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Myths, Stereotypes and Truths: A Critical Look at the Relationship Between Africans and African-Americans.

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MYTHS. STEREOTYPES AND TRUTHS: A CRITICAL LOOK AT THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICANS AND AFRICAN-AMERICANS

by
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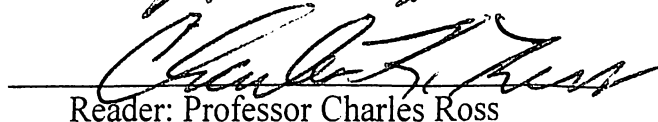
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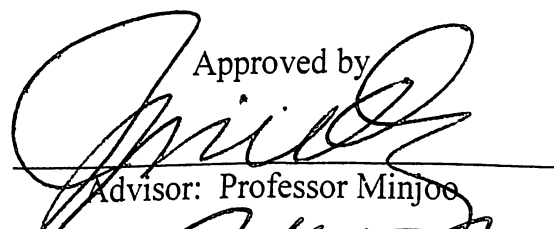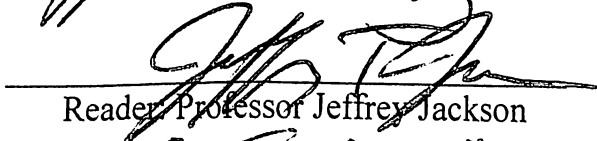
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ABSTRACT
**JENNIFER OLUFEMI SALU: Myths, Stereotypes and Truths: A Critical Look at
the Relationship Between Africans and Africans-Americans.
(Under the Direction of Minjoo Oh)**

This study focuses on the relationship between Africans and African-Americans and

examines the way many members of each group perceive the other. In examining the

relationship between each group, the study focuses on looking at some of the myths and

stereotypes many Africans, especially African students and immigrants in the United

States, have of African-Americans and vice-versa and the impact these myths and

stereotypes have on the way members of both groups view each other. This study also

focuses on understanding some of the differences and similarities between each group

and some of the unique challenges members of each group face in trying to correct

mistaken assumptions about each group.

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However deep and abiding my love of the African continent and its people, I am an

American, albeit an African American, destined to call this place, and not that

unimaginably varied massive continent, my home. - Henry Louis Gates, Jr. "Wonders of

the African World.

* * *

I'm not black, I'm African. If you tell African-Americans they are Africans, they don't

like it. – Anonymous.

* * *

One three centuries removed

From the scenes his fathers loved,

Spicy grove, cinnamon tree,

What is Africa to me? —Countee Cullen, "Heritage"

INTRODUCTION

Knock! Knock! Knock!

The persistent pounding forced me out of my reverie and had me wondering what news the person at the other side of the door had that was so urgent. A quick glance at the clock showed me it was just a few minutes past nine. The insistent pounding continued, and if anything, became even more urgent. A quick glance showed that my twin sister, Sharon, had beaten me to the door. Looking over my sister's shoulder the first thing that struck me as odd was that the visitor, who turned out to be one of the Afro-American girls I sometimes saw on my dormitory floor, but never spoke to, had a barely controlled look of joy on her face. In fact, she was fairly trembling from the strain of having to keep the news to herself. Before I could open my mouth to call out a hello, her words stopped me dead in my tracks.

"Excuse me, your pot is on fire."

It's amazing what seven simple words can do. I closed my eyes and shook my head, certain that I had not heard correctly, but the alarm on my sister's face and the neck-breaking speed with which she rushed out of our room proved otherwise. A million and one questions raced through my mind. My ears rang and my heart pounded. What did the girl mean by saying my pot was on fire? How could a pot catch fire? What could have happened to bring this about this unfortunate event? Knowing that I would never

know the answers to these questions if I remained in my room, I braced myself for the worst and slowly placed my leaden feet in front of me one step at a time. The acrid smell of burnt food in the hallway of the second floor of Miller Hall hit my nose, but it was the sight that greeted me that caused me to gasp in surprise. Yes, I had expected to see a crowd of people gathered in the hallway to see some excitement of a sober kind, but this was quite bizarre.

Two things struck me at once. The first was the sound, like the buzzing of bees, of 30 or more girls crammed in the hallway talking and laughing at once. They looked like they were having a ball. The second was that they were all black. Well, almost all. The only white girl in the group, Denise (not her real name), was now deeply engrossed in conversing with one of the girls. Several other girls (including one who had come to our room to find out about Nigeria) were on their cell phones telling as many people as possible that the African girls in room 207 had finally done it. They had burnt their dinner. Others simply formed groups to discuss what had just happened and to pass comments. Still others started spraying air freshener in the air. When they saw me making my way resolutely to the kitchen they respectfully moved out of my way, but not before I saw their looks of joy. A vision of planting my fists in every smug face fueled the anger within me. That was quickly quelled when I thought of being charged with 30 or more counts of assault.

How would I explain this moment of madness to my father, peacefully sleeping in his bed in Walls, Mississippi, or worse yet to the immigration officers who might gladly deport me because of the zero tolerance for misbehaving foreigners since September 11? It was bad enough that many Americans believed that Africans ran around naked and

lived on trees. but I knew that planting my fist in any girl's face would only reinforce the stereotype that African women were savages. Glancing into the kitchen, I saw my sister throw our burnt dinner of noodles and sausage into the trash can. The pot followed. She looked like she was about to explode with rage.

"What is wrong with these stupid girls? We don't do this when they burn their cookies or food. so why are they behaving like this," she asked angrily in Yoruba, our native language. I couldn't come up with a suitable answer, but instead bemoaned our fate and asked why we couldn't be like some of the African students at the University of Mississippi who rented their own apartments to avoid bad experiences like this.

If I had known that more than two weeks later I would meet two Nigerian girls from nearby Rust College at the International Night at the Gertrude Ford Center whose bad experience rivaled ours, I would definitely have felt better, but at that moment, anger had a tight hold on me and cold rage prevented me from thinking clearly. The two Rust girls, like us, were living in one of the halls on campus, and had gone to the kitchen to warm a traditional Ibo (another Nigerian ethnic group) soup when they were surrounded by 20 or more African-American girls who demanded to know what they were cooking. How does one describe a local meal, when only the natives know the ingredients used to prepare the meals? The best explanation the two Nigerian girls could come up with was that they were warming their melon soup, but that sent the African-American girls, into fits of laughter. The Nigerian girls left the kitchen with the sounds of mocking laughter following them.

Like the Nigerian girls from Rust College, my sister and I squared our shoulders and made our way out of the kitchen at Ole Miss, conscious of the pairs of eyes burning

holes at our backs. Our dinner was ruined and we didn't feel like eating anything again. We saw the mocking glances thrown in our direction, but we were too bitter to care. Instead, I thought of ways to get even with the African-American girls on my floor.

My experience that night opened up the floodgates to a myriad of questions that plagued me night and day. "Why was it," I wondered aloud, "that after more than two centuries of the infamous slave trade, Africans and African-Americans, the two groups of people most affected by this inhumane practice, could still not get along with one another?" "Where did the antagonistic feelings I felt coming from the African-Americans come from?" "Why was it, that while some African-Americans eagerly embraced Africans or anything African, and vice a versa, others did not?" Was the treatment I had gotten at the hands of the girls on my floor an individual thing or was it a collective thing, common to a lot of African-Americans, and if it was collective, what factors influenced this behavior in some African-Americans, while others did not display it?" And lastly, "Would the girls on my floor have reacted the same way if I had been African-American?"

For this research, I will start out by articulating who Africans are, where they live, what issues some of them face both at home and abroad. For the purpose of this research, I'll be focusing on the Africans who are presently in the United States, specifically, the African students at the University of Mississippi. Next, I'll give a portrait of who African-Americans are, and some of the issues many of them have had to struggle with, including racism and poverty. I also discuss how these factors might have an effect on the way they perceive Africans. Like the Africans, many of those interviewed in this thesis are African-American students of the University of Mississippi. After laying the

foundation. I'll begin to examine some of the differences and then some of the similarities between the two groups. Specifically, what makes each group distinct from or similar to the other? Issues like the struggle for independence in African countries, and the struggle for civil rights here in the United States will be mentioned because of the similarities between the two issues. After this, I hope to get into an in-depth look at the relationship between the two groups and what factors shape the way Africans and African-Americans view one another.

CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

The debate about the true nature of the African continent and its people has plagued many African-American scholars for the past three centuries. Starting from the 18th century when large groups of African-American freemen began to emigrate from the United States to the colonies of Sierra-Leone and Liberia until now, the strained relationship between many Africans and many African-Americans has often been put on the back burner. The recent increase in the number of African immigrants in search of better lives in the United States has made this issue a subject of interest to researchers. In spite of the present crisis in Darfur and the scramble for the oil rich wetlands of the Niger-Delta, the African continent is still, in many ways, an enigma to many African-Americans.

In other words, despite the various technological advances being made all over the world, the African continent still remains, to a lot of African-Americans, a place of secrets and history forged in sorrow, tears and blood. Like the Harlem Renaissance Poet, Countee Colleen, many African-Americans have consistently asked, "What is Africa to me?" The answer to that question has sparked heated debates among both Africans and African-Americans, and has roughly divided many African-Americans into two groups: the Pessimists and the Idealists (Gates 1999).

The Pessimists are African-Americans that have come to associate the word 'black' and 'African' to mean something or someone backward, poverty-stricken-- basically blight in the history of the world. Thanks to mainstream media images, of a

poverty-stricken continent. ravaged by the AIDS epidemic, ruled by corrupt leaders and home to various genocides. many African-Americans who share this pessimistic view of Africa try to distance and disassociate themselves from anything African. Many simply have no knowledge of what it means to be African, and like Fredrick Douglass consistently ask "why anyone should leave this land of progress and enlightenment [America, Europe] and seek a home amid the death-dealing malaria of a barbarous continent" (Gates1999: 7).

The Idealists at the other end of the spectrum are the African-Americans who passionately embrace anything African. Every aspect of their lives is spent trying to be more African than even the Africans themselves. They romanticize everything African from Shaka the Zulu to the pyramids of Egypt. While this is good, the downside to this is that these Pan-African nationalists try to re-write African history through rose-colored glasses. Their watchword is "Africa for the Africans" and they ostracize anyone they view as posing a threat to African unity.

By African, of course, they mean anyone living on the African continent or anyone descended from those who have lived on the African continent. They ascribe anything good and glorious to Africa, and deny the presence of anything negative about the African continent. Anyone's attempt to show that not everything African is good is seen as the white man's way of demeaning the African and is strongly rebuffed.

In between these two extremes are other African-Americans like Henry Lewis Gates Jr., who have tried to answer the question in their own way, using the Afrocentric worldview. Afrocentricity is a theory that "situates people of African descents as subjects not objects; promotes the importance of knowing one's history and culture, and

delineates the elements of the African worldview" (Traore 2002:1). Rosemary Lukens Traore. (2002:1) in her dissertation titled. "Implementing afrocentricity: A case study of African and African-American students in an urban high school in America," uses the concept of Afrocentricity to bridge the gap between inner-city African and African American students in Philadelphia. According to Traore, this theory has been used by many Africans and African-Americans to bridge the gap caused by slavery.

In his compelling travelogue about his journey to Africa, aptly titled *Wonders of the African World*. Henry Louis Gates. Jr. takes his readers on a journey not only of the eyes and ears. but also of the mind. Gates' book talks about the conflicting emotions he feels about finally visiting a continent that should have, by right, been his, if the African ancestors had not sold their own brothers into slavery. Gates' experience is further compounded by the fact that his two daughters, who he takes on some of his journeys, are not really interested in tracing their African roots. This ambivalent attitude towards anything African is not new to Gates who writes:

> My father's feelings- shared, I feared, by my two daughters on that
> sweltering afternoon on the Zambian train-of complete and apparently
> unambivalent disconnection from Africa has a painfully long history
> among "African Americans"(Many of whom, if truth be told, have never
> grown comfortable with calling ourselves 'black,' let alone "African"
> (Gates 1999: 6-7).

Gates addresses many of the issues that have bugged many Africans and African-Americans. Specifically, in the above quotation, he tries to give an explanation for the strained relationship between many Africans and African-Americans. Gates also talks

about Ethiopia, which is like the Mecca of all black people, simply because of its rich, documented history. Here at last is proof that Africans (unlike Egyptians who are still steeped in controversy as to their real heritage) actually had a well-developed civilization before the advent of colonialism. In Gates' opinion, Ethiopia is unique because its army led by the legendary Menilek II, from the Solomonic dynasty of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, defeated the Italian army of 1896 on the battlefield of Adwa.

Regardless of what some Afro-Americans would like to believe, the African continent has had a tremendous impact on their lives in America. The wave of African struggle for independence in the 1960s actually helped fuel the Civil Rights Movement in America and vice versa. The term "Black power" became known all over the world by many blacks as a symbol of what they could achieve if they stuck together as one people.

Another important issue Gates addresses is racial segregation. Segregation on both continents, though perpetuated by Caucasian males, was implemented under different circumstances. On the African continent, under colonial rule by the British, French, and Portuguese and other colonial masters, native Africans were exposed to relatively fewer Caucasians than their African-American counterparts on American soil. In his book, Gates reiterates this point and simultaneously echoes the collective opinion of many African-Americans, who believed that Africans did not suffer as much as their African-American brothers. In other words, African-Americans felt that racial segregation was more pronounced and was in many ways harsher than the oppression many Africans faced under colonialism. This made some Afro-Americans angry considering the fact that they (Afro-Americans) felt that their African relatives were more "Negroid" and 'often darker" than them (Gates 1999:12).

It was interesting that Gates identified himself as "a descendant of West African slaves and of ex-slaves, the product of a truly Pan-African new world culture forged out of the crucible of slavery" (Gates 1999:25). In light of this assertion, the concept of identity is another important aspect of the relationship between Africans and African Americans that must be critically examined because both Africans and African-Americans identify themselves in different ways.

Cultural identity

Culture denotes how people relate to their material environment in order to define themselves as a social entity. It is necessary to make a distinction between material culture and nonmaterial culture. Black people in different locales may not share the same material culture, but a contextual definition of culture reveals the basis of black kinship. The key contextual elements of black cultural identity are:

> (1) the commonality of a historical experience that links African origins, trans-Atlantic slavery, and political denial; (2) the combination of economic barriers and exploitation based on race; and (3) similar environmental factors that replicate patterns of structural inferiority. More than simply a shared experience of oppression, however, the emphasis here is on cultural resiliency and the affective bond between Africans and blacks in the diaspora (Robinson 1987:9).

For many Africans and African-Americans, the sense of cultural identity has been a key element that defines them as a people. The concept of cultural nationalism has been the driving force behind many of the key struggles in black history. Both the 1960s civil

rights movement in the United States, and the struggle for independence in many African countries, especially in West Africa, were successful, in part because many intellectuals and activists on both continents used the concept of cultural nationalism to mobilize the masses to change. Not only that, but key influential black figures like the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. and the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah, were active participants in the struggle from oppression on both continents. In spite of these similarities between them, the relationship between some Africans and African-Americans is far from perfect.

One of the reasons why the relationship between some Africans and African-Americans is strained is because they identify themselves in different ways, culturally. An African-American, is first and foremost an American, albeit one who can trace his ancestry to Africa. An African-American, in many cases, will identify himself in terms of his race and nationality. For an African, the case is slightly different. An African will usually identify himself by his ethnic group.

The way the members of each group choose to identify themselves is a reflection of the differences between Africans and African-Americans. When an African asks, "Where do you come from?" he is in essence asking, "What ethnic group do you belong to?" By knowing an individual's ethnic group, an African can neatly place an individual in his or her own niche of society. For an African-American, the opposite is the case. The question of where an individual is from, to an African American, is a question of nationality. An African-American can situate an individual in a country of origin and sees this as akin to an ethnic group.

Ironically, to many young Africans in African countries, being 'cool' means wearing FUBU, 'bling-blings,' Nike, and listening to 50 cents or Ludacris, stereotypical symbols of African-American culture, as opposed to wearing Aso-Oke (a traditional Yoruba fabric) and damask, which are traditional symbols of African culture. Young Africans living in America, on the other hand, look for opportunities to wear their traditional clothes, and organize parties just to feel that sense of community. They wear their clothes to show their pride in being African, but more importantly to re-affirm their Africanness. It is as if they are saying that although they sometimes wear FUBU shirts or Nike shoes, at the core, they are Africans through and through. This sense of loyalty can be seen in the rise of the new African Internet radio stations that have popped up over the past four years. A look at any of these websites, www.abeokuta.org, www.radiopalmwine.com, www.africanmv.com, would show that most of those who visit them are Africans living abroad. Radio Abeokuta for example plays Brazilian music, some of which are old Yoruba songs that are still sung in some parts of Brazil and Benin Republic.

Nationalism and Ethnicity

Closely linked with the concept of cultural identity, are the twin concepts of nationalism and ethnicity. For as long as time, the concept of ethnicity has always defined the African people. From the brown-skinned, curly haired Ethiopian, to the dark-skinned Cameroonian, every culture begs to be represented. From the hilly mountains of Kenya to the flat savannas of Mali, every country in Africa reflects the difference of the millions of people from different ethnic groups collectively called Africans. Each

country has its own separate history, each ethnic group struggles for the claim to be the greatest of the great, but the truth is that each ethnic group has learned something from the other. While there were many prominent ethnic groups like the Asantes of Ghana and the Tuaregs of Timbuktu, there were also many lesser-known groups who had a tremendous impact on the more prominent groups.

In his article, "Nationalism and Ethnicity," Craig Calhoun claims that "Neither nationalism nor ethnicity is vanishing as part of an obsolete traditional order" (Calhoun1993: 211). While the discourse of nationalism is distinctively modern, nationalism has become the pre-eminent discursive form for modern claims to political autonomy and self-determination. Nationalism has been a part of the modern set of categorical identities invoked by elites and other participants in political and social struggles. These categorical identities also shape everyday life, offering both tools for grasping pre-existing homogeneity and difference, and for constructing specific versions of such identities.

For Calhoun, nationalism gets its true meaning from a certain group of people governing themselves (Calhoun 1993: 213). In this sense, nationalism is the tree that sprouts from the seeds of ethnicity. For a group of people to come together, they must have a pre-existing sense of identity in smaller groups, before they eventually merge to form a nation (Calhoun 1993:214). An important difference between nations and nation-states is that nations are groups of individuals with similar interests, who can trace a common descent and most likely speak the same native language, while individuals in a nation-state find that the things that bind them together are location, sovereignty, political power (Calhoun 1993: 217). The main difference, however, is that nations are focused

on political sovereignty, while nation states are focused on imposing cultural power on their members.

To further compliment this theory of ethnicity, Robin M. Williams in the article, "The Sociology of Ethnic Conflicts: Comparative International Perspectives," argues that your ethnic sense affects the way you might relate to people in other states (Williams1994: 49). Williams believes that multi-ethnicity is by far the most prevalent group in the nations of the world today, hence the rising numbers of deadly ethnic clashes (Williams 1994: 50). Ethnic struggles are more detrimental to under-developed countries rather than developed countries probably because most developed countries have existed for many more years and the ethnic groups within these countries have found ways to co-exist peacefully in the nations. Williams further asserts that ethnic conflicts are often as a result of which group has the most power (Williams 1994:51). Like Calhoun, Williams talks about the special role language plays in uniting ethnic groups and nations.

Most conflicts usually occur because minority groups feel they have been seriously wronged and as a result, these groups seek compensation, which the powerful groups are often unwilling to give. The intensity of these conflicts is often very high because of the resources at stake. Williams asserts that the scarcer the resources, the more intense the conflict (Williams 1994: 59). Ethnic groups usually fight for prestige and respect for the group as a whole (Williams 1994: 60). The threat of being extinct by displacement from what some ethnic groups see as their "rightful" residence ignites the flames that become the fires of ethnic conflicts. This probably explains why many ethnic groups are often at the brink of conflict unless their leaders diplomatically resolve them.

According to Williams, the higher the level of education of an individual, the more likely a person is to be an ethnic activist. That would explain why most of the forerunners of Yoruba, Igbo and even Hausa ethnic solidarities in Nigeria are often very educated men and women. According to Williams' article, religious/ideological/class struggles are usually the most intense of all conflicts because by their very nature they include a radical sense of identity that resists change (Williams 1994: 66).

In ethnic conflicts, ethnic solidarities supersede everything, even continents. When the Biafra war was being fought in the Eastern part of Nigeria from about 1966-1970, the Haitians in North America supported the Igbos in their bid to secede from Nigeria simply because most Haitians were actually Igbos who had been taken to North America via the slave trade. Similarly, although the Yorubas of Western Nigeria are different from those in Togo, Brazil, or Benin, they usually forget their differences and band together when something threatens the existence of the group.

Modernization

Given the large-scale international flows of our ideas, language, and cultural productions, terms like nation and ethnicity have proven to be notoriously hard concepts to define. The notion of nation is so deeply implicated in modern politics as to be essentially contested. Robert Park (1926 [1950]), an influential sociologist, studied immigrants, especially those of European descent. He found out that as these people settled down, they assimilated the cultures of the society they migrated to, and became in every way, citizens of these countries. In developing nations, the prevalent view was that as these countries tried to build up their economies, ethnic solidarities would be dropped

in favor of national identities (Park 1926[1950]). For example, in Nigeria, people would no longer identity themselves as Igbos, Yorubas or Hausas, but as Nigerians. This new society was based on merit not ethnicity. Modernization would give people a common language, a common culture, and a common sense of identity.

Identification of individuals with the nation was a functional need to be achieved in the course of modernization. For instance, Emile Durkheim's account of the transition from mechanical to organic solidarity (1983) points to the increasing importance of interest calculation rather than face-to-face social relations as a basis for the bonding of society. Weber (1922) also expressed that modernization would dissolve the membership to an ethnic group, which had been based on the feeling of fitting into a particular niche in the universe. This traditional orientation must vanish in the face of modernity with its incessant rationalization.

Weber's theory of rationalization as the end product of capitalism is in many ways similar to Marx's theory of class. Many researchers who belong to the Marxist school of thought in the social sciences argue for the dissolution of ethnicity and nationality as categorical element of identities. Karl Marx saw capitalism as the hammer that would break ties of race and ethnicity, and fashion these into the iron chains of class. For Marx, the historical evolution to capitalism involved more than simply a change in the economic circumstances of persons. Capitalism altered the grounds of interpersonal relations and associations. In place of the existing ties based on, for example, nationality or tribe, individuals would relate as members of social classes.

Following Karl Marx's arguments, many Marxist researchers believed that class interests would displace alternative bases of action. As capitalism spread, class would

become the bedrock of collective identity and political consciousness, displacing other ties – language, religion, national origin, and the like. Researchers believed that these bases of association would disappear or at least become far less significant. Distracted by the pervasive influence of capitalism, persons and groups would discover that their "true" interests were defined by their positions in productive processes or markets. These purportedly "true" interests would cause all individuals to reconceptualize their basic relations to reorganize themselves along the class lines imposed by this new means of production.

What this means for the relationship between Africans and African-Americans is that in the not too-distant future, members of the two groups will align together not on the basis of ethnic or cultural differences, but on the basis of class. The wealthy Africans and African-Americans will align themselves against the poor Africans and African-Americans. There will be a sharp class distinction, not an ethnic distinction. Language, culture, religion and in the case of some of the Africans in America, national origin would be displaced, in favor of who owns what in the black world.

The issue of identity is central to the subject of the relationship between Africans and African-Americans. We have seen that while some Africans identify themselves by their ethnic groups before their nationality, some African-Americans choose to identify themselves by their nation of origin. More than the issue of identity however, is the issue of how Africans and African Americans view one another. Some African-Americans have a hard time embracing contemporary Africa, while others tend to embrace the present and try to forget the past. Gates' story of Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president, and his African-American colleagues illustrates what happens when Africans

and African-Americans allow the idealistic views of the African continent to guide them in making decisions.

According to Gates, Nkrumah had appealed to many African-Americans and urged them to help him come and build a new nation, obviously to try to reduce the hostilities between the Africans and the African-Americans, and also to include African American intellectuals in his nation-building process. The first group of Afro-Americans assembled at Labadi Beach in Accra, Ghana where they threw away their passports and renounced their American citizenship. A month later, some residents of Labadi Beach saw some shadows on the beach and went out to investigate. There they found the Afro-Americans frantically searching for their passports in the low tide! Apparently, life in Ghana was not as they had imagined it to be and many of them were quickly reconsidering their hasty decisions. (Gates 1999:24)

As seen from the story above, some African-Americans want to embrace the romantic image of the African continent, but very few are willing to embrace contemporary Africa. The key to forging a strong relationship would be embracing both the past and the present. But to move into the future, we must understand the past.

In the next chapter, we'll examine the history of slavery, colonialism, the Jim Crow Laws, the Civil Rights movement, the wave of independence on the African continent, and many of the factors that have shaped the way both Africans and African-Americans view each other.

CHAPTER 2: HISTORY OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN AFRICANS AND AFRICAN AMERICANS

Seventy-one years ago, in 1935 when Benito Mussolini was preparing to invade Ethiopia, the mood among many African-Americans was one of distress and anger. Mussolini's campaign to conquer Ethiopia was seen by many African-Americans, as a slap to the face of the black race because Ethiopia was one of two countries, Liberia being the second, on the African continent to withstand the onslaught of colonialism. These two countries, particularly Ethiopia, were seen as the last two strongholds of black power (Meriwether 2002:1).

On the other hand, the general opinion among many African American intellectuals at that time was that the Africans would just have to weather their own storm since no help would be forthcoming from the African-Americans in the United States. The main reason given for this opinion was that since Africans had not done much to help the African-Americans in the United States in their struggle for equality and freedom, despite worldwide publicity of their plight, not much could be done to help the Africans (Meriwether 2002:1).

In the 1960's however, this opinion changed in part, due to Ghana's struggle for independence. Now the mood was one of expectation and hope. Many African-Americans believed that if their brothers and sisters on the African continent could fight for, and win their independence from the colonial masters, then the struggle for freedom and equality under the law could be won. (Meriwether 2002:1) In many ways, African-

American intellectuals saw the struggle for independence on the African continent as an extension of their own struggles in the United States. Perhaps that was why notable African-American leaders like Dr W.E. Du Bois, and Dr Martin Luther King, always tried to strengthen the link between Africans and African-Americans. They realized that there were lessons to be learned in the struggle for independence ion many African countries that could be implemented in the civil rights struggle in North America (Meriwether 2002:1).

In this chapter, I'll trace the history of Africans and African-Americans from the period of slavery in the 17th century, to the struggle for civil rights in the 1960. This chapter will include sections on the history of slavery in Africa and America, the Jim Crow era, the Pan-Africanist movement on both the African and the American continent, the impact of World War I and World War II on the rise of nationalism in Africa, and the civil rights movement, to give us a brief glimpse at the people we refer to as Africans and African Americans. At the end of this chapter, I hope to have given a clearer picture of the history of these two groups, and how that history affects their present day relationships.

Domestic Servitude in West Africa

Before the advent of the Europeans, slaves were usually prisoners of war from neighboring tribes that had been conquered or people that had been enslaved for civil or criminal offenses against that society, or even people whose relatives had pledged them as payment for certain debts owed (Fage 1961:78). Although there was usually two classes of people in these societies, the slaves and the freeborn, the domestic slaves were

seen by some members of society, as individuals with certain social rights, not as working "beasts of labor" as the slaves on the American plantations (Fage 1961:78). This meant that a slave could on some occasion, inherit property, or that a slave woman married to a "free-born" could give birth to free children. (Fage 1961:78) In some societies however, slaves were prevented from taking chieftaincy titles or assume high positions in society, as they were seen as inferior to the citizens of that nation. With the coming of the European slave traders, however, domestic servitude became commercialized, and slaves were then sold in exchange for European goods.

At first, the African slave traders only sold those they had as domestic slaves to the Europeans, but as the demand for more slaves became greater, these African merchants and coastal chiefs began to go deliberately fight wars in the hopes of getting more slaves, and they began to go further and further into the forest areas of West Africa to look for whole villages to sell as slaves to the Portuguese (Fage 1961:78)

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade

During the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, dominated by the Portuguese, millions of West African men, women and children were systemically kidnapped, sold and then shipped off to the Americas where they were forced into the hard life of slavery (www.mariner.org). The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade reached its peak in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, when the demand for slaves on American plantations, mostly located in the south, and the intense pressure on many competing European traders to adequately provide for this demand, led to the importation of about 7,000,000 slaves, with an average of 70,000 a year. (Fage 1961:83).

The Africans sold as slaves were usually prisoners of war captured by warring tribes. kidnapped strangers or domestic servants and they were usually sold by their captors to merchants and chiefs living on the coastal states, like Whydah, Jacquin, Dahomey. and Great Ardra. who in turn sold them to the European slave-traders that then loaded the slaves in huge vessels bound for the Americas. (Fage 1961: 77). In exchange for slaves. these coastal chiefs and merchants got European goods like guns for which the demand had been steadily increasing.

It was these guns. brought from Europe by the Europeans that many merchants and African slave traders used to capture more slaves. Most of those who needed the guns were from the tribes that lived near the West African Coastland, and since they came in contact more with the Europeans, they were able to buy guns with which they used to capture, and sometimes kill the slaves (Fage 1961:93). Bustling trade ports like that of Whydah, which was conquered by King, Agaja of Dahomey, usually had forts, built by Europeans, most likely the Portuguese, as a stop-over for the exchange of gold, ivory, and captured Africans (Fage 1961:93).

These forts were operated like small cities and they usually had a castle in which was included lavish apartments for the European slave traders, a huge warehouse where the slaves were kept to be sold, and of course armed military personnel, whose jobs it was to see that no slave ever escaped alive. When the slaves were sold, they were shipped on canoes to the huge vessels that would sail to the Americas, where the slaves would then be of loaded and sold at auctions by the seashore (www.slaveryinamerica.org).

The Transatlantic slave trade was divided into three parts, also known as passages. In the first passage, trade goods from Europe were shipped to Africa as

payment for the slaves. In this first part of what is also called the triangular trade, European slave traders and seamen would arrive in West Africa with tobacco, whiskey, textiles, and of course guns for the African merchants and coastal chiefs, who would have captured the slaves the Europeans needed to take back with them. After the goods had been exchanged, the second part of the journey, called the middle passage, involved the shipping of the slaves to the Americas where the slaves were sold in coastal cities like Mississippi and Louisiana where the plantations needed cheap labor (www.africanhistory.about.com).

It is estimated that during this middle passage, thousands of African slaves died during their first week, due to malnutrition and diseases they had gotten in their coastal camps, and on the ships. (africanhistory.about.com/library/weekly/aa080601a.htm). The third and final part of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, involved the taking back to Europe of goods like molasses, rum, cotton and of course sugar from the plantations (www.africanhistory.about.com).

It is estimated that between 1450 and 1900, as many as 500,000 Africans were taken as slaves to British North American and the United States. This number represents 4.4 percent of the 11,328, 000 Africans taken as slaves to the other regions of the world. (www.africanhistory.about.com). Of the 10,240,200 Africans taken as slaves from 1650-1900, about 4,179,500 were from West Central, 2,016,200 were from the Blight of Benin, 1,463,700 were from the Blight of Benin and 1,035,600 were from the Gold Coast. These numbers represent 40.8, 19.7, 14.3 and 10.1 percent respectively of the total number of slaves accounted for (www.africanhistory.about.com).

There is no way to measure the devastating blow slavery had on the African continent, specifically West Africa, however it is estimated that between 15 and 20 million Africans suffered from the slave trade. Not only were the virile young men and women shipped to the Americas, but since in most cases, only the old and feeble people were left behind, it took a while for the population to replenish itself (www.africanhistory.about.com).

Slavery and Colonialism

Slavery in North America differed in a number of ways, from slavery in other parts of America. In the first place, the English did not have a lot of historical experience with slavery when compared to the Portuguese, Dutch or the Spanish (www.slaveryinamerica.org). That was probably why there were not many English slave traders until the 18th century. The first African slaves arrived in Virginia in 1619 and were sold by a Dutch slave trader in exchange for food (www.innercity.org).

At first, the slaves were given the same legal status as many of the poor Englishmen who had sold a few years of their labor in exchange for a passage on board ships going to America. The poor Englishmen were given the status of indentured servants and were often preferred by wealthy plantation owners to the enslaved Africans because it cost a lot less to buy their services, as opposed to buying enslaved Africans (www.slaveryinamerica.org).

Apart from that however, some plantation owners preferred to spend a lot of money buying enslaved Africans because the white indentured servants could run away any time they pleased, and also because the white indentured servants demanded to be treated better than the enslaved Africans. As time went on however, the upper class

white males in the ruling class decided to make a clear distinction between the two groups based on race and no longer on class (www.slaveryinamerica.org).

One of the reasons why this distinction was made was the Bacon's rebellion of 1676. During this rebellion. Nathaniel Bacon. a disgruntled English aristocrat, led a rebellion against the wealthy upper class in Virginia using former, indentured Englishmen. poor farmers. and sometimes free Africans. Many members of the white upper class. fearing an alliance between indentured Englishmen, free and enslaved Africans. decided to make use of only enslaved Africans. and then proceeded to make laws detailing enslaved Africans as lifelong chattel of their masters (www.slaveryinamerica.org). Not only that, but a slave's status was hereditary and could pass on from parents to their children. This law started a new wave of slavery in North America.

Black slaves were no longer seen as equal in status to white indentured farmers, but were recognized by law as being inferior to the white people. The law recognized them as being only three-fifth of a normal person. Perhaps that was why records of slave births, deaths and marriages among other things were sometimes found with records of the plantation owner's animal. In making this law, members of the ruling class made sure that race would be the defining factor and would all people legally recognized as white were aligned together on the issue of race.

Enslaved Africans in North America faced many obstacles under the institution of slavery. They were stripped of all their former identities and given new ones. They were given new names, forced to learn a new language to communicate with one another, were given a new religion, although some still secretly practiced some of their traditional

religions, and were generally forced to assume and adapt to a new way of life. It was as if the slave masters wanted to severe all ties the enslaved Africans had with the African continent, and in some ways they succeeded. Not only that, but they were in some cases relegated to third class citizens, white women generally being treated as second-class citizens.

Enslaved Africans had no rights whatsoever, and could be sold on the whims of their masters. Whole families were separated whenever the plantation owners wanted to sell slaves and they had no say in how their lives turned out. Perhaps the hardest part for many of the enslaved Africans was watching a child come into the world with the parents knowing that they could not provide a better life that theirs for their child. In other words, their child was not guaranteed a future because he or she belonged to the plantation owner to do as he wished. Enslaved Africans were also denied an education, and over time, it became illegal for a slave to know how to read and write (www. wikipedia.org).

With the enslaved Africans in America undergoing a new identity and forging a new culture out of the crucible of slavery, the Africans on the African continent, especially in West Africa continued their trade with European merchants. During this period many kings and rulers solidified their alliance with European merchants and this became crucial in determining who had power. During the Berlin conference of 1884-85, the African continent was shared among the European powers including Britain, France, Germany, Portugal and Italy among others without the consent of the African people. The later consequences of this blatant disregard for the opinions of the African people would be the fire that sparked some of the ethnic wars after independence. After the

conference, there was a great scramble for African countries between European countries, which eventually led to the colonization of these regions. The Africans were treated as second-class citizens on their own land and were denied many of the rights the colonial masters had.

Like the institution of slavery, colonialism did not recognize the rights of the African both on the African continent, and in North America. Instead native Africans were forced to expand the empires of the imperial nations they were under. Colonialism also sought to undermine the native African. Just like the African-Americans in North America, Africans under colonialism were taught that European culture and religion were superior to anything the Africans had before (www.encarta.msn.com).

Colonialism also transformed the African political system. The colonial masters to indirectly rule the native people used chiefs and kings, who traditionally had autonomous powers over their people,. Not only that but the traditional process of kingships were disrupted because the colonial government could dispose of any king or chief who did not do as they said, and replace them with people who might have traditionally never had any claims to the throne. Many of the chiefs and kings were seen as mindless pawns in the hands of the Europeans, and were often ridiculed as the mouthpiece of whatever colonial government was in power. In North America, following the civil war in the 19th century, many enslaved Africans were free to do as they pleased, but laws such as the Jim Crow Laws, which supported segregation, were used to confine African-Americans to second-class citizens.

Jim Crow laws were laws that supported racial segregation the use of separate facilities for those of white descent and those of African descent especially transportation

and schooling facilities (www.wikipedia.org). These laws were officially in effect from between 1876 and 1964. Jim Crow laws were an effect of the civil war, and they were enacted at different times in the different southern states. Jim Crow laws were a direct response by the ruling white class to issues of race after the civil war, and during the reconstruction period. The heart of the Jim Crow laws was contained in the motto, "Separate but equal." but like every other law enacted in the 19th century, Jim Crow laws were anything but equal. The civil rights movement of the 1960's challenged the separate but equal maxim. and in 1964. in the famous Brown vs. the Board of education case, the ruling was struck down and declared unconstitutional (www.wikipedia.org). The myth of being separate but equal was especially perpetuated in the South, and served to undermine African-Americans seeking a better life for themselves.

Pan-Africanism in North America and Africa

The Pan-African movement arose as a direct response to colonialism on the African continent and Segregation of African-Americans on the North-American continent. In its simplest form, Pan-Africanism is a "philosophy that is based on the belief that African people share common bonds and objectives and that advocates unity to achieve these objectives" (www.encarta.msn.com).

The early years of the Pan-African movement saw African-American and Afro-Caribbean intellectuals like W.E. Du Bois and George Padmore dominating the scene, and it would be several years before the African intellectuals like Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Nnamdi Azikiwe of Nigeria would actively become involved in the movement (Adekeye 2004:2-3). The Pan-African movement was

divided into two forms: Continental and Diaspora Pan-Africanism. Continental Pan-Africanism is a branch of the movement that focuses on the unity of African states and the African people either locally, or internationally through political or economic means (www.encarta.msn.com). Diaspora Pan-Africanism on the other hand is focused not only on Africans in Africa. but also on Africans in the Diaspora (www.encarta.msn.com).

Two influential but radically different individuals – Marcus Garvey and W.E.Du Bois shaped the pan-African movement. Marcus Garvey, a native of Jamaica founded the Universal Negro Improvement and Conservation Association and African Communities League (UNICAACL), which eventually became known as the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA). Garvey clamored for Black Nationalism, and by creating the UNIA, Garvey created a system where black people would have the economic power to change their own destinies. Garvey's motto of "Africa for the Africans" was later converted to include other Africans in the Diaspora, especially African-Americans and Afro-Caribbeans. W. E. Du Bois, another leader of the early Pan-Africanist movement, was more focused on getting the intellectuals on both the African and North American intellectuals together. While Garvey focused on a more militaristic approach to improving black solidarity, Du Bois focused on grooming African intellectuals who he believed would work together with African-American leaders to save the African continent from obscurity.

The first international pan-African gathering took place in 1919 and it drew Africans from both the British and French colonies and the Africans in Diaspora. The pan-Africanist movement on the African continent drew active participants from the British not the French colonies. This was in part due to the French policy of assimilation,

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which gave western-educated French Africans certain rights as Frenchmen, but forbade them to participate in any political activity that was not approved of by the French government. (Gershoni 1997:93) The French policy of Association made French Africans agents of the government, and the "exclusion of non-French missionaries from French-controlled territories," the lack of French African newspapers and the lack of a common language drove a big wedge between the French Africans, their British counterparts and many African American intellectuals (Gershoni, 1997:93)

At first, the pan-African leaders were concerned with fighting issues of sound education, good health care services and a better life for Africans and Africans in the Diaspora, but as the years past, and the European colonial powers became embroiled in fighting Nazi, Germany in the 1940's, the Pan-Africanist movement began struggling in earnest for total independence. In North America, the struggle was for civil and social equality for African-Americans, and for Africans the struggle was for independence from colonial rule.

In 1957, Ghana became the first West African country to gain her independence, and in 1960, Nigeria followed. One of the greatest achievements of the Pan-Africanist movement was the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 by Julius Nyerere, the first president of Tanzania (www.concise.britannica.com).

The Pan-African movement was the first movement of its kind that reached out to bring both Africans and African-Americans together. It was a movement formed with the purpose of pulling the best of both worlds together for the good of the black race. With the shared history of slavery and colonialism, both African-Americans and Africans could come together to solve some of the pertinent problems plaguing both people. With

the free flow of information from one continent to the other, it became imperative that contact be made not just through the written word, but also through physical contact. In the course of time, some myths and stereotypes about both groups of people were spread and their effects are still being felt today.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

This research was conducted using a qualitative method of study. I used a qualitative method of research instead of a quantitative method of research because a qualitative method allowed me to plumb the depths of my respondent's response. I needed an approach where authenticity was key, values were present, theories and data were fused. I also needed an approach that would also allow me to construct social reality and cultural meaning, focus on interactive processes and events, and at the same time allow me to be involved (Neuman 2006:13). The qualitative method met all my needs.

In this study, in-depth interviews were conducted in the space of 2 years with most of them being conducted in the fall of 2004. I had a sample size of 17 respondents: fifteen were students and two were faculty members of the University of Mississippi. In the sample there are 7 Africans, 9 African-Americans and 1 Caucasian. Among the 7 Africans, the duration of their stay in the United States, ranged from between a year to 15 years. Many of the respondents I interviewed were members of the African Caribbean Association, some being officers while others were just ordinary members like me. Some of the respondents were referred to me by members of the same organization through the snowball fashion (Neuman 2006:). No interview was ever rescheduled because I got all the information I wanted at one sitting, and interview sessions tended to last about an hour.

Some of the issues I faced in conducting in-depth interviews included having some interviewees that were unwilling or in some cases, uncomfortable with sharing all that I had hoped to explore, and some interviewees that were unaware of recurring patterns in their lives, and so could not be more specific when I asked for some information about certain things they had briefly mentioned during the interview. Another issues I faced in conducting in-depth interview was that some of the respondents may not have been very truthful in their responses because they were worried that they would offend me (because I was African, and they were African Americans) if they were too candid in their responses.

This study was the limitation of generalization due to my small sample size. However since my research was interpretative, sample size is not seen as a key indicator of research quality. It must be noted that all the views expressed in the course of this interviews are the views of a small number of people. However, those views are important because they give me a brief glimpse into the minds of many of my subjects and give voice to many of the voiceless who might otherwise not get a chance to voice their opinions on issues that affect their lives like the ones that I am raising.

I am supplementing the information I got from my interviews with other sources from internet radio stations, chat rooms, on-line forums, on-line newspapers, and personal webpages. These various electronic forms of communications help me to analyze the my interview data.

To record my data, I always had a pen and paper ready in case something happened that I needed to record on the spot, and I noticed that as long as I asked for permission, a lot of my respondents were not uncomfortable with me jotting down a few

notes once in a while during the interviews. Some of the limitations I faced in not using a tape recorder were that most times, respondents tended to answer my questions faster than I could record them, and this led to the rephrasing of some of the words which might have been more profound in the original state. I also had to sometimes ask respondents to repeat themselves because they were sometimes unclear, and I didn't have the luxury of playing back what they said to me. I had to rely on my notes and my wits.

I made use of the unstructured format (Rubin and Rubin, 1995:5) because it had the advantage of allowing me to improvise a lot around a list of topics of discussion, to get the ball rolling. In the course of this interview I had to do a lot of improvising because many of my respondents would give me leads that I had to follow, but which I had not anticipated, and which would produce very important results that were key to this study.

All my interviews, with the exception of only one, were conducted using the face-to-face method of research and I opted to interview my subjects face to face, first of all because the subjects would be more comfortable opening up to me in person, than on the phone, secondly because I could observe the surroundings and use nonverbal communication and visual aids to enrich my study, and thirdly because "face-to face interviews have the highest response rates and permit the longest questionnaires" (Neuman, 2006:301). I could also ask all types of complex questions, and use extensive probes to get the interviewees to the heart of the discussion (Neuman, 2006:301). A limitation of this method would be that my appearance, tone of voice and the way my questions were worded could have affected a lot of my interviewees (Neuman, 2006:301), but I took great care in conducting this interview to rid myself any interviewer

bias before I ever asked the first question. The only telephone interview I conducted was done because the respondent was free at that time and there could be no guarantee of when he would be free for another interview.

The advantage of this type of interview to my research was that I was able to ask my subject a lot of questions that I wanted to see answered. But the disadvantages far outweighed the advantages. The first disadvantage was that my phone card was used up during this interview because of the length of time it took to write what the respondent was saying. Another disadvantage was that a lot of times there was static on the line and there were some brief periods of silence in which I could think of nothing but the mounting cost of my phone bill. Perhaps the greatest disadvantage I faced in conducting a phone interview was that I was not able to correctly gauge the body language of my interviewee and I had no way of verifying his stories.

However, I guarded against this limitation by sometimes going over the same question to see if I would get a different response. The advantage of conducting a phone interview in this study was that because the interview was very long, it lasted for about 1 hour and 15 minutes; I was able to get in-depth information that greatly helped my research.

Researcher's Role in Research

As an 80's girl growing up in Lagos, Nigeria, a city with over 12 million people in residence, I was heavily influenced by African-American culture, specifically the music. But that was it. I didn't see myself as any link that connected the African culture, with the African American one. I did however look forward to the day when I would

come to the cultural capital of the world – The United States of America. When the opportunity came for me to leave Nigeria to come to the United States, I was ecstatic.

The first thing that struck me when I had stayed in Clarksdale, Mississippi for about a week was the level of ignorance many Americans, white and black had about Africa. but I took more notice of the ignorance on the part of many African Americans. I reasoned that as black people. they ought to know that Africans didn't sleep on trees, and that Africans didn't walk around the whole place naked. Another thing I noticed was that some African Americans in Clarksdale immediately became hostile once they heard my accent and found out I was a Nigerian. not Jamaican as they had originally thought.

I was still a bit optimistic about coming to the University of Mississippi because I reasoned that the educated African-Americans of Ole Miss would have thought provoking questions to ask me, but to my surprise, questions like, "Do y'all live on trees?" "I'll love to go back to Africa (as though Africa was a country, rather than an entire continent of diverse people) to see those animals on the streets," and the usual "Do y'all wear shoes in Africa?" were often the only questions I was asked by many of my African-American acquaintances. One of my personal favorites, which a Ghanaian friend of mine told me he was asked was "I heard that Bill Clinton lived on a tree when he went to visit y'all in Africa," and that question, more than any other had me questioning where many of the American students got their information from.

More than any of these thing however, I wanted to know a lot of things. I wanted to know why some of the African American students here at the University of Mississippi were so hostile to me. I wanted to know why anytime the African Association put up a show, majority of those who came were white American students, not African-American

students. I wanted to know why one day when an African American lady had asked if I could help organize the upcoming black history program with a strong emphasis on the African roots, another lady angrily whispered to her son next to her, "This is black history, not African history." I also wanted to know why some African-Americans I had met wholeheartedly embraced anything African, while others shunned it.

There is no doubt that my experience as an African student studying Journalism in the United States helped shaped the way I viewed many things. I could not help but be very angry at the way the media often depicted Africans on many television shows as barbaric, uncivilized people who had not yet caught up with the rest of the world in development. I was also angry at the people who always said never believe everything on T.V, and in the same vein questioned me about the African continent, time and time again, weeks after I had told them things about contemporary Nigeria.

It was all these and much more that prompted me to do a study on Africans and African-Americans. I wanted first of all to interview the African students to see if these experiences were unique to me. If they were not, I wanted to find out some of the experiences of the other African students on campus, and see how similar or how different they were from mine. Secondly, I wanted to interview some African-American students to find out why some of them were hostile to anything African, while some of them loved to do anything African. More than that however, I wanted to know what they thought of the African students at Ole Miss specifically, and Africans specifically. Some of the results of these interviews are shared in the analysis and findings section.

In conclusion. my experiences both in Clarksdale, Mississippi and the University of Mississippi helped shape my interest in the relationship between Africans and African-Americans. and the similarities and differences between members of the two groups.

CHAPTER 4: ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

In taking a look at the complex relationship between Africans and African-Americans, many issues need to be critically analyzed. In this chapter, I hope to give a brief analysis of some of my findings and give the implications of these findings to the research as a whole. In conducting the interviews and analyzing documents prevalent in the media today, one of the issues that has continuously cropped up among many of my African interviewees is the issue of the media's pessimistic approach to the reporting of issues affecting the African continent. Nowhere is this issue better exemplified than in my interview with Joseph Jones, a 26-year-old Ole Miss mechanical engineering male freshman from Accra, Ghana. Below is an excerpt from Joseph's (not his real name) interview:

> This [African-American] girl has been asking me the same questions about poverty and disease in Africa. She does this because she's trying to see if I will change my story or because she doesn't believe my story. She always says things like "I saw this naked woman with a basket on her head. Tell me if this is truly how Africa is because I saw this woman on the national geographic network and they don't lie." Joseph assures me that the girl in question is not a bad person, but is a good example of the effect of bad publicity concerning Africa. "What do you expect her to believe if that is all she sees? The media keeps shining more light on the

negative things happening in Africa," he says, frustration threading his voice.

Joseph's frustration, which is shared by many of my African interviewees, stems from the fact that although he has invested a lot of time trying to change his African American friend's perception of Africa as a 'dark continent,' his friend prefers to believe what she has seen on the National Geographic Channel, a reputable network, than believe anything Joseph has to say on the issue.

Kwame Long, a 21-year-old Electrical Engineering student from Ghana has a different opinion about why Joseph has a hard time trying to get his African-American friends to see Ghana and the African continent through his eyes. According to Kwame the burden of proof lies with Joseph specifically, and Africans generally.

> Africans do a lot of telling by word of mouth, but the media shows a more powerful image. They (African-Americans) believe what they watch. T.V is enough evidence for them. If you say … ok.. we [Africans] have cars, buildings, roads like the way they have. When you say it that way now… anybody at all can say ok… prove it. If you also come up to counteract it, you must have proof. If you just rely on word of mouth, nobody will agree.

Kwame believes that African students have to do more than tell their African-American friends about Africa, they have to show them pictures, videos and solid proof to support their claims about a contemporary Africa.

Alice Brown, a nursing major from Preston Mississippi agrees with Kwame.

I guess in a way. I guess you say if it's not like this, why can't you show me proof otherwise. It's all about how well you convince me, how well you prove your point. Some people have to see to believe. Some people don't read books, they only depend on the media for information. I don't think the media is a reliable source because reporters put in their own opinions.

But Joseph still maintains that the American media and ignorance on the part of some African-Americans are primarily to blame for the way some African-Americans perceive Africans in the United States. Says Joseph:

I think it's all about ignorance. The thing is that Africans come here with an open mind, and I can use myself as an example. I came here with the idea of . . . you know . . . connecting with Afro-Americans because in a lot of ways we are more alike than different. But I found out that they don't really know much about Africa because of the American media. The information they present to them about Africa is too shallow. All they know [about Africa] is the poverty, hunger, disease and war, and the media exaggerates this in a way that Afro-Africans think Africa is all about stuff like this. They don't show much about the societal networks, the developments, and infrastructures in Africa. Because of the media, Afro-Americans refuse to claim their heritage as African descendants, and they refuse to accept Africans as equals. When we [Africans] realized this with all our open-mindedness, we responded to the way they treated us.

Some people don't read books, they only depend on the media for information. I don't think the media is a reliable source because reporters put in their own opinions."

It is important to note that the media in question is more often than not owned by white upper class Christian males who have their own hidden agenda in propagating the myth of a 'dark continent'. Keeping the myth of the Dark Continent alive was one of the ways both plantation owners and colonial masters used to subjugate both African-Americans in North America, and the Africans on the African continent. Africans were often portrayed as being "devoid of reason, and, therefore, subhuman." (Gates 1999:7).

Many Africans resent the Western image of Africa as a 'dark continent'. Chike Gold, a chemical engineering junior from Lagos, Nigeria, is one of them.

Just because we are Africans doesn't mean we don't wear clothes or climb trees. I have lived in Nigeria all my life and I have never seen a live wild animal before, except perhaps in the zoo.

Lance Simpson, a junior chemical engineering major from Ibadan, Nigeria, is another. "We are normal human beings, we speak normal English, and we bath every morning." Lance is also angry at the deceptive image the media portrays of Africa as a country. "Africa is not a country; it is a continent, with distinct countries. Not everyone has AIDS, and AIDS is only in specific parts of Africa," he says.

By making African-Americans feel that anything coming from Africa was negative, the slave owners partially succeeded in changing the mind-set of millions of African-Americans. Africans names were looked down upon, African culture was always seen as inferior to European culture, and so slowly but surely, some African-

Americans learnt to change their way of thinking to that of the white master. Some schools perpetuated this myth by always showing pictures of naked savages, and wild animals running free. or in today's world showing pitiful pictures of the refugees in war torn Somalia and Darfur. The effect of portraying Africa as a dark continent is still being felt today. Of all the groups that have at one time faced discrimination in the United States. African-Americans are the group most distant from their roots. Some names, clothing and sometimes even the way the hair is styled are carefully put together to reflect European. rather than African culture. The myth perpetuated by the slave masters, coupled with the fact that the media almost always portrays the negative aspects of life on the African continent has caused some African Americans to say like Richard Pryor, "Thank God for slavery" (Gates 1999:7).

Many African-Americans would rather believe what they watched on Television than hear the truth from the mouth of an African. The African-American girl in question faces the same challenge many African-Americans face in connecting the reality of Africa with the media's selective reality. The girl would rather believe the national geographic exhibition of a traditional African than that of a modern African because that is all she sees anytime the media chooses to do a spotlight on the African continent. Not only does she see a certain aspect of life on the African continent, but that stereotype of a 'dark continent' gets reinforced every time because the media backs up their claims of a 'dark continent' with moving pictures, sounds and live footage, while all some of the Africans many African-American students come across have is their word.

Since some Africans feel that they cannot in any way compete with the negative images of the African continent the media has to offer, many of them have taken to

playing into the stereotype of the 'typical African.' During one of my long talks with Joseph, he told me the story of a man he met in Ohio who delivered the most bizarre African fib I had ever heard. According to Joseph, when the man got tired of being asked, by many of the Americans he came in contact with, why he only had two children, instead of the usual houseful many African men are fabled to have, he (the man) said that he once had 15 children but that one day a python came and ate 13 of them. The other two were not eaten because they had enough sense to climb a tall palm tree to escape being eaten.

The most amazing part of the story was that some people took it as the gospel! Samuel himself says he has also devised his own mechanism for avoiding answering the same questions from the same people over and over again. According to Joseph, he tells anyone curious enough to ask him what he drawings on his bag signify, that it is a picture of his village in Ghana. The bag in question was a leather bag he brought with him from Ghana and it contained drawings of a palm tree and a thatched roof hut in it among other things. Joseph tells many of his African-American friends that he lives on the palm tree, and that the thatched roof hut is where the members of his community meet for special occasions. Joseph seems to think that many of his African-American friends would rather believe his lie because it is closer to what they see on T.V, than the truth about a developed Ghana.

Another issue that bears closer examining is the issue of competition and the sense of superiority many Africans accuse many African Americans of having. Gregory James, a 20-year-old African American male from Como Mississippi elaborates more on this issue in his interview. Says Gregory:

I don't have problem with Africans personally, but I can speculate that it's because we were born in the United States, and I think we [African-Americans] are inbred with the sense that we are better than a lot of people. There is also that competition among blacks and I think that also contributes to it.

In examining Gregory's statement, two things jump out at me. First is the issue of nationalism exemplified in American citizenship, which Gregory believes makes many African-Americans feel superior to the immigrant and non-immigrant Africans that come in their millions to the United States annually. It also addresses the issue of identity among many African Americans who see themselves as American first and then African-American secondly. Jack Black, a professor of African history at the University of Mississippi explains this issue further.

African Americans are Americans apart from their music and religion. They have a culture that is American and basically have a Western point of view. If you take an African American to Africa, you will probably realize just how different he or she is. A lot of Africans expect to feel kinship with African Americans and are surprised to feel hostility.

Also the feeling of superiority that many Americans are accused of is simply transmitted by many African-Americans to Africans. With the introduction of these new immigrants to American society, comes the issue of competition between the native African-Americans and the new African immigrants.

Tony, an online forum contributor, who identified himself as African, further argues the issue of competition, which Gregory refers to. Tony has a different take on why some Africans feel superior to some African-Americans.

> Africans are on average very successful in the United States and are among the most successful immigrant groups. And they use that as a yardstick to measure the performance of black Americans. In general, African immigrants and students see black Americans as a people who don't take full advantage of the opportunities they have. And they don't see them as achievers, at least not in the same way they [Africans] see themselves. Is it true or not? No, it's not. I don't believe that it's true. One of the reasons, besides arrogance among many Africans as better blacks than American blacks (and vice versa, of course), is that Africans come from a continent with very limited opportunities. So when they come to the United States, they see abundance everywhere in a way black Americans don't (Tony, Online posting.10 April 2006).

It is interesting that Tony says that Africans see African-Americans as "a people who don't take full advantage of the opportunities they have. The late Nnamdi Azikiwe, Nigeria's first premier described America as "God's Own Country." That pretty much describes the way many Africans view the United States. They see it as a land flowing with milk and honey and cannot understand why many African-Americans live in poverty in a land of opportunities. Many fail to realize that the reason why Africans are by and large one of the most successful immigrant groups in the United States today, is because "Statistically, immigrants from Africa have the highest educational levels among all

immigrants to the United State. On average. they have over 3 years of college, and over half are college graduates"(http://www.welcomingcenter.org).

Some Africans do not appreciate. and some others are not aware of, the fact that it took several decades before African-Americans could be properly educated, in part because of slavery and Jim Crow Laws of segregation. Even when African-Americans had schools. their schools were in many ways substandard when compared to the white schools at the time. That notwithstanding. many notable African-Americans like Booker T. Washington. W.E. Dubois and of course the Reverend Martin Luther king still managed to beat all odds and get a great education.

Several issues. apart from the issue of competition, are raised in Tony's response. One is the issue of immigration. Many African immigrants are often from middle class families in their native countries. but when they come to the United States, they usually move to the inner city districts because they cannot immediately afford the high standards of living available in the United States, as opposed to the relatively affordable livings they made back home. The problem though is that many of the African Americans living in the inner cities see this new group of immigrants as a threat to their livelihood, after all they both use the same infrastructural facilities, and social and medical services. Many inner-city African-Americans see themselves as having prior claims to some of these resources, and resent the fact that in some cases, the new African immigrants get first take on some of these resources. With tensions between the two camps brewing, it is not uncommon to hear of violence erupting between these two groups.

John Smith, a global economic and business junior from Biloxi, Mississippi has a completely different take on the issue of why there is that tension between Africans and

African-Americans:

> Hmm... I think Africans. not just here, but Africans I've met before, have bad feelings towards African-Americans. Maybe because they think we're selfish. too American or less black or whatever that means. That's stupid because we are all looked at as the same.

Smith believes that the antagonistic feelings he gets from some of the Africans he has met. is because they [Africans] feel that African-Americans are, what he calls 'less black.' than their African brothers. Many scholars all over the world have exhausted the issue of who is or is not black. and the issue of blackness. Trying to define who is black, and who isn't black physically is very difficult because there are many shades of black all over the world. In the same way, trying to define black culture is very difficult because there is not single thing that totally defines it. Is it only the culture of the African people? And by African. I mean those who reside on the African continent. Or is black culture the culture practiced by every black person in the Diaspora?

When asked, Smith explained that he meant Africans felt that African-Americans were not as 'black' culturally as them (Africans). For some Africans to believe that some African-Americans are less black, it would mean that there is a universal standard for being black that everyone agrees on? Lenny Johnson, an English Professor at the University of Mississippi dispels the notion of a universal standard of blackness. "We don't have a monolithic blackness, but blacknesses, to identify the notions of colors and ancestry. Blackness comes in various shades. We can move from the world of essentialism to that of diversity."

If there is not one notion of 'blackness,' but many notions of 'blacknesses,' it stands to reason then that both Africans and African-Americans share some similarities and differences that are peculiar to them. Professor Johnson explains further:

> First of all, Africans and African-Americans are fundamentally products of the same background in that we can all locate our origin in Africa. We share that common bond - the common bond of blackness or Africanness. Because of this common bond we share privileges and liabilities: great cultures, remarkable heritages, culinary skills, technological interests, clothing, entertainment, and academics; and liabilities in terms of slavery, segregation, and racism in America and apartheid, colonialism, military and civilian dictatorship, and racism in Africa. Our similarities even get clearer in the south. All these similarities and differences of course affect the way we do things and relate to one another.... if you look carefully, you will see that Break dance and Bata dance (a traditional dance from the Yoruba nation) are substantially similar with differences in the drumming part.

Professor Jack Black has more to say about the similarities between the two groups.

> They both have shared experiences. Although there is no tribalism among African Americans, there are distinctions with regard to class and skin color. Those who are lighter are seen as better although there is no ethnic distinction between them. Issues of race put Africans at the bottom of the world in terms of world issues. Take the genocide in Rwanda, where about

100.000 people were killed. If that had happened in Europe, the media would have covered it. but because Africa is at the bottom of the ladder, the U.S did nothing

Professor Jack's statement here is very profound because he sees similarities between tribalism prevalent in many African countries, and certain distinctions with regard to skin color present in some African-American communities. On the issue of tribalism. the point must be made that some Africans are very particular about where an individual comes from. because they equate having a sense of culture to having a sense of identity.

Some African ethnic groups within some African nations are so particular about the issue of belonging to that particular ethnic group that they usually forbid any form of intermarriage with anyone they identify as belonging to another group. In several cases, some ethnic groups within a specific African nation discourage any form of inter-ethnic marriage, either subtly or blatantly. They do this because they believe they are preserving the integrity and the culture of that ethnic group.

Now that it has been established that there is no one definition of what is black, and that Africans and African-Americans, like any other group of people, share some similarities and some differences, why is it that many people tend to notice the differences rather than the similarities. Professor Johnson explains:

> The notion of community has endured among Africans and African
> Americans, though the sense of community among African Americans has
> been affected by American individualism. The community seems stronger
> in Africa than in America. Our differences are primarily because of our

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locations: living in different societies guarantees differences, and the reality of living here forces many differences. One of the more noticeable differences is in our speech.

Professor Johnson's statement that American individualism has had a strong effect on the African-American community is very important. Similarly, Professor Johnson's statement that many of the differences between Africans and African-Americans stems from their different locations is an important fact to note when trying to analyze the differences between Africans and African-Americans.

In many ways, Africans and African-Americans have different perceptions of one another. Some African-Americans feel superior to Africans for very different reasons. Firstly, when many African-Americans consider the history of how they came to be in America, and see how Africans are portrayed in the media today, they understandably feel that they are better off. This makes many of them choose to identify themselves as Americans, not as Africans.

An exception to this general rule of behavior among African Americans is when they (African-Americans) feel cheated or deprived of some basic rights and resources, such as during the Civil Rights era which helped fan the flames of the Pan-African movement in the United States. In such cases, some of them are more likely to embrace their 'African side.' Some of them do this by changing their lifestyles to what they feel is an accurate depiction of what it means to be African. Some do this by adopting new African names, wearing only African prints, and celebrating cultural holidays that they believe are of African origin, but which some Africans are completely unaware of. This

is all an attempt on the part of African-Americans to carve out a sense of African cultural identity, and redeem what they believe they have lost.

The problem with this however, is that many Africans feel that any attempt by non-Africans (many Africans would include African-Americans in this category) to imitate any aspect of African culture for any reason is suspect, insulting, unnatural and ridiculous. Thus, some Africans view these African-Americans as individuals that are not being true to themselves.

In conclusion, the myths and stereotypes perpetuated by both groups, Africans and African-Americans, have become so deeply entrenched in the minds of many members of these groups, that these myths and stereotypes have come to define the way some members of both groups view one another. Africans and African-Americans have come a long way together, but there is still a lot more that needs to be done to reduce the cultural stereotypes that each group has about the other, and when this is done the relationship between members of these two groups can be improved.

CONCLUSION

From time immemorial, one of the questions that has plagued millions of African-Americans is - What is Africa to me? This legitimate question stems from the fact that the only image of Africa most African-Americans ever get to see, are those of Africans swinging from trees, running around naked, dying of AIDS, or killing one another in ethnic clashes. Worse still is the image of Africa as a savage place where wild animals roam about freely, and the Masai hunt for lions. Many Africans who migrate or come to the United States to study are disappointed when some African-Americans relate to them based on these mistaken images.

This study has taken you through the history of both Africans and African-Americans to better understand these two groups of people and to understand the way they relate to one another. This study has also examined some of the myths and stereotypes that have influenced the way both Africans and African-Americans view each other and some of the similarities and differences between both groups were discussed.

As we examine both Africans and African-Americans, we see that the key to understanding one another lies in respecting what each group has gone through, and taking steps in reducing the cultural stereotypes that have come to play a key role in the way both Africans and African-Americans perceive each other.

In conclusion although both Africans and African-Americans share a lot of similarities, they are two completely different people from two completely different

continents. Shaped by their different experiences with colonialism and slavery both

groups have had to find ways to survive in a rapidly changing world.

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