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The Liberation of Cinema: Nurturing Pan-African Narratives During a Culture War

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I am an eighteen-year-old film student from the United States of America. I am a descendant of Africa and have been raised by parents influential in the leadership of the African diaspora. I am prefacing this paper with this information to provide social context. By birthright and personal interest, I should be aware of the cultural, historical, and social factors that contribute to Pan-African cinematic experiences. However, prior to intensive research, I was unaware of the global film industry culture that makes connections amongst people of African descent a necessity in maintaining the integrity of and fostering the advancement of the Pan-African experience on screen. My lack of awareness can accentuate an alarming reality. If one can exist in a space where this information should be widely known but is not, there is potential for the existence of a large number of individuals of whom this information should be deemed relevant who are clueless. A communal lack of awareness regarding the global infrastructure that creates, greenlights, and releases narratives prohibits knowledge of the purpose fueling the distribution of the stories themselves. Underexposure can have negative impact on the reception of ideas, especially in the realm of cinema. Within every culture exists a need for maintaining and displaying a truthful record of one's history. Within the African diaspora exists a plethora of stories, often created and distributed in mainstream societies by cultural entities that are not relative to the culture or narrative being highlighted. While there are organizations, film festivals, and individuals that dedicate their work to creating, conserving, and fostering artistic works that accurately represent Pan-African livelihoods and histories, their presence is not known globally in the likeness of other cultures. Due to the current cultural climate, there is economic and social need for partnership efforts amongst African descendants involved in filmmaking in the global sphere.

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The purpose of this project is to demonstrate how within the African diaspora, the intersection of African and African-American culture particularly can foster dialogue on issues unique to the Pan-African experience. Additionally, due to historical, social, and cultural factors, partnerships between African-American and African artists are essential to maintaining and promoting Pan-African narratives in the global film industry.

The term “Pan-African” encapsulates the complex essence of global “Blackness” and unites those of African birth or descent around the world. Pan-Africanism is a political ideology and “a worldwide intellectual movement that aims to encourage and strengthen bonds of solidarity between all people of African descent” (Oloruntoba-Oju, 2012). Pan-Africanist ideology has been adopted by those of African descent throughout the African diaspora, including the United States, the Caribbean, and Latin America. In sum, Pan-Africanism is "a belief that African peoples, both on the continent and in the diaspora, share not merely a common history, but a common destiny” (Makalani). As it pertains to African descendants living in the United States of America, Pan-Africanism is a philosophy that has evolved into African-American cultural phenomenon’s such as “Black Power,” Afrocentrism, and other unifying African-American platforms. This ideology has been adopted by both those born on the continent of Africa and descendants displaced by colonization or other means of removal. When applied to the film industry, Pan-Africanism’s “belief that unity is vital to economic, social, and political progress and aims to ‘unify and uplift’ people of African descent” is fundamental (Frick, 2006). A unified voice speaks volumes over scattered sounds. And, while there are unified structures in place in some locations pertaining to African cinema in particular, their exposure beyond the communities in which they directly affect is often times limited. Within a culture, unified

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economic power, social status, and political prowess are qualities among those considered to be elite in the film industry.

Historically, those who are considered superior in the cinematic field are Caucasian. Their superiority partially stems from their history of colonization. Particularly, the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, in which approximately twelve million Africans were forcibly removed from their homeland, tortured, and sold into chattel slavery, fostered a culture in which Caucasians identified themselves as superior and forced African people into adopting their beliefs for centuries. Africans were not only bought, sold, and treated as property, but also their offspring were automatically enslaved, solidifying a multigenerational cultural standard. As scholar, Dr. Joy DeGruy, states, chattel slavery was “ form of slavery, which was predicated on the belief that African Americans were inherently/genetically inferior to whites. This was then followed by institutionalized racism, which continues to perpetuate injury” (DeGruy).

Cinema was established less than thirty years after the abolishment of slavery by law in the United States and during an era in which many African descendants around the globe were not yet free. Black scholars including Michelle Alexander, author of *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*, and Douglas Blackmon, author of *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-Enslavement of Black Americans From the Civil War to World War II*, speak to the modern-day systematic oppression that mimics that of African-American slavery in the United States of America. So, in the midst of building a film industry, Africans and African descendants were fighting a battle against oppression and inequality. In the early 1900s, as films were being developed, narratives were being shared, and industry standards were being set, African-Americans were being systematically enslaved and segregated by Jim Crow Laws. Even scholars such as Dr. Joy DeGruy have researched and concluded that the psychological effects of

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slavery, as she eloquently defines it, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, have lasting impact on African-American communities. Slavery was multigenerational, but so was colonization. So, if the systemically imposed inferiority complex still appears in the psyche of the modern-day African-American, then the superiority complex must still showcase itself in the mind of the Caucasian individual and community. Colonization and segregation were social structures simultaneously in place during the creation and evolution of cinema. So, Caucasian narratives were deemed superior and showcased African-Americans and Africans in an inferior light. Naturally, if the economic power not only belonged to the Caucasians but also funded their cinematic creations and distribution, then these narratives would slowly become engrained in American culture.

Socially, the effects of slavery and segregation still contribute to the operation of contemporary American society. The social structure in place as a result of these occurrences largely impacts the way people of African descent are viewed in the United States, especially in the entertainment field. In 2017, Pan-Africans are still trying to combat negative and often inaccurate portrayals of their livelihoods, while concurrently learning about the social identities of Africa's global offspring. The film industry is indefinitely established and finite in a practice that African-Americans and people of African descent were never meant to be a part of; considering that people of African descent were never originally seen to be a part of American culture or acknowledged as fully human in America for that matter. Thus, an African descendent must do double the work to get in "the room," double the work to stay in "the room," and double the work to be recognized as a legitimate entity afterwards. There has been an ongoing discussion about the lack of diversity in front of and behind the camera in the world of entertainment. And, in recent years more parties have acknowledged the lack of diversity in

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spaces of recognition by the film industry. Most recently, in both 2015 and 2016, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences announced Oscar nominees in their top categories of all Caucasian descent, prompting a viral hashtag #OscarsSoWhite to appear across national headlines. There was not an issue of lack of diverse works to assess or lack of African-American or African talent, but instead a lack of acknowledgements of the work that people of color produce. Although the categories have highlighted some diverse artists in years prior, as of 2016, in the “prestigious” Academy’s eighty-eight year history, only fourteen actors of African descent had won an award (Ryan, 2016). These numbers correlate to the “2012 report by the *Los Angeles Times*,” which highlights a disturbing truth, “Oscar voters were 94% Caucasian and 77% male” (Ryan, 2016). According to the 2015 Hollywood Diversity Report published by the Ralph J. Bunche Center for African American Studies at UCLA, those “numbers are on par with film studio heads, who are 94% white and 100%” (Ryan, 2016). Why should African-Americans expect recognition by a board of descendants of their former colonizers without immense pressure and public scrutiny? This exclusive culture has led to the creation of events such as the NAACP Image Awards and the BET Awards in the United States. There are also African formed equivalents on the continent of Africa, such as the Africa Movie Academy Awards presented by the Africa Film Academy. Held in Nigeria, an African film hub, the Africa Movie Academy Awards not only acknowledges cinematic excellence of artists or films of African natives, but also those of African descent. While the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences highlighted significant works of Pan-African creators in the 2017 Oscars following two years of public scrutiny, the Africa Movie Academy Awards awarded three African-American films including controversial “Birth of a Nation” created by actor, Nate Parker and “13<sup>th</sup>” directed by Ava Duvernay (AMA-Awards). The selections of both prestigious Academy’s speak volumes to

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the ethnic makeup of their judges and their location. While primarily Caucasian, male, voters rejected the raw narrative of an African American male leading slaves out of an oppressive environment, a board of Pan-African judges found it to be the most impactful work amongst the diaspora for that season.

The Academy Award decision to not include the “Birth of a Nation” in their nominations may have been a result and example of the historical considerations in America regarding African-American males and sexual assault. In 2016, the film creator, Nate Parker, received public backlash for a 1999 rape trial (in which he was later acquitted). Prior to the revisiting of his trial, Nate Parker’s film was predicted by numerous outlets to be an Academy contender. An Academy voter said “personally, I find it really hard to separate the man from the film” (Kilday, 2016). Yet, Caucasian actor, Casey Affleck settled two cases of sexual misconduct and harassment in the same year and won the Best Actor Academy Award (Petersen, 2016). A BuzzFeed News article, “Here’s What Separates Casey Affleck from Nate Parker” compares the two men’s stories, favoring Affleck, even agreeing with the notion that it was nearly impossible to separate the man, Nate Parker, from his film. Parallel to BuzzFeed author, Anne Helen Petersen’s sentiments, it is nearly impossible to separate *race* from this apparent industry double-standard. How is it that this film could be snubbed of consideration in the United States yet win an Academy Award on the continent of Africa?

On the continent of Africa, descendants of Africa are not held to the same measure of judgment as they are in the United States of America. Furthermore, instead of competing to be recognized by Caucasians, African-American filmmakers are competing at an equal standard in their native land amongst others of African descent. The narratives that hold cultural and historical significance in the United States appear differently to those that are not directly

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infected by American societal beliefs. While there still lie challenges amongst who's story gets told within the Pan-African sphere, there is a common understanding of “Pan-African” ideology that contributes to navigating cultural differences. While recognition may be a continuing dialogue amongst people of color as it pertains to the award shows in the United States, there is underwhelming coverage on the behind-the-scenes presence of diversity in film festivals, which often serve as an identifier of talent in the film industry.

Film festivals are “organized events at which many films are shown” (Oxford Dictionary). In the entertainment industry, film festivals not only showcase films to enthusiasts, attract professional and public crowds, and introduce new artists to the industry. The film festivals also serve as a platform for distribution deals to be made, commend the work of select talents, and promotion of cinematic themes and ideas. According to a globally ranked list of “unmissable film festivals” by notable magazine, Variety, the top five film festivals are Berlin, Cannes, Sundance, Toronto, and Venice. The festivals are ranked in such high acclaim due to their economic power, commercial power, and industry impact. Acceptance into one or many of these film festivals not only grants filmmakers with credibility, but also signifies legitimacy as an artist and cultural leader of Western Caucasian people. Besides their notoriety, the festivals share a common funding source in the governments under which they operate.

In 2016, the German federal government increased its overall budget for cultural funding by 16.6 million dollars (Meza, 2016). While the government previously provided Berlin International Film Festival (also known as the Berlinale) with 7,922,616 dollars towards their annual budget, the overall increase produced an additional 1.1 million dollars for the festival, peaking at \$8,510,184 dollars in the year 2017 (Berlinale). Approximately thirty percent of the film festival’s budget is government funded and affiliated. France’s Cannes Film Festival boasts



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a public budget of around \$23,664,400 million dollars. According to their website, approximately half of their funding comes from public funding “under the authority of the Ministry of Culture, the City of Cannes and other local authorities” (Festival de Cannes). The French Government spends roughly 1,487,999,510 billion dollars on French developing and promoting cinema in their country (Micheni, 2009). The Sundance Institute, which oversees the Sundance Film Festival openly acknowledges its government supporters on its webpage. Eight of its programs are funded by government partnerships which they consider to be a “vital part” of their existence (Sundance Institute). Reports indicate that publicized governmental grants awarded to the Sundance Institute equates to approximately \$2, 194,145 (Charity Navigator, 2017). While Toronto International Film Festival provides the local economy with \$189 million in revenue, it’s forty million dollar annual operating budget is made up of “money from federal, provincial, and municipal governments” (CBC News, 2013). Venice Film Festival does not provide the public with any information regarding their financing. Yet, it is housed by La Biennale Di Venezia, an Italian arts organization that through government-funded pavilions associates with numerous government platforms and agendas. The Venice Film Festival is acknowledged as the oldest film festival in the world. So, beyond finance, its global impact merits respect based on standards of allegiance. These five festivals are invested in by their respective governments for a purpose larger than promoting “legitimate” or “credible” work.

The executive directors of every film festival recognized in this category are Caucasian and their personal salaries showcase their privilege within the film industry. Berlinale has not published the salary of their Executive Director, Dieter Kosslick, but maintains a public record of overall festival associated spending. Cannes has taken a very private approach to exposing budgets and has left no indication of payment or salary for any of their employees. However,

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amongst other festival heads there is suggestion that the President of Cannes, Pierre Lescure, makes around two million dollars a year and holds a budget of two million dollars to spend on cinematic pursuits. Like Berlinale and Cannes, Sundance Film Festival also has not publicized the salary of their Executive Director, Keri Putnam. However, one can infer based on their popularity and rank that their financial standing is similar to that of the aforementioned festivals. For the past twenty-three years, Piers Handling has been the Director and Chief Executive Officer of Toronto Film Festival. In 2016, research by CBC News indicated that Handling, who earns \$352,260 annually, is the top-paid CEO of “salaries at non-profit agencies that get provincial government funding” in Canada (Crawley, 2017). Like his counterparts, President of Venice Film Festival, Alberto Barbera does not display his earnings for public review. As figureheads, public spokespeople, and private leaders in cinematic pursuits of their respective festivals, one can imagine that the salaries of festival heads not released are top-tier like that of Piers Handling.

With a substantial amount of funding provided by the government to fuel these film festivals, there is the possibility of government persuasion in cinematic presence in these countries. Considering their large outreach and economic superiority, their individual governments are therefore providing potential censorship but definite screening to what type of material is being distributed and recognized as legitimate art internationally. These five festivals alone have the ability to set film trends, establish who and what will and should be represented, and ultimately impact the cultural perception of ideas. Cinema holds great influence over audiences and contributes to cultures around the globe. So, considering the largest, most economically dominant cinematic platforms such as Berlin, Cannes, Sundance, Toronto, and Venice, are headed by and promoted by Caucasians, it is safe to assume that the content they promote will

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have Caucasian influence. Because Caucasians represent the majority of gatekeepers to cinematic legitimacy, the Pan-African voice is restrained and often removed from the global pool of art.

Artists of African descent who deserve global recognition for their craft are often slighted in arenas outside of their communities. Thus, there is a need for platforms equivalent to that of the aforesaid film festivals to recognize and legitimize artists in the global forum. By combining efforts to promote Pan-African narratives, film festivals such as the Pan-African Film Festival and FESPACO are providing a seat at the table for African diasporic cinema.

The Pan-African Film Festival, based in Los Angeles, California, has become a hub not only for African-Americans to connect with artists of African descent around the world, but also a platform to showcase Pan-African cinema to a new audience. The Pan-African Film Festival was founded in 1992 by actors Danny Glover, Ja'net Dubois, and Executive Director, Ayuko Babu, with the purpose of engaging in the struggle of “who's story get's told?” (King, 2011). The Mission Statement of the Pan-African Film Festival as stated on its website is the following:

It is PAFF's goal to present and showcase the broad spectrum of Black creative works, particularly those that reinforce positive images and help destroy negative stereotypes. We believe film and art can lead to better understanding and foster communication between peoples of diverse cultures, races, and lifestyles, while at the same time serve as a vehicle to initiate dialogue on the important issues of our times (PAFF).

During interviews, founding member and Director of the Pan-African Film Festival, Ayuko Babu, has indicated that contemporary entertainment culture is the result of the deliberate creation of a people who do not and cannot listen to their own stories as a result of colonization (LA Sentinel, 2017). Babu elaborates that in one's lack of awareness emerges a cycle in which “you end up doing their (Western civilization/Caucasian) program and telling their story to your

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children, so that you follow their thinking and not your own” (Babu, 2017, Personal Communication).

The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade scattered people of African descent around the globe, resulting in pieces of Pan-African stories existing everywhere. So, the consumption of Pan-African stories are also scattered. The Pan-African Film Festival and similar organizations compile the most quality films from African descendants around the globe and allow for an audience to access the information at one time, in one location. Simply, PAFF brings the culture to the people. Unique to other cultures, Pan-African culture is so diverse that the unity of its art and people can be foreign. Often, a person’s first visit to the Pan-African film festival may be the first time they are exposed to works of other thriving African descendants in the entertainment field. How can one advance an un-united people? Without hearing and understanding the full narrative of Pan-Africanism, people lack a cultural consciousness that connects them to their roots and to their futures. Caucasians are united in culture, as it pertains to narrative and cinematic presence. In addition to historical facts, the ability to hold five different film festivals in five different countries and still transfer the same themes, judgment of quality, and audience throughout one another is a clear indicator of cultural unity.

Although the Pan-African Film Festival was established in 1992, Babu clarifies that the journey of establishing a level playing field for Pan-African beings in the world arena began as early as the 1960s. While African-Americans were defying odds in the midst of racial turmoil in the U.S., Africans in Burkina Faso were developing Pan-African Film and Television Festival of Ouagadougou, also known as FESPACO.

FESPACO was founded by a collective of people in 1969 with the goal of promoting “the true face of Africa and her way of being (FESPACO). A biannual event, FESPACO has

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developed into the largest and most well-known African film festival on the entire continent.

FESPACO's goals are as follows:

FESPACO's objectives include promoting African cinema, fostering the distribution and broadcasting of all African film productions both inside and outside Burkina Faso, and providing a platform for the industry people to meet and share experiences. Another objective of FESPACO is to archive, restore and safeguard the continent's film and video heritage (FESPACO).

In recent years, FESPACO's reach has increased, welcoming "more than 80 countries" and thousands of film professionals (FESPACO). At minimum, this platform is an indication of interest in Pan-African cinematic work. As their scope broadened, they expanded their program, allowing for submissions by "filmmakers from African Diaspora in Americas, Europe, and the Caribbean" (FESPACO). Starting in 1973, FESPACO publicly acknowledged the importance of promoting the development of Pan-African film in the global industry. As demonstrated in its honoring of African-American artists such as Danny Glover, Tracy Chapman, Alice Walker, and Antonio Fargas, FESPACO has opened their doors to Pan-African culture around the globe. What they describe as a "policy of conciliation," allows for connecting those of African descent to participate in and connect with each other during the festival. In fact, the "Paul Robeson Award," created in recognition of African-American actor and activist, is exclusive to filmmakers of the Black Diaspora (FESPACO). This award encompasses the bridge between artists of African descent globally, inviting partnerships to emerge out of a common desire to connect to one's roots and promote Pan-African narratives.

Considering film festivals' importance as it pertains to promotion of ideas and determination of what stories reach which audiences, the advancement of Pan-African centered festivals is vital to promoting the liberation of African peoples. While Europeans are the keepers of Caucasian civilization, as indicated by the "Big Five" festivals, Africans maintain the same

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role in the order of homage to their descendants. All cinematic narratives connect back to one's roots. If one is unknowledgeable of their roots, then he/she/other is unknowledgeable about him/her/other-self. One cannot maintain power without self-knowledge. Ayuko Babu states profoundly, "in order to navigate and understand what to do, we got to understand everybody's story... we need to understand those stories to understand that this (the current social climate in America) has been dealt with [before]" (LA Sentinel). European entities of power place such significance on the production and economic authority of their film festivals because they are aware that public consumption of ideology is a method of influencing perceptions about the progress of a culture. Out of these ideals, the battle between who controls the global cinematic narrative is born. Pan-African awareness of this cultural war is the primary fuel for partnering amongst African descendants in the entertainment field around the globe. Steve Gukas, a well-known Nigerian film director and producer, addressed the overall battle over narratives, desire to maintain the integrity of the African narrative in his work, and the "need to not fulfill conventional Western film narratives" in a panel during the 2017 Rapid Lion South African International Film Festival:

The most prevalent challenge to making great African cinema was overcoming the 'white savior complex' in films. Not only did the notion of idealizing western convention over realistic African stories impact the way the world sees the continent, more importantly, watching 'Hollywood heroes' coming to Africa's rescue impacted the way African audiences see themselves (Anderson, 2017).

Gukas most recently directed, "93 Days," which focuses on the African Ebola crisis. The film is produced by other African producers and stars African-American actor, Danny Glover, who has partnered with many Africans during his career through both acting and production. Appearances in films such as *Mandela*, *Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation*, and *Bopha!*, are indicative of Glover's history in partnering with African artists and contributing his African-American voice

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to Pan-African narratives. “Bopha!,” in particular, features a mixed cast of African-American and African actors, featuring well-known African-American artists, Danny Glover and Alfre Woodard. The film was co-produced by African-American television personality, Arsenio Hall, and directed by African-American actor, Morgan Freeman (IMDb). The subject matter features “a black family in South Africa during Apartheid” (Lee, 1993). Danny Glover made it his mission in the delivery of “Bopha!” to combat the inaccurate assumption that Black people would want to see films unlike box-office successes at the time of its release, “Poetic Justice” and “Boyz N’ the Hood” (Lee, 1993). Assumptions such as a lack of interest amongst Black communities pertaining to certain topics are a method of screening and controlling the narratives that Black people see. Films such as “Bopha!” are an attempt to demystify cultural norms and contribute to a more complex, accurate portrayal of “Blackness.” Haile Gerima, Ethiopian filmmaker and professor at the historically Black educational institution, Howard University, makes an insightful statement when answering a question posed by John L. Jackson Jr. regarding the audience whom he creates for in an interview:

My audience is myself, especially since most people are seduced by mainstream cinema and its expectations. You can’t trust all audiences. What does the mainstream cinema give black people? Usually, it’s... with little variation... And so what you have here is the kind of cinema that is addictive but has nothing to do with the enrichment of individuals who pay their money to walk into the theater. And so the audience itself is not your barometer, especially in the twenty-first century where everything has mutated and none of us are normal. None of us are without the virus of colonialism and its impact on who we are. And so, in a time like this, it isn’t safe to just go by public opinion. You have to go on your own frustration, on your own dreams and fantasies, your own alienation and nightmares, and then you see if your voice finds the population that identifies with this state of confusion that you are in. When I do a movie, I respond to my own hunger first (Jackson, 2010).

This desire and hunger to contribute to a multifaceted representation of Pan-Africanhood has led to a trend blossoming amongst elite African-American artists partnering with Africans and appearing in African content. African-American actors/producers/directors, such as, Denzel

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Washington, Forest Whitaker and Vivica Fox are few of an expanding group of artists connecting with Africans on projects. Additionally, African-American director, Ava Duvernay's distribution company, ARRAY, distributes cinema to the masses and promotes films that are not in mainstream review. Festivals such as the Pan-African Film Festival and FESPACO are responsible for many partnerships and projects between Africans and African descendants that exist today. Filmmakers such as Ethiopian, Theodros Teshome (*Triangle: Going to America/Sost Maezen*), and African-American, Charles Burnett, (*Namibia: The Struggle for Liberation*) are prime examples of the successful fusion of Pan-African storylines, filmmakers, and actors. Teshome's film tracks the journey of Ethiopians making their way to America and establishes cultural connection between America and Africa. Burnett's film accounts, "the country's decades-long fight for independence from apartheid-ruled South Africa" (Wissot, et al., 2008). Burnett relentlessly tackles the raw narrative of his subject matter, without compromising to the standards set by Caucasians in the U.S.

Much like Burnett, Afro-French filmmaker, Philippe Niang, creates work that is made with a purpose greater than economic benefit or Caucasian approval. This cinematic freedom is exercised in a film written and directed by Niang, entitled and about "Toussaint Louverture." While the film has been successful in a variety of international film festivals and been screened at a few festivals in the U.S. (including PAFF, twice), no U.S. distributor has picked up the film for countrywide distribution. This is potentially because of the integrity of the narrative. Niang tells "a story that feature black people in revolt and in control of their own destinies, absent of any white inspiration or 'savior'" (Shadow and Act, 2017). This narrative holds similarities to that of Nat Turner's rebellion story in "Birth of a Nation." Currently, the U.S. fosters a cultural climate that is not receptive to ideas of Black freedom of mind, body or soul.



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The struggle of African Americans against national oppression and economic exploitation has continued through the 20th century up until the anti-racist struggles today against police terrorism and the demands for self-determination in the workplace, public service, education and cultural affairs (Azikiwe, 2016).

The issue that continuously makes appearances in African-American cinematic struggle is one of negotiation. Because African-Americans do not own networks or studios in the U.S., they must negotiate with a silent “white voice” and consistently question “what will the White response be?” to authentic displays of Blackness in cinema. These filters can be readjusted when creating films in Africa, simply because the historical and social constraints of African-American narratives can be lifted in a space where the lens is not focused primarily on the impact it may have on African-American communities. Moreover, “African-Americans who seek partnerships with Africans are not only seeking a connection to their roots but also working to keep cultural ideas and the interrogation of those ideas at the forefront of people’s minds” (Babu, 2017, Personal Communication). Mediator and festival director of the 2017 Rapid Lion South African International Film Festival, Eric Miyeni, started a panel of African contemporary filmmakers by “highlighting the challenges of being an African filmmaker attempting to take African stories to the rest of the world. With a legacy of these stories being told through a more Western/European lens, African filmmakers, he said, have a responsibility to represent the continent and its people more accurately” (Anderson, 2017). This is the simultaneously the dilemma and responsibility of all Pan-African filmmakers; one that unites Pan-African people.

Arthur Musah, a U.S.-based, Ghana-born documentary maker, spoke to the struggles faced by Pan-African filmmakers, during the 2017 Rapid Lion panel, stating that his role as a filmmaker, in general, was to fight clichés and champion realism in the stories he told” (Anderson, 2017). His latest work, *Naija Beta*, “follows Nigerian undergraduates returning home to host a robotics summer camp for high schools” (Anderson, 2017). Musah represents the

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collection of young filmmakers that are coming to full consciousness about the current climate and plight of Pan-Africans in the entertainment industry. Additionally, Musah expresses that while “working in Africa and the U.S., it was difficult to not be influenced by the usual Western film tropes that characterized Africa in film” (Anderson, 2017).

### Conclusion

As an African-American millennial filmmaker, I feel responsible to educate my peers and community on the depths of our cultural battle. During the research phase of this piece, I consistently questioned “why do we (African descendants) not know?” However, I am aware that knowledge is power so if this information was universally available to the unassuming public, people might unite to shift the current paradigm to favor those who previously have been unsuccessfully attempting to take a seat at the table. If more African-American and African diasporic filmmakers were aware of the directories that provide Africans with information to connect with filmmaking resources across the entire continent, more films might be made that promote Pan-African narratives. In fact, other Pan-Africans might adopt similar methods and model their infrastructures like that of those who have showcased success in their field. If Pan-Africans watch cinema created by and for their communities, then they might gain intelligence that can contribute to their global liberation and connection. As an up-and-coming generation, we hold the power to carry the torches once carried by our ancestors and pass them on to future generations. Haile Gerima, comments on our generation stating:

They [his students] are so schizophrenic that they don't even know when the stories don't belong to them, when it was interjected artificially into their system. And so, most of them don't want to put the time into the work, not in the way that my students used to... But I don't stop trying to reach them. You can't. Some, you may reach, and then some retroactively will remember. The historic responsibility of elders is to never give up on kids and to never let go of them. You don't patronize your descendants, but you do confront them equally — with respect. (Jackson, 2010).

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Gerima's proclamations speak volumes to the lack of awareness that prompted this paper and are a signifier of a desperate need for change. We, as a generation, need to once again, become receptive to new ideas, new intellect, and greater understanding.

To an oppressor, the most dangerous weapon is a mind armed with knowledge. Thus, the next tactic in this cultural war for all Pan-African people, is to become armed.

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