

# Africa-U.S. Partnership in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

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Photo by Rob Grossman

## Introduction

People of African descent are witnessing an unprecedented economic and political partnership between the United States and Africa in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Never before has the United States and Africa entered into such a positive and important relationship that has the potential to move the world in the right direction. Before this period, especially after World War II, the United States actually had a policy of allowing the continent of Africa to remain Europe's sphere of influence. That includes Europe using Africa's natural resources to rebuild its destroyed countries, while the United States focused on East Asia. By the year 2000 however, the United States had realized that it needed Africa more than it might have expected. African Americans, whose population is now nearly 40 million, have been the driving force behind this new partnership between Africa and the United States. Africans themselves have welcomed the United States and have shown their willingness to work with America on many important issues.

This article explores the new partnership between the United States and Africa in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It examines the types of political, economic and social endeavors

that the two entities have undertaken and promise to undertake in the years and decades to come. It also shows that this new policy of the United States towards Africa goes beyond political parties (Democrats and Republicans), which is why many people across the world have been surprised to see a Republican president and government showing support for these new ties with Africa. I will briefly highlight some of the developments of this new relationship between the United States government and Africa. And, will also examine the reaction of Europe pertaining to its future relationship with Africa, especially as that continent begins to redirect its friendship towards the United States. The role that African Americans play in influencing the United States government in all of these developments will also be examined. Moreover, examples of African Americans' personal efforts to contribute to the development of Africa will be provided.

### **Shifting Relationship Between Africa/U.S. and Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century**

Africa's natural and human resources are very vital to the United States and Europe, and they have always remained the focus of their partnerships. Gordon et al. pointed out that: "Mineral and metal deposits in Africa are among the most important in the world. South Africa alone produces nearly one-quarter of the world's gold and holds 84 percent of the world's total reserve base of the platinum

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minerals. Africa also remains the source of many minerals strategic to the United States: 54 percent of the world's cobalt, 32 percent of bauxite, 52 percent of manganese, 81 percent of chromium stocks.”<sup>i</sup> The United States has also benefited enormously from African human labor in the past 300 years.<sup>ii</sup> However, because the United States left Africa to be Europe's sphere of influence following World War II, it must be very active in establishing new influence on the continent. According to Sanford J.

Ungar: “After Harry Truman succeeded to the presidency on Roosevelt's death, Byrnes [James Byrnes] was named secretary of state and U.S. policy in Africa was brought back in line with European thinking. Truman tended to follow Churchill's lead, and Dean Acheson, the man who later became Truman's secretary of state, saw Africa as a pawn in the Cold War, but one that was Western Europe's job to control.”<sup>iii</sup> After almost half a century, while trade between East Asia and the United States has

contributed significantly to the rise in the living standards of East Asians, trade between Africa and Europe has not been as successful. Prof. Ali A. Mazrui, Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities, State University of New York at Binghamton, also lamented on this emerging rivalry for influence in Africa between Europe and the United States. Prof. Mazrui notes that the "... first stage in Africa's economic development [is] the 'Euro-African' phase of African capitalism. The question which then arises is whether there is an Americo-African phase of African capitalism."<sup>iv</sup> Many African countries are turning to the United States for stronger and successful economic partnerships. In a January 28, 2003, *New York Times* article, Somini Sengupta wrote of the West African country of Senegal, a former French colony, "...cozying up to the Americans and, not coincidentally, threatening the French with a loss of influence."<sup>v</sup>

### **Economic Relations Between Europe/United States and Africa**

It has been widely noted that following World War II, South East Asia and Africa were on the same economic level, but their trade relations with the United States has resulted in the improvement of lives, while Africa's trade relations with Europe has failed to produce any significant improvement in the lives of Africans. According to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), South East Asia is the recipient of an estimated \$53

billion in U.S. direct investments and it is the third largest overseas market for U.S. exports. Two-way ASEAN-U.S. trade was estimated at \$120 billion in 2001.<sup>vi</sup> Research by this author shows that as of 2001, the total population of Southeast Asia was 540 million.<sup>vii</sup>

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Africa's total population as of July 2003 was estimated at 857 million, 13.5% of the world's total.<sup>viii</sup> In 2001, the European Union's merchandise exports to Africa were \$59.3 billion, representing 2.6% of all of its merchandise exports during that year. Its merchandise imports from Africa in 2001 was \$72.2 billion, representing

3.1% of its total imports.<sup>ix</sup> In 2001, over half (51.7%) of Africa's total merchandise exports went to Western Europe.<sup>x</sup> Some have argued that if Europe pays Africans a fair price for their resources, that continent would be better off economically today. Due to such unfair trade policies, Africa ends up in debt because it cannot afford to pay Europeans for the goods and services that it buys from them. According to the advocacy organization, Debt, AIDS, Trade in Africa (DATA), Africa owes nearly \$300 billion in debt, and that Sub-Saharan Africa spends \$14.5 billion dollars annually to repay its debts to rich countries.<sup>xi</sup> Of the world's Gross World Product (GWP, PPP) of \$47 trillion in 2001, Africa's share was only \$1.737 trillion (3.7%).<sup>xii</sup> As individual countries the United States is the largest importer of goods and services from Africa. According to the 2002 United Nations Economic Report on Africa, in 2000, the United States imported \$27.64 billion of goods and services from Africa.<sup>xiii</sup> In 2002 merchandise trade between sub-Sahara Africa and the United States was \$27.8 billion.<sup>xiv</sup>

It has also been reported that the United States is discussing free trade agreements with a number of African countries. According to the U.S. Department of State: "In November 2002, U.S. Trade Representative [Robert] Zoellick notified Congress of the President's intent to initiate a free trade agreement (FTA) with the five member countries of the Southern African Customs Union (SACU):

Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa, and Swaziland. The proposed FTA is in keeping with AGOA, which encouraged the pursuit of free trade agreements with sub-Saharan African countries.”<sup>xv</sup> “The SACU represents the largest U.S. export market in sub-Saharan Africa. Last year [2002] sales topped more than \$3 billion,” writes Mora McLean.<sup>xvi</sup> Also, Elizabeth Becker reported on January 22, 2003 that the United States and Morocco had entered into discussions for a free trade agreement, but that European nations were concerned about such a trade agreement. According to Becker: “The competition between the United States and Europe over trade with Morocco, a country that imports \$11 billion worth of goods a year, blew up into a surprising diplomatic quarrel during March 2004 meetings. French officials were said to have raised questions about Morocco’s ability to have free trade with both the United States and Europe. Ambassador Zoellick [Robert B. Zoellick, U.S. Trade Representative] responded with a riposte he repeated today, accusing France of refusing to recognize that Morocco is no longer its colony.”<sup>xvii</sup>

In 2000, with major efforts by the Congressional Black Caucus (a group of over 35 African American Democratic legislators in the U.S. House of Representatives) and other organizations that lobby for Africa, the United States Congress passed a trade bill, the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), which was signed by President Bill Clinton. About 38 African countries with good

governance are qualified to participate in AGOA. The African Growth and Opportunity Act reduces or eliminates tariffs on over 1,800 items shipped from Africa to the United States. Marc Lacey reported for the *New York Times* on November 14, 2003, that for many African countries, AGOA has been a lifesaver. Lacey writes: “To hear President Yoweri Museveni tell it, AGOA is the best thing the West has done for Africa since independence.” Many Africans support that claim, which is why blacks in the United States must be proud of what AGOA is accomplishing and must also never underestimate their rising international influence. Lacey goes on to point out that because of AGOA: “Kenya has projected 50,000 AGOA-related jobs. Lesotho estimates it has created 10,000 new jobs in the last year, most of them going to young women. Uganda has seen its exports to the United States increase from a minuscule \$32,000 in 2002 to \$909,000 in the first nine months of this year, an increase that will widen by year’s end.”<sup>xviii</sup> In an effort to reduce its dependence on Middle East crude oil, the United States is said to be in the process of building two pipelines from Nigeria and Chad to transport oil from Africa to the United States, which is said to have 8% of the world’s known reserve. “The West African pipeline will link the Escravos gas field in Nigeria with the Ghanaian market. West Africa, mainly Angola and Nigeria, now supplies about 15 percent of U.S. oil imports to the

United States, and U.S. officials project African oil could account for 25 percent of their country’s crude imports by 2015.”<sup>xix</sup> Timothy Burn reported in the *Washington Times* on September 28, 2003, that the American oil company, ChevronTexaco, has plans to invest up to \$20 billion in West and Central African oil production.<sup>xx</sup>

The United States government has also set up an annual \$5 billion account known as the Millennium Challenge Corporation, that will be distributed to African nations with good governance.<sup>xxi</sup> Also, during his 2003 State of the Union address, President George W. Bush pledged \$15 billion in the next five years to be used to fight HIV/AIDS in Africa and other parts of the world. No other American, European leader or administration had ever made such a pledge in the history of the West’s relationship with Africa. The *Guardian* (UK) reported on June 3, 2003, that Britain’s Prime Minister, Tony Blair conceded that the European Union would fall short of meeting the \$1 billion pledge it had made to match the United States pledge to help fight AIDS and other diseases in Africa.<sup>xxii</sup>

### **African Americans and Their Efforts in Helping Africa Develop**

African Americans are playing a vital role in America’s new partnership with Africa. Melvin P. Foote, President and CEO of the Constituency for Africa, wrote in the *New York Newsday* newspaper

pertaining to this issue of blacks in the United States coming to the aid of Africa: "The degree to which the United States comes to respond to Africa, economically, politically and on a humanitarian basis, will depend largely on the lobbying efforts of

African Americans. It stands to reason that if African Americans are seen not to care about Africa - then why would the Irish, Polish, Jewish, Italians and the myriad of hyphenated-Americans care? On the other hand, if African Americans can successfully demon-

strate why Africa does in fact matter, then the potential for U.S. engagement with the continent in a meaningful way to promote progress and development is unlimited!"<sup>xxiii</sup> Julianne Malveaux, columnist for *USA Today* newspaper, also calls for blacks in the United States to pay attention to Africa. She writes that: "The link between African-Americans and our brothers and sisters is too often a sentimental connection, with gifts and goodwill, kinship and kente cloth being exchanged... African-Americans can be advocates for the African continent, for debt forgiveness and economic development. Absent our involvement, we can sit by and watch Africans get caught up in the prevailing anti-American sentiment that our country represents 6% of the world's population but uses a disproportionate share of its resources.... If African-Americans do not begin the dialogue, it is likely it won't take place."<sup>xxiv</sup> African Americans were also among those Americans who strongly urged the Bush administration to intervene in the 14-year civil war in Liberia and stop that war in the summer of 2003.<sup>xxv</sup>

Individual African Americans are also helping Africa in their own special ways. For example, Oprah Winfrey, an African American billionaire is reported to have established a \$10 million "Oprah Winfrey Leadership Academy for Girls" in South Africa. She is also reported to have spent \$6 million on a program called "Christmas Kindness" in South Africa.<sup>xxvi</sup> African American actor,

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Denzel Washington and his wife Pauletta were reported to have donated \$1 million to the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund.<sup>xxvii</sup> Moreover, due largely to efforts by African Americans, an increasing number of Africans are now immigrating to the United States.<sup>xxviii</sup>

Today African immigrants can be found teaching at colleges and universities, and conducting research at America's great research centers (including, the National Aeronautics and Space Administration, NASA), all across the country. As of 1998, a black African from Mali, Dr. Cheick Diarra, was NASA's Manager, Mars Exploration Program Education and Outreach Office for Pathfinder Jet Propulsion Laboratory, in Pasadena, California. In an online interview with the public, Dr. Diarra was asked: "What part do you play in designing future Mars missions?" His answer was: "As a Navigator, I design the strategy to go from Earth to Mars and the results of the strategy determine the size of the tanks for example."<sup>xxix</sup> In France, for instance, it is reported that "...there are more than 50 professions closed to non-EU citizens..."<sup>xxx</sup> Andrew England reported in a Washington Times article on March 20, 2003, that Mr. Noah Samara, an Ethiopian immigrant in the United States, in 1999 launched a WorldSpace satellite radio orbiting above the Earth, broadcasting daily educational programs to remote areas in Africa including Mandera, Kenya. The satellite radio known as XM Radio, also broadcast many American

and foreign programs including NPR, CNN and the BBC. According to England: " In one of the few cases of technology being delivered to consumers in Africa before those in the United States, Africans were able to receive satellite Radio in 1999. American listeners got their first taste in September 2001, when XM Satellite Radio went live."<sup>xxxi</sup> Writing about why most young Senegalese crave coming to the United States, Sengupta writes: "Among ordinary Senegalese, the resentment against all things French is based on the one thing they know best: the difficulties of getting a visa to study or work in France. (They have not had as much experience with the American immigration bureaucracy.)"<sup>xxxii</sup> The irony is that, it is European countries who invest large sums of money in the U.S., which in turn U.S. banks or credit cards loan to immigrants in the country to run their businesses or to pay for their education, and they go on to help America create a huge gap with Europe. So Europe is indirectly paying for the education of the same Africans that they deny entry to their countries. According to Robert J. Samuelson of the Washington Post: "At the end of 2001, foreigners owned \$1.7 trillion of U.S. stocks and \$3.2 trillion of government and corporate bonds.... Japan and Europe don't absorb all their own savings. The surpluses get invested in the United States, propping up the demand for dollars and explaining the huge foreign holdings of U.S. stocks and bonds."<sup>xxxiii</sup> That is a combined total

of \$4.9 trillion, almost 50% of the \$10 trillion GDP of the United States in 2001.

## Conclusion

We have briefly examined important developments in the new partnership between Africa and the United States. With satellite television and the emergence of the internet, and cell phones, more and more people all across the world are now seeing what is happening in the international system. Also, European and developed countries are now closely monitored in how they treat Africa and other developing countries. Africans see their fellow compatriots successful in the U.S., while in Europe, they lack any real chance for upward mobility. While it is very possible in the next decade that diverging worldviews, especially between the United States and the European Union, have the potential to result in another Cold War. The United States currently seems to have an advantage partly because of the 38 million African American population.

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, blacks in the U.S. have more financial capital or access to it than blacks in Africa, but blacks in Africa have excess useful land and abundant natural and human resources. It has been reported that the buying power of blacks in the United States in 2002 was \$646 billion and it is projected to increase to \$853 billion in 2007.<sup>xxxiv</sup> These groups need to find a way to merge these assets and begin to produce and establish themselves as major producers of useful products

and knowledge for the whole world. Speaking of the beginning of this new relationship between Africans and blacks in the United States, Prof. Mazrui writes: “The 21<sup>st</sup> century also may see the emergence of a new relationship between African people and African-American people.... Much still has to be done to solidify this relationship, but recognition of Africa’s importance by African Americans is a positive step toward building a lasting solidarity with African people.<sup>xxxv</sup> One must not forget that the total area of Africa is almost 11.7 million square miles. According to the 2002 World Almanac and Book of Facts, Africa’s share of the world area is 20.5 percent.<sup>xxxvi</sup> Africa’s total population is projected to be a billion in 2015. Numbers are always important in world politics. We now know that as of the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, every major discovery of land on earth has been completed, and that Africans own over 95% of their continent. That fact must not be underestimated. African Americans and the United States stand to profit enormously in this new partnership.

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## Endnotes

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