

Matthew Angelo  
Harrison

With objects from the  
African Collection  
at the University of  
Pennsylvania Museum  
of Archaeology  
and Anthropology

**Colored People Time**  
MUNDANE FUTURES  
QUOTIDIAN PASTS  
BANAL PRESENTS

Chapter II  
April 26–August 11, 2019  
Project Space

“In what tense does one write an ethnographic account? This grammatical detail has considerable intellectual and political significance.... To many readers, using the past tense about an out-of-the-way place suggests not that people ‘have’ history but that they are history.”

—Anna Tsing, In the Realm of the Diamond Queen (1993)

## QUOTIDIAN PASTS

Quotidian Pasts, the second chapter of the exhibition series Colored People Time, reconsiders the trafficking of blackness through colonial practices of collecting, commodifying, and exhibiting people and objects from the African continent. Produced in collaboration with the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, this exhibition examines early-twentieth-century ethnographic practices—and the legacy they left behind in museums—as acts of white supremacy. As anthropologist Anna Tsing has suggested, the seemingly simple act of conjugating a verb in the past tense has powerful political ramifications when describing a non-western subject. This act of objectification through language is placed on display through archival materials from the Penn Museum.

The long history of the exploitation of both the African people and their cultures is told, in the exhibition, through the configuration of a few small objects—a photograph, a journal entry, a letter—and a CBS television show. These archival materials, which range from 1930 to 1968, document key histories and biographies, from the birth of anthropology and ethnographic research in universities and museums to the height of PanAfricanism.

At the center of this exhibition is a newly commissioned installation by the artist Matthew Angelo Harrison. Harrison's 3D-printed works are manipulations of a selection of sculptures held in the Penn Museum's collection from six countries: Angola, the former Benin Kingdom of Nigeria, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, and Sierra Leone.

By pairing Penn Museum's archival materials with Harrison's contemporary sculptures, this exhibition challenges us to question how we see and make meaning of "authentic" African sculpture and how we assign cultural and commercial capital and value on African objects. These complex conversations are sited locally, here, in West Philadelphia. Quotidian Pasts is a reminder that history never occurs in the past tense, but is present with us in the here and now.

—Meg Onli, Assistant Curator, and Monique Scott, Director of Museum Studies, Bryn Mawr College

## COLORED PEOPLE TIME

“The challenge continues to be how to reconcile an ‘in time’ philosophy with the ‘on time’ demands of mainstream America.”

—Geneva Smitherman, Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans (2006)

“The first object that engaged my attention was a watch which hung on the chimney, and was going. I was quite surprised at the noise it made, and was afraid it would tell the gentleman anything I might do amiss.”

—Olaudah Equiano, The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano (1789)

In his 1972 article “Some Notes on the Blues, Style and Space,” Ronald Walcott wrote “time is the very condition of Western civilization which oppresses so brutally.” Published under the Johnson Publishing Company’s imprint Black World, Walcott’s essay examined the works of three prominent black cultural producers—author Ralph Ellison, playwright Charles Gordone, and poet Melvin B. Tolson—through their shared depictions of “Colored People’s Time” (aka CPT or CP Time.) As Walcott observes, black people occupy and deploy CPT as a political performance to “evade, frustrate, and ridicule” the enforcement of punctuality and productivity, key disciplinary structures of capitalism.<sup>1</sup> For many, CPT is the time-space of the struggle.<sup>2</sup> It emerges from conditions of ongoing oppression that stretch back to the beginning of Transatlantic slavery. CPT challenges and disavows the predominant opinion that being “on time” is the only way of being “in time.”

I began thinking about CPT while developing an exhibition that examined how a group of artists, activists, and writers have considered how white supremacy and the legacy of chattel slavery have existed so insidiously in our current moment(s).

I was drawn to CPT as both a living and liberatory phrase. It has provided a linguistic tool for black people to navigate their own temporality, within and against the construct of Western time. Not surprisingly, white supremacist logics have attempted to distort and co-opt CPT, constructing a dual meaning through racial stereotype. In spite of this, CPT has remained part of the vernacular of racially marginalized groups, to think and act differently in time.

Colored People Time, structured as an experimental exhibition in three chapters—Mundane Futures, Quotidian Pasts, and Banal Presents—unfolds over the course of 2019. Within the exhibition, I want to explore the plural and malleable nature of the term. CPT connects to the tradition of black expressions grounded in counter-language, ones performed as part of “resistance discourse, created as a communication system unintelligible to speakers of the dominant master class.”<sup>3</sup> Like the constructs of race and gender, time is an experience and subject that escapes the limitations of language.

The artists represented within this exhibition include: Aria Dean, Kevin Jerome Everson, Matthew Angelo Harrison, Carolyn Lazard, Dave McKenzie, Cameron Rowland, Sable Elyse Smith, and Martine Syms; accompanied by historical objects from the Black Panther Party, Sutton E. Griggs, the National Institutes of Health/Getty Images, and the African Collection at the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology. It is through these works that we are invited to reconsider the singularity of Western time and bear witness to the everyday disruptions that restructure and reorganize black being in the past, present, and future.

—Meg Onli, Assistant Curator

1—Walcott, Ronald, “Ellison, Gordone and Tolson: Some Notes on the Blues, Style and Space.” Black World, December 1972, pp. 4–29.

2—John Streamas, “Closure And ‘Colored Peoples Time’” in Time: Limits and Constraints, ed. Jo Alyson Packer, et al. (Boston: Brill Publishing, 2010).

3—Geneva, Smitherman, Word from the Mother: Language and African Americans (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.

## EXHIBITION WORKS

- Matthew Angelo  
Harrison
- Queen Mother  
(Edo, Oldman)
- 2019
- Ceramic, acrylic,  
aluminum  
Courtesy the artist  
and Jessica Silverman  
Gallery, San Francisco
- Queen Mother  
adapted (Edo, Oldman)
- 2019
- Ceramic, acrylic,  
aluminum  
Courtesy the artist  
and Jessica Silverman  
Gallery, San Francisco
- Sowei Actuation  
(Bundu, J.L. Buck)
- 2019
- Ceramic, acrylic,  
aluminum  
Courtesy the artist  
and Jessica Silverman  
Gallery, San Francisco
- Seated Female  
(Kisi, J. Laporte)
- 2019
- Ceramic, acrylic,  
aluminum  
Courtesy the artist  
and Jessica Silverman  
Gallery, San Francisco
- African Collection  
at the University of  
Pennsylvania Museum  
of Archaeology  
and Anthropology
- Amandus Johnson in  
Angola. At encampment  
with natives and  
other explorers.
- [n.d.]
- University of  
Pennsylvania Museum  
Photographic Archives;  
Standard Size Prints;  
Africa, Box AF 4: Amandus  
Johnson in Angola;  
Penn Museum
- F16-4023 "African  
Heritage"
- 1968
- Digital video  
transferred from 16mm  
film, color, sound,  
27:9 min.  
Courtesy of the Penn  
Museum
- WHAT IN THE WORLD 4  
c. 1952
- Digital video  
transferred from 16mm  
film, color, sound,  
28:28 min  
Courtesy of the Penn  
Museum
- Collection of African  
Specimens arranged in  
Ethnographical Groups,  
Price L865.00
- [n.d.]
- Director's Office,  
Gordon; W. O. Oldman;  
Penn Museum Archives
- Oldman to Hall, 3 Dec.  
1930 [first page]
- 1930
- Oceanian Section; W. O.  
Oldman Correspondence,  
1930-1939; Penn Museum  
Archives
- Frances J. Hall  
Household Book,  
Sierra Leone
- 1937
- Sierra Leone Field  
Notes; F. J. Hall Diary;  
Penn Museum
- "I take, you take..."  
[Word list] by Henry  
U. Hall
- 1937
- Sierra Leone Expedition  
Records; Notebook G  
inclusions; Penn Museum  
Archives

## SUGGESTED READING

- Clifford, James, and George E. Marcus. Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2011.
- Cole, Teju. “When the Camera Was a Weapon of Imperialism. (And When It Still Is.)” The New York Times. February 06, 2019. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/06/magazine/when-the-camera-was-a-weapon-of-imperialism-and-when-it-still-is.html>.
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- Jameson, Fredric. “The End of Temporality.” Critical Inquiry 29, no. 4 (Summer 2003), The University of Chicago Press.
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## Related Programs

Friday, April 26  
Members Preview, 5PM  
Public Opening Celebration,  
6:30 PM

Wednesday, June 5, 6:30 PM  
Film Screening with Maori  
Karmael Holmes

Wednesday, June 19, 6 PM  
Curator-led Tour

Please visit [icaphila.org/calendar](http://icaphila.org/calendar)  
for more upcoming events.

#quotidianpasts

## Credits

Colored People Time: Quotidian Pasts is organized by Meg Onli, ICA Assistant Curator and Monique Scott, Director of Museum Studies at Bryn Mawr College. A fully illustrated catalogue will be published in early 2020.

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The logo for The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage, featuring the text "The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage" in a sans-serif font, with "The" on the first line, "Pew Center" on the second, "for Arts" on the third, and "& Heritage" on the fourth. The text is white and set against a dark, layered square background.

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