

# American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era

a book review

by

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Kevin Gains, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press. 2006. pp. xiv, 342.

Throughout their history in the United States, American Africans have constantly advocated the concept of Black Nationalism. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Black Nationalist such as Paul Cuffe, Martin Delany and Bishop Henry McNeal Turner, either sponsored or promoted various forms of Black self-government for Africans in the Diaspora. Although this concept reached its apex during the Garvey Movement, and continues today, Kevin Gains points out that during the 1950s-60s; Black expatriates from the United States and other parts of the Diaspora, saw the newly independent country of Ghana as a beacon of light that could possibly serve as modeled Pan-African State that would protect the interest of Africans throughout the world. Diasporain Africans such as George and Dorthy Padmore, W.E.B. and Shirley Graham-DuBois, Efua Sutherland, Maya Angelou, St. Clair Drake and Julian Mayfield are only a few who chose to leave the lands of the birth and participate in the nation building process in Ghana during the zenith of the American Civil Rights Movement and the turbulent period of the Cold War.

Gains masterly posits the ongoing Black Freedom Struggle in America into historical context by interjecting the importance of historical episodes of Pan-Africanism and inserting that American Africans were indeed internationalist (Pan-Africanist). Gains also shows that Ghanaian leaders showed their solidarity with the Black Freedom Struggle (Civil rights Movement) by inviting national leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Adam Clayton Powell and A. Philip Randolph to its 1957 independence celebrations.

His chapter on Richard Wright not only details Wright's constant critique of European Imperialism, but also places Wright's scholarship at the center of Black intellectuals who sought to identify with "African anti-colonial demands..." and to promote holistic pan-African solidarity (76).

One of Gains remarkable achievement is his ability to intertwine the biographies of unsung heroes and heroines into the larger narrative and show their attempts to be major players in Ghana's quest to not only unify the African world, but to also modernize it. African American radicals like Julian Mayfield, who had had a plethora of Nationalistic and Pan-Africanist experience in the United States, became one of Nkrumah's most skilled propagandists while working as an official in several of Ghana's state ran media companies. Others such as Civil Rights attorney and feminist Pauli Murray worked as a professor at the prestigious University of Ghana Law School, as she sought resolve what she called the 'identity' crisis with in Black America (110).

Overall, Kevin Gains has produced a well argued--impressively detailed account of the role 'American Africans' played in the anti-colonial movements in Africa during the Civil Rights era. His book *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* is an exceptional contribution to the scholarship on Pan Africanism and Civil Rights and should be a mandatory reading for that era.