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Africa Finds its Voice in the Halls of Manchester

By Chris Varela

Abstract: When thinking of African independence, one will think of the wave of decolonization that swept the African continent beginning in the 1960s. Little attention is paid to what events led up to decolonization, and where the efforts for independence stemmed from, particularly a little-known meeting that took place in the fall of 1945. Pan-Africanism is central to this paper, as it was a movement which sought to unify all of Africa or African people including diaspora. Definitions differ as to the true extent, which is explained in the paper. This paper will look at the creation and history of the Pan-African movement from the late 19th century leading up to 1945. The pivotal role the Pan-African conference in Manchester, England, in October of 1945, played in Africa’s future will be explained. Finally, the importance the Manchester conference played in relation to the independence movement throughout Africa, the impact the Manchester attendees had in Africa, and how and why this conference has been overlooked for the role it played will also be looked at.

“Our fathers fought bravely. But do you know the biggest weapon unleashed by the enemy against them? It was not the Maxim gun. It was division among them. Why? Because a people united in faith are stronger than the bomb” – Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, A Grain of Wheat (1967)

Pan-Africanism is an important concept within the theory of nationalism that was conceived at the end of the 19th century, and remains a vital component in a variety of ways pertaining to Africa. Pan-Africanism was a tool in the struggle against colonialism, initially utilized by members of the African Diaspora, and later by people and groups who struggled for independence within Africa. The ability of the African people to unify was seen

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as integral in their efforts to resist European domination and reflected a desire to attain self-rule. There are a variety of views and definitions of Pan-Africanism, but most scholars agree that some degree of unification, whether political, social, cultural, or economical, was needed in the pursuit of freedom. An important part of the movement was the Pan-African Congress of 1945, held in Manchester, England, which became a seminal event in the movement’s history – as well as nationalism in Africa. The Congress resulted in a unified Pan-African movement, and provided the driving force behind decolonization of Africa.

Nationalism is a difficult concept within political theory due to its fluid definition and intangible qualities. In Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, he theorized that nationality, with regard to Africa, was created through the educational and administrative systems that were forced on the natives by the European overseers, typically picking one ethnic group, educating them, teaching them the colonial powers’ language, and placing them in some level of administration. This was done in an attempt to bring some unity and shared commonalities when ruling over a very diverse group of peoples in a bid to build a cohesive administrative unit while maintaining social and ethnic divisions, and reducing the burden of rule on the European country.

This practice laid the groundwork for the map of modern Africa, which A. Adu Boahen attributes as a positive outcome of colonialism in his book *African Perspectives of Colonialism*, as it created “most of them (countries) with clearly defined boundaries” in comparison to the often arbitrary boundaries of tribal pre-colonial Africa. Boahen is almost singularly alone in this

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2 There are differences as to the sequential numbering of Pan-African Congresses/Conferences among scholars. Some scholars consider the 1900 London meeting as the first congress, while others refer to it as a conference, making the assertion that the congresses did not start until 1919. For the purposes of this paper, the Manchester Congress will be referred to as the Fifth Pan-African Congress, in line with most of the reference material.


4 Dr. A. Abu Boahen, born in the Gold Coast of Africa in 1932, was a Ghanaian professor and political activist. He was a one-time presidential candidate against Ghanaian dictator Jerry Rawlings. Boahen died in 2006, having written nine books and numerous articles.

statement about the positivity of the European creation of modern borders in Africa, as most scholars see this as a major source of the problems within Africa today. Anderson states that once independence was gained, colonies simply supplanted the previous imperial authority with the local educated elite and retained many of the colonial legacies, such as governing apparatuses and social hierarchies. The arbitrary formation of nations is an issue reflected in the development of Pan-Africanism. P. Olisanwuche Esedebe\(^6\) summarizes that “Pan-Africanism is a political and cultural phenomenon which regards Africa, Africans and African descendants abroad as a unit.”\(^7\) Very little connects all, besides race. Anderson’s idea of nations as “imagined communities” allows this grouping to transcend cultural and societal differences, and become something that people wish to strive for. The strength of Pan-Africanism can be seen in the connection, by race, of peoples separated by vast distances. As Africans and African-Americans would travel the world, they would see that people of color the world over were subject to varying levels of discrimination. This was especially true for the black race, which would lead to what John St. Clair Drake\(^8\) refers to as racial Pan-Africanism.\(^9\) Adekunle Ajala believes that this idea of a common struggle gained traction as people from Africa, West Indies, as well as North and South America, would become linked for a variety of reasons and exchange their shared experiences of racism and discrimination.\(^10\) The common struggle to find a place to live one’s life without interference or prejudice led to the development of the precursors of the Pan-African movement, such as Marcus

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\(^6\) P. Olisanwuche Esedebe is a former Senior Fulbright Fellow and currently a professor of history at University of Nigeria, Nsukka.  
\(^8\) John St. Clair Drake was an American sociologist and anthropologist. St. Clair Drake became an early advocate of Pan-Africanism during his stay at Hampton University in the United Kingdom, where he met other activists like George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah. St. Clair Drake focused his research and writing on the African diaspora.  
Garvey’s Back to Africa movement, Harvey Sylvester Williams’ African Association, or Joseph Booth’s African Christian Union. These early groups would become fundamental in the formation of the Pan-African movement of the twentieth century.

This paper will look into the history and formation of the Pan-African movement, and the forces at play in the transition from a Diaspora-centered movement to the African-centered movement which eventually culminated at the Fifth Pan-African Congress. The Congress itself will be analyzed to understand how the leaders viewed the movement and what role it played, what was the discourse which took place during the conference, and how that discourse affected the resolutions that came out of the conference. The resolutions themselves will be examined for their importance in the Pan-African movement and how they helped move Africa towards decolonization. The legacy and impact of the Fifth Pan-African Congress will also be examined in relation to other Congresses, such as the Bandung Conference. However, some background into the formation of Pan-Africanism is needed to understand why the 1945 Manchester Conference was so significant.

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11 Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), was known for advocating black nationalism. He did not attend any Pan-African conferences, but he advocated for African unity.


13 Henry Sylvester-Williams was born in 1869 in Trinidad and Tabago. He took the lead in organizing the first meeting in 1900 known as the first Pan-African Conference, which took place in London. He became the first black man to be admitted to the bar in South Africa, which was known as the Cape Colony at the time. He returned to Trinidad to practice law and died there in 1911. Esedebe, *Pan-Africanism*, 47.

14 Joseph Booth (1851-1932) was an English missionary. He worked primarily in Africa to spread Christianity to the African people. After seeing the treatment of Africans by the Europeans, Booth began to advocate for Africa being returned to the Africans, and for the Europeans to leave.

15 The African Christian Union sought to spread Christianity to the African people, with funding raised in Great Britain. The organization was established in 1896 and based in Natal, part of present-day South Africa. Legum, *Pan-Africanism*, 22.
**History of Pan-Africanism**

Pan-Africanism is a large and overarching term that is used in a variety of ways, often leading to confusion over its meaning. Imanuel Geiss\(^\text{16}\) wrote at the conclusion of his lengthy book, which details in length the Pan-African movement from the beginning to 1968, that “[t]he entire movement is too vague, too ill-defined, too unclear in its purposes.”\(^\text{17}\) Merriam-Webster simply defines the term as the political unity of all African states;\(^\text{18}\) while Encyclopedia Britannica develops the concept further to include all members of African descent and elaborates more about the celebration of Africans’ shared history,\(^\text{19}\) just to highlight a few examples among the vast spectrum of definitions for Pan-Africanism. Some scholars such as Adekunle Ajala in *Pan-Africanism: Evolution, Progress and Prospects*, fail to provide a definition of Pan-Africanism for their readers altogether. Others, like J. Ayodele Langley,\(^\text{20}\) clearly define Pan-Africanism and even differentiate between two forms: New-World Pan-Africanism and West Indies/West African Pan-Africanism. There are also numerous definitions with geographical, societal, and ethnical dimensions, which will be discussed later.

The idea of Pan-Africanism is a relatively recent invention and its origins are in dispute, along with who should be credited with creating the concept. Henry Sylvester Williams, having organized the first Pan-African Congress in London in 1900, is given credit for a great deal of the organizational set up of the Pan-African movement. However, Williams’ biographer Owen Charles Mathurin, credits Edward Wilmot Blyden\(^\text{21}\) with having heavily

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16 Imanuel Geiss (1931-2012) was a German historian. He taught at the University of Bremen and wrote numerous books, primarily about German history.


20 J. Ayodele Langley (1943-2007) was a Gambian politician, diplomat, and academic.

21 Edward Wilmot Blyden (1832-1912) was a Liberian politician, serving as Liberian Secretary of State and Interior. Blyden believed that Zionism could be modeled to the plight of the African diaspora, favoring a return to Africa.
influenced his views.\textsuperscript{22} Blyden was an advocate for unity among the British West African colonies, wishing to form a United West African state. A biographer of Blyden, Hollis Lynch, also viewed him and his work as “the most important progenitor of Pan-Africanism.”\textsuperscript{23}

Rifts appeared early on in the Pan-African movement as to who should be included within the movement, what types of efforts should be put forth, and where. Blyden primarily focused on his region of Africa, and mainly on the plight of Africans. Williams sought change for all people of African descent, primarily for those within the British Empire. Issues of contention included whether the movement should focus solely on Africans from Africa or include people of African descent throughout the world, and whether to include people of mixed ancestry.\textsuperscript{24} Hollis Lynch believes that these differences were such a major point of contention for Blyden that they were the probable reason for Blyden’s refusal to attend the 1900 Pan-African Congress in London. W.E.B. Du Bois\textsuperscript{25} was chosen to preside over the London conference, but Blyden took offense to the decision because Du Bois was a person of mixed heritage, being half-Caucasian and half African-American. Blyden also felt that holding the conference in Europe, the source of imperialism, was counterproductive to the cause. The meeting being the first of its kind for Pan-Africanism, Blyden advocated that it should be held in Africa, possibly in Monrovia. These types of divergent ideologies within the Pan-African movement made for a fractious period that led to very few tangible results.

Similar splits developed among the next generation of Pan-Africanist leaders, such as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois, George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah. Adolph Reed Jr.\textsuperscript{26} details

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Mathurin, \textit{Henry Sylvester Williams and the Origins of the Pan-African Movement, 1869-1911}, 161.
\item \textsuperscript{25} W.E.B. Du Bois (1868-1963) was a prominent Civil Rights activist in the United States and heavily involved in the Pan-African movement. He attended and chaired several Pan-African conferences, and was seen as the leader of the Pan-African movement prior to 1945.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Adolph Reed Jr., born in the United States in 1947, is a professor of political science at the University of Pennsylvania.
\end{itemize}
the split between Garvey and Du Bois, which was symptomatic of this period in Pan-African history from the movement’s founding in 1900 to 1945. Reed details the conflict between Garvey and Du Bois, which concentrated on whether African-Americans should remain a part of American society or return to Africa. Garvey saw the only avenue to peaceful coexistence with whites was to remove African-Americans through his “Back to Africa” movement. Du Bois sought to reduce racism and discrimination while remaining a part of American society.

In conjunction with the racial disagreements early in the movement’s history, some scholars attempt to limit Pan-Africanism to a specific geographic area on the form of Sub-Saharan, Trans-Saharan, Trans-Atlantic, West Hemispheric, or Global Pan-Africanism. Racial and geographic topics are often connected within questions relating to Pan-Africanism, mainly whether to include the sizeable Arab population of North Africa in Pan-Africanist efforts. The Manchester Congress sought to bridge any perceived racial gaps amongst the colonized peoples of the world by including in the final resolution the phrasing “that before long the people of Asia and Africa would have broken their centuries-old chains of colonialism.” There were also efforts to highlight the plight of other groups struggling against European domination in such places as Palestine, Ethiopia, Eritrea, India, and Indochina. Colin Legum details how the Bandung Conference of 1955 would continue this theme of a struggle people of color share. The Bandung Conference would represent the first time formal ties were established between the nationalist movements of Africa and Asia, with both sides expressing support for the others strive for freedom.

30 Legum, Pan-Africanism, 41
32 Colin Legum (1919-2003) was a South African activist who fought against apartheid and was exiled because of his work, being able to return to South Africa in 1991 after the end of apartheid.
Numerous authors, such as A. Adu Boahen, Tajudeen Abdul-Raheem, Colin Legum, Ogba Adejoh Sylvester, and Okpanachi Idoko Anthony all agree that the 1945 Pan-African Congress in Manchester was a turning point in the Pan-African movement, but very few delve into why it is important. Boahen describes the conference as “leading to the eventual demise of the colonial system.”

Abdul-Raheem devotes a few paragraphs to the Congress, stating that “[f]or Africans on the continent it remains the most important Congress ever.” Legum likewise offers some reflection on the meeting, writing about a “new spirit awakened by Pan-Africanism –a farewell to patience and to the acceptance of suffering.” Esdebe dedicates the most space to the subject of the Manchester Congress, a whole chapter of thirty-four pages.

The 1945 Congress is seen as a turning point for the Pan-African movement transforming it from a diaspora centered movement to one in which a large amount of influence was held among individuals and groups based on the African continent. The Congress saw a sizeable portion of attendees come from Africa. A large number of vocal Pan-African leaders, representatives from political and independence groups as well as trade unions, were among those in attendance. In fact, although the reasons for their absence are not clear, there were no United States based groups in attendance. The only African-American attending was Du Bois, and he did so only as a private citizen. The increase in representation from the African continent brought about a fundamental change in the Pan-African movement, as evidenced by a marked change in the topics discussed, as well as in the tenor of the resolutions that came out of the Congress. These resolutions called for a more forceful demand for self-rule, and for the first time mentioned violence as a tool to gain self-rule.

An additional indication of the importance of the Manchester conference is that some scholars use this Congress as a dividing point in the history of the Pan-African movement. The American Society of African Culture divides Pan-African history

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38 Legum, *Pan-Africanism*, 137.
into two eras: 1900-1945 and post-1945. Esedebe also follows this outline, using the 1945 Congress as a demarcation point between two eras of Pan-Africanism. However, although Legum understands the importance of Manchester, he chose to emphasize the 1958 Conference of Independent African States held in Accra, Ghana (previously known as the Gold Coast) as a defining moment in the movement. The Pan-African movement being able to hold a congress on the African continent is important, symbolically displaying that Pan-Africanism had finally returned home and that Africans were in control.

**Pan-Africanism from 1900-1945**

The Pan-African organization came into existence with the first conference held in London in 1900. The conferences later became known as Pan-African Congresses. Subsequent congresses were held in Paris in 1919, London in 1921 and 1923, and New York in 1927. These Congresses, though under the loose umbrella of Pan-Africanism, did little to further the cause of African independence, focusing mainly on the condition of people of African descent throughout the rest of the world. The London conference of 1900 mentioned nothing of independence for Africa, but merely sought better treatment for Africans. These meetings requested that Africans be allowed to participate in local governments, that labor laws be improved to protect Africans, and that Africans be given the right to receive an education. All subsequent Congresses prior to Manchester declared similar sentiments. None of them, however, called for outright independence of Africa, but only for better treatment and living conditions for Africans in the diaspora.

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42 Ibid, 24.
43 Ibid, 28.
44 Ibid, 29.
46 Ibid, 30.
48 Ibid, 28, 134.
The delegates and attendees of these early meetings were composed of people from the United States or Europe, with minimal representation from African groups. Delegates from the Western world primarily focused on addressing the plight of the African diaspora, and the resolutions sought to call attention to the prejudice and discrimination faced by blacks. These meetings garnered little response from the European imperial powers or the United States; while the 1900 conference received a letter from Queen Victoria, stating, “Her Majesty’s Government will not overlook the interests and welfare of the native races,” this was seen as more of a platitude and was not perceived by the conference to carry any substance.

As the Congresses continued and the movement became widespread, many countries began to view these meetings as radical. The United States, United Kingdom, and France, for example, went as far as to deny passports and visas to certain delegates, and hindered some delegations’ ability to attain transportation to, or lodging during, the Congresses. This form of discrimination became more overt as the Pan-African movement became dominated by leaders such as George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah, who had socialistic ideas and close ties to the Soviet Union, and espoused more racial concepts regarding African independence. Although Padmore eventually severed official ties with the Communist Party due to its lackluster support of the independence movement in Africa, his ideology remained socialist-centered throughout his life. Padmore’s ideology influenced the resolutions that came out of Manchester, and although Nkrumah considered himself to be a socialist, he was a more ardent believer in African nationalism.

The Pan-African Congresses prior to 1945 focused heavily on matters concerning the African Diaspora and were restrained on the issue of African independence. With the entrance of Padmore and Nkrumah into the leadership of the Pan-African movement, the prior influence of the intelligentsia was replaced by a more vocal firebrand rhetoric. Padmore, Nkrumah, and others desired to hold a

different type of congress than those held previously. These organizers sought to include more Africans, and not just in the form of individuals. They invited to Manchester political groups and trade unions, involving the masses of African society, rather than just the upper rungs of the Diaspora.\footnote{Esedebe, 	extit{Pan-Africanism}, 171.} Du Bois only learned of the Congress from newspaper reports and wrote to Padmore in an effort to assume control of organizing the next Congress. Padmore was successful in retaining control of the Congress, but felt obligated to invite Du Bois to Manchester, although his role was largely ceremonial.\footnote{Geiss, 	extit{The Pan-African Movement}, 392.} This also led to a diplomatic game between Du Bois and Padmore, who both jockeyed to hold the Congress on their respective sides of the Atlantic Ocean.\footnote{Ibid, 392-398.} He who could hold the conference would be able to set its agenda.

Several important events and meetings occurred in the year prior to Manchester that would precipitate the need for the Congress as well as set its tone. The World Federation of Trade Unions had held a conference in Paris just two weeks prior to Manchester and brought together a number of delegations that represented African and African Diaspora trade unions.\footnote{Legum, 	extit{Pan-Africanism}, 161.} Over the summer, the British colony of Nigeria experienced a general strike involving up to 150,000 workers striking over pay.\footnote{First Cut, “Pan African Congress 1945 by Hakim Adi, Garvey by Cecil Gutzmore, Science by Geoff Palmer WEBCAST,” 	extit{Youtube}, October 17, 2015, accessed May 18, 2016, \url{http://www.youtube.com}.} In June 1945, London was the site of the All Colonial Peoples’ Conference – also known as the “Subject Peoples’ Conference” – which brought together groups from British colonies in an effort to have some impact on the outcome of the United Nations Organization meetings taking place at the same time in San Francisco.\footnote{Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, 	extit{The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited} (London: New Beacon Books, 1995), 19.} The predecessor to the World Federation of Trade Unions met in London in February 1945 as the World Trade Union Conference. The Pan-African Federation had formed in Manchester in 1944, which united several diverse “British-based Black organizations” along with some political and trade organizations from Africa.\footnote{Adi and Sherwood, 	extit{The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited}, 13.}
The Pan-African Federation played a key role in organizing Pan-Africanist efforts in Britain, which had become the epicenter of the Pan-African movement. These numerous meetings and conferences in the run-up to Manchester laid a critical foundation for the change that was coming to the Pan-African movement. The previous meetings brought together people of African descent from a widespread geographic area and a wide cross-section of society, bringing a plethora of ideas into one arena. The presence of such a diverse group of representatives created an atmosphere of hope and a renewed sense that change could be brought about and the current status quo in Africa brought to an end. These feelings were carried on to the Manchester Congress with a zeal as yet unseen in the movement.

Similar to the independence movement in India, the drive for African independence was sidestepped with the outbreak of World War II in favor of the war effort. Although there was still plenty of activity in the form of speeches and conferences, it was not until the end of the war that the idea of another congress took hold. Pan-African leaders wanted to hold the Allies accountable for what had been said during the course of the war, specifically for article 3 of the Atlantic Charter which called for the right of self-determination for all peoples. Pan-African groups were pressing the British government for answers regarding if and when this would be applied to Africa, especially in light of the contributions made by Africans in the fight against Germany and Japan.

**The Fifth Pan-African Congress at Manchester**

Manchester was chosen to hold the Fifth Congress due to it being a hub for Pan-Africanist activities as well as for its liberal racial relations and large African population relative to the rest of Britain. Manchester had not been the first or even second choice for the congressional planning committees. Paris was the first choice as the organizers thought Paris would be the site of any potential peace negotiations, as had been the case at the end of World War I. As it became apparent that the end of World War II

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would not be negotiated, coupled with shortages of basic supplies throughout, it was decided to move the congress to London. However, a few months prior to October, last minute changes were made and Manchester was selected as the final location.61

The Congress began on October 15 in Chorlton Town Hall in Manchester and covered a wide-range of topics over the course of the week, but primarily addressed issues of race and colonialism.62 W.E.B. Du Bois was elected president of the Congress due to his stature and his work in organizing the previous congresses. The numerous delegations and organizations would take turns informing the assembly of the current state of affairs in their country or region as it pertained to the current topic of the session. The week of the Congress was also peppered with several social functions, such as dances and dinners, in an effort to build camaraderie and relationships amongst the attendees.63

The discussion on race centered on the treatment of Africans and people of African ancestry within Britain. The problems people faced with employment, housing, and discrimination were detailed for the attendees. Resolutions pertaining to the issue called for Great Britain to remove any “discrimination on the account of race” and for local support groups to be empowered to help the minority population.64 Regarding the issue of race, the Congress delegates also denounced the race laws that were being enforced in South Africa, as well as the attempted land grab South Africa was pursuing against South-West Africa (present day Namibia). They also called for an end to both the white-dominated government of South Africa and the exclusion of natives from participating in government.65

The issue of colonialism brought heated discussions to the floor of the Congress, and Great Britain provided a lightning rod for much of the rhetoric. The hypocrisy of the Allies, preaching about freedom and democracy during the world war yet not providing those same freedoms to most of the world which was under their control, was not lost on the speakers at the Congress.

62 Ibid., 36.
64 Pan-African Congress and George Padmore, *History of the Pan-African Congress*, 64.
As part of the resolutions that came out of the Congress, many messages were directed towards the United Nations Organization in an attempt to influence positive outcomes for African issues in its deliberations as to how to proceed with decisions regarding post-World War II territories held by the Axis powers. An interesting characteristic of the Congress is those who were absent. One group from which there was no representation was the large Arab population of northern Africa. Also, no one from the French colonies was present. The absence of the Arab countries speaks to the difficulty the movement experienced in defining what was Pan-Africanism and who it covered. This glaring absence from the movement was not addressed until the 1958 Conference of Independent African States held in Ghana, which saw a majority of the states represented hail from North Africa. French colonial policies of “assimilation and integration” helped reduce, at least in the 1940s, the rise of nationalistic feelings in their colonies. This had changed greatly, however, by the 1950s, and French colonies succeeded in sending representation to the 1958 conference. From then forward, a united Africa was present at such meetings.

The resolutions adopted by the Fifth Congress contain some of the most powerful language that had been heard from the Pan-African movement up to that point. This is the milestone that divided the Pan-African movement into two eras, pre-1945 and post-1945. The language was direct and forceful, while the commentary primarily pertained to African issues and drew wide-ranging support. The two most important sections of the resolutions are the “Declaration to the Colonial Powers” and the “Declaration to the Colonial Peoples,” as they both deal directly with colonialism and the aspirations of the African people.

The first of these resolutions, the “Declaration to the Colonial Powers,” was co-written by Padmore, Nkrumah, and De Bois. The resolution was a compromise between the radicals Padmore and Nkrumah, and the more cautious Du Bois. In the following passage, the Congress signals a turning point in the relations between the colonizer and the colonized.

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70 Ibid., 407.
The delegates believe in peace. How could it be otherwise, when for centuries the African peoples have been the victims of violence and slavery? Yet if the Western world is still determined to rule mankind by force, then Africans, as a last resort, may have to appeal to force in the effort to achieve freedom, even if force destroys them and the world.\footnote{Pan-African Congress and George Padmore, \textit{History of the Pan-African Congress}, 5.}

This is the first example of Africans threatening to use violence against European imperialism. The commission to paper of those words, threatening the use of force to achieve an end, symbolically changed the relationship between Africa and Europe.

George Padmore and Kwame Nkrumah wrote the “Declaration to the Colonial Peoples,” a call to action for the people of Africa. This declaration was heavily influenced by communist ideology, appealing to the masses, with workers seen as an important group vital to any independence effort:

The object of imperialist Powers is to exploit. By granting the right to colonial peoples to govern themselves that object is defeated. Therefore, the struggle for political power by colonial and subject peoples is the first step towards, and the necessary prerequisite to, complete social, economic and political emancipation. The Fifth Pan-African Congress therefore calls on the workers and farmers of the Colonies to organize effectively. Colonial workers must be in the front of the battle against imperialism. Your weapons-the strike and the boycott- are invincible.\footnote{Legum, \textit{Pan-Africanism}, 137.}

“Your weapons- the strike and the boycott- are invincible” is an important phrase, empowering those at the bottom of society with a chance to have an impact on the future of Africa. Padmore utilized his communist background to internationalize the struggle and draw more support at the end of his section by writing,
“Colonial and subject peoples of the world, Unite!”73 This mobilizing call for Africans to unite and resist against European imperialism was seen as paramount to this period of Pan-Africanism.

Regarding the Atlantic Charter, section three of the Manchester resolutions asked that, “The principles of the Four Freedoms74 and the Atlantic Charter be put into practice at once.”75 This provided a direct challenge to the imperial powers themselves to abide by the doctrines they expected the international community to abide by. The hypocrisy of an empire continuing to embrace imperial holdings after World War II was blatant, and seen as a flagrant violation in the eyes of colonial peoples. Britain, France, and the United States fought for six years at the cost of eleven million military fatalities76 and unprecedented destruction throughout Europe and Asia, purportedly to ensure the “freedom of the free world,” only to continue to subjugate more than half of the world’s population. Justification to hold on to such a large swath of the Earth became tenuous at best during the post-war era.

Another issue that the Fifth Pan-African Congress chose to target was the original justification Europeans used for colonizing Africa. The “White Man’s Burden” and bringing civilization to the Dark continent of Africa were used as moral justification for

73 Legum, *Pan-Africanism*, 137. The communist influence is clearly seen in this quote when compared to the ending line of the *Communist Manifesto*, “Working men of all countries, unite!” Friedrich Engels and Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto*, (1848).

74 The Four Freedoms refers to the 1941 State of the Union address given by President Franklin D. Roosevelt in which he called for “a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. The first is freedom of speech and expression—everywhere in the world. The second is freedom of every person to worship God in his own way—everywhere in the world. The third is freedom from want—which, translated into world terms, means economic understandings which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants—everywhere in the world. The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world.” “Franklin D. Roosevelt, 1941 State of the Union Address ‘The Four Freedoms,’” *Voices of Democracy: The U.S. Oratory Project*, January 6, 1941, accessed May 21, 2016, http://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/.


annexation of large areas of land. The Congress challenged this notion, and instead exposed the true intentions of Europeans:

That since the advent of British, French, Belgian and other Europeans in West Africa, there has been regression instead of progress as a result of systematic exploitation by these alien imperialist Powers. The claims of ‘partnership’, ‘Trusteeship’, ‘guardianship’, and the ‘mandate system’, do not serve the political wishes of the people of West Africa.

Exposing the true intention of European imperialism and framing it against the original context was an important challenge thrown at Europe which removed any altruistic notions. It was stated “[t]hat there has been a systematic exploitation of the economic resources of the West African territories by imperialist Powers to the detriment of the inhabitants…with the result that the standard of living has fallen below subsistence level.” The Congress succeeded in removing what little moral justification Europe had for holding on to African colonies, and exposed their true reasoning, which was pure economic greed.

Notable Attendees at Manchester

The Fifth Pan-African Congress in Manchester brought together many of the leading figures of the Pan-African movement. With this conference being the first to see the inclusion of a large number of organizations and people from Africa, this allowed many of the preeminent men within African political groups to gather, many of whom would be the next generation of African leaders. Numbers vary as to how many people actually attended

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77 The “White Man’s Burden,” synonymous to Mission Civilisatrice, sought to bring Western civilization to people considered uncivilized, “backward,” or barbaric by Western standards. This was used by Western countries as justification for colonizing Africa and Asia, and the methods that were used upon native peoples.
78 Legum, Pan-Africanism, 135.
79 Ibid.
the Congress – one hundred\textsuperscript{80} to two hundred\textsuperscript{81} attendees were present at Manchester – but regardless of the turnout, many of those in attendance would later have profound effects in many ways across the continent. For many of these figures the Congress represented their emergence on to the world stage, and into the arenas of Pan-Africanism and African nationalism.

Kwame Nkrumah would return to the Gold Coast (Ghana) and help organize and participate in the first election for the colony. He would eventually lead the colony in attaining independence, and became its first prime minister in 1951.\textsuperscript{82} His rule, however, took on dictatorial characteristics, and he was overthrown in 1966.\textsuperscript{83} George Padmore would continue his involvement in the Pan-Africanist effort and later became an adviser to Nkrumah. Jomo Kenyatta was working in various parts of England prior to the 1945 congress and joined the effort to organize the Manchester congress. The following year he returned to Kenya to begin his political work to gain independence for Kenya. After being arrested and jailed for almost eight years by the colonial authorities for his political activities, Kenyatta was eventually released and went on to become Kenya’s first president in 1964.\textsuperscript{84}

Jaja Wachuku was a student from the University of Dublin who attended the Congress and delivered its closing remarks.\textsuperscript{85} He returned to his home country of Nigeria, and eventually became the first Nigerian Speaker of the House of Representatives. Later he attained several other high-level ministerial positions.\textsuperscript{86} Dr. Hastings Banda represented Nyasaland (present day Malawi) at the Manchester Congress while he was a practicing doctor in England. Banda returned to Nyasaland within a few years of the Manchester Congress, entering into politics due to his opposition to a proposed federation between Rhodesia and Nyasaland. After a self-imposed

\textsuperscript{81} Ajala, \textit{Pan-Africanism}, 10.
\textsuperscript{83} Ibid., 361.
\textsuperscript{84} Adi and Sherwood, \textit{The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited}, 139.
\textsuperscript{85} American Society of African Culture, \textit{Pan-Africanism Reconstructed}, 361.
\textsuperscript{86} Adi and Sherwood, \textit{The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited}, 148.
exile, a return to Nyasaland, and subsequent imprisonment, Banda was freed in 1960 and became the de facto ruler of the renamed Malawi from 1961 until 1994, having ruled as an authoritarian for three decades.  

I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson was similar to Padmore and Nkrumah, having an affinity for the communist ideology. Johnson was considered very radical and influential in his work to organize workers and trade unions in Sierra Leone in the 1930s and 1940s. He helped found the West African National Secretariat, which came directly out of Manchester. He entered into politics in the 1950s and helped with the drafting of Sierra Leone’s constitution.

**Pan-Africanism after Manchester**

There was an energy as Manchester concluded and its participants returned home. Immediately following the Congress, there was an attempt to cement the connections forged in Manchester and “publicise the resolutions” from the Congress. However, an overarching organization was not formed. Instead, Kwame Nkrumah created the West African National Secretariat in December 1945, which, as the name suggests, focused primarily on West Africa. He saw this as a way to promote the creation of a federation in West Africa, leading to a United States of Africa. This emphasis on West Africa created some tension among other groups within the Pan-Africanism movement, notably from the West Indies. Nkrumah, however, believed that due to the dominance of British rule in West Africa, their shared traditions and similar style of governments, formation of a federal state that could one day bring the aspirations of Pan-Africanism to fruition in the continent had the best chance in West Africa.

There was a noticeable downturn in the efforts of Pan-Africanism immediately after Manchester. It appears as if, after Manchester, the representatives scattered back to their respective colonies to focus on enabling change from within the colony. Kwame Nkrumah returned to the Gold Coast in 1947 where he

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88 Ibid., 137.
entered into local politics. This left a vacuum at the West African National Secretariat, which collapsed shortly after his departure.\(^\text{91}\) Jomo Kenyatta had also returned to Kenya in 1946, becoming head of the Kenyan independence party in 1947.\(^\text{92}\) As part of the shift in Pan-Africanism from the United States towards Africa, the influence of Du Bois was reduced, and his power within the movement was no longer the same. George Padmore was one of the few influential figures within Pan-Africanism to have stayed in London for any length of time after Manchester, and he was one of the primary conduits for communication between Africa, Europe, and America.\(^\text{93}\)

For a period of a little over a decade following Manchester, nationalistic efforts trumped any coordinated Pan-Africanist efforts. Concerted political efforts began in the Gold Coast, Kenya, Sierra Leone, and Nigeria to move those colonies towards independence. At best, regionalism, most prevalent in West Africa, took its place. Pan-Africanism would be evoked when confronting European imperialism, but if one African country wanted another African country’s territory, Pan-Africanism was easily forgotten. This period in African history is a sadly contradictory time for Pan-Africanism. Its ultimate goal of freedom and independence was being attained across the continent at a dizzying speed, but at the same time, the ever-present legacies of imperialism, poorly defined borders, European treaties that ignored long standing tradition and ownership of land, and an imbalance of natural resources, led to conflicts among Africans that would linger for decades.

**Legacy of the Fifth Pan-African Congress and of Pan-Africanism**

Manchester had a lasting effect on the Pan-African movement, principally by focusing the effort on Africa and away from the diaspora. For many Africans, this Pan-African Congress was the first time they would have a say in their own future. The connections made and relationships built encouraged those in


\(^{92}\) Adi and Sherwood, *The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress Revisited*, 139.

attendance to return home and affect change from within. This contributed to a diluted form of Pan-African nationalism, advocating for unity among Africans, but minimizing calls for an overarching federal state. While this represented a setback to larger scale Pan-African goals, it did succeed in achieving independence for nearly half of Africa by 1960.94

Nkrumah led early efforts to foster community and unity among these newly independent states as early as 1958 with the All-African People’s Conference in Ghana, with subsequent conferences held in 1960 in Tunis and 1961 in Cairo. These conferences, and all succeeding Pan-African Congresses, were modeled off Manchester. They were diverse African-led representative assemblies that included as many constituencies as possible, and displayed unity against imperialism where it remained in Africa. The Bandung Conference of 1955 also brought an aspect of solidarity to the colonial peoples of Africa and Asia, including the Middle East, declaring their joint assertion that they had the right to be free from foreign interference.95

The Pan-African movement became so African-centered, that Pan-African groups from Europe, the United States, and the West Indies became observers within the Pan-African movement at best, or were completely marginalized. This drastic change in such a short time demonstrates the speed with which Africa was able to develop politically and socially, and to take the reins of the movement. This unexpected event forced those groups that were pushed out to develop their own Pan-African structure, which has now taken on a more cultural tone, reconnecting with one’s roots and embracing one’s heritage as with the Black Power or Rastafarian movements, rather than to politically or physically unify with Africa.96

The relative success of decolonization brought about a renewed interest in the idea of a politically unified Africa. After the death of George Padmore, efforts for unity were spearheaded by Kwame Nkrumah, who succeeded with the creation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU). Nkrumah envisioned a United States of Africa, with all African countries following one

94 Geiss, _The Pan-African Movement_, 421.
95 Legum, _Pan-Africanism_, 138.
96 Esdebe, _Pan-Africanism_, 233.
leader, with Nkrumah himself filling this role. This, however, was a mixed success due to ideological differences among the countries involved. There were two sides at odds over the creation of the OAU: the more radical Casablanca group headed by Ghana, with Egypt, Algeria, and Libya, which sought a strong union; and the Monrovian group, led by Senegal, Liberia, Nigeria, and Ethiopia, seen as the more moderate group, which believed a union was a far-off prospect. Compromise was needed to achieve anything concrete, and in this instance, the Monrovian group prevailed, producing a watered-down Organization of African Unity which saw a weak central organization and no ability to enforce its mandates or decisions. As more and more of Africa became independent, with these newly formed countries unlikely to cede control over to a “foreign power,” the idea of a United States of Africa became increasingly remote. The idea all but died as the political union failed after only a few years, and Nkrumah was becoming increasingly unpopular in his native Ghana.

Conclusion

The ideas of Edward Wilmot Blyden, Henry Sylvester Williams, W.E.B. Du Bois, and many other pioneers of Pan-Africanism brought about some of the greatest change the world has ever seen. The idea that one group should not rule over another without consent was not a new concept, as seen with the American Revolution. Nevertheless, the idea that people were not better than others simply because of the color of their skin, and that one’s skin color did not automatically allow domination of another, was slowly gaining traction as a concept. Haile Selassie, ruler of Ethiopia from 1916 to 1974, spoke to this idea with great power at the 1963 United Nations General Assembly in:

On the question of racial discrimination, the Addis Ababa Conference taught, to those who will learn, this further lesson: that until the philosophy which holds one race superior and another inferior is finally

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98 Ibid., 223.
99 Ibid., 231.
and permanently discredited and abandoned; that until there are no longer first class and second class citizens of any nation; that until the color of a man's skin is of no more significance than the color of his eyes; that until the basic human rights are equally guaranteed to all without regard to race; that until that day, the dream of lasting peace and world citizenship and the rule of international morality will remain but a fleeting illusion, to be pursued but never attained.  

Although Pan-Africanism has failed to achieve its goal of a united Africa, the empowerment of Africans through the efforts of pan-Africanism has moved the power from European hands into the hands of Africans themselves. The idea of Pan-Africanism eventually reversed the status quo with regards to Africans, and instead introduced the concept that there was strength to be had in the one thing that unified them – their skin color – and to use that commonality to unify and rise up as a people.

Pan-Africanism has had a rocky road during its relatively short existence. Its definition is vague, its aim have been fluid, and its audience questionable at times. This uncertainty surrounding the concept has produced some invariably similar results; such as lackluster commitments and proposals, unrealistic goals, and myriad of leaders, sometimes with divergent foci. Perhaps the most encompassing definition created is from Jack Woddis, author of *Africa: The Way Ahead*, in which he sums up Pan-Africanism, thus: “In short, Pan-Africanism is African independence, African unity, ‘African personality,’ and radical social change – and all four conceptions are closely linked.”

Applying that definition of Pan-Africanism to Manchester, it can be seen that the Congress fulfills said requirements. The removal of the Europeans and the right to govern themselves was proclaimed in almost every section of the resolutions to come out of the congress. African unity was seen as the primary tool to attain freedom, primarily through the uniting of the lower working

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classes. Manchester began to foster an “African personality,” as it was the first congress where Africans had a voice, were given equal standing with their African cousins from Europe and America, and were given a chance to explain how they saw things and what they would like to see happen. Radical social change evidently took place as well, although in this earlier period, it occurred by small increments. The workers’ call to arms, exhorting them to use their “invincible weapons” and declaring that force could be used as a last resort, were essential changes to a society that had not previously considered – or had the ability of, employing such tactics.

Manchester did not wipe clean the stain of imperialism from the face of Africa the day after the Congress concluded, nor has Pan-Africanism succeeded in doing so in the seventy-one years since that week in October 1945. The people who organized the congress knew that their work in Manchester would not bring about immediate change, and yet strove to at least begin the process of bringing change they hoped for to Africa. They conducted this campaign in a very logical, thoughtful, and relatively peaceful manner. They were clear in one regard: that freedom and independence were going to happen, one way or another, and their resiliency eventually won out against the European powers. Although Manchester was not the end of the problem, it was definitely the beginning on a road to a robust Pan-African movement.

Today’s Pan-Africanism is a culmination of the conferences and congresses held in London, New York, Paris, Manchester, Bandung, Accra, Addis Ababa, Tunis, Cairo, and Lagos. Pan-Africanism has changed, evolved, and molded to fit the times and needs of a diverse African continent. Leaders have come and gone, but Pan-Africanism has lingered and endured. There is no right and no wrong form of Pan-Africanism. While there is a general starting point to the movement in the late 19th century, it is doubtful that there will ever be an end date to this idea, as it will continue to morph through the people it affects the most, and even through those it does not.

Pan-Africanism has left an indelible legacy on world history. Today the African Union, the spiritual successor to the early efforts of Pan-Africanism, is a strong union encompassing fifty-four nations of Africa. There are talks underway within the African Union about forming a union government, with models
ranging from the European Union to a federal structure like the United States. It is unknown where these talks will take the African Union, and there are many obstacles standing in its way, but a look back on the history of Africa and the Pan-African movement shows the possibility of rapid change.

Manchester holds a significance in world history similar to the First Continental Congress during the American Revolution, the Tennis Court Oath of the French Revolution, and the Haitian Revolution. This Pan-African Congress resulted in a change in the world order that shook the status quo. These events are hailed collectively as a courageous stand by oppressed peoples seeking freedom and standing up for their natural rights. Manchester was no different and, as such, it deserves all the respect and importance accorded to other pivotal hallmarks of world history.

A news article detailing the proceeding in Manchester. This was typical coverage of the event outside of local Manchester news and black newspapers. Courtesy of Sydney Tribune, Oct. 30, 1945.
Africa Finds its Voice

September 14, 1946

Mr. Metz Lochard, Editor
Chicago Defender
3435 Indiana Avenue
Chicago, Illinois

My dear Mr. Lochard:

The Board of Directors of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People has asked me to attend the Pan African Congress which has been called from October 15th to 21st in London. There are going to be difficulties in getting transportation both going and especially for return and also in getting the consent of the State and War Departments and a British visa. I am beginning to work on these. If you see any way of helping, I should be glad to have you do so. Perhaps, the Chicago Congressman might help.

Secondly, there is the question of reporting the Congress. Pratiss of the "Pittsburgh Courier" has a passport but has not yet gotten the British visa and he, I think, is planning to go to the Paris meeting of trade unions; whether he will be in London or not, I do not know. There ought, of course, to be special reports and I have thought of several possibilities: First, special letters to the Defender; second, letters to the Associated Negro Press and third, some special arrangement with one or more of the New York papers. Think this matter over and advise me.

I shall probably be in Chicago September 20th and will look you up.

Very sincerely yours,

W. E. B. DuBois

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**Author Bio**

Chris Varela graduated from CSUSB in December of 2016 with a B.A. in History. He plans on pursuing his teacher credential through CSUSB in the Fall of 2017. After completing his credential, Chris will be moving to rural Northern California to teach social sciences at the high school level. He has a passion for educating future generations and hopes to make a positive impact on his community through teaching. Any free moment Chris has, he can be found traveling the Western U.S. in his travel trailer with his husband Josh, and their Australian Shepherds, Patxi (pronounced pah-chee) and Jackson.