

Proceedings of the
13th Annual Africa/Diaspora Conference
African and African American Relations in US,
Americas and Africa.

BY:

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Introduction:

May 1-3, 2004, fifty scholars from sites as distant and varied as Starkville and Washington D.C., Accra and Calabar, Moscow and Andhra Pradesh assembled at California State University, Sacramento for the 13th Annual Africa/Diaspora Conference, to address the silent but potent issue of the current state of affairs between “Africans” and “African-Americans” in the United States. The conference was intended not to debate the different definitions of Africans, either in the continent or the United States (see Uzoigwe’s paper herein; see also Mazrui’s distinction between "African-Americans" and "American Africans" or between Africans "by blood" and "of the soil" in the report on the CSUS Africa/Diaspora Conference of 2000) but to identify areas of recent tension between descendents of those Africans abducted into slavery and those who migrated afterward, to investigate the sources and recent catalysts of these tensions, and to consider peaceful, mutually beneficial resolutions to these tensions.

Over two hundred people attended six plenary sessions, twenty paper presentations, and two roundtable discussions. Educational, inspiring, culturally diverse, and globally informed, the 2004 Africa/Diaspora Conference was vibrant with free, robust, and incisive debate, yielding some profound insights and action-centered resolutions. The following report offers some relevant background and summaries of selected papers from the conference.

The full selected papers are also enclosed in the proceedings. Attempts have been made to edit the papers without distorting the author’s intention. The authors are fully responsible for their respective papers. Please direct any inquiries on the papers to the particular author.

Brief Background:

Some may be surprised to learn of the 2004 conference theme, inspired locally by Dorothy Korber’s *Sacramento Bee* article in which she profiles the growing number of CSUS faculty born in Africa and the question of their relationship with their American born colleagues (December 26, 2001, p. A.1). In same article, Professor Clarence Walker of UC-Davis sees misunderstanding on both sides: “Despite the Kwanzaas and wearing of kinte cloth,” he argues, “[African Americans’] knowledge of Africa is, frequently,

shallow at best. Meanwhile, there is a sense, in some Africans, of looking down on American blacks— even though, in this country, they are still grouped with us because they share our blackness” (26). In response, Professor Ernest Uwazie of CSUS suggested that better communication between Africans and African-Americans might ease some of the recent tension. Given the interlinks between them, there is great need for both groups to learn to work together. Follow-up discussions and responses to the article suggested that the topic is “an elephant in the room” that many had been reluctant to discuss. Indeed, roundtable discussions on the same topic at previous Africa/Diaspora Conferences confirm, retrospectively, the need for a full conference dedicated to this one issue.

By late 2003, the Third Black Alumni Weekend at Harvard University brought the debate to the national stage. Two keynote speakers at the gathering, Henry Louis Gates and Lani Guinier, insisted that the benefits earned by the Civil Rights Movement should go to those whose ancestors had borne the burdens of slavery (see also Guinier 2004). Then, during the heated 2004 Illinois Congressional race between Republican Alan Keyes and Democrat Barack Obama, Keyes argued that he and his opponent "have the same race . . . [but] we are not of the same heritage. . . My ancestors toiled in slavery in this country." Thus, he suggests that he is better qualified than Obama—whose father is Kenyan and whose mother is a white woman from Kansas—to assess and promote the interests of "real" African-Americans.

Who is a “true” African-American? Do Africans serve as model citizens refuting the ingrained negative image of African-Americans? Is this debate merely one aspect of larger issues emerging in the era of globalization? Passions run very high.

Nevertheless, we suggest that these recent conflicts are not irreconcilable if understood and addressed as an inevitable intra-racial, “family” issues, exacerbated by poor communication and *mis-education*.

For the past 13 years, CAPCR's Annual African/Diaspora Conferences have attracted nearly 3000 people from 5 continents and over 25 countries. Locally, these conferences have energized the Pan-Africanists at CSUS while contributing to the university's global education mission and community outreach programs. The proceedings of the 2004 Africa/Diaspora Conference published here attest to CAPCR'S wider importance as a forum for discussing strategies of partnership, sustainable dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution among all peoples of the African diaspora.

Future African/Diaspora Conferences will emphasize other relevant and timely issues. The Center for African Peace and Conflict Resolution at California State University, Sacramento publishes these yearly proceedings as a durable and accessible resource of education and a catalyst for further research. This juried publication welcomes unsolicited scholarly contributions and action-centered responses to the analyses and points of view reflected in the following papers.

Summaries of Papers:

In his conference keynote address, “Continental and Diaspora African Relations in the Context of Struggle: A Pan-Africanist Perspective,” Dr. Maulana Karenga of California State University, Long Beach argues that the relationship between continental and diasporan Africans cannot be fully understood until it is placed in the context of the historical and ongoing global project we call pan-Africanism, i.e., the thought and practice directed toward identifying the common struggles and goals of all African peoples globally. Dr. Karenga warns all peoples of African descent that, without an expansive conception of continental and diasporan African relations within the pan-Africanist global project, discussions can deteriorate into petty bourgeois recriminations rooted in either limited experiences, anecdotes of negative personal exchanges, or in the debris of divisiveness still present in the not-yet decolonized mind. He emphasizes the political and cultural dimensions of the recent tensions, warning against problematizing the relationships by racializing them. Grounding his argument in *Nguzo Saba*, The Seven Principles of *Kawaida* philosophy, he asserts that Africans everywhere must assert themselves as members of a global community, seek constant dialogue with African cultures, speak their own special cultural truth to the world and, thereby, make their own unique contribution to the forward flow of human history.

In his article, “Pan-Africanism in World Politics,” G.N. Uzoigwe of Mississippi State University, Starkville reviews the history of the first Pan-African Congress convened in 1900 and of the six subsequent Pan-African Congresses convened from 1919 to 1974. Emphasizing the dilemmas and limitations of the Pan-African Congress and the OAU/AU, he suggests that the failure of Pan-Africanism to realize its dreams of African unity and black solidarity can be linked to three dilemmas: 1. the incompatibility of the ideal of continental unity with demands for national independence, 2. the meanings of Africa and, 3. the role of the global African Diaspora in Africa’s overall development. Uzoigwe has little hope that Pan-Africanism and the new African Union will have a viable impact in world politics.

In his paper, “The Figuring of Diasporic Africans in Continental African Literature,” Evan Mwangi of Ohio University surveys patterns of imagery in the depictions of the African-American in African prose fiction. Dr. Mwangi argues that, while most African writers present images of crude, materialistic, and overbearing African Americans, some have attempted to deconstruct some of the negative stereotypes most often circulated in mainstream media. He proposes that African and African American artists cultivate better mutual understanding by initiating intensive dialogues and collaborative projects. Dr. Mwangi also encourages African-American writers to learn some of the languages of Africa, so that a larger audience of Africans can read their works.

In his paper, “Intercultural Miscommunication: Perceptions and Misperceptions between Africans and African-Americans,” Funwi F. Ayuninjam of Kentucky State University identifies instances mutual misunderstanding resulting from stereotypes disseminated by popular culture, in particular, popular language use. Dr. Ayuninjam

considers how these globally disseminated stereotypes result in intercultural misunderstanding and mistrust between African-Americans and continental Africans. He suggests that African-Americans travel to Africa, that Africans and African-Americans initiate inter-continental discussions on books of mutual interest. Even though African Americans have lived in the United States for more than three and a half centuries, resulting in a distinct African-American culture, he argues that the authenticity of that culture still derives from its African essence, which binds all peoples of African descent. The author contends that even if Africans and African Americans fail to see the immediate need to initiate sustainable relationships that promote their mutual interests, they should do so for the sake of their future descendants.

Kuria Githiora of Michigan State University presented the results of his study of African attitudes towards AAL or US *Ebonics* in his article “An Exploratory Study of Language Attitudes Towards African American Vernacular Language (AAL) or US *Ebonics* (SAE) by Africans students attending a large Midwestern University in the US.” Dr. Githiora composed a language attitude questionnaire, using a matched-guise technique developed on a model by Wallace Lambert et al combined with a semantic differential scale designed by C. E. Osgood et al. His respondent sample, consisting of 12 African students, originally from eastern, western, and southern Africa, listened to tape recorded voices of African Americans speaking both AAS and SAE. The author documents that the respondents from each region had a more favorable attitude towards Standard America English, with which they were most familiar. Since both continental Africans and African Americans share a common ancestry and linguistic heritage, and since the students of today are the future leaders of African peoples, this surprising result implies a great need for more of such studies before venturing premature interpretations. In the process, the frank and rigorous exploration of such perceptions can serve as a pretext for initial conversations that can lay the groundwork for mutual understanding between African peoples around the world.

Adewale Aderemi, author of “The African Crisis, ‘Development Partnerships’ and the African Diaspora: Constructing the Synergies”, examines the roles that the African Diaspora could serve in the socio-economic development of Africa. In his examination, Aderemi organizes the African Diaspora into four categories or classifications. The first category, the Second Generation Africans, consists of those persons who were born outside of Africa and therefore do not have official African citizenship. The second classification, referred to as the Brain Drain Diaspora, consists of those African professionals, specialists and experts who were born in Africa but live outside of the African continent. The third category consists of the African Economic Migrants who for economic survival left Africa in search of work. Many of these Migrants find themselves living as illegal immigrants in western countries and working several odd low paying jobs to survive. The fourth and final classification, the Associate Diaspora, includes both the political refugees and the newly arrived Africans who live legally outside Africa but who are not favorably integrated in the host economies in terms of employment and income. The author contends that all four categories have specialized, maybe overlapping roles, to play in Africa’s development process. Aderemi believes that the Diaspora can provide a strong lobby for pro-African policies at the

international and national levels, especially with regards to debt cancellation, reparations, trade renegotiations and favorable microeconomic policies. He convincingly argues that unless all Africans, including the rich Diaspora, develop the continent, the West could very well reclaim Africa in the 1st century. Therefore, the Diaspora should consider direct involvement in the political processes of Africa; take up citizenship and in time, make themselves available for political leadership. He further suggests that if continental African governments want to be successful, they must incorporate this very important constituency into their developmental policies and programs.

Ogonna Anaagudo-Agu's article, "Filling the Gap of History: The usefulness of cultivating a common and collective African Experience", seeks to trace possible connections between the cultural traits of West Africa, south of the Sahara, with those in ancient Egypt by concentrating on the ancient civilizations of West Africa, their strengths weaknesses and their contributions. The author also provides a discussion of the intellectual, cultural and spiritual impact of Islamic and Christian cultures on both the Africans and the development of the entire continent. And, he further contends that West Africa, in particular, will never be truly independent intellectually and spiritually unless the yokes of Islamic and Christian cultures are eliminated. He suggests that indigenous African scripts should be revived and/or developed, then used to write the history of the continent. Thus, Africans and Africans of the Diaspora can take charge of their own history and, hence, their future. So, he makes a general call for continental Africans and Africans Americans in particular to join together for the survival of Africa.

In his paper, "Recipe for the Future Africa/Diaspora Relationship," Odife Ikenna of Nnamdi Azikwe University in Awka, Nigeria calls for a strengthening of bonds between Africans and African-Americans, bonds grounded in ideologies such as pan-Africanism and the African Personality, the common experiences of racial and economic victimization. He laments the impact of slavery and the slave trade on the relationship between continental Africans and African Americans considers life threatening challenges like AIDS that plague many African countries, in addition to, the need for Africans and diasporic Africans to establish a more positive and stronger relationship. Dr. Ikenna further contends that the intellectual and cultural contacts symbolic of the earlier the Pan-Africanist conferences and Jamborees appear to be inadequate to address the present needs of the people of African descent. He concludes that it is only through a collaborative strategic vision and hard work that Africans and Africa's offspring in the western hemisphere will ever enjoy a healthy and prosperous symbolic relationship.

Mikhail Vishnevskiy of the Institute for African Studies in Moscow provided a brief historical overview of the impact of African Americans on United States Policy towards Africa from the period of the Civil War to the present in his paper, "On the Influence of the African-Americans on the U.S. Policy toward Africa." He strongly believes that the "Black Capitalism of African-Americans in the US" has enhanced the political power of African-Americans, which in turn, could have a positive economic impact on Africa in the future. In particular, he emphasizes the power of African-Americans to influence American trade and economic relations with African countries such as post-colonial Ghana and South Africa under apartheid as the basis for suggesting

that African-Americans might effectively protest U.S. policies toward Africa drafted at the 2001 UN Conference in Durban, South Africa where, according to the author, the former colonial powers and the US Administration were able to avoid any decisions on critical issues such as debt relief because of the disunity of the African and African Diaspora delegates at this Conference.

Conclusion

The appointment of Clarence Thomas as a "replacement" for Thurgood Marshall sparked fierce national debate and deeply polarized African-American communities. To the extent that this polarizing effect was an instance of black Americans reduced to fighting one another over scraps—as if by a law of nature only one black American at any point in history can occupy a seat on the United States Supreme Court—perhaps it is comparable to the current conflict between prominent Africans and African-Americans. As the slow pace of gradualism since the Emancipation Proclamation continues to withhold full citizenship from *all* taxpaying black Americans, they remain confined, as ever, to battling one another for the scraps, after "truly important" communities and individuals are guaranteed representation, job opportunities, civil rights, police protection, educational opportunities, and other fundamentals necessary to compete in a highly technological, capitalist democracy.

This is not to trivialize the debate, for the fight over scraps can be intense, giving rise to real and lasting grievances. But, while resting between rounds, does not this black-on-black conflict, at times, call to mind an old joke, i.e., who benefits most from the fight over scraps? Answer: the ones dispensing the scraps and keeping the lion's share for themselves.

At the opening ceremonies of the 13th annual Africa/Diaspora Conference, poet, V.S. Chochezi (of Sacramento's Straightout Scribes) incants "Our [African] history is no mystery," implying that where Western history is most silent, the true lessons of history may be least mysterious: that Africans of the soil and the diaspora are "family," weakest when divided and strongest when working together for common goals. Enjoining all to fill that space of silence with dialogue, transforming it into a space wherein we tell our stories to one another rather than getting them second-hand. The poet awaits our response no less urgently than Victoria Valentine of *Crisis* who argues: "Only through dialogue, interaction, and coalition-building will relations between the two groups [Africans and African Americans] improve . . . The diversity of the Black Diaspora in the United States needn't prompt a family feud. It should be viewed as a family reunion" (2006). There is no better alternative!

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