

IN CONVERSATION WITH...

Professor Horace Campbell is Professor of African American and Political Science, and Director of the Africa Initiative at Syracuse University, New York, in the United States of America. Professor Campbell was the third Kwame Nkrumah Chair in African Studies at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Accra. On behalf of the CJAS, Peter Bembir, Senior Research Assistant to the Office of the Kwame Nkrumah Chair, chats with Prof. Campbell about his childhood in Jamaica, his pan-Africanist journey and tenure as Nkrumah Chair.

CJAS: Thank you for agreeing to talk to us. Could you tell us a little about your academic journey: what led you to an academic career, and specifically to Syracuse University?

HC: Thank you for having me.

For the academic career part, the importance of knowledge, ideas and information in shaping destinies or the liberation of Africans and pursuit of global peace and justice? You would answer it best.

I was born in Jamaica at a time where two prominent influences shaped that country. On one side there was the Jamaica Imperial Society that supported, uncritically, the British colonial authorities. These authorities were backed up by the sugar planters and their institutions (banks, commercial houses, churches, schools, and social clubs).

On the other side were the anti-colonial forces that opposed British colonialism. At the core of these anti-colonial forces were the Rastafarian forces. These elements of the Jamaican workers and peasant sector had rejected the colonial king and replaced the British king with an African king. These social forces in Jamaica were influenced by Garveyism and the ideals of Pan African liberation. My father was a Garveyite. He heard Marcus Garvey speak in the late twenties in Montego Bay and he and his fellow workers were supporters of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA).

My father was born on June 5, 1907, in Westmoreland and moved as a youth to Montego Bay to seek work. He then worked at the Public Works Department (PWD) before going off to Panama in the late thirties returning to Jamaica in 1944. My father was a worker intellectual who kept books on history and social conditions in Jamaica. It was from his small library and from his memories of the uplifting statements of Garvey that I first became familiar with the Philosophy and Opinions of Marcus Garvey. At the time of the boom of the tourist industry in Jamaica, my father worked for Air Jamaica as a porter. He later migrated to the United States in 1969. My father passed away in July 1984 in Providence Rhode Island.

I grew up in a working-class community of Upper King Street in Montego Bay and attended the Calvary Baptist church whose dominant ideas were the ideals of the anti-slavery struggles in Jamaica. Baptist preachers had led most of the rebellions against enslavement in Jamaica. In fact, the free blacks had represented one of the earliest forms of Pan African solidarity in Jamaican society. George Lisle, for example, was a free black from Savanna, Georgia in the USA who had migrated to Jamaica at the end of the 18th century to agitate against enslavement. He established the East Queen Street Baptist Church which became a citadel and school for anti-slavery ideas.

The church camp that I attended every year at Calabar in Kingston had been infused with this anti-colonial tradition. Church picnics also reinforced this tradition. Our picnics to Trelawny, for example, were excursions where we were told stories of William Knibb, a staunch anti-slavery campaigner. While we learnt of Knibb in school, it was in the community that we learnt of Jamaican revolutionary fighters such as Sam Sharpe, Paul Bogle and Nanny.

My youth had been influenced by the ideas of self-reliance and hard work of my parents, of my anti-slavery environment in the places of worship, and in the community, reasoning about Africa that was conducted by Rastafari elders. Older students from my school had achieved excellence and international notoriety and I can single out two names that comes to mind. The first is Rex Nettleford who was an influential figure in our youth. The other was Felix Waldron, a brilliant mathematician who had embraced the ideas of liberation of Africa and the liberation of Jamaica. Both Nettleford and Waldron preceded me at Cornwall College¹.

The primary and secondary school years were spent in the Caribbean. Shortly after two years working in Jamaica, I joined the ranks of migrant workers who trekked to Canada. I started out my student journey as an immigrant because my parents did not have the material resources to support me as an international student in Canada. I therefore travelled to Toronto, worked in many sundry jobs, and after ten months enrolled in York University.

The university years (1967–1970) had been a period of intense global struggles against imperialism, war, racism, and colonialism. I benefitted immensely from the ideas and strategies for struggles that emerged in that period including participating in the historic Black Writers Conference in Montreal in October 1968. Rosie Douglas and Alfie Roberts were two important moving spirits behind the 1968 Black Writers Conference. It was at this meeting where the ideas of Frantz Fanon were laid out by speakers such as James Forman, Walter Rodney and Stokely Carmichael.

¹ See the lecture of Rex Nettleford in Cornwall College, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4gHqJSriNI>.

I was to later crystallize my outlook on Pan African liberation while studying and working as a community organizer in Toronto. While I was a student, I was a part time worker, and a community organizer and found time to travel and participate in meetings on Black Liberation. We organized the Black Education Project at the premises of the UNIA in Toronto and worked with the old Garveyites from the twenties to build community and international solidarity. I remember welcoming Samora Machel to Toronto. One of the more memorable organizational feats was the organization of the African Liberation Day rally in Toronto, 1972.

We had worked closely with Owusu Sadauki (now called Howard Fuller) of Malcolm X University in North Carolina to build the national and international networks for mobilizing Africans.

We were not to know then that the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) had infiltrated the ranks of the youth with provocateurs to foment situations that could bring more oppression in the community. The tight organization of the Black Education Project (BEP) and the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) ensured that it was the community that acted as the eyes and ears of our work as Pan African activists. As an outlet for the ideas of Pan Africanism, there was a community newspaper named ‘Contrast.’ The editor of Contrast, Harold Hoyte from Barbados was a committed journalist who built the circulation of this paper and exposed police brutality and the racism meted out to black children in the school system.

It was at this time that I initiated the Transitional Year Program (TYP) at the University of Toronto. I had worked with an organization called Praxis. Praxis was a loose collection of Professors from the University of Toronto who were active in the Committee for an independent Canada. This organization accepted the fact that there was racism in the school system, and working within this community, the TYP opened one more avenue for black youth to enter the University of Toronto.

As a Pan Africanist, I yearned for an opportunity to travel and study in Africa. One of my Professors at York University, Selwyn Ryan had gone to teach in Makerere University in Uganda and had worked with Ali Mazrui in Makerere’s Department of Political Science. He encouraged me to travel to study in Uganda. I met my future wife while I was travelling to Uganda on October 8, 1972.

By the time I arrived in Uganda, the social and economic conditions had changed. The militarization of the state and society deepened in the so-called economic war launched by General Idi Amin. The years in Uganda cemented the understanding of the need to struggle against all forms of oppression. My research was on the economic war. This research brought me in contact with the leaders of the anti-imperialist forces of Uganda who had been at the forefront of the 1945 and 1949 anti-colonial struggles in Uganda. It was in the process of doing this research that I came to know Ignatius K. Musazi who is now recognized as a Uganda National hero. In fact, later when Musazi was in exile in the UK, he introduced me to Fenner Brockway with whom he had worked in the 1920s.

From Kampala, I journeyed to Dar es Salaam and deepened my relationship with Walter Rodney who was then teaching at the Department of History at the University of Dar Es Salaam. I had met Rodney briefly in Montreal in 1968 and later in Toronto after he was banned from Jamaica. In Dar es Salaam, I became even clearer on the questions of anti-imperialism and Pan African liberation. I worked hard along with the forces of the Pan African Skills Project on the 6th Pan African Congress that was held in June 1974. In 1975, I edited a book on specific papers that emerged from the 6th Pan African Congress.

Upon obtaining master’s degree at the Makerere University, Uganda, I embarked on my doctoral studies at the University of Sussex, UK. I had conducted research while in Uganda and used data from this research for my Ph.D. dissertation. During the years of the struggles in Southern Africa I lived in Tanzania where I taught at the University and became part of the Dar es Salaam School in Tanzania. It was after this African assignment that I moved back to North America, specifically the USA. However, the relocation from Tanzania to the USA was not entirely voluntary. My contract at the University of Dar es Salaam was not renewed in 1987.

After brief teaching years at Northwestern University in Illinois, I moved to Syracuse University where I currently hold joint professorship in African American Studies and Political Science. I have also been a visiting scholar to China’s Tsinghua University while at Syracuse. I took leave from Syracuse University to take on the role of The Nkrumah Chair, which was a continuation of the traditions of Pan African intellectual and political engagement.

CJAS: What, for you, is the meaning of “Pan African” and why is a Pan African agenda still important today?

HC: My understanding of Pan Africanism has evolved over that past fifty years. After starting out in life as a Garveyite and learning of the international class struggles, I became clear that the mantra of Marcus Garvey was real. No African could be free until all of Africa was free. Kwame Nkrumah also articulated this position at the independence of Ghana. It was during the intellectual struggles over the liberation movements in the 6th Pan African congress that the position was concretized that there should be no sharp distinction between race and class. At that moment of the Sino-Soviet split, we also clarified the necessity for Pan Africanists to have an independent position that placed the liberation of Africa as the priority.

After competing my doctoral thesis on militarism in Uganda, I immediately went to work on my first major Pan African project, the writing of *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney*.

While doing archival work for my thesis on Uganda, I came across archival documents on the struggles against plantation slavery in Jamaica. The urgency for the book emerged from the sociological slander against the Rastafarian movement. The benign slander termed the Rastas ‘escapists; cultists, and millenarian,’ while the sociology of empire attempted to place the stamp of criminality on the movement. Professor M.G. Smith had launched the first major salvo of the assault mobilizing the ideas of ‘cultural pluralism’ to demonize the Rastafari brothers and sisters¹.

Rasta and Resistance served to highlight the centrality of Pan African ideals in the Rastafari movement. I had joined in the opposition to colonialism and apartheid and was a guest at the Zimbabwe Independence celebrations in April 1980. The electric representation of Pan Africanism by Bob Marley at this celebration formed a core aspect of the book that spelt out the cultural resistance of the Rastafari and the importance of the Rastafari song of memory and liberation, Reggae.

The Pan African struggles to end apartheid led me directly to deepen the study of militarism and the militarization of the state in Africa. I did in-depth study of the apartheid war machine and published numerous articles on the role of imperialism and apartheid in Africa. This study brought me to fully understand the meaning of the victory of Africans at Cuito Cuanavale for the history of humanity. The centrality of the sacrifices of the Cuban peoples in this epic battle cemented our understanding of the relationship between socialist reconstructions and Pan African Liberation.

I learned another important lesson from the Caribbean theatre of Pan African struggles. Walter Rodney had worked within the Caribbean society for the emancipation of the working peoples. He worked particularly among the Indian and African workers. Rodney taught Pan Africanists of the importance of working for Pan African Liberation within multiethnic societies. His last major study on *The History of the Guyanese Working Peoples* was a classic rendition of why the questions of health, safety, livelihood of the working peoples should be at the forefront of Pan African concerns for liberation and emancipation.

The other important influence came from progressive Pan African feminists such as Micere Mugo, Andiaye and Bonita Harris. These Pan Africanists and feminists had taken the strong position that the question of the future of oppressed women must be at the heart and soul of the Pan African struggles. These questions were fought out at the 7th Pan African Congress in Kampala in 1994. It was in this meeting where there was the effort to birth the Pan African Women Liberation Organization (PAWLO). This meeting also battled the question of ‘who is an African?’ The issues of the Sudan were also fought out on the floor of this Congress. The third major question was to establish the framework for the full unification of Africa and for the advance of reparative justice. The latter two questions took concrete form on the World Conference against Racism in Durban in 2001.

The other major effort to emerge from this Congress was the coming into being of the Constitutive Act of the African Union. Tajudeen Abdul Raheem, the then Secretary General of the Pan African Movement, had worked tirelessly for peace and unification. In his own life, Tajudeen worked to educate the youths to work across racial barriers and to build international solidarity in all parts of the Pan African world. Those who opposed the Kwame Nkrumah position on Pan Africanism termed Tajudeen and Pan Africanists such as me as ‘continentalists.’ Tajudeen had married a Tunisian woman and the ‘anti-Arab’ wing of the movement vilified him for this move.

One of the more challenging aspects of this period for the Global Pan African movement was the genocide in Rwanda and the multiple wars in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. At the time of the genocidal war, the Pan African movement worked hard to oppose the machinations of France. A. M. Babu was still alive and he along with Tajudeen and the progressive wing of the Global Pan African movement worked to give clarity to the alliances that were being formed. Ultimately, the prize of the Congo was too big for imperialism to allow the peoples of Africa to determine the future of the Congo and the Great lakes region. Imperial intrigues, low levels of political understanding, divisions between African states (Rwanda and Uganda on one side against Zimbabwe, Namibia, and Angola) ensured that the Global Pan African movement was crippled by the war and confusion over the future of the Congo. Although Pan African progressives worked hard to give clarity to the issues of the Congolese freedom and independence, this was one area that divided Pan Africanists and is still outstanding.

CJAS: Are there some specific African agenda items we should be thinking about?

HC: Africa entered the 21st century with so many opportunities and challenging tasks. Some of the key tasks are providing employment to youth, transforming the economies, reversing global warming, ending the oppression of women, and neutralizing religious alienation. These tasks involve the social and economic transformation of Africa. There is now a debate on the African left on whether the tasks of socialism and unification should be preceded by a struggle for state capitalism and social justice. Samir Amin as one of the leading Pan African thinkers and activist for 60 years had taken the position that the transition to socialism will be protracted so, in the short term, there should be the struggle to nationalize the resources and commanding heights of the economy under a form of state capitalism. This debate needs to be intensified to isolate the neo-liberal ‘discourses’ that divert attention away from Pan African liberation.

1 For the interview on the impact of the sociological work of Professor M.G. Smith, see, <https://anniepaul.net/our-man-in-mona-an-interview-by-robert-a-hill-with-annie-paul/>

One of the most pressing and urgent tasks is the Unification of Africa. It has become clearer that the goals of unification that had been outlined by Marcus Garvey, the Rastafari, Kwame Nkrumah, and Walter Rodney should ground discussions about Africa's future. The current small states approach to advancing the interests of the peoples of Africa is obviously unsustainable. The processes of unifying Africa must however be a peoples' project. The grassroots African women and the traders who cross the borders daily to do business are signaling the leaders that these artificial borders must fall. COVID-19, Ebola, tsetse fly and rinderpest do not recognize the artificial borders. Africa cannot maximize its full potential unless it unites. The plundering of its resources cannot end until all the economies are unified. A United Africa will be the largest single market on the earth with vast potentials for trade, investment, and joint management of African resources.

Observably, the combat of environmental challenges on the continent in the context of global warming has raised the Pan African agenda to the question of environmental repair and regeneration of Africa. As the years of untrammeled capitalist destructive activities brings the earth to its knees, progressive forces in the spirit of our shared humanity are pushing for the rights of mother earth. For Africans, the question of drying rivers with its untold sufferings resulting for Africans in the respective basins has drawn attention to the need for a robust African solution to address the impact of global warming in Africa. In these questions, Lake Chad remains ground zero and African efforts to unite the waters of Africa may be the best solution to save the heart of Africa and to oxygenate and regreen the continent.

Peace is another agenda item crucial to the processes of transformation in Africa. The war on terrorism has, however, been a business for the military industrial complex headquartered in the USA. This so-called war on terror has meant a proliferation of external military forces on African soil. The main purpose of the presence of these forces is however to safeguard their interests in African resources.

I wrote the book on NATO's intervention in Libya to highlight the urgency for the unification of Africa. When I was in East Africa, I had opposed the leader of Libya. Inside the Pan African movement, I had written critical arguments against his irresponsible actions and statements. However, the NATO intervention in Libya and the destruction of that society necessitated a Pan African intervention that was independent of President Gaddafi. In the book, Global NATO and the Catastrophic Failure in Libya, I likened the NATO intervention and destruction to the Italian invasion of Abyssinia in 1935. My prediction was that just as how the Italian invasion sped the process of decolonization, so the NATO incursion and French manipulations will hasten the push to unify Africa.

The other urgent question for progressive Pan Africanists is the understanding of the unfolding global realignments. For Pan Africanists, there are three urgent questions, (a) the complete unification of Africa (b) the empowerment of the African descendants in Latin America and the Caribbean (heightened today by the coming to power of the neo fascists in Brazil), and (c) pushing for the democratization of the North American society to end the unlimited killing of Black youths. The Black Lives Matter movement is now a central pillar of the Global Pan African Movement and will require continuing focus in demanding for justice and accelerated democratization of the United States of America.

Pan Africanists must define their priorities to ensure that the imperial battles over the emergence of China do not distract Africans from their own agenda. Since the end of the Cold War, the military management of the international system has ensured that the dollar remains the currency of international trade. Many regions of the world want to end the dominance of the dollar and the unlimited right of the US Treasury to print dollars at will. Since the financial crisis of 2007–2008, the US has printed over 16 trillion dollars under the banner of quantitative easing. The Europeans want to end this exorbitant privilege of the dollar and have established the Euro. The Chinese are also working to internationalize their currency and have established the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS). This payment system which, offers clearing and settlement services for its participants in cross-border RMB payments is a direct challenge to the US dominated Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT). It is in the face of these challenges to the hegemony of the USA that there has been intensified trade and currency wars.

Progressive Pan Africanists will have to be alert to the changes in the international system and the new alliances that are being formed such as the BRICS formation. Pan Africanists will also have to be literate about the current phase of the global capitalist crisis and the emergence of neo fascists and racists in Europe, North America, and Latin America. It is urgent for the Global Pan African movement to grasp the balance of class forces in China as the militarist thrust of the present leadership of the USA push for military confrontation with China. Africans must oppose war and support those sections of the ASEAN community that are working for a multipolar world free from all hegemons.

Peace cannot be obtained in these contexts. The Global Pan African Movement must therefore intensify efforts towards the demilitarization of Africa. States such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates that are stoking the ignorance associated with religious extremism must be opposed. These forces of conservative ideas about religion are fomenting conditions of insecurity in Africa that provides the context for the USA and France to intervene under the guise of 'fighting terror' in Africa.

The forces of Pan African freedom must work to isolate those youths who have succumbed to the negative ideas of religious extremism. From our experiences in the Lake Chad Basin, joint efforts with the communities may be more effective to ferret out elements in society that are threatening peaceful existence in Africa. Imperial military presence and their recorded duplicity works to sustain war for this model of war for business and its profits

The African continent should therefore be demilitarized to stop the continuation of war and counter terrorism as business.

CJAS: You have been researching about Lake Chad especially in the two-year tenure as Nkrumah Chair. What do you find striking from the findings of this research in the Lake Chad Basin?

HC: Within four decades Lake Chad has lost about 95% of its water resources. Contrary to what some western scholars find as favourable conditions for the people in the basin, these Africans have no assets. Many have lost their sources of livelihoods as the Lake continues to recede and the jobless youths are now ready market for extremist groups who promise better live here and in the hereafter. Although flood recession agriculture has been ongoing in some part of the Lake Basin, the insecurity in the area has meant that many of these farms are abandoned amidst missing livestock who leave no traces since extremists' attacks surfaced in Northern Nigeria.

CJAS: What should African youth both inside and outside the academy be working on in terms of an African future?

HC: Revolutions and social change throughout the ages have mostly depended on the youths of the age. African youths continue to show their essence in parts of Africa where it has been necessary to change systems and move in better directions in society. One window of the forms of self-organization and self-expression was manifest in the Egyptian revolution of 2011. Like all revolutionary processes, counter revolution immediately reared its head and is now present in Egypt. However, the structural conditions of oppression that gave birth to the revolutionary processes in Egypt have not gone away. If anything, the exploitation of the Egyptian workers and youth has intensified. These conditions demand that in this period there is clarification of the ideas, organization and forms of leadership that can end the violence of neoliberal capitalism all over Africa.

Neo liberal forms of democratic engagement based on elections have led to disillusionment among the youths. After mobilizing for elections in The Gambia, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Burkina Faso, these youths have seen the coming to power of governments that turn to the same International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank to ensure the survival of the instruments of domination and exploitation. It is these same youths with the robust skills set who form the crux of Africa's demographic dividend.

It would be important that youths in Africa begin to look inwards and not decide to drown in the Mediterranean given their historical successes no matter the present challenges. Migration is a human phenomenon and our ancestors moved to fill the planet. However, the current trend with its related slavery leaves much to be desired. It is time to take responsibility and continue the work of serving as drivers of social change and unifying force in Africa.

CJAS: : How did you learn about the KN chair and why did you decide to apply for the position of Kwame Nkrumah Chair?

HC: I had participated in the major international conference of the Kwame Nkrumah centenary in Accra in 2010. It was then that I first heard of the Kwame Nkrumah (KN) Chair. I was encouraged to apply for the position as KN Chair by my brother Kofi Anyidoho, who also served as the first occupant of the Chair. Nothing would have given greater joy than working for the African cause.

We are privileged and humbled to have come far from the traditions that raged ferocious war against Apartheid and laid the foundations for the independence of many parts of Africa. The struggle for African liberation is however not over and the foresight of Kwame Nkrumah offered remedies that have yet to be applied to transform the continent. It was therefore a pleasure to carry the Nkrumah torch and keep that never-dying fire burning towards the unity and survival of Africa and its peoples all over the world (the global African family).

CJAS: What would you celebrate most about your tenure as KN chair and your time in Ghana?

HC: This tenure has seen many things to celebrate most about. One of my close friends from Ghana who had served as a diplomat in Zimbabwe had told me that my work as a Pan Africanist would be enriched by a sojourn in West Africa. Firstly, this position afforded me an opportunity to better understand West Africa. I travelled extensively throughout the region, to Burkina Faso, Mali, Nigeria, Niger, Chad, Senegal, Ivory Coast and within Ghana. The Nigerian trips were many and in the last year of my tenure as Chair I made four trips to that country. The vibrancy and promise of Nigeria to anchor the liberation of Africa has always been clear, especially when the progressive Pan Africanists in Nigeria can emerge from the shadows of the financial barons.

The second Kwame Nkrumah intellectual and cultural festival was a major milestone. Multitudes convened in Accra in June 2017 to investigate questions about education and transformation in global Africa in the spirit of the continental agenda to transform itself by 2063. What has further defined commitments is the research in the Lake Chad Basin. This research has been one of the major research projects that have defined my life as a scholar, activist, and African. The work in that region has opened other opportunities and showed how the rivers and the

ecological systems in Africa are readying for the unity of African peoples.

CJAS: Do you have any concluding comments for us as a journal based in an African University in a time when there is a heightened culture of a journal's ranking and accreditation as a measure of good scholarship?

HC: The first is to question the heightened culture itself. Your readers and editorial team may be aware of the limitations of the ranking and the so-called impact factor which is calculated as the quotient of number of times articles published in two years were cited and the total number of articles that could be cited. Impact rankings should be taken with a pinch of salt given possibilities of sampling error. For the CJAS what may be more necessary is to increase access and reach as an African voice in Africa and in the world. Increasing reach and visibility to the non-English speaking African world alongside current audience would therefore be a helpful step.