Towards a Holistic Review of Pan-Africanism: Linking the Idea and the Movement

KURT B. YOUNG
University of Central Florida

This article explores two general approaches to defining Pan-Africanism. Traditional Pan-Africanism reflects definitions of Pan-Africanism that begin with the assumption that distinctions must be made between early “ideas” of group identification with Africa versus modern organizational activities. However, holistic approaches emphasize the interconnectivity of Pan-African ideas and concrete activities. This discussion explores these approaches and their implications for contemporary analyses of Pan-Africanism. The essay concludes that the holistic line is best suited for developing a new model in Pan-Africanism.

There is now a need to look at Pan-Africanism holistically. After a general view of Pan-Africanism, it is also a necessity to look at the many manifestations of Pan-Africanism under different historical pressures and in different places.

Dr. John Henrik Clarke

The late professor John Henrik Clarke, widely regarded at the time of his passing in 1998 as one of the elder thinkers on the subject of Pan-Africanism, penned these words at a critical moment when political movements on the African Continent and across the Diaspora were transitioning into a new and less certain period. New possibilities and aspirations borne from the “decade of African independence” faded with ensuing challenges of debt, conflict, and other contradictions associated with the emerging African state. Likewise, the potent movements that reverberated across the African Diaspora from the 1960s to the 1970s, ranging from Black Power! to Civil Rights, began to lose their footing as the ideas that informed a whole generation of mass-based politics yielded as the landscape throughout the Diaspora.
shifted. Ebbs and flows in Pan-Africanism also mirror internal contradictions. Clarke’s call for redefinition was also compelled by persisting inconsistencies between the ways Pan-Africanism had been conceptualized to that point and its actual practice in times of change. This article explores these contradictions between the conventional definitions of Pan-Africanism and their practical utility for contemporary Pan-African political efforts throughout the African Diaspora.

What follows examines the works of pioneering as well as current Pan-African scholars and practitioners in order to contrast two general approaches to defining Pan-Africanism. Pan-Africanist political thought and practice can be divided into two overarching camps. One, definitions of Pan-Africanism have historically leaned towards what has been referred to as traditional Pan-Africanism, which tends to draw distinctions between nascent reflections on Africa and the modern structural activities that engaged Africa. Second was an alternative that has emerged over the last 25 years that Clarke dubbed holistic Pan-Africanism, and it emphasizes the interconnectivity between a Pan-African consciousness and organized political acts throughout the Diaspora. They represent conflicting orientations on the origins, the motive forces, and the concrete activities that comprise Pan-Africanism. This discussion evaluates these competing perspectives in two ways. The first is to outline the basic tendencies in the traditional approach. Second, a case is made for the utility of the holistic approach for the contemporary task of redefining Pan-Africanism in a manner relevant throughout the African Diaspora. Since comparative analyses like this seldom unfold in a vacuum, this discussion begins by briefly constructing a paradigmatic backdrop for defining Pan-Africanism.

THE IDEA VS. MOVEMENT PARADIGM

Pan-Africanism has always been saturated with competing points of view on any number of topics. As one might expect, canonical disputes will occur in any political tradition as old and complex as Pan-Africanism. Moreover, disagreement, in most cases, is often a strength. Unfortunately, the line separating disagreement and confusion can be blurred. This was one of the central concerns that occupied Clarke throughout his long career. His view is that a crisis had emerged as a result of the absence of an “operational definition of Pan-Africanism that prevails throughout the whole of the African world.” Clarke was not alone in this. Other noted Pan-Africanist scholars have made similar observations. Ofuatey-Kodjoe hit the same point when he observes that major points of confusion have and continue to exist in Pan-Africanism as a result of the widespread problem of defining it. For Ofuatey-Kodjoe, “it is precisely this confusion that has been responsible for some of the most serious setbacks of the Pan-African movement.” What are of concern are
the practical contradictions that surface when disagreement gives way to confusion.

Definitions are important because they govern organization and practice. Exploring approaches to definitions of Pan-Africanism inherently provides a path towards resolving contradictions in its application on the ground. This is to the extent that confusion in defining Pan-Africanism actually exists, it begs the question: What is its main source? A path to an answer leads, ironically, to one of the customary frameworks for defining Pan-Africanism: the “idea versus movement” paradigm. Three core tendencies will be evaluated in this framework:

(1) A distinction made in Pan-Africanism between two separate dynamics: the maturation of a sense of affinity towards Africa (ideas) and the emergence of institutionalized activities focused on varying degrees of unity (movements).

(2) In addition to this dichotomy in defining Pan-Africanism, there is a stronger reference to the latter. Emphasis is placed on organizational formations and their traditional political expressions such as Pan-African conferences, Congresses, and governments.

(3) Consequently, the operationalization of Pan-Africanism tends to legitimize the political manifestations associated with the activities of Congresses and states at the expense of other political formations.

The paradigm acknowledges the presence of Pan-African “ideas” that survived the devastating effects of the middle passage, enslavement, and colonization. However, there is an imbalance. In articulating Pan-Africanism as a “movement,” weight is placed on those programmatic activities such as the Pan-African Congresses that emerged in the early 1900s and reached a crescendo with the arrival of the independent African state in the 1950s and 1960s. A closer look at paradigm’s imprint on traditional approaches to Pan-Africanism further illustrates this dilemma.

THE TRADITIONAL CANON

In the 1982 publication of *The Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora*, the late and distinguished Pan-Africanist scholar, St. Clair Drake states:

For almost a century, a conscious and deliberate movement has been developing within various parts of the black world to increase cultural contacts between its diverse segments and to unite them in the pursuit of common interests. I refer to this as traditional Pan-African activity.
Drake provides a succinct definition of the traditional approach in this extensive essay on the relevance of Pan-Africanism to the African Diaspora. His piece was particularly valuable in its recognition of the importance of global African political connections. Interestingly, however, Drake added the following delimitation:

Pan-African *apolitical* activity can be traced back into the eighteenth century, but Pan-African political activity has been concentrated between the years 1900 and 1958. During that span of years, Pan-African political activity developed as a series of local, highly specific struggles against discrimination based on race and color, sometimes overt, sometimes covert, and against material and psychological legacies of the slave trade.5

Note that Drake’s emphasis on distinguishing between 18th-century “apolitical activities” and the actual Pan-African political activities emerging after 1900 flows neatly from the idea versus movement model.

Similarly, George Shepperson, in his serious essay “Pan-Africanism and ‘Pan-Africanism’: Some Historical Notes,” develops what has become an enduring definition by distinguishing between “Pan-Africanism” and “pan-Africanism.” In his scheme, Pan-Africanism with a capital letter “P” is a clearly recognizable movement. He particularly references the five Pan-African Congresses convened in 1919 in Paris, 1921 in London, 1923 in both London and Lisbon, 1937 in New York, and the great 1945 meeting held in Manchester. The “movement” designation during this era was reserved for these identifiable political activities from the early to mid-1900s, within which W. E. B. DuBois played the key role. Shepperson separates this from “pan-Africanism” with the smaller letter “p” that, he states, “is not a clearly recognizable movement, with a single nucleus such as the non-agenarian Dubois.”6

Shepperson’s popular definition is directly connected to the view here that at least three features dominate political historiography in traditional Pan-Africanism. They include:

1. A chronological leap from ideas regarding Africa towards the post-1900 arrival of the Pan-African Congress movement.
2. The premise that Pan-Africanism’s institutional maturation reached a highpoint in the transition from organizing Congresses to protest the treatment of Africans to the outright seizing of the African state.
3. The vision that the highest stage of Pan-Africanism was the political unification of African states on the Continent.

In the first case, a valuable aspect of the traditional approach is its illustration of, through the evolution of the Congresses, a steady progression in Pan-Africanism itself. Rayford Logan’s “The Historical Aspects of Pan-Africanism,”
The history of Pan-Africanism as a movement to encourage mutual assistance and understanding among the peoples of African and of African descent goes back to the beginning of the twentieth century, but it was only after World War I—that calamitous folly of the so-called superior races—that the movement as a whole began to have the ultimate aim of some form of self-government for African peoples. The two central themes in his observation, the activities of the Congresses and African nation-states, both reflected internal growth. He credits the former for establishing the global framework that would eventually prompt the latter to place “self-government” at the front of the Pan-African dialogue. The underlying point is that the meetings from 1919 to the eve of the pivotal 5th Pan-African Congress (5th PAC) convened in Manchester, England in 1945 anticipated the gradual internal development of the movement from Congresses to the state. The process was actually formalized at the 5th PAC under a new cadre of Pan-Africanists including, among others, George Padmore, Kwame Nkrumah, and C. L. R. James. It is noteworthy, as Kwame Nantambu has long stressed, that the evolution of Pan-Africanism stemming from the 5th PAC coincided with major geopolitical forces unfolding at the midpoint of the 20th century. In contextualizing the broader international implications of the Manchester Congress, Nantambu asserts the following:

The Fifth Pan African Congress also precipitated the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement in 1955, the demand by non-European countries (the South) for a New International Economic Order (NIEO) in 1973 and the demand for a New World Information and Communications Order (NWICO) in 1978. However, it was Padmore who, as an organizer of the 5th PAC, engaged Pan-Africanism at a defining moment: the celebrated transition from the protest-oriented Congress movement to the era of African nationalism.

In his extensive 1971 classic, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*, Padmore offered a comprehensive definition that contributed directly to the re-centering of the Congress movement. While Padmore believed that Henry Sylvester Williams first conceived the Pan-African idea, his, like most definitions in the traditional approach, points to the 1900 Pan-African Conference as the origins of the movement. It was here that the Pan-African idea first began to search for an organizational base that gave it meaning. However, his discussion of the resolutions at the 1st through 4th Congresses contrasted with the aims and objectives of the 5th PAC, which he saw as
the period of Pan-Africanism’s full arrival. This helps to explain the popular notion that the Manchester Congress represented the highpoint of the Pan-African Congress movement. Padmore, commenting on the significance of the Congress to Pan-Africanism’s ideological development, stated that “here at long last was a philosophy evolved by Negro thinkers which Africans and people of African descent could claim and use as their own.”

To Padmore, much of the 5th PAC’s importance was predicated upon its bold attempt to Africa and Africans from Western manipulations. He also notes that “From henceforth Africans and people of African descent would take their destiny into their own hands and march forward under their own banner of Pan-Africanism in co-operation with their own selected allies.” Thus, the new types of alliances that emerged were, for Padmore, a defining characteristic of Pan-Africanism at that historic stage. It was to be linked, in this new brand of Pan-Africanism, to the goals of an “Africa for Africans” and the unification of the Continent through the instrument of “positive action.” In another sense, Padmore captures the new zeitgeist in the movement in declaring that “Africans feel that they are quite capable of leading themselves, and of developing a philosophy and ideology suited to their own special circumstances and needs, and have come to regard the arrogance of white ‘loftiness’ in this respect as unwarranted interference and unpardonable assumption of superiority.” This was a maturation from the earlier posture in the movement that stopped short of demanding, through Pan-Africanism, the mechanisms of the state. Accordingly, Padmore articulates the arrival of a new era in the movement when he states that

For politically, Pan-Africanism seeks the attainment of the government of Africans for Africans by Africans, with respect for racial and religious minorities who desire to live in Africa on a basis of equality with the black majority.

Moreover, for Padmore, the seizing of the African state was ultimately a step towards a higher and more comprehensive Continental stage where

the self-determination of the dependent territories is the prerequisite to the federation of self-governing states on a regional basis, leading ultimately to the creation of a United States of Africa.

Padmore’s conceptualization of the movement in terms of the African state and Continental unity was truly revolutionary in the sense that this surge in Pan-Africanism, under the leadership of Nkrumah and Padmore himself, ultimately materialized in the tangible independence of Ghana in 1957.

In shifting to the Continental unity discourse, variations within the traditional school on the treatment of the idea/movement dynamic begin to appear. In Africa and Unity, V. P. Thompson, much like those above,
suggests that the “first phase” (1900 to 1927) was primarily a “period of ideas.” DuBois, the key actor during this period, sought to establish a “coherent philosophy” as well as a “protest” movement. However, for him, the Accra Conference of Independent African States in 1958 was the landmark event. Thompson then classifies the years from 1946 to 1957 as a “lull period” that was to be followed by the significant contributions of Nkrumah and Ghana’s role in efforts to unify the African states. The increasing significance Ghana, the Accra conferences in 1958, and the establishment of formal Continental bodies prompted a new direction in traditional Pan-Africanism.

Charles Andrain, who in 1962 published an organizational analysis illustrating the vitality of developing a strong political apparatus, took the position that “in the most general sense, the Pan-African movement exemplifies the contemporary African search for organization and community.” More specifically, “If independent African states are to achieve economic and political viability, their leaders must cooperate to form organizations strong enough to mobilize resources and to implement common goals.” Writing at a time when most of the Continent was struggling over the direction of postindependence African regional and international policy, Andrain recognized that, whatever the decision, Pan-Africanism and Continental unification were effective only in an organizational context. Since, as he saw it, the Congresses from 1900–1958 displayed a gradual evolution of an organization-building process, the independent African state had to do so as well.

For Andrain, at the root of Pan-Africanism’s organization-building thrust was the 1900 DuBois-led London conference. This represented the first of three periods of Pan-African political/organizational advancement: the eras of “political acquiescence,” “nationalist agitation,” and “modernization and stabilization.” In the first period (1900–1945), an organizational entity evolved out of “four loosely structured” Congresses: a secretariat that functioned for only two years and, in Africa, the National Congress of British West Africa, West African Youth League, and West African Student’s Union. During the second period, the All-African People’s Conference in 1958, its steering committee, and the secretariat “made effective progress toward building a permanent organization to spearhead national independence throughout the African continent.” Finally, in the modernization/stabilization period, Andrain highlights the direct role of African states and leaders in organizing permanent bodies and conferences to pursue cooperative political and economical unions. Although criticisms of the neocolonial posture of some Pan-African players might apply (especially during the third period), Andrain concludes with the following observation:

The development of Pan-Africanism has witnessed not only a gradual change toward tighter, more permanent all-African organizations, but also a change in the idea of community.... In the contemporary stage of development, Pan-African advocates search for a community feeling in
their geographical contiguity, African pre-colonial cultural heritage, desire to prevent intervention by non-African powers, and common socio-economic needs.21

Interestingly, perhaps the most compelling part of Andrain’s analysis is the emphasis he places on the vital role of a shared “sense of community.” In exploring Pan-Africanism’s organizational development, Andrain offers these insightful words of warning: “If more effective organization to help solve economic, political, and social problems is the primary need of developing African nations, then the lack of an extensive all-African feeling of community solidarity is the main factor hindering African capacity to form a Pan-African association.”22 He was critiquing what was then a potential dilemma confronting the Continental unity model. Today, the threat Andrain articulates then has become one of the real contradictions associated with traditional Pan-Africanism.

As Drake’s essay suggests, and as Andrain demonstrates, there are some traditional thinkers who were more nuanced in navigating the idea/movement premise and its practical ramifications. In his 1974 piece, *The Pan-African Movement: A History of Pan-Africanism in America, Europe and Africa*, Geiss defines Pan-Africanism as “intellectual and political movements among African and African-Americans who regard or have regarded Africa and people of African descent as homogenous.”23 According to Geiss, this sense of homogeneity creates feelings of “solidarity” and an awareness of Africa as a “homeland.” In addition to this, Pan-Africanism included “All ideas which have stressed or sought the cultural unity and political independence of Africa, including the desire to modernize Africa on a basis of equality of rights.”24 Finally, he identifies those “ideas or political movements, which have advocated, or advocate, the political unity of Africa or at least close political collaboration in one form or another.”25 A closer look at how Geiss operationalizes this definition is helpful.

Geiss presents a number of what he calls “planes” of Pan-Africanism that represent its various and dominant dimensions. First of all, there is the expression of Pan-Africanism in terms of a movement of oppressed peoples of color. Of specific importance to Geiss is that level of Pan-Africanism embodied in the non-aligned posture of the Bandung Conference in 1955. Second are those Pan-African notions that accept race as the primary criterion for participation. Referred to here as “Pan-Negroism,” it was a level of Pan-Africanism that embraces black people while excluding Arabs primarily of North Africa. The Continental level represents his third plane, where organized struggles’ primary goal was the unification of the African continent. The contributions of individuals such as Nkrumah and organizations like the Organization of African Unity (OAU) emerge as relevant examples.26 The fourth plane, closely related to Continental unification, emphasizes the necessity of regional integration. This strategy advocates not only the creation
of regional groupings of African states in the various sectors of the Continent but it considers them more moderate steps towards the eventual unification of Africa. Fifth, there is Pan-Africanism on the national plane. Emphasis is placed on mobilizing the mechanisms of the state in order to strengthen a Pan-African base. The sixth plane includes those expressions that amount to a form of nationalism. Here, Geiss identifies the role of ethnic groups as the primary units of mobilization among Africans.27

Geiss’ definition appears more complex than those mentioned earlier in that it avoids the rigid limits placed on the conferences and Congresses. His definition of Pan-Africanism recognizes the influences Pan-Africanists of the 19th century had on the conferences. In fact, one of his criticisms was that the Congresses have been overrated. He attributes this more to the role and perception of DuBois than to the actual products of the meetings from 1900–1927.28 Notwithstanding this, Geiss, in traditionalist fashion, favored the assumption that political movements defined as Pan-African waited for the turn of the 19th century.

Milfred Fierce adopts a chronological that reintroduces Shepperson’s method. In The Pan-African Idea in the United States, 1900–1919, he not only embraces the dichotomous idea/movement split but also selects the movements at the beginning of the 20th century as the highpoints of Pan-Africanism. In defining Pan-Africanism, Fierce expands upon the relationship between the idea and movement:

The movement refers to an organized set of activities designed to relieve Black people (especially but not exclusively Africans) from various kinds of exploitation and oppression on the path to bonafide Black nationalism: social, political, and economic. The idea is the extent to which, if any, an African kinship or brotherhood consciousness exists among African-Americans, irrespective of the steps taken.29 (emphasis original)

From this framework, Fierce defines Pan-Africanism “as a view, notion or ideology that promotes the global cooperative struggle for dignity and self-reliance among Black people and the complete stripping away of colonial and neo-colonial legacies.”30 He recognizes the link between actions and thoughts existing in “antecedents,” such as the American Colonization Society, Paul Cuffe, and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, that preceded the 1900s. Nevertheless, he treats them as examples of African-American “interactions” and “engrossments” with Africa that took the forms of Black nationalists, “Back-to-Africa,” and Black missionary movements.31 These activities were considered minor compared to the Pan-African conferences and Congresses:

African-Americans’ interest in Africa during the nineteenth century was selective but continuous. Africa had its champions and detractors. There were back-to-Africa zealots and stay-at-homes. When the twentieth
In the example of the early 20th-century activities of the Black Church, Fierce takes the position that “during the early twentieth century the role played by Black missionaries in general and the independent Black denominations in particular was a *sans pareil* bulwark in the perpetuation of the Pan-African idea” (emphasis original). For Fierce, in contrast to Padmore’s 1945 Congress and Logan’s post-WWI period, 1900–1919 represents the zenith in Pan-Africanism because of the higher numbers and levels of organized efforts. However, like those above, he considers these earlier efforts as dress rehearsals to the 20th-century movements.

While there are important variations, these approaches within the traditional canon’s idea/movement orientation all sustain and legitimize, implicitly or explicitly, the assumption that programs-of-action that seek to unite Africans occur separate from a Pan-African consciousness. One is left with the impression that the political instruments outside Congresses and states, which were generated from a sense of oneness among African people (and with Africa itself) and responses to the concrete conditions and experiences, are somehow less significant than formally institutionalized political structures. This has contributed significantly to the confusion Clarke and Ofuatey-Kodjoe lamented.

THE HOLISTIC ALTERNATIVE

Conversely, in holistic Pan-Africanism, the idea or sentiment and actual Pan-African activities are intrinsically, philosophically, and historically linked. Clarke insisted on approaching Pan-Africanism first as “a collective effort to preserve and reconstruct Africans’ nationhood, culture and humanity.” Pan-Africanism as a practical product of reconstructing “nationhood” and “humanity” made sense because it flowed from a particular type of consciousness. Hence, Clarke held that definitions of Pan-Africanism had to reflect the practical manifestations of this consciousness all over the Diaspora. Accordingly, two components of the holistic perspective are offered here:

(1) Pan-Africanism emerged at precise points in time and place where a consciousness of Africa and of being African materialized within the context of organized political responses to the conditions confronting African people. Therefore, the essence of Pan-Africanism is the reciprocal relationship between a Pan-African political consciousness and Pan-African political struggle.
Since Pan-African political formations unfold in different regions of the Diaspora with idiosyncrasies based on differing historical forces, Pan-Africanism must account for the unique, Diaspora-wide manifestations of that reciprocal relationship.

The notion of a Pan-African consciousness is central to the holistic paradigm in that it represents an identification with Africa on levels much deeper than isolated “ideas” about the physical Continent. Pan-African consciousness refers to an awareness that members of African origin communities—and by extension the community itself—belong to a global African “family.” It transcends mere reflections on Africa towards an awareness of kindred relationships among African origin people and communities. Finally, the presence of a Pan-African consciousness creates a sense of unity in struggle. That is, where there exists manifestations of this type of consciousness anywhere in the African Diaspora, one also finds notions of a collective commitment to the prevailing political struggles of that region and to those waged elsewhere. As expressions of consciousness, this commitment can be demonstrated in moral, psychological, spiritual and even artistic terms. However, what is most important in the holistic context is the interaction between a wider Pan-African consciousness and the specific political organizations, formations, and movements created as a means of confronting any undesirable reality. It is at the precise moment, when notions of a collective commitment manifest themselves strategically, tactically, or in practice, that the point of convergence between Pan-African consciousness and collective political efforts produce Pan-Africanist activities. The framework that follows expands on the core assumption of the holistic alternative.

Clarke, in *African World Revolution*, captures the basic thrust of the holistic approach in his analysis of what he calls “uncompleted revolutions” represented in the thought and contributions of pivotal Pan-Africanists such as Marcus Garvey, Kwame Nkrumah, Patrice Lumumba, Malcolm X, and Tom Mboya. Clarke makes the case that the contemporary empowerment of African people globally relies upon a collective, internal rededication to the principles of these revolutions. To do so, Clarke urges that African people needed a new global “political apparatus” that was equipped to address now global realities. However, this apparatus had to be historically conscious and should learn from the limitations and contradictions of those revolutionaries. The following statement demonstrates this:

> What needs to feed into Pan-Africanism is a new kind of spirituality. In total liberation, religion cannot be left out, commerce cannot be left out, culture cannot be left out. How we think, how we walk, how we act; everything we do must be part of a totality.
In this regard, Clarke articulates a critique that began with an internal re-assessment of Pan-Africanism.

Other components of Clarke’s holistic analysis, such as an expanded notion of Pan-African ideas, have been anticipated by previous generations of Pan-Africanist thinkers. A case in point was Collin Legum’s research in *Pan-Africanism: A Short Political Guide*, which introduces Pan-Africanism as a movement around ideas of African upliftment and liberation. These ideas first evolved in the Diaspora, where intellectuals from the Caribbean and North America began to set up organizational structures. He credits these organizers for creating a multifaceted movement reflecting the complexities of the African world. Legum outlines eight components that combined in various ways to form the basis of Pan-Africanism. The experiences of slavery and colonialism produced an “alien and exile” people who would psychologically, physically and collectively reclaim their African roots. The enslavement experience also created an “ambivalence towards the West” characterized by a sense of being stuck between two irreconcilable worlds. The remnants of Africa and the brutality of the plantation system triggered various levels of “black solidarity,” which lie at the root of Pan-Africanism. The psychological brutality, however, also resulted in “feelings of inferiority” among African people whose physical domination was justified by the European mission to “civilize the savage.” Interestingly, Legum points out that Pan-Africanism also included a “rejection of inferiority” among African people expressed in ideas of racial pride and a rehabilitation of things African. The reclaiming process, however, brought out a “sense of a lost past” that was imposed upon Africans by enslavement. There was a lingering sentiment that much had been forgotten and damaged.

Regarding a Pan-African consciousness, a critical element in Legum’s method was the similar notion of an “African Personality.” First coined by Edward W. Blyden, this African personality was a source of a collective, Pan-African consciousness shared by people of African descent dispersed across political and sociocultural boundaries. The idea of an African personality, principally in terms of its relationship to Pan-Africanism, has been expressed as a subtle or outward manifestation of an African identity that survived the various forces of dispersal that helped to create the African Diaspora. In expressions of political unity, the African personality aided in defining the sense of oneness shared between African people organizing to collectively liberate themselves from concrete threats to the group. Sterling Stuckey made the same connection but extended its relevance to the development nationalist political expressions in *The Ideological Origins of Black Nationalism*. Though concerned with the contributions of this to the emergence of Black nationalism, Stuckey offers an important historical framework for pinpointing the origins of Pan-Africanism. He explains a Pan-African process where the differences among African people from various geographical regions “were virtually destroyed on the anvil of American slavery.” Instead of preventing
the possibility of successful unification, the geographical separation and psychological manipulation necessary to sustain domination and exploitation actually helped to stimulate Pan-Africanism. That is, despite factors such as the different ethnic origins on the African Continent, the Lingua Franca of the Americas and dispersal throughout the region, unity was forged out of the realization of a shared struggle and out of a common sense of being African. Stuckey explains the Pan-African nature of these responses in the following summation:

A consciousness of a shared experience of oppression at the hands of white people, an awareness and approval of the persistence of group traits and preferences in spite of a violently anti-African larger society, a recognition of bonds and obligations between Africans everywhere, an irreducible conviction that Africans in America must take responsibility for liberating themselves these were among the pivotal components of the world view of the black men who finally framed the ideology.41

It is in this sense that a group’s identity is inseparable from its political responses to the group’s lived experiences.

In the same way, but perhaps more to the point, C. L. R. James’ definitive work, History of the Pan-African Revolt, is essentially a reconsideration of one of the African world’s most celebrated political feats.42 Beyond its magnificent revolution, James specifically holds Haiti as the early embodiment of a Pan-African revolutionary consciousness informing a revolutionary political process. Pan-Africanism for James evolved from a spirit of revolt that prompted Africans to strike out against enslavement with the highest possible levels of organization. In a sense, Haiti is actually a precursor to the Pan-African geopolitics Nantambu articulated earlier as its ripple effects, like those caused by the 5th PAC a century and a half later, were a matter of international significance. In illustrating Haiti’s Diasporic impact, James argues that the Haitian Revolution was to have a lasting effect on Africans in the Caribbean and in the United States who began to engage in similar revolts during the 20 years following Haiti.43 Eric Williams dedicated an entire chapter to the resulting implications of this on the British, French, Spanish, and American slavery in his classic, From Columbus to Castro.44 Similarly, Vincent Harding later explored the linkages between the Haitian Revolution and the maturation of resistance efforts against enslavement in America.45

Political manifestations of this Pan-African consciousness were prominent elsewhere in the Diaspora. Abdias do Nascimento, in Africans In Brazil: A Pan-African Perspective, stresses the importance of recognizing the historic contributions made by African people in South and Central America towards Pan-African world struggles. Africans brought to the Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking colonies in the Americas represented some of the earliest collective efforts by Africans, in spite of ethnic lines, to protect
themselves while simultaneously recreating an African cultural identity. According to Nascimento:

The early history of anticolonial resistance shows that Africans in this region waged one of the first, most heroic, and longest lasting battles for freedom know to the African world. Brazil’s Republic of Palmares and its great leader Zumbi, defeated in 1696 after a century of anticolonial resistance, symbolize this early Pan-African history in the Americas.46

And in terms of specific examples of the same process in Spanish colonies, Nascimento highlights Maroon societies in observing that “Further witnesses are the palenques, cimarrones, and cumbes of the Spanish-speaking Caribbean and South and Central America, boasting heroes like Baorucu, Diego de Guzman, Lemba, King Bayano, and Benkos Bioho throughout the colonial period.”47 Maroon societies are important to the scope of the holistic line because they represent political manifestations, initiated and nurtured at the very beginning of the Pan-African phenomenon that must inform models in contemporary Pan-Africanism.

For example, Nascimento’s research helps broaden the scope of Pan-Africanism to add African antislavery struggles in Central and South American to the better-known Pan-Africanist contributions of African people in the Caribbean and North America. Moreover, he provides evidence of Pan-African roots directly linked to the Maroon tradition throughout the Americas dating back to the 16th century. The more these societies are assessed as archetypes in the Pan-African phenomenon the more is understood about Pan-Africanism itself.48

A new generation of scholars such as Michael Williams has advanced this thinking. In his view, “Pan-Africanism can be understood as the movement among African people in different parts of the world to unite Africa and its people in an effort to liberate them from oppression and exploitation associated with European hegemony and the international expansionism of the capitalist system.”49 His instructive essay fittingly entitled “The Pan-African Movement” makes for a broader notion of Pan-Africanism’s origins and evolution by avoiding the urge to stress the Congresses and the OAU. The raw materials of Pan-Africanism, Williams suggests, were the initial struggles by African people against the processes sparked by enslavement:

Perhaps the most balanced approach to this question [of origins], for now, is to argue that the origin of Pan-Africanism was characterized by a form of mutual duality, thus recognizing the genuine sentiments and concrete efforts of the struggle for Pan-Africanism in Africa and in the African diaspora. It can be plausibly argued that Pan-Africanism originated in the dispersion of Africans and not necessarily just among those who were dispersed.50
Williams situates among the original political acts of Pan-Africanism’s early efforts ranging from resistance to the plantation to attempts at repatriation by Africans enslaved in North America.

Williams’ last point is noteworthy because it captures holistic Pan-Africanism’s concern with understanding Diaspora-wide manifestations of interconnected Pan-African thought and practice. For example, John K. Marsh notes in *African People in the Global Village* that “Pan-Africanism is the emotional, cultural, psychological, and ideological movement that began among the African diaspora in the Western Hemisphere, for a closer unity of purpose, so that African people could feel secure, attain political, economic as well as psychological power, vis-à-vis other races or world regions.”

Marsh makes reference to two similar yet related dynamics. With the coming of slavery, Africans on the Continent initiated processes that connected consciousness to movements for self-definition, self-defense, and self-perpetuation. Marsh offers the continental struggles of Mansa Musa, Shaka, and Samori Toure as examples of the seeds that would germinate into Pan-Africanism in the West. Capture in West Africa and the Middle Passage became a force that compelled Africans to minimize regional, ethnic, and linguistic differences as a prelude to the prototypical Pan-African struggles referenced earlier (Maroon societies). The experience in the Americas will be analyzed shortly.

In Africa, the ensuing arrival of colonialism meant the development of a different Pan-African trajectory. Marsh offers the leadership of the “continental Pan-Africanist” Kwame Nkrumah to illustrate this. For Marsh, Nkrumah embodied a particular version of Pan-Africanism where connected notions of African consciousness and of political struggle manifested themselves in the process of state-building. Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first president and one of the towering figures in Pan-Africanism, believed that any process of social revolution aiming to free African people from their colonized status could only succeed if balanced with a process of revolutionized thinking among African people. This was the broad context within which his famous observation that “Thought without practice is empty, practice without thought is blind” was seated. Marsh also stressed Nkrumah’s clarity on the presence of a “oneness” existing among Africans globally. For many in the traditional approach, Nkrumah has been relegated to the discourse on uniting Africa’s governments. For Marsh, and others of the holistic sort, the Continental Pan-African agenda under Nkrumah’s leadership was a part of a global process:

Pan-Africanism in Nkrumah’s hands transcended pleading to colonial masters for the better treatment of the African elites and natives to one acknowledging African people, globally, as belonging to the African nation, to mobilizing for African independence, the consolidation of that independence, the achievement of a United States of Africa for the economic, social, cultural, and the industrial transformation of the African
continent, and thereby the empowerment of African people [wherever] they are.55

Thus, the holistic interpretation of Nkrumah and his vision of a “United States of Africa” differed from traditional embrace of a state-centric focus on Nkrumah’s contribution to continental unification of African governments.56 Rather, the movement to unite all of Africa coexisted with of a new way of thinking where, in addition to an Akan, Kikuyu, and Balante identity, consciousness of a collective African identity was being politicized.

A similar analysis can be made elsewhere in the Diaspora. In the Americas, for example, notions of politicized consciousness followed a different trajectory. There, the unique experiences of enslavement demanded a different historical and developmental process. Clarke again provides the historical backdrop:

There is a need for a Pan-African mission that will transcend national borders, cultural and religious differences and political preference. The Africans living in the Western hemisphere should be sensitive to the fact that the slave ships coming from Africa to the so-called New World brought no West Indians, no black Americans, no South Americans. They brought African people who had to adjust to the conditions where the slave ships put them down. It is by sheer accident that some Africans away from home are called Jamaicans, some are called Trinidadians, Barbadians and some are called African-American. They are all African people reacting to different forms of oppression.57

Accepting this general picture, Marsh focuses on one of the unique considerations presented in the Americas: the psychological dimension. The connection between a psychology and Pan-Africanism rests in a peculiar type of double-barreled attack on the identity of the enslaved African and resistance to this attack. During slavery, sustaining bondage meant that a premium had to be placed on sealing, in the African mind, notions of European cultural superiority while associating all things African with savagery, barbarity, and inferiority. Consequently, collective acts of political resistance to slavery were inseparable from forms of psycho-cultural resistance. This is why, from Marsh’s view, “Pan-Africanism then is a psychological response to powerlessness and a desire to act upon the environment in which Africans found themselves, rather than remain the ones being acted upon without any meaningful resistance.”58 Thus, Pan-Africanism in the Americas had to include a collective reaffirmation of African identity expressed in acts of collective political resistance.

As an example, Marsh highlights the emergence of David Walker (who he labels a “Pan-Negroist”) as a personification of the struggle to transform the “historic global conditions of Black people.”59 Clearly, David Walker’s
Appeal to the Coloured Citizens of the World, published circa 1829, still ranks as one of the most important statements in the Pan-African discourse. David Walker’s Appeal was unequivocal in connecting the struggle against slavery to a rejection of psychological bondage and the reaffirmation of an African historical identity. Walker confronts the question head on in “Article II” of the Appeal when he identifies the relationship between grasping contribution to humanity “by the sons of Africa” and “among whom learning originated.”

Walker charged enlightened Africans with the task of linking historical consciousness to the eradication of both collective ignorance and the ultimate defeat of slavery:

I advance it therefore to you, not as a problematical, but as an unshaken and for ever [sic] immovable face, that your full glory and happiness, as well as all other coloured people under Heaven, shall never be fully consummated, but with the entire emancipation of your enslaved brethren all over the world.

Here, the convergence of such factors reflects the basic tenets of holistic Pan-Africanism.

Williams’ treatment of Marcus Garvey’s significance to Pan-Africanism makes a similar point. He argues that a popular misconception and oversimplification of Garvey’s Pan-Africanism was the tendency to narrow his ideas down to a “Back-to-Africa” agenda. A more accurate analysis, in Williams’ opinion, is that Garvey’s attempt to liberate the Continent of Africa was a prerequisite for liberating African people in the Diaspora. He quotes Garvey’s argument on the importance of Africa’s redemption to the larger African world:

We are determined to solve our own problem, by redeeming our Motherland Africa from the hands of alien exploiters and found there a Government, a nation of our own, strong enough to lend protection to the members of our race scattered all over the world, and to compel the respect of the nations and races of the earth.

Again, a complete understanding of Garvey and the UNIA’s contribution to Pan-Africanism can only be achieved by appreciating the practical dimensions of the Garveyite creed, “Africa for Africans, at Home and Abroad.” In this regard, Williams, like Marsh, surpasses the narrow reference points in Pan-Africanism. However, the two were less effective in systematically exploring the practical connections between an African consciousness and Pan-Africanism. They did not fully engage the question of how Pan-African consciousness contributed to Pan-African political struggles.

One of the most advanced theoretical discussions in recent times on the structure and intricacies of that connection is Ronald Walters’ exceptional
study, *Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora*. His central argument is that Pan-Africanism and Pan-African strategies must simultaneously reflect unique local realities and the cultural, political, and economical linkages constructed by African people in different parts of the world. Walters offers five potential “varieties of Pan-Africanism” where the level of interaction determines the nature of linkages “among African-origin communities outside the African Diaspora or between them and those on the continent.” He ranks them as such:

1. Unity among peoples within an African-origin community;
2. Unity among African-origin people within a predominantly black, culturally heterogeneous state;
3. Unity between or among African people in African-origin communities in the Diasporas;
4. Unity among African peoples in African-origin states; and
5. Unity between or among peoples in African-origin communities and African-origin states.

Using this as a guide, Walters examines international linkages as institutionalized political manifestations of consciousness. Walters’s assessment of these linkages begins with the assumption that “Africa endures in Black people of the Diaspora not only in the surface physical manifestation of skin color and physiognomy and the remnants of cultural practices, but most powerfully in the imagination.” Unity linkages that are the essence of Pan-Africanism are the strategic expressions of this imagination. To illustrate this, Walters offers, among other Diasporic expressions, the Negritude movement, the struggles in “Black Britain,” and the emergence of the African Heritage Studies Association (ASHA) as non-Congress and non-state examples of a consciousness/linkage relationship.

Walters frames the Negritude movement, led by writers from Africa and the Caribbean such as Léopold Sédar Senghor, Aimé Césaire, and Léon Damas, in terms of a preliminary step in self-redefinition that connects to organized efforts:

Empirical proof of the power of the “African imagination” within Black people was provided by the Negritude poets in Europe at the turn of the century who, facing the push of racism and oppression and the pull of the substance of African culture, also created an expression of the new “African personality” as a way of rehabilitating and defending African culture and using it as an alternative model for their psychological liberation.

Negritude’s main contribution was its attempt to reassess, to reaffirm, and to redeem African cultural identity in the context of evolving liberation struggles
on the African Continent. To this point, Senghor casts Negritude as a concept very similar to the African personality. However, he adds that “Perhaps our only originality, since it was the West Indian poet Aimé Césaire who coined the word negritude, is to have attempted to define the concept a little more closely; to have developed it as a weapon, as an instrument of liberation and as a contribution to the humanism of the twentieth century.”

Accordingly, the Negritude era produced major accomplishments such as the Conference of Negro-African Writers and Artists that convened in Paris in 1956 and the creation of the Society of African Culture. Walters notes that the American delegation to the Paris meeting, in its effort to institutionalize the linkage, returned home and immediately created AMSAC, the American Society for African Culture, in 1957. The conference in Paris also set the stage for The Second International Conference of African Artists and Writers, held in Rome in 1959, where the Pan-African journal, Presence Africaine, was founded. The concentration among these African writers, artists, and scholars on African liberation began to ripen at an AMSAC-sponsored conference in Philadelphia in 1960, where the issue of African culture was discussed specifically against the backdrop of the ongoing African independence movements. The relevance of the discussion to African liberation would continue in 1969 at the First Pan-African Cultural Festival, held in Algiers, Algeria.

Regarding the African Diaspora in the United Kingdom, Walters provides an extensive discussion on the Pan-Africanist tradition. Here, Walters targeted two points: On one hand, he presented a case for a comparative framework for understanding Pan-Africanist linkages between Blacks in Britain and the United States. However, he makes this point with an eye to appreciating the uniqueness of the British experience. This was vital since, historically, Pan-Africanism in Britain was a response to the early foundations of racism set in place with British abolition (1807) and emancipation (1833) and concretized during the immigration of Black workers from across the British colonial empire during WWI. By the 1940s, the decade that spawned the famed 5th PAC, the decolonization era in general and particularly the heightening of political awareness, protest and organization-building by colonial subjects from Africa and the Caribbean introduced into the British domestic setting what has become one of the truly unique chapters in the Pan-African story. These dynamics certainly fueled the efforts of Pan-Africanists in the United Kingdom from Henry Sylvester Williams to Nkrumah. It is also true that they provided a foundation for the Pan-African linkages Walters explores in Britain’s Black Power Movement, the African Liberation Support Committee, and African Liberation Day from the 1960s to the 1980s.

Finally, the 1972 formation of ASHA and the maturing Black Studies Movement were late 20th-century examples of linkages in Pan-Africanism. Walters highlights the formation of ASHA and was particularly interested in demonstrating how its break from the African Studies Association was part of a larger, Pan-Africanist process. He states, “Most important, as
the political character of the Black liberation movement of the 1960s changed to become more pan-Africanist, so did the movement for Black studies. The Black Studies Movement could only be correctly understood in the context of its connection to Black liberation struggles in the United States, Africa, and elsewhere. Thus, AHSA’s break from ASA, as it was grounded in the black liberation movements and reflecting the African consciousness/Pan-Africanism connection, was centered around these following demands:

[T]he need to control one’s own history and culture, the need to participate in conferences in Africa, the need to reduce the distance between Africans and Afro-Americans, the need to contribute to the Black community, the need to form a liaison to other Black scholars, the need to collaborate with African countries and their embassies.

So then, Walters exemplifies holistic Pan-Africanism. In general terms, he locates this link in the larger issue of understanding political struggles among any ethnocultural group. He explains that “politics emerges not as a unique product of social life apart from culture, but as part of the challenge of everyday living,” and that “it is the organized way in which people respond to their environment by seeking to protect and advance their overall cultural interests.” Walters sums it up this way:

A unique form of politics is related to Pan Africanism where the activity is directed toward protecting and advancing the cultural heritage of African-origin peoples, where they are engaged in protecting and advancing the interests of African continental peoples, and where the activity is based on protecting and advancing the linkages of kinship among African-origin peoples in the Diaspora.

CONCLUSION

The history of Pan-Africanism has often been defined by status quo orientations confronted by alternatives for more pragmatic levels of organization. Kwesi Kwaa Prah anticipated the contemporary arrival of such a confrontation:

Pan-Africanism, if it is to successfully confront the challenges of tomorrow should not acquiesce in the rhetorical fantasies of a pseudo-church: a community of “believers” who meet every so many years, to affirm their faith and venerate their ancestry and its iconography. The challenge is to organize democratic institutions for the emancipation and development of mass society.
In addition, Prah contends that

Pan-Africanism is at the same time an affirmation and assertion of African humanity, a spirit of indomitability, an attestation of the right and willingness of Africans to unite and seize their equality amongst humankind. It is not dogma cast in stone by a political pedigree, and which requires doctrinal fidelity every time it is called into analytical or practical service. It is a dynamic frame of reference which responds to changes in focus and relevance according to changing historical realities.78

As such, a useful contemporary approach, consistent with Prah’s critique and charge, would reconceptualize Pan-Africanism so that outmoded definitions are adjusted to inform new practical models. In the final analysis, the holistic Pan-African alternative holds the promise of influencing the development of such a new model, not only in terms of organized manifestations of consciousness but also as a vehicle for crafting new international linkages that capture the reciprocal relationship between consciousness and practice.

NOTES

5. Ibid., 453 (my italics).
10. Ibid., 95.
11. Ibid., 130.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid., xv. After serving as a ranking official in the Communist Party in Russia during the 1940s, Padmore would play a leading role cementing the ideological shift occurring in the Pan-African movement at the time. His involvement, along with others such as Ras Makonnen and Nkrumah, built on but broke with the largely intellectual, nonthreatening versions in the four previous Pan-African gatherings.
15. Ibid.
17. Ibid., 39.
19. Ibid., 15.
20. Ibid., 16.
21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 7.
24. Ibid., 3.
25. Ibid.
26. The OAU was created in 1963. In 1999, member states of the OAU called for its transition to the African Union. The first assembly of the African Union was held in 2002.
28. Ibid., 232.
30. Ibid., xx.
31. Ibid., 3.
32. Ibid., 30. Fierce is of the opinion that one of the dominant characteristics of this 20th-century Pan-Africanism was the increasing involvement of intellectuals from the Western hemisphere. Their involvement, in his view, contributed to an elevation of the movement to unprecedented levels.
33. Ibid., 177.
36. Ibid., 25.
38. Ibid., 14.
40. Ibid., 1.
41. Ibid., 6.
43. Ibid., 22. While one might suggest that James, on various occasions, preferred a full class analysis rather than an emphasis on African cultural dynamics, his evaluation of the Haitian Revolution revealed key elements that support holistic Pan-Africanism.
47. Ibid.
50. Ibid., 170.
52. Ibid., 83. It should be noted that, although these are examples of attempts at African unification, I do not uncritically argue that these are examples of Pan-Africanism. At least two of the three are examples of struggles that did not place the interests of the masses of African people at the heart of the movement. Mansa Musa’s reign, for example, accepted and promoted the subjugation of the non-Muslim African masses.


54. Marsh, African People, 82.

55. Ibid., 98.


57. Clarke, Notes for an African World Revolution, 419.

58. Ibid., 80.

59. Ibid., 85.


61. Ibid., 50.


64. Ibid., 41.

65. Ibid., 325.

66. Ibid., 355.

67. Ibid., 356.


69. Walters, Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora, 361.

70. Ibid., 362. Walters suggests that, at the Philadelphia conference, a very important theme entertained at the conference was the prospect of defining what Samuel Allan ‘called an ‘ensemble of African values’ that comprised the ‘vital force’ as the concrete expression of the African personality.” In Algiers, the debate shifted towards the issue of culture in the context of African-Arab unity. One of the critical issues in 1969 was the question of whether or not Arabs were culturally African.

71. Ibid., 193.


73. Walters, Pan-Africanism in the African Diaspora, 355.

74. Ibid., 366.

75. Ibid., 383.

76. Ibid.


78. Ibid., 11.

Dr. Kurt B. Young is an Assistant Professor in the Political Science Department and the African American Studies Program at the University of Central Florida. Dr. Young’s research areas include Pan-Africanism, Africana political thought and movements, African American politics, and African and Caribbean political economy.