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## LOBBYISTS FOR THE BLACK CAUSE:

AFRO-AMERICANS AND AFRICANS \*

by

A. J. Williams-Myers

It is a historical fact that wherever the African is found he has maintained a distinct cultural identity.<sup>1</sup> Although in most western countries the African has been relegated to the fringes of society - as a peripheral or marginal man --he has nevertheless acknowledged his historical role in the development of that particular society. The African in Africa accepts his continual historical residency on that continent as a fact, and exerts efforts to rid his society of the last vestiges of a lethargic colonialism. Yet, no matter where this African may be found, he is aware of others like himself, and out of the need for self-fulfillment and enlightenment, he reaches out to them. By doing this he reestablishes the historical *ethos* of unity which is the essence of his Blackness.

This historical *ethos* of black unity was the prime ingredient that led Henry Sylvester-Williams to launch what became the "First Pan-African Conference of the World"<sup>2</sup> more than a half century ago. This conference, and subsequent ones, led by such noted Pan-Africanists as W.E.B. DuBois,<sup>3</sup> Marcus Garvey,<sup>4</sup> Kwame Nkrumah,<sup>5</sup> and C.L.R. James<sup>6</sup> had as its main topic the complete physical, intellectual, and psychological liberation of oppressed black people around the world. It was an indisputable fact that so long as one black man remained subjugated and oppressed by an ethnocentric white population, the entire black population throughout the world suffered from this same philosophy of ethnocentricity. Today, Africans the world over are even more aware of this, and through black unity they are beginning to make positive assaults on the out-dated belief in white superiority. Wherever blacks are found, they are becoming lobbyists for the black cause.

\*This paper was originally read at the 7th Annual Conference of the African Heritage Studies Association, April 3-6, 1975, in Washington D. C. It was presented as an appeal to black consciousness.

This unified assault on this out-dated belief that has so engulfed the western world takes form in many different ways. Last year the world witnessed the defeat of western imperialism in the Portuguese territories of Southern Africa. Portugal's so-called *Christianizing mission among her African wards*<sup>7</sup> of Guinea-Bissau, Mozambique, and Angola was brought to an abrupt halt by our black brothers and sisters within the forces of PAIGG, FRELIMO, MPLA, FUNA, and UNITA.<sup>8</sup> Prior to this time, black unity in the United Nations, with corroborative efforts on the part of Representative Charles Diggs's House Sub-committee on Africa, and Owusu Sadaukai's AISC, were important factors leading to the eventual admission of the liberation movements with *Observer* status in that world body. More recent efforts on the part of the Congressional Black Caucus, in alliance with the Organization of African Unity, in confronting the Ford Administration and Congress (Senate) over inappropriate nominations are relevant here. The nomination of the former Ambassador to Chile, Nathaniel Davis, to be Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs is a case in point and an example of the direction this assault is taking.<sup>9</sup> These and a number of others<sup>10</sup> qualify for what is meant by lobbying for the Black cause by Afro-Americans and Africans. Together, Afro-Americans and Africans constitute the most effective lobby for the total and unconditional global liberation of Africans.

During my most recent trip to Africa (1973-1974), it became quite evident that the African in Africa- at least in the Southern, Central, and Eastern parts which I visited- was making a tremendous headway as lobbyist. Lusaka in Zambia has become the cross-roads of the Third World. The movement of couriers, nationalist leaders, freedom fighters, and inevitably, the imperialist spies. This part of Africa has become the political arena of the world, and the African as lobbyist or negotiator has performed superbly. The assault on western imperialism in Southern Africa, and its eventual defeat by the forces of freedom, demonstrates the extent of success that is possible through the Black *ethos* of unity.

It was most refreshing to have been able to talk with some of these lobbyists. In many ways our conversations had the tendency to fill a void within me. My discussions with Comrade Gumbo, Information Officer for ZANU in Lusaka, was most revealing as to the Black *ethos*. ZANU's efforts in North-eastern Zimbabwe has proved favorable and advantageous to the freedom fighters in combining their military role with that of politicizing the indigenous people in the countryside. Their ability to move into Zimbabwe undetected by security forces was dependent upon both ZANU and FRELIMO uniting their military operations.<sup>11</sup>

To sit and listen to an MPLA official (known only to me as Gadapo, and who had been in and out of Angola on many military campaigns) recount his exploits within that country was overwhelming. On many occasions he and his compatriots would have



to carry their tools of liberation on their backs for weeks before arriving at the objective; and there was the inevitable return trip, when hunger tore at their insides, but they had been trained to avoid attacking enemy positions for simply the sake of destruction. They had encountered and destroyed their objective, and now the ultimate aim was to return to base safely. What was heart-warming in the final analysis was to hear Gadapo's praise for President Kaunda for allowing MPLA to use Zambia as a place of refuge for its weary warriors.<sup>12</sup> In the Eastern Province of Zambia, not very far from the Mozambique border, the determination and commitment of the young FRELIMO soldiers never ceased to amaze me. Here were young men and women eager and willing to cross into the *homeland* and strike a blow for freedom. Many of them were aware of the fact that there existed the possibility that they would never live to see the unfolding of the new state, but they were committed to insuring that those who were to follow them would. Again, it was refreshing to know that the idea of a lobbyist was not simply limited to bridging the gap between Africans and Afro-Americans, but that also within each group the lobbyist must be functional.

Most of us in America are aware of our African Brothers' apprehensions about us as some of us are apprehensive about them. But I can assure you that in my travels throughout the city of Dar in July 1974, and while visiting the offices of SWAPO, ZAPU, FRELIMO, and MOLINACO (an organization for the liberation of the Camoro Islands), I found that most of our brothers were more than eager to get our support in bringing their plight to the conscience of Black Americans specifically, and any other concerned Americans in general. ZAPU and ZANU officials were visibly disturbed over the actions of some members of the American delegation to the Sixth Pan-African Congress, which quite appropriately has been described as 'a cross between a Who's Who of petit bourgeois conference goers and middling "celebrities," plus a few dyed-in-the-system reactionaries, of all "ideologies."' <sup>13</sup> But these officials were able to see it as simply another ploy by the C.I.A. to forestall the inevitable fruition of the Black *ethos*. It is with this in mind that I think it apropos that we turn our attention to the black community in the United States, for it is here that such a tremendous impact can be made on American foreign policy towards positive action for Africa. Thus we may perhaps be able to avoid such egocentric documents as the National Security Study Memorandum 39 (NSSM 39).<sup>14</sup> And given the nature of our American way of life, it is the American black community that must seriously look at itself objectively if any positive political inroads are to be made.

To just think about Africa, Afro-Americans, the legislative process and the evident weak political *clout* of the black electorate on what is said or done in Africa by the U.S., instead of expressing one's inner convictions either verbally or actively through the *political process* is tantamount to allowing the *thief* to ravish the house and its female occupants in hopes that your life would be spared.

Such a position on Africa has become customary for generations of Afro-Americans and as with the old *Sambo Phobia* it is best handled by relegating such a topic to the far inner reaches of the subconsciousness. But as most blacks have experienced, the topic never lies dormant. It is as real as the very blackness that is a part of our everyday awakening in white America. Our blackness alone dictates that we respond to the inertia of legislative initiatives for a more positive approach towards Africa, because to continue to allow this to happen is to deny the very soil from which our blackness sprang.

One could postulate that a lack of awareness on the part of Afro-Americans towards Africa can be attributed to the historical legacy of slavery that has been a stigma on black consciousness, and the desire or the part of many blacks to move into the so-called American mainstream of life. The feeling is that one prerequisite for such a move into the mainstream, is the denial of Africa and the acceptance of a Euro-centric philosophy of life. One could also lay the blame for such a *void* on the establishmentarians, who, over the years, have fed black Americans biased information on the place of Africa and the black man in the world. But then again it would simply be a convenient way of avoiding the real issue as to whom accusations should be made. Perhaps in the final analysis the lack of insight into an African perspective will have to be directed towards a black community that refuses to accept the fact that through its *blackness* it is allied with that black continent. It is this Black Alliance that urges Afro-Americans to assert themselves politically, and economically, in calling forth a more positive approach to Africa by the United States Government.

Totalling approximately 30 million people, the Afro-American community is the largest black community outside of Africa. And this number alone makes it larger than most African states. This in itself should be evidence enough to demonstrate that our political *clout* in the U.S. arena of foreign policy should be more effective than it has been in the last two centuries. There are other ethnic groups in this country whose population percentages are nowhere near the above number, but their political influence into foreign policy and domestic issues is far out of proportion.<sup>15</sup> What they may appear to lack numerically they have made up for economically, and this has allowed political inroads. Given the nature of western capitalism, this disproportional impact on the political arena is possible, especially where the economic variable becomes a silent equalizer. Although Afro-Americans are the largest ethnic minority in the United States, and have been in this country as long, if not longer, than most white Americans, their political and economic inroads into the so-called American mainstream are definitely far too disproportional to the rule of historical residency.

One could also point to the establishmentarians for this legacy of black peripheral or marginal participation. Yet one



could also mention a black legacy of an absence of a community of interest towards the common goal of total black involvement in the political and economic institutions in America.<sup>16</sup> If Watergate demonstrated anything, it was how far removed blacks are from the reins of political and economic power, which of itself necessitates the immediate development of a confirmed community of purpose in overcoming institutional marginality.<sup>17</sup> In overcoming institutional marginality, Black America must fully acknowledge that it is an oppressed-colonized community within White America, and that for generations it has been denied access to the 'means of production' because of which American imperialists have found it quite easy to export this differential approach to our black brothers in Africa and elsewhere in the Third World. Unquestionably, when black America arrives at this level of consciousness it becomes revolutionary, which is an essential element in becoming a lobbyist for the black cause.

Here I am reminded of what Gadapo related to me concerning their retreat from the interior of Angola after having destroyed their objective. Many in the group found it difficult to put up with the pains of hunger, and urged their leader to allow them to attack a Portuguese base in order to get food. The leader, aware of his directives to retreat without detection, bade his followers take note of the ripening mangoes on a nearby tree, and that in a few days they would be ripe enough to consume. The followers, imbued with the philosophy of the supremacy of ultimate victory, but nevertheless racked with hunger, elected to wait for the fruit. Determination, commitment, you name it. Yet it is a level of consciousness that, for many of us, is difficult to comprehend, yet the mark of a true revolutionary who has grown to encompass the totality of the black man's plight.

I am reminded also of those young soldiers of FRELIMO, ZANU, ZAPU, and SWAPO, deployed along the borders of their homeland, who waited or are anxiously waiting for their turn to cross over and "strike a blow and die"<sup>18</sup> for an ultimate objective that many of them would not be present to see unfold. But as revolutionary lobbyists for the black ethos they had made their commitment to insure that for those who came after them, this would be a historical fact.

With this as the background, and as sure as our "Black Awakening in Capitalist America"<sup>19</sup> is a fact, we must make that commitment to the total liberation of black people around the world. In the words of Comrade Ndabaningi Sithole, President of ZANU, "We are our own liberators."<sup>20</sup> Black Americans must bear in mind, as black people throughout the world have come to realize, and as the forces of FRELIMO so well remembered, that for us it must be total physical, intellectual, and psychological "Independencia du morte [mais VENCEREMOS!": Independence or death but we will have victory"<sup>21</sup>

FOOTNOTES

1. Historically this has been shown through repeated refusals on the part of the blacks in the United States to either be totally colonized in Africa or elsewhere: The American Colonization Society failed in its efforts; President Lincoln failed in his and Marcus Garvey had little response to his movement to return. Cf., B. Quarles, "Evacuation with the British," in *The Negro in the American Revolution* (Chapel Hill, 1961); B. Quarles, *The Negro in the Making of America* (New York, 1969), pp. 95-96, pp.112-115, pp. 195-197.
2. Quoted in *Afro-Americans and Africa: The Continuing Dialectic*, a minority report by Elliott P. Skinner, p.8
3. It was DuBois' efforts which were responsible for keeping black people of America informed about Africa in the early decades of the present century: *Suppression of the African Slave Trade to America*, Ph.D. Thesis, Harvard, and published as vol. 1. of Harvard University's Historical Series, 1896; *Dusk of Dawn* (1940); *The World and Africa* (New York, 1946).
4. Although Garvey never attended a Pan African Congress, the ideology of his Universal Negro Improvement Association can be said to have encompassed the black *ethos* of unity.
5. Proclaimed by many to have been the "Spiritual leader of modern independence movement in Africa and as chief apostle of Pan-African unity." He was a firm believer in the idea that independence without unity was meaningless. Cf., J. Gus Liebenow, "Which Road to Pan-African Unity? The Sanniquellie Conference, 1959," in *Politics in Africa* (New York, 1966), Carter, G. (Ed.), pp. 1-31.
6. This long-time Pan-Africanist has contributed immensely to the political development of black peoples, and was a primary convener of the Sixty Pan-African Congress: "Pan-Africanist C.L.R. James," S.K.B. Asante, *Africa*, No.30. February 1974; "Some Questions About the Sixth Pan-African Congress," Imamu Amiri Baraka, *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 6, No. 2, October 1974, pp.42.
7. Perry Anderson, "Portugal and the End of Ultra-Colonialism," *New Left Review*, No. 16, July-August 1962, p.112; Marvin Harris, *Portugal's African Wards* (New York, 1960).
8. To date, MPLA, SINa, and UNITA have been able to surmount their ideological differences, and are now preparing for an equity of political control with independence.



9. The argument against N. Davis is that his confirmation would not help African-American relations in the long run; and it is alleged that he had something to do with the overthrow of the Allende regime in Chile, (L.A. Times 3-9-75), has been confirmed!
10. An excellent example is the response sent to the late President John F. Kennedy by the African Heads of State meeting in Addis Ababa, after they were beamed a message of good will by Gordon Cooper in May 1963: "The Negroes who, even while the conference was in session have been subjected to the most inhumane treatment, who have been blasted with fire hoses cranked up to such pressure that the water would strip bark off trees, at whom the police have deliberately set snarling dogs, are *Our Own Kith and Kin*...The only offenses which these people have committed are that they are Black and that they have demanded the right to be free and to hold their heads up as citizens of the United States." Quoted in Skinner, op. cit., pp. 22-23. (Underlining my own)
11. Interview, Comrade Gumbo, Lusaka, Zambia, 4 December 1973.
12. Interview, Gadapo, Lusaka, Zambia, 30 December 1973, 7 January 1974.
13. Imamu Amiri Baraka, op. cit., p.44.
14. The essence of NSSM 39 is that "Our tangible interests form a basis for our contacts in the region, [Southern Africa] and these can be maintained at an acceptable political cost." This in itself is an affront to black America for it puts corporate wealth above that of human dignity, and in the words of Representative John Conyers, Jr. "It dramatically illustrates the bankruptcy of American foreign policy ." John Conyers, Jr., "The United States' Growing Support for Racism in South Africa," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 6 Number 4, December 1974, p.35. "The Secret U.S. Plan for Southern Africa," *The Black Scholar*, Vol. 6, No.4, December 1974, pp. 39-48.
15. An example of this inertia of legislative initiative is the continual disregard on the part of Black legislators and/or Black legislative lawyers to press Congress on its inability to carry out the consequences for states which continue to disregard *Section 2* of the Fourteenth Amendment. These states have conveniently gotten around the "denial of vote" through legislative gerrymandering of the black electorate, which consequently has affected black representation in both Houses of Congress. With a larger Black representation in both Houses, our influence upon legislation concerning Africa would be greatly felt.



16. America's intimate relations with the State of Israel is an example of this disproportional approach to the political arena. Jews may hold dual citizenship. California Congressman Waxman's revelations about his initial rejection by the Saudi Arabian government for a visa made headlines, but then again South Africa's stand on American Blacks visiting that country seldom gets such attention. After the Mideast War in 1973, the U.S. gave Israel an "extraordinary \$2.2 billion grant" to enable it to rebuild its armaments, while total grants and loans to all of Africa only totaled \$135 million. Cf. "How Africa is Short Changed," William R. Cotter, *African Report*,
17. The variable of racism as a limiting factor must be considered.
18. It is the immediacy of such a task that the black lobbyist must disseminate to the black community.
19. Here one is reminded of that early Malawian Pan-Africanist, John Chilembwe, immortalized in the narrative, *Strike a Blow and Die*, (Cambridge, 1967), R.I. Rotberg, (Ed.).
20. Cf., Robert L. Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America* (Garden City, 1970).
21. "We Are Our Own Liberators," Presidential address by Comrade Ndabaningi Sithole at the Party Congress in Gwelo, Zimbabwe, May 21-23, 1964.
22. "Message of the President of FRELIMO," included in the April-June issue of *Mozambique Revolution*, No. 59, 1974, the official organ of the Mozambique Liberation Front.

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