

Abuja Statement on Neo-Garveyism

Preface to paper on 21st century agenda for Pan-Africanism

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Pan-Africanism and a Black Superpower —The 21st century agenda

By Chinweizu

Black Power Pan-Africanism or Neo-Garveyism is my theme today. It is, in essence, Nyerere's Sub-Sahara Pan-Africanism plus Garvey's Black superpower project as its paramount project. Why do we need Neo-Garveyism?

Since completing the task of political decolonization in 1994, Pan Africanism has lost momentum and has been floundering towards a goal called the US of Africa which, alas, is a mortal danger for Black Africa.

Pan-Africanism needs a new agenda, a new agenda for a new century, an agenda that can actually solve our cardinal problems, the enduring problems facing the black race, namely, powerlessness and poverty and racism.

If we want to abolish our powerlessness, if we want to abolish our poverty, ***the theme or objective of Pan Africanism needs to change from African Unity to Black African Power and Prosperity; if Pan-Africanism is to become once again relevant to the ordinary people, it must return to its pre-1958 ethos and become the champion of the reforms that will give the ordinary Black African a life of prosperity and dignity.***

Let me point out that

Racism will not disappear until there is a Black superpower on earth, and a USofAfrica will not be a superpower. Therefore, the problem of the 21st century is not the problem of African unity, or the problem of the color line, but the problem of Black African power: how to build it, and enough of it to stop the extermination of Blacks that is now in process, and to compel the respect of all humanity and guarantee the survival, sovereignty and dignity of the Black race.

With these observations in mind,

I do not speak of freedom;

I do not speak of the unity that does not bring us power and prosperity and the respect of the world.

I do not speak of the continent;

I do not speak of a land mass, but of a people, of a race, the black race.

I speak of a constituency, and a project that will unite the constituency and make it powerful.

I speak of a constituency: the Black race, of black Africa and its global Diaspora.

I speak of power, of Black power, of a superpower in Black Africa. A superpower that will make the world sit up and respect Black people anywhere on earth.

For the past six centuries, when people of other races encounter a black person, they have assumed, and quite rightly, that the black person does not belong to any society whose power is to be feared and respected. We need to change that presumption of powerlessness. We need to create a Black superpower in Africa, so that when a black person is seen anywhere in the world, it will not be presumed that he belongs to a powerless group.

I want to speak of a world where every black person will experience the quiet confidence that comes with knowing you can defend yourself and your loved ones against all comers. Others sense this confidence without any immediate proof. If they know there are people in your race with that capacity, they automatically wonder if you are one of them, and give you the benefit of

the doubt. Their caution is warranted, for your weakness can then not be taken for granted, as it presently is, and will continue to be for as long as your black skin is indisputably a badge of chronic powerlessness. I therefore repeat:

Racism will not disappear until there is a Black superpower on earth, and a USofAfrica will not be a superpower. Therefore, the problem of the 21st century is not the problem of African unity, or the problem of the color line, but the problem of Black African power: how to build it, and enough of it to stop the extermination of Blacks that is now in process, and to compel the respect of all humanity and guarantee the survival, sovereignty and dignity of the Black race.

There were three main strands of Pan-Africanism in the 20th century: that of DuBois, that of Garvey and that of Nkrumah. These strands each aimed to accomplish Black Africa's emancipation from white domination, but they differed in what they defined as the constituency to be emancipated and in the project through which that emancipation would be pursued. In other words, they differed in their answers to the two key questions: emancipation for whom? And by what means?

For DuBois [1868-1963], the constituency was the Negroes of Africa and the Negro Diaspora in the Americas; and the project was to abolish the color line and socially integrate blacks and whites.

For Garvey [1887-1940], the constituency was all the Negro peoples of the world, wherever they were; and the means to achieve emancipation was by building "*a strong and powerful Negro nation Africa,*" an industrial superpower that would be "*strong enough to lend protection to the members of our race scattered all over the world, and to compel the respect of the nations and races of the earth. . . .*"

For Nkrumah [1909-1972], the champion of Continentalism, the constituency was, as in the OAU/AU, the inhabitants of the African continent, Arabs and Negroes together, but without the black Diaspora; and the means to achieve emancipation was by building socialism and integrating the neo-colonial states on the continent into one continental state with a single continental government.

DuBois was a pioneer, with the inevitable limitations in the work of a pioneer. Garvey was a great leap forward from DuBois; and Nkrumah was *a great leap backward* from both Garvey and DuBois. Why do I say that? DuBois got the constituency right and the project wrong; Garvey got the constituency right and the project right; Nkrumah got the constituency wrong and the project also wrong. But that is a topic for another occasion.

After 50 years of following Nkrumah and going astray into the Afro-Arab and neocolonial AU, let us, for the 21st century, get the constituency and the project right by returning to Garvey for guidance. Let us make Neo-Garveyism the Pan-Africanism of the 21st century. Why Neo-Garveyism rather than Garveyism? As we can all appreciate, though Garvey's diagnosis and prescription are still valid, it is now a century since Garvey made them. The world has changed considerably in that century, therefore we have to interpret his prescription and apply it in the context of today. We therefore need to bring Garveyism up to date as Neo-Garveyism. That, in brief, is the message elaborated in my paper. Here in Garvey's own words is the project for the 21st century:

[T]he Negro peoples of the world should concentrate upon the object of building up for themselves a great nation in Africa. . . [of] creating for ourselves [there] a political superstate . . . a government, a nation of our own, strong enough to lend protection to the members of our race scattered all over the world, and to compel the respect of the nations and races of the earth. . . . [P&O, I:68; II:16; I:52]

Therefore, away with the neocolonialist Pan-Africanism of the AU, and forward with Neo-Garveyite Pan-Africanism to liberation and prosperity for Black Africa!

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