

Promoting and practicing Pan Africanism in the Diaspora

Written by Ron Daniels

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I recently wrote an article in memory of the Honorable Marcus Mosiah Garvey in which I discussed the challenges of implementing the concept of Pan Africanism in the global context, particularly as it relates to the unification and development of Africa. I suggested that it may be the African Diaspora that will once more play a major role in articulating a progressive vision and program for Pan Africanism in the 21st century.

In that regard, it is useful to recall that Pan Africanism, the concept that people of African descent wherever they are should unite to promote racial progress, was initially conceived and nurtured among Africans displaced/dispersed by the holocaust of enslavement. It was African leaders and thinkers like Martin R. Delaney, Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, Edward Wilmot Blyden, Henry Sylvester Williams, W.E.B. DuBois, Marcus Garvey, George Padmore and CLR James who helped define and promulgate the concept of Pan Africanism.

Out of the bosom of sons and daughters of Africa, whom the slave master strove to strip of identity and culture, was born the yearning to unite with each other and their ancestral homeland to better the race. These thinkers would have an enormous impact on the emerging leadership of the anti-colonial struggles in Africa, most notably Kwame Nkrumah and Jomo Kenyatta (they would also have a powerful influence on the anti-colonial struggles in the Caribbean). After the historic Manchester Pan African Congress in 1945, African leaders, with the fervent support of leading Pan Africanists from the Diaspora, left for home irreversibly committed to the total liberation of Africa from European colonialists. A little more than a decade later Ghana would win independence from Great Britain. Eventually, the entire continent would break the yoke of colonialism. The African Diaspora played a significant role in this process!

As Kwame Nkrumah warned, however, the end of colonialism, the direct control of Africa, would not be the end of external domination. Now Africa faces the challenges of neo-colonialism, the indirect control of its resources and economies by Europe, the U.S. and increasingly nations like China and Korea. This fundamental contradiction is exacerbated by an overabundance of inept, incompetent and corrupt leaders, most of whom are too self-observed to envision the kind of Pan African unity required to free their nations from the clutches of neo-colonialism. Some force must emerge to issue a clarion call for an end to neo-colonialism and the rape of Africa by external powers and corrupt leaders. In my judgment, that force must be the African Diaspora.

In the U.S., however, the African Diaspora cannot effectively play that role without simultaneously addressing the need to promote and practice Pan Africanism inside this country. The 2010 Census, if the count is accurate, will reveal that continental and Caribbean Africans now number in the millions in the U.S. There was a time when you would mostly find Caribbean and continental Africans in New York and Washington, D.C. Today you can find Africans from the continent and the Caribbean in virtually every region of the country from Atlanta to Jackson, Mississippi, New Orleans to Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Columbus, Ohio, Memphis, Tennessee, Selma, Alabama ... everywhere!

This dramatic influx of new African immigrants is changing the face of the African community in the U.S., potentially adding to the power of the Diaspora to impact U.S. policy toward Africa and to influence Africa's people and leaders. But, if the African Diaspora in the U.S. is to be in the forefront of promoting Pan Africanism in the 21st century, the first question that must be

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answered is "can we all get along" - can we practice Pan Africanism among the disparate ethnicities/nationalities and cultures in the African community in the U.S.?

By and large, various African nationalities/ethnicities co-exist within the Black community without meaningful communication, dialogue or relationships with each other. Indeed, sometimes there is competition, division and tension between the various groups. There are questions about what it means to be "African American" or whether that designation should be limited to a certain category of Africans in America. Some groups are vigorously pushing to be counted in the 2010 Census by their specific continental or regional identity, e.g., African or Caribbean as opposed to being counted as African American within the broader Black community. There is even a debate about what constitutes the African Diaspora, the sum total of all people of African descent in the U.S., or the more recent immigrants from Africa exclusively.

We cannot effectively achieve our full potential to promote Pan Africanist goals abroad unless we achieve better unity and cooperation among African groups in this country. When the New York Police Department tortured Abner Louima, an African from Haiti, gunned down Amadou Diallo, an African from the Guinea, and killed Sean Bell an African born in the U.S., they did not make a distinction based on their nationality or ethnicity. They were seen as suspicious/dangerous Black men in a nation where racism is still alive and well. Faced with this reality, as Marcus Garvey taught, we must instill the notion that we are one people with a common aim and destiny irrespective of our particular nationality or ethnicity.

As President of the Institute of the Black World 21st Century, I have been urging leaders from the various African nationalities/ethnicities to initiate dialogues to exchange information about the issues affecting our respective communities, to bridge divisions and promote cooperation, collaboration and joint action to advance the interests and aspirations of African people in our totality. This Pan African cooperation should focus on fully mobilizing/organizing the total African community to address issues of concern to Black people at the local, state and national levels. Equally important, the African community should be continually educated and mobilized to promote and defend the interests of Africa. This not only includes engaging in the policy formulation process but becoming the voice and force, relentlessly calling on our sisters and brothers in Africa to shed the shackles of neo-colonialism, embrace moral and ethical leadership and adopt people-oriented practices of governance and economy.

To move beyond theory to practice, IBW has convened Pan African Unity Dialogues in the greater New York area for the past two years. It is our hope that this effort will become a model for creating similar processes around the country. The ultimate goal is for a unified Diaspora to become a formidable force for liberation "at home and abroad." The key to "African redemption" in the 21st century may well depend on the degree to which we as Africans in the U.S. can effectively reclaim our role as the leading proponents of Pan Africanism in the Black World!

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