



## Article

# We were brave. We were strong. We survived. Acts and arts of liberation in the African Atlantic imaginary

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## Introduction

We Were Brave. We Were Strong. We Survived.

Acts and Arts of Liberation in the African Atlantic Imaginary

Celeste-Marie Bernier and Nicole Willson

“All the World is now Richer” is a sculpture to commemorate the abolition of slavery. The sculpture hopes to show that the people of slave heritage are brave and have dignity and strength,’ so reads contemporary artist, Sokari Douglas Camp’s explanation of a politically hard-hitting and emotionally unequivocal work she created a few years ago in 2012.<sup>1</sup> As an artist who was born in Buguma, Nigeria, in 1958, and who is living and working in the UK today, she dedicates her practice to tackling the racist myopia generated by British celebrations of abolitionist reform movements as whites-only organizations head on. In a radical declaration of independence, Douglas Camp awards centre-stage to missing histories of Black resistance by dramatizing the lives and works of African diasporic women and men who fought by every means necessary to reject their non-existence as enslaved people who were bought and sold in their millions during the centuries long histories of transatlantic slavery and the slave trade. Memorializing the freedom struggles of Black people living beyond the pale of dominant records over and above the activism of white philanthropists as repeatedly paraded in official accounts, she bears witness to an empowered rather than disempowering and a dignified rather than dehumanizing ‘slave heritage.’

‘During Britain’s bicentennial abolition celebrations, I was reading various essays about the slave trade and Middle Passage,’ Douglas Camp recalls, noting, ‘I came across a passage of text from the Quaker campaign to raise money for abolition efforts. I felt that

these were the perfect words to go along with the sculptures: “From my rich ancestral lands, we were sold, bought, and used but we were brave. We were strong. We survived. All the world is now richer.”<sup>2</sup> She bears witness to the collective struggles of all African diasporic peoples living and dying in historical and contemporary eras by making the following slight but significant alterations to this text: ‘From our rich ancestral life,/ We were sold, bought and used./ But we were brave./ We were strong./ We survived/ All the world is now richer.’<sup>3</sup> Working to do justice to a new ‘Black lexicon of liberation,’ as theorized by Black British artist Donald Rodney, she transforms ‘my rich ancestral lands’ into ‘our rich ancestral life.’<sup>4</sup> For Douglas Camp, transatlantic slavery and a ‘slave heritage’ are no catalyst to Black disenfranchisement and death but a crucible for the fight for Black revolutionary freedoms.

‘The figures vary in size, from six feet to nearly eight feet tall,’ Douglas Camp summarizes regarding the steel sculptures of the six women and men that together comprise *All the World is Now Richer*.<sup>5</sup> As she emphasizes, ‘The vertical component consists of a line of life-sized figures representing successive stages of the slavery saga.’<sup>6</sup> Working to memorialize missing milestones within the freedom struggles of the ‘slavery saga,’ she endorses a teleology of uplift. She maps the ‘stages’ from enslavement to emancipation as follows: ‘the line starts with a figure clad in indigenous robes. Then come two figures representing trans-Atlantic slave labour: a plantation worker with a machete and a domestic serving woman. These are followed by three figures representing the post-liberation era: a Sierra Leonean woman in nineteenth-century Creole dress, a man in a twentieth century executive suit and finally another relaxing in casual trousers and a tee-shirt.’<sup>7</sup> Starkly contrasting to Douglas Camp’s preference for working with faceless figures in her other sculptures such as *Rack of People* (2006), she does justice to the psychological and physical realities of individual women and men in *All the World is Now Richer*.<sup>8</sup> She begins with a ‘figure clad in indigenous robes’ to testify to the survival of Africanisms in the New World

and foreground Black resistance strategies. For Douglas Camp, transatlantic slavery failed to eradicate African diasporic histories, cultures, beliefs, social practices, political ideas, and art-making traditions.

Openly defiant regarding the nefarious attempts of white audiences to appropriate or commodify Black subjectivities, Douglas Camp insists on the autonomy of her 'figure clad in indigenous robes.' At the same time that she clothes her male subject in ornately patterned 'indigenous robes,' she ensures his eyes are closed. Here she confirms his right to an introspective meditation that signals his preservation of an imaginative and spiritual inner life against all the odds. She continues the theme of Black male rebellion by next dramatizing a 'plantation worker with a machete.' She replaces the 'indigenous robes' of the 'first man' with the short pants of the field hand to testify to centuries of enslaved Black labour on the plantation. No epitome of crushed and bleeding humanity, however, he brandishes his 'machete' as a weapon rather than as a labouring tool. Douglas Camp foregrounds the exemplary musculature and iconic strength of her 'plantation worker' to guarantee his status as the embodiment of an empowered masculinity and herculean prowess. Signalling his invincibility rather than his vulnerability, his warrior attributes act as a touchstone for the hidden histories surrounding African diasporic maroon communities in particular, as well as enslaved led and enslaved executed freedom struggles more generally. According to Douglas Camp's radical imaginary, what to a white person was a slave insurrection to a Black person was a slave revolution. As a testament to her figure's enduring power, she admits that of all her sculptures, 'The tallest is the plantation worker.' Douglas Camp freely celebrates his indomitable power, 'He is formidable. He nearly fell on me in my studio several times.'<sup>9</sup>

In *All the World is Now Richer*, Douglas Camp memorialises Black women's lives as lived across the 'successive stages of the slavery saga.' Surviving as no spectacle of Black female subjugation, she imagines a 'domestic serving woman' in a head wrap and plain shift

dress in order to exalt in her exemplary physicality. As a source of domestic industry and maternal succour, she summarizes, ‘The third figure is sort of a mama type with nice droopy breasts, and you can imagine her feeding many children and tending house.’<sup>10</sup> She refuses to show her anonymous Black woman on her knees with the result that audiences have no choice but to ‘imagine’ her labouring duties. Rather, Douglas Camp prefers to reimagine her female figure fully erect and with wide open rather than closed eyes: she directly confronts the viewer with a contemplative physiognomy that demands recognition of her humanity. Far from the only woman Douglas Camp chose to include in this sculpture, she also represents ‘a Creole woman based on Sierra Leone women living in London.’<sup>11</sup> No figure could be further from her imagining of the ‘domestic serving woman’ than her recreation of this fashionable African diasporic female protagonist whom she openly admits, ‘is a lady that obviously has style and is sophisticated.’<sup>12</sup> According to Douglas Camp’s reimagining, ‘all the world is now richer’ due to the struggles of a multitude of Black women who fought for the freedom to experiment with their sense of ‘style’ and to do justice to their strategies of self-expression. Living in a contemporary era as opposed to the historical period of chattel slavery, her female protagonist testifies to her new found freedoms by wearing a wide-brimmed hat, a delicately patterned short sleeve dress, and ornately detailed shoes. According to Douglas Camp’s reimagining, her Black female protagonist no longer directly confronts the viewer. Rather, she exhibits the visionary pose of the heroic icon as hard-hitting evidence of centuries of Black solidarity and a visual embodiment of the refrain, ‘we were brave./ We were strong./ We survived.’

A return to Black masculinity as a quintessential site of freedom within the ‘slavery saga’ concludes *All the World is Now Richer*. ‘Then there is a person in a suit, the fifth person,’ Douglas Camp stipulates, arguing, ‘The last figure is in jeans and a T-shirt, which is a uniform that is universal and yet very contemporary.’<sup>13</sup> Circulating as hard-hitting visual

counterpoints to the ‘plantation worker,’ her fourth and fifth figures variously represent a man wearing an ‘executive suit’ and a man in ‘casual trousers and a tee-shirt’ to memorialize competing forms of Black male autonomy. Regarding her penultimate male figure that she originally titled ‘Business Man’ and sculpted in 2010, she carefully delineates the collar on his shirt, the lapels on his suit jacket, the belt at his waist, the creases in his pants, and the laces on his shoes. Working with a meticulous use of detail, she celebrates his importance as a subject rather than an object within western systems of global capitalism in order to foreground Black agency rather than passivity. Ultimately, she dramatizes everyday rather than exceptional Black men’s lives by emphasizing that her final protagonist ‘is like every other man of the future in that his heritage is what has made the world what it is today.’<sup>14</sup>

For Douglas Camp, ‘all the world is now richer’ for a ‘heritage’ – for which read ‘slave heritage’ – that was born of struggle, suffering, and sacrifice yet resulted in survival. She does not equivocate on either the physical fragility or the signifying force of her sculpted women and men by summarizing, ‘They have an element of shantytown about them. But I also wanted this piece to have a look of expensiveness.’<sup>15</sup> No respecter of boundaries, she populates this work with a ‘first man,’ a ‘plantation man,’ a ‘Caribbean domestic woman,’ a ‘Sierra Leone woman,’ a ‘Business Man,’ and a ‘T-shirt Man’ to dramatize enslaved and free, rich and poor, and urban and rural African diasporic societies. Douglas Camp’s determination to force her audiences to confront an ‘element of shantytown’ in her steel surfaces is revealing. Here, she lays bare her searing indictment of contemporary global systems of economic deprivation. In the twenty-first century, African diasporic peoples are forced to live in ‘shantytowns’ directly as a result of the financial, political, and social, let alone the cultural, legacies of transatlantic slavery. Far from the whole story, however, she refuses to lose sight of her commitment to ‘expensiveness’ by executing these sculpted figures on a monumental scale. ‘All the world is now richer’ within Douglas Camp’s imaginary due to the

social, political, cultural, and historical contributions of Black women, men, and children whose “blood, sweat, and tears” built the foundations of the modern world.

Across her bodies of work, Douglas Camp does justice to her conviction that, ‘the cities of Bristol, Liverpool, and London wouldn’t be the same without having profited from the slave trade.’<sup>16</sup> She is adamant regarding the on-going failure of UK governments, politicians, and members of the public to understand that, ‘all the world is now richer’ due to the ‘blood sweat and tears’ of African diasporic populations. ‘The fact still isn’t recognized enough, especially in London, where black men are so often arrested or searched for no reason,’ she observes.<sup>17</sup> Working to inspire her Black audiences to ‘go forward’ despite their unending exposure to arbitrary systems of discrimination and persecution, Douglas Camp refuses to succumb to despair. Candid regarding the intellectual and political rationale undergirding her sculptures and installations, she revisits hidden histories of African diasporic courage and creativity to inspire Black audiences. ‘It’s a question of leaving a legacy of pride for future generations of black British people or black people in the world,’ she argues.<sup>18</sup>

At the same time, Douglas Camp is insistent regarding the need to acknowledge a stark reality according to which ‘There are slaves somewhere who enabled us to have the status we have in more developed countries.’<sup>19</sup> No sanitizer of global inequalities, she urges the on-going relevance of her visual narratives of transatlantic slavery by insisting, ‘it is a story that needs to be told continuously.’<sup>20</sup> The necessity of telling the story ‘continuously’ remains ever more pressing due to the status of *All the World is Now Richer* as a public work of art that is yet to find ‘a permanent home in London.’<sup>21</sup> ‘I originally made this work for London’s Hyde Park; it was submitted in a competition to commemorate the two hundredth anniversary of the abolition of slavery,’ she explains only to be met with disappointment: ‘I lost the commission to another artist.’<sup>22</sup> As of writing, her appeal ‘to show these figures in the

Great Hall at the Houses of Parliament, during President Obama's visit' because it 'would show the role the Houses of Parliament have played through world history' has been unheeded.<sup>23</sup> Very likely Douglas Camp's reimagining of British political history through a lens of slavery is not the national story white official gatekeepers of British values would like to tell.<sup>24</sup> Undeterred, she deals with difficult subject matter within her practice by admitting, 'I work on things that disturb me.'<sup>25</sup>

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Visualizing Black not only to the historical injustices but to the iconographic violations enacted against African diasporic people, Sokari Douglas Camp is insistent that, 'My main aim for the work is to create a sense of pride for black people, because although Wilberforce's movement (one of the eighteenth-century abolitionist lobbies) was fantastic in its day, the monuments of the period—such as the antislavery medallion designed by Josiah Wedgwood in 1787—seem inappropriate today.'<sup>26</sup> Ultimately, her monumental sculpture testifies to her lifelong conviction that, 'A black man on his knees begging to be recognized as a man is hurtful, and from a black perspective it doesn't make me feel proud.'<sup>27</sup> She is not alone.

For Frederick Douglass, an individual who had been born into US chattel slavery centuries earlier and who went onto become one of the most important freedom-fighters, antislavery activists, social justice campaigners, philosophers, writers, orators, and intellectuals in world history, the spectacle of a 'black man on his knees' was a source of devastating personal trauma and emotional hurt. A hard-hitting case in point, Douglass was confronted with just such a dehumanized rendering of a subjugated and caricatured Black manhood in the *Emancipation Memorial*, a commemorative sculpture created by white artist,



Thomas Ball, and installed in a public park in Washington D.C. in 1876. A traumatizing vision of white supremacist power and Black unfreedoms, the idealized figure of Abraham Lincoln as the physical embodiment of the myth of the ‘great white emancipator’ not only stands but looms over the kneeling figure of a partially clothed Black man. During his delivery of an address at the monument’s dedication, Douglass was categorical in his protest against this sculpture as a work which ‘showed the Negro on his knees when a more manly attitude would have been indicative of freedom.’<sup>28</sup> Living centuries apart and on either side of the Atlantic ocean, just as Douglas Camp working today understands the damage done to Black people by the aesthetic no less than ideological and political stranglehold exerted by ‘hurtful’ imagery, so Frederick Douglass rejected white US sculptor, Thomas Ball’s rendering of an enslaved man kneeling at the foot of Abraham Lincoln in a statue he considered discriminatory over a century previously,

As an artist working within an African Atlantic imaginary as characterized by acts and arts radicalism, resistance, and revolution over the centuries, Sokari Douglas Camp’s conviction that ‘all the world is now richer’ for a ‘slave heritage’ that was born of struggle and suffering yet resulted in survival is no less at the heart of the resistance strategies endorsed not only by Frederick Douglass but by millions of African diasporic women, men, children fighting for survival: enslaved and free. As an individual who dedicated his life to the liberation of all enslaved people, Douglass never lost sight of the fact that, ‘My part has been to tell the story of the slave.’<sup>29</sup> For Douglass, as for many more authors, artists and activists living and working at the height of transatlantic slavery and the slave trade, acts and arts of self-representation and self-imagining in word and image were quintessential weapons in the freedom struggle. And yet, while he himself wrote over 7,000 items - as consisting letters, autobiographies, essays, poems, diaries, speeches, and histories – and while he was the most photographed individual in the nineteenth-century US, Black or white, Douglass

nevertheless insisted, 'language has no power' and the 'image is mute' when it comes to telling the 'story of the slave.'<sup>30</sup> As he understood only too well, language and images necessarily fail when even beginning to attempt to represent the tragedies of chattel slavery and its traumatising legacies.

As we recognise in this special issue titled *Strike for Freedom* and which is dedicated to African diasporic acts and arts of imaging and imagining, just as Black authors and artists developed self-reflexively experimental textual and visual practices as they took on the burden of representation by acknowledging that, as Douglass insisted, 'language has no power' and 'images are mute' when faced with the impossibility of representing the tragedies of chattel slavery and its traumatising legacies, we as scholars must take on the burden of interpretation by developing a new theoretical language. The authors in this introduction and the scholars writing in this special issue take the view that we are not there yet by arguing for the intellectual and political necessity of working with interdisciplinary methodologies within Black Studies, African Diasporic Studies, Slavery Studies, American Studies, Memory Studies and Social Justice Studies as the only way in which to investigate the otherwise missing historical, social, cultural, philosophical, ideological, political, psychological and aesthetic contexts of Black lives. At the heart of this special issue, therefore, is a shared conviction that the only way in which to do justice to the under-researched writings and artworks produced by Black women, children and men bought and sold into transatlantic slavery, and for whom the written word and the image remained contested terrain, is to develop a cross-, multi- and inter- disciplinary scholarly practice. Dominant theoretical models do not apply. Researchers must develop alternative analytical approaches in order to examine Black literary and visual arts traditions as forged in the interstices of legal, physical, cultural, historical, psychological and imaginative subjugation.

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The first section of this special issue, ‘Historicising Freedom: Multimedia Modes of Telling and Untelling Across the Black Atlantic,’ engages with complex strategies of ‘Historicising Freedom’ through multimedia modes of telling across the Black Atlantic imaginary. Jonathan Ward’s comprehensive analysis of the Wakandan universe in the 2018 film *Black Panther* demonstrates how Black cultural aesthetics and the medium of film present radical possibilities for deconstructing the inherited cultural infrastructure of white supremacy. In exposing the myopic worldview of Wakandans like T’Challa, however, and in challenging the film’s problematic neoliberal politics, its occlusion of oppressed ‘others’ and the embedded histories of colonial violence and trauma, he foregrounds the need to engage with both decolonial and intersectional thought in developing effective and affective strategies for ideological resistance to these histories and structures of oppression.

Working to do justice to a centuries-earlier tradition of female centred radicalism and resistance, Earnestine Jenkins’ article expands the frame of African Atlantic ‘authorship’ to consider the self-reflexive strategies and expressive modes historically employed by women, enslaved and free, living and fighting for survival across the Black diaspora. Her article presents an insightful case study of several women whose lives intersected in nineteenth-century Memphis, offering a unique window into the ways that they not only ‘authored’ but created and recreated their lives through photography, dress, census records, educational achievement and the crafting and production of hairwork mementos. These multiple forms of authorship and artistry reveal complex and multi-layered ‘elite’ identities. Throughout this article, Jenkins does powerful justice to the imaginative ways in which women of colour in the age of slavery and in its immediate aftermath strove to preserve their own family legacies and create their own archives for posterity.

Shifting the focus away from the nineteenth century US South to the twentieth-century North, Benjamin Houston's article 'Rhythm, Colour, and Movements: Narratives of Art and Life in Black Pittsburgh' investigates the vitally important role played by oral cultures, histories, memories and storytelling traditions across the African diaspora. The oral histories with which his study engages are supported by thoughtful scholarship and are curated to give voice to the subjects at its core, and in particular to the lives of Thaddeus Mosley and Elizabeth Asche Douglas whose voices and testimonies shape the discussion. In this article, Houston testifies to the ways in which these oral storytelling traditions are mutually reinforcing, interconnected and interdependent in order to map the symbiosis between arts and activism that is central to Black cultural life in Pittsburgh at mid-century.

In the second section, 'African Atlantic Literary Traditions: Past, Present and Future,' Hannah-Rose Murray's article offers a kaleidoscopic insight into the wide-ranging political, social, cultural, and oratorical weapons employed by African American activists, formerly enslaved and free, who were living and working in the Britain and Ireland between 1865 and 1903. In this article, she does powerful justice to the self-reflexively radical and experimental ways in which African American authors, orators, artists, and activists disseminated their political message across the Atlantic, taking their reformist agendas to arenas both large and small; to locations both central and remote. In this way, she demonstrates that world-renowned individuals working within a longstanding tradition of Black transatlantic revolutionary such as Frederick Douglass were not alone in moving the hearts, minds, and intellects of their typically white audiences. Above all, she acknowledges and catalogues the tireless efforts and prolific acts of African American freedom-fighters in their struggle for meaningful forms of freedom and equality.

In an equally powerful analytical study, Rachel Farebrother's 'panorama' of Black internationalism as articulated in Nancy Cunard's 1934 *Negro* anthology showcases a myriad

of Black resistant aesthetics and explores how the anthology, as a platform for these diverse and resistant aesthetics, and as a mode of telling in its own right, became a subsequent model for Black artists across the diaspora, especially for poets such as Claudia Rankine. More especially, she demonstrates how Cunard developed a proto-Black Studies approach to exploring and articulating resistant Black aesthetics by foregrounding the importance of interdisciplinarity as a challenge to the dominant white colonialist historical archive.

Grace Musila's inspirationally incisive article 'The afterlives of slavery and the narrative pressures of Black precarity in Dinaw Mengestu's *How to Read the Air*' analyses how the structures of oppression and trauma that characterised the transatlantic slave trade and its attendant diasporas are replicated in the present day, especially in the current global migrant crisis and in prevailing structures of global inequality that have been exacerbated by neoliberalism and global capitalism. Through her close reading of Dinaw Mengestu's *How to read the air*, Musila offers unique insights into the prevalent themes of contemporary African literature in English and shows how Mengestu navigates complex transatlantic histories with journalistic precision and authorial skill.

The final section, 'Visualising Resistance: Art and Agency in the African Atlantic Imaginary,' looks at radical articulations of resistance and insurgency through art in the African Atlantic Imaginary. Nicole Willson's article, which centres on the much-mythologised figure of Catherine Flon, who purportedly sewed together the first Haitian flag in the concluding moments of the Haitian Revolution, examines the limitations of the textual archive in faithfully recuperating insurgent Black histories (and histories of Black women in particular). In an effort to combat the violence of the archive, and fill the silence generated by colonialist voices, this article amplifies alternative forms of historical inscription embedded in material culture. In this way, Willson advocates for a 'creative interdisciplinary' methodology informed by Black diasporic principles of creation and recreation in excavating

women's histories of the Haitian Revolution. She thereby demonstrates how such strategies are employed by artists across the Haitian 'diaspora' to preserve historic narratives of female insurgency and create enduringly resonant and useable narratives for the present.

Celeste-Marie Bernier's article investigates African American artist Horace Pippin's domestic interiors of Black family life to encourage scholars and critics to 'read against the grain of oversimplified scholarly discourse.' As a painter who rejected the authority of a white US normative context that continued to exert a racist stranglehold over African American lives, Pippin's paintings provide powerful vignettes of everyday life in which he defamiliarises dominant default filters inextricably associating Blackness with spectacle and performativity. Creating a body of work as freed from the racist injustices perpetuated by monolithic and prescriptive constructions, Pippin's reimagining of everyday life constitutes a highly charged arena in which he not only politicised and interrogated but also displaced exclusionary paradigms. As Bernier argues, the responsibility lies with us as critics to identify Pippin's under-examined, if not entirely distorted, self-reflexive aesthetic practices. Working to shed light on the self-reflexively experimental dimensions to his painterly practice, she investigates his search for a new visual language in which to narrate the untold stories, hidden histories, and forgotten memories of African American lives.

Finally, Fionnghuala Sweeney's article, 'Pretending to catch a mouse: Photographing Paul Robeson, popular modernism, the aesthetics of risk and the reality of the game', speaks profoundly to the theme of art as resistance and the theme of this special issue more broadly. She situates Robeson's performance as a photographic subject within a long-established tradition of 'revolutionary image-making' by African Americans that have refuted and resisted 'regressive, primitivizing or otherwise exploitative representations of black subjects' in the white popular imaginary. As shown here, she nuances and problematises Robeson's engagement with white audiences and white media, especially as articulated in his

characterisation of Brutus Jones, and in his collaboration with the photographer Edward Steichen in realising a visual archive of that characterisation. As she argues, this collection of images is shown to ‘stretch the limits of previous visual practices and inherited constraints’, thereby disclosing ‘its modern temper and radical political ambition’. Central to the study is the idea of risk as resistance. She demonstrates, in compelling ways, how Robeson’s multiple and multi-layered performances as performance artist, curator and photographic subject open a gateway to ‘racial memory and the history it verifies’ as well as to the dichotomies and disjunctures between the various political forces that shape that memory. In this study, Sweeney offers an incisive commentary on the intersection between Robeson’s political and artistic career. In situating his life’s work within a trajectory that encompasses both African American resistance and the modernist project, Sweeney demonstrates both the possibilities of his radical vision and the incompleteness of that vision: a vision which, as she powerfully demonstrates, invites continuing radical acts and arts of recreation, reinterpretation and reimagining.

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*Memory & Skin* is a story-telling space for the past, present and future; the personal and the political. It explores the fragmentation, reflection and layering, dichotomies and contradictions, that form these “special relationships” between Europe and the Caribbean.’ So reads Black British artist Joy Gregory’s summary of *Memory & Skin*, a mixed-media photographic and installation work she completed in 1994-98. Here, she shares the determination of the authors writing in this special issue not only to narrate but to denounce, destabilize, critique, and interrogate the ideologies, philosophies, social contexts, political frameworks and cultural realities undergirding ‘tales of imperialism, colonisation, slavery

and trade – the shared histories that bind them.’<sup>31</sup> The social and political issues undergirding her decades’ long practice testify to her preoccupation with unpacking the ‘special relationships’ as in evidence across the geographical sites, national contexts, and political movements that assume centre-stage across Black struggles for survival within the African diaspora. For Gregory, as for Douglas Camp, Douglass and the millions of artists and authors working across the African Atlantic world, issues related to the fight for the fulfilment and expression of acts and arts of Black agency and authority in the face of international systems of slavery, colonialism, and empire remain a defining feature of her visual and textual lexicon. ‘The changes experienced in the region over many centuries have been political, physical and economic, altering the geography, the “native” and the way these regions and their inhabitants view themselves, others and the World,’ she writes of the Caribbean in particular. At the same time, she observes more generally, ‘What links the shores of the old world with the new is abundant in everyday conversations and points of view – in the sounds and rhythms of the street and, perhaps most tellingly, in the language and skin of the people.’<sup>32</sup>

As an artist who remains committed to recreating and reimagining the ‘everyday conversations’ and stories, memories, and histories contained within the ‘language and skin of the people,’ Gregory admits that, ‘The town of Marigot in Haiti is a very beautiful place, which typifies the European fantasy image of the Caribbean,’ only to narrate the traumatizing realities that lie underneath this white racist ‘fantasy:’ ‘I saw a woman who sat on the beach holding a pot and looking out to sea. I went and spoke to her. She was looking at the sea in the hope that it would give her an answer – she had no food with which to feed her five children. They had not eaten for several days, and she hoped that by looking at the sea food would appear in the pot and she could come home to her children for Sunday dinner.’<sup>33</sup> For this unnamed woman fighting for her own and her family’s survival in the twenty-first century,



the body-and-soul-destroying legacies of slavery, colonialism, and empire refuse to die as they live on in the daily exposure of African diasporic peoples to starvation and suffering and a fight even for the right to an existence let alone a life.

As Joy Gregory, no less than Sokari Douglas Camp and Frederick Douglass, understands only too well, African diasporic struggles for physical and psychological, let alone legal, historical, and cultural existence, represent a fight that is far from over. Past, present, and future African diasporic artists, authors, and activists issue a call to scholarly arms to which we should pay urgent heed regarding the necessity of our recognition of our on-going failures in even beginning to do justice to the hidden histories, forgotten memories, and untold narratives of the ‘sixty million and more.’<sup>34</sup> Writing his life story in 1855, Frederick Douglass titled his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*. And yet, as the acts and arts of activism and authorship not only within Douglass’s own family – Anna Murray, his wife, Rosetta and Annie, his daughters, and Lewis Henry, Frederick Jr. and Charles Remond, his sons – but across contemporary artists such as Joy Gregory and Sokari Douglas Camp reveal, it is the collective fight against ‘our bondage’ to secure ‘our freedoms’ that lives on in the African Atlantic imaginary to lay bare the heartfelt and undying conviction endorsed by millions: ‘We were brave. We were strong. We survived.’

## Acknowledgements

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## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Sokari Douglas Camp, *All the World is Now Richer*. Available online:

<http://sokari.co.uk/project/all-the-world-is-now-richer-great-hall/>

<sup>2</sup> Qtd. in Leora Maltz-Leca, 'Sokari Douglas Camp.' Available online:

<http://artforum.com/words/id=26071>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Rodney quoted in Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Stick to the Skin: African American and Black British Art (1965-2015)* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2019), vi.

<sup>5</sup> Qtd. in Leora Maltz-Leca, 'Sokari Douglas Camp.' Available online:

<http://artforum.com/words/id=26071>

<sup>6</sup> Sokari Douglas Camp, *All the World is Now Richer*. Available online:

<http://sokari.co.uk/project/all-the-world-is-now-richer-great-hall/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> For a reproduction of *Rack of People* see the following: <http://sokari.co.uk/project/rack-of-people/>

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<sup>9</sup> Qtd. in Leora Maltz-Leca, ‘Sokari Douglas Camp.’ Available online:

<http://artforum.com/words/id=26071>

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Sokari Douglas Camp, *All the World is Now Richer*. Available online:

<http://sokari.co.uk/project/all-the-world-is-now-richer-great-hall/>

<sup>15</sup> Qtd. in Leora Maltz-Leca, ‘Sokari Douglas Camp.’ Available online:

<http://artforum.com/words/id=26071>

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Sokari Douglas Camp, *All the World is Now Richer*. Available online:

<http://sokari.co.uk/project/all-the-world-is-now-richer-great-hall/>

<sup>22</sup> Qtd. in Leora Maltz-Leca, ‘Sokari Douglas Camp.’ Available online:

<http://artforum.com/words/id=26071>

<sup>23</sup> Sokari Douglas Camp, *All the World is Now Richer*. Available online:

<http://sokari.co.uk/project/all-the-world-is-now-richer-great-hall/>

<sup>24</sup> For further information, see

<https://www.theguardian.com/education/2014/nov/27/schools-england-promote-british-values>

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<sup>25</sup> Wtd. Felicity Green, 'n.t.' In *Sokari Douglas Camp: The Pleasure of Seeing you: Sculpture and Fabric Patterns*, ed. Sokari Douglas Camp (London Lethaby Gallery, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, 2008), n.p.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> For further information see the following: <https://medium.com/@raulspeaks/a-monument-to-white-supremacy-stands-uncontested-in-our-own-back-yard-672f26db429c>

<sup>29</sup> Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Boston: De Wolfe & Fiske Co., 1892), 372.

<sup>30</sup> Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, edited by Celeste-Marie Bernier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 72, 52.

<sup>31</sup> Joy Gregory, 'Memory & Skin,' 62.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>34</sup> Toni Morrison, *Beloved* (New York: Vintage Classics, 2007), n.p.