



# NO EASY



# VICTORIES



**African Liberation and  
American Activists over  
a Half Century, 1950–2000**

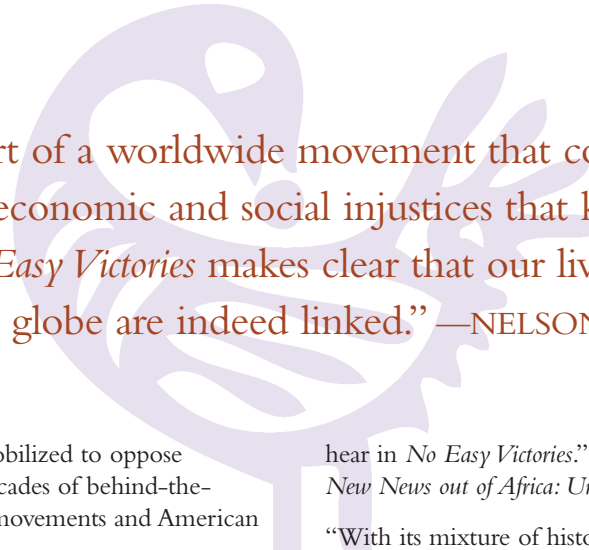


Edited by  
William Minter, Gail Hovey,  
and Charles Cobb Jr.

with a Foreword by  
Nelson Mandela



# FOR THE FIRST TIME, A PANORAMIC VIEW OF U.S. ACTIVISM ON AFRICA FROM 1950 TO 2000.



“We were part of a worldwide movement that continues today to redress the economic and social injustices that kill body, mind, and spirit. *No Easy Victories* makes clear that our lives and fortunes around the globe are indeed linked.” —NELSON MANDELA

Hundreds of thousands of Americans mobilized to oppose apartheid in the 1980s. They built on decades of behind-the-scenes links between African liberation movements and American activists, both black and white.

*No Easy Victories* draws on the voices of activists of several generations to explore this largely untold history. While U.S.-based groups and individuals contributed to African liberation, African struggles also inspired U.S. activism, including the civil rights and black power movements.

Today Africa and the world face global injustices as deadly as apartheid. Understanding this history of solidarity is essential for finding new paths to a future of equal human rights for all.

Richly illustrated with 120 photographs, *No Easy Victories* features chapters by William Minter, Lisa Brock, Mimi Edmunds, Joseph F. Jordan, David Goodman, and Walter Turner. Shorter essays highlight a wide array of individual activists and organizations.

“*No Easy Victories* tells the compelling stories behind the U.S. anti-apartheid movement in the voices of those who were there. It reminds us that movements emerge over time, built on hard work by movement foot soldiers and on personal networks that bridge generations and continents.” —Danny Glover, actor, activist, chair of TransAfrica Forum

“Africa today is experiencing a second wind of change, with Africans demanding good governance, respect for human rights, and empowerment of women. Those who are in the forefront are standing on the shoulders of those whose voices and stories we

hear in *No Easy Victories*.” —Charlayne Hunter-Gault, author of *New News out of Africa: Uncovering the African Renaissance*

“With its mixture of history, personal stories and photographs, this richly detailed book has the feel of a family album. The family, though, is a large one: multiracial, multicontinental. Some of its members are well known, some unsung. All of them share a passion for justice.” —Adam Hochschild, author, *King Leopold’s Ghost*

“*No Easy Victories* is equal parts inspiration, education and celebration of how social change happens. It is a remarkable chronicle of how activists on opposite sides of the Atlantic united around their shared commitments to freedom and self-determination.” —Amy Goodman, host, *Democracy Now!*

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“This is a remarkable and often insightful collection of essays and reflections ... in its very strength it exposes an entire realm of research that has yet to be completed.” -

Gerald Horne, H-Net review January 2008

## Chapter 4

# The 1970s: Expanding Networks

*Joseph F. Jordan*

In 1972 I was a 20-year-old psychology major at Norfolk State University, a historically black institution in Virginia. One day a visiting white South African lecturer came to campus. In his speech, he referred to the lesser capabilities of “our blacks”—meaning black South Africans—compared to U.S. blacks. I still remember the students’ anger. One of us challenged the visitor by asking him what he meant by “our blacks.” Was he suggesting some kind of ownership? The lecturer, visibly perturbed by our contempt, tried to forge ahead. But it got worse.

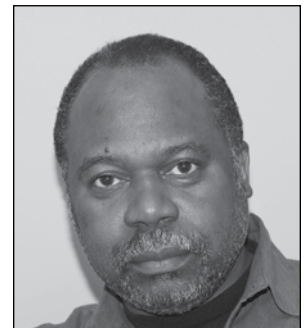
He launched into an explanation of the physical characteristics of some black South African women, the so-called Hottentots (the term is a derogatory reference to the Khoikhoi people driven into the Kalahari Desert by the first wave of white settlers). According to the lecturer, these women were able to weather periods of privation and scarcity by storing fat in their buttocks! We didn’t riot; we simply tuned him out. As far as we were concerned, he had nothing to say that we needed to hear. While few of us could have spoken in depth about South Africa and the situation there, we were familiar enough with racism to know a racist when we heard one.

The South African’s disturbing visit was an important moment for me because it demonstrated both my ignorance about Africa and my lack of political sophistication. The Vietnam War and the draft of young men like me was another indicator

that I needed to become more politically engaged. Some of my high school classmates, who had either been drafted or had volunteered for military service, had returned home in body bags, forcing me to think about their senseless deaths. I vowed never to participate in a war unless I was fighting for something I believed in, something for which I was willing to die.

I still hadn’t connected Vietnam to South Africa, though, or the situation in either of those places to the one at home. At Norfolk State we were more concerned with the racism we encountered each day than with racism 4,000 or 5,000 miles away. It wasn’t until I began graduate study at the much larger Ohio State University in 1973 that the relationship between Southern Africa and the United States became clear to me. That was partly because there were many foreign students on campus, and a substantial number of them were from nations in Southern Africa.

At Ohio State, where I was a member of the All-African Student and Faculty Union (AASFU) and co-editor of its monthly newspaper, *Our Choking Times*, my consciousness and activism increased. In AASFU I participated in heated political debates about competing liberation groups in South Africa, Angola, and Zimbabwe.



Joseph Jordan

*Photo courtesy of Joseph Jordan.*

And since this was the era of Black Power, black students like me also debated what allying with the white Left in the United States might mean.

As our sense of the world we lived in developed, we began to see that local cops or sheriff's departments weren't all we had to confront. Challenging the U.S. government seemed an increasingly important task that those of us trying to support Southern African liberation movements would have to shoulder. The giant multinational corporations we were being educated to serve seemed a dominant force in Southern Africa, maintaining the status quo. Support for Southern African liberation meant we would have to challenge them. South Africa, where many U.S. corporations were concentrated, took on special importance. Given South Africa's powerful political and economic role in the region, we knew that if African revolutionary movements were successful and the apartheid nation fell, black majority rule would become a reality throughout Southern Africa. We also recognized South Africa's role as a regional terrorist that attacked and destabilized independent African nations in an attempt to guarantee its own security.

It was a great learning period for me and for others like me. We had first been influenced by black radical organizations, notably the Black Panthers and the All-African People's Revolutionary Party. These had succeeded groups like the NAACP, CORE, SNCC, and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), which had largely focused on civil rights in the U.S. South. Although we didn't make the connection until later, during the 1960s civil rights activists like SNCC's James Forman had already recognized a relationship between the oppression of blacks in the United States and in Southern Africa. Indeed, the "one man one vote" slogan SNCC had used for its Southern voter registration campaign was borrowed from Zambia's independence struggle. By the 1970s SNCC no longer existed, and CORE changed for the worse under new leadership. The NAACP was still focused on its decades-old approach to civil rights, and the SCLC had declined after the assassination of King. But militant and thoughtful activists who had been shaped by these organizations remained active, forming a kind of loose political network or set of interconnecting networks.

Activist and scholar Geri Augusto, who took part in protests on the Howard University campus in the late 1960s, recalls these networks as complex and multigenerational. Her mother and father had been active with CORE and SNCC in Dayton, Ohio. Augusto herself became involved with the DC-based Center for Black Education, an independent school and community education center. Later, while living in Angola, she was one of the key contacts in Africa for the Southern Africa Support Project (SASP) of Washington, DC.

Augusto emphasizes the myriad interconnections between activists, individuals as well as groups. At the Center for Black Education, she recalls, there were old SNCC people, a few people who had been involved in the student strike at San Francisco State, and others with links to the Black Panthers or to black nationalist Maulana Ron Karenga's U.S. organization.

This whole thing is a story of networks and nodes and density and connections. I think complexity theory is probably a good frame for looking at how black activists got created and how they got hooked into other nodes and sets of institutions and activities across the country.

A quick summary of complexity theory is many agents interacting in a field or a system or a space. Each one has its own logic, its own culture, its own interests, but for whatever reason, it has, from time to time, to interact with any number of others. And then they come to share certain kinds of things, like you might share a set of ideas or beliefs. Or you might come together from time to time to work on a purpose, like all of us came together for that first African Liberation Day. We [all] came together where there was mutual interest.

If the roots of the anti-apartheid movement were planted in earlier decades, the 1970s was the decade in which those roots began to grow, shaping the course of the movement in the 1980s and into the 1990s. In my own case, involvement with African liberation pushed me away from my own uncritical politics into a more disciplined analysis and approach to struggle. By the end of the 1970s I had left Ohio State for Howard University in Washington, DC. There I

joined SASP, a stalwart in DC's black community, serving as its co-chair for several years.

Many people representing a range of political positions were part of the 1970s anti-apartheid movement in the United States. But the movement was primarily shaped by activists who recognized the importance of local organizing and local strategies. In many cases these were designed to coincide with the national focus of organizations like the African Liberation Support Committee, AFSC, ACOA, the Washington Office on Africa, and, beginning in 1978, TransAfrica. Close attention was paid to the use of local, national, and international media.

Veterans of the civil rights movement, in particular, brought useful skills and experiences to this phase of the movement. Frank Beeman was a key figure in the Southern Africa Liberation Committee, a small group founded in East Lansing, Michigan in 1972. He recalls that, for him, anti-apartheid work "just seemed to be a natural shift from the civil rights movement."

Older organizations and their members, who had been involved with Africa far longer than our student generation had, helped connect us to groups in various communities around the country. The ACOA, in addition to Washington lobbying, also funded field programs, working in Chicago with Prexy Nesbitt and in New York, building bridges to the black activist communities in those cities.

ACOA and other experienced activist groups brought sophisticated strategies and tactics to our attention. As early as 1966, for example, the National Council of Churches and its member churches began using their institutional power to challenge investment in South Africa. Although this was only a beginning, it pioneered the strategy of targeting individual corporations involved in South Africa.

Another member of SASP, Mark Harrison, served as program director for the United Methodist Board of Church and Society and as human rights coordinator for Clergy and Laity Concerned. He remembers that in the religious community, "the growth of activity was uneven, and mostly unstructured except for the work of some key groups at the national level." Even so, he notes that the religious community led the way. "As early as 1976, before

the divestment issue became nationally prominent, the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) had adopted a strong resolution on divestment and on bank deposits by member congregations and agencies" (Harrison 1995). Church activism encouraged our own, and we in turn pressed church groups to become more active, despite the conservatism of some denominations.

At the national level, labor unions were reluctant to join our effort because they maintained a strong anticommunist stance inherited from the Cold War. Yet the rank and file members in local branches often adopted a more militant anti-apartheid attitude than the leadership. At the local level, direct action was carried out by groups like the Dodge Revolutionary Union Movement and the League of Revolutionary Black Workers, both operating in the auto industry in Detroit.

In Cambridge, Massachusetts, the Polaroid Revolutionary Workers Movement was formed for the express purpose of taking action on South Africa. In 1970, two black employees at the Polaroid Corporation in Cambridge, Ken Williams and Caroline Hunter, had discovered that Polaroid was selling its instant photo technology for use by the South African military and police. They organized the workers' movement, which demanded that Polaroid stop doing business in South Africa and turn over its South African profits to African liberation groups. Working with South African exile Chris Nteta, who was based in Boston, they gained not only local but international attention. They testified before the United Nations and at the House Africa Subcommittee in Washington. Polaroid responded with an "experiment," improving conditions for its black workers in South Africa. The experiment ended five years later when it was revealed that Polaroid's distributor was violating Polaroid's commitment not to sell directly to the South African government.

In 1972 black longshoremen, in an alliance with black students, held demonstrations at ports in Burnside, Louisiana, aimed at preventing ships from unloading Rhodesian chrome. Similar actions were held at ports in Baltimore, Boston, and Philadelphia.

An emerging figure in the early part of the decade was Randall Robinson, a brilliant young student at Harvard Law School. In 1971 he teamed up with Chris Nteta, then a student at Harvard



## Historic Protest in the Deep South Dockworkers Slow Ore Ship

By KEN LAWRENCE  
(Staff Correspondent)

BURNSIDE, La.—One of the most significant events of this period in the South occurred here this spring when black dock workers refused to unload a ship full of chrome ore from Rhodesia.

The ship was finally unloaded by other workers but only after a historic protest by black workers and students.

It appeared to be the first time that black Americans had refused to unload a ship bringing imports from a country run by racists and imperialists.

The protesters said the ore is the product of the oppression of the people of Rhodesia. They called on all citizens to join them in opposing the exploiting of Africans by U.S. corporations and the U.S. government policy which encourages this exploitation.

"Racism abroad, like racism at home, must be resisted with all the power and strength that we have," one of the black organizers of the protest declared. "Black Americans will not tolerate a Vietnam in Africa!"

Chrome ore is among 12 items specifi-



—Photo by James W. Terry, III

cally barred from trade with Rhodesia under a resolution passed by the United Nations Security Council in 1966.

The resolution was aimed at the white rulers of Rhodesia, known to Africans as Zimbabwe. The Rhodesian government has been harsh in its repression of black people, who make up 95 per cent of the population.

The United States had voted for the boycott resolution, but the U.S. Congress and President Nixon got around it with the Military Procurement Act of 1971.

In early March, Africans notified friends in New York that an Argentine vessel, the *Santos Vega*, was on the way to Burnside terminal with 25,000 tons of the ore. The New Yorkers notified movement people in Louisiana, who went into action.

An alliance was formed between the predominantly black locals 1830 and 1833 of the International Longshoremen's Association (ILA) and an organization of faculty members and students at Southern University in Baton Rouge called the Committee of Blacks Against Oppression.

The ILA, an AFL-CIO affiliate, refused to unload the "hot cargo" and the Committee organized a mass demonstration at the Burnside terminal. More than 300 Southern University students joined the demonstration.

In the face of this massive protest, the *Santos Vega* didn't dock on March 15, as

(Continued on page 2)

Front page of the *Southern Patriot* shows black dock workers in Louisiana who refused to unload a ship carrying chrome ore from Rhodesia, April 1972.

Photo courtesy of Ken Lawrence.

Divinity School, to form the Pan-African Liberation Committee. The group called for Harvard to divest from Gulf Oil, which was providing the colonial Portuguese government with funds to wage wars in Angola, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. In April 1972 Robinson, Nteta, and 36 black Harvard undergraduates took over the building that housed the office of the newly appointed president, Derek Bok. The takeover lasted six days, ending when Harvard agreed to send what would prove to be a fruitless fact-finding mission to Angola.

By the mid-1970s new voices, including those of students, were making themselves heard. Grass-roots groups in the United States were forging close working relationships with the liberation organizations in Southern Africa, including South Africa's ANC and PAC, Angola's MPLA, Mozambique's Frelimo, and Namibia's SWAPO, among others. These ties influenced our political thinking, guiding

us to a more radical stance on an array of Southern African issues.

An anti-apartheid and Southern Africa support community was growing internationally, and this also had an impact on the growth of the movement in the United States. Contacts with counterparts in Canada, Great Britain, and other parts of Europe, as well as in Africa itself, influenced the strategies and tactics of U.S. activists. Cultural and economic boycotts as well as the campaign for sanctions gained momentum from the continuous interaction between groups on both sides of the Atlantic.

Broadly speaking, this phase of the anti-apartheid and Southern Africa liberation movement was probably the most radical, mirroring the political sensibilities of the era. As the U.S. governing establishment moved away from the liberal domestic policies of the Kennedy-Johnson administrations, the crackdown on domestic dissent and the escala-

tion of the war in Vietnam had a radicalizing effect. Equally important were developments in Africa. The Cold War conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, having festered throughout the 1960s, raged across the continent in the 1970s. The settler colonies of Southern Africa were allied with the United States and apartheid South Africa, ostensibly in the name of fighting communism. All continued to turn a deaf ear to the growing chorus of voices demanding African majority rule.

## The Influence of the Liberation Movements

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At various times in the mid-1970s, liberation movement leaders visited Ohio State University and many other U.S. colleges and universities to talk about the struggle in Southern Africa. They included, among others, ANC stalwarts like Johnny Makatini and Thabo Mbeki and SWAPO leaders Sam Nujoma and Theo-Ben Gurirab. These voices from the front added a measure of validity and contributed mightily to campus organizing and public information work.

As the Southern Africa liberation movements grew in sophistication, they also challenged U.S. support groups to move beyond an idealized and simplistic image of the struggle. They encouraged us to develop a political analysis capable of critiquing the various forms of colonialism, neocolonialism, and imperialism supported by the U.S. government. This challenge opened up the intellectual space for us in the support movement to debate the concept of “solidarity” and how best to organize ourselves to be most effective.

What emerged as a crucial domestic task, as we in SASP often said, was to make the struggle in Southern Africa real and not something that was remote and unrelated to our daily lives. Frank Beeman says his organization knew that “people would do what was right if they knew the truth, if they knew what was actually happening.” Bringing the Southern African struggle home depended on maintaining close ties with the people involved in and leading those struggles in Africa. Those ties in turn depended on face-to-face contact, often in the course of U.S. visits by the liberation leaders. George Houser, a founder and former director of the ACOA, recalls:

We made contacts with liberation movements our primary focus. This began with the ANC and Indian Congress leadership in South Africa—Sisulu, Cachalia, Luthuli, Tambo, Z. K. Matthews, Manilal Gandhi and later Mandela, and so many others. We can still recite the initials and acronyms by which the movements were commonly known [but] it’s easier to use names of leaders—Nkrumah, Azikiwe, Mondlane, Cabral, Nyerere, Kaunda, Kenyatta, Mboya, Nkomo, Mugabe, Kozonguizi, Nujoma, Neto, Lumumba. Each name conjures up memories. I recall when Sam Nujoma, [who was to become the first president of Namibia], came to New York after escaping from the then South West Africa after the Katatura uprising of 1959. One of the first places he came was to our office.

If the task was to make the struggle in Southern Africa real, Robert Van Lierop’s documentary film *A Luta Continua* (The Struggle Continues) accomplished it brilliantly. Based on his travels inside Mozambique with Frelimo in 1971 and released the following year, the film was a spare cinema verité record of Frelimo’s struggle. Its impact was far-reaching, as it brought the battlefield of Mozambique and the struggle against Portuguese colonialism to the U.S. public as well as to viewers in other countries. Van Lierop recalls:

It was smuggled into Portugal by Frelimo. They used it there. It was also smuggled into South Africa. And prior to the Soweto uprising it was shown by the Black Consciousness Movement and others in South Africa. And they began to use some of the slogans—*a luta continua*, which was, as you know, the way Eduardo [Mondlane] always signed his letters. That was why we chose that title.

Van Lierop recalls showing the film in venues throughout the United States, including in prisons and on a Navajo Indian reservation.

I can remember an outdoor screening in Harlem. We put some sheets as a screen, and screened it—I can’t remember the exact street, but I think it was around 132nd Street. And Guebuza was there, and Guebuza stood on top of a car to address the crowd [Armando Guebuza, a top Frelimo

leader in the 1970s, would be elected president of Mozambique in 2004].

Dr. Sylvia Hill, an educator and one of the original organizers of the Southern Africa Support Project, also recalls that *A Luta Continua* had a transformative effect on her when she first saw the unfinished version of the film in 1971.

I remember distinctly looking at that film and envisioning social change based on a science, much like when I first saw the *Battle of Algiers* in San Francisco with Jimmie Garrett, [and] a whole bunch of Black Student Union folks. I remember for the first time having this sense that you can have a science of change because you have to think methodologically about what you're doing. It's not just haphazard and just occurring willy-nilly.

Van Lierop had already been involved in anti-apartheid and Southern Africa work before the 1970s and had served on the board of the ACOA in the late 1960s. With Prexy Nesbitt, he founded the Africa Information Service (AIS), which provided valuable research material for organizations interested in Africa work. In October 1972 Van Lierop used AIS to bring together PAIGC leader Amilcar Cabral with about 120 African Americans to discuss the liberation struggle in Africa (Cabral 1973a). AIS was never able to realize its full potential, but it produced a number of important documents including a collection of speeches by Amilcar Cabral, *Return to the Source* (1973b), republished in 1974 by Monthly Review Press.

## **A Watershed Moment: The Defeat of Portuguese Colonial Rule**

Cabral had returned to Guinea-Bissau from exile in Angola in 1956 to found the African Party for the Independence of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. During 1970 he traveled to the United States for a series of public and private engagements (see chapter 1). In a 1965 published interview, Cabral had already articulated PAIGC's understanding of the role of solidarity with progressive forces in support of revolutionary struggle.

Our solidarity goes to every just cause in the world, but we also derive strength from the solidarity of others. . . . [We] have a fundamental principle that consists in

counting above all on our own efforts, our own sacrifices. But, in the objective framework of Portuguese colonization, dear friends, we are also aware that our struggle is not solely ours in the present stage of man's history. It is one that comprises all of Africa, all of progressive humanity. This is why we, . . . confronting the peculiar difficulties of our struggle, and in the context of current history, have realized the need for concrete help from every progressive force in the world. . . . We expect only that aid which each is able to offer to our struggle. This is our ethic of help.

Cabral returned to the United States in 1972 for a historic appearance at the United Nations, where he was welcomed as the de facto leader of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde. On both trips he met informally with supporters in the activist community. Because of these contacts, he had a large influence on the thinking of many in the anti-apartheid and Southern Africa support movement. Cabral used his keen theoretical insights into the process of liberation to build a movement based on the realities of the people of Guinea-Bissau and Cape Verde and the concerns of their daily lives under colonialism. As one writer noted: "Cabral's revolutionary strategy emphasized the political mobilization of the masses around practical material issues rather than grand theoretical ideals" (Meisenhelder 1993, 40).

Cabral's conversations also ushered in a renewed and often heated debate in movement circles about the process and practice of solidarity and, in particular, about the role of race. There was tension over the various forms of radicalism that were shaping black struggle in the United States, and over some of the forms of black nationalism that some activists embraced. Much of this came to a head in the split over Angola, between those in the United States who supported the MPLA and those who supported Jonas Savimbi's Unita. The debates revealed an overall lack of coherence and the absence of a coordinating structure for the U.S. movement. These weaknesses would continue to plague the movement even though it was able, ultimately, to play a vital role in the eventual fall of apartheid as well as in the liberation of other Southern African states.

Amilcar Cabral's assassination by agents of the Portuguese secret police in 1973 was a tragedy for



the entire Southern Africa liberation support movement. His brilliance as a revolutionary theorist and his legacy of principled leadership helped change the way the movement defined its role in liberation struggles in Africa and elsewhere. The assassination also meant the loss of an important political voice that advocated for Africa's liberation movements here in the United States. Nevertheless, while he didn't live to witness it, I like to think that Cabral knew that the Portuguese fascist state was about to fall. And so it did, on April 25, 1974, just over a year after his death. Portugal's new rulers moved quickly to recognize the independence of Guinea-Bissau and to begin the transition to independence in Cape Verde, Angola, São Tomé, and Mozambique.

We in AASFU were buoyed by the dictatorship's demise and the birth of the new nations. The independence of the Portuguese colonies allowed us, for the first time, to celebrate national liberation to which our support work in the United States had contributed. The Portuguese defeat also vindicated our choice to support the MPLA, Frelimo, and the

PAIGC over other groups that had vied for our backing. Against the backdrop of the Cold War, questions had been raised, both inside and outside of government, about our support for movements on the political left, seen by the U.S. government and some civil rights organizations as "communist." Equally controversial, especially to many in the non-violent civil rights movement, was the decision to support groups that had taken up arms. The victories in Mozambique, Angola, and Guinea-Bissau helped justify our support for armed struggle against colonial rule. It was clear that victory did not mean a bloodbath of retribution.

But the Cold War context remained, so that even in this moment of accomplishment and celebration the liberation process faced a new danger. The Cold War would play out in decidedly hot and vicious wars aimed at destabilizing Angola and Mozambique. These two countries were targets because they were providing bases and support for the continuing liberation struggles in Namibia and South Africa. As early as August 1974, the CIA had begun funneling aid to the National



The All-African Student and Faculty Union organized in solidarity with African liberation at Ohio State University in Columbus during the 1970s. At this fundraising event Joseph Jordan is at the center playing the cabaça. *Photo courtesy of Joseph Jordan.*

Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), led by Holden Roberto. South Africa, aided by the United States, was assisting Unita in the south of Angola, as well as backing insurgents in Mozambique.

Meanwhile, Roy Innis, who had replaced Floyd McKissick as chair of CORE, forced many Southern civil rights movement veterans out of the organization. He announced that CORE was now recruiting black Americans to fight in Angola against the MPLA—effectively inviting African Americans to fight on the side of the apartheid state. We thought, what foolishness! Doesn't he know what a mercenary is? Doesn't he know what mercenaries have done in Africa?

The AASFU meetings in the fall of 1976 were the scene of heated debate. Savimbi's appeal to the most narrow aspects of black nationalist sentiment was attractive to some in the African American activist community. At the same time, liberation movements with Soviet backing were looked on with suspicion by some, not only because the Soviet Union was communist, but also because it represented an alien presence in Africa and ran counter to the Pan-African politics that were popular at that moment.

Looking back some years later, I recall the temporary confusion in our ranks. A member of the All-African People's Revolutionary Party who visited one of our gatherings looked me straight in the eye and asked who were the "correct" forces to support in Angola. I think we spent several hours denouncing Jonas Savimbi, leader of Unita, and talking about his ties to the CIA and to South Africa.

The warfare in Angola would go on for almost a quarter century. The battles to control this resource-rich nation would eventually involve five U.S. presidents, numerous other leaders from around the world, and tens of thousands of innocent, noncombatant Angolans. The counterrevolutionary war was even more devastating than the revolutionary war for independence in terms of the damage it inflicted on the country. Those of us in the U.S. movement struggled with thorny questions: What could we be *for*, now that national liberation had been achieved? We watched in dismay as the superpowers fanned the flames of civil conflicts designed to tie up resources, split once unified movements, and neutralize solidarity forces in the United States and elsewhere.

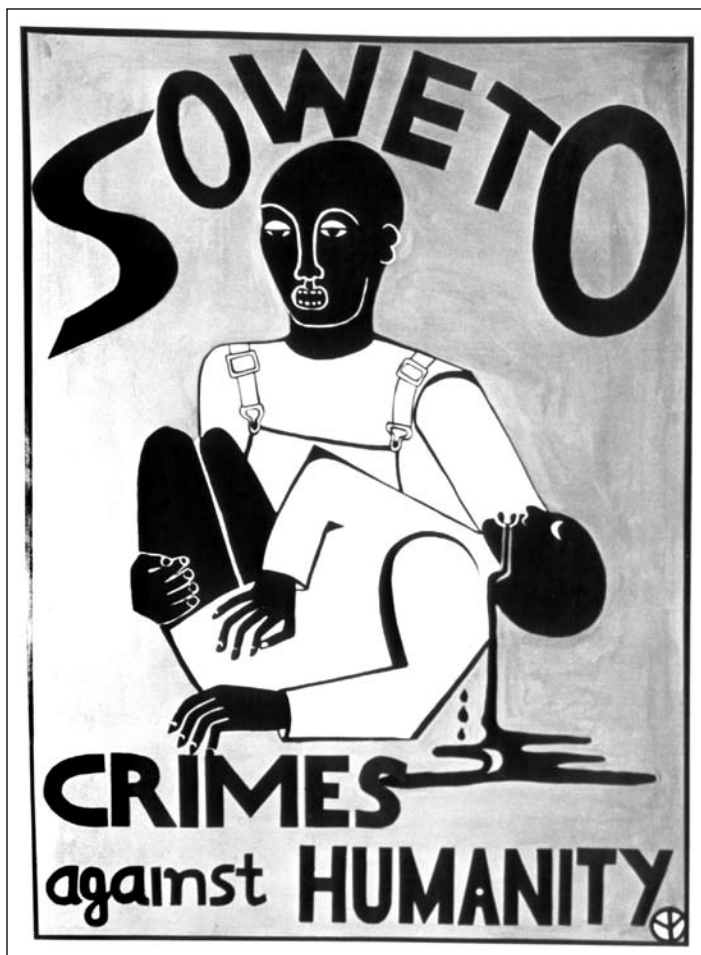
## Strategy and Tactics

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In practice, one of the most important answers came from South Africa. On June 16, 1976, students in the South African township of Soweto took to the streets in opposition to the apartheid regime, sparking a wave of protests around the country. The response from the regime's security forces was brutal. Over the following eight months, according to low-end estimates by the government-appointed Cillie Commission of Enquiry, 575 people died, 451 of them as a result of police action. Within four months people in over 160 African communities around the country became involved in resistance, at least 250,000 people in Soweto alone. Despite the banning of organizations, arrests, and torture, by 1977 the regime had only succeeded in imposing a temporary calm. The continuing resistance inside South Africa evoked a worldwide response and the solidarity movement entered a new phase, gaining mass support and high visibility.

There were political divisions among opponents of the South African regime, of course. Some U.S. activists were strongly allied with the ANC, others with the PAC, the Black Consciousness Movement, or the Unity Movement. But these differences were almost always eclipsed—at least in public—by the common ground found in opposing U.S. collaboration with apartheid. The drama of resistance in South Africa and the brutality of regime actions such as the killing of Steve Biko in prison in 1977 were powerful incentives to unity.

The latter half of the 1970s saw the beginnings of high-profile campaigns targeting state and local governments, churches, universities, and other institutions. The goal was divestment, the withdrawal of funds or selling of stock in banks and corporations operating in South Africa. *Divestment*, it was hoped, would lead to *disinvestment*, the actual exit of a bank or corporation from South Africa. Along with divestment campaigns, sports and cultural boycotts proliferated, aimed at isolating South Africa on the international scene. Such campaigns and boycotts were important actions for many groups, both national and local. But most never saw themselves as working only or primarily toward those objectives. While some groups were founded specifically to work for divestment, disinvestment, and sanctions, with only occasional involvement in the broader



Sam Nzima's photo of 12-year-old Hector Pieterse, the first person killed by police in the student uprising of 1976, was shown around the globe. Artist Birgit Walker created this graphic based on the photo, and ACOA used it for an anti-apartheid calendar in 1978. Photo courtesy of Richard Knight.

movement, most of the groups saw these strategies as means to more radical transformation.

The growth of divestment campaigns provided new opportunities for organizations and individuals to become involved in the anti-apartheid fight. At Ohio State University, from 1975 until I left in 1979, AASFU and *Our Choking Times* continually pressed the university administration to divest the institution's holdings in companies and funds that did business in South Africa. We encountered resistance that was as much cultural as political. In one confrontation with the administration over these and other issues, we were met by an assistant to the president of the university. As we explained to him our position on South Africa, he said that he had heard that no blacks inhabited the Cape of Good Hope when the Dutch arrived, therefore it had been open territory. We then asked him, if Africans or any

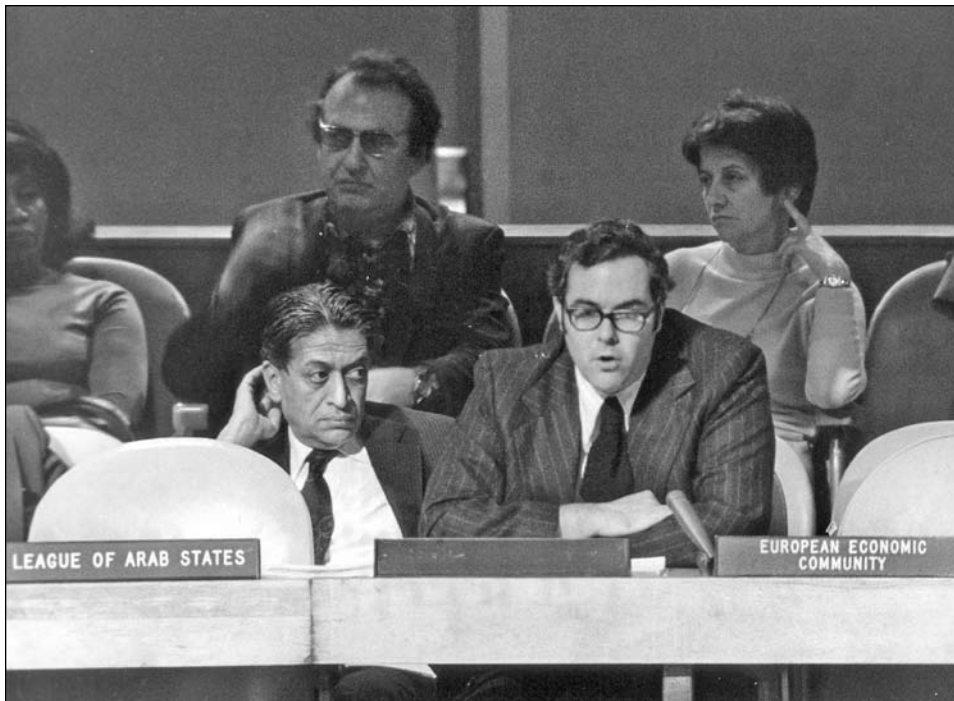
other people had landed on one of the uninhabited beaches of Great Britain, could it have been claimed by the explorers? He replied that using our logic the United States would belong to the Indians. Without hesitation we responded, you're damn right!

We also worked hard to support the sports and cultural boycotts on campus and picketed any event featuring South African performers or performers who had played in South Africa. In the winter of 1976, Arthur Ashe sponsored white South African tennis players in an exhibition at French Field House on the university campus. That winter like all Ohio winters was frigid, yet we bundled up with our leaflets and staked out the facility. We were even able to recruit non-AASFU members to help distribute the flyers to white and black attendees. To our amazement, some of the black attendees, as well as most of the white attendees, balled up the flyers and threw them back at us. Although disappointed, we pressed on. It is a moment that remains in my consciousness, 30 years later. Ashe subsequently changed his position on South Africa and supported the sports boycott.

Many U.S. companies stayed in South Africa, leading some analysts to say that the divestment, disinvestment, and boycott campaigns failed to achieve their goals. But even a casual look at these efforts refutes such argument. These campaigns had several objectives. The first was to make participation in the movement accessible and easy for individuals and organizations that might be reluctant to fully commit to the entire range of activities that were part of movement work. Support for disinvestment and divestment campaigns could be as simple as casting a shareholder vote or signing a petition.

A second objective was to expose U.S. state and corporate complicity with apartheid, which was hard to defend under any circumstances. Denying South Africa and the other outlaw regimes in the region safe corporate cover helped raise the consciousness of many beyond the activist community. This "public" strategy not only embarrassed corporations, it also helped garner additional exposure for the work of the movement.

Finally, these campaigns did eventually have economic repercussions, both directly on U.S. corporations and by building support for the demand that the U.S. Congress pass economic sanctions against South Africa. The movement has never claimed that



Tim Smith, right, testifies at the United Nations, November 4, 1976. From 1976 to 2000 Smith led the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility, a faith-based coalition of institutional investors who were key players in the divestment movement. *UN Photo.*

divestment or disinvestment strategies alone were effective, but it is clear that these actions functioned as part of a comprehensive strategy that hastened the end of colonialism and settler rule.

A 1970 ruling by the Securities and Exchange Commission that allowed shareholders to submit resolutions on specific social responsibility concerns opened the door to anti-apartheid activists, including elements within the National Council of Churches. The church council established the Corporate Information Center in 1971, which became the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility (ICCR) in 1972. ICCR played a pivotal role, encouraging Protestant and Catholic churches and religious orders to challenge support for apartheid.

Investors introduced these concerns at shareholders' meetings through two main types of resolutions: fact-finding resolutions, which requested that the corporation disclose its operations in South Africa or create an investigative committee to examine the impact of its corporate activities on black South Africans, and calls for unconditional termination of all activities in South Africa (Culver-son 1999, 87).

Shareholder resolutions were widely used in the 1970s. For example, on January 27, 1973 the Church Project on U.S. Investments in Southern Africa filed resolutions with 11 companies. Groups involved in supporting this initiative included the American Baptist Churches, the National Council of Churches, the United Presbyterian Church in the USA, the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the Unitarian Universalist Association.

As the push for divestment and disinvestment continued to grow, many activists were surprised to see the introduction of the Sullivan Principles in 1977.

The brainchild of Rev. Leon Sullivan, a Baptist minister, the Sullivan Principles presented a dilemma for the anti-apartheid movement in the 1970s and early 1980s. Sullivan pitched the principles as an alternative to divestment and disinvestment that would offer corporate interests an opportunity to reject the mandates of apartheid in the operation of their business interests in South Africa.

In Sullivan's view, disinvestment and divestment would harm blacks in South Africa. A better strategy, he believed, would be to work through corporations that could, by their presence and size, bring about crucial societal changes. Numerous corporations rushed to sign the principles and then argued that because they were signatories they had rejected apartheid, so divestment and disinvestment campaigns were no longer relevant.

Many of us disagreed with Sullivan's reasoning, even though the principles garnered wide support in some liberal corners. We felt that the issue was not simply workplace conditions but the question of majority rule; once that was achieved, the nation could then select the policies that investing companies should follow. Sullivan himself later renounced the principles and declared that sanctions against

South Africa would be the only way to force that nation to change its ways. Nevertheless, Sullivan's supporters still claim that the principles played a key role in the dismantling of apartheid.

### **The Link between Organizing and Community Consciousness**

Organizations like the Southern Africa Support Project in Washington, DC understood that popular education was important. Divestment campaigns and boycotts, as well as opportunities for direct-action protest, helped raise awareness of the connections between the U.S. economy and the colonial and apartheid machinery. This knowledge would become important in the 1980s when SASP and others coordinated the demonstrations at the South African embassy. They found a receptive audience among people whose consciousness had been raised during the campaigns of the 1970s. It was clear that education, especially at the local level, was a crucial part of organizing that could pay off, sometimes in unanticipated ways.

Cherri Waters, a former staffer at TransAfrica, emphasized the important role that local organizing groups played in building the movement:

There were these little Africa focus groups all over the United States that nobody outside that city and that group knew anything about. Certainly, that was true in DC with SASP . . . And the divestment campaign also pulled together and recreated that. The other source of continuous interest would have come out of the churches. And it was the action at the level of the people in the pews that ultimately got the people in the hierarchies to pay



Divestment demonstration, New York, 1977. The Committee to Oppose Bank Loans to South Africa was established by ACOA, AFSC, and Clergy and Laity Concerned. At this June 24 demonstration, a member of the Furriers Joint Council joined the march. His union would withdraw more than \$11 million of pension and welfare funds from a bank making loans to South Africa. *Photo by David Vita.*

attention to these issues—not the other way around.

These were new voices, and while many of these individuals may have been somewhat unfamiliar with the political details of Southern Africa, a good number were already skilled in organizing work. Many of the black leaders of the movement were former members of SNCC or other civil rights organizations that had been active in the 1950s and 1960s. Still others had participated in revolutionary black nationalist, cultural nationalist, or other radical organizations that emerged with the call for Black Power in 1966. Their approach to the struggles in Southern Africa was greatly influenced by their experience with struggles in their own communities against racist oppression and segregation. The fit wasn't always perfect. The liberal push for reform in U.S. communities was not at all the same as the revolutionary struggle to overthrow governments in Africa. African liberation movements and their supporters often found Marxist analyses the best guide to understanding their realities. But for white and





More than 1,000 people participated in a May Day march in Boston, Massachusetts, to protest apartheid and U.S. involvement in South Africa on April 30, 1977. Organizers included Youth Against War and Fascism and the African National Congress. Sponsors included several state representatives and labor officials. Photo by Dick Wheaton.

black liberals, Marxism was anathema. And many black radicals saw it as an alien philosophy that had little relevance to African realities or struggles. Still, a good number of organizations embraced the vision of a free, egalitarian, and socialist Africa that Marxism seemed to promise.

Despite the difference in context and in understandings, the role of the U.S. government in opposing liberation in Southern Africa made for common ground between the liberation movements and Americans questioning their own country's direction. This required building alliances that cut across divisions in the United States and reaching out to distinct sectors of U.S. society, including public office holders, church groups, advocacy organizations, and community-based groups. Special efforts were made to encourage solidarity with the black community as well. This close engagement encouraged the development of many activists who eventually became dedicated and effective workers for Southern African liberation.

## Emerging Activism in the Black Community

The decade of the 1970s saw the creation of an unprecedented number of new organizations in black communities that focused specifically on South Africa and Southern Africa. In addition, many black organizations that had never expressed a specific interest in Southern Africa work began to turn their attention to the crisis that was growing in the region.

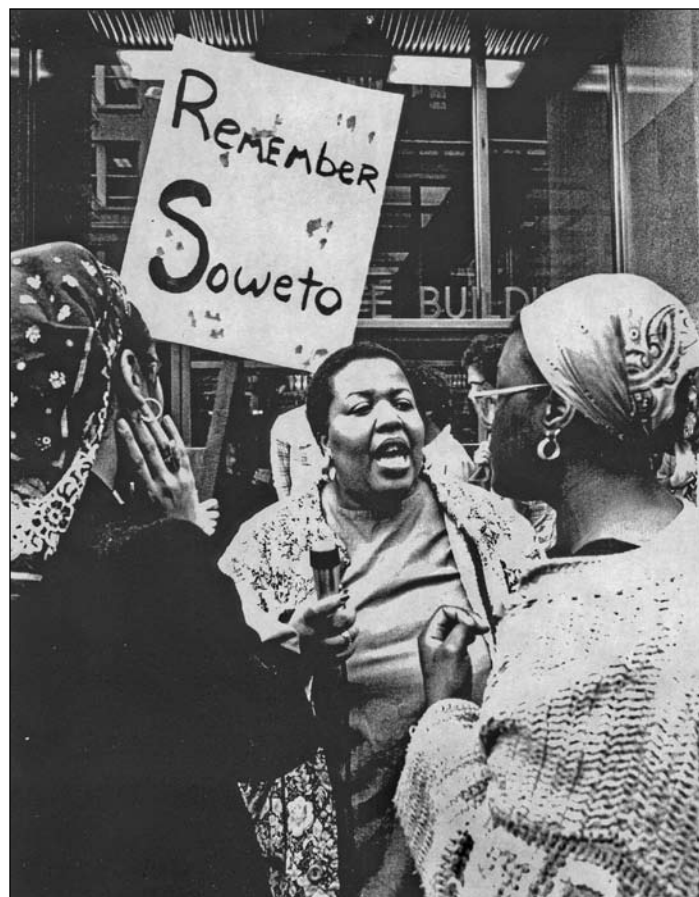
Older, conservative, middle-class black organizations like the NAACP, the Urban League, and a number of national religious organizations also expressed support for liberation struggles in Africa. One of the vehicles for this expression was the American Negro Leadership Conference on Africa (ANLCA), which had been founded a decade earlier in 1962. Believing that pressure from the black community was needed to change U.S. policy toward Africa, the American Committee on Africa proposed creation of the organization to civil rights leaders, including Roy Wilkins of the NAACP, Whitney

Young of the National Urban League, Martin Luther King Jr., labor and civil rights pioneer A. Philip Randolph, James Farmer of CORE, and Dorothy Height of the National Council of Negro Women. Ted Brown from the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters became executive director. Under his leadership the ANLCA worked to establish an Africa program for each civil rights organization and to make an impact on U.S. policy toward Africa. The organization was active in the 1960s and early 1970s, laying a foundation for subsequent work.

During the first half of the 1970s, determination grew stronger within the black community to support South Africa's anti-apartheid struggle as well as the liberation struggle intensifying across Southern Africa. Groups such as the African American Solidarity Committee of Chicago, the African Liberation Support Committee, and the Harlem-based Blacks in Solidarity with South African Liberation were formed. Their radical agendas aimed not only at supporting Southern African movements but also at challenging U.S. foreign policy at many different levels.

The rhetoric and objectives of the liberation movements tended to push black organizations toward more radical analysis and actions than domestic struggle did. In order to be effective advocates, black Americans were obliged to commit to constant study that both informed and critiqued the practice they had followed in previous movement work. Even many of the most conservative black organizations came to understand that the movements in Namibia, Mozambique, Angola, Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Guinea-Bissau/Cape Verde were not struggling merely to achieve civil rights in their countries but were engaged in a fight for a nation.

With the rise of a new black consciousness in the United States, the traditional civil rights organizations faced a demand for a more pronounced commitment to the South African and Southern African support movements. They had seen their influence weakened by the radicalization of the black community, particularly among young people. Regaining their place as recognized opinion leaders was directly related to their ability to stake out a more progressive position on issues that were important to blacks. Because of this, support for African struggles became as much a strategic move for these organizations as it was an expression of their strongly felt convictions.



The Third World Women's Alliance rallied at the Federal Building in San Francisco in 1979 to protest U.S. complicity with the apartheid regime. Leading the chant, from left, are Michele Mouton, Letisha Wadsworth, and Attieno Davis.

*Photo courtesy of Nunu Kidane and Women of Color Resource Center.*

Activists focused on Southern Africa began to increase their work with the social justice groups that had emerged with the rise of black consciousness that followed Stokely Carmichael's call for Black Power in 1966. Much of the work of these groups was concerned neither with Southern civil rights nor with South Africa. Increasingly, though, they included support for Southern African liberation movements as part of their overall activism. Their important support is almost always overlooked when scholars assess the work of the black community in the period 1970–79. These organizations included the well-known Black Panther Party for Self-Defense; the African Heritage Studies Association, a group formed by dissident black members of the African Studies Association; the African American Scholars Council; the Coalition of Black Trade Unionists; *Black Scholar* magazine; and the Black World Foundation. Other organizations that became prominent during the decade were the Con-

gress of Afrikan People, whose founding convention in Atlanta on September 6–9, 1970, drew 3,500 people, and the National Black Political Assembly, established in October 1972 after 10,000 delegates had attended the National Black Political Convention on March 10–12, 1972, in Gary, Indiana.

The launching of the Congressional Black Caucus (CBC) meanwhile heralded the rise of black legislative power. Formed in 1969, the CBC was made up of black congressional representatives who immediately began to take an active interest in Southern African issues. The caucus came to prominence in 1971 when it presented a list of 60 recommendations on various domestic and foreign policy issues to President Nixon. Detroit congressman Charles Diggs, one of the founders of the CBC and its first chairperson, also chaired the House Subcommittee on Africa from 1973 to 1978. From that position he consistently advocated independence for the former Portuguese colonies and for majority rule in the other Southern African states controlled by white minorities. He and his staff became key allies of anti-apartheid groups, as well as those concerned with Southern Africa in general. In 1976 Diggs and others pushed for the creation of a black American lobby for Africa and the Caribbean, leading to the birth of TransAfrica.

### **African Liberation Day and the ALSC**

Perhaps the most dramatic example of black U.S. activism on Africa during this period was the campaign for and organization of African Liberation Day (ALD). This was one of the few instances in which a black campaign for African independence garnered mass support nationally.

In the summer of 1971, a group of black activists, influenced by a strong Pan-Africanist consciousness, traveled to Mozambique's liberated areas to spend time with Frelimo, the leading revolutionary force in that liberation struggle. They included Owusu Sadaukai, one of those who had founded Malcolm X Liberation University/African People's Liberation and Technical Institute in October 1969, originally in Durham, North Carolina. After returning home from Mozambique, Sadaukai convened a gathering in Greensboro that then launched African Liberation Day the following spring. Marches on May 27, 1972 under the ALD banner drew 60,000 demonstrators in cities across the

United States and in Canada and the Caribbean, with over 30,000 taking part in Washington, DC alone. The day is still vivid in the memory of Geri Augusto:

That march went from what was Meridian Hill Park, next to a Howard University dormitory—and from thenceforth it became Malcolm X Park—on down to the Washington Monument. . . . It was a glorious and large occasion and for many radical black groups across the country, it put the whole question of African liberation square in the middle. At that time it wasn't just about anti-apartheid at all, it was about all of [the Southern African countries].



African Liberation Day rally in Washington, DC, 1972. Photo © Jim Alexander.

Energized by the success of the first ALD, the organizers launched the African Liberation Support Committee (ALSC) at a conference in Detroit in Sep-

tember 1972. The organization held its first international steering committee meeting in South Carolina in June 1973. The following year, a second conference in Greensboro, North Carolina, was attended by 51 local committees from 27 states and six countries.

In those heady early days, ALD and the ALSC seemed to represent the greatest possibilities yet for a mass movement in the black community geared toward the liberation of South and Southern Africa. The May observances of ALD continued to grow: 1973 saw demonstrations in over 30 cities, drawing an estimated 100,000 participants. In New York, Manhattan borough president Percy Sutton proclaimed May as African Liberation Month. He named the intersection of 7th Avenue and 125th Street in Harlem "African Liberation Square." Also in 1973, ALD expanded to include the launch of the United African Appeal and a stronger call to boycott Portuguese products and Gulf Oil, whose operation in Angola was fueling the Portuguese military (*New York Times*, May 20, 1973, GN54).

May 1974 saw another pivotal event in the struggle to build a mass constituency for the liberation movements in the black community. The ALSC sponsored a conference at Howard University, "Which Way Forward in Building the Pan African United Front?" The event attracted over 700 attendees and was followed the next day by an ALD march with over 10,000 participants.

The conference was significant not only for the sizable attendance but also because of the intense debate among the participants. These discussions reflected disagreements within the movement as a whole that would lead to the splintering of the ALSC and the ALD movement several years later. They focused in part on the struggle between the various ideologies and political tendencies that had emerged in the ranks of black activists, related especially to the struggle underway in Angola but also to Africa advocacy work more broadly. Some of the debate was constructive, helping to challenge ahistorical views of Africa and movement support for authoritarian regimes such as Uganda's Idi Amin. But the



African Liberation Day rally in Washington, DC, 1977. Photo by Stan Sierakowski.

arguments often became violently divisive. One consequence was that by the mid-1970s various political and ideological conflicts disrupted meetings of erstwhile allies and found their way into the pages of publications like *Black Scholar* and *Black World*.

In the summer of 1974, soon after the Howard University conference, the Sixth Pan-African Congress—"Six PAC"—was held in Tanzania. It was the largest of the Pan-African congresses ever held, and the first since 1945. Yet the unresolved rifts within the ALSC that had erupted at the Howard conference carried over to Six PAC. There were other differences too, such as whether movements opposed to existing governments in the Caribbean and Africa would be officially welcomed at the event. This created political tension with the host country, Tanzania, and with other participating African governments, limiting the effectiveness of the gathering. Despite these disappointments, the experience was invaluable for the U.S. participants as an introduction to the real world of Africa's struggles, and many black activists mark their participation in Six PAC as the turning point for their activism on South and Southern Africa. Many returned to the United States and took leading roles in the growing anti-apartheid and broader solidarity movement.

Despite a strong and experienced organizational and leadership structure, the ALSC saw its national influence waning by 1975. By 1977 ALD too had become a victim of factionalism, with ALD marches being held under the auspices of two separate groups who vied for the support of the black community. *Washington Post* staff writers Cynthia Gorney and Juan Williams openly derided the ALD march and its participants in the newspaper. Although the story was riddled with inaccuracies, its publication signaled that the influence of the ALSC had diminished considerably (*Washington Post*, May 29, 1977, D1).

Beyond fundamental ideological conflicts, an array of other factors, including class and regional differences, affected the ALSC and the black activist movement as a whole. These disagreements were not limited to the black community, however. Similar debates raged within many groups in the wider movement throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s.

While the ALSC's influence was declining, that of TransAfrica was on the rise. Launched on May

20, 1978, TransAfrica was officially a product of a 1976 Congressional Black Caucus Conference, but it really existed because of the efforts of Congressman Diggs and his House Africa Subcommittee. It was intended to be an effective domestic lobby on Africa issues for the black community. Upon its launch it released a position paper that, among other demands, called on the United States to cease treating African nations as "pawns in a game of geopolitical roulette between the major powers." The paper also addressed Southern Africa economic cooperation, the Horn of Africa, and U.S. relations with the Caribbean. TransAfrica soon became the preeminent organization that was articulating a common position for black Americans on U.S. foreign policy toward Africa and the African diaspora. TransAfrica also became a prominent voice outside the black community as it entered into strategic partnerships and coalitions with other groups and forged strong relationships with the most progressive of the Southern African liberation organizations.

TransAfrica's first director, Randall Robinson, who had first gained prominence in the early 1970s, would also become a central figure in the anti-apartheid and Southern Africa support movements in the 1980s. The birth of TransAfrica along with the demise of the ALSC ushered in a new phase of the movement in the black community.

Many activists formerly associated with the ALSC and the Six PAC movement went on to found or join other organizations. Their previous work served as important preparation for the challenges of the next two decades. SASP found that the study/work collective model of organization was a successful way to build a strong local movement with national and international connections. This model allowed groups to build on their strengths and minimize some of the weaknesses of the movement in the 1970s, including its inability to resolve some of the deep ideological and philosophical differences within its ranks. These realizations proved to be of great importance to the development of the more broadly based anti-apartheid and Southern Africa advocacy movement that emerged in the next decade.

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*Oral sources for chapter 4 include interviews with Geri Augusto (2005), Frank Beeman (2003), Sylvia Hill (2003, 2004), George Houser (2004), Robert Van Lierop (2004), and Cherri Waters (2003).*



# Remembering Nyerere ~

## Charles Cobb Jr.

**T**oward the end of the 1960s, many of us who had been involved in the Southern civil rights movement were looking for ideas. New ideas seemed scarce in America just at the moment we needed them most. The political establishment here—integrating rapidly—was saying, enough of this talk of poor people taking control of their own destiny, making decisions about their lives. Instead, they said, “learn to think like us and act right and we’ll make a place for you.”

I wish I had time to talk about the rejection of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party in 1964, or the way the federal government injected itself into Mississippi in the late 1960s.

We were thinking “black,” I say unapologetically and without elaboration, and Africa seemed to be the direction to point ourselves toward to find the ideas we needed—just Africa. Down there, struggling on Mississippi back roads and plantations, we knew very little about the continent. For some of us, Kwame Nkrumah was the president of all of Africa. There were words that meant Africa to us: Lumumba. Mau Mau. Sharpeville. Freedom fighters. Liberation struggle. Fanon. We didn’t know very much, in truth.

*Ujamaa* and *uhuru*—those two words meant Africa to us also. It was Julius Nyerere’s Tanzania that reached out to my generation, demanding that we think about this Africa that Africans were trying to fashion. Although necessarily there were ideas and processes specific to Tanzania underway in that then-new East African nation, the Africanness reached through to us. Something larger seemed to surround local Tanzanian efforts. *Kujitegemea*, or self-reliance, was a term that reached many of us via President Nyerere’s important writings on education for self-reliance. The concept seemed bigger than Tanzania, and relevant to my neighborhood too. *Ujamaa* seemed to be more than a Swahili phrase defining rural cooperative efforts in Tanzania.

And think about it. These two terms, *ujamaa* and self-reliance, are now part of our political lexicon. They are still ideas we can work with—Tanzania’s contribution to our idea of struggle.

And no, I am not going to get into the question of who “our” refers to. Or who “we” are. I do not know that President Nyerere thought of himself as a Pan-Africanist. But he certainly saw himself as an African contributing to, if I may use an old phrase that I still like, “the redemption and vindication of the race.”

Tanzania’s streets and roads housed much political opinion: Southern African liberation movements, opponents of neocolonial African regimes, and, yes, political refugees from Afro-America. And there certainly is a

Julius Nyerere, often called Mwalimu or Teacher, led Tanganyika to independence. He retired as president of the Republic of Tanzania in 1985 and died on October 14, 1999. Charles Cobb Jr., one of the editors of this book, spoke at a memorial gathering for Nyerere in Boston, Massachusetts, on November 21, 1999.

straight line connecting today's liberated nations of Southern Africa and President Nyerere's commitment to their liberation. And, if I may speak personally, there are few conversations in Africa I consider more important than those that many of us held with Tanzanians. They were patient with what surely must have seemed a strange and confused lot of distant cousins from America who washed up on their shores. Benjamin Mkapa, the current president of Tanzania, then a newspaper editor, was one of those Tanzanians. We owe Mwalimu Nyerere some thanks for opening instead of locking the doors to his house, and I am here to publicly acknowledge the debt.

It was in Tanzania, a crossroads of Africa and Africans, that a lot of us learned that political struggle was necessarily about more than color. And that political struggle was about more than being against something. The essential discussion in Tanzania centered on how human resources could be mobilized and organized. For me, anyway, it was the first time seeing what it meant for a state, a government, and a nation to commit to all of its people.

And let me say quickly that judging Tanzania now in terms of its successes and failures in this regard is less important than applauding Tanzania, the Tanzania of Nyerere's vision, for its commitment. For Africans in America like myself, the value of seeing an African effort like this was sustaining. And the final chapter on the effort has not yet been written.



Bill Sutherland, right, meets with President Julius Nyerere, left, and the deputy foreign minister of Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, 1977. Photo by Harry Amana. Courtesy of American Friends Service Committee.

# Charles Diggs and Goler Butcher

## *Taking the Lead on Africa in the U.S. Congress*

**William Minter**

**M**embers of Congress are under constant pressure to pay attention to issues close to home. This is particularly true of those in the House of Representatives, who are elected by specific districts within their states. Focusing on foreign policy rarely brings political rewards or campaign contributions. But Africa became a central focus for the Congressional Black Caucus, which grew from five House members and a lone Senator in 1968 to 23 House members and no Senator two decades later. This happened largely because of the direction set by the CBC's founder, Charles Diggs Jr., with strong reinforcement from his younger colleague from California, Ronald Dellums. The tradition of strong, competent staff for the House Africa Subcommittee, which continued through the 1980s under Diggs's Michigan colleague Howard Wolpe, was launched with the early leadership of Goler Butcher.

Elected to Congress for a first term beginning in 1955, Diggs came from a prominent Detroit African American family. His father had established a leading mortuary business and had been one of the black pioneers in state Democratic Party politics. When the younger Diggs came to Congress, he was one of only three African American members, and he was conscious of the obligation to stand up for black people everywhere, not just in Detroit. His grandfather, a Baptist pastor in Mississippi in a county next to the one where Emmett Till was killed, had been a missionary in Liberia for a year in the early 1880s.

Diggs gained national attention from his presence at the Till trial in 1955, and he continued to take a leading role on national civil rights issues as he gained seniority. In 1969 he took the initiative to create the Congressional Black Caucus. He took on the chairmanship of the congressional subcommittee that oversees the District of Columbia in 1972, and he played a key role in bringing local elected government to that black-majority city that still lacks its own voting representation in Congress. Diggs also became the first black congressman to visit Africa when he was chosen to join the U.S. official delegation to Ghana's independence in 1957. He returned to Africa on his own to attend the All-African People's Conference in Accra in 1958. In 1959 he became the first black to serve on the House Foreign Affairs Committee. He joined the Subcommittee on Africa immediately and became its chair 12 years later, in 1971.

At just this time, the incoming Nixon administration was replacing official indifference toward white minority rule in Southern Africa with a more decisive tilt in favor of the white regimes. In 1971, as a member of the U.S. delegation to the U.N. General Assembly—part of a tradition of bipartisan representation—Diggs decided it was time to make a decisive stand against U.S. policy. On December 17 he held a press conference at the

In the 1970s and 1980s, the Congressional Black Caucus and the Subcommittee on Africa of the House Foreign Affairs Committee were the two key government institutions in Washington keeping a consistent focus on African liberation. Without the efforts of a handful of individuals, however, this probably would not have happened. Talk to anyone familiar with the congressional scene on Africa during these years, and you will hear two names again and again: Representative Charles Diggs Jr. of Detroit and his first staff counsel for Africa, Goler Teal Butcher.

Sources for this profile include a biography of Diggs by Carolyn DuBose (1998) and an article about Butcher by J. Clay Smith Jr. (2000).

United Nations. He denounced the recently signed Azores agreement with Portugal as “a partnership in the subjugation of the African people” and announced his resignation. Administration officials, including then U.N. ambassador George H. W. Bush, were outraged.

In the 1970s Diggs traveled repeatedly to the continent. He organized committee hearings on a wide range of African issues, forcing administration officials to present their views and providing a forum for critics. The foundation for this work was laid between 1971 and 1974 by Goler Butcher, who had already won a reputation as a leader in international legal issues. Graduating from the Howard University School of Law in 1957—the sole female graduate—she joined the legal staff of the Department of State in 1963, the first black person to serve in that unit. At the Africa Subcommittee, she was key to ensuring that questions addressed to administration witnesses and criticisms of administration policy were solidly based on detailed data.

Butcher left the subcommittee staff in 1974, but she continued her involvement with African issues and her ties with congressional allies. In 1975 she was one of the lawyers challenging a Civil Aeronautics Board ruling that allowed a South African Airlines flight to New York. During the Carter administration she served as assistant administrator for Africa in the U.S. Agency for International Development, and she then became professor at the Howard Law School, where she stayed until her death in 1993. She continued to provide advice on Africa to members of Congress and to groups such as the Lawyers’ Committee for Civil Rights Under Law. In 1989 she served as an election monitor in Namibia.

Diggs was forced to resign from Congress in 1980 after being convicted of fraudulent financial mismanagement of his office budget. Many were convinced that the conviction was unjust and that white colleagues guilty of similar



Congressman Charles Diggs of Detroit and his associate, Goler Butcher, as he resigns from the U.S. delegation to the United Nations in 1971 to protest Nixon administration support for South Africa and Portuguese colonialism. *Photo courtesy of South African Research and Archival Project, Howard University.*

abuses would not have suffered a similar penalty. In the 1980s he withdrew from political involvement. But he never lost the respect of his colleagues or of Africa activists, who paid tribute to his work at his death in 1998.

Diggs and Butcher are significant not just for their individual commitment and contributions, but for illustrating the complex ways in which Africa solidarity moved into the mainstream as the anti-apartheid movement grew. They were among a much larger cohort of African American politicians and professionals who gained entry, if only marginal, into the corridors of Washington power in the wake of the 1960s civil rights movement. Diggs and Butcher paved the way, in the words of Sylvia Hill (2004), for “young black activist types, . . . internationalists in some sense, whether they defined it as Pan Africanist or anti-imperialist, . . . [people who were not] careerist in the traditional sense of the word.” This group may have been a minority, even among their African American peers in Washington. But they retained bonds of mutual trust with the activist groups. The continuous interchange between activists and Congress over two decades was one of the keys to the capacity of the anti-apartheid cause to make an impact.



# Durham, Durban, and AllAfrica

## Reed Kramer and Tami Hultman

### Reed Kramer

Tami and I had gone to Africa in late 1969 on the Frontier Internship program sponsored by the United Church of Christ (UCC), United Methodist, and Presbyterian churches. We were assigned to assist the Methodist Church of South Africa in launching a racially integrated youth leadership training program. Called “Give a Year of Your Life,” it brought two dozen young people together in Durban for three months of intensive training, followed by nine months as youth leaders in their congregations. We weren’t trained for the challenge of helping young South Africans—some older than we were—negotiate their first relationships across racial lines as equal partners. But there was lots of good will, as well as tears and agony. So the courses became a learning laboratory that prefigured the post-apartheid era in many ways.

Steve Biko, then a medical student, was one of the first people we met in Durban. He was kind enough to speak at the leadership course, where his charisma made an enormous impression. He and other founding activists of SASO, the South African Students Organization, drew us into their circle and gave us extraordinary insights into the emerging political culture of black consciousness. Most of them went on to become deeply engaged in their communities. For example, a woman student, Vuye Mashalaba, who was on the initial SASO executive committee, became a beloved doctor in one of the roughest townships outside Durban.

Tami and I had access to a minivan provided by the churches, and we would often load up a group of students and drive up the coast, north of Durban, where you could get beyond the apartheid signs and go to the beach. We were also privileged to be there at the time of an explosion of black cultural projects. The Theatre Council of Natal, founded in 1969, united African, Indian, and Coloured students across ethnic lines to produce workshops and drama and poetry events. We saw the first performance of Welcome Msomi’s stirring play *Umabatha* in an outdoor amphitheater under a full moon. It’s now a South African classic that has been performed all over the world.

Our other assignment, which was not public, was to document the role of U.S. companies in South Africa’s economy, research we undertook on behalf of the Southern Africa Committee and the Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility. While in South Africa we spent three months at a time in Durban and then three months on the road, gathering data on dozens of the largest U.S. companies. In Port Elizabeth, for example, we visited all the auto assembly plants, interviewing everybody from managing directors to shop floor workers.

The data and photographs we collected were used by organizers of the first shareholder resolution against General Motors in 1971. After our

AllAfrica.com is the largest free-access source of African news on the World Wide Web. By 2007 it was posting some 1,000 stories daily from African newspapers and other sources. The predecessor to allAfrica.com, AfricaNewsOnline, was one of the first public Web sites. But few allAfrica.com readers are likely to know that its origins can be traced back to the 1970s, to Durban, South Africa and Durham, North Carolina.

Reed Kramer, the CEO of AllAfrica Global Media, and Dr. Tamela (Tami) Hultman have guided these news services through more than 30 years. Kramer reflected on these experiences in a 2005 interview with William Minter. This brief recollection is adapted from the interview and also draws on a 2003 article by Hultman.

return, the research formed the basis for a book, *Church Investments, Corporations and Southern Africa* (Corporate Information Center 1972). Our photos were used and reused in the divestment movement. I remember one ubiquitous photo of a General Motors police van carrying black prisoners. We were chased a few times while taking pictures of police or military facilities, but we always managed to get away.

It was an irony that when we were expelled from South Africa, in March 1971, it had nothing to do with our research. The government at that point hadn't realized the sensitivity of economic information. Our visas were revoked, along with those of other foreigners working with denominations belonging to the World Council of Churches, after the council gave humanitarian grants to Southern African liberation movements such as Mandela's ANC.

For six months after being expelled we visited groups working on Southern African issues in several African countries, discovering how little information was available and how hungry people were for it. In Nairobi we worked with the Africa region of the World Student Christian Federation. From José Chipenda, one of its regional secretaries, we got our first real training in photography, a skill we've made the most of ever since. In Lusaka we worked with a Zambian organization and discussed with the top leadership of the ANC what we had learned in South Africa, particularly about American companies, but also about the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement. In Dar es Salaam we began our journalism career, writing for the Tanzanian daily paper edited by Frene Ginwala, an exile who became speaker of the South African parliament after apartheid. We were in the fortunate position of knowing both the activists arising inside South Africa and a network of outside contacts who wanted to support them.

After two years investigating the role of U.S. companies in South Africa and a year in New York writing up our research, we returned to Durham, North Carolina, in 1972, initially working as a local branch of the New York-based Southern Africa Committee. The concept of a news agency focusing on Africa stemmed from frustration with the lack of news and information. Africa News Service was born through a small grant from the UCC Commission for Racial Justice, directed by the Reverend Charles Cobb Sr. and sustained by his colleague, UCC Africa secretary Larry Henderson. It subsequently received other church and individual contributions, as well as foundation grants.

The initial target audience for Africa News Service was the American public. Tami had visited 13 African countries on a Presbyterian student seminar in 1966, before I met her, and remembers meeting a small boy, about 10, in a village on the lower slopes of Mount Kilimanjaro. He queried her group incessantly about civilian casualties in the war in Vietnam, U.S. support for apartheid, and whether the CIA had been involved in the assassination of Kennedy and the overthrow of Nkrumah in Ghana. The contrast between his knowledge of the outside world and most Americans' lack of familiarity with Africa made an indelible impression. But in 1973 we could see that many people in the United States were eager to know more about Africa, if given a chance.

We based ourselves in Durham because that's where we had gone to university and first became involved with community issues. In 1968, after the assassination of Martin Luther King, I had helped organize a demonstration that began with a march to the Duke University president's house. All 300 of us were invited in and we spent two nights. The protest ended with 1,500 people—a significant percentage of the student body—staging a four-day silent vigil on the Duke quadrangle. Supported by many of the faculty, we stayed until the trustees agreed both to raise wages for nonacademic employees and to negotiate with the mostly black employees union. There were also continuing black student movement protests, and Tami and I had been lucky enough to have roommates who were leaders of that group. So when we went to South Africa, we'd had a bit more exposure to the racial issues in our own society than was the case for many white Americans our age.

We began Africa News Service by mailing out news scripts for radio stations to read on the air. In those days, news from Africa could be several days old and still seem fresh! Black radio networks, a commercial all-news network, and college stations were among the subscribers, along with public stations. We also began reporting for National Public Radio in its early years. As interest in Africa grew, stations wanted the news faster. In response, we converted a closet in the old house we were renting—it had large walk-in closets—into a recording studio. Somewhere we got a castoff reel-to-reel recorder and began taping our own reports, which we fed to stations over a telephone line.

We gathered news by phone, often getting a more accurate story than reporters on the scene. One dramatic example was the 1976 Soweto uprising, when journalists were barred from the township. We called friends and contacts and recorded eyewitness accounts. In one call I particularly remember, a woman explained that the news stories about random destruction were wrong. "I can see the smoke from the pass office," she said. "It's where they keep the records that control our lives, and that's why it was torched." Protestors knowingly targeted places they regarded as instruments of oppression, but most coverage portrayed them as marauding mobs.

We also monitored shortwave radio broadcasts. With an array of antennas in the backyard and on the roof, we could pull in stations from Africa and Europe, along with the Africa services of the BBC and the Voice of America. The bloodless Portuguese revolution of April 25, 1974, which ended the dictatorship, was played out on Radio Portugal. We recorded the music and the announcements and used them in a radio show. We could listen to Radio South Africa and many other broadcasts in French and English. In addition, we inherited a bank of teletype machines that could decode radio signal transmissions and spit them out as wire copy. That was another cost-efficient way of getting news out of Africa.

At the time, major media basically worked one way. If you had a correspondent somewhere, you got a story. If you didn't, and you wanted a story, you'd pick up a wire story, if there was one; if there wasn't, the story probably wasn't newsworthy anyway. That was the thinking.

Over the years, the constituency for Africa grew incrementally, but significantly and visibly. Most dramatic was the growth of the anti-apartheid movement. When we started *Africa News* there was an active anti-apartheid movement, and we were very much aware of it and knew many of the people. All over the country, there was hard work going on, but it was completely below the radar of media coverage and invisible to most Americans. It managed to have episodic impact when it organized actions such as sit-ins at the South African embassy in Washington. But slowly the movement grew on campuses. It grew in the black community. It grew among churches and synagogues. It grew with involvement of the Congressional Black Caucus. And eventually the media responded.

Our use of technologies to gather news grew out of necessity. We wanted the news, and a growing number of people across the country wanted the news. We didn't have the budgets to fly in and out of places or to hire lots of correspondents, so we figured out a way. The telephone was a good, affordable, low-tech tool, though there were times the line got cut because we couldn't pay the bill. We were also early adopters of fax machines, which had the advantage of allowing us to avoid South African censors, who routinely intercepted our telephone conversations.



The Africa News Service staff in Durham in 1985. Back row, from left: Jim Lee, Katherine Somerville, Debbie Jackson-Rickettes, Lise Uyanik, Pat Ford, Barbara Neely, Reed Kramer. Front row, from left: Mills Crossland, Charles Cobb Jr., Tami Hultman, Susan Anderson, William Minter, Charlie Ebel, Seth Kitange. *Photo courtesy of AllAfrica Global Media.*

Around 1976, we started producing for broadcast through direct telephone feeds rather than printed news scripts. We immediately heard from our nonmedia subscribers—church agencies, libraries, government offices, anti-apartheid groups—who said, “Wait, we still want this news.” That’s when we started a print publication, which became a biweekly newspaper. We continued to produce, edit, and consult for radio and television. We still report occasionally for public radio or appear on CNN and other networks.

The newspaper continued until 1993, when issues of sustainability forced us to move more aggressively to become an online service. We had begun electronic publishing in late 1983 on the NewsNet bulletin board, almost a decade before the emergence of the World Wide Web, and in 1991 on LexisNexis. Around 1993 we were approached by the newly formed America Online (AOL) and had extensive discussions. They wanted us to create a closed channel for them, but in the end we thought it better to be on the open Internet. So we launched a Web site instead.

We began early on and continue to this day to work with African journalists, some very brave and dedicated people among them. They were always ready to work with us. These days it’s common to hear reporters interviewing other reporters who are in some place of breaking news, but it wasn’t a widely used technique at the time. The relationships we developed with African media professionals were an early form of what we do now in a more formal way, by working with 125 African news organizations at allAfrica.com. Through those ties, users of our Web site have easy access to news gathered by African journalists across the continent. Large information wholesalers also distribute the daily news feeds we provide, reaching an even larger global audience. The resulting revenues from advertising and from royalties are split between AllAfrica and the participating publishers. We hope it will continue to grow and become sustainable.

Throughout these years we have drawn on our early African experiences and on the skills we learned from and with our African colleagues. AllAfrica, which has pioneered several aspects of information technologies and won international prizes, was founded with mostly African funding and with prominent African media professionals as executives. It is built on the legacy of people from the United States traveling to Africa and learning from the people they came to know in the cauldron that was the struggle against apartheid.

# “The Angolan Question”

## *Walter Rodney Speaks at Howard University, 1976*

### Walter Rodney

I would like to come to the situation in the U.S. and to look at the types of responses, and to look at what I consider to be some fairly horrendous mistakes which were made by certain forces in this country in their approach to the Angolan question.

Again I will dismiss at least one element. We can dismiss those who are attempting to hire black mercenaries for the FNLA and Unita. When this individual [Roy Innis, who took over the Congress of Racial Equality in 1968] purports to be organizing black mercenaries to go and fight in Africa, and then we know that mercenaries cost, whether they are black or white—and we know that this particular black functionary cannot afford to pay anybody—we know that these black mercenaries would have been paid by imperialism, to go and fight in Angola.

But I think we can dismiss that as an aberrant phenomenon—as the expression of a particularly reactionary and unresponsive force within the black American political environment. So we should really concentrate attention on those elements that are serious. With serious people, one engages in serious debate. And I think there were a large number of serious people throughout the Afro-American community [who supported Unita] when they should have been lending uncompromising support to the MPLA at that particular historical juncture.

It was immediately obvious that there was a startling coincidence—a startling convergence—between the positions of certain individuals who call themselves progressive, revolutionaries, and who in fact regarded themselves as the essence of revolution—yet their positions converged with that of U. S. imperialism. And this amazing historical convergence needs to be understood.

I assume that there are elements within the audience who took that position, and I’m not going to engage in any abuse of those elements. I am simply going to say I believe the position was historically completely incorrect. I will indicate how I believe that error took place

The first thing is Unita gained a certain popularity in this country in the very late sixties and the early seventies, particularly in the period of the rise of the African liberation movement, and the like. I was following the process, so I know that they were becoming more exposed and more popular in this country. And that they used certain very opportunist political tactics and techniques. They simply appealed to the growing black consciousness by saying, “Inside of Angola we stand for the elevation of the black man to a position of dignity and rule, and the MPLA stands for the elevation of whites and mulattoes over the indigenous African people.” That was the standard line in the late sixties and early seventies.

Walter Rodney, best known as the author of *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (1972), was a highly respected revolutionary scholar and activist from Guyana who taught at the University of Dar es Salaam from 1968 to 1974. This excerpt is from “The Lessons of Angola,” a speech that Rodney delivered at Howard University on April 22, 1976, just a month after South African troops had withdrawn from Angola after their first unsuccessful invasion.

In their war for independence, which began in 1961, Angolans were divided. The National Front for the Liberation of Angola (FNLA), based among Kikongo-speaking people in the north, had ties to Mobutu Sese Seko of Zaire and to the CIA. The Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) had a national appeal, with its strongest base among Kimbundu-speaking people in the Luanda area. It was closely allied with Frelimo in Mozambique and the PAIGC in Guinea-Bissau, and it had support from the Soviet Union, as well as from most solidarity groups in Western countries. Jonas Savimbi’s Unita claimed leadership of Umbundu-speaking Angolans but secretly collaborated with the Portuguese military during the last years before independence.

Portuguese control began to crumble in 1974, and rivalry between the three groups led to war the next year. U.S., Zairian, and South African military intervention in favor of the FNLA and Unita was countered by Cuban forces and Soviet supplies aiding the MPLA. After Angola’s independence in 1975, the victorious MPLA soon gained international

*continued on next page*

recognition, except from the United States and South Africa. The U.S. Congress barred further U.S. military involvement in Angola, and the South African troops also withdrew. But the wars that followed, with a series of South African invasions as well as internal conflict, continued until 2002, with Unita being backed by the CIA and apartheid South Africa until the mid-1990s.

It was the war in 1975–76, however, that most provoked division among liberation supporters outside Angola, particularly in the United States. Rodney's commentary explains the issues.

And they would then say, "Look at the MPLA. It has so-and-so, who is in its executive, who is a white, who is a Portuguese. It has so many mulattoes who are on the Central Committee, it has so-and-so who is married to a white woman, President Neto, so on and so forth."

And in the context of the U.S., I think that those are very telling points. In the context of the black struggle in this country, when brothers and sisters were going through that terrible period of self-identification, trying to extract themselves out of the dominant white culture, I think that those points made a great deal of impact.

Particularly because the MPLA was not really seeking to influence the Afro-American population. Or much of the American population.

So that is one reason why the Unita gained in popularity. And when we examine that very carefully, we must of course admit that to declare blackness is a very easy thing to do. I mean the same character who was mobilizing black mercenaries was also in the forefront of declaring his blackness—and he would call himself Garveyite, and so on and so forth.

To declare for blackness is one of the easier things to do. Once one—uh—recognizes the opportunities inherent in that situation [*laughter*].

But surely we need to go further than that. We need to examine, firstly, whether the reality in Angola was the reality as portrayed by Unita. We need to go further and ask whether the historical experience of Angola could be so easily assimilated into the historical experience of black people in the U. S. that Afro-Americans should run to make a judgment on Angola on the basis of some knowledge they had that so-and-so was married to a white. Or that so-and-so was a mulatto.

Because the central understanding that we must reach is that any situation must be examined on its own historical merits. What is called "race" in the U. S is not the same thing as [what] might be called race in Angola. In fact, in this country, those who are all called black, or used to be called Negro—if they went to Angola, they would be distinguished, many, as mulattoes. If we want to understand Angola and the complex of the relationships between social strata and race, etc., we must then understand Angola. We cannot sit in Washington or in Detroit and imagine what we are seeing around the block is Angolan society.

And this seems to me to be one of the mistakes which the brothers made when they tried to transform a very simplistic understanding of black-white relationships in the judgment of whether they would support the MPLA or support Unita.

One is reminded here of some of the things which Fanon wrote in regard to Africa, when he was talking about the pitfalls of national consciousness. He was talking about the pitfalls of African national consciousness. Now we can apply that to the pitfalls of black national consciousness. Which is to say that national consciousness is clearly a liberating force, but at a certain point it can provide blinkers. It can turn into blinkers and constitute a barrier for further understanding of the real world.



The second and more widespread factor, and one that ultimately proved to be most decisive [for many black progressives], was the notion that Unita was a Maoist movement. And these left forces who [opposed the MPLA] were moving from the starting point of supporting Marxism-Leninism, Mao Tse-Tung thought.

In their own words, they have a vision and an analysis of contemporary society wherein they identify as the principal contradiction that between the two superpowers. They argue further that the more dangerous force is Soviet socialist imperialism, because it's more covert, it's more subtle, and because it ultimately can be more powerful, since capitalist imperialism is on the wane. And therefore, in a situation in which the Soviets are involved, one has to take a stand on the opposite side.

Now, what is my disagreement with that position? I shall not go into all my disagreements, because I do not want any sort of global confrontation. I am not in favor of trying to resolve all the problems of the world at the same time, in a single stroke. So that I'm not going to attempt to deal with that postulation about the principal contradiction and its implication.

What we are going to ask is how does that relate to Angola with its specific characteristics. If someone holds that belief as a sincere revolutionary tenet, when that person approaches Angola, how is it that such a belief ends by placing such forces on the side of those who have for 500 years oppressed the African people?

What explanation does such a person give to the Angolans who have been engaged since 1960 in armed struggle against the Portuguese, against NATO, who, at the end of that struggle found they were faced with the South Africans and with an escalation of U.S. support to the so-called liberation movement which had been harassing the genuine freedom fighters for many years?

So that from a dialectical perspective and a scientific perspective we struggle and work to discover the correct line. It is only from a theological perspective that one *knows* the correct line because of revealed truth. And it seems to me that the limitations of that position were very clearly revealed in the Angolan situation. I have not seen a single analysis from forces claiming that they had the "correct" line, which meant opposing the Soviets—not a single analysis of what was going on *inside* of Angola. It was purely external. And I do not believe we can proceed on that basis.



Walter Rodney speaks at Yale University, 1972.  
Photo © Jim Alexander.

# Robert Van Lierop & *A Luta Continua*

## Robert Van Lierop

**M**y father was born in Suriname, and his father was Dutch. My grandfather had actually been in South Africa and had participated in the Boer War. My father had been to South Africa, subsequently, as a merchant seaman. Didn't like it. And he told me about it, about what was wrong with South Africa. He always told me a lot about other parts of the world and always talked about colonialism. He hated colonialism, and he had a lot of firsthand experience with colonialism.

After working as a chauffeur and truck driver my father went into the dry cleaning business in Queens, and made a really successful go with that. I didn't want to take over my father's dry cleaning business when he retired, and he eventually sold it. Interestingly enough, he sold it for less money than he could have got. He had two buyers, one white and one black, and he sold it to the black person for less money because he felt that it was important to keep a business opportunity for black entrepreneurs.

I was very much influenced by Malcolm X. I didn't know Malcolm, but I was very influenced by his journeys to Africa and what he saw and wrote about and spoke about. I became determined to go to Africa after law school.

Having met Eduardo Mondlane and coming under his sway, one didn't easily walk away. He was a very captivating and larger-than-life personality. When Sharfudine Khan came to stay [to represent Frelimo at the United Nations in 1968], I was one of the people that Eduardo told him to contact. The three of us would sometimes talk about what could be done to increase people's knowledge and awareness of Frelimo. The idea of a complete media treatment came up—articles, photos, even a film documenting the struggle.

I was not a film director, and I had no previous experience or knowledge about film. My initial assignment was to find somebody to do it. I asked quite a few people I knew who were filmmakers. None of them seemed to have time to take it on.

I had been involved in the area of private offerings for theatrical ventures at the law firm where I worked, and I used that approach to raise money for the film. I actually met Carol Ferry because she was a client of the firm, and Peter Weiss did a lot of work with partners of the firm. And so Carol put money in the project, and Peter and Cora Weiss did; they were the two biggest sources of funds. The churches also put some money into the film, primarily the United Methodist Church, the Episcopal Church, and the United Presbyterian Church in the USA.

Bob Van Lierop doesn't know how many copies of his film *A Luta Continua* (The Struggle Continues) were made, or how many times it was shown. But there is no doubt that for many in North America and Europe, the short film provided the definitive visual imagery that made the African liberation struggles come alive in the 1970s.

*A Luta Continua*, portraying Mozambican guerrillas fighting against Portuguese colonialism, was filmed in 1971 in the liberated areas of Mozambique, across the border from Tanzania. A sequel, *O Povo Organizado* (The Organized People) was filmed shortly after Mozambique's independence in 1975 and released in 1976.

The two films had a profound impact on black independent cinema in the United States in this period, yet their producer, Van Lierop, was not a filmmaker by training. He was a progressive African American lawyer based in New York, who launched the project in solidarity with Frelimo, opting to make the first film himself when he was unable to find a filmmaker willing to take on the task. He recruited his friend Bob Fletcher, who had been a photographer for SNCC, and credits him with most of the technical work on the film.

In the 1960s, Van Lierop's political activities had included opposition to the Vietnam War and support work in New York for SNCC. SNCC later helped put him into contact with Eduardo Mondlane of Frelimo, who encouraged the film project and whose signature slogan, *A luta continua*, provided the title. Carol Ferry and Peter and Cora Weiss were all friends of Mondlane from the early 1960s, and they were among the key financial backers of the film.

I met Bob Fletcher, who had never made a film before either, but he had been a photographer with SNCC in the South, and he had a lot of experience doing that. And Bob agreed to go.

The film was distributed by a lot of the African support committees, and also by the Southern African Committee and former Africa Research Group people, groups in Chicago. All of those people helped get the film out, as well as colleges and universities. I knew a lot of people in Europe also, and met even more—the Angola Comité in the Netherlands and groups in London and the Scandinavian countries. They helped get the film out there. The film was smuggled into South Africa and shown in Soweto before the uprising. The title of the film, *A Luta Continua*, began to appear scrawled on Soweto walls.

Most people would have said that I was too loose with it, because I didn't keep much control over distribution. I just basically let people who were willing to go out with it, use it. And I asked that the money that was raised be sent to Frelimo.

I left law and was working as a waiter down at the Village Vanguard [a club in Greenwich Village] at night, so that I'd be free in the daytime to do this work without a salary. Everything that we brought in from the film went back to the project. I just lived on the tips that I made as a waiter. And some people who knew that I had been a lawyer already said, You did this when you were in law school! What are you doing? You're a lawyer now, why are you waiting on tables? But it just seemed like the right thing to do. I wanted to do this, and this was the only way that I could support myself without taking money from the project.

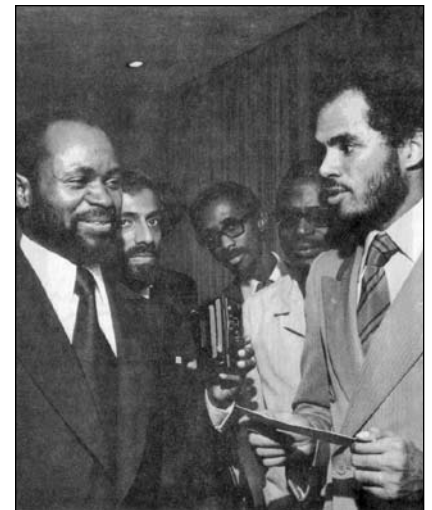
Technically, we were not able to do what we had planned on doing because some of our equipment was lost crossing the river into Mozambique. We didn't have a sync camera, so we had to use a 16-millimeter spring-wound Bolex camera. That means, number one, very short takes, and number two, the sound could not be synced to the picture. So we had to do that in the editing process. Richard Skinner was the editor of the first film, and Richard had experience making television commercials, so he was very good at editing with quick cuts.

It's very gratifying, because I think that everyone would like to feel in life that he or she has contributed to something meaningful. I never was able to keep records of how many copies were made and where it was shown and all of that. But I definitely feel good, because I think that we did contribute to something that was both good and important.

Between 1971 and 1978 Van Lierop gave up his law practice to dedicate himself entirely to the Mozambique film project and related activities of the Africa Information Service, an organization he co-founded in late 1972 with Prexy Nesbitt.

The release of *A Luta Continua* in 1972 came just as the armed liberation struggle against Portugal was reaching its height. In the first half of the 1970s, before the Soweto uprising of 1976 focused solidarity efforts on South Africa, the figure of Amílcar Cabral and that of Samora Machel of Mozambique featured prominently in the rising identification with Africa among American activists, African Americans in particular. The African Liberation Day coalition, described in Joseph Jordan's chapter on the 1970s, is in part the outgrowth of Van Lierop's visit to liberated Mozambique in 1971.

In a 2004 interview with William Minter, Van Lierop talked about his background and how he became involved in filming and distributing *A Luta Continua*.



Robert Van Lierop, right, presents a check to President Samora Machel of Mozambique at the United Nations in 1977. The funds, raised from Van Lierop's film showings across the country, went to build a health clinic in rural Niassa province. In the background, from left, are Valeriano Ferrão, James Garrett, and an unidentified man. Photo reproduced from Van Lierop 1977.

# From Kenya to North America ~ *One Woman's Journey*

**Njoki Kamau**

**I**t was during my early years in high school in Kenya that I was first exposed to the idea that far away in the Americas lived people who were black. I was greatly fascinated by this idea. Until then, history was just another mundane class that focused on Europeans colonizing Africa and large parts of the rest of the world. The materials covered in class included David Livingstone's three missionary journeys. No effort was made to bring to the student's awareness the fact that the caravans of the so-called "slaves" that Livingstone stumbled on in the interior of Africa were Africans like ourselves. Obviously this was part of the colonizer's overall strategy to keep us disconnected from not only other Africans in the continent, but also black people in the diaspora.

In September 1976, after finishing college, I came to the United States as a Fulbright student to pursue graduate studies in management. When I arrived at Southern Methodist University, I was excited to note that my roommate was a black woman. I felt a great sense of relief, especially because I had noticed that the campus was predominantly white. When I woke up the following day, I further noticed that everyone in the apartment and building was black. I soon learned that this was where SMU housed its few black undergraduate students. SMU was not willing to place me in its graduate housing because this was reserved for their white students only.

When I complained to the housing office and threatened to call the Kenyan embassy, I was moved to the "theology complex," where there were a few international students. After a while, I decided to move off campus, only to find that an apartment that had been promised to me was given to somebody else by the time I arrived to sign a lease. When I told an Asian graduate student from Kenya, he told me that these things happened often to people of color and were classic examples of racial discrimination in the United States.

I was too new to this society to fully understand and detect racism in all situations. I began to notice in class, however, that some professors would never call on me even when I had my hand raised. It was a rude awakening, that the color of my skin had become a most significant factor in defining who I was and, to some extent, in determining my ability to fulfill my potential as a human being. Needless to say, I felt both anger and fear simultaneously. From then on, I began to live with the unsettling feeling that I lived in a society where, because of my skin color, I would be required to prove myself at every turn—in the classroom, in the workplace, indeed everywhere.

[During the time I lived in the all-black housing], black Americans in the complex, while somewhat intrigued to have me there, were not ready to embrace me yet. In a few instances, my roommate and other students in

Njoki Kamau is originally from Kenya. A women's rights activist, she is associate director of the Women's Center at Northwestern University near Chicago and has taught courses in women's studies at the university. From 1985 to 1990 she directed the YWCA North-shore (Chicago) Shelter for Battered Women, and she has been a leader in action against domestic violence.

Excerpted from "From Kenya to North America: One Woman's Journey," in "African [Diaspora] Studies," edited by Lisa Brock, special issue, *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* 24, no. 2 (1996). Reprinted by permission of the African Studies Association.

the complex would hold parties right on the doorstep of our building, and I would not be invited. In the Kikuyu culture that I come from this would have been considered unthinkable. In fact, when I tried to make friends with some of the black students on campus, I was not very successful. It slowly began to dawn on me that even though we shared the same skin color, our cultures were vastly different, and we had little information about each other's way of life. I came to the conclusion that I was not invited to the party because I was different; I was African and not black American.

Unfortunately for myself and my two fellow African students, our feelings of rejection and exclusion left us vulnerable to an internalization of the dominant culture's stereotypes of black Americans. We began to believe some of the things that we heard from whites who did strike up friendships with us. But as I grappled with the idea of giving up any hope of ever developing a meaningful connection with black Americans, it hit me that African Americans were probably also vulnerable to stereotypes about us. They had grown up on racist tales of the dark continent, and thought themselves better than Africans or at least too different from Africans to know them. I therefore decided to keep an open mind and to embark on a long journey of educating myself about black Americans as my way to bridge the impasse. I hoped that this process could open a gateway through which one day I would build strong connections with this people, whose capacity to survive continues to fill me with awe.

As if my life as a graduate student was not already complicated enough and my needs and desires to find my feet difficult enough, I could hardly believe that I had become a victim of domestic violence while at Northwestern University [where I went for a PhD in 1978]. The perpetrator was a Kenyan man whom I viewed as my "brother," Kikuyu like myself. When the police came, time and time again, they tried to encourage me to file a complaint. I could not find it in my heart to throw not only a foreign African but now a "black" brother into the throes of a colonial-like white criminal justice system. What if I was accused by the few Africans and African Americans on campus of betraying our already oppressed race? Was I not supposed to put my being African/black (race) before my being a woman (gender)? What if both communities ostracized me?

This experience became the turning point in my life. It completely shattered my former beliefs: one, that higher education could cushion me from being victimized by racism, and two, that self-identifying as an African or black could protect me from gender-based violence. I set out on a second mission to become a women's rights advocate. The question that continues to perplex me is, "When a black woman is victimized by violence, in a racist society, where should she go for help without seeming to betray the race?"

Thus my effort to become informed about African Americans has been joined with my discovery of what it means to be a woman. By connecting with a black community I have discovered a resilience, creativity, and brilliance, and a spirit that will not give up, no matter how overwhelming the odds. This has left me with a sense of deep respect and admiration for all African Americans as a people, but especially black women.

What I have learned is that there is overwhelming evidence that if one is born nonwhite in this society, and especially if one is born black, one receives the message from birth that one is somehow inferior. The misinformation campaign by the larger society is directed at all black people who live in the United States throughout their entire lives and is part of the overall strategy to keep racism in place both in the diaspora and in Africa. It is especially disturbing to note that our direct interactions with each other occur through the prism of this erroneous information. Our deep internalization of this misinformation about ourselves renders our efforts to come together very difficult. The good news is that we have begun to understand what has happened to us, and to make concrete efforts to dismantle our internalized oppression.

I have also sought to learn from all women, rich and poor, white, black, Latino, Asian, and Native American who simply want to be treated humanely. Working with women, and on women's issues, has shown me the uneasy ways in which gender, class, and race intersect and the contradictions they produce in all communities. For instance, while most black men can deeply understand racism, only a few are able to confront their own sexism. Similarly, while most white feminists experience great outrage at sexual harassment in the workplace, few show real empathy toward victims of racism.

Over the last decade, therefore, I have devoted my time to advocating for women and blacks and learning about race, class, and gender. In fact, my journey to learn brought me into an active involvement in the community on racial, gender, and cultural issues and to teaching a course on race and gender at Northwestern University. Through this involvement, I have developed deep and meaningful relationships with black Americans, which has shown me that skin color is one thing but situating oneself within the socio-political context and culture of a people is most important. I also once served as the director of the very domestic violence center that I had called for help.

When I left my home village in Kenya 19 years ago to pursue a higher education, there was nothing in my background as a young woman that could have adequately prepared me for what awaited me on this side of the Atlantic. I am fully aware that without the support of my community of black and women friends that I would never have successfully overcome the obstacles that lay in my path. I have learned the importance of belonging to a community. For us Africans who are far from home, I cannot over-emphasize how important it is to belong to and identify with a community of your choice. The community that I have chosen is the descendants of those Africans who were brought here 400 years ago. Even with its paradoxes, it has seemed to me the most right and intelligent thing to do.

# From Campus to Statehouse

## *East Lansing Connections*

### **William Minter**

**T**he Southern Africa Liberation Committee (SALC) was founded by campus minister Warren (Bud) Day and political science doctoral candidate Carol Thompson in 1972. Never large, it was made up of faculty and students at MSU, with a sprinkling of others from the local community. Day and Thompson moved away from Michigan in 1976 to continue their academic and activist work on Africa over the next decades in Los Angeles, Tanzania, Zimbabwe, and Flagstaff, Arizona. But the group they had started found both continuity and a solid link to national organizations through the involvement of activists at MSU's African Studies Center.

From the start these included anthropologist Bill Derman, who had already been involved with divestment campaigns in Toronto. In 1977 he was joined by African Studies Center director David Wiley and outreach coordinator Marylee Crofts, who moved from the corresponding positions at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. In the early 1960s Wiley and Crofts had worked with the interracial Student Christian Movement in then-Rhodesia, and in covert support for the then-emerging Zimbabwean nationalist groups. They were eventually declared prohibited immigrants by the white minority regime.

Michigan had other assets for mobilization on Africa. Detroit's strong African American congressional delegation, headed by veterans Charles Diggs and John Conyers, made the state a natural base for anti-apartheid action. Former governor Mennen Williams, a liberal Democrat, had headed the Africa desk at the State Department under President Kennedy, although his policy initiatives then received little support from more conservative administration officials. Elsewhere in the state, at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and many smaller institutions, African students and Americans who had worked in Africa were well represented. And in 1979, Howard Wolpe, a professor in African studies at Kalamazoo College, was elected to Congress to represent the district to the west of Lansing. He would later head the House Africa Subcommittee and play a key role in the adoption of sanctions against South Africa.

Within this mix, East Lansing's SALC played a key catalytic and communications role. And critical to the success of the group, its members concur, were Frank and Patricia Beeman. The Beemans, who grew up in Michigan and worked there all their lives, never visited Africa during the years they were active with SALC, though Frank Beeman was finally able to visit South Africa in 2001. He was the tennis coach and director of intramural sports at MSU from 1947 until his retirement in 1987. As director of intramural sports, he successfully spearheaded a national effort to block South African teams from intramural sports at U.S. universities. Patricia

Michigan State University (MSU) in East Lansing housed both the largest African studies program in the country and a host of specialized study centers in agriculture and other development issues. There the anti-apartheid divestment movement found fertile ground. The university's location adjoining the state capital made it ideal for the move from campus to local to state action.

David Wiley has directed the MSU African Studies Center since 1977. William Minter spoke with him and edited this brief account of the Southern Africa Liberation Committee (SALC), which led anti-apartheid efforts at MSU.



Beeman was inducted into the Michigan Women's Hall of Fame in 1999 for her anti-apartheid work in Michigan. Their initial connection to Africa was through Patricia's brother Rick Houghton, who had been an Episcopal missionary in Namibia and was expelled by the South African authorities.

Patricia and Frank Beeman were the ones who always showed up with a literature table, posters, and films on South African apartheid and other liberation struggles in Southern Africa. Their message, repeated in dozens of demonstrations and meetings and hundreds of private conversations, was not a political or ideological argument but a moral one: apartheid was wrong, and therefore any collaboration with the apartheid regime was also wrong. Claiming no status as experts but speaking as members of the community, they had credibility that came from their persistence and their integrity.

SALC's efforts first paid off in the passage of the East Lansing Selective Purchasing Resolution in 1977, which prohibited the city of East Lansing from using suppliers that were operating in South Africa. In 1978 SALC successfully campaigned for MSU to divest its stock from companies with subsidiaries in South Africa, making it one of the earliest major universities to take such action.

That same year, SALC member David Wiley met with Representatives Lynn Jondahl of East Lansing, Virgil Smith of Detroit, and Perry Bullard of Ann Arbor and developed a decade-long plan to seek state of Michigan sanctions on South Africa. They supported a Michigan state legislature resolution calling for national sanctions against South Africa, and then a series of three sanctions bills for the state of Michigan.

These acts prohibited the state from depositing its funds in banks making loans in South Africa (1979); prohibited state university and college investments in firms operating in South Africa (1982); and divested the \$4 billion state employees' pension fund of any companies operating in South Africa (1988). And at MSU in 1986, SALC won their demand that the MSU Foundation divest its holdings of stocks of companies operating in South Africa.

## Frank Beeman

I came as a freshman in 1939 and graduated from Michigan State and went in the service. I came back and started as an intramural director and tennis coach in 1947. And we got involved in civil rights. We got involved with a program called STEP, Student Teacher Education Program. A group of students, in fact from Michigan State, met and went down to Rust College in Holly Springs, Mississippi. That started because Bob Green [former dean of urban affairs at MSU, who had worked with Martin Luther King] had been down through there and had been involved in voter rights.

The James Meredith march occurred in 1966 and we joined that march at Tuskegee and marched all the way to Jackson. As we turned the corner in the neighborhood, we saw the Capitol and the Capitol was ringed by soldiers in at-ease position with their shotguns. And so we marched up to the Capitol and Bob Green and other people spoke. It was quite an adventure.

Back in East Lansing, we were involved in a number of demonstrations. At that time East Lansing had a housing covenant, and they wouldn't allow any Native American or nonwhite people to move in. So our daughter and 46 other students sat in front of the police station and blocked the traffic in East Lansing.

And it just seemed to be a natural shift from civil rights to apartheid. It came about partially because of Pat's brother, who was an Episcopal priest who went to Africa and taught in Africa. He was in South Africa and in Namibia and kept us informed on how unjust things were. He gave us the straight scoop on what was happening there. So we got involved, figured that that wasn't right, that our country shouldn't be involved that way in supporting apartheid.

SALC was always a combination of students and faculty and community people. Any event that was on, the general rule was that if three people would show up then we would stay there and leaflet and hand out information. The idea behind SALC was that people would do what was right if they knew the truth, if they knew what was actually happening. And so most of this stuff that we put out was informative and educational.

It was kind of interesting, because generally, jocks weren't so much involved in civil rights and things. So we

Frank Beeman, one of SALC's most consistent activists over the years, spoke with David Wiley and MSU Africana librarian Peter Limb in 2003.



March in East Lansing, Michigan, organized by the Southern Africa Liberation Committee based at Michigan State University. Photo courtesy of Frank Beeman and Dave Wiley.

kind of stood out. When I would say it as a coach, people would stop and think about it, and wonder about what was all this activity. . . . maybe there must be something to this if Beeman is saying it.

SALC generally generated, at these weekly meetings that we had, probably six to 10 people really. But it became evident that with persistence, and constantly bringing this to the fore and getting the student newspaper to cover things, that the word was going out. One of the things we had was a shanty that we built out in front of the administration building, trying to get the MSU Foundation to divest. Students would come by and we had stickers that were cut out, with “No to Apartheid” and “Support Mandela.”

We would have a representative at every meeting on the campus, whether it was the trustees or the faculty group and so forth. We would have a representative there to speak on the divestment proposal, so that it was constantly kept in front of their noses, actually. I can remember, in one of the trustee meetings, one of the trustees said, well, if we use the word slavery, they’d know what we were talking about. So it was constantly in front of them.

We had prepared a green book folder with a lot of information on apartheid and divestment, it must have been 20 pages. We went in early and put one at each of their places. And so they thought that that was part of the official documents that they were supposed to talk about that day.

At our literature tables very rarely was there anybody that really argued about this is wrong or this is right. One South African from the Lansing area came by and said, well, this is propaganda that you’re handing out. I said, well, it may be so but it’s true whatever it is. That was what made the arguments easy—because it was true. It was so wrong to have enslaved a whole nation of people, how do you argue for it?