and community ties. In other words, unlike masjids, the entrepreneurial culture at these shops extends beyond formalized ritual practices and informs these Muslim communities' ongoing daily routine. It is in this sense that African Muslims in Harlem are able to embed themselves into the larger community and experience an attachment to place.

The social life Muslims experience at the shops is also a visual manifestation of their Islamic community and the values that support it. "Religious texts provide the sacred core of the community of Muslims," Nilüfer Göle asserts, "however, [...] the religious text, in itself, is not sufficient. Communal practices of the belief are at the center of the community construction." She goes on to say that "[b]y performing communal activities, such as praying, eating together, engaging in conversation [...], and economic activity in accordance with Islamic precepts, a sense of community is constituted."<sup>33</sup> The many restaurants operated by Harlem's African Muslims are unlike most eateries in the city. African restaurants, for example, inscribe identity by employing religious symbols or wording like halal to guarantee that the food is authentic and religiously "pure." The stores may also bear the name of spiritual guides (Mbacke), the holy city in Senegal, Touba, or a combination of both. On the other hand, some businesses like Restaurant Le Baobab, a popular Harlem eatery on 116th near Malcolm X Boulevard, uses familiar imagery like the African Baobab tree to publically indicate its more common character. Other African restaurants employ names that demonstrate a cross-cultural appeal to both an African clientele and the local American population, such as the Senegalese-owned Blues Café directly across the street from Le Baobab. The African dishes, products and services consumed in these establishments are communal acts that perpetuate African cultural beliefs and construct a shared Muslim space.<sup>34</sup>

These businesses and the cultural behavior around them also create a vibrant "street presence," as Robert A. Orsi described it. Orsi argues that the "Catholic urban experience in the cities of the industrial North and Midwest was so thoroughly articulated to place that Catholics identified their neighborhoods by the names of their churches."<sup>35</sup> Catholics, Orsi continues to say by quoting the work of John T. McGreevy, "'used the parish to map out—both physically and culturally—space within all of the northern cities,' creating disciplined moral worlds in which 'neighborhoods, parish, and religion were constantly intertwined.'"<sup>36</sup> In a similar way, African businesses have "street presence," because roving bodies, masjid life, and built forms intersect one another and heavily mark the

physical environment with a Muslim awareness. This mass presence, however, certainly creates what Fran Tonkiss terms an “architecture of authority.” Tonkiss says, “One of the most visible ways of exercising power, after all, is to occupy or to control space; [...] urban architecture is readable as a ‘landscape of power,’ a built environment of dominance and subordination that is also legible in the spatial assertions of a corporate skyline, the decaying hulks of redundant urban industries, or in the blank spaces of deteriorated zones that capital has rejected.”<sup>37</sup>

While the businesses, masjids and associations do not belong to a single group but instead represent several ethnic communities from West Africa, their combined presence as African and Muslim underscores a common identity to outsiders. As such, many longstanding African-American residents stated feeling under siege. Harlem has long been celebrated as a Black cultural center, particularly since the glory days of the Harlem Renaissance during the 1920s and 30s. With the decline of this cultural movement, Harlem suffered. Discriminatory practices such as redlining, which indicated the minority areas where banks would not invest, exacerbated urban decay in Harlem and other black neighborhoods. Today, the ongoing effects of rapid gentrification have likewise proved harmful for poor and working class residents and many Blacks and Latinos are being routinely displaced, because they can no longer afford to reside in Harlem. A massive influx of African immigrants into an already depressed area has created some resentment on the part of previous residents. This feeling, undoubtedly, has much to do with how African immigrants have so pervasively impacted the physical environment. However, following the Cheikh Amadou Bamba Day Parade on July 28, 2001, a series of lectures were held at the United Nations in which a Senegalese official announced that “by opening legitimate businesses and demonstrating their economic empowerment, Murids hope to earn the respect of Harlem locals.” Because they are in a capitalist society, he argued, “economic power is a crucial symbol of success.”<sup>38</sup> While some residents may be impressed, many more have expressed their disdain. In the end, built spaces can certainly foster cultural values, mark community boundaries, and help to maintain a Muslim sense of self, but this can also backfire and produce unintended consequences.

### **Reflections: Culture, Community, Space**

I end this discussion by raising a few points about culture, community, and space. In *Design Criteria for Mosques and Islamic Centers*, the authors write that immigrants must “translate their memories” and “display a self-conscious synthesis between culture and environment.”<sup>39</sup> This statement, as I read it, raises an important question about the nature of culture itself and the myriad ways researchers refer to it. That is, what does it really mean when

immigrants “self-consciously” imagine their culture as something that can be synthesized with something else? Further, what does it mean to engage in a public display of this synthesis? As I mentioned at the outset of this article, West African Muslims in Harlem feared losing their “culture” to the pressures of assimilation and violence. As a result, many consciously chose to preserve it by wearing African clothes, worshiping in African masjids, and consuming African cuisine and products. In essence, culture is viewed as an “object,” something tangible or something that could somehow be put forth into the public sphere. “The cultural work of migrants, refugees, and exiles,” David H. Brown writes, “does not involve merely the simple implementation of original, traditional, and bounded cultural contents on unproblematic urban frontiers. Some groups must patch together remembered and encountered cultural resources and devise strategies and tactics of cultural reterritorialization in order to ‘transform space into place,’ including the invention of new ‘homelands.’”<sup>40</sup> This “cultural work” of which Brown speaks underscores a crucial point about how immigrants may objectify their culture—or view culture as an object to be used as a resource for survival.

In a multicultural America, diverse groups are encouraged to invoke their unique cultures, acting them out on the public stage for evaluation or, at times, for entertainment. In American anthropology, however, a discipline where the “culture concept” has been a primary area of study, the idea of culture has been understood in numerous ways. Early on, culture was perceived as a key source for understanding how people organized themselves in relation to their environment, giving rise to the field of cultural ecology. Later, others were concerned with an idea of cultural evolution or how cultures and societies change overtime, which essentially questions the relationship among social structure, values and the development of more efficient technologies. But the most recent idea that culture is a system of symbols and their meanings, as David Schneider and Clifford Geertz formulated in the 1970s, is informative for what it reveals about how African immigrants navigate their way through urban America.<sup>41</sup> In *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, Richard Handler endeavored to understand the politics around how the Québécois treated culture as a “thing,” allowing them to “stand back and look at themselves, their ideas, their symbols and culture and see it as an entity.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, Handler discovered that at folkloric events—like “fairs, festivals, feasts, and dances—culture and tradition became objects to be scrutinized, identified, revitalized, and consumed.”<sup>43</sup> In this sense, when Africans speak of efforts to preserve their “culture” against change, what is meant is an effort to actively engage in the process of identity formation or the politics of representation. In this way, culture is treated as a tangible object that can be converted into religious or economic assets, which in turn might support claims for collective rights and self-determination. While there is little room to explore the scholarly literature on

the objectification of culture here, I argue that researchers must not simply study the “culture” of a group but also include an investigation into how groups deploy the notion of culture itself.<sup>44</sup>

In a post-Fordist, deindustrialized world immigrants are entering a new urban terrain unlike that of their predecessors. In the past, community and an attachment to place could be based on the sharing of long-term employment, local shopping, and fraternal organizations. But in an age of globalization, when people increasingly appear to be more transient than stable, what defines a community? “As a category,” Homi Bhabha writes, “community enables a division between the private and the public, the civil and the familial; but as a performative discourse it enacts the impossibility of drawing an objective line between the two. . . . [and] disturbs the grand globalizing narrative of capital, displaces the emphasis on production in ‘class’ collectivity, and disrupts the homogeneity of the imagined community of the nation.”<sup>45</sup> In Bhabha’s view, community as a concept and its lived reality are two separate things, because the latter is a construction that responds to or acts upon the exigencies of the world. Moreover, as Fran Tonkiss suggested, when we talk about community we are often talking about a racialized entity. In other words, one rarely speaks of community as it refers to the majority population such as the “white” community. So, she argues, community is typically a euphemism for race or a “code for ‘race’, a politer means of lumping people together on the basis of skin or culture,” she argues, “a way of identifying a problem.”<sup>46</sup> It is not my intention to exaggerate the point of these categories but to remind readers that any discussion of them as static entities is problematic. This is particularly the case when a category like community might obscure the fluid collectivities or flexible arrangements people create.

Lastly, in her edited work on Muslim space, Barbara Daly Metcalf defines these spaces as “embodiments of Muslim ritual and practice.”<sup>47</sup> That is, anywhere one can ascertain a Muslim presence constitutes a Muslim space. Elsewhere, I have added that a Muslim space is comprised of “the social relations (e.g., Muslim gatherings or ritual performances), cultural productions (e.g., reinvention of old narratives or traditions) and physical objects (e.g., Islamic clothing, Muslim architecture, incense aroma, Islamic bumper stickers) that signify and sustain a Muslim presence or identity.”<sup>48</sup> Despite these attempts to delineate how Muslims map an Islamic identity onto spatial forms or what one might call the spatialization of Islam, it is important to note that the boundaries that indicate Muslim space are, in fact, mutable and unfixd. Because they are cultural constructions, Louis P. Nelson reminds us that “the meanings of sacred spaces are an unstable construction of human context and vary as those contexts change.”<sup>49</sup> As masjid participants engage one another in the ongoing travails of social life, the boundaries marking Muslim space will simultaneously be defended and contested, redrawn and erased, improvised and reimagined. Either way, scholars

will do well to realize that our analytical categories like culture, community and space must be interrogated with as much rigor as is employed for the people and places we study. The rewards for doing so will result in a much deeper understanding of the societies we research.

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Amy Waldman. "Killing Heightens the Unease Felt by Africans in New York." *New York Times*, (1999) Feb. 14: 1
- <sup>2</sup> Orlando Patterson wrote about the social death of enslaved Africans and illustrated how the plight of these people was in some respects just as devastating as the destruction of millions crossing the seas. See Orlando Patterson. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
- <sup>3</sup> Eric Hobsbaum. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge University Press, 1983).
- <sup>4</sup> The size of the West African Muslim community in New York City varies, depending on the source one uses. For an overview of their presence, see Zain Abdullah. "African 'Soul Brothers' in the 'Hood: Immigration, Islam and the Black Encounter." *Anthropological Quarterly* (2009) 82/1 Winter issue: 37–62. For a fuller treatment, see Zain Abdullah. *Black Mecca: The African Muslims of Harlem* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- <sup>5</sup> For the resettlement of African immigrants into other American cities like Houston, see Sam Roberts, "More Africans Enter US Than in Days of Slavery," *New York Times*, Feb. 21, 2005 (Sec. A, pg 1). The term "Mecca," a major pilgrimage city in present-day Saudi Arabia and the holiest site in Islam, is used in popular parlance to describe any place as the center of an activity. During the Harlem Renaissance of the 1920s and 1930s, Harlem was called the Negro Mecca or Black Mecca for its high cultural and social development.
- <sup>6</sup> Robert Dannin. *Black Pilgrimage to Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Abdullah, *Black Mecca*.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert A. Orsi. "Introduction: Crossing the City Line." In Robert A. Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Indiana University Press, 1999), 41.
- <sup>8</sup> Henri Lefebvre. *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1991), 122.
- <sup>9</sup> Michel Foucault. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Random House, 1975).
- <sup>10</sup> Waldman, "Killing Heightens the Unease Felt by Africans in New York,"; Janet Allon. 1995. "A Little Africa Emerges Along 2 Harlem Blocks." *New York Times*, Sunday, Dec. 3, sec. 13:6.
- <sup>11</sup> The "African Square" street sign which was posted in 1983 is still present. The location of the sign is on several corners at the intersection of Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard or 7th Avenue and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard, which is W125th Street. For more information, see Sanna Feirstein. *Naming New York: Manhattan Places and How They Got Their Names* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 153.
- <sup>12</sup> Sylviane Diouf-Kamara. "Senegalese in New York: A Model Minority?" *Black Renaissance / Renaissance Noire* (1997) 1(2).
- <sup>13</sup> Zain Abdullah. *Islam, Africa, and the Black Encounter: Boundary Shifting among African Muslims in Harlem*. PhD Dissertation (New York: New School for Social Research, 2004), see Appendix.
- <sup>14</sup> Louis P. Nelson. "Introduction." In Louis P. Nelson, ed., *American Sanctuary: Understanding Sacred Spaces* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006), 8.
- <sup>15</sup> Jerrilynn D. Dodds and Edward Grazda. *New York Masjid: The Mosques of New York City* (New York: Power House Books, 2002), 65-67.
- <sup>16</sup> SETHA M. LOW. *On the Plaza: The Politics of Public Space and Culture* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 92.
- <sup>17</sup> Fran Tonkiss. *Space, the City and Social Theory: Social Relations and Urban Forms* (Malden, MA: Polity Press), 128.
- <sup>18</sup> Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, p. 94.
- <sup>19</sup> Joseph Sciorra. "'We Go Where the Italians Live': Religious Processions as Ethnic and Territorial Markers in a Multi-ethnic Brooklyn Neighborhood," in Robert A. Orsi, ed. *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), 328.
- <sup>20</sup> Pierre Bourdieu. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14 (1985): 734.
- <sup>21</sup> Doran H. Ross. *Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African American Identity*. Vol. 2. (Los Angeles, CA: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1998), 9
- <sup>22</sup> Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, 59.
- <sup>23</sup> Emma Tarlo. *Visibly Muslim: Fashion, Politics, Faith* (New York: Berg, 2010), 7.
- <sup>24</sup> Jocelyne Cesari. "Islam and the Secularized Nation: A Transatlantic Comparison," in Nigel Biggar and Linda Hogan, eds., *Religious Voices in Public Places* (New York: Oxford University Press), 301.
- <sup>25</sup> Emma Tarlo quotes several women who felt that their hijabs helped them create a community, even among women unfamiliar with each other. See Tarlo, *Visibly Muslim*, pp. 37, 54, 55, 64, 89.

- <sup>26</sup> Pnina Werbner. *Imagined Diasporas among Manchester Muslims: The Public Performance of Pakistani Transnational Identity Politics* (Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press, 2002), 117.
- <sup>27</sup> Akel Ismail Kahera. *Deconstructing the American Mosque: Space, Gender, and Aesthetics* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press), 107.
- <sup>28</sup> Michael Tavinor. "Sacred Space and the Built Environment," In Philip North and John North, eds., *Sacred Space: House of God, Gate of Heaven* (New York: Continuum, 2007), 31.
- <sup>29</sup> Dodds and Grazda, *New York Masjid*, 90.
- <sup>30</sup> Nilüfer Göle, "Islamic Visibilities and Public Sphere," In Nilüfer Göle and Ludwig Ammann, eds., *Islam in Public: Turkey, Iran, and Europe* (Istanbul: Istanbul Bilgi University Press), 16.
- <sup>31</sup> For more information on Muridiyya and the city of Touba, see Cheikh Anta Babou. *Fighting the Greater Jihad: Amadu Bamba and the Founding of the Muridiyya of Senegal, 1853-1913* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007) and Eric Ross. *Sufi City: Urban Design And Archetypes in Touba* (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2006).
- <sup>32</sup> For a comprehensive examination of the parade, see Zain Abdullah. "Sufis on Parade: The Performance of Black, African, and Muslim Identities," *The Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2009) June 77:2.
- <sup>33</sup> Göle, "Islamic Visibilities and Public Sphere," 31.
- <sup>34</sup> Kahera, *Deconstructing the American Mosque*, 114.
- <sup>35</sup> Orsi, "Introduction," 50.
- <sup>36</sup> Ibid. Also see, John T. McGreevy. *Parish Boundaries: The Catholic Encounter with Race in the Twentieth-Century Urban North* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 15, 22.
- <sup>37</sup> Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, 60.
- <sup>38</sup> Abdullah, *Black Mecca*, p. 199 [The quote refers to the uncorrected proof copy, but interested readers may see the beginning of chapter 8, "Family Matters."]
- <sup>39</sup> Akel Kahera, Latif Abdulmalik, and Craig Anz. *Design Criteria for Mosques and Islamic Centers: Art, Architecture, and Worship* (Burlington, MA: Architectural Press), 8.
- <sup>40</sup> David H. Brown. "Altered Spaces: Afro-Cuban Religions and the Urban Landscape in Cuba and the United States," in Robert A. Orsi, ed., *Gods of the City: Religion and the American Urban Landscape* (Indiana University Press, 1999), 157.
- <sup>41</sup> For the original sources that correspond to this brief genealogy of the culture concept, see Julian Steward. *Theory of Culture Change: The Methodology of Multilinear Evolution* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1955); Leslie White. *The Evolution of Culture: The Development of Civilization to the Fall of Rome* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959); David M. Schneider. *American Kinship: A Cultural Account* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1968); Clifford Geertz. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books 1973).
- <sup>42</sup> Richard Handler. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 14.
- <sup>43</sup> Handler. *Nationalism and the Politics of Culture in Quebec*, 12.
- <sup>44</sup> For studies on the objectification of culture, instructive and recent works include Roy Wagner. *The Invention of Culture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press 1975); Franseca Merlan. "The Objectification of 'Culture': An Aspect of Current Political Process in Aboriginal Affairs." *Anthropological Forum* (1989) 6(1), 105-116; Virginia R. Dominguez. "Invoking Culture: The Messy Side of 'Cultural Politics'" *The South Atlantic Quarterly* (1992) 91, (Winter, 1), 19-42; Neriko Musha Doerr. "Global Structures of Common Difference, Cultural Objectification, and Their Subversions: Cultural Politics in an Aotearoa/New Zealand School." *Identities: Global Studies in Culture and Power* (2008) 15: 413-436; Steffen Dalsgaard. "Claiming Culture: New Definitions and Ownership of Cultural Practices in Manus Province, Papua New Guinea," *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* (March 2009), vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 20-32; Robert Baron. "Sins of Objectification? Agency, Mediation, and Community Cultural Self-Determination in Public Folklore and Cultural Tourism Programming," *Journal of American Folklore* (2010) 123(487): 63-91.
- <sup>45</sup> Homi K. Bhabha. *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge 2004), 330.
- <sup>46</sup> Tonkiss, *Space, the City and Social Theory*, 9.
- <sup>47</sup> Barbara D. Metcalf. "Introduction: Sacred Worlds, Sanctioned Practice, New Communities." In Barbara Daly Metcalf, ed., *Making Muslim Space in North America and Europe* (Berkeley: University of California Press 1996), 11.
- <sup>48</sup> Abdullah. "African 'Soul Brothers' in the 'Hood," 58, note 5.
- <sup>49</sup> Nelson, "Introduction," 9.

# THE VALUE OF EDUCATION AND THE AWARENESS OF DIVERSITY AND CULTURE<sup>1</sup>

DR. NECIA DESIREE HARKLESS

## **Abstract**

*The purpose of the essay is to examine the value of education and the diverse cultures that became successful during the early 17th and 18th centuries; 19th and 20th centuries including the 21st. The focus will be on the dominant American culture, the African American culture and their symbiotic relationships during the above periods.*

## **Introduction**

The emerging consciousness of the Americans in the 21st century is one of demythologizing the past, questioning the establishment or power structure, and shaping new paradigms of justice, truth, freedom, and equality for all. The core American principles were forged during the pre-colonial period with the Magna Carta and eventually the Constitution of the United States with its pertinent amendments.

It is the intent of this essay to examine the value of education and the diverse cultures that became successful during the early 17th - 18th centuries ( 1776), 19th century ( 1876 ), and the 19th - 20th centuries ( 1976 to the present). Throughout this essay the main focus will be on the dominant American culture and that of the African American and their symbiotic relationships during the above periods. These dates are water sheds in the crucible of change with federal initiatives and popular uprisings. In revisiting the past it may be possible to envision the future not with fear but with hope. 1876 is a focal point because it was the founding date of PrairieView A& M University, my mother's Alma Mater.

## **The Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries**

Education in the pre-colonial and colonial eras followed the approach of Massachusetts “to preserve and perpetuate the culture of the settlers and to prevent social and cultural disorganization, inherent to pioneer life in the New World. Early on, the well known endowed schools, the perennial school dame the New England Primer and Latin grammar education was preparation for college.”<sup>2</sup>

The provincial governments of Puritan New England, when families failed to educate their children and to supervise their morals, took steps to require parents and masters to train children in letters, vocational arts, religious doctrine, and the laws of the land. Those men that were to pursue the ministry, business and other professional or political fields required additional education in the classics to prepare for college entrance.

There were variations in the education of the children because of availability and kind in the middle colonies because of the religious sects: Quaker, Lutheran, Catholic, Dutch reformed and Anglican who met the educational needs of their own children. The Indian and Negro were oftentimes ignored. However, at first they were of concern because of humanitarian interests, which declined as the dominant society became more complex. The Christianizing of the Indian was mentioned in the charter when it was granted to the colonies.

The population of America in the 17th and 18th centuries was diverse, since many of the indentured class came from Britain, Ireland, Scotland, Germany, Africa, and the West Indies. It is interesting to note that “over half of all white immigrants to the English colonies of North America consisted of indentured servants.”<sup>3</sup> There is a difference between indentured servitude and that of slavery. The indentured servant was a laborer under a signed contract for usually three to seven years, in exchange for free passage, food, and accommodations. They were known as the indigent class and they were able to learn a trade and to read and write while in servitude. Indentured servitude was a way of increasing the number of colonists to the free world. The population was also increased by voluntary migration and Convict Labor (Georgia). In Massachusetts, the indentured were those of the unemployed poor of England and religious instruction was often part of the contract to insure that they would follow the Puritan way of life. The indentured in Virginia, also from Britain, shared a more commercial culture where religion did not play a large role in everyday life, although Anglican in religious outlook. In the early years of colonialism, most black and white indentured labored together in the fields. The first census of 1790 records that the total population after independence had risen to 3,929,214. The total indentured servants were 3,199,727 and the total number of slaves was 694,207<sup>4</sup>.

Slavery was not defined racially; the term ‘indentured’ in the records was always that of servant. Slavery was slow in developing as it followed the economic laws of supply and demand for the planters of tobacco, rice, and cotton in the south; and the mercantile interest of the north. Massachusetts was the first to recognize slavery legally, Virginia followed in 1662, and then the Carolinas in 1705. At the time of Declaration of Independence most people of color were deemed property or chattel. During this period of transition to independence the ideas of the value of education varied ‘with the cry of reform and meeting the needs of all the citizenry.’



**Figure 1**

*Necia Desiree Harkless with her parents, Ethel Esther Williams, Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College (1915), and James McConnell Harkless, Tuskegee Agricultural and Mechanical College (1914)*  
(Image courtesy of Necia Desiree Harkless)



**Figure 2**

*A class in dressmaking, Hampton Institute, Hampton, Virginia*  
(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)



**Figure 3**

*African American school children and teacher, studying leaves out of doors*  
(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)



**Figure 4** *African American school children facing the Horatio Greenough statue of George Washington at the U.S. Capitol*  
(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)

Anthony Johnson (African) was considered an American Colonial as he was one of the original 20 laborers brought to Jamestown in 1619 as an indentured servant. In 1640 he was free from indenture as he purchased his freedom for himself and his wife. “Anthony became very prosperous as a free man and imported five servants of his own in 1651 for which he was granted 250 acres.”<sup>5</sup>

According to court record, “a young man was an apprentice to serve his master until the age of 21 during which time he would learn the trade of a blacksmith and to read and write, etc. A young lady upon the death of her parent was bound to a Thomas Bentley until the age of 18. She would receive “the rudiments of the Christian Religion, to learn to learn... to read perfectly”. It was also noted that during this same period, “a Charles Purdy of South Carolina be bound to a Mrs. Planter until 21 years of age, and that the Parish pays her ten pounds in consideration of her giving him a years Schooling”. Later a letter was written regarding another man to the court “to be absolved of his contract to his villainous apprentice because of his affection for Drink, Play and Scandalous Company. He mentioned that he had a Negro boy whom he was teaching the Printing business of which he was the sole proprietor.”<sup>6</sup> The court records indicated the concern about education for the indigent.

As the slave was apart of the family it was up to the master to take on the task of saving the savage soul. In 1706, Cotton Mather wrote to the slaves “to be good and faithful servants in bondage in order to enjoy the great privileges of heaven” which was embodied in his catechism of the Ten Commandments. Cotton Mather was the clergyman and historian who led the Salem, Massachusetts, Witch trials.<sup>7</sup>

In some of the colonies the status of the slave was ambiguous as “he was considered property and persons before the law, they could acquire, receive, hold, administer and transfer property, sue or be sued, be tried by grand and petit juries, with the right to pass upon trial jurors, and offer testimony against anyone”.<sup>8</sup> The first official ownership of land by an African in Philadelphia came about when William Penn deeded 100 acres of land to his former slave, Old Sam, in 1701.

In 1774, Abijah Prince, the founder of Sunderland, reportedly owned 100 acres in Guilford, Vermont. In 1778, Rev. Peter Williams founded the first African American church in New York. In 1808, he published his oration on the slave trade. Williams was intimate with slavery as he was born a slave. He was purchased by John Aymar, an expert cigar maker. Later Williams was purchased by New York’s John Street Methodist church and considered the church his master. He became sexton of the church and purchased his freedom, repaying the church that purchased him.<sup>9</sup>

It is no longer a secret about the abilities of the Africans who were brought to America as indentured

contractors and slaves. The cultural traditions of the African are now a matter of record through the arduous efforts of archeologists, anthropologists, linguists, historians, ethnographers, and the media. Contrary to early beliefs about the “noble savage with bestial natures and total illiteracy”, the Africans brought needed skills to the new world. However, Arnold Toynbee, historian, had the same belief when he wrote “Black races alone have not contributed too positively to any civilization as yet.” He did not know or refused to recognize the extent of their civilization, which has existed since ancient times. It is known Africans were master builders, great militarists with knowledge of iron, animal husbandry, and agriculture. They developed their own language and culture and conquered Egypt in 750 BC, establishing the Twenty-fifth dynasty of Black Pharaohs.<sup>10</sup>

Just as the European brought their cultures to the Americas, the African also brought with him cultural memories only to be subverted by his servitude. It was not necessary for the missionary to bring Christianity to Africa in the 1800’s. In the 1960’s the Polish archaeological team excavated a great Christian Cathedral at Fares at the southern tip of the Second Cataract, dating back to 700 AD.<sup>11</sup>

In the period following the War for Independence between 1776 and 1820 there was a premature nationalism emerging as the Americans strived to achieve a degree of cultural and economic independence. It was evidenced by the change in the textbooks. The traditional English readers, spellers, and grammars were no longer palatable. It was noticeable in the change of titles and the content of exalted Americanism seen in the early American writers. It also represented a new milestone in America reflecting Republicanism, which was quite nationalistic; pointing to the Free Education movement that could assist in achieving the national objectives of happiness and prosperity. “The early American compilers of books recognized that the printed word was a potent weapon in promoting cultural independence and in promoting learning among all classes.”<sup>12</sup>

The state would become the purveyor of education as was the church in the Colonial period. The scions, of intellectual landscape, were preparing the new nation for a school system that would bind together the nation, unify, and promote cultural development. The state and the church recognized the value of education in developing youth. Both understood the doctrines of loyalty, responsibility, and orthodoxy.

The problems of diversity were a very great concern. How do you arrive at the ‘*Unum* through the *pluribus*’? There were many plans, schemes and questions posed by many learned men. One was public education for the talented proposed by Jefferson, which reminds me of W.E.B. Dubois and his “Talented Tenth”, both of which are elitist in concept but very radical in their time. Benjamin Rush questioned the practicality of the two dead languages, Greek and Latin. Vassar sums up the new thrusts aptly “the demand was for a new kind of education that concerned

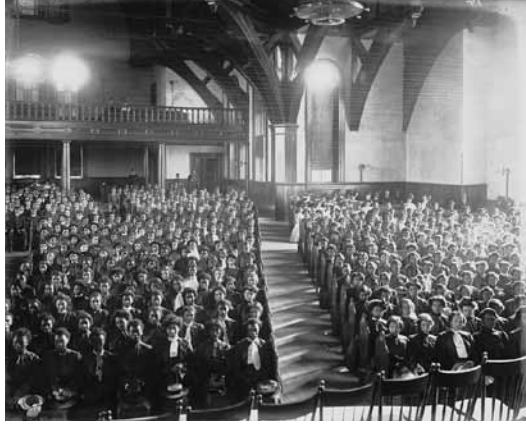
itself with promoting the welfare of the classes rather than promoting the welfare of the classics, that met the needs of the new nation, and helped to promote its cultural, economic, and political potentiality.”<sup>13</sup>

The Raleigh Register, August 20, 1808, reports that John Chaves, Presbyterian minister and Negro teacher, informed his employers and the citizens of Raleigh that the present quarter of this school will end... and the next quarter will begin on the 19th. He will at the same time open the Evening School for the purpose of instructing Children of Color (free), as he intends, for the accommodation of some of his employers, to exclude all Children of Color from his Day School...terms of teaching the white children will be as usual, two and a half dollars per quarter; those of color, to put one dollar and three quarters. Those who think proper to put their Children under his care, may rely upon the strictest attention being paid, not only to their Education but also to their Morals, which he deems an important part of their education. Two days later the editor of the paper wrote: We attended an examination of the free children of color (Chav[e]s School)... To witness a well regulated school, composed of this class of persons – to see them setting an example both in behavior and scholarship, which their white superiors might take pride in imitating, was a cheering spectacle to a philanthropist.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Nineteenth Century**

As the new crops in the colonies of tobacco, cotton, rice, and sugar made the planters rich, during the 17th and 18th centuries, slavery became a necessary evil and an important economic institution. 1808 was a signatory year, as Britain abolished slavery to the Americas and to the Caribbean in the period between 1834 and 1838. However, the back of the trade was not broken until 1862 in Carolina and the rest of the states, 1865.

The complicity between the church and the states in slavery has been acknowledged and is beginning to be better documented. “Today, the legacy of the slave trade continues to have consequences and remains at the root of some acts of racism, discrimination and intolerance against the black community as well as the underdeveloped countries and communities from which people were abducted”.<sup>15</sup> One of the heroes of the Anglican Communion was James Augustus Holly, the first African American Bishop to Haiti in “May, 1861... he and hundred-odd persons who accompanied him assumed that they were headed for a land of hope realized. In Holly’s reckoning the gift of African-Americans to Haiti would be political stability. And the gift of Haiti to African-Americans would be racial dignity.”<sup>16</sup> Holly was born in Washington D.C. into a free African American family in 1829.



**Figure 5**  
*Interior view of chapel filled with female students  
at the Tuskegee Institute*  
*(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)*



**Figure 6**  
*Interior view of library reading room with male and female  
students sitting at tables, reading, at the Tuskegee Institute*  
*(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)*



**Figure 7**  
*W.E.B. (William Edward Burghardt) Du Bois, 1868-1963*  
*(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)*



**Figure 8**  
*Booker T. Washington, circa 1895*  
*(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)*

Several milestones were made in African American education in spite of the barriers to learning of the African American, slave or free, between 1776, the Revolutionary War or War for Independence and 1865, the Civil War or euphemistically speaking, War for the Independence of the Slaves. Between 1854 and 1856 while education successes were being documented, Mrs. Margaret Douglass became a martyr because of her benevolence and charity to “a downtrodden race”. She flaunted the law and was imprisoned for teaching slaves or free colored people to read and write. The case was reported by the Daily Southern Argus (Norfolk Virginia) February, 1854.<sup>17</sup>

The perils and advantages of slavery were being tested on all sides in the north and the south until it erupted into the Civil war. It was after the Civil War that education, justice, and equality met its greatest challenges during the Reconstruction period (1863-1877). Eric Foner, historian, calls this period America’s Unfinished Revolution. This brief period of time was seen by many historians as an attempt to reconstruct the American system to reflect the goal of all men being equal before the law. In 1935, W.E.B. Dubois published his *Black Reconstruction in America*, which was construed as “an idealistic effort to construct a democratic, interracial order from the ashes of slavery, as well as a phase in a prolonged struggle between capital and labor for control of the South’s economic resources.”<sup>18</sup>

The Reconstruction era was poised to answer the questions that the war had made. The Civil War had forced the nation to look at its own nationality. It was confronted with the knowledge that “it has hardly had a distinct consciousness of its own National existence Thus, two societies each divided internally, entered the Reconstruction years to confront the myriad consequences of the Civil War.”<sup>19</sup> After 205 years, historians are recognizing the distinct role that the black soldier played in the winning of the war, and also helped to define its consequences. The black man assumed a new status by his performance and was perceived differently throughout the nation. His role in the North had changed but in the south in had remained the same. Although free, the society continued to insist that his labor was free. Most importantly his own perception of himself had changed as he began to understand the role he had played in gaining his own freedom. The training and education that he received in the army equipped him with the tools of literacy and bargaining chips in the free market of the north.

With the help of the intellectuals and reformers of the north and the efforts of the Freedmen’s aid movement, in an attempt to help the government cope with the daunting problem of fitting the destitute blacks into a system that was on the brink of decay, over 100 teachers were able to teach over 200,000 black pupils. Medical relief was also a result of the voluntary activities of the women. My mother, Ethel Esther Williams became a member of the Woman’s Christian Temperance League to help combat the abuses on women and children because of the intemperate use of alcohol. Other women began charitable services that would later become social welfare institutions of the

future. Large number of orphans had to be rescued, housed, fed, trained, and taught moral and Christian principles.<sup>20</sup>

Emancipation did not negate the mental anguish that was produced by the racial tension that was inherent within the twin societies of free and slave but free. Freedmen in the North were advised in the spirit of the Great Tradition espoused by General Sherman “forsake menial occupations, educate themselves and their children, and live unimpeachable moral lives, thus ‘elevating’ the race, disproving the idea of black inferiority and demonstrating themselves worthy of citizenship.”<sup>21</sup> General Sherman was instrumental in freeing many of the slaves in South Carolina in 1862 and Georgia 1864 when he captured Atlanta. It was through the Carolina Special Field Order 15 that the Sea Islands and a portion of Charleston became the domain of the freed slaves with the settlement of each family on forty acres and the mule would come later for labor intensification. The value of education became a priority for Charlotte Forten, third generation free African American teacher from Boston, when she came to Beaufort to help establish the first school for the children of the emancipation.

A Baptist minister, Ulysses Houston, was the first to take advantage of the order after his group met with Sherman. He led “1,000 blacks to Skiddaway Island, Georgia where they established the self-governing community with Houston as the “black governor.” By June, in the region that had spawned one of the wealthiest segments of the planter class, some 40,000 freedmen had settled on 400,000 acres of “Sherman’s land.”<sup>22</sup> Freedom and dignity had become a possibility.

This acquisition of land did not mean that blacks did not work because their perception of freedom was the ability to become a free laborer. Since the land had been given to them, it was assumed that it was earned by their own labor. The freedom won by Toussaint L’Ouverture for the Haitians was the hope that he had bestowed on the African American slave. Land ownership and education were necessary in the minds of the slaves as a means to determine their freedom and to have autonomy with control over their own lives. This definition of freedom was unknown to the planter class about their slaves and it became apparent that their former notion of, jolly and gay, was flawed.

The struggles over land ownership and labor between the two societies that survived the Civil War was underpinned with fear of displacement in the labor market, the change of rolls within the classes which portended the future riots, burnings, and hangings of the newly emancipated. The sudden change of the social structures was costly in mind and body to the whole nation. The federal initiatives enacted upon during this period were the first of this kind for any nation and it was a bold and courageous step to redress the losses of war and unify a nation that was fractured. Under the reconstruction Acts (March, 1867) and statutes the following main actions were to

be executed with some opposition and vetoes of President Johnson. This act took one year for its initial meeting. Since the Republicans outnumbered the Democrats they brought with them the radical moral sensibilities of the men from New England and those that had migrated into the rural North and upstate New York, Ohio's western reserve, northern Illinois and the upper Northwest.

The Blacks in the Constitutional Conventions were a total of 265 out of 1000 and severely underrepresented. They formed a majority of the Louisiana and South Carolina Conventions and nearly forty percent in Florida, but only one fifth in Alabama, Georgia, Mississippi, and Virginia and 10 percent in Arkansas, North Carolina, and Texas. Nearly half of the delegates and those born free were from Louisiana and had a monopoly on positions. Forty delegates served in the army, the largest group was ministers. The artisans were barbers, shoemakers, blacksmiths, masons and carpenters. There were also a number of teachers. The freeborn of South Carolina and Louisiana were politically astute, very articulate, and could hold their own in debate oftentimes outmaneuvering the white constituents. A few blacks owned substantial amounts of property. One hundred forty-seven members of the Convention were elected to state legislatures and nine went to Congress.<sup>23</sup> Most of the Republican minds were fixed on free labor in their small farming communities and the zeal of abolitionism. The house was assured by Thaddeus Stevens, an iron manufacturer, that Negro equality was acceptable but "that does not mean that a Negro could sit on the same seat or eat at the same table with a white man. That is a matter of taste which every man should decide for himself."<sup>24</sup>

The new northern entrepreneurs of the emerging industrial nation filled the ranks of Republicanism. The blacks in the south clung to Republicanism as a beacon of hope for equality, and the ballot became their Ship of Zion. The diversity in politics was a product of economic motives and myriad needs based on ethnic and social consideration. The Democrats and the Ku Klux Klan were almost synonymous, as they were considered the military arm of their party. Needless to say, they opposed anything that did not uphold white supremacy, and the negation of freedom of the black man. The Klan was to convince people not to vote through hooded violence. By 1871 North Carolina, Tennessee, and Georgia were Democratic states. The elite planters were almost unanimously Democrat. The Republicans were known as Carpet Baggers as they came from the North with all their possessions in bags and the Scalawags were the white southerners who supported Reconstruction. Over all, the vote and labor was the determination of strife in the South. The mantra in many places was "Vote and don't come back to work."<sup>25</sup> The goals of the Constitution Conventions were reached and set the stage for future Civil Rights in spite of the opposition.

The Black Codes of 1865 were reviewed by Jessica Mc Elrath in *Your Guide to African American History*. The Codes, in essence, were crafted to curtail the advances and freedoms of the African American slave that was in the process of being freed. These laws controlled all aspects of the freedman life. Differing in each state they included

northern apprenticeship laws, and the Freedman Bureau, and the War Department regulations. These codes limited marriage, freedom of speech, vagrancy restrictions, choice of occupations, freedom of movement, and the right to sell and hold property.

The main players on the Reconstruction Stage were rewarded in many ways. The 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments guaranteed the right of all African Americans as citizens. The Morrill Act which became the Federal vehicle to allow the creation of land grant colleges introduced in 1857, passed in Congress in 1859, vetoed by President Buchanan and finally refigured and re-submitted by Morrill in 1861, and signed into law by Abraham Lincoln in 1862. The purpose of the Land Grant College was spelled out in the act:

Without excluding other scientific and classical studies and the military tactic, to teach such branches of learning as are related to agriculture and the mechanical arts, in such manner as the legislatures of the States may respectively prescribe, in order to promote the liberal and practical education of the industrial classes in the several pursuits of and professions in life.<sup>26</sup>

This was a major step in the historical development of education, which aided all of the Union States and later extended to the Confederate States who had seceded. Each eligible state received a total of 30,000 acres of federal land as of the 1860 census. Michigan State was the model for this great experiment and gift.

An appalling need became apparent with the examination of the 1870 census that disclosed the state of ignorance in the country. One-fifth of the 6,000,000 people over the age of ten, could neither read nor write. Of the 8,000,000 voters who mold our institution, and control our political destinies, 1,600,000 could not even read the ballots they cast. In looking at the illiteracy map of the eleven southern states in 1870 the total population of 9,487,386, the numbers for the colored people were 3,989,032. This mass of ignorance was suddenly raised to the dignity of citizenship, in the midst of the impoverished and bankrupt former owners.<sup>27</sup>

While the south was being demoralized from the war and the population shift, the North was being transformed by its new industrial labor force. Three million immigrants, poured in from Europe to become a part of the new industrial age. They filled the industrial centers of Chicago, grain and meatpacking, and Detroit, automobiles and the assembly line. The shift toward new machine tools, iron, steel, pig iron created the new capitalists and robber barons, heady with the fruits of their labor, and the completion of the railroad network. At the same time the West was booming with mining gold or silver, lumbering, commercial farming by indentured Chinese and migrant Mexicans, Indian wars and subjugation.

During this time one does not only show the value of education materially. The measure of success and endurance during such stressful times should go to Tuskegee and Prairie View, both Agricultural and Mechanical Colleges, both as land grant institutions during that same period. *[Both are now universities, have become the model Land Grant agencies for the twenty-first century as Michigan State was the model for the nineteenth century. It is compelling that Prairie View is not stagnant but continues to grow in leadership and has been a Beacon for the Alumni through the years. It was founded in 1876 and is a historically Black College, and a member of the Texas A&M University System. It is the second oldest state sponsored institution of higher education in Texas.]*

According to Foner, the Reconstruction ended with the election of Hayes in 1877. “Yet the institutions of the Civil war—the black family, school and church—provided the base from which the modern civil rights revolution sprang and for its legal strategy, the movement returned to the laws and amendments of the Reconstruction.”<sup>28</sup> The successes of the Post-Reconstruction have been minimized. Both black and white veterans of Reconstruction survived on federal patronage. The successes of the African American need to be highlighted because they became blueprints for the Harlem Renaissance.

### **The Twentieth and Twenty-First Centuries**

The wealth and prosperity of the Nation beacons to three million immigrants to fill the sweat shops of the textile industry and increase the growth of the labor force with the shifts toward iron, steel, machine tools and other highly mechanized branches of capital interest. America had gained second place to Great Britain who started the Industrial Revolution in the nineteenth century. To assess the value of education and the awareness of diversity and culture in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries is like being jet propelled into space with outdated tools for assessment. Education for success and happiness was still a goal. Free public education, in the minds of the youth, was the ultimate desire; but not even necessary to earn a living in the factories or on the farms. The shift to urban

areas and to specificity of commerce and banking called for educational advancement to become a more productive citizen. Industrial training, commercial training, and college education were the ladders to success with the exception of the entrepreneur who was willing to take a chance in the new industrial and technological age and the genius to help create new use of the resources. World War I and II moved the nation from isolationists to globalists in the information or cybernetic age with the cooperation of the military industrial and educational complex.

The American experience began as an immigrant society and it continues that process today. The new immigrants are from Mexico, Asia and the Pacific Rim Isles. The U.S. Census Bureau confirms the process. Today, the population of the United States has grown to 375 million, the third largest in the world; the growth is closely allied with *E pluribus Unum* and striving for a greater democracy. The educational gap between the different ethnic classes, black and white, rich and poor, the issues of segregation, desegregation, integration, and affirmative action continue to be driven by federal initiatives of the past that are still in process and have not been completely actualized, such as, *Plessy v Ferguson*, the 1954 *Brown v the Board of Education*, Civil Rights Act of 1964, Title VI to facilitate integration by cutting funds of school districts not in compliance; Title I funds for compensatory education for low income children and Bilingual education.

Education in the Twenty- First century is more imperative now than it was in the nineteenth century to the slave as s/he became free and it will be even more critical as the United States attempts to hold its place as a democracy in the world economy. What educational reforms will take precedence in the future will determine its greatness and educational excellence.

**ENDNOTES**

- <sup>1</sup> This essay is dedicated to my mother, Ethel Esther Williams, Prairie View Agricultural and Mechanical College (1915), and my father, James McConnell Harkless, Tuskegee Agricultural and Mechanical College (1914) and to their parents who sacrificed much in integrity and vision and received so little.
- <sup>2</sup> Rena L. Vassar, ed., *Social History of American Education, Vol. I : Colonial Times to 1860*. Chicago, 1965, 3-4.
- <sup>3</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org>
- <sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org>
- <sup>5</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org>
- <sup>6</sup> Vassar, *Social History of American Education*, 41-53
- <sup>7</sup> Charles L. Blockson, *The Liberty Bell Era: The African American Story*, Seitz and Seitz, Philadelphia, 5-6
- <sup>8</sup> Blockson, *The Liberty Bell Era*
- <sup>9</sup> Blockson, *The Liberty Bell Era*
- <sup>10</sup> Necia Desiree Harkless, *Nubian Pharaohs and Kings: The Kingdom of Kush*, Indiana, Author house publisher, 2006
- <sup>11</sup> Harkless, *Nubian Pharaohs and Kings*, 193
- <sup>12</sup> Vassar, *Social History of American Education*, 100
- <sup>13</sup> Vassar, *Social History of American Education*, 103
- <sup>14</sup> Vassar, *Social History of American Education*, 269-277
- <sup>15</sup> *Anglican-Episcopal World*, Trinity 2007, issue No.126, p.27
- <sup>16</sup> *Anglican-Episcopal World*, 15
- <sup>17</sup> Vassar, *The Reconstruction of American Education*, 270-276
- <sup>18</sup> Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: 1863-1877*, Harper and Row, New York, 1988, xxi
- <sup>19</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 34
- <sup>20</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 69
- <sup>21</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 95
- <sup>22</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 71
- <sup>23</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 318 - 319
- <sup>24</sup> Foner, p. 231
- <sup>25</sup> Henry Gates and Kwame Appiah, ed., *Africana*, Perseus Books, New York, 1999, 1598-1599
- <sup>26</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org>
- <sup>27</sup> Vassar, Rena, *The Social History of American Education Vol. II : 1860 to The Present*, Chicago, 1965, 39
- <sup>28</sup> Foner, *Reconstruction*, 813

# ART IS NOT CREATED EX-NIHILO: ORDER, SPACE & FORM IN THE WORK SINAN & PALLADIO.

AKEL ISMAIL KAHERA, PH.D.

## Abstract

*The aim of this paper is to discuss the concept of order, space and form in the aesthetic language of two 16th century architects: Sinan Abd al-Mannan (d. 1588) and Andrea di Petro della Gondola aka Andrea Palladio (d. 1580). Sinan and Palladio were both engaged in a lasting search for an aesthetic language firmly grounded in order, space and form. However both Sinan and Palladio were also influenced by Byzantine and Roman building traditions, the projects they completed in the period 1540-1580 reflect an architectural style, which was unmistakably a part of the political, social and cultural Renaissance and Ottoman milieu. Because the Renaissance and Ottoman epochs during which both men lived were ideologically different, we use this as means to interrogate the meaning of order, space and form?*

## Origins & Space Conceptions

Sigfried Giedion the author of *Space, Time and Architecture*, describes the organizing principles of architecture under the rubric of a “space conception.”<sup>1</sup> He argues that a “space conception” is the manner in which a spatial form (an edifice) is perceived, realized and is embodied with meaning. The earliest “space conception” can be seen in Egypt, Sumer and Greece. They are typified by architectural themes representative of the interior and exterior space of an edifice.<sup>2</sup> Giedion further attempts a time line for the earliest architectural “space conception” and its subsequent development. The first “space conception” corresponds chronologically to the civilizations of Egypt, Sumer and Greece; the next period lasts from the rise of the Roman Empire to the end of the 18th century; and the last period from the industrial revolution to the present day. It was in the latter period that the optical revolution altered the way we see an object in a field; hence one and two point perspective were subsequently enhanced by the science of optics.<sup>3</sup>

From the beginning, the “order of things” can be seen in philosophy, and the construction themes of Greek edifices. It could be argued that the Greeks were not concerned with the art of construction per-se but with the discovery of fundamental truths.<sup>4</sup> Thus, nature was thought of in terms of how it can be *ordered*, or *given order*, and the Greek temple was built to house or to honor a deity, which in-turn would give *order* to the existence of human

life and its natural environment or the Gaia (the world).<sup>5</sup>

For instance the Parthenon (*House of the Virgin*) was built (c.447-432 B.C.) for the honor and love of the goddess Athena-goddess of wisdom. It is a simple rectangular chamber with an entrance porch flanked by columns. The sides and the ends being surrounded by a colonnade of Doric columns. A body of traditional mathematical formulas ensured the harmony of proportions of the edifice, which occupied an acropolis or a temple site on a steep hill overlooking the city.

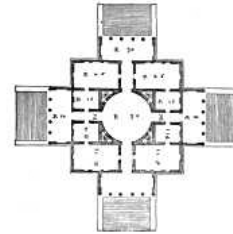
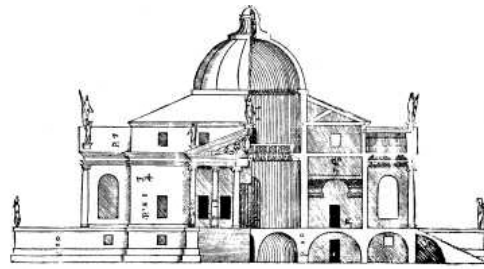
In Roman and Byzantine building traditions a different idea connected with Greek order emerges in the basilica a large Roman building originally used to transact business and legal matters. The basilica, is essentially a transformation of the Greek forum, it was a rectangular roofed hall with an interior colonnade with an apse at one or both ends. A series of successive and contiguous spaces from the exterior to the apse or the inner most space consisted of an entry portal, atrium, narthex, nave, aisle, bema and the apse. Another innovative type of Roman building, the Pantheon was built in 27 B.C. (originally a temple to all the gods) and later rebuilt in 2nd. Century A.D. by Hadrian.<sup>6</sup> Its large hemispherical brick dome represents the apogee of Roman architecture. The dome is 141 ft. in diameter was based on a sphere; the heights of the walls being equal to the radius of the dome (71 1/2 ft.).

With the introduction of the dome the Romans were the first to develop this spatial *form*, which would later be refined by Byzantine builders incorporating it with the pendentive -essential to placing a dome over a square - in the Hagia Sophia (GR., =Holy Wisdom) built at Constantinople (A.D. 532-37).<sup>7</sup> A lofty dome carried on pendentives covers the nave of Hagia Sophia; its weight thus rests on four huge arches and their piers-a *baldachin*, which is a dome canopy on columns.<sup>8</sup> The dome is 102 ft. in diameter (31m) and 184ft. (56 m) high, with a corona of 40 windows flooding the interior with light. The east and west arches are extended by half domes and domed exedra. A vast oblong space is thus created, this space was later adapted as a masjid (mosque) by the Ottoman Muslim conquerors of Constantinople (Istanbul) in 1453.

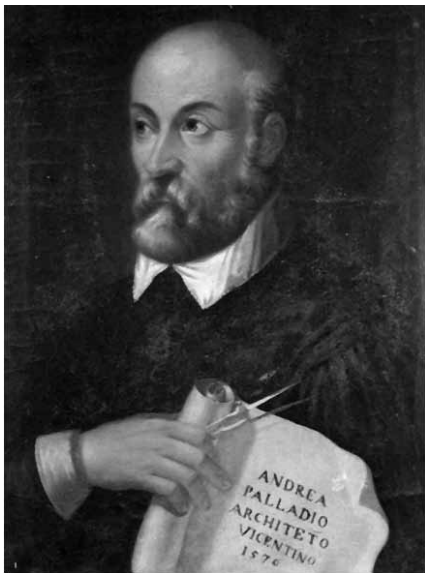
By using the dome as a spatial form to define the interior of the edifice, the “space conception” of the exterior is married with the interior creating a unique Christian edifice, which would influence later Church architecture. At Hagia Sophia the dome takes on a symbolic meaning of the earthly and heavenly majesty of Christ the King and of His representatives on earth.<sup>9</sup> In one sense Constantinople was the “new” Rome and its architecture took up where the old Rome had left off.<sup>10</sup> Hagia Sophia was a “new” space conception a culminating achievement of Byzantine architecture and a *tour de force* an expression of an architectural tradition, which originated in Rome



**Figure 1**  
*Süleymaniye, Istanbul, Turkey*  
(Image courtesy of Library of Congress)



**Figure 2**  
*Villa Rotonda designed by Andrea Palladio*  
Source: <http://www.wikipedia.org/>



**Figure 3**  
*Andrea Palladio*  
<http://www.wikipedia.org/>



**Figure 4**  
*University of Virginia, Rotunda, University, Charlottesville, VA. Historic Buildings Survey. Jefferson thought of the Rotunda as a half-size scale model of the Roman prototype, and he derived his working dimensions from the writings of Andrea Palladio (1508-1580); the name Palladio appears frequently on drawings for the rotunda, written in Jefferson's hand. (Image courtesy of Library of Congress)*

with the Pantheon.<sup>11</sup> For a time the Hagia Sophia and the Church of San Vitale existed side-by-side, in the end it was Hagia Sophia the simpler expression of form and building technique, which triumphed.<sup>12</sup>

Palladio who added his own interpretation of space and order revived the compositional techniques used by the Romans. Sinan took the principles of the dome as an element of “space conception” beyond what already been established at Hagia Sophia, giving it a new definition. We will re-visit the Hagia Sophia and the construction techniques of Roman building traditions later when we discuss the work of Sinan and Palladio.

In the aesthetic principles and the works of Sinan and Palladio we can observe the taste of their clients and patrons. What remains to be deciphered is the manner in which both architects have forged or defined an architectural language using *order, space and form*, which was also *responsive* to the exigencies of time.

### **Precedents & Antecedents**

The Renaissance (1450-1600) was a period during which noblemen, emperors, kings and worldly churchmen promoted and shared secular interest in the arts, letters and architecture. The Renaissance was immediately preceded by Hellenistic, Gothic and Romanesque styles of architecture and the so-called High Renaissance in Italy lasted roughly from the time of Alberti (1404-1472) and it ended with Palladio (d.1580). The rise of secular architecture evolved to great heights during the Renaissance period, which saw the introduction of a new style of building which replaced the dominant Gothic style.<sup>13</sup> Ecclesiastical Gothic architecture had dominated the middle ages--it was costly and slow to build. The Renaissance style, apart from re-working the Classical Roman themes of building was easily constructed, less costly and offered a new aesthetic genre to suit the tastes of worldly church men, noblemen, kings and emperors.<sup>14</sup>

From the court and under the patronage of noblemen would emerge new intellectual ideas, which conveyed vogue trends and tastes in modernity, appealing to the taste of a new Bourgeois society, which had shaken off the yoke of medieval feudalism.<sup>15</sup> Noblemen of the court endorsed these new ideas, which harked back to Classical Roman intellectual thought. For instance the pre-eminent sponsor of the arts were the Medici family, they were wealthy noblemen of Florence, the heart of Renaissance intellectual thought in Italy.<sup>16</sup> Renaissance architecture was rooted in the past, and like Greek and Roman models which had sought *order* through a rigorous use of an architectural style--which was meant to give order to the political disorder of their age--so did the Italians of the High Renaissance who sought to recall past traditions of building and to provide an intellectual and 'humanistic' mode of defining the elements of a building's composition.

Palladio was one of the proponents of this new humanist mode, he like many of the Renaissance architects of his epoch quoted the rules of the Roman architect Marcus Pollio Vitruvius who in the time of Augustus wrote a treatise for an ideal building composition called: *De Architectura (The Ten books on Architecture)*. Palladio himself would also produce his own treatise, which he modeled on Vitruvius's treatise: *Il Quattro Libri dell' Architettura (The Four Books on Architecture)*. The tendency to look back to ancient Rome and to derive inspiration from its architecture was the manner of the day. The interpretations of such rules however, took on a new definition, which did not comply entirely with Roman models, but merely quoted the Roman style of Building.<sup>17</sup> It nevertheless resulted in a “refining mastery” which would permeate and influence the arts, architecture and liberal arts as well; essentially a new “humanism” which relied heavily on the ability to think independently and to claim liberty of thought had emerged.<sup>18</sup>

But the intellectual desire for an authority gave rise to the use of Vitruvius's writings, *De Architectura* that were re-discovered around the 15th. century. In addition, the Italian landscape and especially Rome housed extant Roman buildings of the past, which were easily studied and measured by Palladio, and many of his contemporaries. By measuring they were able to derive the rules, proportions, harmonies and relationships of elements, through archeology a building pedagogy was derived. This was essentially how Palladio began his formal training as an architect.

### **Palladio the Architect**

In 1540 Palladio was given the title ‘Architect’, in the same year he made the first of five trips to Rome the ancient *Urbs*. Subsequent trips were made in 1546-47, 1549 and 1554. He had been an apprentice stonemason from age 13 to 16. From age 16 he worked in Vicenza in a stone masonry shop and was later admitted to the Guild of masons and Carvers. He apparently did well because he was able to get married at age 26 after becoming a builder and a stone carver.<sup>19</sup> We are told that in 1537 he built his earliest building.<sup>20</sup> By 1540 he had acquired his first Patron-Friend, Count Trissino, a member of the nobility of Vicenza who took him to Rome with him and also gave him the name “Palladio”, an allusion to Pallas Athena, Goddess of Wisdom.<sup>21</sup> The name was taken from an epic called *L'Italia Liberata dai Goti* that the count had written. The count him self was absorbed with reviving the knowledge and ideas of the ancient classical world.

Palladio would later acquire the friendship of two other Patrons. Daniele Barbaro (1513-1570) and his brother Marcantonio Barbaro (1518-1595)<sup>22</sup> Marcantonio gave Palladio a commission for the church of

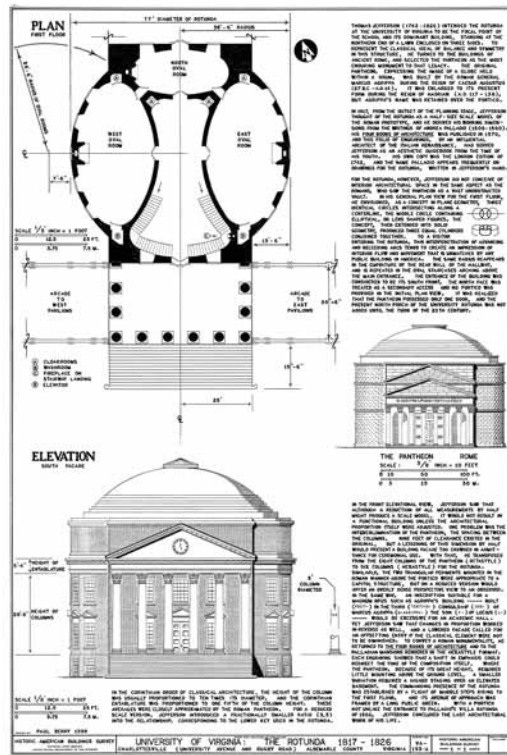


Figure 5

University of Virginia, Rotunda, University, Charlottesville, VA.  
 Historic Buildings Survey  
 (Courtesy of Library of Congress).

The name Palladio appears frequently on drawings for the rotunda, written in Jefferson's hand.



Figure 6

Ornate title page illustration for *Quattro libri dell'architettura* by Andrea Palladio  
 (Courtesy of Library of Congress)

the Redeemer (Il Redentore), and a bridge, which was never built (Rialto).<sup>23</sup> It seemed that Marcantonio was fond of building for upon his death he was re-named *Il Constructore*, the Builder. It was Count Trissino however, who financed Palladio's trips to Rome where he would measure, and draw the ruins, and reconstruct what he saw. Shortly after his first trip, Villa Marcello (1542) at Bertisina was built on Roman principles which were: a pediment, a row of Corinthian pilasters, pediment windows, in-post at the arches, an arched porch with key stones and a flight of steps. These elements would become his so called "Roman vocabulary" which were re-enforced by his many trips to Rome and the inspiration he got from as far away as Nimes, a site of Roman ruins.<sup>24</sup>

Palladio's works may be classified under three main groups. (1) Palaces (2) Villas (3) Churches. He also built a theater and prepared the design for a bridge in addition to writing several books which include; *Le artichita di Roma: A guide to Ancient Rome* (1954); Translations of Caesar's Commentaries and *Il Quattro Libri dell'Architettura* (The four Books on Architecture). The number of villas he built far exceeded the palaces and the three churches and a convent. In 1547 he remodeled an early Renaissance palace at Vicenza - *Palazzo Della Ragione* also known as, Basilica. It is a two-storey building, which employed motifs from an early Renaissance Architect Sebastino Serlio (1475-1554). The Palazzo was laden with Roman grandeur, the main element being a columned screen facade on a heavy building mass. In 1550 Palladio built his first palace in Vicenza, Palazzo Porto. It was a symmetrical plan entirely derived from ancient Roman, the facade was enriched with sculptural ornament.<sup>25</sup> This was followed by a succession of commissions.<sup>26</sup> He also executed several villas beginning as early as 1537 with -Villa Godi -a single structure.<sup>27</sup> Palladio's churches and the one convent he built are: The Convent of Santa Maria Della Carità in Venice (1560-61); Il Redentore, Venice (1576-92); San Giorgio Maggiore (1565-1610); San Francesco Della Vigna (1562).<sup>28</sup>

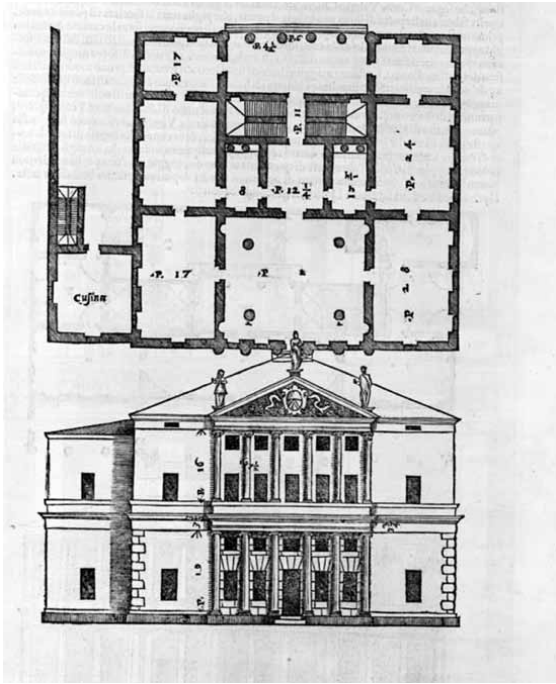
### **Mannerisms and Roman Vocabulary**

In the discussion above we used the term "Roman vocabulary ", which generally describes Palladio's use of an architectural vocabulary of the past, we also noted a "Humanistic" attitude which was *en vogue* during the re-birth of Classical traditions in 16th and 17th century Italy, aptly called, "Renaissance." Palladio's architecture would quote heavily from Roman Classical Traditions (which as we have noted were essentially derived from Greek origins). It did not end here, he would re-define and re-use these past traditions, often verbatim (as a standard feature in a building), or rather he would exercise freedom in the use of the elements, yet still artists and architects of his own epoch influenced his work. His building activity was quite intense during the latter part of the 16th

century and by 1570 he was named architectural advisor to the Republic of Venice a title he had long been denied.<sup>29</sup> No doubt Palladio's theories and style of building rested heavily of the influence of Vitruvius's writings, but he would succeed in re-defining the context of these writings to meet the taste and needs of his many clients and patrons. His use of materials is a clear instance where he departed from Vitruvius. He used brick covered with stucco in imitation of stone; he used several types of rusticated columns and walls, sometimes in combination; he avoided opulent interiors, forbade the use of frescoes in his churches, he relied heavily on a system of harmonic proportions but would often discard the system saying, "there are also other heights for vaults which do not come under any rule and are therefore left for the architect to make use of as necessity required and according to his own judgment."<sup>30</sup>

It is this attitude of independent judgment, which speaks to his "Humanistic" side, and his manner of using what is known from the past. This attitude has been defined by historians as 'mannerism', a term which suggests that the architect may use architectural elements drawn from a previous age with the freedom to re-define and give it new meaning. This is exactly what Palladio did; his use of Roman and Greek column *orders* on the facade of a palazzo or a villa combine Ionic columns at an upper story with a Doric *order* at a lower floor (Villa Pisani-Montagnana). Likewise the use of a Corinthian *order* over (upper level) Ionic (Villa Cornaro) or Ionic order over Doric (Palazzo Chierichati), or an emphasis on rustication at lower floors and to a lesser extent at an upper floor in combination with composite columns (engaged with the facade of the building). His columns were no longer circular but flat, windows were framed with Ionic columns whose engaged shafts were divided by blocks, which reinforce the sense of visual power (Palazzo Thiene).

Palladio's "Roman Vocabulary" was drawn from a genre of elements: tall columns of the three orders Doric, Ionic and Corinthian; or pilasters of the same type set on a base at a lower story; colonnades two stories high, barrel vaults, domes, statues, voussoirs, flights of steps, solid and voids. Using stone, bricks, stucco and several types of rustication he was able to compose the devices of the past, or his "Roman Vocabulary" in a re-defined aesthetic manner. It remains however to discuss how Palladio's "space conception" operates. And how did he actually evolve a genuinely "original" building type using his mannerist-humanist attitude and "Roman Vocabulary"? Palladio succeeded in reviving the old Roman notion of a villa, which had all but disappeared in the Medieval period, and he went further by giving it a re-defined "Roman Vocabulary." In 16th and 17th century Italy the villa was attractive to bourgeois noblemen, the court, worldly churchmen, emperors and kings all of whom were property owners (farms), and many of whom were bankers like the Medici's of Florence. The farm was part



**Figure 7**  
*Floor plan and elevation of a classical style house,  
from *Quattro libri dell'architettura*  
(Courtesy of Library of Congress)*



**Figure 8**  
*Venice, Italy--Panorama from the campanile of  
S. Marco towards S. Maria della Salute  
(Courtesy of Library of Congress)*



**Figure 9**  
*Selimiye, Ederne, Turkey  
(Courtesy of Hulya Aybek)*

of 16th. and 17th. century Italian landscape, by adopting a language for the spatial composition of the villa, Palladio succeeded in re-defining a Classical building type, which would now have the following compositional elements:

- (1) A central hall which was either round, square or rectangular or cross shaped, of which would be four rooms normally fitting into the rectangular frame of the plan.
- (2) The temple facade or front at the center with two or more wings.
- (3) Allowing the building to command a view of the landscape and countryside surroundings by setting it on an elevated platform. (farmlands came right up to the sides of the villa).
- (4) The symmetry of the exterior building facade and its plan using three primary devices, columns, rustication, engaged pilasters, and fenestration.
- (5) Using proportions such as the heights of columns the edifice and openings for doorways and windows to achieve a harmonious ratio.<sup>31</sup>

The finest example of the use of these principles is the Villa Rotunda (1552) on the out skirts of Vicenza, it is an archetypal villa, designed to be seen as part of the landscape. The square plan of the building has an Ionic column portico on four sides (each facade), a shallow dome, and flights of steps on four sides leading up to the column portico. The ratio of these elements has been carefully worked out to give a harmonious proportion to the whole composition. For instance the columns are two feet four inches in diameter at the base and twenty two feet in height; the door way is thirteen feet high; the flight of steps eleven feet five inches above the terrace; the top of the dome is seventy five feet five inches above the terrace.<sup>32</sup> In the villa Rotunda it is the mastery of these elements, which took Palladio's works beyond the narrow "archeological" boundaries of Classical traditions to give it a re-defined spatial composition. It broke him away from the *order, space* and *form* genre of antiquity towards a Renaissance erudition and originality; which was equally in high demand in 16th century Italy by his many gentrified patrons and bourgeois clients.

### **Sinan the Architect**

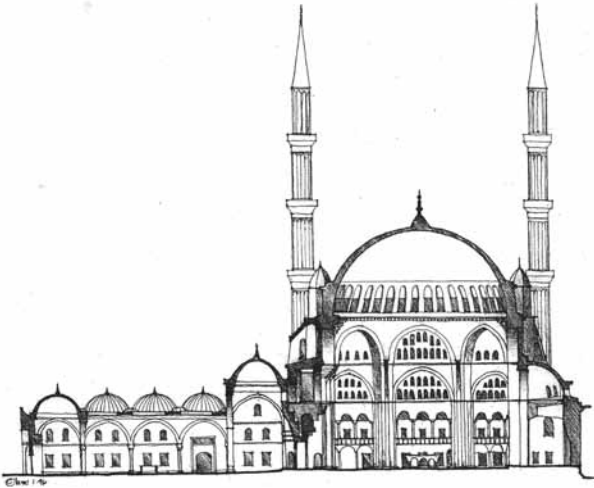
In spite of his training and patronage, Palladio had to compete with several great Renaissance architects, artists and builders for recognition. Unlike Palladio, Sinan's early education and professional development would eventually propel him to become the unchallenged Master Builder of the Classical Period of Ottoman style architecture. (1501-1703). He was further assisted by the fact that building works under the Ottomans was an organized practice and an 'in-house' court function. Architects in private practice were not allowed to build

Royal projects. Thus, some 350 to 400 buildings built by the court during his tenure as Chief Architect of the court would carry his name. Sinan's development begins with him as a builder, a military engineer, enlisted in the military corps (*Janissary*), building bridges, technical works and other utilitarian structures. His early training as an apprentice carpenter and engineer-builder is therefore worthy of consideration with regards to his later development as an architect.<sup>33</sup>

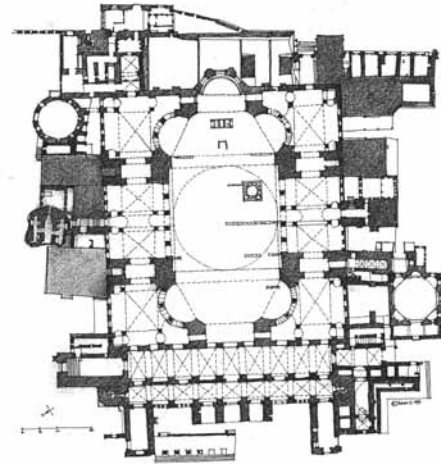
Sinan was born a Christian and at an early age he was conscripted into the Janissary corps where he remained until he was made Chief architect of the Royal court sometime around 1538. The details concerning his conversion to Islam are sketchy but it must have taken place soon after his conscription to the military service in 1512 at age 22,<sup>34</sup> where he was trained and educated in building practices, engineering and religious studies. Several authors place Sinan's birth date some time in the year 1490.<sup>35</sup> The date is apparently conjectural.<sup>36</sup> He was born in the village of Agirnas in the district of Kayseri. His grand father, Dogan Yusuf Aga, was a builder who apparently exposed Sinan to several Seljuk monuments in the vicinity of Kayseri. Under the tutelage of his grandfather he must have learnt a great deal about building until age 22. He entered Primary Military School in Istanbul after his conscription into the military, which he completed in 1521, and becoming a Construction Officer in the Janissary. Sinan traveled considerably on several military campaigns with the Janissary corps, he was therefore exposed to extant structures inside and outside of Istanbul and as far away as Egypt and Iran (Tabriz). As an Officer serving with the Janissary he was therefore in a position to study and examine these structures in intrinsic detail given his interest in construction.<sup>37</sup>

The Seljuks a Turkish dynasty of Central Asia (1040 -1308 C.E.) had constructed several religious and secular structures before they were replaced with the rise of the dynasty of Osman (Ottoman) in the 13th century.<sup>38</sup> Extant buildings of the Seljuk period and the early Ottoman structures pre-date Sinan's own rise to fame by a span of some 250 years. In addition, Istanbul (former Constantinople) had superseded Rome as the new capital of early Christendom, and was then the site of Hagia Sophia the most celebrated monument of the Byzantine epoch. Constantine made Constantinople his capital, because Rome was 'excessively pagan', but by the time of his death 'pagan' Rome was 'officially' converted to Christianity. Justinian would also establish Christianity as the Imperial Religion of Constantinople, he ordered his two Greek architects, Anthemios of Tralles and Isidorios of Miletus<sup>39</sup> to build Hagia Sophia in 532-37 A.D. as a further symbol and celebration of the rise and triumph of Christianity over paganism - which was synonymous in many ways with the beliefs of Greeks and Romans of antiquity.

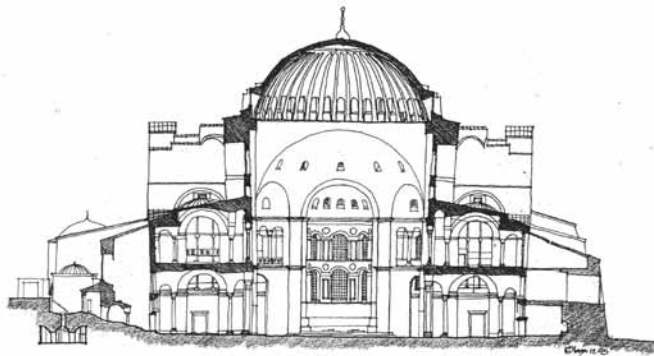
Hagia Sophia and the other Christian monuments of Istanbul were familiar to Sinan but most important



**Figure 10**  
*Selimiye (Section), Ederne, Turkey*  
(Courtesy of Latif Abdulmalik)



**Figure 11**  
*Hagia Sophia (Floor Plan), Istanbul, Turkey*  
(Courtesy of Latif Abdulmalik)



**Figure 12**  
*Hagia Sophia (Section), Istanbul, Turkey*  
(Courtesy of Latif Abdulmalik)

were the building techniques of Byzantium, which were more than likely adopted in the buildings which succeeded Hagia Sophia and to which many converted Janissary members and builders, some of whom were Sinan's had knowledge of. One such example of an extant building is the Church of St. Sophia at Iznik, which was converted to a mosque in the early Ottoman period (Bursa Period). But there were also several great mosques and building complexes consisting of public baths, redresses, public fountains, Inns, hospitals, clinics, public kitchens, Qur'an schools, which served civic functions. Most notably are the Mosques of Oran Gazi at Bilecik (Built by Oran Gazi:1326-1359 for his father Osman Ghazi:1299-1326) Beyazid I at Edernie (Built by Bayazid I 1389-1402) Beyazid II complex at Istanbul (1501-1506), The Great domed mosque at Mansia built in 1366, The Uc Serefeli at Ederne (1438-1447), The Mosque of Mehmet the Conqueror (1467-1479). There were of course several others, which we have not mentioned here for the sake of brevity.

Sinan was therefore exposed to the Christian-Byzantine style of building and to the Muslim structures of the Seljuks and the Ottoman conquerors of Bursa and Edernie and who had also built several works elsewhere in the newly conquered region before their arrival to Istanbul in 1453. These works were some of his initiatory architectural precedents, they play a constituent role in the development of the Classical Ottoman style which reached its prominence during Sinan's time: a style to which he would be attached and would become its most celebrated proponent.

### **Sinan's Architectural Works**

Sinan's earliest architectural works date to the time of the Sultan Suleyman - The Magnificent (d. 1566) who rose to power in 1520 and reigned for some 46 years. His first religious buildings were not domical structures but were simple, highly functional mosques with pitched covered lead sheets roofs over a simple orthogonal prayer hall. The hall being contiguous with an entry a canopy or an extension of the roof structure covered a portico. He would soon abandon this type of roof structure and would adopt the dome as an ordering element and spatial theme for the mosque. His use of the dome suggests a return to a building tradition common to early Ottoman, Seljuk and Byzantine architects as means of covering an orthogonal space. It indicative of a kind of *ciborium* or *baldachin*, either projecting from the walls of the space or from free standing columns. For instance in the mosques of Oran Ghazi (Gebze) and Yeschil-Kulliye (1413-21) in Bursa the dome is projected from the walls of the mosque, while in the early Byzantine church such as St. Sophia a much larger space it is projected from columns which creates aisles in the plan of the space. In later mosques built by Sinan such as the Suleymane, Selemiye and the Shezade

the projection would also take place from columns as the size of the dome increased considerably. Sinan would use the spatial concept of the *baldachin* in conjunction with the square, hexagon and octagon to place the dome on what is essentially a centrally planned orthogonal space. There are important points of differences, structural and aesthetic, between the *baldachin* of St. Sophia, St. Peters and the Suleymane, Selemiye and the Shezade mosques, which we will return to later in this essay.

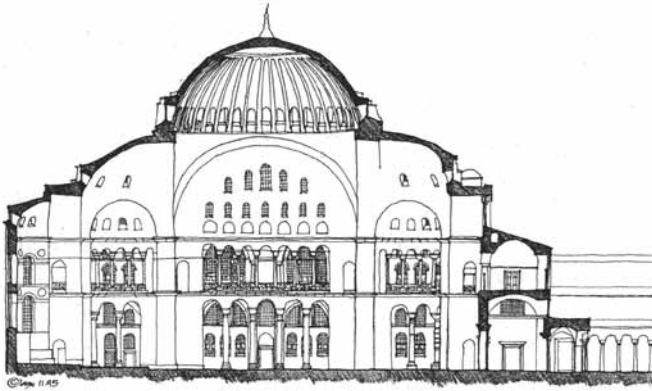
Sinan's first royal commission as Chief Architect of the court in 1539 came from Hurrem Sultan, the wife of Sultan Suleyman. The Haseki Hurrem Sultan complex (Imaret) consisted of a single dome mosque hospital, (*Daru's-shifa*) soup kitchen & dining hall, medressa, Qur'an School (*maktab*), ablution fountain (*Sardirvan*). It has been suggested that Sinan did not design the soup kitchen and dining hall but the other structures were clearly his, except that a second dome was added in 1606 to his original single domed prayer hall after his death.<sup>40</sup> The complex was apparently built in three stages (1) Mosque (2) Madrassah (3) Hospital and soup kitchen. There are two points of importance here. Firstly Sinan's use of the single domed space recalls similar use in the early Ottoman period. One example being the Oran Gazi mosque (Gebze) and secondly the non-axial layout of the complex, which reflects an organic 'urban space' can be seen also at Bursa. The site of Haseki Hurrem Sultan complex is severely constricted by the existing street patterns, which probably influenced the accretive development of the buildings. Sinan's layout of later complexes would eventually become more axial, ordered and spatially balanced with the mosque monopolizing the key spatial arrangement in the scheme.

Sinan's next major work the Shezade complex (1543-48) demonstrates his maturing use of axiality, ordered space and form. Prince Mehmet Shezade was a beloved son of Sultan Suleyman who died unexpectedly at age 22, his father commissioned the complex in memory of his beloved son. The complex consists of: (1) Mosque (2) Medressa (3) Caravanserai (4) Mausoleum (5) Qur'an school (6) Public kitchen and bakery. Sinan placed the mosque at the center of all these ancillary structures giving immediate axiality to the scheme, with the plan of the mosque, which were two orthogonal spaces of the same size. One used as exterior court, of twenty-five units, symmetrically domed around its periphery with five dome, a *sidravan* (ablution fountain) in the center of the court of nine units on the axis of the plan. The other orthogonal space is the enclosed prayer hall covered with the *baldachin* supported on four equilaterally placed columns. But perhaps the most significant development here is the bold square cross-in-plan concept highly evolved by Sinan which he achieves with the use of one central dome (it covers a space equivalent to nine units of the court yard) in addition to four half dome buttresses. Barrel vaults would normally vault Kuban observers that the space covered by the half domes in Christian churches.<sup>41</sup> Sinan departs

from the barrel vault arrangement by introducing the four half dome buttresses. The whole *baldachin* arrangement forms a 'Greek cross', placed on a nine unit orthogonal space of the prayer hall. It is concept which had been in evolution and development for some time as can be seen in the *baldachin* schemes of the mosques of Oran Gahzi at Bilecik and Gebze, Beyazid Kulliye mosque in Edirne (single dome spaces) Guzelce and Uc Sefereli, Atik Ali Pasha, Fatih or Mehmet the Conqueror, (single and one half dome buttress) Beyazid II mosque in Bursa, (single dome with two half dome buttresses), Mihrima Sultan (single dome with three half dome buttresses), Shezade (single dome with four half dome buttresses). He introduced a new facade treatment with the Shezade, earlier Ottoman facades were flat an un-formulated. Sinan departs from the traditional facade treatment of the earlier mosques. Shezade's facade is a sixteen unit exterior facade, which further reinforces the structural centrality of the orthogonal space of the prayer hall. The fenestration treatment adds light to the prayer hall but it also reduces the massive effect of the space in a very sophisticated manner with its geometric modulation. These domical and geometric themes will again be played out in the *baldachins* of Selimye (1569-72) complex at Edirne and the Suleymane (1550-55) complex at Istanbul, where Sinan would again return to variations of facade treatment, and modular axial planning. Shezade would remain his consummate work, sensitive and perhaps un-matched in its use of *space, form* and *order*. His later buildings would seek to re-interpret these themes, continuing to use the Ottoman vocabulary, which had now been formally established, but whose rules would be further refined in his search of new definitions and use of *order, space* and *form*.

## Narratives

Apparently the narratives, which speak of Sinan, were written on his behalf or to celebrate his architectural mastery after his death. His thoughts are therefore reflected in the edifices he built. In a text *Tezkiret -ul-Bunyan* (A Book about Buildings) we may glean some insight from his memoirs written in prose and verse on his behalf, that he apparently dictated to his friend Sai Mustafa Celebi.<sup>42</sup> Two other key Sinan works, which signal his pioneering spirit, deserve mention here: the Suleymane complex at Istanbul and the Selimiye complex at Edirne. Apparently in a reference to sultan Suleyman, Sai states in the words of Sinan, "Instantly I drew a beautiful mosque It was much appreciated by the Sultan"<sup>43</sup> In the Suleymaniye and the Selimiye complexes additive and subtractive themes, present a very vexing problem. But to understand them we must turn once again to the Church of St. Sophia. Several scholars have argued St. Sophia played a pivotal role in Sinan's definitions of space and his use of the past. It is a plausible argument but we cannot ignore the fact that there maybe more influential origins, particularly



**Figure 13**  
*Hagia Sophia (Section), Istanbul, Turkey*  
(Courtesy of Latif Abdulmalik)



**Figure 14**  
*Hagia Sophia, Istanbul, Turkey*  
(Courtesy of Library of Congress)



**Figure 15**  
*Hagia Sophia, (Interior), Istanbul, Turkey*  
(Courtesy of Library of Congress)

Ottoman, for example the extant mosques of Bursa and earlier Seljuk structures which may have contributed to his use of 'dome geometry' to define the spatial composition of his mosques. It seems anti-climacteric that he would turn to the St. Sophia for inspiration after having designed the Shezade. Shezade was the apogee of his use of 'dome geometry', the *baldachin* which witnessed a progressive development from a single domed space, single and half dome buttresses, single and two halves, single and three halves, and finally the quatrefoil *baldachin* of the Sherzade signals the climax of the spatial theme using 'dome geometry'. It would seem likely that Sinan may have defined his spatial elements for the roof structure in terms of referential devices such as the dome.

In this regard we can clearly see an evolutionary trend with the thematic development of the dome from Bursa to Istanbul over a period of 100 years, with the most activity in its development occurring in the period of Sinan's tenure as chief architect. (1538-1588). But paradoxically Sinan returns to the two half domes and the central dome ( Suleymanie) which squarely places it in contrast to St. Sophia because of its structural kinship with St. Sophia. As we have seen above the two halves and central dome was used before Sinan by the architect Hayredin for the mosque of Bayazid II at Bursa. And even later by Sinan at Ali Pasha mosque in Tophane (1571-87). In addition the building that would exceed the size of St. Sophia would be Single dome of 31 meters (Selemiyé). How does one explain this puzzling occurrence? First of all the Suleymaniye was his largest complex in Istanbul the first to be built with four minarets and the second largest dome (26 meters) after the Selemiyé (31 meters). It also boasted seven medressas, hospital, kitchen, guesthouse, funerary gardens that follow the axial layout akin to the contour of the site while maintaining the mosque as the central element. The overall spatial effect of the prayer hall, putting aside the roof structure, is entirely different from that of St. Sophia, there is a functional and liturgical clarity, which occurs in the plan of the mosque (and similarly in the mosques of Bayazid II and Ali Pasha), which is not apparent in the St. Sophia's plan. I would suggest then that the differences may be explained in a way, which has to do more with the use of geometry in the sense that Justinian's architects may have designed the church as a 'bottom up' spatial configuration, while Sinan and Hayredin designed the space of the mosque as a 'top down space'. To explain further : In a 'top down' space the square is transformed to an octagon using the squinch which then allows the circle to connect gracefully to base of the dome. Unlike the St. Sophia there is no break between the roof structure and the aisles of the mosque but a total structural continuity and composition of the *baldachin*. In this respect the developmental concept of additive and subtractive spatial articulation of a central space is taking place at the roof structure through the articulation of 'dome geometry', squinch, circle and octagon with the plan of the building being influenced and perhaps defined unlike the St. Sophia by the roof composition. If there is

an aspect of commonalty between the church and the mosque, it is simply the geometric con-figuration of the *baldachin* (a central dome attached to two half domes) along a longitudinal axis.

By the time the Sulemaniye and the Selimiye were built Sinan had already mastered the art of building large singular domes, carefully articulated with half domes, squinches, pendentives, square, hexagonal and octagonal transitional bands and *exedra* domes. Sinan's buildings were therefore more closely connected to the themes already established at Bursa, and to the earlier Ottoman architects such as Hayredin rather than to Justinian's architects. It would appear that Sinan was clearly not interested in the revival of archaism, The St. Sophia would hold no spiritual meaning for him at the least it was an engineering feat which he would surpass. He did not suffer from technical inferiority even if he did declare: "All the infidels claim that we cannot build a dome larger than St. Sophia." Sinan would rise to the challenge by building the dome of the Selimye with a large single dome, larger in diameter than the St. Sophia (31 meter). In so doing he had answered the challenge of the infidels.

### Summary

Art is not created *ex-nihilo*. Sinan's "space conception" and Palladio's "space conception" were both inspired by buildings of Roman antiquity. Sinan would re-define the use of Roman and Byzantine technology in his approach to building the dome, because of his pioneering spirit and his commitment to pleasing God and the Sultan. His religious conviction, can be gleaned from his declaration in the following statement:

*As a capable architect I wished to leave behind me*

*Works that would remain in this world.*

*I prayed that God would see me worthy*

*To build a soaring mosque.*

*What I had prayed for was granted, for God.*

*In his divine wisdom allowed me to become*

*the Sultan's favorite [architect]<sup>44</sup>*

Palladio had no similar commitment, he would consign himself to the ideas of his master Vitruvius. He wrote in his Four Books of Architecture:

*Guided by a natural inclination, I gave myself up in my most early years to the study of architecture: an as it was always my opinion , that the ancient Romans , as in many other things , so in building well, vastly excelled all those who have been since their time, I propose Vitruvius for my master and guide, who is the only ancient writer of this art ...<sup>45</sup>*

He was intensely influenced by his epoch, which had embraced neo-platonic and neo-pagan ideas. Such ideas proposed power over nature and the removal of God's power from the schema of things, relegating the cause of progress to the human mind. These *virii novi* or renewed men who presumably understood the secrets of the human mind and were able to unlock the powers essential to experimental methods of art and architecture.<sup>46</sup> These ideas were essential to the constitution of a 'humanist spirit' in the composition of buildings that was widely sought by Renaissance clients and patrons. For instance Renaissance ideals of geometry relied heavily on the acceptance of classical 'neo-pagan' and 'neo-Platonic' traditions. Many medieval ideas, which remained alive in the 16th century, were redefined in architectural terms. The symbolism of the circle and the square which occupied the minds of medieval thinkers is again revived, redefined and re-used in the plans of several of Palladio's buildings, for instance in the Villa Rotunda and the church of S.Giorgio Maggiore. The theme of circle and square also occurs in Alberti's church of S. Sebastian at Mantua a centrally planned building bearing close resemblance to the symmetrical plan of the Rotunda.

In the Rotunda and S.Giorgio Maggiore it is no coincidence that we find reoccurring themes of circle and square. Medieval scholars before Palladio's time understood the circle and the square in symbolic terms, and one writer went so far as to declare in neo-Platonic terms, " God is a circle whose center is everywhere and whose circumference is no where."<sup>47</sup>

The circle and the square were exploited by the Renaissance architects in a search for three-dimensional properties, and as a means to explore an "ideal" spatial conception. Centrality is therefore a repeated theme, which we find in the works of Palladio, Alberti, Bramante, Leonardo and several other Renaissance architects. The interest is only natural because of the medieval legacy which continued to ensue in the sentiments of architects, which led Michelangelo to declare, in speaking of the plan of St. Peters: "Whoever departs from Bramante departs from the truth".<sup>48</sup> Michelangelo's dogmatism indicates his commitment to Bramante's plan for St. Peters and to Bramante's ideas of an "ideal" Renaissance space conception. St. Peters was a centrally planned space clearly influenced by the use of the circle and the square, with a strong cruciform axis that joined these elements. What is significant in Palladio's space conception lies in his rediscovery of the "truth" which he apparently equates with Greek and Roman antiquity since medieval models of space were too static and devoid of principles. A close examination of humanist ideas however indicates that it too was devoid of a particular body of belief, it was a vague concept whose definition today connotes an entirely different meaning. Which makes it easy to understand why architects from Wren to Jefferson, and in this century the American post-modernist have clung to Palladian ideas.

The humanist was in search of new learning, a passion for the ancient world with the belief that it held the key to civilization. To the larger public the new learning came in many ways through the revival of texts such as Vitruvius's text, in the form of neo-Platonic ideas, the collection of books, the advent of printing, the arts and in Architecture which found support among the aristocracy. Palladio was therefore able to experiment with ideas of antiquity because these ideas represented the 'sacred ruins' of Greece and Rome in the absence of 'truth'. Neo-Platonic ideas of harmony, scale, balance, proportion were rediscovered in the 'sacred ruins' and were re-lived in the works of Palladio, who exercised diligence in the application of these themes in his building composition and to his conception of *order, space and form*.

An aesthetic evaluation of Sinan in light of humanist concepts is almost impossible. Sinan's worldview is *de facto* an Islamic one, more over it consigns itself to the context of the Muslim world with a strong belief in artistic creation tied to concepts of beauty and belief. In the context of Ottoman Art, "the work of man no matter how innovative is engendered in a context already formed and ordered *by God*.<sup>49</sup> All artistic work or significant human creation was conceived in a network of relations with a world already supplied and ordered with meaning by God." Sinan's "space conception" was therefore tied to an understanding of aniconism with hierarchical of references to God, the Prophet and the Sultan. In the formulation of his building compositions the qualities of *order, space and form* becomes a kind of spatial and spiritual poetry, which celebrates harmony and balance and mimetic qualities of nature. It also seeks to demonstrate life as being intelligible with a telos: beginning and an end.

Notes

## ENDNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Sigfried Gideon, *Space Time and Architecture*, Harvard University Press, 1967, 124-125; *The Eternal Present*, Pantheon Books, 521-526
- <sup>2</sup> Gideon, *Space Time and Architecture*, 521-526
- <sup>3</sup> Gideon, *Space Time and Architecture*, 521-526
- <sup>4</sup> Bruce Allsopp, *A General History of Architecture*, Pitman Press, Bath 1971
- <sup>5</sup> Gaea=Gaia: The Greek goddess of the earth who bore and married Uranus and became the mother of the Titans and Cyclopes.
- <sup>6</sup> In 609 A.D. the Pantheon became a Christian church.
- <sup>7</sup> Anthemius of Tralles & Isidorus of Miletus built the present structure for the emperor Justinian I.
- <sup>8</sup> It also means a canopy over a throne altar, which may be portable, suspended from a ceiling, projecting from walls or free standing—a ciborium
- <sup>9</sup> David Talbot Rice, ed., *The Great Palace of Byzantine Emperors*, Edinburgh University Press, 1958, 103
- <sup>10</sup> The founding of Constantinople signified the break up of the classical world. The hegemony of the classical world had been held together by an ever-increasing dependence and tendency towards the unity and ideals of Christian belief.
- <sup>11</sup> Rice, *The Great Palace of Byzantine Emperors*, 104
- <sup>12</sup> Rice, *The Great Palace of Byzantine Emperors*, 103
- <sup>13</sup> Allsop, *A General History of Architecture*, 150
- <sup>14</sup> Allsop, *A General History of Architecture*, 150
- <sup>15</sup> Allsop, *A General History of Architecture*, 151
- <sup>16</sup> Allsopp, *A General History of Architecture*, 128, tells us that Cosimo dei Medici (1389 -1464) was the first of the family to succeed, he was extremely intelligent, a business man, keenly interested in the arts and letters he constructed villas and great Palaces in Florence, founded libraries, welcomed Greek refugees from Constantinople and promoted the translation of complete works of Plato and he founded a Platonic academy in Florence. The influence of the Medici's would last way into the 17th century Europe.
- <sup>17</sup> Allsopp, *A General History of Architecture*, 132
- <sup>18</sup> Allsopp, *A General History of Architecture*, 132
- <sup>19</sup> Reed, *Palladio's Architecture and its Influence*, introductory chapter.
- <sup>20</sup> Reed, *Palladio's Architecture and its Influence*
- <sup>21</sup> Palladio was born 1508 Andrea di Pietro della Gondola (The son of Piero della Gondola) in the University city of Padu, his father was a Miller of modest circumstances.
- <sup>22</sup> Marcantonio was the Procurator of the Church of St. Mark, he was the sole Overseer of the Church's properties in the Venetian Empire. He was also responsible for the wills, trust funds and held wards (orphans) minors, and those of unsound mind.
- <sup>23</sup> The bridge was later built in England at Stowe according to Palladio's design.
- <sup>24</sup> Reed, Intro.
- <sup>25</sup> John Fleming, Hugh Honour, Nikolaus Pevsner, *Dictionary of Architecture*, England, Penguin, 1980, p.235;

- <sup>26</sup> Pevsner, *Dictionary of Architecture*, 282; Palazzo Thiene at Vicenza -his second palace (began 1542-46); Palazzo da Porta Festa (1549) Palazzo Chiericati at Vicenza (started 1550 and completed in the late 17th century); Palazzo Valmarna (1566); Loggia del Capitaniato (1571); Palazzo Barbarno at Vicenza (1569-70); Tempietto Barbaro commissioned by Marcantonio (1580); Palazzo Da Porta Bregane -incomplete (1571); Teatro Olimpico at Vicenza (1580), the last building he design which was started in 1580 but later finished by Vincenzo Scamozzi (1552-1616) an Architect of Vincenzo who took over several of Palladio's work after his death.
- <sup>27</sup> *Dictionary of Architecture*, 282.; Reed, Intro. His later villas include: Villa Pisani, Vicenza (1542-45); Villa Valmarana, Vicenza (1541); Villa Marcello at Bertesina, Vicenza (1542); Villa Saraceno, Vicenza (1545); Villa Caldogno, Vicenza (1545); Villa Poiana Vicenza (1548-49); Villa Pisani-Montagnana-at Pauda (1552); Villa Cornaro at Piombine Dese (1553); Villa Badoer at Fratta Polesine (1556); Villa Barbaro at Maser (1557-58); Villa Foscari (la Malcontenta), near Gambarare di Mira -Venice (1559-60), Villa Emo at Fanzolo (1564); Villa Trissino (1567); Villa Sarego (1569); and Villa Rotonda or Almerico on the outskirts of Vicenza (1566-67).
- <sup>28</sup> Pevsner, *Dictionary of Architecture*, 282; Reed, *Intro*,
- <sup>29</sup> Reed, *Intro*.
- <sup>30</sup> Reed, *Intro*.
- <sup>31</sup> Reed, *Palladio's Architecture and its Influence*, 1 and *passim*
- <sup>32</sup> Reed, *Palladio's Architecture and its Influence*, 40
- <sup>33</sup> One is reminded of the remarkable similarity with Apollodorus of Damascus (active A.D. 97-130). Born in Syria but who later ended up in Rome as the Official architect to Trajan (A.D. 97-117) accompanying him on military campaigns and being responsible for the buildings during his reign, such as bridges , baths, a forum markets, triumphal arches, see Pevsner, *Dictionary of Architecture*, 15
- <sup>34</sup> V.D. Volkan and N. Itzkowitz, *Turks and Greeks: Neighbours in Conflict*, The Eothen Press, 1992, 49; D. Kuban, s.v. Sinan, *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, vol. 4, New York, 62-72
- <sup>35</sup> Sinan, *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Architects*,
- <sup>36</sup> For instance Kuban's entry, s.v. Sinan in *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Architects*, does not offer 1490 as the date of his birth; Ulya Vogt-Goknil states that his birth date and his origins cannot be established but suggests 1491 based on evidence from Ernst Egil. See Ulya Vogt-Goknil, *Living Architecture: Ottoman*, Grosset & Dunlap, New York , 1966, 96
- <sup>37</sup> After about 23 years of military service Sinan was appointed Royal Architect of the Court in 1537 at age 47, he served in this position until his death in 1588.
- <sup>38</sup> The Seljuk Style spans two dynasties firstly the Seljuk of Persia 1040 -1194 A.D. and the Seljuks of Anatolia 1071-1308 A.D. both were Turkish Dynasties in Origin.. The Ottoman style I am referring to here is the Classical Ottoman period which lasted from 1501-1703 CE, The earlier Ottoman period is referred to as the Bursa (Foundation ) Period 1299-1501 CE. The Ottoman Dynasty ended in 1923.
- <sup>39</sup> Pevsner, *Dictionary of Architecture*, 15
- <sup>40</sup> Aptullah Kuran, Sinan, Institute of Turkish Studies, Washington D.C. and ADA Press Istanbul, 1987, 49
- <sup>41</sup> D. Kuban, s.v. Sinan, *MacMillan Encyclopedia of Architects*.

- <sup>42</sup> V.D. Volkan and N. Itzkowitz, *Turks and Greeks: Neighbours in Conflict*, 50
- <sup>43</sup> Aptullah Kuran, The Mosques of Sinan, *Fifth International Congress of Turkish Art*, ed. F. Feher, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, n.d., pp. 559-568
- <sup>44</sup> V.D. Volkan and N. Itzkowitz, *Turks and Greeks: Neighbours in Conflict*, 50
- <sup>45</sup> Anthony F. Janson ed. *History of Art*, vol II, Prentice Hall -Abrams, New Jersey, 1995 626 . The quote is from Palladio's *Four Books of Architecture*.
- <sup>46</sup> Thomas Molnar, Paganism and its Renewal, *The Intercollegiate Review*, 31:1, 1995, 28-35
- <sup>47</sup> Joan Helm, Eric and Enide: Cosmic Measures in Nature and the Hebrew Heriage, in *Medieval Numerology*, ed. Robert L. Surles, Garland Publishing, New York, 1993, 53-76
- <sup>48</sup> Peter Murry, Italian Art from Masccio to Mannerism, in Denys Hay ed., *The Age of the Renaissance, Thames and Hudson*, London 1986. 89-100
- <sup>49</sup> Erzen, J. N. Aesthetics and Aesthesis in Ottoman Art, *Journal of Islamic Studies* 2:1, 1991, 24; Italics mine.

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The Texas Black History Preservation Project (TBHPP) is documenting the comprehensive history of African Americans in Texas through a series of books and interactive DVDs. This is a landmark project in that no one has ever attempted a project of this magnitude and scope in regard to Black history in Texas. While there have been numerous works about various segments of the Black community in Texas, there is nothing that ties those stories together, nothing that brings those stories together in a central location.



The project will have a profound effect on education, specifically in the teaching of Black history. We will conduct scholarly research and promote the history of African Americans in Texas to the benefit of teachers, students, historians and also the general public, across racial lines, in Texas and beyond. We feel there are still large gaps in the teaching of Black history, and it is our hope that the fruits of this project will have a direct impact in classrooms, enhancing and increasing the ability of teachers to offer in-depth lessons about the statewide African American experience, and to present those lessons well beyond the boundaries of Black History Month.

Culturally, what we do will give African American youth an increased sense of self and pride, and a deeper knowledge of what generations before them have contributed to the growth of Texas.

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Heading the project, as co-editors-in-chief, will be veteran journalists Roxanne Evans (Des Moines Register, Austin American-Statesman, deputy press secretary to Gov. Ann Richards) and Michael Hurd (USA Today, Austin American-Statesman, Houston Post, and noted Black college football historian).

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# TIPHC JOURNAL OF HISTORY & CULTURE 1:3

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