

**Leonard Gadzekpo**

**A New Paradigm: African Americans in the American Experience**

**ABSTRACT**

What makes a person African American? Given history, culture, and political and economic realities of the American experience rooted in professed freedom, African American emergence as a people through the centuries within the republic demands a new paradigm in dealing with and understanding that peoplehood. The lecture offers four aspects of genetic heritage, culture, awareness of struggle and progress, and multiplicity of identities, as against socially constructed and untenable notion of race, to inform and to underline a new paradigm that situates African Americans inextricably in the American experience and in a larger American peoplehood.

**BIO**

Ph.D. Dr. Leonard Kodzo Gadzekpo is a Ghanaian American who was born in Cote d'Ivoire. He got his first degree from the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, and taught in Ghana and Nigeria. He also studied at Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg, Germany, and at Universität Mozarteum and Salzburg Universität, Austria. He did graduate studies at Bowling Green State University, Bowling Green, Ohio and earned M.A. in German, M.F.A. in Drawing and Painting, and Ph.D. in American Culture Studies. He researched the Civil Right Movement and participated in National Endowment for the Humanities Institute Seminar at Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research, Harvard University. Before coming to Southern Illinois University Carbondale, where he is Associate Professor and Interim Chair of the Department of Africana Studies, he was Assistant Professor of Art and Interdisciplinary Studies at University of Maine, Orono, Maine. He also taught at Bowling Green State University and University of Toledo, both in Ohio.

As an artist, Dr. Gadzekpo has been exhibiting drawings, paintings, and sculpture pieces in America, Europe, and Africa. He completed a mural for Our Lady of the Holy Rosary Catholic Church at the University of Science and Technology, Kumasi, Ghana, painted several triptychs and altar-pieces for the St. Stephanus Katholische Gemeinde, Oldenburg, Germany, and designed stained-glass windows for the Warren A. M. E. Church, Toledo, Ohio, U.S.A.

Dr. Gadzekpo's research and writing focus on the African American experience, American history and culture, and comparative study of Africana history and culture.