

Perspective

Emancipating the “Kin beyond the Sea”: Reciprocity between Continental and Diasporic Africans’ Struggles for Freedom

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Abstract: While the African Diaspora’s relentless commitment to the liberation of Africa from colonial bondage is well documented, the literature has, arguably, obscured the profound inspirations that Continental African people have had on Black Americans’ struggles against racism. Unfortunately, the downplaying of the pivotal role of the forces from Continental Africa divorces the understanding of the interconnectedness of transnational black consciousness. This paper contributes a greater balance to the understanding of black racial solidarity by discussing the formation and sustenance of the interrelationships between Continental African people and the African Diaspora, particularly in the United States, during the struggles of anti-colonialism in Africa and anti-racism in the United States, dating back to the turn of the 19th century. The paper conceptualizes the interconnectedness of the twin struggles from the Cross-national Diffusion theoretical framework. The theory offers appealing explanations and insights to the apparent mutuality regarding the formation, processes, outcomes, and consequences of the twin struggles. Galvanized by the common vision of emancipating the black race, the two movements were inspired by the exchange of ideological and organizational tactics, of which the exchange itself constituted another solid ideological tactic.

Keywords: transnationalism; cross-national diffusion; Pan-Africanism

1. Introduction

When I was a graduate student at a predominantly white Midwestern university, I had the honor to serve as an executive board member of a student organization that was dominated by African American graduate students. At that same time, I was also actively involved with an African students’ organization, which was predominantly constituted by graduate students from sub-Saharan Africa. Apart from the shared common racial identity of their affiliated members, the two student organizations shared commonalities in historical experiences and challenges, all directly or indirectly linked to perpetual white domination. Interestingly, there were also fundamental differences between the two student organizations. The African American student organization was a discursive space for black identity expression, where African American students organized and deliberated on challenges they faced in their quest for recognition and equality amidst perceived contexts of prejudicial racial attitudes against black people. On the contrary, the African students’ organization provided a forum through which members shared views on political, social, and economic challenges facing contemporary Africa. In view of the commonalities and apparent differences between the two black student organizations, I fathomed what would happen if the two organizations had merged into one; how would the students interact? Would that change their agendas? In trying to envision the merging of the two black student organizations, I was stimulated to investigating the meaning of the black racial identity. I was also eager to explore the nature of the historical connection between Continental African people and the

African Diaspora. What socio-historical factors have influenced their relationship? What were the implications of their connectedness, if any, on the development of transnational resistance to racism and colonialism?

2. Defining Blackness

Having been a member of two distinct black student organizations stimulated me to investigate the meaning of blackness. In general terms, blackness is a racial designation assigned to people based on phenotypical characteristics such as skin color and hair texture. However, the meaning of blackness is more complex and cannot be strictly conceptualized in the simplistic view of phenotypical features. As [Kusow \(2006\)](#) argues, one cannot fully understand blackness without considering the historical, cultural, and political contexts within which categories of social stratification are constructed. [Manguvo \(2012\)](#) considers the institutionalization of slavery as the moment of inception of blackness in the United States, while the advent of colonialism brought about the concept of blackness in Africa. Thus, in addition to the phenotypical connotations, blackness is also a constructed identity upon which people of the African descent mobilize and defend themselves against perpetual white domination. In the context of the United States, blackness has followed several historical trajectories, since the period of slavery, which include post-slavery segregation, civil rights struggles, emancipation, and reconstruction to the modern-day struggles for equality and addressing of historical imbalances. Continental Africans also have an understanding of blackness as a determinant of social, political, and economic differentiation. Similar to slavery in the United States, European imperialism initiated racial hierarchies that left long-lasting effects throughout the African continent. Slavery and colonialism, thus, provoked transnational perspectives of blackness, which manifested through Pan-Africanist movements. The movements culminated in twin struggles across the Atlantic, both of which were aimed at emancipating the black race from subjugation ([Manguvo 2018](#)).

While the African Diaspora's relentless commitment to the liberation of Africa from colonial rule is well documented (see, for example, [Campbell 1994](#); [Erhagbe and Ifidon 2008](#); [Gramby-Sobukwe 2005](#); [Gwekwerere 2014](#); [Hayes 2005](#); [Lynch 1978](#); [Parker 2009](#); [Von Eschen 1997](#)), the literature has, arguably, obscured the profound inspirations that Continental African people had on Black Americans' struggles against racism. There is little public awareness of the interconnectedness of the movements and yet, as [Minter \(2008\)](#), submit, the ties, both organizational and personal, had powerful effects on how both struggles were executed. As [Meriwether \(2002\)](#) posits, Black Americans were not just proactively engaged in the liberation of Africa; they also obtained profound inspiration from the people of and activities in Africa. Unfortunately, the downplaying of the pivotal role of the forces from Continental Africa divorces the understanding of the interconnectedness of black racial solidarity. Guided by the Cross-National Diffusion theory, the paper discusses the formation and sustenance of the transnational relationships between Continental African people and the African Diaspora during the twin struggles against colonialism in Africa and racism in the United States, dating back to the turn of the 19th century. Galvanized by the common vision of emancipating the black race, the two movements were energized by the reciprocal exchange of ideological and organizational tactics.

3. The Cross-National Diffusion Theory

[McAdam and Rucht \(1993\)](#) Cross-National Diffusion theory provides an appealing theoretical framework through which mechanisms of the interconnectedness between the twin struggles against racism in the United States and colonialism in Africa can be examined. Guided by fundamental quest to construe social change, the theory seeks to explain how social movements influence one another across national borders. According to [Hayes \(2005\)](#), the social movement diffusion process entails the spread of the motivation to participate as well as the sustenance of emotional commitment to a movement. As [Walsh-Russo \(2004\)](#) further submits, cross-national diffusion also occurs when one social movement transmits ideology, tactics, and perceptions of chances of success to the other social movement. These phenomena are shared through various channels of diffusion, which can be

either relational, by direct interpersonal contact, or non-relational through different kinds of media (McAdam and Rucht 1993).

The Cross-National Diffusion theory pinpoints mutual identification as a fundamental mechanism for the diffusion to take place. The connection between Africa and the African Diaspora is rooted in their shared African ancestry. As Holmes (2002), postulates, the shared African identity is grounded on the idea that black people, no matter where they reside in the world, are African descendants; as such, they recognize Africa as an ancestral homeland (Holmes 2002). The connection between Africa and the African Diaspora during the period in question was not only rooted in ancestral ties, it was also reinforced by shared experiences of oppression. Racial consciousness stirred the development of a united front between Africa and its Diaspora. The quest for independence movements in Africa to end the racial segregation that characterized the socio-political processes of the colonial rule was quite comparable to anti-racism struggles in the United States.

Chabot and Duyvendak (2002) posit that cross-national diffusion is not only top down, it is also bottom-up. This implies the existence of reciprocal transmission and reformulation of tactics and strategies. In line with reciprocity traits of diffusion, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the struggles for independence in Continental Africa and the anti-racism protests in the United States were interconnected. Additionally, the Cross-National Diffusion theory purports that movements are not orchestrated by single, discrete actors; instead they must be construed as dynamic incidents of concerted effort by multiple actors (Walsh-Russo 2004). In keeping with this, this paper unveils collective critical roles played by political and civil rights activists, intellectuals, religious leaders, black students, the Black Press, political organizations, and other grassroots organizations across the Atlantic in developing a mutual understanding between Africa and its Diaspora on the quest for freedom. Although inexperience, powerlessness, and many other factors may have impeded the efforts on many instances, the quest to raise consciousness of a shared common fate and the need for collaboration was, by and large, fruitful (Gramby-Sobukwe 2005). Arguably, the collectiveness of efforts contributed immensely to the movements' success.

4. The African Diaspora's Engagement on Africa's Struggles

There is an unquestionable articulation of numerous inextricable efforts by the African Diaspora to emancipate Africa from colonial and racial subjugation from as far back as the turn of the 19th century. Key players in these early efforts include black intelligentsia, the Black Press, labor unions, and non-governmental organizations. It is, however, important to note that the African Diaspora's engagement in African struggles for independence did not arise uniformly (Von Eschen 1997). As Meriwether (2002) submits, there was an abundance of differing forms and degrees of interest in the motherland, and, resultantly, the degree of engagement expended varied. Regardless of inherent differences on the level of interest and engagement, there is no question that the African Diaspora initiated and maintained unwavering commitment to liberate and emancipate Continental Africa from colonial and racial subjugation (Manguvo 2018).

The Chicago Conference on Africa, convened in 1893, was one of the earliest attempts by the African Diaspora to address the plight of Africa. The Congress combined intellectual, ideological, religious, philosophical, and scientific ideas to formulate a public policy on the status of Continental and Diasporic Africans (Reed 1971). In other words, the conference aimed at inspiring a responsibility among the African Diaspora of liberating Africa from colonialism. Similar goals and sentiments to liberate Africa were echoed at a follow-up conference held in Atlanta, Georgia in 1895.

Following political cultivations from these early meetings, black consciousness came into full conception in 1900 when Henry Sylvester Williams, a London-based black barrister from Trinidad organized a conference in London. The conference was attended by 32 delegates from Europe, Africa, and the Caribbean and came up with resolutions, which included an appeal for European leaders to grant African colonies rights to self-governance. The London conference ushered in a remarkable point in Diasporic Africans' commitment to the liberation of Africa from European imperialism. It is

not surprising that, following this conference, the spirit of Pan-Africanism began to sow its seeds into various parts of Africa and the African Diaspora. Conceptualized as both a political and racial philosophy and a movement, [Campbell \(1994, p. 285\)](#) defines Pan-Africanism as ‘an exercise in consciousness and resistance [which] reflects the self-expression and self-organization of African people.’ The movement aimed at promoting feelings of oneness among people of the African descent, Continental or abroad, with the goal of self-restoration and emancipation from perpetual white domination ([Manguvo 2016](#)). The early decades of the 20th century, thus, witnessed the formation of the Niagara Movement in 1905, whose ideals paved the way to the formation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the United States in 1909. Although most of the organizations in the United States primarily focused on civil rights, they played a vital role in laying the foundation for emancipation of Africa from European imperialism.

4.1. Pan-African Congresses

Feelings of mandated responsibility by the African Diaspora to liberate Africa took full force through a series of Pan-African congresses that were organized throughout the first half of the 20th century. The first Pan-African congress was organized by Du Bois in 1919 and was attended by sixty representatives from sixteen nations, protectorates, and colonies and included members of the NAACP and some black women’s rights activists. The congress came in the aftermath of World War I, which, as [Du Bois \(1996\)](#) submits, ‘was a war over spheres of influence in Asia and Africa.’ Attendees resolved to exert pressure on delegates of the Versailles Peace Conference to consider ‘the importance of Africa in the future world’ as well as to ‘give the Negro race of Africa a chance to develop unhindered by other races’ ([Du Bois 1996](#)). An appeal for the establishment of a Human Rights Charter that would guide European colonial powers’ relations with native Africans, guided by the League of Nations, was forwarded to delegates of the Versailles Peace Conference. The congress also demanded, among other things, the abolishment of slavery and capital punishment of colonial subjects especially in the Belgian Congo. The delegates also demanded the right to education for African natives.

Although European powers represented at the Versailles Peace Conference were non-committed to any of these demands ([Adejumobi 2001](#)), a notable impact of the 1919 Pan-African Conference was the pledge by Queen Victoria of England to ‘not to overlook the interests and welfare of the native races’ ([Du Bois 1996, p. 7](#)). As [Gwekwerere \(2014\)](#) reiterates, what is even more significant from outcomes of this Pan-African Conference is the commitment by the African Diaspora to a collective responsibility to liberate Africa regardless of the physical separation from the mainland.

The Pan-Africanists reconvened and held major congresses in London and Brussels in 1921 and 1923 respectively and echoed earlier resolutions of denouncing European imperialism in Africa and racism in the United States. The fifth Pan African congress, organized by London-based George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and held in Manchester in 1945, was pivotal for Pan-African movements. A record number of African scholars, intellectuals, and political activists attended the congress, and these include Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Hastings Banda of Malawi, and Patrice Lumumba of the Congo; who later became influential leaders on the African continent. It was at the 1945 congress that a commitment was made to decisively radicalize the movement for African freedom and strategic military approaches for liberation of African countries were adopted ([Adi and Sherwood 2003](#)).

If the western world is still determined to rule mankind by force, then Africans [. . .] may have to appeal to force in the effort to achieve freedom, even if force destroys them and the world. We are determined to be free. ([Asante and Abarry 1996, p. 520](#))

The asserted declaration of militant approach later manifested in the form of armed liberation movements in several African countries such as Kenya, Mozambique, Namibia, and Zimbabwe as well as mass protests in Congo, Ghana, Malawi, Nigeria, and Zambia. Throughout these struggles, the African Diaspora maintained an unwavering commitment towards complete emancipation of Africa from European domination. Regardless of the non-commitment by the dominant forces towards

addressing Pan-Africanists' demands, there is no question that Pan-African movements played a major role in the struggle for Continental Africa's freedom (Manguvo 2018).

Alongside Pan-African congresses, several organizations and movements advocating freedom and emancipation of Africa also gained momentum in different parts of the African Diaspora. For example, the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA), founded in 1914 by Marcus Garvey, a Jamaican-born nationalist and United States immigrant, played a pivotal role in the 1920s. In fact, Garvey was one of the pioneer Diasporic Africans to perpetuate the notion of the link between Africa and the African Diaspora. Thus, in addition to advocating for civil rights for black people in the United States, UNIA also primarily advocated for total emancipation of Continental Africa from European subjugation. Throughout his life, Garvey worked tirelessly to foster consciousness of African origins among the African Diaspora and solidarity among people of the African decent (Von Eschen 1997):

... we are going to seek a method of saving Africa first. Why? And why Africa? Because Africa has become the grand prize of the nations. Africa has become the big game of the nation hunters. Today Africa looms as the greatest commercial, industrial and political prize in the world [...] we shall march out in answer to the cry of our fathers, who cry out to us for the redemption of our own country, our motherland, Africa. (Garvey 1986, p. 97)

On the other hand, the International African Service Bureau (IASB), founded by George Padmore in 1937, mobilized activists from Africa and the Caribbean to promote Pan-African unity. The bureau intended to address issues relating to Africa and the African Diaspora to the British general public. The IASB also sought to inform the public about the grievances faced by African people in the mainland. They created a list of desired reforms and freedoms that would help African colonies. The bureau also hoped to encourage new African trade unions to affiliate themselves with the British labor movements.

During the same period, the Council of African Affairs (CAA) was exerting pressure on the United States government to implement policies that would expedite the advent of African independence (Watson and Johnson 2000). Described by Lynch (1978) as the most important American organization concerned with Africa, CAA served as an educational bureau devoted to dissemination of information about Africa. As time progressed, leaders of CAA adopted more expressively political sentiments of liberating colonized African nations. As the demands for independence of Africa grew stronger, the CAA propagated the promotion of anticolonial sentiments in the United States and consistently put the issue of liberation of Africa on the United States agenda (Von Eschen 1997). They insisted that Black Americans' fight for civil rights was inseparably intertwined with the liberation movements in Africa. In light of that embodiment, it is not surprising that the CAA provided concrete assistance to African nationalist movements (Gwekwerere 2014).

Other organizations in the United States such as the American Committee on Africa (ACOA), did not only campaign against colonialism, but also provided concrete assistance and sponsorship to African liberation movements (Von Eschen 1997). Constituted mainly by Black Americans and some White civil rights activists, ACOA formed strong network in global support of the African struggle. ACOA members traveled extensively to Africa, attending African people's conferences and visiting newly independent countries and the Frontline States to meet with African leaders. ACOA also offered educational opportunities in the United States to future African leaders. Among them were Tom Mboya, a Kenyan trade unionist and educationist, as well as Oliver Tambo of South Africa.

4.2. International Events

The African Diaspora's engagements on the liberation Africa from colonialism were facilitated by multiple historical trajectories, which inevitably shaped the world in various forms in the 20th century. The events include the rising of Fascism, World Wars, the Cold War, and the invasion of Ethiopia by Italy in the 1930s (Meriwether 2002).

The invasion of Ethiopia by Italy in the 1930s was one international event that cemented the connectivity between Continental Africa and the African Diaspora. Black Americans viewed the United States' non-involvement approach to the Italo-Ethiopian war as being rooted in racism (Gramby-Sobukwe 2005). It was, therefore, imperative for Black Americans to take it upon themselves and create platforms through which diverse efforts in defense of Ethiopia could be executed. According to Gramby-Sobukwe, the efforts include mobilizing and sending resources, increasing awareness about the Ethiopian crisis, as well as protesting the US non-involvement policy. They also formed alliances, nationally and internationally, to help defend Ethiopia. Those who were most actively involved include scholars and intellectuals, grassroots community organizers, and religious groups. As the invasion was unfolding, Black Americans called upon the League of Nations to intervene and stop the invasion. For Gramby-Sobukwe, the petition represented a significant extension of the African Diaspora's involvement in the affairs of the motherland. The defense of Ethiopia was a significant event in the interrelationship between Africa and its Diaspora. As Scott (1993) noted, African-Americans spoke about the Ethiopian crisis with a nationalistic rhetoric, which demonstrates mutual identification. Their perspective of Ethiopians' cause was fundamentally a part of the struggle of the racial emancipation of the black race (Erhagbe and Ifidon 2008).

The onset of the Cold War in the late 1940s also had tremendous ramifications on the African Diaspora's commitment to the emancipation of Africa. According to Berg (2007), the global ideological confrontation between Communism and Liberal Democracy and the claim by the United States of leading the free world made domestic racial discrimination an international embarrassment. It was becoming more evident that America's problematic race relations were having a negative impact on her diplomatic endeavors (Krenn 1996). Galvanized by the understanding of these international dynamics, Black Americans exerted more pressure towards both eradication of racial segregation at home and elimination of colonialism in Africa.

On the other hand, the outbreak of World War II accelerated the already heightened sensitivity against colonialism in Africa among the African Diaspora. As the war brought to light fundamental issues of racial prejudice, Black Americans took advantage of the ideological battle against Nazism to condemn notions of white supremacy in both Africa and the United States (Von Eschen 1997). Anti-Nazism had far-reaching ramifications on American domestic policies regarding institutionalized racism as it increasingly sought to protect its image to the outside world. World War II, thus, ushered in a new political dispensation in the United States in which anti-colonialism acquired prominence, standing alongside with anti-racism in the domestic arena. Taking advantage of the new political constellation, Black Americans' advocacy for colonial freedom for Africa gained continued momentum as they relentlessly pushed the subject to the forefront of contemporary political discourses in the United States.

4.3. The Role of Black Churches

The key scholarship on anticolonial activism among the African Diaspora has, unfortunately, focused mainly on Pan-Africanist intellectuals and has overlooked the galvanizing anti-colonial deliberations by the black churches. Religious groups in the United States undeniably played a pivotal role in shaping, driving, and advancing the anti-colonialism agenda. As Martin (2015) submits, black churches often opened their minds and doors in solidarity with the African liberation struggle as most church leaders joined hands with intellectuals in preaching the gospel that was centered on Christian brotherhood. Using tenets of black liberation theology, the clergy and their parishioners initiated, participated in, and supported anti-colonial movements and organizations in various ways. For example, Harlem-based black churches provided financial support to ACOA and the CAA. In addition to financial support, black churches also hosted some of the organizations' activities. When Italy invaded Ethiopia, several black churches in the United States took public positions in support of Ethiopia (Gramby-Sobukwe 2005).

4.4. The Role of Black Universities

While the role of Diasporic African intellectuals on emancipating the African motherland has been well documented in the Black history scholarship, the role of Black academic institutions in the United States is another crucial part of the network that has been largely overlooked (Parker 2009). Black universities indeed played an important role in the struggle against colonialism in Africa. After the abolition of slavery in the Americas, the now referred to as Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in the United States began admitting black students including those from Africa and the Caribbean. By the 1950s, many foreign black students had enrolled to study in the United States. Due to the then racial stratification of the American society, most foreign black students attended HBCUs, where they met and exchanged ideas with Black American students. For example, it was at Lincoln University that Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana gained a better and deeper understanding of the conditions facing black people in the United States (Malisa and Nhengeze 2018). Many other African leaders were influenced immensely by their experiences at HBCUs as they learned from Black American activists and intellectuals. Furthermore, during the invasion of Ethiopia, some Black American scholars at HBCUs mobilized black students for a collaborated defense of Ethiopia. By early 1935, students from black universities began staging demonstrations against the invasion (Gramby-Sobukwe 2005). Black universities, therefore, internationalized Black Nationalism, where students' sense of racial solidarity helped diffuse ideas from America back to the motherland (Parker 2009).

Hayes (2005) has also chronicled how black student organizations such as the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) often engaged with African independence movements during the 1960s. Although the SNCC's overall objective of improving the conditions of Black Americans was maintained throughout its existence, their commitment to working with and supporting African independence movements was also enduring. The SNCC proposed multiple programs, which raised awareness and provided support for African independence movements. On some occasions, members of the student group traveled to African countries to provide political support for African independence. Indisputably, black universities provided an ideal ground for nurturing of Black Nationalism (Hayes 2005).

The African Diaspora's commitment to the liberation and emancipation of Continental Africa is unquestionable. Habituating in the still racially segregated United States, Black Americans relentlessly fought for the liberation of Continental Africa from European colonial domination. However, as some African countries were gaining political independence, the focus of the African Diaspora, particularly in the United States, shifted from anticolonial and transnational interests and more emphasis was now placed on domestic civil rights (Berg 2007).

5. Continental Africa's Influence on Black Americans' Civil Rights Struggle

Many scholars of black history have perceived civil rights movements within a domestic US-based framework. Viewing civil rights movements within a global framework, however, enhances appreciation of the motivations of those who challenged the status quo (Gaines 2007). Indeed, civil rights movements had global connections which may not have been abundantly noticeable during the contemporary times. Nonetheless, the connectivity between the civil rights movements and political uprisings in Africa was not a surprising phenomenon when one considers the comparability of the segregation laws in the United States to the socio-political processes of colonial rule such as Apartheid in South Africa. Although literature abounds with the African Diaspora's influence on the liberation of Africa from colonial rule, the profound reciprocal influence of Continental Africa on civil rights movements has been obscured. The following sections, thus, discuss ways through which events, activities, and people of Continental Africa influenced civil rights movements in the United States.

5.1. The Role of African Intellectuals Studying in the United States

As stated earlier, following the abolition of slavery in the Americas, HBCUs in the United States began admitting black students including those from Africa and the Caribbean and, by the 1950s, a few African students had enrolled. During their stay in the United States, African students gained a deeper understanding of the conditions facing Black Americans in the racially stratified society (Mwakikagile 2007). Having been subjected to the same racial discrimination, many African students forged and strengthened ties with Black Americans in their struggles for racial equality.

Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana was one prominent African scholar who relentlessly condemned racism while studying in the United States. Nkrumah attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, one of the most prominent HBCUs. He also lived in Harlem, a predominantly black district, when he was a student at Columbia University. It was during his stay in Harlem that Nkrumah stood as a strong advocate for black freedom. He preached in black churches in Pennsylvania and New York condemning racism. Nkrumah was heavily invested in learning about civil rights organizations, which further strengthened his ties with Black Americans. Additionally, Nkrumah exhibited a strong interest not only in African history but also in Black American history. He even wrote a “Negro history” series for the student newspaper at Lincoln University and taught classes on the subject at the University of Pennsylvania. Considering these strong ties, it was not surprising that when he revisited Harlem as prime Minister of Ghana in 1958, he symbolized a victory that Black Americans could identify with and celebrate (Mwakikagile 2007). In his speech in Harlem during the visit, Nkrumah echoed the notion of the genealogical bond between Africa and its Diaspora.

Tom Mboya was another African intellectual who was committed, not only to the liberation of Continental Africans but also Diasporic Africans. As stated earlier, Mboya was a Kenyan trade unionist who came to the United States in 1956 under the sponsorship of ACOA. While studying in the United States, Mboya spoke at rallies at colleges, universities, and several other places, most of which were organized by ACOA (Garrow 2016). Mboya won the hearts of many Black Americans through his speeches. Resultantly, he fostered inextricable linkages with several civil rights movement leaders including A. Philip Randolph, Jackie Robinson, Harry Belafonte, Martin Luther King Jr., and others (Goldsworthy 1982). On 18 April 1959, Mboya, alongside Martin Luther King Jr., Charles Zimmerman, the civil rights chair of the a labor union, and Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, addressed a crowd of about 26,000, who had marched to the Washington Monument to urge the implementation of the Supreme Court’s *Brown v. Board* decision (Garrow 2016). Two days later, Mboya gave another speech at an “Africa Freedom Dinner” organized by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC) in Atlanta. Prior to Mboya’s keynote address, Martin Luther King, Jr. reiterated the link between the civil rights movements and the African liberation movements:

I am absolutely convinced that there is no basic difference between colonialism and segregation. They are both based on the contempt of life, and a tragic doctrine of white supremacy. So, our struggles are not only similar, they are in real sense, one [. . .] We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality. (Garrow 2016)

It is apparent, therefore, that the civil rights movements embraced African intellectuals like Nkrumah and Mboya and, in return, the African scholars embraced the civil rights struggle. Undoubtedly, Pan-Africanists from the motherland and those in the Diaspora, particularly in the United States, were comrades-in-arms in the struggle for racial equality.

5.2. The Role of African Liberation Struggles

Comparable to the civil rights movements in the United States, African independence uprisings sought to end the racial segregation that characterized the socio-political processes of colonial rule. Independence uprisings in Africa were an invaluable source of inspiration for Black Americans’ cause for freedom (Minter and Hill 2008). Walsh-Russo (2004) postulates that cross-national diffusion occurs when one social movement transmits ideology and tactics to the other movement. Diffusion of

ideological tactics from African liberation struggles to civil rights movements was indeed evident throughout the various stages of the twin struggles.

Much like Mahatma Gandhi of India, Kwame Nkrumah considered non-violence as his ideological cornerstone to defeat colonialism in Ghana. The tactic entailed use of legitimate political agitation, educational campaigns, intelligent compromise, strikes, boycotts, and non-co-operation; all based on the principles of absolute non-violence (Owusu 2006). Perceiving colonization and segregation as twin evils sharing the same head, Martin Luther King Jr. advocated for similar non-violent “decapitation” (Mwakikagile 2007). He made direct references to Ghana (and India) as examples of progressive radical movements that rejected oppression through non-violent tactics. King remarked:

And it's a beautiful thing, isn't it? That here is a nation that is now free, and it is free without rising up with arms and with ammunition. It is free through nonviolent means. Because of that the British Empire will not have the bitterness for Ghana [. . .] Because of that when the British Empire leaves Ghana, she leaves with a different attitude than she would have left with if she had been driven out by armies. We've got to revolt in such a way that after revolt is over we can live with people as their brothers and their sisters. Our aim must never be to defeat them or humiliate them. (King 1992)

It is, therefore, arguable that Martin Luther King Jr. was a follower of Kwame Nkrumah's philosophy of non-violence. Nkrumah served as an inspiration to King, who often looked to his leadership as an example of non-violent activism. For King, the strategies and tactics that Nkrumah had employed in Ghana against colonialism were also needed to combat American racism and disenfranchisement. Regrettably, as Levitt (2017) argues, history has severely underplayed the extent to which Martin Luther King Jr. was invigorated by Kwame Nkrumah's philosophy.

Additionally, Nkrumah's quest for Continental unification also had a strong emotional appeal among many leaders of civil rights movements in the United States. Although the ambition of a United Africa was perceived controversially by many, it still stood out as a message of racial solidarity, which resonated perfectly among many Black Americans in their quest for racial equality (Mwakikagile 2007). Nkrumah's vision of United Africa probably inspired Malcolm X's formation of the “Organization of Afro-American Unity.” This demonstrates the extent to which Malcolm X was influenced by Nkrumah's political ideology. Undoubtedly, Nkrumah's dream of a United Africa indeed inspired future generations within Continental Africa and the African Diaspora to work towards racial solidarity across the Atlantic.

Contrary to Nkrumah's non-violent approach, other African countries employed radicalized militant tactics in defiance to colonial rule. For example, the Mau Mau, a radical nationalist movement in Kenya, advocated violent resistance to British domination. Meriwether (2002) attests that (much like the non-violent approach of Ghana), the Mau Mau insurgency widened parameters of debate over how to combat racism in the United States as some black civil rights leaders preferred militant tactics.

Malcolm X was one proponent of the militant approach of resisting racism. He travelled to Africa 1964 where he spoke with several political leaders including Jomo Kenyatta of Kenya, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, and Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana. It was during his trip and the inspiration he received from Pan-Africanists in the motherland that he refined his position on the anti-racism struggle. He was particularly inspired by the Mau Mau militant resistance to British colonial rule. As Meriwether (2002) attests, Malcolm X's militant preference is summed up by his controversially perceived “by any means necessary” phrase. He perceived the Mau Mau militant defiance as signaling the right way to dismantle white oppression. He even called on Black Americans to “even the score with Whites” by creating their own Mau Mau armies (Koster 2015). Malcolm X's advocacy for militancy, though controversial, resonated with a substantial number of Black Americans. Not surprisingly, a song giving praise to the Mau Mau revolution was sung at a rally organized by SNCC in Harlem in 1964. As Horne (2006) posits, Black Americans in Harlem were equating the phrase ‘Mau Mau’ with the notion of strength, fierceness, and determination in resistance to white domination. Following the

song, Malcolm X used the platform to underscore the importance of the connections between Kenyans' resistance to British colonial rule and Black Americans' struggle against racism (Koster 2015).

Much like Malcolm X, many Black Southerners adhered to the Mau Mau style of self-emancipation. One such activist was Medgar Evers of Mississippi, the state's field secretary for the NAACP. Evers and his brother Charles grew very interested in African freedom movements, in particular, Jomo Kenyatta and the Mau Mau rebellion. Recognizing a similarity between Kenya's colonial segregation and the racial discrimination in Mississippi, Evers sought to build an organizational base for the NAACP that would directly challenge white supremacy in the Mau Mau style. Guided by his "eye for an eye" rhetoric, Evers encouraged mass action among Black Mississippians in resistance to Jim Crow (Henze 2017). Although he later renounced sentiments of violence, Evers maintained that he had greatly been inspired by Kenyatta and the Mau Mau militant approach. His efforts in resisting racism continually embodied the militant spirit of the Mau Mau resistance, thus, centering the Mississippi Freedom Movement within the contexts of Kenya's struggle for independence from British colonial rule (Horne 2009).

Overall, the significance of the Mau Mau rebellion as an inspirational symbol of black resistance to white oppression is unquestionable. As Koster (2015) argues, the Mau Mau rebellion facilitated the much-needed connections between Africa and its Diaspora by pushing Black Americans toward greater militancy. This is a clear demonstration of diffusion of ideological tactics between Africa and its Diaspora in their defiance to systems of white oppression.

5.3. *The Black Media*

The Cross-national Diffusion theory propounds that for social movement diffusion to occur, channels of diffusion should be in place and one such channel of diffusion is through different kinds of media. The information spreads across movements through non-direct ties when physical connections are not possible. Von Eschen (1997) and Meriwether (2002) chronicle the importance of the Black Press to the transnational structural connection between Continental Africa and the African Diaspora. African activists and journalists banded together in Black American newspapers to form a dense network with Black journalists and publishers in the Diaspora (Von Eschen 1997). For example, the magazine: *Africa Today*, first published in 1954 by ACOA, served as a key source for transmission of African Nationalism to the African Diaspora. The Black print medium, therefore, facilitated dialogue between Continental African people and the African Diaspora about the commonalities in the injustices both societies were receiving because of race.

5.4. *The Role of African Nations' Attainment of Independence*

The emergence of new African nations as sovereign countries free from colonial rule in the 1950s and 1960s (whether through non-violence as was the case in Ghana or through militancy as was the case in Kenya) did change not only the destiny of the African continent, but also the plight of Black Americans as a result. The attainment of independence by African countries inaugurated a new spectrum of racial pride among Black Americans. Mwakikagile (2007) posits that, for the first time in modern history, black countries now had a voice of their own in the international arena; and this was a source of pride for Black Americans. As Mwakikagile further reiterates, their identification with Africa was no longer something they could be ashamed of; rather, the victory of their brethren in Africa was seen as their own victory. Not surprisingly, the racial pride inaugurated by the independence of African nations had a long-lasting impact on Black Americans' self-identity. According to Mwakikagile, it was during this period when propositions for Black Americans to call themselves "African Americans" (instead of being called Negroes) came into political and social discourses. The term "African Americans" was abound with political connotation of racial solidarity with fellow Africans who were emancipating themselves. Furthermore, the term was associated with, unity, militancy, and pride.

In particular, the independence of Ghana in 1957, the first African nation to break the chains of colonial bondage, was very significant to Black Americans because of strong kinship connections with West Africa. Apparently, Kwame Nkrumah, the first president of Ghana, was very much aware of the significance of those genealogical ties as he stated in his Independence Day speech, “There exists a firm bond of sympathy between us and the Negro peoples of the Americas. The ancestors of so many of them came from this country . . . (Nkrumah 1961).” In recognition of these strong genealogical ties and, most importantly, their shared common fate, Nkrumah invited many Black Americans to Ghana for the independence celebrations. Among those invited were Martin Luther King Jr. and his deputy Ralph Abernathy, veteran civil right leader A. Philip Randolph, UN Undersecretary-General Dr. Ralph Bunche, as well as Harlem Congressman Adam Clayton Powell (Mwakikagile 2007).

Walsh-Russo (2004) submits that cross-national diffusion occurs when one social movement transmits chances of success to the other social movement. This is quite relatable with regards to the impact of African nations’ attainment of independence on Black Americans’ struggle. Considering the comparability between the twin struggles for civil rights in the United States and for independence in Africa, the resounding success recorded by some liberation movements in Africa in the late 1950s and 1960s, culminating in political independence, had intense inspiration for Black Americans’ struggles against racism. For example, when Ghana attained political independence in 1957, one Black newspaper, *The Pittsburgh Courier*, published a 32-page “Salute to Ghana” article. In a front-page editorial, the *Courier* observed:

When we, American Negroes, shake hands with Ghana today, we say not only ‘Welcome!’ but also, ‘Your opportunity to prove yourself is our opportunity to prove ourselves’. (Zachary 2007)

Upon his return from Ghana’s independence celebrations, Martin Luther King Jr. explained the lessons of the Ghanaian struggle in a series of speeches and sermons. For example, during his speech at the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, he stated:

Ghana has something to say to us. It says to us first, that the oppressor never voluntarily gives freedom to the oppressed. You have to work for it. And if Nkrumah and the people of the Gold Coast had not stood up persistently, revolting against the system, it would still be a colony of the British Empire. Freedom is never given to anybody. For the oppressor has you in domination because he plans to keep you there, and he never voluntarily gives it up. And that is where the strong resistance comes. Privileged classes never give up their privileges without strong resistance. (King 1992)

The excerpts above are an indication of the often-underplayed extent to which Ghana’s independence invigorated Black Americans’ cause. As Levitt (2017) submits, King perceived Ghana’s independence as a clear manifestation that “forces of the universe are on the side of justice,” implying that Ghana’s success was a symbol of assurance of the certainty of victory for Black Americans.

Although the connection between Malcolm X and Kwame Nkrumah has not been well documented, there is enough evidence that Nkrumah was a source of inspiration to Malcolm X, who in turn labeled Ghana the “fountainhead of Pan-Africanism.” As Dokosi (2016) postulates, there is a lot to extrapolate about this connection from Nkrumah’s letters, Malcolm’s own diary, and the FBI and the CIA files that have been made public. Despite publicizing his meetings with Islamic leaders during his trip to Africa in 1964, Malcolm X’s reckoned his meetings with Nkrumah as “the highest honor of my life” (Koster 2015). Their connection is corroborated in Nkrumah’s letters, in which he confirmed to have developed and maintained a relationship with Malcolm X until his assassination in 1965 (Milne 1990). As Dokosi (2016) opines, making his connection with Malcolm X public was potentially detrimental to Nkrumah’s administration given that the US government had made clear of their displeasure. Considering that the newly founded nation of Ghana fairly relied on the United States and Britain for skills and resources, Nkrumah was torn between risking to lose the much-needed support

from the super powers and making a public connection with Malcolm. Malcolm X corroborated this dilemma in his diary when he alluded to the pressures involved when African leaders were considering inviting him. The dilemma probably explains why neither of them dared to reveal much about their connection nor the contents of the discussions. Regardless of the threat from the US government, Nkrumah still went ahead and met with Malcolm X in 1964. This demonstrates his unwavering commitment to the principles of black emancipation.

In view of the inspirational value of African nations' attainment of independence, it is not surprising to note that the decade in which most African countries won independence was the very same decade in which civil right movements in the United States gained momentum. As [Mwakikagile \(2007\)](#) posits, the two movements did not only complement each other, but they also started in earnest on both sides of the Atlantic during the same period, and they also started advancing their victory during the same decade in the 1960s. Most importantly, the attainment of independence by African countries provided an opportunity for people of the African descent across the Atlantic to identify as a people of one ancestry with a common fate.

5.5. The Organization of African Unity (Now African Union)

Following the attainment of independence by a handful of African countries in the 1950s and 1960s, the Organization of African Unity (OAU) (now African Union) was formed in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1963. The organization was committed to restoring the dignity of African people as well as fostering cooperation among African countries. Remarkably, the OAU demonstrated great interest in the civil rights struggles in the United States right at its formation. The organization issued a statement, which was incorporated into the OAU Charter, condemning racism and linking racial discrimination in the United States with Apartheid in South Africa:

The Summit Conference of Independent African States meeting in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from 22 May to 25 May 1963: having considered all aspects of the questions of apartheid and racial discriminations, unanimously convinced of the imperious and urgent necessity of coordinating and intensifying their efforts to put an end to the South African Government's criminal policy of apartheid and wipe out racial discrimination in all its forms [. . .] [and also] EXPRESS the deep concern aroused in all African peoples and governments by the measures of racial discrimination taken against communities of African origin living outside the continent and particularly in the United States of America; EXPRESSES appreciation for the efforts of the Federal Government of the United States of America to put an end to those intolerable malpractices which are likely seriously to deteriorate relations between the African peoples and governments on the one hand and the people and Government of the United States of America on the other. ([Cervenka 1971](#))

One year following the formation of OAU, Malcolm X made a trip to Africa and presented the cause of Black Americans at the OAU's second convention in Cairo, Egypt. He noted how the atrocities committed in Hungary, Latin America, and among the Jewish people of the Soviet Union were brought before the United Nations, yet the problems of Black Americans were being ignored. Malcolm X, therefore, appealed to African leaders to address the plight of Black Americans at the upcoming United Nations General Assembly convention. As [Yeboah \(2018\)](#) posits, the grand scheme of presenting Black Americans' plight to the United Nations would have been difficult to achieve if Black Americans championed this cause alone. Malcolm X's appeal culminated into resolutions by the OAU to reaffirm its concern about persistent racial discrimination in the United States and urging the US government to take deliberate steps to end racism ([Mbughuni 2014](#)). As Yeboah further submits, nine African countries agreed to take up the matter and bring it to the United Nations General Assembly during the convention; however, they did not do so for several reasons including political and diplomatic reasons. As discussed earlier, the US government had made clear of its displeasure with the connection between African newly formed governments and leaders of the civil rights movements. Being dependent

upon the skills and resources from super powers, most African states were torn between meddling into US domestic issues and risk jeopardizing diplomatic relations or maintaining an unwavering commitment to emancipating the kin beyond the sea. In view of this political dilemma, it is, therefore, not surprising that the assassination of Malcolm X in 1965 seems to have apparently sealed the fate of his appeals to the OAU to have the plight of Black Americans brought to the United Nations. Regardless, as [Yeboah \(2018\)](#) rightfully opines, the OAU could still have done more to show solidarity with Black Americans than just passing non-binding resolutions. They could have been more vocal about the plight of Black Americans to the United Nations than they did.

Despite the apparent mediocre commitment by the OAU as a body, there were notable African leaders who continually spoke out against racial injustice in the United States and these include Kwame Nkrumah and Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. One year after Ghana's independence, Nkrumah visited the United States at the invitation of President Eisenhower. Reflecting on the close ties he had fostered with Black Americans during the time he was studying in the United States, Nkrumah used the occasion to condemn racial segregation against Black Americans. As [Mwakikagile \(2007\)](#) submits, many other governments of independent African nations issued statements condemning racial injustice in the United States.

6. Conclusions

The chronological coincidence of the struggles for independence in Continental Africa and anti-racism protests in the United States was not mere coincidence ([Parker 2009](#)). This paper discussed how collective efforts of political and civil rights activists, intellectuals, religious leaders, Black students at HBCUs, the Black Press, as well as the thousands of individuals and grassroots organizations across the Atlantic played critical roles in developing a foundation of mutual understanding between Africa and its Diaspora. Dating back to the turn of the 19th century, Africa and its Diaspora banded together as advocates of black emancipation at critical historical junctures. The connectedness of the two movements was both a symbol and a strategy for consolidating greater unity among people of the African descent. Arguably, the connectivity contributed significantly to the success of both movements. Pan-Africanism was the bricks and the mortar that cemented their structural connectivity. Undoubtedly, the growth of Pan-Africanism molded the African continent and its Diaspora into a solitary entity, thus, inspiring the development of a united front between Africa and its Diaspora. Against this background, it is not surprising that to date; the African Diaspora is represented in the African Union as it is considered an integral part of the African world.

The mutual inter-dependence between Africa and its Diaspora in the 1960s demonstrates an inextricable genealogical and historical connection between Continental Africa and the African Diaspora. As [Gramby-Sobukwe \(2005\)](#) submits, the instances where Africa and its Diaspora organized together, shared, learned, and advocated shared objectives is a fertile ground for enhancement of present-day collaboration. Although Pan-Africanism as a political movement has practically weakened, the genealogical connections between Africa and its Diaspora can still be redirected and harnessed towards continuous emancipation of the Black race in economic, cultural, and other social arenas.

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