

Dr. Anthony Monteiro and the Assault on the Black Radical Tradition

By [Eric Draitser](#)

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The recent firing of scholar and activist Dr. Anthony Monteiro from Temple University is unquestionably a politically motivated and racist assault on a world-renowned professor and community leader. However, it is equally an attack upon the very foundation of higher education and the place of Black people, Black politics, and Black communities within it.

Dr. Monteiro, internationally recognized as one of the world's leading authorities on W.E.B. DuBois and the Black left radical tradition, has been a fixture on the campus of Temple University in Philadelphia for more than a decade. His lectures, publications, annual W.E.B. DuBois symposia, community engagement, leadership in the movement to free Mumia Abu Jamal, and other activism have made him an indispensable figure at Temple University, in Philadelphia, and in the Black scholarly community more generally. So, the question then becomes...why was his contract terminated?

The Real Story

The events which led to the dismissal or, as Temple University Dean of the College of Liberal Arts Teresa Soufas lovingly refers to it, his "non-renewal," have their roots in the struggle over the Chair of the African-American Studies department. In 2012, Soufas attempted to assert her control over the historic African-American Studies program (the first in the country to offer a PhD in Black Studies), by appointing her colleague and ideological ally Dr. Jayne Drake as interim Chair of the program. Dr. Drake, a white professor of American literature, was installed over the vociferous objections of many in the department and the campus community - objections voiced perhaps most strongly by Dr. Monteiro.

Monteiro [supported](#) Dr. Kariamuwelsh, a tenured professor from the Dance department of the Boyer College of Music and Dance to chair the department. In the struggle that ensued, Dean Soufas attempted to impose her will on the program with the appointment of Dr. Drake. Monteiro then led numerous demonstrations in collaboration with campus and community groups to unseat Soufas' viceroy and, instead, reappoint the founder and former Chair of the program Dr. Molefi Asante. Despite initial resistance and continued threats and attacks upon the integrity and character of Dr. Monteiro, Soufas relented and Asante assumed the position of Chair of the department in 2013.

Although the struggle led by Monteiro was ultimately successful, this victory left a bullseye on his back, and it seems that Dean Soufas used the issue of his contract termination as her vengeance. As Dr. Monteiro [stated](#):

This is a retaliatory act and firing for the [protest] we held to get Dr. Molefi Kete Asante as the chair of the [African-American Studies] department over her [Dean Soufas] objections....It's nothing except her anger...It is her getting back at me for my standing

up to her bullying, pointing fingers at Black men, her authoritarian attempt to take over African American Studies and my taking the struggles for the life and integrity of our department to the Black community — those to whom we are ultimately accountable.

When asked about this critical question of the motivation and ultimate responsibility for the decision to not renew the contract of one of the most highly regarded lecturers on campus, the story takes on an added dimension. Dean Soufas seems to imply that the ultimate decision was made by the department Chair Molefi Asante himself, while Dr. Asante asserts that he was merely informed of the Dean's decision. Dean Soufas [stated](#) on the record that there was “no truth whatsoever” to Monteiro's allegations. However, she also immediately pointed the finger at Dr. Asante who she said ultimately collaborated in the decision not to renew Monteiro's contract.

Soufas [explained](#) that:

All decisions about the renewal of contracts of non-tenure-track faculty members are made jointly by department chairs and the dean's office[emphasis added]. Often when departments revise their curricula, it is necessary to change faculty resources in the non-tenure-track ranks to match the new course directions. Dr. Asante, the chairman of African-American Studies, is making some exciting curriculum changes in the department and wanted different fields of study to be covered by instructors.

Of course, in response to the accusation that Asante himself made the decision, Dr. Asante replied that:

The dean writes the letter when she wants to write a letter about anybody in the department...Did she consult with me to tell me what she was going to do? Yes, she did. I didn't provide any guidance at all. My position is he has a year-to-year contract and it's up to the dean... [I am] not worried about [Monteiro's contract not being renewed] because it is year-to-year...there are scores of African-American people who could help us build this program. The thing you can't worry about ... if somebody signs a [year-to-year] contract and then get upset when someone says your year is up.

At best, Asante shows a complete disregard and utter betrayal of a colleague who, just a year earlier, led the charge to have him reappointed to a prominent position. At worst, Asante actively participated in the decision to terminate Dr. Monteiro, demonstrating an insidious willingness to collaborate with a vindictive attack upon a colleague in the interest of pleasing those in positions of power. In his statement, Asante implies that Monteiro could easily be replaced by “scores” of other African-American scholars. Such a statement should be correctly understood as a personal insult not only to Monteiro, but to the thousands of undergraduate and graduate students at Temple who have studied under him, as well as the countless Philadelphia residents who have benefitted from his activism and engagement with the community.

Why Monteiro Matters

Dr. Monteiro, or Tony as his friends refer to him, is an absolutely essential figure for Temple University, Philadelphia, and the Black community as a whole. As a scholar and educator, he is world-renowned. He established the annual W.E.B. DuBois symposium to bring together scholars and activists from all over the world to not only celebrate DuBois's great contributions to the fields of sociology, anthropology, political philosophy, and race theory,

but also to engage communities in an understanding of DuBois's relevance today. It is this connection between "the Academy" and the lives of working people, the poor and the otherwise marginalized that truly illustrates what Tony is about.

Tony goes further, leading the "Saturday Free School" which brought members of the community of North Philadelphia and surrounding areas onto the campus of the university – a grave sin in the eyes of the white establishment, investors, and real estate developer "philanthropists" – to truly incorporate the black community into the campus culture. He has worked tirelessly to bring together organized labor, community groups, political associations and others in order to build coalitions that could represent the interests of working people in and around Philadelphia and resist the continued privatization, gentrification, and liquidation of the poor and disadvantaged communities.

Tony is one of the principal organizers of Educators for Mumia Abu Jamal, a coalition of scholars and academics who continue to wage a tireless campaign to free the revolutionary activist, journalist, and leader Mumia Abu Jamal, as well as all other political prisoners languishing in the Great American Gulag. The movement that Tony helped build has grown throughout the US and internationally, with Monteiro as one of its key figures. Mumia himself, in speaking from prison about Dr. Monteiro, [noted](#) that, "Dr. Anthony Monteiro is a name known among scholars, among activists, among sociologists, and among the people of Philadelphia. A brilliant and incisive teacher and thinker, Dr. Monteiro is a scholar's scholar."

Monteiro has published over one hundred articles and essays in a wide variety of journals and publications, engaging wide-ranging fields of study including sociology, critical theory, African and African-American studies, and a host of other disciplines. He is the most cited scholar in his department, and one of the most cited DuBois scholars in the world. His work has received acclaim from academics the world over. For these reasons, he is respected by some of the most prominent scholars and public intellectuals in the United States, including Dr. Cornel West who, in support of Tony [stated](#) that Monteiro is, "one of our grand intellectual freedom fighters who works in the tradition of W.E.B. DuBois and C.L.R. James. I'm in his corner 120 percent...I'm so glad to see both his students, as well as the community, rise up and support Dr. Monteiro."

One would think that with world famous intellectuals such as Cornel West and Mumia Abu Jamal, among many others, speaking on his behalf, there would be no question that Monteiro would be secure in his position, with tenure, and the respect afforded to a public intellectual of his stature. However, that is not the case. The question is why?

The Neoliberal Purge of Black Radicalism in Academia

The treatment of Dr. Monteiro by Asante and Soufas is worrying in and of itself. However, even more troubling is the fact that it represents a continuing trend within academia and, specifically, within the Black academic community. It would seem that the "Age of Obama" has done wonders to make some corners of the Black academic community feel as if, contrary to their previous status as outsiders who felt it their responsibility to challenge the power structure and agitate for radical progressive change, today there is a growing sense of participation in power.

No doubt, this is one of the deleterious effects of the Obama presidency where many white and black liberal scholars have felt it their responsibility to close ranks behind the President and, in so doing, transform the radical tradition itself. In discussing precisely this

development Glen Ford, the renowned political commentator and Executive Editor of Black Agenda Report, [explained](#) in the context of Angela Davis's support of Obama that:

The "delusional effect" that swept Black America with the advent of the First Black President has warped and weakened the mental powers of some of our most revered icons – and it has been painful to behold...Angela Davis diminished herself as a scholar and thinker in a gush of nonsense about the corporate executive in the White House...She called [his] campaign a 'victory, not of an individual, but of...people who refused to believe that it was impossible to elect a person, a Black person, who identified with the Black radical tradition'... Angela Davis was saying that Barack Obama is a man who identifies with the Black radical tradition. She said it casually, as if Black radicalism and Obama were not antithetical terms; as if everything he has written, said and done in national politics has not been a repudiation of the Black radical tradition.

Ford correctly notes the feeling of betrayal by icons of the Black radical movement willingly deluding themselves into believing that the ruling class has suddenly transformed itself, that the black radical tradition, rather than being in opposition to Obama and the neoliberal order, is now a part of it. For Angela Davis, an icon of the liberation struggle and black academia, to spout this narrative, is indicative of the transformation currently underway – a transformation to sanitize the radical tradition and to annex it to the power structure, with Obama as the catalyst.

This same delusional thinking can be seen in the historical revisionism of Manning Marable in his book *Malcolm X: A Life of Reinvention* in which Marable, a respected black scholar and author, essentially argued that Obama is the natural inheritor of the tradition of Malcolm X and of black radicalism. However, thankfully not all agree with such absurd revisionism. Noted author and lecturer Jared Ball wrote in his book *A Lie of Reinvention: Correcting Manning Marable's Malcolm X* that Marable's book, "is a corporate product, a simple commodity to be traded, but for more than money; it is a carefully constructed ideological assault on history, on radical politics, on historical and cultural memory, on the very idea of revolution." Ball essentially argues that Marable, like Angela Davis, purges the radicalism from black radicalism in order to fit it within the narrative of contemporary political discourse, namely the discourse of power, the discourse of inclusion within the ruling class.

Davis and Marable (before his death), along with Molefi Asante, represent not only a betrayal of the radical tradition and a selling out to, and collusion with, neoliberal capitalism in the "Age of Obama", they have made themselves into the arbiters of "acceptable discourse" within black academia. And it is precisely this acceptable discourse that Dr. Anthony Monteiro rejects. And it is for precisely this reason that Asante has spoken of "scores of African-Americans" who can take his place. Indeed, there are scores of African-American scholars willing and able to supplicate to corporate power and the de-radicalization of the radical tradition.

But not Monteiro. Rather than submit and cooperate, he continues to challenge power, whether it is the derisive wag of Dean Soufas' white finger, or the limitless greed and racism of the white establishment and its black collaborators. He opposes them both with vigor, with fervor, and with uncompromising ethical and moral courage. He upholds the tradition of W.E.B. Dubois, and lives his principles. This is why he has been attacked. And this is why he must be supported.

Visit "Justice for Dr. Anthony Monteiro" on Facebook to see how you can get involved. If you are an educator, please contact Johanna.fernandez@baruch.cuny.edu or mark.taylor@ptsem.edu to sign the petition to reinstate Dr. Monteiro.

Join Dr. Monteiro and members of the community to show your support at a meeting of Temple University's Board of Trustees meeting:

Monday March 10th, 2014 at 2pm.

Sullivan Hall

1330 Polett Walk

Philadelphia, PA 19122

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