

The Humanities Center
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Presents

**The "Culture Industry" and the Black Atlantic:
Thodor Adorno's "*Enlightenment as Mass
Deception*" in a West African/Yoruba Context**



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All Lectures are Free and Open to the Public

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In an essay published in the mid-1940s, titled "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception," Theodor Adorno indicted the modern "culture industry" for resigning itself to the production of safe, standardized products geared to the demands of the capitalist economy, rather than nurturing freedom, individuality and the ability to represent the real conditions of human existence. Members of the Frankfurt School of critical theory, a tradition that reexamined the Enlightenment in order to rethink the political values of knowledge itself, provided a time-tested toolbox of techniques and strategies by which multinational capital was to be thought through as a new and historically unique concept. Critics claim, however, that Adorno's intellectual contribution showed a lack of appreciation for the emancipatory visions and creative capacities nurtured within individual and communal contexts such as those of the modern Black Atlantic. This study highlights the role and impact of popular, expressive culture in both colonial and modern Africa. More specifically, I explore the similarities and differences shared by the late ordained Anglican Christian Missionary Society Deacon J.J. Ransome-Kuti, and his grandson, Pan-Africanist, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti, with respect to their musical careers and the direction their careers took on both socially and politically. I also seek to emphasize the impact of British colonialism on the musical production of J.J. Ransome-Kuti and, likewise, that of the post-/neo-colonial world in which Fela Kuti created his own unique and revolutionary style of music. Analysis of these two figures brings light to the manner in which social institutions and expressive forms evolve or are deliberately created in response to new social and cultural needs. I will use brief musical excerpts—the respective 1922 and 1978 recordings of J.J. and Fela Ransome-Kuti—to reveal how music serves as an important vehicle for inciting social and political action, effectively allowing for a combination of social commentary and political satire. External cultural forces modified the musical careers and political influences of both J.J. Ransome-Kuti and Fela Anikulapo-Kuti: British for J.J. and mainly African-American for his grandson. Their lives, both highly shaped by colonialism's impact in Nigeria, provide an opportunity for intergenerational analysis of acculturation and resistance to colonialism's socio-political and economic influence within the context of West African elite and popular culture.

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