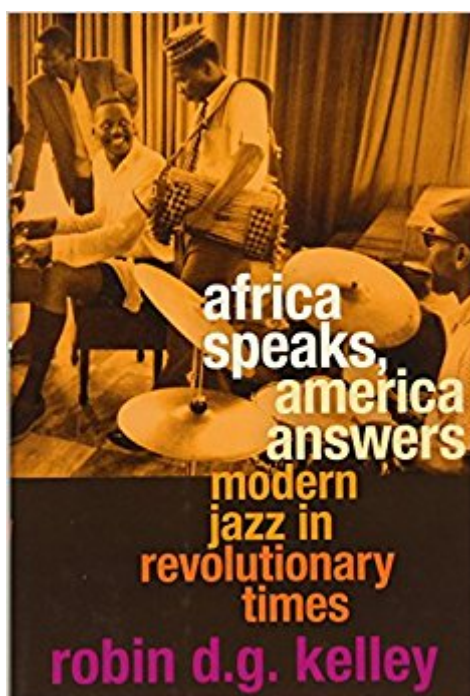


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# Africa Speaks, America Answers: Modern Jazz In Revolutionary Times (The Nathan I. Huggins Lectures)



## Synopsis

In Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, pianist Randy Weston and bassist Ahmed Abdul-Malik celebrated with song the revolutions spreading across Africa. In Ghana and South Africa, drummer Guy Warren and vocalist Sathima Bea Benjamin fused local musical forms with the dizzying innovations of modern jazz. These four were among hundreds of musicians in the 1950s and '60s who forged connections between jazz and Africa that definitively reshaped both their music and the world. Each artist identified in particular ways with Africa's struggle for liberation and made music dedicated to, or inspired by, demands for independence and self-determination. That music was the wild, boundary-breaking exultation of modern jazz. The result was an abundance of conversation, collaboration, and tension between African and African American musicians during the era of decolonization. This collective biography demonstrates how modern Africa reshaped jazz, how modern jazz helped form a new African identity, and how musical convergences and crossings altered politics and culture on both continents. In a crucial moment when freedom electrified the African diaspora, these black artists sought one another out to create new modes of expression. Documenting individuals and places, from Lagos to Chicago, from New York to Cape Town, Robin Kelley gives us a meditation on modernity: we see innovation not as an imposition from the West but rather as indigenous, multilingual, and messy, the result of innumerable exchanges across a breadth of cultures.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

A fascinating and pathbreaking contribution to African diasporic and music studies. *Africa Speaks, America Answers* is a marvelous book. (Manthia Diawara, author of *In Search of Africa*) Kelley vividly captures this all-star quartet riffing on new alternatives within jazz. Filled with stories and songs that need to be heard, *Africa Speaks, America Answers* is an essential addition to any jazz library. (Jason Moran, jazz pianist, composer, and 2010 MacArthur Fellow) *Africa Speaks, America Answers* is an exquisitely rendered account of the lives of African and African American musicians, their music, and their worlds. Kelley transforms our understanding of jazz, the history of Africa and its diaspora, and the global circulation of culture. (Penny M. Von Eschen, author of *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War*) Continually surprising. (Peter Monaghan *Chronicle of Higher Education* 2012-02-19) An illuminating document. (Daniel Spicer *The Wire* 2013-07-01)

Robin D. G. Kelley is Gary B. Nash Chair of U.S. History at the University of California, Los Angeles.

I originally purchased this eBook for a college course that I ended up dropping but I decided to read the book anyway it was very interesting. It is always a pleasure to read a well researched book. Even though I will probably take the course in an upcoming semester I am sure I gained more from reading it now than I would have if I read it while taking the class where my time would have been more limited.

Another intelligent, well-researched book from Professor Robin Kelley. Fascinating account of musical cross pollination between Africa and the U.S. during a pivotal time of great cultural and political awakening. Especially liked the chapters on Randy Weston and Sathima Bea Benjamin.

I highly recommend this book to anyone interested in jazz, African American history, the evolution of the struggle in Africa and its support by African Americans. Robin Kelly is brilliant.

As one might expect from the author of the recent and superb biography of Thelonious Monk, Professor Robin Kelley has given us a fine, if smaller, book, an offshoot of the Nathan Huggins lectures. The subject here is the modern, rather than longer historical, interplay of American and African jazz music, focusing on the Ghanaian drummer Guy Warren, the great American pianist Randy Weston (who deservedly gets the lion's share of attention), the South African singer Sathima

Bea Benjamin, and what we learn here is the American oud and bass player Ahmed Abdul-Malik, despite his lifelong claims to be Sudabese. Kelley questions neither his nor the others' musical credentials, nor their earnestness in spreading the music across the Atlantic in either direction. I should clarify that while Kelley does not re-inter the longstanding debate of the African roots of jazz, or AfrAmerican culture more generally (his conclusions in that regard are clear), his treatment of mid- to late-twentieth century history, particularly of South Africa, and its context for the music, is outstanding and welcome. One of the most fascinating phenomena of jazz in recent years has been the cross-pollination of jazz with various forms of world music--- Latin American, Asian, even Klezmer--- in terms of style, rhythms, and instrumentation. Of all these, though, the African/America connection has, for historical reasons, the most resonance, and Kelley convincingly explores this, for want of a better word (and it is my word, not his) symmetry. It is elegantly written, informed, useful, and very entertaining, and adds (along with his own recent memoir) to what ought to be Mr. Weston's growing esteem and importance, which is not to denigrate the others covered here. My minor quibbles--- and they are indeed minor--- should probably be laid not at Kelley's doorstep, but at his publishers', of all places, Harvard University Press, and its copy-editing department. It is one thing to transpose the author David Hajdu's name as "Hadju", but quite another in a book and by an author of this stature to repeatedly add an "s" to the surname of music producer and pioneer John Hammond. This is, however, the merest tiny burr under the reader's saddle, and in no real way detracts from the quality of this wonderful book.

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