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America and Africa: Building New Bridges Across the Atlantic

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America's relationship with Africa began in 1619 when 20 indentured Africans landed in Jamestown, Virginia. These and the other indentured Africans that followed mingled culturally and biologically with European indentured servants; by the 1660s, however, a line of demarcation had been created, that relegated the Africans to perpetual chattelhood.



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The Africans could be thus enslaved, in part, because they were too different in culture, religion, and coloration; they also lacked a powerful state or religious leader to speak on their behalf; their technologies and military weapons were also no match for the European invaders.

Before slavery was abolished in the United States in 1865, a group of freedom-loving Africans, Americans and Europeans had established colonies in Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa, and in Freretown in East Africa.

The black settlers in Sierra Leone and Liberia carried with them European and American systems of education, currencies, government, religious institutions, patterns of dress, and even recreation. The Americo-Liberians in West Africa replicated the U.S. currency, flag, patterns of political organizations, churches, and held a superior attitude toward the African natives.

The United States was not officially interested in colonizing Africa, as this had been

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effectively accomplished by Britain, France, Portugal, Germany and Spain by the early 1900s; but as these African nations obtained political independence from Europe in the late 1950s and the 1960s, the United States moved in to fill the vacuum that was thereby being created. President Kennedy's ambitious Peace Corps project was such an instrument. In her book, How Can Africa Survive? (1998), Jennifer Seymour Whitaker tells us that, United States' "first big commitment for development in Africa was a hefty \$225 million Independence gift to Nigeria in 1961." In Ghana, "the United States supported World Bank involvement in the Massive Volta Dam and hydroelectric plant and guaranteed the U.S. investment...in the nearby Valco aluminum smelter" (P. 65).

The 1960s were also the years of the Cold War between the West and the former U.S.S.R, during which the United States pursued relationships with strategic, wealthy, large African nations, popular or unpopular African leaders; the bottom line was that the then U.S.S. R. was not to entrench itself in Nigeria, Ghana, South Africa, the now Democratic Republic of the Congo, Egypt, and in the Horn of Africa; Cuban Marxism was not to be tolerated in Angola, Mozambique, and Namibia; Amilcar Cabral's scientific socialism, Kwame Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism, Sekou Toure's Marxist tendencies, Patrice Lumumba's anti-colonialism and neo-colonialism were to be undermined at all cost.

In this Cold War fiasco, some African autocrats and Kleptomaniacs were elevated and favored by the United States and constructive engagement with apartheid South Africa was propagated as though it were in the interest of the South African black masses.

But that myth was broken in 1989 when Communist U.S.S. R. was dismantled; the Cold War had left millions of Nigerians dead in the 1967-1970 Civil War, amputated Angolans, victims of coups and counter-coups in Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Somalia, Liberia, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast, Ethiopia, and Guinea-Bissau; massive starvation and poverty had inundated sub-Saharan Africa.

The United States, the most powerful nation in the contemporary global village, and a new generation of African leaders must now reflect on their errors of judgment for the last fifty years, with particular emphasis on the project for the upliftment of the African masses, those who cannot afford to hop the plane to Paris, London, New York City, Washington, D.C. or Lisbon in Portugal.

Furthermore, to prevent the entrenchment of terrorists in Islamic Africa, the development of the African masses will be a viable deterrent; discrimination against Bantu Africans in Somalia and Kenya must be, in no uncertain terms, denounced as anachronistic in emergent civil societies; an enlightened U.S. policy toward Africa will be good for both peoples on both sides of the Atlantic. The African masses, that have now been introduced to American consumption patterns, will provide a large market for American products, provide employment opportunities to American businesses, industries, and expert personnel. In addition, there appears to be no better U.S. foreign policy toward Africa than that of former President Clinton's, that makes it clear that, African and American interests are not necessarily antagonistic; the upliftment of the African masses

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must be the focus as opposed to feeding the capacities of the African elites, most of whom have repeatedly left their people holding the bag of poverty and empty promises.

Finally, as William Greider has observed in his 1998 book, One World, Ready or Not, “...the top of the ladder will continue to fall if the bottom is not brought up more rapidly” and that, “one end of the ladder (or seesaw) cannot defend its own general prosperity without attending to human conditions at the other end” (p. 43), especially in our now contemporary global village.

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