“Long Live African Women Wherever They Are!”
Black women’s Pan-African organizing during the Black Power era

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In July 1972, Alberta Hill, a member of The East, a Brooklyn-based cultural nationalist organization, boarded a plane. Looking to foster ties with African women abroad, the East Sisterhood—the women’s division of the organization—engaged in an ambitious fundraising campaign to send Hill to the All-Africa Women’s Conference (AAWC) in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania. A meeting designed to develop a collective identity and liberation agenda for women across the continent, the AAWC was a pivotal moment for defining women’s roles in Pan-African liberation. East Sisterhood members viewed Hill’s participation in the AAWC as a way to strengthen their Pan-African ties and political identities.

Hill’s journey to Africa represented one of the many ways in which U.S.-based Black women practiced Pan-Africanism during the Black Power movement. In the 1960s, a record number of African countries gained their independence from European colonial powers. In the subsequent decade, self-governing countries including Tanzania and Ghana became paragons of Black Power’s potential. Motivated by rapid decolonization, Black Power activists increasingly situated their domestic organizing within the global context. They participated in a range of Pan-African-inspired protests and meetings including the AAWC, African Liberation Day (ALD), and the Sixth Pan-African Congress (Sixth PAC). Not only did these protests and summits bolster ties between domestic and international movements, they also served as conduits through which U.S.-based activists articulated their real and imagined identification with Africa and as Africans.

For Black women activists, this Pan-Africanist reawakening presented new opportunities to reshape ideas about Black womanhood across the globe. Although they had long been active in diasporically-minded struggles, patriarchal ideas about Pan-African liberation and leadership dominated conversations about global Black liberation. However, Black American women’s participation in international summits and increased contact with other women across the globe propelled their formulation of gender-conscious forms of Pan-Africanism. By the mid-1970s, they developed working-papers, speeches, and conference referenda that challenged monolithic and masculinist characterizations of Pan-Africanism and offered more holistic approaches to diasporic frameworks.
Pan-Africanism in the Black Power era

The Pan-African resurgence of the early 1970s was the latest iteration of Black activists’ concerted interest in championing Black nationalism and self-determination around the globe. Stimulated by late twentieth-century African decolonization, U.S.-based Black Power activists framed their organizing as a link in the chain of global Black uprisings. In 1961, activists protested Congolese Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba’s assassination at the UN. Burgeoning organizations such as the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) linked the fates of Blacks in Alabama and Africa through liberation schools and their International Affairs Commission—a policy wing designed to shift American perceptions and policies toward the African continent. Black Panther Party members continually asserted their support for anticolonial liberation struggles in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mozambique, and Guinea-Bissau. Meanwhile, the U.S. Organization and the Committee for Unified Newark practiced Kawaida—a cultural nationalist ideology aimed at repairing Black Americans’ cultural connection to Africa.

Events like African Liberation Day united students, Black nationalists, and other leftists under the banners of Pan-Africanism and anti-colonialism. The seeds of ALD germinated throughout the 1960s by way of globally minded protests, activist envoys to Africa, and Black Power organizers’ communication with African leaders. In the early 1970s, Durham-based activist, Owusu Sadaukai (Howard Fuller), spearheaded the effort to bring the day-long, multi-city protest to fruition. Sadaukai suggested that U.S.-based activists hold a day of coordinated demonstrations in support of African independence and liberation struggles. In the waning months of 1971, activists announced plans for the first African Liberation Day.

Black women across the country played a critical role in bringing ALD to fruition. Black Power icons and figureheads including Angela Davis and Malcolm X’s widow, Betty Shabazz, were part of the steering committee. SNCC organizing Florence Tate, a member of the African Liberation Day Coordinating Committee (ALDCC), helped plan the day of multi-city protests. In early 1972, Tate was among the organizers that announced that marches would take place in multiple cities in “support of liberation efforts in Africa and in demonstration of solidarity between Africans born in the United States and Africans born on the continent.” Washington, D.C. was to be the epicenter of the ALD protests, with additional demonstrations taking place in San Francisco, Toronto, Dominica, Antigua, Grenada, and other North American cities.

On May 27, 1972, thousands demonstrated in support of African liberation, decolonization, and Black self-determination. Dressed in outfits adorned with African symbols and carrying signs declaring, “Africa for the Africans,” the majority of ALD marchers participated in the Washington, D.C protest during which they paraded to the Washington Monument by way of “Embassy Row where the governments of the United States, Portugal, Rhodesia and South Africa were denounced.” On monument grounds, overlooking a sea of black, green, and red flags, Black Panther Elaine Brown gave a rousing speech. The Washington, D.C. march reached its zenith when thousands of participants, led by Sadakai, chanted in unison: “We are an African People.” One of the largest and most diverse Pan-African protests on American soil, the event countered claims of Black Americans’ domestic-centered perspectives and foregrounded the potential of Pan-Africanism to unite groups and factions across the movement.

As protests like ALD generated Pan-Africanist sentiment they also engendered questions about women’s role in Pan-African organizing. Black women were often the primary
organizers of Pan-African organizations and events. However, their participation rarely translated into adequate recognition of their diasporic perspectives. Instead, activists often charted the path to African redemption and liberation through the restoration of Black manhood, casting women as “propagations of male mythology,” or as mothers and molders of the African continent and its people. This patriarchal perspective produced discourses and iconography replete with rhetoric of Black men “emancipating” and “redeeming” “Mother Africa.” Moreover, Black Power activists designated intellectuals such as Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, and Walter Rodney as the leaders of Pan-African movements, relegating women to traditional roles as rank-and-file organizers, nurturers, educators, and caregivers. This male-centered perspective often proffered a monolithic, masculine Pan-African community and lacked a clear recognition of women’s specific perspectives on global Black liberation.

Moreover, ALD organizing and symbolism was a manifestation of the complicated and, at times, contradictory debates over women’s roles in Pan-African organizing. As Fanon Che Wilkins explains, the ALDCC used the image of an African woman in indigenous clothing, with a baby in her arms and rifle on her back, as a symbol and advertisement for the protest. On the one hand, such imagery framed women as vital figures on the front lines of liberation struggles. On the other hand, these representations suggested that women should remain tethered to traditional roles such as motherhood. Similarly, Black women played critical organizational and ceremonial roles in the initial day-long protest; however, their participation and visibility did not result in an interrogation of the complicated gender politics embedded in the event or Pan-African organizing writ large. At subsequent international summits and conferences, Black women questioned this approach and developed more capacious ideas about Pan-Africanism and their roles within it.

Black women and the Sixth Pan-African Congress

As African Liberation Day developed, the idea to hold another Pan-African Congress also germinated within international organizing circles. Pan-African Congress meetings began at the turn of the century when activist-intellectuals such as W.E.B. Du Bois helped establish the meetings to secure the “political and civil rights for Africans and their descendants throughout the world.” The first five Congresses took place between 1900 and 1945 in Europe and North America. After the success of African Liberation Day, activists became convinced of the possibility and promise of a Congress on African soil. They envisioned the summit as a space in which to chart a course for the future of the decolonized Black world.

By the early 1970s, a small collective of U.S. and Caribbean-based organizers took concrete steps to make the next Congress a reality. Stateside, the SNCC-staffed Center for Black Education (CBE) was an epicenter of the Sixth PAC organizing. SNCC activists and CBE members such as Geri (Stark) Augusto, Judy Richardson, and Jennifer Lawson played a leading role in this early phase of organizing. Along with other locally and nationally known activists, they developed the organizational infrastructure for the Congress, managed the initial logistics of the meeting, established domestic and international offices for the event, and crafted the meetings’ guiding documents.

In the fall 1972, Augusto drafted the Sixth PAC Call to Congress. Heeding the advice of her mentor, Trinidadian intellectual C. L. R. James, she framed the twentieth century as the “Century of Black Power,” defined by “a unified conception of all peoples who have been colonized” and the “unparalleled degeneration” of “white power.” The goal of the Sixth PAC was to bring these groups together and channel their efforts into collective
programs to promote self-determination, political freedom, economic self-reliance, and anti-Western modes of social, political, and cultural organization. The “Call” also announced organizers’ plans to “pursue the development of a Pan-African Science and Technology Centre … designed to serve the vast needs of African people in the scientific and technology fields.”

Black women from across the Americas answered the call. Sylvia Hill, then a professor at Macalester College, became the secretary-general for the North American region—which included the United States and Canada. Hill volunteered because she felt that it was time for Black Americans to “contribute to the transformation of Africa in terms of its fight against colonialism and apartheid.” As secretary-general, Hill organized the series of planning meetings designed to elect members of the North American Delegation and hammer out its platform. Once selected, Hill coordinated travel for the 250 participants from the United States.

Other women took part in the discussions and debates that shaped delegate selection and the positions that their region, and, eventually, the North American delegation would put forth at the Congress. The North America Region Planning Conference was the first step in this process. Nearly 200 activists from more than 40 organizations met in May 1973 at the Institute for African Affairs at Kent State University, to hear information about the Sixth PAC, address different viewpoints, and further develop delegate selection procedures. Attendees heard speeches from C.L.R. James, Sixth PAC Secretary General Courtland Cox, Owusu Sadaukai, and others. They then branched off into workshops to produce reports on liberation movements, health and nutrition, and political and educational support. Activists and organizers like Dr. Frances C. Welsing and Barbara Kamara chaired the Health and Nutrition Workshop, while other women focused on financial support.

A central point of contention at this and other planning meetings was whether racism or imperialism was the primary animator of global white supremacy and the driving force of Black oppression. Black Marxists and nationalists had been waging this “two-line struggle,” or race versus class debate, since the start of the twentieth century. During the Black Power movement, many organizers within groups such as the Black Panther Party and the Congress of African People began to openly embrace class-first approaches to Black liberation. Conversely, Black nationalists insisted on the particularity and pervasiveness of American-bred racism. In the eighteen months leading up to the Sixth PAC, these theoretical disagreements evolved into factional fissures, hung over pre-Congress talks, and fostered regional disputes.

Yet women refused to let their political participation and priorities get lost amid these ideological debates. They applied to be delegates, special guests, and observers at the conference and emphasized their interests in integrating their gender-specific concerns into delegation documents. Women such as Lois L. Johnson, a California-based lawyer, applied to be a delegate. Johnson indicated that her legal and finance experience made her qualified to assist the delegation in the areas of education and social science, political organizing, and international banking and finance. Dara Abubakari (Virginia Y. Collins), a grassroots activist from New Orleans also applied. Drawing on her long history of organizing in local Pan-African groups, Abubakari indicated that she was expressly interested in focusing on “women’s issues” at the Congress.

While some women applied to be delegates, others continued to plan the event at home and abroad. Judy Claude, Jo Ann Favors, Edie Wilson, Kathy Flewellen, and Geri Augusto formed a powerful activist cohort that helped bring the Congress to fruition. Claude, an experienced organizer with SNCC, participated in the early Sixth PAC planning
meetings in Washington, D.C.\textsuperscript{30} Favors worked alongside Hill in the North American Delegation coordinating office in Saint Paul, Minnesota.\textsuperscript{31} Wilson, who began organizing with the CBE as a college student, travelled with Sixth PAC Secretary General Courtland Cox to West Africa to represent the Congress in the early planning stages.\textsuperscript{32} She later joined Kathy Flewellen and Geri Augusto in setting up the Sixth PAC International Secretariat in Dar es Salaam in November 1973. Augusto became an information officer and the official liaison with the anticolonial African nationalist organizations headquartered in Dar es Salaam.\textsuperscript{33} Meanwhile, Flewellen and Wilson managed “everything from protocol to passports” in Tanzania. They also worked with the Tanzanian government to coordinate logistics, media coverage, fundraising initiatives, and the collection and distribution of delegation position papers.\textsuperscript{34}

Activists like Augusto also heralded the Congress’s promise to tackle patriarchy. In a May 1974 interview, she explained that, at the Sixth PAC, the “position of sisters throughout the African world [was] sure to be discussed.” Augusto continued: Some liberation movements use the term ‘National Reconstruction.’ Within that term is great significance because it implies a reconstruction of the nation physically, and a reconstruction of attitudes, values, systems of economic [sic] and politics, and culture…One of the facets of this kind of national reconstruction is [the] position of women.” Referencing the gender parity policies of some African liberation groups, Augusto argued that the “rest of the African World” was “behind” these groups in developing a gender-inclusive vision of Black liberation. She predicted that the Sixth PAC, largely due to the participation of women across the Diaspora, would be a constitutive moment for reshaping Pan-Africanist perceptions of gender roles and womanhood.\textsuperscript{35}

Augusto publicized the Congress’s progressive aspects amid mounting ideological and logistical tensions. Many participants had misgivings about the timing and purpose of the Congress. The delegate selection process was riddled with intensifying ideological divisions and accusations of elitism among Congress organizers.\textsuperscript{36} Diplomatic tensions compounded procedural ones. Organizers originally conceived of the meeting as a non-governmental meeting with limited representation from heads of state. However, just weeks before the conference, the governing party of Tanzania, Tanganyika African National Union (TANU), decided that delegates had to be appointed by their respective countries in order to participate. The American and Canadian governments were not officially involved in the Congress, exempting delegates from these countries from adhering to this protocol. However, the policy barred militants, activists, and opposition groups from Antigua, Trinidad, Barbados, and other countries whose governments were key sponsors of the event.\textsuperscript{37} Excluding certain activists, intellectuals, and nations shifted the character and ethos of the meeting, transforming it into a state-sanctioned event rather than a people’s convention.\textsuperscript{38}

The decision cost the Congress key supporters including Walter Rodney and C. L. R. James, the latter of which had played a pivotal role in legitimizing and developing the summit.

Nevertheless, the Sixth PAC, held from June 19–27, 1974, attracted delegates from across the globe. Participants heard opening speeches by Tanzanian President Julius Nyerere and Guinean President Sékou Touré.\textsuperscript{39} As the gathering continued, delegates and observers participated in a range of workshops including “Political and Material Support for Liberation Movements” and “African Youth and Development.” In the afternoons, they convened in smaller committees to focus on “Economic Development through Self-Reliance,” “The Organization and the Use of Pan-African Technical Skills,” and “Technology and the Development of Natural Resources.”\textsuperscript{40} After a week of debate, each delegation produced
a set of general declarations replete with their positions on economics, politics, science and technology, and gender roles.

The North American delegation was the largest contingent at the conference, with women composing a significant portion of the group. Activists such as Florence Tate attended workshops and committee sessions, while experienced organizers such as Audley Moore and Mae Mallory were special guests and observers at the meeting. Muriel Snowden, a Boston civil rights activist, was in attendance, as was Barbara Huell, a leader at Atlanta’s Martin Luther King Jr. Community School. Other organizers in attendance included Dorothy Dewberry, a SNCC activist, Monica Steward, a student at Vassar College, and Alyce Gullat, a professor at Howard University. Women such as Bernetta Bush, another member of the North American Delegation, participated in the Sixth PAC because she believed that it “provided a vehicle which allow[ed] for significant interaction between African[s] and those of African descent around aspects of their struggle throughout the world.”

As Augusto predicted, the question of women’s roles in Pan-African organizing was a topic of debate. These conversations generated position papers aimed at reorienting participants’ perspectives on women’s rights and roles. Grenadian delegation representative Carl Buxie read “The Role of Women in the Struggle for Liberation,” a statement summarizing Grenadian women’s stance on gender equality within Pan-African liberation. In the document, they foregrounded the vital role women played in their country’s independence struggle and lauded female freedom fighters in African liberation movements. They also stressed the importance of developing a malleable, gender-conscious definition of Pan-Africanism, warning that the “wholesale transplantation” of independence models across the Diaspora would have negative implications for newly freed Black nations and the women within them. Other women, such as those in the Sierra Leone Delegation, called for a united effort in fighting sexism “through attitude formation, education, legislation, research and studies, seminars, and international conferences” including the Sixth PAC.

Women in the North American Delegation also developed documents aimed at redefining their identities and roles in Pan-African organizing. Records indicate that they presented working papers dedicated to debating the “Question of Women in the Struggle.” Participants framed the document as a set of observations about the changes needed to “ensure the fullest participation of [North American] women in the continuing struggle of African people.” To that end, they documented how organizers could disrupt patriarchal attitudes and practices. Chief among their suggestions was a call for activists’ collective reorientation of their conceptualizations of Pan-African organizing and political work. North American Delegation women emphasized that no group could advance if they did not consider the ways in which “work must be organized so that women can actively participate.” They also argued that there was a “deliberate need for support systems” including childcare and the political education of men, women, and children to “make a woman’s work meaningful and productive toward the liberation of African people.” North American women ultimately called on activists to develop a small cell or cadre model of political organizing in order to further integrate women into Pan-African organizing and challenge traditional attitudes about women’s work.

Delegation members also postulated that anti-intellectual characterizations of women impeded activists’ ability to develop an accurate and nuanced Pan-Africanist theory. They maintained that “women’s brains [were] able to conceptualize struggle as well as men’s” and that they could discuss “ideology in a mixed audience just as easily as they [could] discuss ideology on a panel for [a] women’s workshop or conference.” The activists called for an end to the lionization of male theorists and a recognition that Black women were equally
capable of interpreting and formulating theories and frameworks for global Black liberation. Neglecting to acknowledge this, they argued, was “to deny [their] people and [the] cause half of its capacity for struggle.” It was also to run the risk of adopting Pan-African schemas without interrogating their applicability to particular geo-political and gender-specific frames. Making ideological debate and development a central component of women’s roles would aid in organizers’ collective goal of developing a clear understanding of global Black struggle for their communities. Accordingly, the Sixth PAC participants insisted on Black women’s theoretical acuity and framed them as capable ideologues poised to develop a “correct” analysis of racism, imperialism, and Black struggle.

Changing attitudes about women’s ideological acumen also meant challenging their beliefs about Black manhood. Delegates argued that a clear and grounded theory of Pan-African liberation required healthy debate about Black Americans’ relationship and potential contributions to diasporic struggles. Such debate and consensus could only be achieved, they reasoned, if activists rejected conceptions of Black manhood that rested on men’s unquestioned monopoly on ideological leadership. The activists noted: if a man cannot be disagreed with for his manhood’s sake, and our womanhood’s sake, we develop paper tigers unable to engage in the realities of revolution. Everyone loses when [women] do not question, demand, and have input into the ideology espoused as the correct line for our people to follow. Just as Black women needed to re-define their worldview and priorities in order to advance global Black liberation, so too did Pan-African liberation depend on men’s reorientation of their gendered political self-conception.

Some of these ideas would make their way into the North American Delegation’s official position on women presented at the end of the Congress. “Women’s Contribution to Pan-African Struggle,” a position paper included in the “General Summary of Positions” of the North American Delegation, that summarized delegates’ perspectives put forth throughout the meeting. A three-part document in which delegates enumerated Black women’s “ancient,” “modern,” and “future” contributions to Pan-African organizing, the resolution functioned as a referendum on women’s historical and contemporaneous exclusion within Congress documents and Pan-African organizing as well as an index of the delegation’s perceptions on women’s roles in global struggles.

The delegation opened the resolution by recapitulating the history of Black advancement through the lens of Black women’s activism and leadership. They framed the Diaspora as emerging from a singular African lineage that the “ancient African woman” advanced and refined. Delegates noted that historically, this woman “took her place as an equal in society in which she made many valid contributions to her family, as the mother of civilizations … to warfare as an inventive tactician … to economics as the mistress of the marketplace and the inventor of agriculture.” These contributions, they argued, positioned women of African descent at the vanguard of the Pan-African liberation struggle. Participants then offered a litany of examples attesting to women’s “modern” efforts at sustaining and liberating the Diaspora. They emphasized how women had made their mark in the “area of politics,” citing the activism of women such as “Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks, Madame Cissie, Queen Mother Moore, and Shirley Dubois” as well as “the many African women who are soldiers in the liberation armies of Guinea Bissau and Mozambique.” The delegation credited women as being important “preserver[s] of health and a curer[s] of illness” and with playing a “vital role” in “the economic management of the community.” Summarizing Black women’s global, sustained, and holistic contributions to Pan-African struggle, they concluded that the Black woman’s role had “always been one of continuous contribution whenever and whenever the need arose. Her traditional role, as
a functional contributor to society as a whole, has reasserted itself even after 400 years of limitations, blunting of spirit and overt oppression.”

Delegates then used this history of Black women’s activism as justification for their pronouncements about the role women should play in prospective Pan-African organizing. Going forward, they argued, “there should be a strong emphasis on the ‘harmonious dualism’ of pre-colonial African societies” or a “recreation of unity between men and women, a unity in which the African woman stands beside, not behind, not ahead of the African man.” Delegates envisioned this unity as “characterized by [women’s] mutual support and leadership in all spheres—home, battlefield, workforce, and community.” They also suggested that Black women reaffirm their solidarity with “African women, and men, toward the end of self-determination and a strong united Africa by strengthening their ‘commitment to and participation in the Pan-African liberation struggle’ and by making ‘concrete moves to eliminate racism, capitalism, imperialism, and neo-colonialism.’”

This final position paper reflected the North American Delegation’s preoccupation with redefining Black women’s roles in Pan-African organizing and the limitations of the American-centered Pan-African framework in achieving this goal. The first half of the resolution indicated an interest in acknowledging Black women as critical members of the historical and contemporary Pan-African community. The “ancient” contributions section notably recapitulated theories of a universal African past, while the “modern” contributions section framed U.S.-based Black women as global liberation leaders by rhetorically fusing their “modern” contributions with those of other women across the Diaspora, blurring the boundaries between the activism, goals, and identities of women across the Diaspora. This promoted a unified but falsely inscribed understanding of Pan-African identification and community among Black women. It also rhetorically situated U.S.-based women as leaders in the Diaspora’s ongoing quest for cultural re-identification and self-determination.

In the “future recommendations” section, delegates once again attempted to reconcile their U.S-centered view of Pan-Africanism with a more nuanced idea of women’s roles. On the one hand, they supported the importance of women ascribing to an “African Value System” and an idealized understanding of “pre-colonial societies.” Such frameworks, often promoted by U.S.-based cultural nationalist groups, offered the promise of “re-Africanization” without attending to the temporal, regional, and ethnic heterogeneity of African histories and cultures. On the other hand, the document included statements that eschewed cultural and political abstraction and gestured toward a more nuanced interpretation of Pan-African identification based on analysis and coalition-building rather than imagined paternal ties. Delegates’ prescriptions for women to invest their energies in “Pan-African solidarities” and “concrete” efforts to eliminate racism created openings for women to develop new understandings of Pan-Africanism rooted in their lived experiences with racism and imperialism and built on present political consensus rather than identifications with historical abstractions.

Other aspects of delegates’ prognostications for the future of the Pan-African Woman were more progressive. The North American Delegation statement directly countered hierarchal concepts of gender roles imbedded in their existing Pan-African frameworks. The delegates’ assertion that women stood “beside, not behind or ahead” of their male counterparts was an unequivocal statement of support for women’s equality. Furthermore, their contention that women were leaders in “all spheres” of work challenged claims that women’s “natural” roles were in the areas of childrearing and education. Reporters covering the event for the Tanzania Daily News noted that, throughout the Congress, there was a consistent call for the Pan-African world to “do something about its
womenfolk.’ By the end of the Congress, North American Delegation members had responded, rhetorically disavowing hegemonic gender hierarchies and opening the door for future debates about reevaluating the centrality and scope of women’s contributions to Pan-African organizing.

The delegation’s resolutions reflected female activists’ concerted efforts to center and challenge debates about women’s roles from the planning stages of the Congress. Soon after Augusto drafted the “Call to Congress,” women across organizations and ideological affiliations responded, offering their support and organizational labor to make the meeting a success. Congress volunteers and delegates often also engaged in debates about redefining women’s roles in their respective activist circles and they brought this perspective to bear on their Congress work. In regional and national meetings, workshops, working papers, and formal resolutions, U.S.-based women asserted their centrality to past and present Pan-African projects, their investment in reformulating the intersection of Black womanhood and Pan-African praxis, and the importance of developing a holistic and inclusive concept of global Black liberation.

The Sixth PAC ended with a series of declarations rather than concrete political or social actions. At the close of Congress, the participants vowed to “completely restore the dignity of African people through the building of socialism” and to “exclude all racial, tribal, ethnic, and religious considerations in the development of Pan Africanism.” This statement in support of the class side of the two-line struggle led many to conclude that the “Marxists were in command” of the event. Delegates did not make provisions to create a permanent Pan-African secretariat nor did they establish a date and place for the next Congress. This lack of tangible outcomes or plans caused many to view the event as a tactical failure.

Nevertheless, the Sixth PAC did strengthen activist ties and bolster Pan-African organizing. The meeting offered the opportunity for organizers from North America to solidify real and imagined bonds with African countries and cultures and offer tangible support to African liberation groups. The North American Delegation brought 300 pounds of medicine for and donated blood to anti-colonial liberation fighters. As Sylvia Hill pointed out, “this was concrete support that did not just happen;” it was the result of coordinated efforts among Black peoples across the globe and fostered a shared sense of solidarity across ideological and factional lines. Organizers also noted that the Sixth PAC allowed North American delegates to “reaffirm [their] relations to [their] homeland,” and fostered their interest in further linking their movements for freedom throughout the Black world. Although the Sixth PAC highlighted the impossibility of unifying the Diaspora under a singular, consolidated Pan-African agenda, it played an important role in cultivating global Black political consciousness through the creation and circulation of documents aimed at redefining and refining the future of Pan-African advocacy.

Congress participants’ final “Resolution on Black Women,” was an overlooked progressive outcome of the event. The collective statement passed at the end of the meeting was both an affirmation of women’s activism and a challenge to male-centered conceptions of Pan-Africanism. In this document, delegates maintained that Black women played a “key role” in “revolutionary struggles against imperialism and racism” and that they had “too often been relegated to inferior positions” in political struggle. In response, Congress delegates collectively proffered a set of resounding statements of support for women’s equality and inclusion in the Pan-African struggle. They announced their intent to give their “total support to the political struggles for equality undertaken by Black women” and called on “all the states and organisations participating in this Congress to tackle the problems of the oppression of women thoroughly and profoundly.”

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If the goal of the Sixth PAC was to redefine Pan-Africanism in the twenty-first century, then this resolution reflected Black women’s persistent claims that a male-centered conception of Pan-African identity and community was insufficient for the task at hand. In order to move to the next stage of struggle all members of the Pan-African community had to heed female delegates’ advice of changing their “attitudes” about womanhood, manhood, and women’s work and their insistence that Black women were uniquely situated, class and race-conscious political actors. Reflecting these debates and discussions, the “Resolution on Women” discursively linked Pan-African liberation and Black women’s liberation rather than subsuming the latter in the former. The resolution also identified and named the intersecting racist, imperialist, and sexist forces at work in Black women’s oppression and the importance of viewing women as political actors in their own rights. Ultimately, the document reflected female participants’ efforts to problematize conventional constructions of diasporic peoples and their interest in forging new ones that did not rely on masculinist and essentialist interpretations of Pan-African identity or community.

Black women’s participation in Pan-African events and meetings embodied the promise of their goals of personal and political redefinition. In striving to develop a new understanding of Pan-Africanism that could meet their needs as globally minded organizers, they intervened in male-dominated conversations about the contours of Pan-Africanism and men’s and women’s roles in diasporic struggle. Although they may have fallen short of completely upending prevailing Pan-Africanist frameworks, their speeches, position papers, and documents gestured toward dynamic alternatives to the static ideas of African unity that many leaders on both sides of the Atlantic promoted.

Chief among their claims was the idea that contemporaneous conceptualizations of Pan-Africanism suffered from more than just oversimplified ideas about race and class; they were also hampered by patriarchal interpretations of global liberation. U.S.-based activists were deeply entrenched in debates over the primacy of race or class in global liberation schemas. Black American women challenged this dichotomy at international meetings and events, refusing to assert the primacy of one form of oppression over the other, instead insisting that female Pan-Africanists should take a leading role in addressing the simultaneous manifestations of white domination. Not only did their political writings challenge the binary of the two-line struggle, they also injected an intersectional ethos into conversations about the contours of Pan-Africanism.

Black women’s ideas about Pan-African womanhood also intervened in dominant, male-centered discourses about Pan-African subjectivity and liberation. In their speeches and working papers, these women directly disputed male leadership’s claim to ideological and organizational authority and framed female Pan-Africanists as capable political actors and theorists. In the process, they disrupted historical and contemporary associations among nationalism, masculinity, and Pan-Africanism and highlighted the impossibility of subordinating the “woman question” when charting the future of global Black revolt.

Black women’s participation at the Congress indicates that their interest in integrating Pan-Africanism and their gender-specific concerns galvanized women across the organizing spectrum. Through events like ALD and the Sixth PAC Black women activists reconciled their political imaginations of the Diaspora with their, and other women’s, lived experiences. These international summits also became spaces in which these activists could redefine their roles in U.S-centered organizing and experiment with new ideas about their self-development and political self-conception outside of male-led and male-centered spaces. If, in the 1970s, Black Power activists embraced Pan-Africanism as a higher and more rigorous emancipatory framework, then Black women argued that their schemas had to incorporate
a more equitable and nuanced conception of women’s roles and goals in order to reach the next plane of ideological and political struggle. Their speeches, working papers, and resolutions proffered intersectional approaches Pan-Africanist theorizing and mobilization for Black Power activists to adopt.

Notes

1 For more information see: Kwasi Konadu, A View from The East: Black Cultural Nationalism and Education in New York City (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2009).
16 Wilkins, “In the Belly of the Beast,” 150; Rickford, We Are an African People, 182–183.


24 Sylvia Hill, interview with author, August 3, 2010; Memo from Sylvia Hill, Secretary-General to State/District Contact Person Responsible for Distribution of This Application and Questionnaire,” December 19, 1973; Folder 21, Box 6, Sixth Pan-African Congress Records, Moorland-Springarn Research Center, Howard University, Washington, D.C. Hereafter referred to as 6PAC Records.

25 “North American Region Planning Conference Report,” Folder 64, Box 6, 6PAC Records.


28 “Sixth Pan African Congress Delegate/Observer Questionnaire Application: Lois L. Johnson,” Folder 35, Box 1, 6PAC Records.

29 “Sixth Pan African Congress Delegate/Observer Questionnaire Application: Mrs. Virginia E. Y. Collins,” Folder 16, Box 1, 6PAC Records.


31 Ibid.

32 Markle, “We Are Not Tourists,” 259; Letter from Courtland Cox to Sylvia Hill, March 18, 1974, Folder 4, Box 4, 6PAC Records.

33 Markle, “We Are Not Tourists,” 259–60; Geri Stark Augusto, interview with author.

34 Markle, “We Are Not Tourists,” 259; Publicity Release, 17 January, 1974, Folder 85, Box 3, 6PAC Records.


39 Hoyt W. Fuller, “Notes from A Sixth-Pan-African Journal,” Black World (October 1974): 73–74; Sixth Pan-African Congress Program, Box 1, Folder 22a, Muriel S. and Otto P. Snowden Papers, Archives and Special Collections, Northeastern University Library, Boston, Massachusetts. Hereafter referred to as the Snowden Papers.

40 Sixth Pan-African Congress Program, Box 1, Folder 22a, Snowden Papers.

41 “Congress Participants,” Folder 3, Box 3, 6PAC Records.


43 “The Role of Women in the Struggle for Liberation,” Folder 32, Box 4, 6PAC Records.

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