

Jeune Afrique 1961-1971: U.S. Race Relations

by

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Abstract

With the election in 2008 of Barack Hussein Obama as president of the United States, there is renewed interest in the African perspective on American politics. It remains to be seen whether Obama's election triggers abiding change or simply highlights the resurrection of the crucible of race relations in the U.S. as these played out during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. However, Obama's election has caused a groundswell of attention from around the world focusing on the current state of U.S. race relations. Although it is far too soon to evaluate the full impact that the election of the first African-American president may have on race relations in the United States, it should inform the assessment of this historical event by better understanding how the movement for racial equality that dominated news reports in the U.S. during the 1960s was portrayed for readers living in Africa during that period. During that same period, Africans were themselves engaged in a series of efforts to achieve similar racial equality.

In this article, the authors look back at the African perspective on U.S. race relations in the 1960s through the lens of *Jeune Afrique*, a major source of news for the African continent, particularly francophone Africa. A careful reading of *Jeune Afrique* from 1961 to 1971 reveals that more prominent attention in this publication was given to Pan Africanism and militarism against the white establishment than to the non-violent movement, principally under the leadership of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Obama's election may be the culmination of one of these movements, or both. This article concludes that the readership's interest dictated the selection made by the editors of *Jeune Afrique* about what to report about events in the U.S. For the reader of *Jeune Afrique*, although the type of non-violent civil resistance epitomized by Dr. King was inspirational, it was not practical given the historical underpinnings of race relations in Africa. The reader of *Jeune Afrique* was more likely to learn about the riots in Watts, the peevishness of James Baldwin, or the black power movement evoked by H. Rap Brown and Stokely Carmichael than about the march on Selma or the courage of Rosa Parks. To this readership of *Jeune Afrique* in the 1960s, the peaceful but resounding election of Barack Obama may not be the culmination of the events in the U.S. of the 1960s but a transformation of them.

With the election of Barack Hussein Obama as President of the United States there is renewed interest in the African/American connection both on the continent of Africa and in the U.S... This article examines the depth and breadth of coverage of U.S. race relations in *Jeune Afrique* during a very important decade for both Africa and America. The Sixties represented the first decade of independence for most African countries, and the decade encompassed the most dramatic moments of the civil rights struggle in America. *Jeune Afrique*, an independent weekly periodical published in France in French, has been a crucial voice of Africa since 1960. Béchir Ben Yamed, a former minister in the Tunisian government and the director general of *Jeune Afrique* since its inception, described its purpose in an editorial celebrating the journal's first decade.

A journal must accurately inform its readers, explain to them events as they happen, propose an interpretation, help the readers have a well documented opinion so that they can act as human beings and citizens in their judgment

Our credo at *Jeune Afrique* is that Africa is one in its diversity. Consequently, we make the same journal for all Africans, we react the same way for each African country; we try to interest each African in what is going on elsewhere in Africa. We support any manifestation of African fraternity: we fight and will always fight all those who consciously or unconsciously favor prejudice among Africans (Yamed, 1970, p. 13).

In other words, *Jeune Afrique* has been committed to serving the whole of Africa, regardless of ethnic, linguistic, and political differences that may exist among its readership. Although the journal's weekly circulation was only 8,400 in 1969, a survey conducted by SOFRES, a marketing research firm in France, estimated that 320,000 people read each issue, as most subscribers shared their copies with many others (SOFRES, 1970, p. 62).

Since the United States has one of the largest populations of people of African descent outside of Africa itself, and the U.S. has experienced a long fight against racism, it would be expected that in its earliest editions *Jeune Afrique* would publish significant reports about the U.S. The research questions addressed in the present study are: 1) How did *Jeune Afrique* cover U.S. race relations from 1961-1971 and 2) What does this tell us about how this period in American history might be understood by Africans? During the decade of the 1960s, *Jeune Afrique* featured political articles covering official diplomatic visits of Americans to Africa and Africans to America as well as presidential elections, civil rights news describing blacks'[1] struggles to change their status, special reports on civil rights leaders and militant black writers, sporting events involving black athletes, U.S. involvement in international conflicts and other topics of international interest such as the space program, progress in medicine and science, black entertainers and the American way of life.

Methodology and Data Analysis

The primary focus of this study was to examine how the United States race relations, in general and the civil rights movement in particular, were covered in *Jeune Afrique* from 1961 – 1971. Every *Jeune Afrique* from that time period was searched for the words U.S., American, race, Black and civil rights. Three hundred and thirty-one articles were identified. Using content analysis each was read and then grouped into four categories: American race relations, U.S.-Africa relations, United States relations with other nations and other U.S. issues. Of the 331 articles, 138 covered U.S. race relations. The U.S.-Africa relations category encompassed 96 articles that examined the bilateral relations between the United States and individual African countries and the continent at large. Topics in this category included visits and cooperation and U.S. elections. The U.S. and the world category included 42 articles that discussed primarily U.S. military involvement in other countries and the tensions with the Soviet Union, France and China and in the other issues category were the topics of American culture, sports, music and book reviews. In this last category there were articles that covered works by civil rights leaders and that discussed race relations briefly. They are included in our analysis of how race relations were portrayed during this decade as reported in the articles published in *Jeune Afrique*.

Topics of Articles in <i>Jeune Afrique</i> 1961 - 1971	# of articles
United States/America	331
U.S. race relations	138
U.S.-Africa relations	96
U.S. and the world	42
Other U.S. issues	55

Of the 331 articles about the United States that *Jeune Afrique* published between 1961 and 1971, race relations were given substantial coverage, comprising 42% of the articles during this period. This is important to note as the combined number of U.S.-Africa and the U.S.-world articles equals the number of articles on U.S. race relations. For present purposes, the focus will be on the articles that discussed U.S. race relations. Of the 138 articles covering U.S. race relations, the major focus in general was on the struggles of Blacks for equality and justice and, in particular, the civil rights movement, the events, and the people involved. It's important to remember that during this period, many African countries also were gaining their independence through their own struggles with the colonial powers.

American Race Relations

The African-American struggle against second-class citizenship has been widely publicized in the media both in the U.S. and abroad; indeed, the struggle for black equality has become one of the most visible aspects of American life. The coverage of U.S. race-relations in *Jeune Afrique* from 1961-1971 demonstrated both concern for and pride in black Americans' struggle for equality and justice. The 138 articles, gathered together, provide a solid foundation in U. S. Black History focusing Africans' attention on the major civil rights events in America. The contributors to these articles tended to be reporters who were in the U.S., only some of whom were black. In some cases the articles were French translations of articles that had appeared in *Time*, *Newsweek*, or *Life Magazine* with an introduction by a *Jeune Afrique* reporter sent specifically to cover a major civil rights event, such as school desegregation, the Freedom Riders, the 1963 March on Washington, and the urban riots in the late 60s. Usually the articles bore sensational titles such as "The Funeral of Racism", "What Will Kill U.S. Racism?", "The Bloodhounds are Launched", and other provocative or polemical phrases. Although the articles were obviously supportive of the struggles of blacks, the coverage tended to be accounts of events and not editorials with anti-racism messages. A 1961 article entitled "The Freedom Riders," for example, depicted the odyssey of the freedom riders through the South. James Peck (a white man) narrates his experience with seventeen white and black males who vowed to test the enforcement of the inter-state desegregation law. *Jeune Afrique* readers could sense the brutality that the young men met in Birmingham, Alabama where a crowd of 100 agitated white men waited for the riders, turned their bus over as they tried to enter the city, set the bus on fire, and trampled on or abused the riders. The focus of this article, however, was the riders' pride that they were making history. According to Peck (1961), "The whole world talks about our experience already, and the majority of American people followed our odyssey with admiration" (p. 25). *Jeune Afrique's* coverage of this event allowed many Africans to follow the plight of the freedom riders with admiration as well.

Another article, entitled “Our Report on American Racism: Not to Die from Shame,” explored the strategies used by blacks and sympathetic whites to counter the antagonism of segregationist white Southerners in their efforts to keep blacks away from the ballot box. Serge Lafaurie, a French journalist, who was a special envoy of *Jeune Afrique*, reported on the training and objectives of the 1964 Mississippi Summer Project workers. This article covered the training of the volunteers at Oxford College for Girls in southern Ohio, which included how to protect themselves when attacked, their reasons for joining - the idealism driving the white participants and the determination to rid the South of racism – the motivation of the black participants, but both white and black shared courage and a determination to act to bring about change. Their mission was to help blacks register to vote and recruit members for the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party (Lafaurie, 1964, p. 15).

In “Blacks to Kennedy: We Came for the Check,” Simon Malley, an African journalist who also served as correspondent at the United Nations, described briefly the reasons that motivated blacks to march on Washington on August 28, 1963. According to Malley (1963), the coalition of Southern Democrats and some Republicans had hampered the passage of the legislation submitted by Kennedy to grant certain rights to blacks. He contended that the march was a bold statement by blacks warning everyone that if their rights were not respected, they would be forced to pursue justice through violence. The article minimized the participation of whites in the march and stressed instead the coming together of black Southerners and Northerners and their determination to stand up for their rights (p. 14). This accounting is a bit far removed from the focus of the event in the U.S., which stressed the coming together of blacks and whites for equality for all. The song, “We Shall Overcome,” which the marchers sang while congregated in front of the Washington Monument, symbolized and embodied their unity in the struggle for justice and equality for all.

In his 1967 article, “The End of Integrationism: Neither Assimilation, nor Secession, Black Americans Engage in a New Way,” Ida Lewis, a black American journalist, contrasted the tactics of non-violence with the new program advocated by Stokely Carmichael. Lewis (1967) asserted that until 1967, black Americans’ struggle for civil rights had been assimilation, the merging of Blacks into the ‘melting pot.’ For Lewis, this would ultimately lead to a loss of identity for blacks. To prevent this loss of identity, Carmichael and other leaders of SNCC (Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee) advocated a new orientation for the black struggle, demanding equal rights without assimilation and by force where necessary. According to Carmichael, black Americans wanted the same rights as white Americans but they did not want to have to be white Americans. Carmichael had argued that white Americans were only in advance in what they had, not in who they were. Lewis (1967) pointed out that the changes on the African continent, the negritude movement and a growing pride in their African heritage, as well as the resistance from whites to integration, greatly influenced Carmichael and others who proposed Black Power as the new form of struggle.

Editorials

It is notable that in the 10 years from 1961- 1971, only two editorials were published by *Jeune Afrique* on American race relations. Both were written in 1968, by the same person, Béchir Ben Yamed, the director general of the journal. Both were published after the assassination of two leaders: Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy. In the editorial on Martin Luther King's assassination, "When There Remain No More Blacks...", Béchir Ben Yamed (1968a) proposed that the solution to U.S. racism was interracial marriage. He argued that interracial marriage was a critical step in the integration of blacks into all aspects of life in America. He asserted that a good president could initiate an education of all Americans that would convince Whites to accept blacks as full citizens and educate blacks so that they would be able to catch up despite the time lost.

In the second editorial entitled "Robert Kennedy," Béchir Ben Yamed (1968b) suggested that Robert Kennedy might have continued his brother's program if he had been elected president of the United States. "His program," Yamed wrote, "would have been geared towards the elimination of injustice, inequality, and racism in the United States" (p. 11). This editorial reflected *Jeune Afrique's* shared rejection of racism and unqualified support for the American leaders who had an open stance against racism.

U.S. Leaders – Africa Relations

John F. Kennedy's interest in and policies affecting Africa were highlighted in several *Jeune Afrique* articles. John F. Kennedy warranted Africans' attention because of his interest in Africa. Howe (1975) pointed out that Kennedy mentioned Africa 479 times in his campaign speeches in 1960 and received 26 African presidents and prime ministers during his years in office. Under Kennedy's leadership, the U.S. government focused on some of the key problems facing African countries. *Jeune Afrique* covered the visit to 16 African countries of Mennen Williams, the U.S. Deputy Secretary for African Affairs. The objectives of his visit were to assure Africans of the United States' forceful and positive friendship and to learn about Africa. According to Williams (1967), the principal concerns of Africans were liberation, racial equality, neutrality in the Cold War, governmental institutions consistent with their social values, quick economic development, improved health conditions, improved agriculture, and above all, education. Williams urged the U.S. to help Africa by building schools and hospitals, and by sending instructors, food surpluses and other assistance needed for development. Many students came to study in the U.S. under the auspices of the Institute of International Education in New York, and American schools that trained African military and police officers (pp. 39-41).

Not all U.S. involvement in Africa was viewed as positive. In “How Washington Decided to Intervene in Congo” Simon Malley (1964) identified two factors that influenced the United States intervention in the Congo secessionist crisis. First, after Kennedy’s assassination in 1963, his successor as president, Lyndon Johnson, relied on CIA reports about the crisis in Congo. These reports suggested that in order to prevent a Communist takeover in Congo and protect American interests there, the U.S. should intervene. Second, like the CIA reports, diplomatic information to Washington D.C. by the U.S. Embassy in Congo indicated that Moïse Tshombé could not contain the “rebels” pressure without foreign aid and without such aid, Congo would be lost to the communists (Malley, 1964, p. 9). While opposing the threat of communism was a top priority for the U.S., there was some concern that an intervention in Congo might be regarded by blacks in America as a hostile act that they could see as African kin being killed by American soldiers. Deputy Secretary Williams opposed supporting Tshombé. Yet, while Williams was on his way to Congo, the U.S. sent troops and ammunitions to help Tshombé. Béchir Ben Yamed condemned the intervention of the U.S. in Congo in a 1964 editorial (*Jeune Afrique*, September, 1964, 7). Almost all African countries accused the U.S. of calculated and premeditated aggression (*Jeune Afrique*,

December 20, 1964, 8). The turmoil in Congo represented the most noteworthy example of *Jeune Afrique*’s coverage of American policy in Africa during the decade of the 60s.
U.S. Presidential Elections

Jeune Afrique provided coverage of the 1964 and 1968 presidential elections in twenty-six articles. Africans were interested not only in the outcomes but also in the process of the elections, not only the foreign policies of America but also the domestic prospects for blacks in America. The black vote was of particular interest. The candidacy of Barry Goldwater was cause for alarm. King Hassan II of Morocco was the first to address his concerns to his fellow heads of states assembled at the Organization of African Unity annual meeting in Cairo, Egypt in 1964:

An election whose results affect us particularly will be held in November in the United States. What must we do in case Goldwater is elected? Of course we have our diplomatic representatives in the U.S. but wouldn’t it be better if we could join our efforts to resist the decisions made by his government against us? What will be the impact of Goldwater’s election on the struggle against apartheid? It should be recalled that the Republican candidate announced that he would grant aid only to those developing countries that will follow America in a “vigorous” struggle against the USSR, China, and international communism. What will happen to the United Nations, an organization whose free functioning has been so helpful to Africans? (*Jeune Afrique*, August 3, 1964, p. 7)

Addressing his colleagues on the same issue, Hamani Diori, the chief of the Niger government, declared:

Americans tell us that their elections concern nobody but themselves. This could be true if America had resumed isolationism, but this is not the case. Anything that deals with American politics concerns us. Washington is present everywhere today. Its decisions determine peace and security in the world. How can we then remain passive before the events of American internal policy (Ibid.).

Key among the internal policies of interest to Africans was the status of blacks in America. For this reason, some of the articles on U.S. elections dealt with the black vote and how it would affect their economic and social status. Concerns over the impact of American domestic policies on Africans were also voiced in *Jeune Afrique* in an article, "What Will Be Nixon's Policy Towards Africa, the Middle East and Black Americans?" Kamal Jawad (1968) argued that Africa should be of prime interest to Nixon because there were more than 20 million black Americans who were sensitive to her. Indeed, he stressed that black Americans in search of their identity increasingly found their roots in Africa and discovered more and more solidarity with those they call their "brother Africans."

A Gallup poll after the 1968 election showed that an overwhelming majority of blacks voted against Nixon. This important phenomenon occurred at a time when blacks were more actively claiming their rights and more likely to accept violence as a means to get them. In such circumstances, Jawad believed that Nixon was likely to make more concessions to blacks than any of his predecessors. According to Jawad (1968), Nixon had only two options: support blacks' claims in order to reduce their opposition to him or face more violence. He pointed out that the political fragility of Africa worried Nixon and his administration; the CIA was keeping an eye on Africa and how the African nations related with the Soviet Union or China (p. 48). In all, thirty-one articles covered the U.S. role in international conflicts including: the Berlin crisis, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the Bay of Pigs, and the Vietnam War. Eleven articles focused on U.S. policies towards the Soviet Union, Europe, France, in particular and China.

Black Leaders

Notably absent from *Jeune Afrique* during this decade was Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (MLK). In contrast to the coverage of MLK in the U.S., there was in *Jeune Afrique* only one brief biographical sketch, summaries of two of his presentations, and an editorial after his death. In the biographical sketch of MLK, the focus was on his having been jailed 17 times, and the author described MLK as the champion of desegregation through non-violence (1965, pp. 11-12).[2] In "Blacks Go Neither Too Fast Nor Too Far," the author provided a summary of a paper written by MLK explaining the riots in New York.

In the paper, MLK had criticized the violent methods advocated by new black leaders and attributes the violence in New York to the government's failure to meet its promises and the attitudes of some black leaders. He reiterates that violence is not the solution to blacks' problems. The solution, he argued lay in unity between blacks and whites to fight for equality and social justice together. "Blacks cannot and do not wish to get freedom by taking the places and jobs of whites. They desire to collaborate with whites to create new jobs" (Blacks Go Neither Too Fast Nor Too Far, 1964, pp. 12-13).

In contrast, Malcolm X was interviewed by *Jeune Afrique* on several occasions and they covered his trip to Mecca and his views on Islam. The predominant voice of blacks in America in *Jeune Afrique* during this time was Stokely Carmichael. Carmichael was interviewed four times. The disparity in coverage of these prominent black leaders could indicate that the journal favored the black power movement, or it could be that because Carmichael spent some time in Guinea and toured many African countries he was more accessible to be interviewed. The second most often quoted black figure was James Baldwin, who was very accessible because he resided in Paris, France. In an interview entitled "There Are Several Ways of Killing a Black Man," Baldwin shared how he had been a strong proponent of nonviolence and had counseled angry young black men who felt disinherited and despairing that the Molotov cocktail and guns would not solve their problems. At that time he was convinced that social change could be realized through nonviolence. However, when the youth reminded him that America was using violence in Vietnam, he realized that he could no longer tell the oppressed youth to avoid violence without addressing America's use of violence. The article indicates that Baldwin supported the use of violence against racism, although he asserted that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was his friend despite the differences between them; he admired and respected MLK.

Simon Malley interviewed Malcolm X after his trip to Mecca and wrote about his new stance on Islam and his criticism of Elijah Muhammad's radical intolerance of whites. His trips to Mecca and Africa transformed Malcolm X. He expressed his disapproval of a Nation of Islam doctrine that discriminated against non-Muslims and whites. Malley (1964) quoted him as saying:

During my recent visits in Egypt, Sudan, Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria and Algeria, I had had extremely useful contacts that led me to change some of my fundamental concepts with regard to the struggle we are engaged in for recognition of our civil rights in the United States. From now on, we mean to accept among us black Christians, as well as black Jews and white Muslims. Even the atheist will be accepted... (p. 32).

Malley's article focuses on how Malcolm X was changed by his experiences in Mecca and in Africa. The Islamic and the African connections had a profound impact on him.

Also notably absent from coverage in *Jeune Afrique* was James Farmer, a non-violent civil rights leader who toured Africa and met with heads of state. During this decade there seemed to be a lack of coverage in *Jeune Afrique* of the non-violent struggle for equality and more of a focus on black power.

The Black Struggle in Book and Film Reviews, Sports and Entertainment

In one of the most prominent book reviews during this decade, Christian Peyre (1968) examined the meaning of black power in three works. The first, Charles V. Hamilton and Stokely Carmichael's book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (1967) attempted to counter the negative images of "black power." Peyre (1968) emphasized that from the perspective of these authors "black power" did not imply either hatred or violence towards whites or the desperate or confused attempt to give oneself an impossible identity. According to Peyre, Hamilton and Carmichael's book was neither a cry of hatred nor revolt but rather a statement about America's underdevelopment in terms of human relations and politics. America would not just be judged on its output but on the way that it had acquired its status which included the institution of slavery, the source of cheap labor. This institutional racism, born out of a justification for slavery, maintained the black population in a state of permanent inferiority. All American institutions were blotted with this "original sin." The only solution would require modifying the institutions. In the review, Peyre (1968) argued that the black power movement had at its foundation a call for blacks to take their own affairs into their own hands not for retribution but for solidarity and unity among blacks and with all oppressed people around the world (pp. 50-51).

Yves Soyer covered the historical development of the black power movement. Soyer, a French critic of American race relations, argued that the struggle of blacks was divided into two tendencies: the integrationist movement and the separatist movement. The black power philosophy was an attempt to reconcile the two movements, one towards the tendency to identify with whites, who even if liberal, held blacks at a distance, and the other the idealization of an African past and the dream of the creation of an autonomous black political entity either in Africa or in a separate American state (Peyre, 1968).

Film reviews provided *Jeune Afrique's* readers with the opportunity to appreciate that black Americans were capable and accomplished in many fields. Two movie reviews during this period depicted the changes that occurred in the acting profession moving from second rate and stereotyped roles to major roles for blacks. "Rebel" was an adaptation of Martin Ritt's play, "The Great White Hope." It recounted the challenges Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champion faced. His success caused a violent racist opposition on the eve of World War I. The FBI wanted to destroy Jack Johnson because he was becoming an example to his black brothers and sisters. He was accused of promoting prostitution.

Rather than face trial he fled to Europe with his title. Later he moved to Mexico where he lived in total misery. He was allowed to re-enter the U.S. on the condition that he fight and lose against a white boxer who was considered "The Great White Hope," in a memorable staged fight held in Havana in 1915 (1971, pp. 9-10).

Jeune Afrique featured U.S. films that told the story of black Americans' struggles and accomplishments. The movie review about Benito Cereno told the story of black slaves under the leadership of Babo and even though the movie ends tragically for them, their struggles are a source of pride. Black pride was most obviously promoted by *Jeune Afrique* in its coverage of sports and music. Twenty articles exalted the performances of black athletes and musicians. The focus was largely on those who voiced their opposition to blatant as well as subtle racism. For example, the dramatic, unified gesture by Tommie Smith and John Carlos of raising their black gloves as a sign of "black power" during the medals ceremony at the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City, highlighted their dissatisfaction with the way black Americans were treated in the U.S. "Black Champions and Racism" provided a summary of articles on the black athlete published in *Sports Illustrated* and it focused on the black athletes' frustrations with their conditions. Black professional athletes were underpaid and treated as inferiors by white coaches (1968, p. 59). College athletes were left without a degree, as in the case of the Texas Western 1966 championship team's five black players, or they left with diplomas that would not serve them much. Even black athletes who did graduate confronted many more difficulties in employment than their white peers. John Carlos explained, "If I had had a degree at East Texas State, I would never have passed a single professional test. I would have been left with simply running up and down in the personnel office. I was at school to run, not to study" (Ibid.). According to the article, black athletes were becoming more and more conscious that their second class status was maintained even when they surpassed expectations and accomplished great feats (Ibid.).

"The Black Gloves" was an article by Paul Bernetel (1968) describing the black Americans' participation in the 1968 Olympic Games in Mexico City. After threatening to boycott the games, black Americans decided to participate but declared that they would use their participation to protest the second class status of blacks. Lee Evans, their spokesperson, declared: "We will go but we will protest" (p. 44). After they won the gold and bronze medals in the 200m race, Tommie Smith and John Carlos jointly raised their fists while the American anthem was played. "I have never been so conscious of the fact that I ran for my people," Tommie Smith said. "All black Americans saw that gesture which symbolized the unity of black people," John Carlos added (Ibid.). Paul Bernetel asserted that for black Americans the gesture was not as much a political statement as a human rights statement, symbolizing the unity of black people in their struggle against segregation. Smith and Carlos contributed a public denunciation of racism in America (Ibid.).

Muhammad Ali (Cassius Clay) received more coverage in *Jeune Afrique* at that time than any other black American. Of the 29 articles on sports and music, nine were devoted to Muhammad Ali. This extensive coverage of Ali was due not only to his exceptional talents as a boxer but also for his militant stance against racism and his religious identification with Islam. He was the best known advocate of the American “Black Muslim” philosophy of separatism and the establishment of a nation of Islam in America. Because of his prominence in the world as heavyweight champion he was more popular in Africa than Elijah Muhammad. In an interview entitled “Black Americans are 22 Million Dead,” Muhammad Ali discussed his conversion to Islam and his views on the black struggle in America. He explained how he learned about Islam, why he converted and his belief in the self-help and separationist doctrines emphasized by Elijah Muhammad. He proposed that blacks not ask whites to clean their slums but clean them themselves and discovering their innate dignity, blacks would be able to create a paradise (*Jeune Afrique*, May 1967, p. 39). Ali added that he only suggested violence when attacked. He critiqued the non-violence movement:

...the biggest mistake they made was to put black women and small girls at the front of their demonstrations. This resulted in their massacre. This is the reason why Elijah Muhammad showed that the civil rights movement is a stupidity (*Jeune Afrique*, May 1967, 40-41).

Ali stressed that Elijah Muhammad warned his followers not to be attacked by the white man, not to give them the chance. The black man is to be the equal of the white man. “If he had a factory, we wanted one. If he had a shop, we wanted a shop too” (pp. 40-41).

Jeune Afrique reported on a number of black American singers, including Mahalia Jackson, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, Ray Charles and James Brown who had all performed in Paris. James Brown’s “Say It Loud! I’m Black and I’m Proud” was very popular in Africa. (*Jeune Afrique*, October 1967, p. 47). “Through the Mirror” by Andre Bercoff (1967), focused on James Brown’s role in igniting racial pride among black youths around the world. “Ray Charles Sings Black” chronicled his journey from poverty to achieving the American Dream through music. Although he became a multi-millionaire, owned a company and a plane with two pilots, his music, rhythm and blues chronicled and celebrated the sadness and sufferings of black Americans (p. 6).

Personal Perspective

Reading the articles from the 60s, the reports of the Civil Rights movement in America as published in *Jeune Afrique*, was like revisiting my teenage years growing up in Mali. Indeed, the 1960s were years of independence for many African countries, while they remained a prolonged period of struggle for others. My homeland, Mali was at the forefront of the struggle for total independence of Africa and the end of apartheid in South Africa.

Likewise, Mali supported African Americans in their struggles to end racial discrimination and achieve equality in America. In addition, Mali was supportive of the struggle of other nations in South East Asia and Latin America against imperialism.

The people of Mali understood that their independence would be meaningless if all African countries were not free. As a young student, I was molded in such an atmosphere at school. During those years, one mission of school under the socialist regime of Modibo Keita was to decolonize the mentality of the Malian people. We were taught to be proud of our race and our culture. We were taught Malian and African histories as they were written by Malians and Africans. Our school curriculum included studying the slave trade and slavery in America. As a result, African American living conditions were of great concern for militant Mali. While reading *Jeune Afrique*'s articles covering US race relations I realized that this journal selected events and personalities that echoed favorably in Africa. First of all, *Jeune Afrique* was determined to increase its readership by targeting the youth who were militants in the 60s. Secondly, *Jeune Afrique*'s coverage of the world events in general and news of the Civil Rights struggles in the U.S. in particular reflected its Pan Africanist nature at a time when Pan Africanism was most celebrated.

Summary

Jeune Afrique's mission, to inform Africans about important events in Africa and around the world so as to enable them to make their own judgments about what was happening was accomplished in many respects regarding U.S. race relations. Anyone reading *Jeune Afrique* in the 60s would have had a clear idea about what was happening to black Americans and how they responded to their status in American society. They would also have had a glimpse at white brutality and the struggle for equal rights despite the opposition. A compilation of the articles would make an excellent Black History lesson today. Unfortunately, today in many classrooms in the United States, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. may be the only civil rights leader that students recognize and the bus boycott or the "I Have a Dream" speech as the only events. Much more was covered by *Jeune Afrique*.

However, the reader might also notice that the periodical seemed to feature the more radical components of the civil rights movement. More articles were published about the black power movement, the Black Panther Party, and the Black Muslims than the oldest and most moderate civil rights organizations such as the NAACP, SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) and CORE (Congress of Racial Equality). Moreover, the absence of biographical coverage of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and James Farmer, who toured Africa during the 60s, could be construed as a lack of appreciation for the non-violent leadership and philosophy of this segment of the civil rights movement.

Although the topic of U.S. race relations in the 60s amounted to 42% of the articles about the U.S., the impact of this coverage could only be appreciated by those few who could obtain the periodical and who could read French. Thus the reach of this information was much smaller than the general population. Only 10% of Africans could understand French at this time; therefore, *Jeune Afrique* could address only a small portion of the African population. In addition, newly independent African countries had political and economic constraints which undermined their coverage of anything other than Africa. There were ten military coups, two secessions and problems of illiteracy, hunger and disease. Although the African/American connection may not have reached that far, Africans did not ignore their brother and sister black Americans' struggle for equality. One reader of *Jeune Afrique* wrote a letter entitled "Africans and Black Americans," which was a criticism of Africans' inertia before the civil rights events in the U.S.:

...It is, however, good that the black American populations know that their struggle is not ignored in Africa. It is supported by the masses and the youth particularly. However, black Americans must also know that in their legitimate revolt, they must count more on themselves than on Africa of today. Tomorrow things might change. But before then, they are what they are. That is very sad (*Jeune Afrique*, October 6, 1970, p. 9).

Africans were confronting their own struggles for freedom, forming new nations despite huge obstacles and yet, there was a focus on the shared commitment to equality and social justice and an end to bigotry and racism that mirrored the turbulence of the civil rights movement as it evolved in the U.S. over the course of the 1960s.

Notes

1. The descriptive word “Black” for African Americans was not capitalized in *Jeune Afrique* in this decade, thus this article will retain this format.
2. There were articles with no author listed.

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