

The Pan-African Movement

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Introduction

Pan-Africanism has been one of the most fundamental experiences within the history of the African world community. Before analyzing the historical evolution of this movement, it is first necessary to discuss its meaning. There is enough consensus among scholars and consistency within the movement itself to argue that Pan-Africanism has been and continues to be the cooperative movement among peoples of African origin to unite their efforts in the struggle to liberate Africa and its scattered and suffering people. More specifically, Pan-Africanism can be understood as the movement among African peoples in different parts of the world to unite Africa and its people in an effort to liberate them from oppression and exploitation associated with European hegemony and the international expansionism of the capitalist system. Furthermore, Pan-Africanism has always manifested a multi-dimensional character, which has included the use of political, economic, religious, and cultural approaches in the struggle to rehabilitate Africa and its people. In short, Pan-Africanism can be defined as the multifaceted movement for transnational solidarity among African people with the purpose of liberating and unifying Africa and peoples of African descent.

However, during most of the twentieth century, because of its entanglement with Western expansionism, Pan-Africanism has evolved into a variant of the socialist movement as well. In fact, the leading advocates of Pan-Africanism during the twentieth century espoused some form of socialism. Hence, the broadest definition of Pan-Africanism includes both unity (of Africa and peoples of African descent) and socialism.

Major terms and concepts: Pan-Africanism, diaspora, repatriation, African World, Berlin Conference, Garveyism, Nkrumahism, imperialism, Eurocentrism, assimilation, self-determination.

Origins and Early Emigration Efforts

The roots of Pan-Africanism lie squarely in Africa. For too long historians, and even Pan-Africanists themselves, have traced the movement to unite the continent and its people to the transatlantic slave trade or, sometimes later, to the Pan-African Conference held in London in July of 1900. This meeting, organized by Henry Sylvester Williams of Trinidad, is often credited for putting the word “Pan-Africanism” in the dictionary. Then, nearly two decades later, Du Bois—who actually attended the 1900 London conference—began organizing a series of Pan-African Congresses in 1919. The most significant of these congresses, the fifth, was held in Manchester, England, in 1945 under the leadership of Padmore and Nkrumah. These formal gatherings, and lest we forget the brilliant conventions organized in Harlem by Garvey and his UNIA during the early 1920s, represent a cherished legacy in the struggle to unite Africa and its scattered and suffering people.

However, this was not the beginning. After all, even Williams was busy organizing fellow Africans from different parts of the world—to give them an independent voice in resisting the oppression that had engulfed them—into his *African Association* in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. And more than a century earlier, we have documented evidence of displaced Africans, slaves in New England (USA), struggling to reunite with the motherland. Indeed, the efforts of countless numbers of Africans in the diaspora to return home, discussed below, constitutes an integral part of the Pan-Africanist movement as well, the tragic and anomalous histories of early statehood in Liberia and Sierra Leone notwithstanding.

Instead, it seems far more accurate to argue that the movement to unite Africa and its people, which represents the very epitome of Pan-Africanism, began somewhere in the long centuries before foreign invaders entered Africa and changed its course. During this pre-invasion period in Africa, we have a near steady progression of smaller and weaker ethnic formations being swallowed up by, and integrated into, larger, stronger, and more developed ethnic and regional formations as part of the process of creating huge nation-states. This evolutionary, Pan-African process is, in fact, what the slave traders, from both the east and the west, and later European imperialism served to arrest. Two relatively modern and glaring examples of this process took place amongst the expansionist empires of the Asante in West Africa and the Zulu in Southern Africa—both of which were brutally dismantled by British imperialism. But they were not the only ones. Once again, this process was taking place in several regions throughout the continent, so much so that it would not be difficult to argue, or to at least honestly speculate, the following: had Africa not suffered from these external invasions, the number of nation-states in Africa, currently, would hardly reach 10, let alone the 54 artificially created ones we have today.

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similarity of Africa’s topography and geography, and the normal socio-cultural vicissitudes that occur when people struggle to adapt, survive, and flourish in the physical environment and social milieu that they meet. This same process helps to explain why pre-colonial African cultural patterns, throughout much of the continent, share so much in common, especially in matters relating to familial life, governance, health care, agriculture, linguistic structure, artistic expression, and the philosophical concepts of time, space, and being.

Although this movement in Africa was not conscious of itself, unlike modern social movements (with their stated programs, agendas, and objectives), this informal human activity should not cloud our understanding of where Africa was headed: family, clan, tribe, nation, and continent, in short, Pan-Africanism—before, that is, European imperialism fossilized Africa at the tribal stage while balkanizing the entire continent into the factitious, fragmented, warring mess it is today.

The struggle of Africans who had been (or whose forebears had been) forcibly removed from their homes to reunite with Africa began in earnest during the earliest years of slavery in the Western Hemisphere. Not only did the lyrics of songs sung by Africans during slavery, in both North America and the Caribbean, indicate a strong desire to reunite with Africa, but even attempted suicides often reflected their longing to return home. This rudimentary manifestation of Pan-Africanism among enslaved Africans and their emancipated descendants continued throughout the slavery period and for many years thereafter, albeit at different levels of momentum and with different degrees of success.

As would be expected, the interest among Africans in North America in physically returning to Africa was greater among those who were most oppressed and most excluded from American institutions. And since lower-class Africans in North America experienced a far greater number of injustices than their middle-class brethren, the desire to physically reunite with Africa was always greater among the former. This pattern of interest toward Pan-Africanism paralleled experiences in different parts of the Caribbean as well.

The repatriation experience of Africans in the diaspora, who returned to West Africa during the nineteenth century and established Sierra Leone and Liberia, is often included as part of the historical development of Pan-Africanism. However, this experience was more anomalous than congruent with the historical evolution of the Pan-African movement. Both states became, in effect, colonies of the West. And with the use of a class of educated, privileged, or financially advantaged African descendants from abroad, the indigenous African population was compelled to provide exploitable labor for European capitalist investments. Still, the willingness of thousands of Africans in North America and the Caribbean to return to Africa, as arranged under white tutelage, is an indication of the sentiments for Pan-African unity among the scattered descendants of Africa at that time. Moreover, many emigration move-

Contrary to the white-dominated emigration schemes of groups such as the American Colonization Society, which transported thousands of Africans in North America to Liberia, there were many black-controlled efforts to reunite with Africa. This activity also represented a genuine sentiment and burgeoning struggle for Pan-African unity. As early as 1773, slaves petitioned the colonial legislatures of North America to be emancipated in order that they might return to Africa. Around this same time, Africans from Jamaica who were exiled by Great Britain to Canada were making identical requests to their European captors. Also in the Caribbean, men such as Joseph Cinqué in Cuba and Macandal Daaga in Trinidad led movements in the 1830s to reunite with Africa. However, throughout most of the nineteenth century, in general, the efforts by African descendants in the diaspora to reunite with Africa were better financed and organized than the attempts just cited.

The New Englander Paul Cuffee, is often credited for organizing the first serious attempt to return Africans in the diaspora back to Africa. Driven almost as much by missionary zeal as a genuine thirst for freedom, Cuffee, had he not died unexpectedly in 1817, might have succeeded partially in his objective given the enthusiasm he received from fellow blacks interested in his plans.

By 1859, Robert Campbell of Jamaica and Martin Delaney of the US travelled together in Africa in search for land for resettlement purposes and succeeded in signing an agreement with a Yoruba King that gave them and their followers the rights to uncultivated land. The advent of the Civil War in the US, however, was among other factors that prevented Delaney and Campbell from realizing their Pan-African goals.

One year before Delaney and Campbell travelled to Africa, Henry Highland Garnet founded the African Civilization Society, of which he became president. While this organization, like others before it, had ambitions that reflected the Eurocentric biases of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—which sought to “civilize” Africa with Euro-Christianity—it also had aims that were both militant and Pan-African. In addition to seeking to “strike the deathblow to American slavery,” one of its major objectives in Africa was “to establish a grand centre of negro nationality, from which shall flow the streams of commercial, intellectual, and political power which shall make colored people respected everywhere.” Despite his occasional vacillation, Garnet succeeded in keeping alive the notion of reunification with Africa; still, he was unable to implement his plans effectively, partly because of the hostility he received from men such as Frederick Douglass in the United States, who adamantly opposed any efforts that were inconsistent with his aspirations for black assimilation into the North American mainstream.

During this same period, in the Caribbean and in Latin America, there were many African descendants who sought and advocated a return to Africa in order to assist in Africa’s development. Although they mostly came as Christian mission-

this trek of black missionaries from the Caribbean to Africa was the West Church Association, formed in the 1850s. One of the most successful products of this effort was Edward Blyden from St. Thomas, in the Virgin Islands, whose evolution into Pan-Africanism as a Christian missionary. After dropping his pursuit, Blyden soon became one of the leading Pan-African intellectuals in the African world. Throughout the last quarter of the nineteenth century, he labored tirelessly for African descendants in the diaspora to return home. Due largely to his encouragement, many other African descendants in the Caribbean sought to return to Africa.

During the last decade of the nineteenth century, no one better embodied the notion that oppressed descendants from Africa, especially in the United States, should return to Africa in order to liberate Africa and Africans everywhere. Bishop Henry McNeal Turner. He was a leader in the African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and organized many efforts to realize his Pan-African goals. Turner made frequent trips to Africa and constantly promoted the cause of African emigration, which nourished the growing disenchantment among the poorer segments of the African American population in the United States. Black peasants were especially receptive to Turner’s message. Although he succeeded in transporting any significant number of people back to Africa, he made a significant contribution towards keeping alive certain fundamental African ideals. Foremost among these was the notion that the only hope for some African descendants was in building a powerful and independent nation of their own in Africa.

While there were many other emigration efforts that took place throughout the African world that have not been covered in this brief summary, a genuine appreciation of this dimension of the historical evolution of Pan-Africanism requires an understanding of several key points. First, the black-controlled efforts never made claims to land outside or inside of Africa that required the eventual expulsion or political and economic subjugation of indigenous inhabitants. Second, the majority of these movements belonged to the poorer segments of the African world population, as the more economically mobile African descendants observed with disdain. In relative terms, the number of African descendants who actually returned to Africa was never that large, although the figures can belie the actual support that emigration schemes received from the masses of scattered Africans. Fourth, these movements, although never really anti-capitalist in their ideological orientation, were clear manifestations of a resistance to the consolidation of black suffering and white supremacy under the growing domination of the international capitalist system. Fifth, these movements were very influential in the historical development of Pan-Africanism, which became effectively interwoven with similar movements and events that occurred in the struggle for Pan-African unity throughout the twentieth century.

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Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Developments

Pan-African activity geared towards physically reuniting African descendants abroad with their ancestral homeland did not stop after the turn of the century. Bishop Turner continued to lead the emigration movement in the United States during the first decade of the new century. Replacing the void left by Turner after his death was Chief Alfred Charles Sam of the Gold Coast in West Africa. Chief Sam generated considerable enthusiasm for his emigration plans by travelling extensively, forming emigration clubs, and selling shares of stock in his emigration company, the Akim Trading Company. He received his greatest support from all-black communities in Oklahoma in 1914. Although Chief Sam succeeded in returning a small number of followers back to the Gold Coast, conditions in Africa—the result of British lack of cooperation and African underdevelopment—led to disenchantment among the emigrants.

The evangelical dimension of the Pan-African struggle to return African descendants to Africa also continued. These efforts contributed in no small way to the radicalization of the religious leadership and laity in Africa. As a consequence, by 1926, white missionaries—the religious embodiment of European expansionism—grew so disquieted from the growing Africanization and radicalization of Euro-Christian doctrines, that they organized, in Le Zoute, Belgium, an international conference of missionaries concerned with Africa. One of its main purposes was to prevent the return of black missionaries whose teachings resulted in “serious disturbances” in Africa.

Although the European partitioning and colonization of Africa began nearly two decades before the beginning of the new century (formalized at the infamous Berlin Conference of 1884–1885), it was not completed until two decades into the twentieth century. The Pan-African response to this bold initiative on the part of the European capitalist powers was significant. Given the considerable amount of communication and interaction that had already taken place prior to the twentieth century between Africans on the mainland and their brethren scattered abroad, it is no wonder that African descendants in different parts of the world were able to engage themselves effectively in Pan-African cooperation against the injustices of European hegemony during the first quarter of the twentieth century. Several conferences, congresses, and conventions were organized by African descendants, some even before the twentieth century, to address the common misery and suffering experienced by Africans under European colonial rule in Africa and African descendants living in the Caribbean and within the colonial metropolitan governments in Europe and the United States. Some of the most important meetings of this type included the Chicago Congress on Africa of 1895; the Atlanta Congress on Africa of 1895; the Pan-African Conference of 1900 in London; the First Universal Race Congress of 1911 in London; the Pan-

These meetings were organized and attended by outstanding Pan-African proponents as well as other notable intellectuals, businessmen, bureaucrats, and royalty within the African world. Although reformist in nature, the resolutions drafted at these meetings were consistent and demonstrated an anti-imperialist awareness; a strong desire for greater Pan-African unity and cooperation between peoples of African descent; an aim of industrializing and advancing Africa in particular and all African peoples in general; an effort to preserve and regenerate Africa’s most worthy cultural traditions; and a responsibility to protect the sovereignty of Ethiopia, Liberia, and Haiti against the attacks of European imperialist domination. It is interesting to note that, due to the political, economic, and military hegemony of the West, all of these meetings were held outside of Africa, despite attempts by Du Bois and others to hold such meetings inside.

In 1914, Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League (UNIA-ACL) in Jamaica. He did so, according to his own account, in order to address the wretched condition of the African World at that time—which he observed, firsthand, throughout his travels. Furthermore, Garvey benefitted from, and was deeply influenced by, the Pan-African efforts of his nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century predecessors. The impact that Garvey and the UNIA-ACL had on the African World in general, and the Pan-African movement in particular, was monumental. Their influence is still being felt today, in large part because of the tremendous organizational success that characterized the Garvey movement. With chapters and divisions of the UNIA-ACL in almost every corner of the African World, Garveyites could boast a membership of nearly six million. That Garveyism had a profound impact on the thinking and behavior of millions of African descendants struggling to be free during the 1920s and 1930s is unquestionable. Even Garvey’s detractors have recognized him as one of the greatest black leaders since Emancipation. With great organizational skill and oratorical mastery, Garvey took advantage of the frustration and disillusionment that peoples of African descent were feeling after the First World War, in which they had fought and died, supposedly, to make the world safe for democracy and to ensure the right to self-determination. Having been denied these basic human rights for so long and experiencing greater levels of economic penury, African people around the world, especially those in the United States who had migrated to either southern or northern cities with the false expectation that life would be better, placed unparalleled faith in the Pan-Africanism of Garvey and the UNIA-ACL. And while Garvey’s program, despite its limitations, did address, concretely, many of the basic problems that confronted the African World community, most historians and other commentators have consistently and mistakenly reduced Garveyism to simply a “Back to Africa Movement.” However, although emigration plans were undoubtedly a part of the UNIA-ACL’s overall strategy, its primary and ultimate objective was to liberate and reconstruct Africa into a nation powerful enough to liberate Africans around the world. On behalf of the UNIA-ACL, Garvey declared:

nation of our own, strong enough to lend protection to the members of our race scattered all over the world, and to compel the respect of the nations and races of the earth.

In short, the contribution of Garvey and the UNIA-ACL to the struggle for Pan-Africanism was unrivaled and explains the keen interest the imperialist powers had in seeing Garvey fail. As a movement staunchly opposed to European imperialism, the Garvey movement lionized the fundamental ideals of Pan-Africanism in a way never before done in the long history of the movement.

In addition to the Garvey movement, at the end of the First World War, there emerged a number of other activities centered in Western Europe that were significant expressions of Pan-African struggle. While some of them received their initial impetus from the Garvey movement, these efforts, in the main, were also a product of increased disenchantment with colonial rule that resulted from the hundreds of thousands of black troops who returned from the war effort and were denied the basic human rights that they had been told they were risking their lives to defend. These expressions were manifested in the creation of several organizations dedicated to the realization of Pan-African aims. In London, Africans from West Africa and the Caribbean formed the Union for Students of African descent in 1917. A year later, also in London, the African Progress Union (APU) was formed, with the famous Egyptian Pan-Africanist, Duse Muhammed Ali, as one of its members. The APU's declared aim was to promote the social and economic welfare of African peoples throughout the world. By the mid-1920s, the influential West African Student's Union (WASU) was established, including in its membership, despite its name, Africans from other parts of Africa besides West Africa. Moreover, it was concerned with other issues besides student-related ones, such as the future advancement of Africa and African peoples throughout the world.

France, as the colonial power that had expropriated more of Africa's land than any other European nation, was not devoid of Pan-African activity after the First World War. In addition to its capital serving as the location of the 1919 Pan-African Congress, the Paris Peace Conference at Versailles was the target of further Pan-African efforts. Du Bois, along with others, sought to arrange for Africa to have a voice at this conference. Besides advocating the establishment of a Charter of Human Rights to guide the colonial powers in their relations with mainland Africa, they sought to affect the impending redivision of Africa by the victorious Allied Powers along lines consistent with their Pan-African goals. That the European powers chose to ignore these concerns and continue pursuing their imperialist interests in Africa should not overshadow the significance of this Pan-African attempt. Indeed, subsequent to this, not only did Du Bois make similar requests to the newly formed League of Nations, but Marcus Garvey and the UNIA-ACL made identical demands to this same body.

The French-speaking African community in France created several Pan-African organizations in Paris. Men such as Marc Kojo Tovalou Houenou of Dahomey, founder and president of the Ligue Universelle pour la Defense de la Race Noire, challenged the assimilationist policies of French colonialism between the years of

1924 to 1936. Interestingly, Houenou was invited to the 1924 UNIA-ACL Convention in New York City. With the production of its journal, *Les Continents*, the Ligue Universelle pursued aims that were fundamentally Pan-African.

Also important during this period was the Comité de la Défense de la Race Nègre, led by Lamine Senghor from Senegal, and the Ligue de la Défense de la Race Negre, led by Tiemohor Garon Koyate from the Sudan. These organizations, built by French-speaking African descendants from Africa and the Caribbean, showed great interest in the plight of the African diaspora in the United States, and were particularly impressed with the rise of Garveyism. Moreover, they were more radical than the Ligue Universelle, since they understood, and vehemently criticized, the collaboration between the rulers of French colonialism and the French-speaking African middle class. Consequently, they earned a considerable amount of hostility from French governmental authorities.

The ideological radicalization of the Pan-African movement continued during the 1930s. Led by African descendants from the Caribbean located primarily in Great Britain, numerous Pan-African organizations were established by committed socialists such as George Padmore and C. L. R. James—friends from childhood in Trinidad. During the mid-1930s, James formed the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA). Shortly afterwards, Padmore created the International African Service Bureau (IASB), which was replaced by the Pan-African Federation in 1944. James and Padmore, along with other West Indians, were joined by other notable figures from different parts of Africa, such as Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya and I. T. A. Wallace-Johnson of Sierra Leone. Collectively, through the convening of several meetings and the dissemination of anti-colonial writings, they were essentially responsible for maintaining the only significant Pan-African opposition to imperialist plunder throughout the African World. While the ideological persuasions of this group of Pan-Africanists were diverse, they were practically all heavily influenced by the writings of Marx and Lenin.

In 1935, the Italian invasion of Ethiopia intensified the growing anti-imperialist orientation of the Pan-African movement. As chairman of the IAFA, James's reaction to this crisis reflected the views of many Pan-Africanists during this period when he wrote:

Africans and people of African descent, especially those who have been poisoned by British Imperialist education, needed a lesson. They have got it. Every succeeding day shows exactly the real motives which move Imperialism in its contact with Africa, shows the incredible savagery and duplicity of European Imperialism in its quest for markets and raw materials.

The Italian invasion also served to galvanize the seemingly latent Pan-African aspirations of African descendants around the world. For instance, in different countries they organized Ethiopian support groups, raised funds for weapons and medical supplies, boycotted Italian-produced goods, wrote articles condemning Italy and admonishing the League of Nations, petitioned European colonial powers to deny Italy loans and weapons, held prayer meetings, staged violent riots against colonial governments, and sought to join the Ethiopian military effort against the Italian invaders. However, despite the groundswell of popular support that this movement received

from countless black communities around the world, African peoples were still unorganized. Hence, they lacked any significant amount of power to save Ethiopia from the clutches of European imperialism or to achieve any other meaningful Pan-African objective.