

It is my distinct pleasure to introduce Wale Adebawo for the keynote lecture on Africa this afternoon. Before I do that, let me share a few remarks on the study of Africa at Harvard. Department Chair Tommie Shelby also requested that I do so to bring Africa fully into this celebration. Tommie Shelby gave an excellent overview yesterday of the student protests in 1969 that led to the demand for African and African American Studies at Harvard University. The 1960s was the context of the Civil Rights struggles with the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr in 1968 and the decade in which several African countries became independent. These two processes reinforced each other, as African countries such as Ghana, Guinea and Tanzania became extensions of the American Civil Right Struggle. WEB Du Bois, our intellectual ancestor, did assume Ghanaian citizenship and died in Accra on August 27, 1963, where he is buried with a Center named after him.

Tommie Shelby, Skip Gates, and former Dean Henry Rosovsky spoke yesterday about Harvard's decision not to create a Department of African and Afro-American Studies in 1969, but to create separately a Department of Afro-American Studies and a Committee on African Studies. Intriguingly, the first hire in the new Department of Afro-American Studies in 1969 was an Africanist, Professor Ephraim Isaac, who taught among other subjects the Concept and History of Slavery, Ancient African Civilizations, and Ethiopian History. There were other Harvard faculty with an interest in Africa. The political scientist Martin Kilson, who received his PhD from Harvard in 1959, became Harvard College's first tenured African American professor in 1969. Kilson was a scholar of African politics, conducted extensive research in Sierra Leone, and wrote a book on *Political Change in a West African State: A Study of the Modernization Process in Sierra Leone* (1966). He and his wife Marion lived in Ghana under Nkrumah's government together with several other African Americans, including St. Clair Drake, David Levering Lewis, and Maya Angelo. The Nigerian historian Kenneth O. Dike was recruited to Harvard in 1970 as the first Mellon Professor of African History in 1970, and chaired the Committee on African Studies. Dike would return to Nigeria in 1979.

A new phase in the development of African and African American Studies began with the hire of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. His first hire was Kwame Anthony Appiah, the Ghanaian philosopher. The recruitment of Lorand Matory as an assistant professor in Afro-Am and Anthropology underscored the Africa interest in what was still then the Department of Afro-American Studies. It is instructive how the fields of African and African American Studies seem to be propelled by crises. An important one was the disagreement between Harvard President Larry Summers and Brother Cornel West in 2001. Brother Cornel left for Princeton in the same year as Anthony Appiah. Brother Skip threatened to follow his two close friends to Princeton. Harvard was in turmoil. Watching these developments from the safety of sabbatical in Accra, I received a formal letter from Larry Summers. In absentia I had been appointed chair of the Committee on African Studies. On my return FAS Dean William Kirby and Provost Steven Hyman asked for a five-year vision of where I would like to take African Studies. I proposed three things: an interdisciplinary, inter-school research agenda called the Africa Initiative; an African Language Program (ALP), and for an undergraduate degree in African Studies to replace the Certificate in African Studies granted by the Committee on African Studies. The President, the Provost, and the FAS Dean recommended that the Committee on African Studies and the Department of

Afro-American Studies dialogue over the possibility of a Department of African and African American Studies. That the ALP and the undergraduate degree could be located in the new department and we would be given 5 senior FTEs to strengthen the study of Africa. I invited Skip to a meeting of the standing committee on African Studies for us to make the case for a Department of African and African American Studies. The standing committee voted in favor of this with the understanding that all tenured professors in FAS would automatically become joint professors in the renamed Department. Skip and I made the case before our FAS colleagues in the Faculty Meeting Room and there was a unanimous vote in favor of the new department.

We went on a recruitment drive. Those were exciting days. John Mugane was our first recruit to design and lead the African Language Program. It has since grown to become the largest African Language Program in the world, having taught some 5,000 students since 2003 in almost 30 African languages. Then came Abiola Irele, Jacob Olupona, for a brief period Kofi Agawu, and then Biodun Jeyifo. We could now offer both Bachelors and PhD degrees in African Studies. Irele directed the first doctoral dissertation by Laura Murphy and her successful job placement convinced us that we were on the right path. Sangu Delle wrote the first undergraduate thesis within the new framework of social engagement. When it won the university-wide Hoopes prize, we were certain that the sky was the limit for African Studies. More PhDs and BAs have been produced since then in African studies with an excellent record on the job market for our graduate students. In 2012 Jean and John Comaroff joined the Department of African and African American Studies and became the conveners of our very high-profile African Studies Workshop. Through an anonymous gift in 2014, the Committee on African Studies became the Center for African Studies, and I describe the Center for African Studies, the Department of African and African American Studies, and the Hutchins Center for African and African American Research as three legs of a stool.

Now to our Africa keynote as we celebrate our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary. We are honored to have the distinguished political scientist and social anthropologist Professor Wale Adebani deliver the keynote for this afternoon. Wale is the Rhodes Professor of Race Relations and Director of the African Studies Centre at Oxford University. Before Oxford, he was a professor of African and African American Studies at the University of California at Davis from 2012 through 2017. Wale holds two PhDs: the first in political science from the University of Ibadan in 2002; the second in social anthropology from the University of Cambridge in 2008. The author of several books, edited volumes, and journal articles, I will mention only three of his solely authored books: *Authority Stealing: Anti-Corruption War and Democratic Politics in Post-Military Nigeria* (2012); *Yoruba Elites and Ethnic Politics in Nigeria: Obafemi Awolowo and Corporate Agency* (2014); and *Nation as Grand Narrative: The Nigerian Press and the Politics of Meaning* (2016). Wale is a researcher of the processes of the mobilization and articulation of interest in state and society. His keynote lecture for today is entitled "Contesting Africa's 'Dissimilarity': Reflections on Global African Studies." Please join me in welcoming Professor Wale Adebani.