

# From the Civil Rights Movement to Black Lives Matter: The African Union and the African-Americans in the United States

by

Roland Mireku Yeboah  
nanayawmireku.gh@gmail.com  
Graduate Teaching Assistant, Institute of African Studies  
University of Ghana, Legon

## Abstract

*“Just because a cat has kittens in an oven, that doesn’t make them biscuits”.*

These were the words of the Civil Rights Activist and Pan-Africanist Malcolm X and indeed it became the philosophical imperative that drove him to internationalize the Black struggle in the United States when he established OAAU (Organization of Afro-American Unity) in 1964 modelled after the OAU (Organization of African Unity) that was founded in 1963. Indeed, the same impetus fueled the ideological descendants of Malcolm (the Black Power Movement and the Black Panthers) after his death. The emergence of independent African states and their sudden assumption to their rightful place in UN in the 1960s generated immeasurable pride for the Black diaspora and indeed for the CRM (Civil Rights Movement) in the US. This was an opportunity for them (CRM) to identify with the continental struggle as a people of one race (Black people) and with one ancestral home (Africa). The African Union has replaced the OAU and unlike its predecessor designated the African diaspora as its Sixth region as enshrined in Article 3(q) of its Constitutive Act. This paper examines the relationship between the AU and the African Diaspora with special reference to the African-American Diaspora.

It advances the argument that while the AU has done much better than its predecessor in engaging the African diaspora, the relationship between the two is relatively beneficial to the AU rather than mutually beneficial to both parties. It draws parallels between the desuetude of the CRM and the Black Lives Matter Movement while placing the AU at the center of this comparison. The paper places a historical development into a modern-day struggle of the Global African family.

## **Introduction**

The African Union replaced the OAU in 2001 and unlike its predecessor, the AU for the first time called the African Diaspora to the negotiation table to begin an inclusive process. The importance of this agenda was clearly captured in the swiftness with which the AU moved to include Article 3(q) in its Constitutive Act in 2003, just two years after the Union's establishment (Ngulube 2013). This was a special provision for the African Diaspora as a whole. Later in Addis Ababa in March 2005, ECOSOCC (Economic, Social and Cultural Council) with several members of the Diaspora who were present as non-voting members met to discuss how the African Diaspora could be incorporated into the AU (Horne, wordpress.com). The AU as such, for the first time in history, established a policy through the ECOSOCC to rigorously engage the African diaspora <sup>1</sup>(Ikome 2009). From the viewpoint of the author, the swiftness with which the AU moved to formally engage the African diaspora (in 2003) speaks volumes of how important the AU considered the Global African family. Clearly, the AU was, and is, much readier for the African diaspora than its predecessor. What waits to be revealed is the manner in which the AU finds the African diaspora relevant.

The AU is a continental institution that represents the African peoples. Its historical foundations lie in the ethos of pan-Africanism, a concept that is concerned not only with continental Africa, but the global African family. It was therefore only proper that the new continental institution found the need and means to engage the African diaspora. Indeed, the AU as an institution falls within the theoretical framework of neo-institutionalism, which among other features assumes the position that by their very establishment, institutions are to satisfy the mutual interest of all its members and avoid partial tendencies likely to generate apprehensions. For what it is worth, the relationship between the Union and its African diaspora must be mutually beneficial, one that satisfies the interests of both parties and which this paper strongly supports. The AU subsequently established the Sixth Region as a constituent part of the Union, solely designated to the Global African family (Edozie 2012).

This paper examines the relationship between the AU and the African Diaspora with special reference to the African-American Diaspora. It advances the argument that while the AU has done much better than its predecessor in engaging the African diaspora, the relationship between the two is relatively beneficial to the AU rather than mutually beneficial to both parties.

It draws parallels between the desuetude of the Civil Rights Movement (CRM) and the Black Lives Matter while placing the AU at the center of this comparison. To this end, the article is in three sections. The first part examines the political and economic relevance of the African-American Diaspora (AAD) to mother Africa and the AU in particular. The second part examines the Black struggle in the US. A clearer picture, however, of the second task would not be achieved without situating it within the historical context of the OAU, as the latter's formation coincided with the peak of the CRM. Doing so, by extension, paves the way for a proper analysis of the relationship between the two parties and the extent to which the AU has been receptive to America's Black struggles which is what constitutes the third section. It should be mentioned that the paper examines policies of engagement of the AU (as an institution) with its Sixth Region and not that of individual arrangements of member states in engaging the Global African Family.

### **The Global African Presence**

Scholars like Shepperson, Manning, Alpers, Falola, Zeleza, Akyeampong, Kambon, Cohen, Gilroy, Safran and Palmer have already expended thorough intellectual energy into the study of spatialization and periodization of African diaspora studies. This is therefore not the avenue to add to this exercise, except to draw on its relevance for a work like this. The African diaspora encompasses both the Eastern (Asia and the Middle East) and Western hemisphere (Europe, North and South America and the Caribbean). Out of these two groups are three kinds of diaspora groupings based on periodization. There is the Ancient Voluntary Migration (AVM) which consists of African people who migrated on their own free will throughout the world in ancient times 100s of thousands of years ago (Kambon 2013). They can still be found in places like the Pacific Islands (West Papua New Guinea, Bougainville, Vanuatu, Andaman Islands, etc.), Southern India, Southwestern Asia, Australia, and Central America (Ibid). There is also the African diaspora created through the forceful removal of African people called *maafa*. This group of African diaspora is inextricably connected to the continent and out of consciousness for this connection is making contacts with Africa through calls for repatriations and occasional visits (Ibid). Then there is the Contemporary diaspora which constitutes a crucial part of the African diaspora. This group constitute Africans who migrated outside Africa during the period of colonization, decolonization and during the implementation of the structural adjustment programme (Zeleza 2008). Added to this group are those who travel abroad to seek for greener pastures (Kambon 2015). The African diaspora of this nature constitutes the Voluntary form of migration. They have direct blood relations in Africa and frequently return home to the continent (Ibid).

This work, however, restricts itself to the people of African descent in North America (United States of America). It must be pointed out that the author is fully conscious of the Atlantic hegemony in African diasporic studies and that the author's reason for choosing the African American Diaspora (AAD) as a case study is far from being a victim to the universalization of the Black Atlantic model as the central category of analysis for African diaspora studies.

In fact, the reason for such special attention is not only due to the strong historical ties between Africa and African Americans, but to the social and political relations that have over time been galvanized and crystallized between the two different geographical people. Most significant is the recurrent attention the Black struggle in the US continues to receive in international media in the wake of the emergence of the Black Lives Matter Movement. As such, while the article offers a glimpse of the relationship between the AU and its Sixth Region, it may or may not be a generic reflection of the relationship between the AU and the whole Global African family.

## **The African American Diaspora and Mother Africa**

In an interview with the President of the African-American Association of Ghana (AAAG), it was revealed that African Americans (AAs) have made immeasurable contributions to the political and economic development of Africa and particularly Ghana.<sup>2</sup>

In 2016 there were approximately 5,000 African-Americans living in Ghana. Five years ago, in 2011 this number was approximately 2,500. Clearly, there is an upward trend in African Americans seeking to call Africa in general and Ghana in particular home (AAAG 2017). In 2016, African Americans contributed over \$25 million annually in pension remittances alone (Ibid). Within Ghana, African Americans and other diasporans of African descent generate millions of dollars annually, not to mention the intellectual capital they provide. They own businesses and employ people. They built schools, and medical clinics, run businesses, and work for Ghanaian and international companies as they work toward the development of Africa. It must be pointed out that the presence of AAs on the African continent as well as their significant contribution is not a recent development. Even though their presence has been felt on the continent for a long time (with the creation of Liberia by the American Colonization Society), contemporary repatriation of AAs to Africa began from the 1950s (Gaines 2012). This was inspired by both political and cultural reasons. Politically, the painful experience of anti-Black racism in the United States triggered their intention to repatriate en masse back to Africa (Ibid). Africa for Africans was the solution to the institutionalized racism against the Black race as some AAs thought.

Although this was an old message preached by Martin Delany, Edward Wilmot Blyden and given momentum by Marcus Garvey, the message became ever more relevant during the Civil Rights era in the US in the 1950s (Ibid). The blatant, naked racial discrimination and lynching of African Americans convinced a number of America's Blacks that it was high time they repatriated to Africa. This was against the backdrop that by this same time, Africa was already announcing its presence and taking its rightful place in international politics (Meriweather 2002). AAs felt it was time for them to flee from the oppressive American system, and Africa offered the opportunity (Ibid). In this instance, the country among others in Africa that became a symbol of hope for the Black struggle was Nkrumah's Ghana, which had assumed Pan-African leadership on the continent.

In this regard, the work of Kevin Gaines (*American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*) remains a very useful research publication that provides a wealth of information. The other reason is the spiritual connections AAs make with Africa which is thought to be their motherland and ancestral home (homeland). This more than anything binds them to the African continent.

As much as Africa presented an opportunity for repatriation of America's oppressed Blacks, AAs also helped to internationalize Africa's anti-colonial struggles through support in diverse ways (Von Eschen 1997). Martin Luther King, Jr., George Padmore, W.E.B. Du Bois, Malcom X, Maya Angelou, John Henrik Clark, Richard Wright, Pauli Murray, C.L.R. James and Muhammed Ali (and the list remains inexhaustive) are AAs who either visited or settled in Ghana (Gaines 2012). Their presence alone in Africa shifted international perception on Africa and created a sustained pro-Africa advocacy in the international media (Legwaila 2006). Legwaila averred that this reversed the constant bleak portrayal of the continent and created a more balanced and accurate coverage of African issues (Ibid). Du Bois, for instance, renounced his American citizenship and together with his wife took on Ghanaian citizenship and actually died in Ghana (Agbeyebiawo 1998).

AA expatriates also came to Africa with lots of professional and intellectual skills. They had among them Doctors and healthcare professionals who put up health facilities. They include the Bryan Lowe Orthopedic Hospital in Mampong and Dr. Robert Lee, classmate of Dr. Nkrumah, who opened Ghana's first dental clinic (AAAG 2017). There were also Engineers, Certified Public Accountants and IT specialists working with Ghanaian counterparts and starting their own companies. Carlos Altson, for instance, who was invited by Dr. Nkrumah, brought the first electric street lights to Accra (Ibid). AAs have made significant contributions to the development of the tourism and hotel industry.

Moving away from Ghana, AAs also nurtured the intellectual origins of Pan-Africanism and transformed it into a movement (Adi 2002). They provided a safe haven for the expression of Pan-African ideals and, as such, gave momentum to the largest movement in Black history (Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association and African Communities League) (Adi 2002). It was through the series of conferences organized by the doyen of Pan-Africanism, Du-Bois that Pan Africanism as a movement reverberated in Africa during the Nkrumah years. As it were, African liberation fighters tapped into the euphoria and motivations of Pan-Africanism and their lived experiences among Black people in the US proved useful for their anti-colonial achievements (Adi 2002).

Nowhere was AAs' support for the continental struggle more dramatic than in the case of South Africa. As a way of supporting the Black majority and the anti-apartheid party, AA Civil Rights Activists in the 1980s led the national anti-apartheid movement in the US. At the forefront of the struggle was the founder of TransAfrica, Randall Robinson, together with Rev. Jesse Jackson and activist Harry Belafonte (Penial 2013). TransAfrica exerted pressure on American corporate and federal powers to disinvest in a racist institutionalized regime. In this regard, mention should also be made of Leon Sullivan who used his influence as a board member of General Motors to encourage multilateral disinvestment from the Apartheid regime (Bolaji 2015). The Black Power Movement that existed in the 1960s and 1970s served as a stimulant to Steve Biko's Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa (Penial 2013).

Arthur has also argued that it was the pressures of the Civil Rights Movement, for instance, that made the US government enact the Hart-Celler Act of 1965 (Arthur 2016). The Hart-Celler Act of 1965 abolished the highly restrictive national origins quota system that had formed the pivot of American immigration policy since the 1920s (Ibid). The removal of this immigration bottleneck facilitated African migration to the United States. The toils and achievement of the CRM (the desegregation laws) made lives relatively comfortable for continental Africans who travelled to the United States (Ibid). The introduction of African and African American studies as a holistic academic discipline, which now prominently features in modern day university curricular the world over, was partly the achievement of the CRM. The intellectual exchanges between AAs and continental Africans should also be mentioned.

AAs continue to contribute to the national income of African countries through remittances and pension's expenditure, creating jobs and employment and, therefore, strengthening the private sector. The above discussions prove therefore that the relevance of this diasporic body does not only lie in its economic relevance because, beyond that, there is a shared history of political struggle in which the AAD come across as very resourceful. It is, therefore, only normal that, considering the enormous benefits that accrue the African continent from the AAD, the AU makes a reciprocal gesture of including the former as a part of the Union.

## The African American Struggle in Contemporary Times

The AAD in the United States is in a very crucial situation at this point in time, and history is at the verge of repeating itself. There is literature that exposes the extent to which AAs in the United States are still victims of racial discrimination and white supremacist attitudes which have manifested in myriad ways. Almost sixty decades after the end of the CRM and the nullification of all segregation laws, AAs are still living in the shadows of the civil rights era. This phase of the Black Freedom Struggle was adroitly characterized by Malcolm X when he remarked that:

*[t]he only revolution in which the goal is a desegregated lunch counter, a desegregated theater, a desegregated park, and a desegregated public toilet; you can sit down next to the white folks -- on the toilet. That's no revolution (Wolfenstein 1981).*

To say segregation laws are no longer in existence and so anti-Black racism of the 1960s variant does not exist in the present-day US is to similarly be under the illusion that the dismantling of apartheid in South Africa in 1995 was the end of anti-Black racism, as both situations indicate otherwise (Kunnie 2000). There is a school of thought that enslavement in the US never ended, but merely underwent rebranding (Kambon 2015). According to this thought, there was nothing emancipatory about the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment that was enacted in 1865. In fact, the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment according to this literature is pregnant with meaning upon a closer examination. As the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment of the US Constitution reads:

*Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction (Ibid).*

One would have thought that a law that meaningfully abolishes a murderous act like enslavement is out rightly unequivocal and unconditional, but this is not the case with this Amendment which remains in use today in the US Constitution. The caveat in this wording (*except as a punishment for a crime*) definitely did not go unnoticed as far as the authors of the amendment were concerned. This is the situation (the continuation of enslavement) African Americans in places such as the United States have lived with even in modern times. In sum, as argued by Kambon (2015):

*as long as AAs are successfully criminalized (either with or without any actual so-called “criminal activity”) they can and will be lawfully enslaved. The venue of enslavement therefore is merely relocated from open-air plantations to convict hire corporations to state-owned chain gangs as well as privatized prisons.*

This Amendment has become a trap clause for modern day enslavement of AAs in the States in what has been described as the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC) (Alexander 2012). In this Prison Industrial Complex, AAs are the victims of vicious “criminalization” by the justice systems for the purposes of convict leasing through mass incarceration (Ibid). Once a Black person in the US has a criminal record today, it sanctions the very forms of discrimination (discrimination in public benefits, employment, education, housing, and jury service and sometimes these labelled criminals are disenfranchised) purportedly eradicated (Ibid). *Huffington Post* reports that if current incarceration trends continue, one in three black males born today in the US can expect to go to prison at some point in their life as compared with one in every six Latino males, and one in every 17 white males (*Huffington Post* 2013).

The renowned African American psychologist and expert in the study of White Supremacy and racism provides insight into the reasons for the massive incarcerations of Black males in America in her paper, “The Cress Theory of Color Confrontation and White Supremacy” (Welsing 1991). A new documentary directed by Ava DuVernay explores how the United States has become the country with the world's largest prison population and why a hugely disproportionate number of those prisoners are Black (CNN 2017). The Netflix produced documentary which is titled *13<sup>th</sup>* took its title from the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment embedded in the American Constitution that is still in use. It traces the very subtle relations between enslavement and mass incarceration as well as Black criminalization in America (Powers 2016). The United States has 5% of the world's total population, yet it has 25% of the world's prison population. In this equation 40% of the prisoners are Black people (Ibid). In the most poignant situation AAs have become the target of racial profiling and high-profile police killings. The Department of Justice in the City of Baltimore reported that Black residents of low-income neighborhoods are more likely to be randomly stopped and searched by police officers, even if white residents are statistically more likely to be caught carrying guns and drugs (Tedeneke 2017). Unarmed AA males in particular have been the victims of racially-motivated killings by the American police force, and the international media has not disappointed in bringing this out to a global audience. It was revealed in a study that



*half of the victims of police shootings in the US are white, but then, white people make up 62% of the American population. Black people, on the other hand, make up only 13% of the US population, yet they constitute 24% of all people killed by the police. Furthermore, 32% of these black victims were unarmed when they were killed. That is twice the number of unarmed white people to die at the hands of the police. African Americans, therefore, are two and half times more likely than white Americans to be shot and killed by police officers (Tedeneke 2017).*

In 2012, Trayvon Martin, an AA teenager, was shot by a white neighborhood watch volunteer, George Zimmerman, in Florida (Garza 2014). The following year when a court ruling acquitted Zimmerman of murder, the outcome led to the creation of a movement that reverberated throughout the United States as an awareness and bulwark against profiling and killings of unarmed Black men and police brutality. This movement became known as the Black Lives Matter Movement (BLM). It was co-founded by the three AA women, Alicia Garza, Opal Tometi, and Patrisse Cullors (Garza 2014). BLM began with the aim of emphasizing the disproportionate, racially-motivated killings of unarmed Black males in Black communities (ibid). It gained international recognition, however, after the death of Michael Brown in Missouri a year later. It has inspired a number of protests on the streets of America in defiance of inappropriate police force. Such protests were in demand of justice for the death of unarmed Black men in the hands of the police.

On August 9<sup>th</sup> 2014, unarmed Michael Brown, who was 18 years old, was shot and killed by the Ferguson police officer Darren Wilson (ABC News 2016). A month before, in the same year, after he was put in an illegal chokehold for 15 seconds by a white police officer (allegedly for selling loose cigarettes), Eric Garner, who was 43 years old, was choked to death (Ibid). Garner cried "I can't breathe" 11 times, yet he was held down by several officers in the glaring view of the public (ABC News 2016). Later that year, on November 22, Tamir Rice, who was only 12 years old, was shot and killed by Cleveland police after officers mistook his toy gun for a real weapon. On April 4, 2015, Walter Scott, 50, was shot by a police officer while running away from a traffic stop for a broken taillight (Ibid). The list remains non-exhaustive. Surprisingly, most of these police officers were acquitted of any criminal charges. AAs are now living in perpetual fear as they have become targets and second-class citizens in their own country. America is gradually becoming unsafe for Black people, and just as in the 1920s, the only thing it takes for one to be a victim is for one to have a concentrated dose of melanin. In a BBC report, a white police officer comforted a white lady whom he stopped not to be worried because they (police officers) only kill Black people (BBC 2016).

The Black Lives Matter Movement is the modern-day CRM that speaks for Black people and every aspect of their lives in the US. It protects the intersectionality of AAs and has a unique way of appealing to sympathizers, which is through social media. Most importantly, the message of the Movement resonates with other communities of color who also identify with similar human rights struggles. Black Lives Matter is, therefore, not only necessarily about civil rights (Haweya NBC 2016). It is now about recognizing the humanity of all Black people as a dignified people, everywhere (Ibid). In an interview with Professor Campbell, he remarked that:

*The BLM is the leading edge of pan-Africanism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and the leading edge of answering the question on the meaning of life.<sup>3</sup>*

Ever since its humble beginning in the United States in 2013, BLM has acquired global audience and sympathizers alike with similar protests organized in countries beyond the US. Brazil, Australia, the United Kingdom, Canada, South Africa and France are countries that have overtly shown solidarity with the movement through protests (Haweya NBC 2016).

### **Internationalizing the Black Struggle: Malcolm X and the OAU**

Black Nationalism in the United States in the 1960s saw a new group of radical nationalist leaders who assumed diametrically opposite directions and views to that of Martin Luther King, Jr. Even though many activists campaigned for the recognition of the Black person in the society as a human being, as well as clamored for a decent life for the African-American like any other race, their methods of achieving this was different (Dyson 1996). The new crop of leaders in the Black struggle in the 1960s were militant in their demands and also advocated versions of Black Power, racial self-determination, Black pride, cultural autonomy, cooperative socialism, and Black capitalism (Dyson 1996). They were the Nation of Islam's most influential and eloquent minister Malcolm X (El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz), Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael) as leader of the Black Power Movement and much later the Black Panther Movement with leaders like Fred Hampton, Huey P. Newton and Eldridge Cleaver.

Most importantly, this latter crop of Civil Rights leaders sought to internationalize the Black struggle and mainly drew inspiration and support from Africa's liberation struggles of the time and significantly from the OAU. Malcolm X however, stood out as the one leader of all the leaders of Civil Rights Movements in the 1960s who made significant efforts to reach out to African leaders and identify more with Africa's liberation struggles also in the 1960s (Malcolm 2015). In many ways, the South African struggle against racial apartheid, for instance, mirrored America's Blacks' painful history of struggle against Jim Crow Segregation, denial of constitutional rights and profiling and murder by law enforcement.

Malcolm was of the opinion that as long as the name civil rights was designated as the nomenclature for Black struggle in the United States, then it remained a domestic problem of the United State government, and as such, closed to international deliberations (Ibid). In this line of thought, his ambition was to internationalize the struggle and popularize it as a human rights violation rather than a civil rights issue and bring it to the door steps of the United Nation (Malcolm X's interview 1966). This plan was to give unprecedented exposure to anti-Black racism by the American system and at the same time force the American government in the face of international criticism and charges of violations of human rights to make great concessions to the demands of the Black struggles (Ibid).

This grand scheme could not have been achieved or would have been difficult to achieve if America's Blacks championed this cause alone to the UN. This is because they had very inconspicuous voices as long as the struggle remained a domestic one (civil rights) and especially at that racist peak against Americas Blacks of the time. Malcolm's way out was to reach out to independent African states that were facilitating the continent's liberation process in the sixties (Ibid).

He saw the speedy gaining of independence of African countries as an opportunity to identify with the continental struggle as a people of one race (Black people) and with one ancestry (Africa). His tactic was one of coordinating the struggles of Black people the world over by significantly identifying with African states. As Malcolm X, once said:

*They tell us we are all citizens, that we were born in this country. Well, a cat can have kittens in an oven, but that doesn't make them biscuits.<sup>4</sup>*

This means that the African diaspora can never in practice naturally (genotypically and phenotypically) delink itself from their African ancestry, and both sides of the globe have recognized the need to harness efforts together through cooperation for their ultimate interest. The independence of Africa in the 1960s and its appearance on to the global scene in international politics created a positive image of a rising continent that instilled racial pride among all Black people of the world (Ibid). In fact, Malcolm perceived African leaders as shepherds of African People everywhere (both on the continent and abroad) (Ibid).

Perhaps, Malcolm's ultimate aim would have been for African states to have used their independent status as legitimate subjects of international law in the General Assembly to highlight the struggles of Black people in the US as a human rights violation. Addressing the gathering of leaders of independent African countries Malcolm made a passionate appeal:

*In the interests of world peace and security, we beseech the heads of the independent African states to recommend an immediate investigation into our problem by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights (Serumaga 2016).*

In this line of thought and body of desire, Malcolm established the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) on June 28<sup>th</sup> 1964 (Mbughuni 2014). It was modelled after the OAU established in 1963. It was envisaged that, the OAAU would be the medium and offer some glimpse of hope by which Black people in America would be inseparably linked with Africa's liberation struggle. In order to give practical meaning to his ambition, he made trips to the continent of Africa, the last of which though with tremendous difficulties culminated into getting the OAU to pass a "mild, nonbinding resolution" urging the US to devote resources to fight racism during the 2<sup>nd</sup> OAU Summit in Cairo (Ibid). Although this was the first of its kind, it was to be the only and last of its kind as far a continental show of solidarity to America's Black people is concerned. This was not an easily-made decision for it took the significant efforts of Julius Nyerere and the Tanzania delegation to pass this July 21<sup>st</sup> 1964 OAU Resolution (Ibid).

It was as far as the OAU could go in solidarity with their African brothers and sisters in the United States, even though some African leaders were once victims of racial abuse in the States. For instance, on October 7, 1957, Komla Agbedi Gbedemah, finance minister of the newly independent West African nation of Ghana, and a small entourage made a stop at the Howard Johnson's restaurant in Dover (Black History Month 2014). Gbedemah and an aide ordered two orange juices, but they were shocked when the waitress replied "colored people" were not allowed to eat in the restaurant (Ibid). He consequently paid 60 cents for the orange juice, left it there, and went away (Ibid). Malcolm also made reference to ongoing events at the time in the 1960s where three Kenyan students and two Ugandan diplomats had been badly beaten by New York police because they were mistaken as US "Negroes" (Serumaga 2016).

These experiences showed how segregation laws in the United States drew no boundaries or made no distinction between continental Africans and African Americans in the US, for one was a victim of racism by just being Black, plain and simple. Such experiences provided a glimpse of the struggles that Blacks have been putting up with for centuries. One would therefore have expected that even if African leaders could not take up the initiative to showing solidarity with Black struggle in the US, they would have at least unequivocally rallied behind Malcolm X when he presented such an opportunity of internationalizing the Black struggle. This was a golden opportunity for the OAU to identify with the global Black struggle. However, the internationalization of the Black struggle by identifying with Africa's liberation struggle was held alive only as long as Malcolm was alive, for his death saw the demise of this ambition, and the OAU did virtually nothing to continue that which Malcolm started.

The point is that the African diaspora in general and the AAD in particular was on the periphery of the calculus of the OAU, and so it took the initiative of Malcolm X to make that wake-up call to African leaders of the time to the struggles of their ancestral brothers and sisters in the States. Even when the call was made, member states of the OAU were hesitant to throw in their support, albeit in the end they did in a halfhearted way (a way that never obliged or condemned the United States government to alter structural racism which affected African Americans of the time). If the support for this struggle was limited in the first place, then it comes as no surprise that the OAU did not continue with Malcom's internationalization of the Black struggle in the UN as he intended. The attitude of the OAU in this situation is comparable to the bull dog which could lick, but could not bite, and therefore, a toothless bull dog as far as the struggle of Blacks in the US was concerned. Several African leaders had reservations and were very circumspect in assisting Civil Rights struggle in the US.

The ordeal for the OAU was that if it acquiesced to the support of the African American civil rights issues of the time, it would meddle in the internal politics of the United States government and that would be from all directions politically and economically dangerous. The Cold War, which was also at its peak, meant that if the OAU engaged the US on any such scale of criticisms, they could be perceived as courting the Soviet Bloc and this could invite the displeasure of US, which could consider member states of the OAU as hostile states and such perception could generate possible repercussions.

This is the sense in which it was politically not tactical to engage the plight of the AAD of the African diaspora, as doing so would have been an indirect criticism of the country of residence of African Americans, which is the (United States), not to mention the fact, that the OAU had enough problems on its hands at home on the African continent. It must be mentioned that regardless of the circumstance of the day, it was also the heyday of Pan-Africanism and the assertion of the African personality, and so it behooved the OAU to significantly support Black struggles in the US. In another dimension, these African Americans were dearly considered as an extension of the African geographical space, not to mention the immeasurable roles they played in Africa's struggle for independence as already discussed.

It was, therefore, never out of place for African leaders to use their positions (medium of statehood and as subjects of international law) to help the Black struggles in the US, which is exactly what Malcolm X sought to plead from the African leaders but was not consistently forthcoming on the part of African leaders.

The point is that if the European Union (EU) as a regional bloc can criticize and instruct African governments on the continent's domestic issues ("EU to Burundi: Respect Human Rights to Get Aid"), then at least the OAU could have shown more international solidarity beyond the non-obliging resolution it passed that was not even in the UN, but in the OAU.

Again, it is unjustifiable to continue to think of the AAD only in terms of economic relevance (remittances and cultural heritage sites visits through tourism). It paints a perceived picture of exploitation which the author believes was not the intent of the OAU and is not that of the AU in dealing with the AAD as well.

On the whole, therefore, the OAU did not have any significant institutional structure and critically robust engaging policy for the African diaspora. At best, what happened was that individual countries allowed the development of some connections and arrangements between their respective countries and the African diaspora but not from the institutional arrangements of the OAU.

## **The AU and Black Lives Matter**

The AU is in the ideal sense of the word the most direct and legitimate ideological descendant of Pan-Africanism on the African continent. It has full inheritance rights to the unimaginable momentum that Pan-Africanism wields if all people of African descent the world over unite for a common cause. Great powers, however, also come with great responsibilities, and that means the AU has surmountable but mammoth tasks on its shoulders. It should be pointed out that, albeit the AU is a Pan-African project on the African continent, it does not mean it is concerned with African people on the African continent only. Pan-Africanism, which is the most substantive ethos that underpins the AU, is concerned with the global struggle of Black people, not only with Black people on the African continent.

The point is that as a movement Pan-Africanism is largely an African diasporic gift to Africa. Had it, however, remained an exclusive reserve for one group of people of African descent, it could not have facilitated, inspired and actually crystalized the wheels of freedom and unity on the African continent in the 1960s. This means Pan-Africanism is a liberatory tool for all people of African descent regardless of geographic location. In other words then, Pan-Africanism is an international concept of Black solidarity. No wonder Walter Rodney argues that by definition Pan-Africanism is internationalist because it represents the lives and dignity of African people who are in different parts of the world (Rodney 1990). He says this better in his own words:

*To talk about Pan-Africanism is to talk about international solidarity within the Black world. And in which ever world we live in, we have a series of responsibilities. One of the most important is to define our own situation. A second is to present that definition to the other parts of the progressive world and [importantly] to help the others of the Black World reflect on their own specific experience (Rodney 1990).*

This Pan-African ideology is what serves as the structural philosophy of the AU, and the latter must live up to this bestowed challenge. Besides, the AU has demonstrated, for all intent and purpose, that it is relatively more concerned with the global African family than the OAU.

The paper has established that the AAD has contributed significantly to the political and economic development of the African continent and Ghana in particular. Regardless of this, the OAU (the predecessor of the AU) did relatively little to engage the African diaspora in the continent's affairs and offered very limited support for the CRM or the Black struggle in the United States. Except for a mild, non-binding OAU Resolution which did not condemn the US government for anti-Black racism in the US, the OAU showed no significant enduring leadership in the Black struggle in the US in the 1960s and 1970s.

The OAU failed to push on this agenda that consequently died with Malcolm. Seeking to correct the mistakes of their predecessor, the AU has sought to engage more with the African diaspora (which the AAD is part) (Kamei 2011). As a transformational product that seeks to correct the anomalies of its predecessor, the AU's Diasporic clause is therefore, a step in the right direction. What then is examined in the rest of this chapter is the kind of engagement the AU has with the AAD.

It is surprising to know that in a tireless effort to find the position of the AU on this matter, not even a single statement nor any show of solidarity whatsoever to the BLM exist to the credit of the AU. While the AU has stood by as on-lookers, the government of Malaysia called on the US government to double up its efforts to ending racial discrimination and high percentages of racial profiling and killings by the police (Aljazeera 2015). This study is not the only one that has observed this and criticized the AU for its non-caring position on issues affecting the AAD. Writing in 2008, Abbas Hakim remarked that in the wake of hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the USA in 2005 the African American population in these areas were most affected. They were the targets of systematic violations of human and peoples' rights committed by the US government, including lack of protection, forced displacement, arbitrary arrest and extrajudicial killing (Abbas 2008). In this unfortunate development, Abbas (2008) makes us aware that:

*Only the governments of the republics of Cuba and Venezuela urged the US government to end all abusive practices and condemned the subsequent ethnic cleansing of New Orleans. In this development not a single AU representative or African state showed any sign of solidarity in the face of this crisis.*

As has been established, however, if Pan-Africanism is international by nature and the AU is a direct ideological descendant of Pan-Africanism, then in the ideal sense, the African Union must necessarily care about the AAD which is an instrumental part of its Sixth Region.

History and nature has once again presented the AU with an opportune moment akin to that presented to the OAU by the Civil Rights leader Malcolm X in the 1960s. If the AU is concerned about the African diaspora to this extent so that, unlike its predecessor, it has triggered the Diasporic Clause (the Sixth Region), then it must walk its bold talk. It must be seen as living the Pan-African ideals and assuming the Pan-African leadership. Solidarity must definitely be structural for reciprocity to become an action rather than rhetoric.

Already, some members of the AAD blame continental Africans for selling them into enslavement and so for the AU to sit on the fence on the issue of BLM only confirms and aggravates such feelings and the perceptions of some AAs that African leaders are insensitive to the Black struggle in the United States (Gates 2010).

Besides, the AU is missing the point by staying unconcerned about BLM in the US. The point is that police brutality in the US makes no distinction between continental Africans and African Americans. No police officer ever paused or thought twice to ask if a Black unarmed man was from Africa or not before shooting or beating them to death. The *Guardian* Newspaper reported that Black males within the ages of 15-34 were nine times more likely than other Americans to be killed by law enforcement officers (The *Guardian* 2016). In this report no distinction was made between Black people from Africa and those from America. Black males are Black males, period, and it does not matter whether one comes from continental Africa or is an African American. More to the point, continental Africans in the US have been victims of America's police brutality.

It is recalled that in 1999, a 23-year old Guinean immigrant, Amadou Diallo, was shot 41 times by police officers after he failed to stop at their command and pointed a dark object that was later found out to be a wallet at them (Echezonam 2017). In a similar circumstance, a Ugandan immigrant, Alfred Olango, was shot dead in a San Diego suburb after pointing a vape smoking device at the police in 2016 (Ibid). A year before that, a 21-year old Nigerian student by the name Matthew Ajibade died in restraints inside an isolation cell while in police custody (Ibid). His death was caused by a list of bodily mutilations including abrasions, lacerations, skin injuries above the head and some other areas of the body enumerated in his autopsy report. All these happened while he was in police custody (Ibid). Kwame Adu Brempong, a Ghanaian PhD student, was shot in the face by a University of Florida police officer. After receiving a call from a neighbor, concerned that Adu-Brempong was screaming due to stress over his studies and his immigration status, campus police stormed his apartment, tased him three times and then shot him in the face with an assault rifle ("University of Florida students to protest shooting of unarmed Ghanaian [sic] student").

The AU has demonstrated the capacity to lend international solidarity to some European governments in the wake of terrorists' attacks, yet it has remained silent in the face of racism against African-Americans and Africans which have manifested in the forms of racially-motivated police brutality in the United States (AU's Press release, May 2017).



This is against the background that African migrants are swelling up America's immigrant population. According to a US Census there were:

*2.1 million African immigrants living in the United States in 2015, up from 881,000 in 2000 and a substantial increase from 1970 when the U.S. was home to only 80,000 foreign-born Africans. They accounted for 4.8% of the U.S. immigrant population in 2015, up from 0.8% in 1970 (Gambino et al 2014).*

There is also a growing African-foreign born in the US, and the largest group in the US by region of Africa is West Africa (Gordon 2011). It only stands to reason, therefore, that as an institution, the AU necessarily must stay woke and show some significant solidarity with the BLM because the lives of continental Africans in the US are also at stake. So far, an impression is created of an AU that is unconcerned about the struggles of AAs and is only interested in harvesting the economic gains of AAs for continental development. In a recent Ghana- African Diaspora Summit, the country's government sought to harness the potential economic gains of its diaspora ("Ghana Diaspora Homecoming Summit 2017 – Day 2 Round Up"). Ghana is among other African nations who recognize the economic relevance of the African diaspora and are eager to tap from its potentials. There is every reason for all practical intent and purpose for the AU to be concerned and show solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement in the United States and the Global African struggle in general.

## **Conclusion**

It has been established that albeit there have been efforts to mainstream the African diaspora into the affairs of the AU, the latter has done very little in terms of solidarity with the Black Lives Matter Movement that mainly represents the Black struggle in the US. A critical examination of the intent behind the AU's Diasporic Clause (Sixth Region) reveals ways in which the Union would properly, in a more structured manner, harness the resources of the African diaspora to the development of the African continent while giving the latter relatively little in return. Unfortunately, some sons and daughters of Africa in the US agree with this. In an interview, Pan-Africanist Jullylaine Walker, averred that the AU's Sixth region was an opportunistic motion to capitalize on the remittances that the contemporary African diaspora provides to the respective countries of origin.<sup>5</sup> In her opinion, the AU needed to find a way to formally incorporate the African diaspora into the Union's affairs in order to properly make use of the resources of the African Diaspora less the former is charged with "taxations without representation".

Regardless of the enormous economic and political relevance of the AAD to the African continent, the AU remains unconcerned about the Black struggle in the United States and only considers the AAD relevant mostly in their economic value. The AU has been very parsimonious with solidarity to the AAD. It has not communicated any psychological or physical impression that it is in solidarity with the Black struggle in the US. The AU and its member states have rather demonstrated the capacity to lending in abundance the very scarce commodity (support and solidarity) it denies the BLM to European governments in the wake of the terrorist attacks in 2015 and 2017. This situation of the AU is comparable to the adage where the AU is bent on removing the speck of sawdust in someone's eyes while they fail to remove the log in their own eyes.

The AU must correct the mistakes of the past and its predecessor's and show solidarity to the Black struggle in the US by taking the initiative to criticize the United States government for the human rights violations of its Black citizens and population. This is worth it, especially so when the UN in 2015 passed some recommendations advising the US government on dealing with racial discrimination, racial profiling and the use of excessive force by police officers, as well as addressing racial disparities in the use of the death penalty (*Aljazeera* 2015). A display of solidarity on the part of the AU would be nothing more exceptional than living up to an expected responsibility. It should, whether in the diplomatic circles or overtly, show moral and political support for the Black Lives Matter Movement in the US. This is because the movement speaks against anti-Black racism and police brutality which makes no distinction between AAs and African immigrants in the US. The AU should act in this manner to support Black struggles everywhere in the world. African leaders must, of course, put their own house in order to have the moral authority to criticize the American government for the unjustified police brutality and modern day anti-Black racism.

This is also a wakeup call for all continental Africans who remain unconcerned about the Black Lives Matter Network because they conceive it as a distant movement with no direct bearing to Africa. Well, it is high time such thought was disarmed because once Black lives are not respected anywhere all Black lives are not dignified everywhere, as the global African family is one people in different locations. For as Malcolm X remarked over five decades ago,

*Our problem is your problem. No matter how much independence Africans get here on the mother continent, unless you wear your national dress when you visit America, you may be mistaken for one of us and suffer the same psychological and physical suffering that is an everyday occurrence in our lives. Your problems will never be solved until and unless ours is solved. You will never be respected until and unless we are respected. You will never be recognized until and unless we are also recognized and treated as human beings (Mwakikagile 2007).*

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Although it must be emphasized that some member states had before this period found the need to engage the African diaspora even before inception of the AU (Kamei 2011).

<sup>2</sup> Interview with Mrs. Theresa Kwakye who is the President of the African American Association of Ghana (AAAG). She has been the occupant of this position since 1999 and have lived in Ghana for thirty six years. This interview was held on July 17, 2017. Information on the presence of African Americans in Ghana and their contributions to the development of that country was acquired during this interview.

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<sup>3</sup> Interview with Professor Horace Campbell on 11<sup>th</sup> July 18, 2017 at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Legon. Professor Horrace Campbell is the Occupant of the Endowed Kwame Nkrumah Chair at the Institute of African Studies in the University of Ghana at the time of interview. He is a professor of political science and international relations at Syracuse University.

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.azquotes.com/quote/947286>

<sup>5</sup> Jullylaine Walker is an African American and a Pan-Africanist. This interview was conducted on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2017. This was during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Kwame Nkrumah Pan-African intellectual and Cultural Festival; in which both the author and the interviewee were participants.