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# In Conversation with Fatimah Jackson: The Life and Career of An African American Muslim Biological Anthropologist

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## Abstract

As an important voice in genetic and molecular anthropology, Fatimah Jackson has challenged race science and modeled ethical, methodological, and analytical responsibility in relation to the role of race and exclusion in anthropology. She has published innovative research on ecology, plant–human–animal interactions, health, and disease, particularly in her commitment to studying malaria and its abatement. In this conversation, Jackson shares her frank assessments of the racism and sexism she has faced. Current events and day-to-day life shaped her outlook and cultivated her curiosities, as did her involvement in key scientific achievements, such as the Human Genome and Human Genome Diversity Projects. These trials and tribulations were not merely challenges

to transcend or leave behind. They were central to her experiences, first as a student and then as a scholar, shaping her commitments to science, scholarship, and pedagogy. In this interview, the interweaving of biography and science that makes Jackson's pedagogy so distinctive also marks her reflections on her career.

On March 11, 2020, just as the United States was slowly awakening to the COVID-19 pandemic, I spoke with anthropologist Dr. Fatimah Jackson. Jackson is professor of biology and the director of the W. Montague Cobb Research Laboratory at Howard University. In 2020, she was recognized by the American Association of Physical Anthropology with the Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award.<sup>1</sup> Jackson is also a member of *Feminist Anthropology's* editorial board.

As an important voice in genetic and molecular anthropology, Jackson was dedicated to her continuous work to challenge race science and to think ethically, methodologically, and analytically about the role of race and exclusion in anthropology. Her interests have included innovative approaches to ecology, plant–human–animal interactions, health, and disease, particularly in her commitment to studying malaria and its abatement. At the W. Montague Cobb Research Lab, Jackson collaborates with colleagues and students to integrate osteological and molecular techniques to pursue her understanding of race and history.

As an undergraduate anthropology student at the University of Maryland, College Park, I was once Jackson's student in a large biological anthropology lecture and lab course. My interview with Jackson is grounded in my strong impressions of her pedagogy and my retrospective appreciation of the singular opportunity to study with one of the few Black women physical anthropologists in the discipline in the early 1990s. As a cultural anthropologist noting the scholarly turn toward human–animal relations and posthumanism in the past decade, I connected this present anthropological moment with the pioneering work of biological anthropologists like Jackson, whose genomic interventions traversed human, plant, and animal species decades before we created the generative spaces of multispecies salons or asked whether forests think.

Jackson stood out as a faculty member who spoke openly and honestly about her faith. In this interview, she shares her frank assessments of the racism and sexism she has faced. Current events and day-to-day life shaped her outlook and cultivated her curiosities, as did her involvement in key scientific achievements, such as the Human Genome and Human Genome Diversity Project.<sup>2</sup> These trials and tribulations were not simply challenges to transcend or leave behind. They were central to her experiences, first as a student and then as a scholar, shaping her commitments to science, scholarship, and pedagogy. In this interview, the interweaving of biography and science that makes Jackson's pedagogy so distinctive also marks her reflections on her career.

Written by Sameena Mulla, Milwaukee, WI, July 1, 2020

SM: How did you find yourself in the field of biological anthropology?

FJ: Sometimes I think that I was predisposed towards it because I always wanted to find clothing that would fit. And back in the day, we used to wear these really tight blue jeans. They were so tight that you had to lie down in the bathtub to zip them up. That is really ridiculously tight, right? The problem with the blue jeans is that they were really not made for our physiques. I would notice that.

I had gone to predominantly African American elementary school, junior high school, and high school even though I grew up in Colorado. But when I went to the University of Colorado, it was my first exposure to non-African-descended people. I kept wondering “who are they making go-go boots for?” Because they didn't seem to fit. Who were the legs modeled on? And of course, people were wearing lots of miniskirts, so I had a lot of chances to look at legs and see the variation in morphology. And this was in 1968.

The [1968] Olympics were in Mexico, so the very interesting situation there was that African Americans and African-descended people were dominating the sprints but not the long-distance running. So I thought, what is

the reason for this? Of course, now Africans are dominating all of the short races and the long races. But at that time in '68 the East Africans hadn't begun running or weren't Olympic runners. We didn't see their participation. I also noticed that African Americans were not involved in swimming activities in the Olympics. Usually if you run track, your coaches will tell you don't swim because the set of muscles you develop is different for swimming than for running. I was wondering if it was because of a lack of swimming pools, or was it something physically different, physiologically different? Most of the African Americans I knew, if they tried to swim, they would sink.

I was just poised with a lot of different questions that for me, anthropology in general and biological anthropology began to provide some answers. Because when you are in your late teens and early twenties, you want some answers. Personal interest got me into the field. The chance to study contemporary human diversity was really exciting to me. To me, at that time, that was more exciting than paleoanthropology or primatology. Although since then, I have had enough world experiences to get really interested in the past evolutionary record and nonhuman primates. But the first thing that drew me in was self-interest.

SM: It's interesting to hear you describe the world you were living in, in part because exclusion does seem to be something that framed how you were thinking when you approached these questions. Is it physiological or is it being coached away from a sport? Is it people looking at you and saying you are going to be a better runner, so don't swim? Or is it access to swimming pools? Or some combination of all of these?

FJ: [*Nodding*] With the protests in Mexico City [*we both make the closed fist sign*], it was a politically poignant moment.<sup>3</sup> Because these young men had worked their entire lives to get in the Olympics, and when they got in the Olympics and won the medal, they remembered their people. And that was really meaningful to me. So [Tommie] Smith and [John] Carlos were kind of legendary in that sense. Because at the time, we were all talking about being relevant. Developing skills that would enhance the revolution. We kind of smile about it now because we were naively optimistic thinking we could change the status quo and we just needed the skills. And here we were in college, so we had this chance to get the skills to be involved in building a very different kind of nation.

SM: Anthropology, particularly in the '60s and '70s, is not well known for having been a very diverse field in terms of faculty and students. What was that like for you?

FJ: Anthropology was white and male for the most part. And definitely very conservative. There were courses on the "primitive man" and the "Other." Anthropology was so Eurocentric that they didn't even recognize their own bias. They hadn't confronted their own bias. They were very content, especially in biological [anthropology], with race science. It was a struggle to not feel humiliated from just reading your textbook. Because the textbooks use various schema to denigrate people of color, and particularly African people. But it wasn't just anthropology—biomedicine was the same way.

I will never forget an article that I had a chance to read when I was an undergraduate at Cornell working on my honors thesis. The article was about cervical cancer, and it said that in their sample design they contrasted African American women with European American nuns, and they said that this presented the greatest contrast in sexuality, because the nuns were clearly not promiscuous, but the African American women were clearly promiscuous. So here I am, nineteen years old, never been married, reading this crap. And I thought, "Wow, this is what they think of me, that I am promiscuous!" They were juxtaposing it because they were trying to test the hypothesis that sexual promiscuity was a precursor for cervical cancer. That is how they chose the two groups to compare cervical cancer incidents, with all these assumptions and all this baggage about these two groups.

I remember being angry, being hurt, actually crying about it. And then saying, "I have to do something about it. I have to get the credentials so I can challenge this kind of nonsense that passes as legitimate science." But that is just one example of thousands of examples that are out there. I wonder how many future scientists were turned

off because of the inherent racism of the accepted science. A normal reaction to that would be, "I don't want any part of this." It's like a bad smell; you want to get away from it. But I hung in there because I felt that somebody's got to challenge this.

SM: Did you have a support system as you made your way through your undergraduate and graduate programs? What did that look like?

FJ: After two years of being at the University of Colorado, where I did have a support system because I am from Colorado and had four cousins who were in school with me, I realized that if I was going to grow, I needed to get out of Colorado. So I talked to one of my professors, [an] African American man named Delmos Jones, a cultural anthropologist. I said to him, "I need to get out of here." And he said, "Where would you like to go?" I said, "I don't know." So he said, "the two places that you should go are either Berkeley or Cornell." I said, "OK. I guess I will apply."

I was oblivious to status or how much it would cost. I just felt like I needed to spread my wings. I needed to grow. I needed to see something different. That's what my nineteen-year-old mind was saying. I applied to both schools, and Cornell sent me an airline ticket to come in the middle of the summer. I was working at IBM, so I left IBM to go to Cornell, and Cornell was lush and green in the summer. I thought great, I can live here. Because by that time in the summer, Colorado was very brown and boring.

Cornell came through with admission, and I drove out to Ithaca, New York, but I didn't know anyone. When you are from a place like Colorado and you are African American, you find that African Americans on the coast don't think that you exist even. There is an incredible amount of geographical ignorance, not even about the world, but within the country. What I recall about Cornell is feeling quite a bit of isolation, but it was probably just as well because I studied quite a lot.

My support network was my grandmother, because I grew up with my grandmother and my mom, and my father passed away when I was six years old. When things would get tough, I would call home and talk to my family members, especially my grandmother and my mother. They would give me that homespun encouragement. My grandmother was from Atlanta, Georgia. So she would tell me things like, "You have to root hog or die poor." And I was like, "What is that?" She said, "Oh, you know how a hog roots?" [*Gestures with her hand as a snout, digging deep in the earth*] It sticks its nose in the soil, and that's how it finds food. Because pigs have very big olfactory bulbs, so they can smell through gloves and plastic. If you say that you have to root hog, it means you have to dig. Otherwise you will have nothing. You will die poor.

Those kind of sayings, they served as a huge reservoir of courage and optimism in what was a very difficult environment. That was my main support, my family back home. And not wanting to fail. Wanting to succeed, and wanting to be whatever was intended for me. But because I didn't know what was intended for me, but I wanted to at least give it a shot.

I met my husband at Cornell. I had seen his picture in a newspaper in Colorado ... that really encouraged me to go to Cornell. The students had taken over the Student Union to protest for Black Studies. And when I got to Ithaca, he was the first person I met. And I said, "Oh, I like that guy! He's kind of cute, but he wouldn't be interested in me." I think that he became a very big support system for me. We were friends first, and we were talking a lot. What you really need is not people to do your work for you. You need people to listen to you, so you can think through what you ultimately decide to do.

Then we left Cornell, went to East Africa for three years, and came back and finished our coursework, then went to West Africa for two years, and then came back and wrote up our results. In that interim, I had three kids.

Three children. And then we went out to California and I took an assistant professorship at Berkeley, and another child was born there.

I got a call from Marvin Harris about four years into the Berkeley position. And I said, "Yes!" because I was working on a tropical plant that would just get annihilated whenever the fog would roll in from San Francisco because the temperatures would drop. We went down to Florida. I had another baby. Then, I was at Maryland for twenty years. I left Maryland to go to North Carolina for five years. I became director of a research institute.<sup>4</sup> And then Howard [University] called me and asked me if I would like to direct the Cobb Research Lab.<sup>5</sup> And I said, "Yes!" because I had always wanted to teach at an HBCU [historically black college or university]. The chance to do that! I have been at Howard now ... this is my seventh year. It is probably time for me to think about my retirement, because I have put in my time. You have to make space for the next generation. But anthropology has served me.

For biological anthropologists, it is often difficult being in an anthropology department. We have twice the teaching that you have in a biology department. There is an absence of colleagues who really understand and appreciate the science you are doing. Although they appreciate the species you are working on, they might not understand the science. And therefore, they're not much use to you in terms of collaboration. Sometimes I have been in anthropology departments that were just openly hostile to biological anthropologists. I was always an enigma for them, because they wanted to frame biological anthropology as some archaic racist discipline, and then here I am. It's a kind of a conundrum for some colleagues, I think. I was determined to deal with the issues that were facing African Americans and Muslims. I've been pretty happy with what I have been able to produce with the grace of Allah. We are starting to push some issues out there in the public domain and to change some paradigms.

When I was teaching at the University of Florida, where I was for five years, when I would tell students that humankind originated in Africa, whole groups of students would get up and leave. When I would say, "Where are you going?" [they would say], "Well, ma'am, I'm sorry, but we can't listen to this." But I'm not giving you an Afrocentric view. I'm giving you the facts. But the facts were too painful for them to even sit through my lectures. When I got to Maryland, people complained, but they complained behind my back. The science was catching up with the synthesis that I was presenting, so more and more, people became comfortable with the idea of an African origin and all of human diversity being a subset of African diversity.

Now when I say these things, there is such an acceptance, and I think that some of what I was able to see over the past forty years in our discipline, some of those things are coming to fruition. That may be what was behind the award I got. There is a recognition that, "mmm, maybe she was right? Maybe there is substructure in people other than Europeans? Maybe diet does have an impact on gene frequency?" Now we have the technology, and we can show some of these concepts in other species, so it's not so threatening. What I had told them and published on is not seen as being so threatening.

SM: You have said that with other parts of your research, maybe related to diet and gene frequency, there are possibilities for testing that out with nonhuman species that are less "threatening." Can you help me understand what the threat is?

FJ: The problem is that the Western academy has painted Africa as a slate that we are unable to fully know. Africa, and African peoples. That they are primitive and unknowable. They are remote, inaccessible, and strange. That then makes the assertion that human origins are in Africa, that makes it threatening. Then, if Africa is not really knowable because it is the "dark continent," anything that is said about Africa is suspect. It's not knowable, so it can't be confirmed. By the same token, the more absurd things that have been said about Africa are just as acceptable as the more reasonable things, because Africans can't really be known.

That is the armchair anthropology that people fantasize. The more exotic, the more fantastic, the greater the tenacity of the lies that stuck around. Also, there is a lot of projection. Anthropology has been a conduit for projection onto peoples of color and their descendants. It's not just anthropology. Genetics is the same way. In fact, the work I had been doing with dietary components and phytochemicals and looking at plant compounds and their ability to modify human metabolic processes and change gene frequencies really was ahead of its time.

In 1990, the Human Genome Diversity Project was getting started. The chief scientist, [Luigi Luca] Cavalli-Sforza, had very colonialist ideas about the world. He once said to me, "Fatimah, the world stood still until Vasco de Gama circumnavigated the globe." I would say, "No, it didn't!" And he said, "Of course it did!" We were trying to push the Human Genome Diversity Project to include African Americans. And he said we weren't a real population because we didn't exist before 1492. The telling thing was that it is an attitude that it is so generic that it is worth reminding ourselves of it: back in '94 or '95, there was a meeting at Tuskegee about the Human Genome Project. The Department of Energy brought all of these scientists to Tuskegee, and they were talking. Cavalli-Sforza was there. They were kind of talking down to people because they thought it was just people from the community. They didn't realize it was physicists and statisticians. They were talking down to the people. So I raised my hand and asked, "Dr. Cavalli-Sforza, are you going to include African Americans in the project, either the Human Genome Project or the Human Genome Diversity Project?" And he said, "Oh, yes, Fatimah! Of course! Because you people are such good dancers and such good entertainers." There was this collective groan in the audience. And he still didn't get it.

I went to the George Washington Carver bookstore and got him some children's books about Blacks in sciences and Blacks in medicine. And I said, "Luca, I have a gift for you." And he said, "Oooh, what do you have for me?" "These books!" And they were children's books, little cartoon books. And it outlined some of the scientists and thinkers he had never heard of, and he was talking about our ability to dance and sing, and not realizing that just like every other people, we are a whole people.

SM: This was in the '90s?

FJ: Yes, the mid-'90s. I realized that with this kind of leadership in the Genome Project, I really needed to get involved in their sampling strategy. The science doesn't begin when you start pipetting. The science begins when you envision the project, and you start to imagine who are going to be your participants. That is as scientific as your pipetting. I put down my phytochemical research, also because it was impossible to get funding for those projects in those days. This was because you couldn't patent a natural product. Now you can. The funding has also guided my research. I would say societal need, and the urgency of alternative voices, and then the funding to support the research accounts for the meandering that I have had in my research agenda.

What I have realized is if you can live long enough and stay productive long enough, all of your research actually connects. The phytochemical work that I was doing looking at cassava and cyanide compounds and its effect on sickle cell [disease] is now back and bold. It was work done in the 1980s, and it was work done on these cyanide compounds, and trying to improve the biological fitness of people with sickle cell anemia and sickle cell trait, using the diet. When I first would present that, I remember encountering a lot of hostility and resistance. Physicians who said, "We don't want patients managing their own sickle cell. We're going to nip this in the bud. We are not going to recommend funding for these kinds of studies." Then, I started looking at these same compounds to see if I could inhibit the parasite that causes malaria.

That led to a Fulbright scholarship and testing in Egypt, Sudan, and Cameroon. Who would have thought that an anthropologist could become a vector biologist, but that is what the PhD can give you. I feel like I've had several lifetimes of research and been able to accomplish a lot. Maybe because I gave myself permission, and maybe

because people didn't take me seriously enough to be threatened by me. When Howard called, I had to bone up on skeletal biology. Basically, I'm interested in the genetics, and we just use the skeletal biology to get to the genetics. I think I have made something of a contribution there. We have 400 years of African American biological history in one place, so we can start to say some things about causes of death, cancer, or hypertension in a way that we couldn't before when we had only living people to deal with. That is where I am.

[My] career has followed the vicissitudes of funding and political dynamics. If a few of us had not spoken up about the Genome Project and insisted on diversity, which they ultimately brought in [through] HapMap and 1000 Genomes,<sup>6</sup> there would be no diversity had we not screamed for it. Worse than that, civil rights for people of color would have been set back 125 years because the people who were in the leadership were not necessarily progressive or positive. They didn't even have good attitudes about women, much less people of color. I feel like there is a time for everything, and that Allah puts you in the right place at the right time. Then your task has been to respond appropriately. If we don't respond appropriately, then that opportunity becomes a penalty for us. I tried to respond appropriately, and I probably could have done better. But I look back and I think, not too bad. Not too shabby. [Laughs]

The best thing is that I have had students who have taken some of the ideas and gone farther. I had my first Rhodes scholar at Howard. Not only did he spend time at Oxford, but he applied to medical school and got into all of the top schools. And then [there are] other students; I have been able to mentor them. I have had trans students who have encouraged my own growth and development. They were my student, but I was their student, too. I have learned as much from the students as they have learned from me.

One of my students had his first publication in *Nature Scientific Reports*. I feel like I am in roller derby, and you reach back and you swing someone forward. That's me, I swing my students forward! I get them more momentum, and they go on and win the race. That has been very rewarding for me, especially at Howard. That has been easier at Howard because I am not going up against white supremacy. My students at Maryland would say, "we learn so much, but when we are out of school, it's really hard to hold on to those values." Because they are not supported in the larger society.

SM: Your path, to me, is so unique and so important. It was important for me as a young Muslim woman to have a Muslim woman professor.

FJ: Thank you.

SM: I think at Maryland, it turns out to be quite unusual that I had two Black professors in an anthropology department, because I had you and Tony Whitehead at the time. I talk to people and I say, "I don't know how that happened."

FJ: Tony recruited me from Florida the year I went to Egypt as a Fulbright scholar. Because this commute thing, where [my husband] was in Maryland and I was in Florida, that really wasn't working with six kids. Fortunately, Tony lobbied for me as a candidate for the position. It narrowed down to me and a colleague out in Colorado. I was really glad they chose me.

SM: I remember you explaining to us your own experience with malaria.<sup>7</sup> And that story has stuck with me for a long time. We're not supposed to talk about faith or *iman* in our own journeys, and here I have this professor who was willing to share this story.

FJ: Not talking about how we became the person we are is cheating ourselves and cheating the students out of insights. And cheating ourselves out of appropriate self-reflection. You have to say, "This is how I got here, I nearly died from malaria. I have a vendetta against mosquitoes. I want to kill as many mosquitoes as I can, at least female mosquitoes." I want to do something about malaria because that is what I prayed for. I prayed that



God would not let me forget, that Allah would not let me forget that I had nearly died. So I promised that I would go back to graduate school to study malaria. I made a commitment in East Africa, prayed to God as I understood him to be, and said, "If you save me from this," because I had lost my eyesight, lost my ability to speak, "If you save me from this, I will go back to graduate school and study malaria." And he made it possible. Now I want to take the insights that I have on malaria and the insecticide I developed, and I want to get it to the people, because if you don't take it all the way, it's like you never did it. You know what I am afraid of; I am afraid of *yawm al-qiyamah* [the day of resurrection] and being told, "Drag that woman by her hair to hell because I gave her so much and she didn't save one person. Not one of my servants did she save, and she had the capability." That's the one thing that keeps me kind of "OK, I can't give up quite yet." Because I need to pass the baton.

SM: Is there anything I should be asking you that I haven't?

FJ: I should say something about evolution, because I am getting the Charles Darwin Award. I think Darwin understood that intelligence is equally distributed in all human groups. It's not by gender, and it's not by color, or anything like that. It's just the mercy of God. Then the question is, what do you do with your intelligence? Whatever I've been blessed with, I have to turn around and give it to someone else. Otherwise it's not a blessing, it becomes a curse. I have thoroughly internalized that viewpoint. I think that I saw the way that Muslims were dealing with evolution. You know I became a Muslim in 1977. I was attracted to Islam because it seemed to me like a thinking woman's religion. You get to think. And you get to keep your own money! [Laughs] That's like a win-win. Winning in the capitalist mode, and winning in the individualist mode.

There is a layer of ignorance that has permeated authentic Islam that really limits our ability. It maligns the true religion of Allah, and it substitutes some kind of dogmatic sense that all the thinking that needed to be done was done in the ninth century, and we don't need to think anymore. [Laughs] And that, I don't like that. And I thought, I want to talk about evolution because I know it annoys some of those really dogmatic antifeminist fakers, because they are fakers. Because I can't believe in the same Allah that I believe in and then treat other people the way that they do. I said that I would, even though my husband was saying "Don't give these talks! It's going to be a problem," I needed to do it. I needed to do it for me. I needed to do it for the little girls who are out there who have been told to shut up and sit down. And then, of course, they become adults and they are still operating under that shadow of "shut up and sit down," and they can't assert themselves.

I hate oppression. I hate oppression and all forms of it. It is one of the things that riles me up. I thought I would go talk about evolution, because I really know about evolution. Women's Studies, I don't really know. But evolution, that is what I have studied. I feel that that has been a service and I hope that it has expanded the parameters that you can be religious and you can be a scientist. You can have belief, and you can be a scientist. You can say *bismillah* before your experiment, and still do your experiment and get it published. I get challenged all the time, because of wearing a hijab or because of reading Q'uran, or any little thing, but that is just part of the life here in America. But I think that not giving up on the evolution has been a positive thing in my academic career and in my personal development, because, to me, I see that I have not given evolution to the atheist. I won't allow them just to hijack it. And I won't become an anti-evolutionist because it makes some people uncomfortable and they don't want to pray next to me, or they denounce me in a *khutba* [sermon during Friday prayer]. None of that really bothers me, because at the end of the day we stand before Allah individually. No one can stand in for us. That is why Islam is a thinking woman's religion. If we give up that right of thinking, that responsibility of thinking to someone else, then we're doomed.

SM: What *nasiha* [advice] would you offer your younger self?

FJ: Worry less about what other people think. It matters what Allah thinks, and what you think. What you think about yourself. What Allah thinks about you. None of this other stuff matters. If you are thinking about what are other people going to say, then you can't be honest with yourself. It is very important to be honest with yourself. I think that ethnic minorities in particular are very susceptible to the vicissitudes of other people's opinions of us. We should be able to live our lives fully. Whoever we are, we should be able to live as we are. If it's good and wholesome and doesn't hurt other people, what are we upset about here? I think my *nasiha* to my younger self would be to spend less time trying to meet other people's expectations. You can never meet other people's expectations, because they will never see you as a whole person. Everyone needs to dance to their own tune, their own rhythm. That would have saved me a lot of heartache, illness, and anxiety. If I had just said, "I am going to do what I am going to do. And I am not going to worry and let the chips fall where they may." And when you do that, then you can be your best.

## Notes

- 1 The American Association of Physical Anthropologists (AAPA) established the Charles R. Darwin Lifetime Achievement Award in 1992. The purpose of the award is to honor distinguished senior members of the profession who have made extraordinary contributions to the field of physical anthropology. More information about the award and current and previous winners can be found on the AAPA's website at <https://physanth.org>.
- 2 The Human Genome Diversity Project is a distinctive initiative to include a wide variety of populations within a genome mapping project. The results of this mapping project were just published in 2020. It is sometimes conflated with the Human Genome Project, which was a scientific collaboration beginning in 1990 and ending in 2003 that mapped the entire human genome. Jackson advocated for greater inclusion of African Americans (African-descended peoples in the Americas) in the studies. The issue of variation was included to some extent in some of the post-Human Genome Project efforts. For example, the HapMap included a Nigerian Yoruba population and the 1000 Genomes had more worldwide diversity. Jackson reflects that none of this was conscientiously thought out, however, so the samples overall could only begin to hint at some of the expansive genomic diversity present across the globe. In her estimation, the issue of inclusion, particularly of African samples, remains critically deficient.
- 3 Jackson is referring to the iconic protest of runners Tommie Smith and John Carlos, who stood atop the Olympic podium during their medal ceremonies and made the Black Power salute while wearing single black gloves. At the time, they were sent home early from the Olympics and faced vitriol and blacklisting on their return to the United States. Since 2005, one can see a statue commemorating this important moment on the campus of San Jose State University and, more recently, at the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC.
- 4 Jackson was the director of the Institute of African American Research at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, from 2009 to 2011.
- 5 The W. Montague Cobb Lab at Howard University houses unique human skeletal and bioarchaeological collections and continues to be central in the analysis of the remains of enslaved peoples recovered from the New York African Burial Ground. DNA samples and genomic database resources are central to the lab's work, and the lab also supports a writer's collective and offers programming in the educational development of health professionals.
- 6 The International HapMap Project was a scientific effort to identify common genetic variations (or haplotype maps) among people. The project generated a catalog of common genetic variants. The HapMap described haplotypes, including their locations in the genome and how common they are in different populations throughout the world. The 1000 Genomes Project was an international collaboration that extended the HapMap Project.

7 As I recall it, Jackson explained to a lecture hall full of rapt students how she had contracted malaria and the parasite crossed into her brain. Blinded, she prayed to God and pledged that if she recovered her health and her sight, she would make it her life's goal to eradicate malaria. She recovered and promptly changed her research topic to the study of malaria.

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