

# **Kendrick Lamar's Grammy Performance points to a Simple Truth, #Black Lives Matter When Africa Matters**

by

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In January 2006 while flying on an 11 hour flight from Accra, Ghana to Washington Dulles airport I sat looking out of the window as we approached the landing strip, both excited and exhausted from my three week sojourn in a country that many consider the gateway to West Africa. I remarked to the Ghanaian woman (an Ewe) I had sat next to during my air travel that it felt so good to be back “home.” She retorted, “This is not your home—Nigeria, Ghana, Mali maybe, they are your home.” I began to laugh, and of course I agreed with her. I did not need to be convinced or persuaded. I had simply spoken out of travel fatigue. Yet she continued with her gentle reprimand, “The United States is a good place to pursue an education or establish an economic base, but Africa is your birthplace, your home; although African Americans have been over 400 years removed from the continent of Africa the heritage, history and culture is still yours.” She posed the question, why is it that Blacks have built up America yet continue to be abused, maligned, discriminated against and maltreated? She said to me finally, “You don’t have to accept that return to Africa and develop your homeland.” The counsel of this Ghanaian woman was not only instructional for my own personal interests, but also prescriptive for a new generation of insurgent, grassroots, organically devised, millennial led, indigenous Black freedom fighters on the streets of Ferguson, Baltimore and New York as well as the university campuses of Mizzou, Yale, Occidental and Howard among others. In fact today as I engage in transnational, Pan Africanist leadership between Los Angeles and Accra, Ghana I am even more convinced that the struggle for the dignity of African humanity in the United States transcends the quest for racial equality—and is more precisely a battle for the assertion of African power, sovereignty and the right to be self-determining, self-defining and self-building in the world.

The #Black Lives Matter movement emerged in response to a series of violent police assaults that have killed countless unarmed African Americans around the country, including Eric Garner, Sandra Bland, Freddie Gray, Michael Brown, Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Tamir Rice, Tanisha Anderson and more recently Laquan McDonald. These criminal acts by police against their own citizenry have been exacerbated by the failure of the justice system to convict or in many cases even investigate the perpetrators which for many equates to a system of state-sanctioned police violence. Unexpectedly this racialized para-military force has rekindled an awareness of how racism and white supremacy has embedded itself into the institutional fiber of this nation's universities—and students have responded by demanding that university administrators be held accountable for their apathetic and complicit stance in reinforcing hostile campus environments for African American and Latino students.

The declaration #Black Lives Matter presents another opportunity however, that is the possibility and necessity of African-descended people in the United States, realizing that their lives matter because their ancestral continent, Africa is the most important and strategic piece of real estate on the globe. #Black Lives Matter need not reinvent the wheel of protest politics and political and social activism by reiterating a position that the Black Power movement settled over 40 years ago—not only do Black lives matter, but organized Black Power can alter this nation and transform the globe. The late Stokely Carmichael aka Kwame Toure who helped shaped the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the Black Panther Party and anti-imperial and anti-colonial resistance in Guinea, West Africa left for this generation a valuable lesson when he said the highest political expression of both Civil Rights and Black Power is Pan Africanism.

In other words #Black Lives Matter when Africa Matters. Hip hop artist Kendrick Lamar reminded a new generation of this truth---in fact his own generation of emerging activists and revolutionaries through his blistering, conscious, progressive and uncompromising Africa-centered performance at the 2016 Grammys that Africa is in Compton and Compton is in Africa and by extension wherever Black folk live in the United States we too are Africa. The next step of course beyond aesthetic appeals is to organize and mobilize this consciousness into action that is formidable and directed toward the assertion of power within the global community.

African Americans representing 13% of the U.S. population and the third largest ethnic group are actually part of the 1.2 billion people on the African continent who have been formally recognized as the African Diaspora and the sixth region of the African Union.

When we consider the magnitude of the African immigrant diaspora in the United States, it becomes very clear that the appeal to Pan Africanism is not a romanticized foray into a bygone era of utopian Pan African nationalism, but instead, it can be the seeds of Pan African alliances that can potentially take root in the cities of Detroit, Los Angeles, Cincinnati, Atlanta, New York, Philadelphia and Washington DC. My current city of residence, Los Angeles presents tremendous potential for concerted Pan African mobilization between Black America and the African immigrant diaspora with its significant Nigerian, Ethiopian, Cameroonian, Ghanaian and Kenyan communities.

#Black Lives Matter must uncompromisingly declare that Africa Matters. China, Japan, Turkey, France, UK, Anadarko Oil, Luc Oil, Exxon, Shell, Mobil, Firestone, Samsung, GE, USA energy security, multinational coltan mining companies and countless others all know Africa matters. The sooner Black America figures that out #Black Lives Matter signs, t-shirts, protests and marches will become obsolete. The answer to Ferguson and Staten Island is Pan African power not pleading, begging, petitioning and empty demands. Black Churches generate nearly 20 billion annually and Black America's purchasing power amounts to 1.1 trillion dollars annually. Do Black lives matter enough to ally with African nations and communities to invest and develop some of the largest iron ore deposits in the world in Gambia or diamonds and oil in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Botswana and South Africa—and Hydropower and coltan in the Congo as well as gold, cocoa and bauxite in Ghana. It is unacceptable that 80% of France's electricity is from nuclear power from the country of Niger in West Africa which is rich in uranium deposits and accounts for 33% of France's uranium supply. #Black Lives Matter and the rise of the new student movements will come to realize that when you control the resources of the African continent and diaspora, Black lives will automatically matter.

A simple review of the carousel of slides on the Corporate Council on Africa's website home page reveals the strategic, economic significance of Africa by highlighting that over the next three decades middle class households in Africa will grow from 335 million to 1.1 billion, agricultural output from 280 billion to 880 billion and infrastructure development will double from 45 billion to 93 billion. This is the reason why Obama called for an Africa Leader's summit and young African leader's summit in July 2014—and formed the President's Advisory Council for Doing Business in Africa.

All this was going on in Washington DC during the incidents surrounding Michael Brown, Ezel Ford and Eric Garner. African leaders just waltzed into town and signed a billion dollars in deals and the protests in Ferguson, Baltimore, New York and Los Angeles were completely silent on how the U.S. corporate elite could engage in business in Africa and yet, this may not have any meaning for Black lives in the U.S.

African leaders were let off the hook by not having to address the challenges facing their diasporic offspring in America—no discussion about physical assault and police violence directed against Black bodies and no contingencies or conditions established that made upholding the dignity and humanity of African Americans as a precondition for the corporate elite doing business on the African continent. In fact the Nigerian lawyer and leadership expert Adewale Ajadi in an article entitled, *#Black Lives Matter and the African Imperative* suggests that the #Black Lives Matter movement presents “a platform for moral leadership and pulpit to the African continent to define African values and principles to the world.” This would mean African nations making the murder of Africa’s descendants in the United States by state-sanctioned police violence a foreign policy imperative for African governments. Such a united stance between Africa and the African Diaspora would demonstrate power especially since the U.S. and other western powers always seek to impose their standards of human rights and good governance as a pre-condition for aid to Africa.

Yet who is aiding who? Africa puts out 192 billion to the world and receives about 32 billion in aid. In fact the remittances sent back to their home countries by the African immigrant diaspora in the U.S. has exceeded western aid over the past two years at 35 billion. Compound this with the \$1.2 trillion consuming spending power that Black America possesses and it is clear to see the potential for Africa and its diaspora to emerge as a global superpower by 2063. It is time for Black America, #Black Lives Matter and the recent Black student protest movement to reaffirm their connection with its ancestral homeland and its resources and leverage this power for a global agenda for development.

In a recent discussion with my colleague and dear friend Dr. Lawson Bush V (Nana Kweku Baakan), Professor of Educational Leadership at California State University, Los Angeles he was adamant that African nations should take the position “Leave our Children Alone or Leave our Resources Alone.” In other words, if you continue to ignore the human and civil rights of our diasporic children in the U.S. your business is not welcomed or wanted, and neither is the internationalist neo-liberal corporate policies that are often imposed on African nations at the expense of the populace. Let us not forget that Kwame Nkrumah, founding president of the Republic of Ghana was clear that African nations belonged to African Americans because of their contributions to the global Pan Africanist struggle. Nkrumah once remarked that African Americans “provided the main driving power” of the Pan Africanist movement before it took root on the African continent. Therefore #Black Lives Matter and the broader Black student protest movement ignores Africa to its own demise and detriment—and even more devastatingly, it will forfeit the African continent to the interests of the European Union, China, Japan, India and the American corporate elite who engage Africa without the consent, guidance and input of Africa’s descendants in the United States.