

- Rise and Fall of 1960s Counter-Culture* (London and New York: Canongate Books US, 2009).
21. Quoted in Jeff Tamarkin, "Jefferson Airplane: The Summer of Haight," *Mojo* April 2003. Accessed online at rocksbackpages.com: Jefferson Airplane/2003/Jeff Tamarkin/Mojo/Jefferson Airplane: The Summer Of Haight/12/08/2012 04:51:17/http://www.rocksbackpages.com/article.html?ArticleID=19203 (accessed October 7, 2012).
 22. Meehan, 183.
 23. Meehan, 125.
 24. Meehan, 68.
 25. Meehan, 112.
 26. *The Fourth Way*, liner notes (Capitol ST-317, 1969).
 27. Thomas de Hartmann discussing the role of music in Gurdjieff's teachings on the recording, *The Music of Gurdjieff/de Hartmann* (New York: G-H Records, 1971).
 28. Personal communication, January 31, 2012.
 29. Meehan, 120.
 30. Besides the Charles Perry and Barry Miles books cited in note 7, see *Imagine Nation: The American Counterculture of the 1960s and '70s*, edited by Peter Braunstein and Michael William Doyle, for more on the fluidity of participation within the counterculture.
 31. See George Lewis, "Improvised Music after 1950: Afrological and Eurological Perspectives" *Black Music Research Journal* v22 Supplement: Best of BMRJ (2002; originally published in *BMRJ* v16 n1 [1996]): 214–246.
 32. Angela Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Getrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Random House-Vintage, 1998), xv.
 33. Zimmerman, 33.
 34. Meehan, 153.
 35. See Baraka, *Blues People*.
 36. If you listen closely to the entire fadeout, you will hear the band closing the song by slowing down on the final riff of the A section, performing in an increasingly "square" manner before the song ends in a final flourish with an upward glissando on the electric piano.
 37. Tragically, Marshall died in 2011 from a heart attack at the age of 73, as reported in the *San Francisco Chronicle* (Wednesday, September 14, 2011), available here: <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2011/09/13/BAE21L3EDP.DTL>>
 38. Marcuse, 69.

CHAPTER 10

"A Weapon in Our Struggle for Liberation": Black Arts, Black Power, and the 1969 Pan-African Cultural Festival

Samir Meghelli

"We are still Black and we have come back. *Nous sommes revenus* ['We have returned']. We have come back and brought back to our land, Africa, the music of Africa. Jazz is a Black Power! Jazz is a Black Power! Jazz is an African Power! Jazz is an African music! Jazz is an African music! We have come back!" proclaimed African American poet Ted Joans as he stood before an audience in the overcrowded streets of Algiers, Algeria, at the First Pan-African Cultural Festival in July 1969. He continued the poem, emphasizing his French phrases to ensure the largely Francophone African crowd would understand him: "*Nous sommes revenus. Nous sommes les Noirs Americains, les Afro-Americains, les Africains des Etats-Unis. Mais, le premier chose, nous sommes Africains.*" ["We have returned. We are Black Americans, Afro-Americans, Africans of the United States. But foremost, we are Africans."] Next to Ted Joans was an animated and commanding Archie Shepp, pacing across the stage playing his saxophone. Riding over and through Shepp's melodies were the rhythms of the Algerian Tuareg² musicians who stood nearby, beating at their drums. The audience responded with uproarious applause and spurred on what was to become a classic jazz recording, Archie Shepp's *Live at the Panafrican Festival*.³ Shortly after the performance, Shepp was interviewed about the experience by the Algerian national newspaper, *El Moudjahid*. He described the moment's meaning in personal and political terms: "In my opinion, jazz is the music of all the long-lost Africans in America. So, I am happy to be here in Algeria: it is a return to Africa after 500 years of estrangement."⁴

The epic display of improvisation and transnational collaboration between Archie Shepp, Ted Joans, their bandmates, and the Algerian Tuareg musicians took

place as part of one of the twentieth century's most significant pan-African gatherings: the "First Pan-African Cultural Festival" of July and August 1969. Occurring at a critical moment in the history of the African and African American freedom struggles, the festival brought together thousands of official delegates and visitors from more than 30 African nations, and from North and South America, the Caribbean, East Asia, and Europe.⁵ Musicians, writers, filmmakers, visual artists, politicians, scholars, and liberation movement leaders convened under the auspices of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) to discuss, explore, and display the role of culture in revolutionary movements. By July 1969, with three-fourths of African nations having already gained independence from the European colonial powers and with the civil rights movement in the United States having secured the right to vote for African Americans, culture became an increasingly important battleground for progress.

Cultural and political movements were afoot in both postcolonial Africa and in African America that viewed culture as central to the continuing struggle for freedom. In the United States, the Black Power movement and its "aesthetic and spiritual sister"⁶ the Black Arts Movement sought to deploy culture as a key tool in the project of political liberation. Historian William Van Deburg rightly notes that "Black Power was both a cultural and a political revolt, each thrust reinforcing the other."⁷ As he explains, "since culture could be seen as a 'whole way of life' encompassing the economic, political, social, and aesthetic aspects of a people's existence, the work of black artists was capable of accomplishing liberation in the temporal as well as in the 'spiritual' realm."⁸ In many of the African independence movements, culture was also considered crucial: as the repository for the history, character, and quality of the community, and as an integral force in solidifying a mass-based political consciousness necessary for overthrowing the colonial powers. And in many newly independent African countries, artists of all kinds were directly linked to the nation-building project, either as official collaborators or as harsh critics.⁹

In his remarks at the 1959 Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome, Italy, Guinean president Sékou Touré captured the meaning and significance that many African leaders, intellectuals, and freedom fighters assigned to the role of culture in the pursuit of African independence:

To take part in the African revolution it is not enough to write a revolutionary song; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves, and of themselves. In order to achieve real action, you must yourself be a living part of Africa and of her thought; you must be an element of that popular energy which is entirely called forth for the freeing, the progress, and the happiness of Africa. There is no place outside that fight for the artist or for the intellectual who is not himself concerned with and completely at one with the people in the great battle of Africa and of suffering humanity.¹⁰

Frantz Fanon, the Martinican-born psychiatrist who later renounced his French citizenship and joined the Algerian independence movement, quoted from that

speech in the opening to his chapter "On National Culture" in his widely read and cited book, *The Wretched of the Earth*. Marien Ngouabi, former president of the Republic of Congo, also echoed Sekou Touré's sentiment when Ngouabi commented:

The aim of our culture is not to lull our friends with fairy stories, nor to boast of our art or civilisation—in a word, our knowledge of human sciences. It has a more important part to play, namely to awaken in the African a sentiment of striving for the national liberation of the continent. It is not even a question of proclaiming or glorifying our heroes, though this is indispensable. African culture should be the light which guides our combatants towards national liberation, because it will enable Africans to free themselves. For when a vast continent such as ours is able to appreciate and to defend its culture, this means that it is determined to fight.¹¹

African revolutionary and intellectual Amilcar Cabral, whose ideas found great resonance among African American activists in the 1960s and early 1970s, also saw culture as playing a critical role in continued efforts at liberation:

The value of culture as an element of resistance to foreign domination lies in the fact that culture is the vigorous manifestation on the ideological or idealist plane of the physical and historical reality of the society that is dominated or to be dominated. Culture is simultaneously the fruit of a people's history and a determinant of history, by the positive or negative influence which it exerts on the evolution of relationships between man and his environment, among men or groups of men within a society, as well as among different societies.¹²

There were, of course, important differences in belief over what sort of organized form—if any—a continent-wide or transnational diasporic cultural movement could take, but there was also consensus that culture could not be detached from the ongoing African independence movements or from the ongoing efforts to maintain newfound independence and autonomy. In the United States, *Liberator* magazine, one among a number of important periodicals of the Black Arts and Black Power movements, often featured articles and interviews with artists that similarly contemplated the role of art and the artist in the struggle. Topics and titles such as the following made this connection explicit: "Black Revolution in Music: a talk with drummer Milford Graves," "Keep on Pushin': Rhythm and Blues as a Weapon," "Revolutionary Theatre," and "The Black Writer's Role." In the 1966 article, "The Black Writer's Role," Larry Neal, one of the Black Arts Movement's foremost theorists, wrote:

The Black creative artist is ensnared in a constricted web of contradictions and assertions which, if not resolved, will leave the artist far behind the socio-political thrust of his people. If the Black artist truly desires to be an artist of his people, his work must have an affinity with whatever political and social forces are working toward Black liberation.¹³

In an August 1969 *Ebony* magazine article titled "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation," Neal added:

The Black Arts movement seeks to link, in a highly conscious manner, art and politics in order to assist in the liberation of Black people. The Black Arts movement, therefore, reasons that this linking must take place along lines that are rooted in an Afro-American and Third World historical and cultural sensibility. By 'Third World,' we mean that we see our struggle in the context of the global confrontations occurring in Africa, Asia and Latin America. We identify with all of the righteous forces in those places which are struggling for human dignity.¹⁴

Neal articulated what many on the African continent understood about the centrality of the African American freedom struggle to the dismantling of imperialism around the globe when he wrote: "The Afro-American is that part of the Third World situated in the belly of the beast. The key to its destruction. The world, so carefully described by Fanon, is waiting to see just how the deal will go down."¹⁵

In the midst of the global unrest of the late 1960s, many activists and intellectuals on the African continent and in the diaspora recognized their efforts as being closely aligned. Whether through movement organizations, lobby groups, or arts endeavors, African Americans and Africans attempted to forge stronger ties with one another and to map out the inextricable links between their respective struggles for freedom.¹⁶ The increasing evidence of collaboration between American institutions (such as the Central Intelligence Agency or large corporations) and counterrevolutionary forces in Africa made evident the necessity of these transnational solidarities.¹⁷ Alongside political strategizing and practical support, culture was mobilized as a potential force for social change. This preoccupation with culture and with the transnational linkages between continental African and diasporic movements was not unique to the era of the 1960s. An entire tradition can be traced back at least to the New Negro Renaissance (or what is often referred to as the Harlem Renaissance) and the Négritude movement of the early part of the twentieth century.¹⁸ But for many activists of the Black Arts Movement, even those who were influenced by the work of the New Negro Renaissance artists, this earlier movement was seen as too disconnected from practical political work to be truly effective. For instance, Black Arts proponent Larry Neal, who was himself deeply influenced by New Negro poets Langston Hughes and Sterling Brown,¹⁹ nonetheless felt (echoing the sentiment of Harold Cruse) that the "Harlem Renaissance... was essentially a failure" because "it failed to take roots, to link itself concretely to the struggles of that community, to become its voice and spirit."²⁰ The Black Arts Movement was proposing a much more radical engagement with its public—in community centers and out on the streets—while simultaneously maintaining a deeper dedication to the idea that art had to move people into action. Larry Neal captured this sentiment:

Poetry is a concrete function, an action. No more abstractions. Poems are physical entities: fists, daggers, airplane poems, and poems that shoot guns. Poems are transformed from physical objects into personal forces... The poem comes to

stand for the collective conscious and unconscious of Black America—the real impulse in back of the Black Power movement, which is the will toward self-determination and nationhood, a radical reordering of the nature and function of both art and the artist.²¹

Indeed, then, this moment in the late 1960s was ripe for the staging of a festival that would wrestle with this key issue of the role of culture in revolutionary movements. Taken within the context of the Black Power and Black Arts movements, as well as the African anticolonial and postcolonial efforts, the First Pan-African Cultural Festival represented a crucial opportunity for the African continent—through its Organization of African Unity—to make a case for its cultural and intellectual richness, to renounce European and Euro-American social and intellectual domination, and to bring artists and activists from across the African continent and diaspora into conversation with one another. And although there had been a number of other seemingly similar cultural festivals in preceding years—notably the 1966 Negro Arts Festival in Dakar, Senegal—none matched the radical spirit and eventual impact of the Algiers gathering.

From the very beginning of the Pan-African Festival, Nathan Hare, an African American sociologist and coordinator of the first Black Studies program at an American university, observed a "contrast in the type of Black Americans at the [Negro Arts Festival in Dakar and the Festival in Algiers]."²² He noted that "Dakar had collected the most well-known artists and entertainers, the Duke Ellingtons and the like; Algiers had attracted the new breed young militant whether those of fame, those on the rise, or those yet to begin the making of their names."²³ In addition to being criticized for having appealed to an elite audience—and by the accounts of some, to have been "attended by ninety-percent European and American whites"²⁴—the Negro Arts Festival was also widely criticized for being backed by AMSAC (the American Society of African Culture), which was exposed less than a year later as having been secretly funded by the C.I.A. (Central Intelligence Agency).²⁵

One of the Dakar Festival's most insistent and outspoken critics, South African poet Keorapetse Kgositsile, decried what he saw as the decidedly apolitical nature of the gathering and its heavily pro-Négritude, pro-Western leanings. The promising new wave of young radicals, Kgositsile argued, "realize that the most beautiful poem [Senegalese President Léopold] Senghor can write about the validity of the existence of a glorious Black culture, without attempting to make the social institutions in Senegal actually African, actually liberated from France, does not even improve the diet of a single undernourished black child anywhere in the world where black people are colonized by Caucasians; most probably not even in 'independent' Senegal."²⁶ Another critic, Afro-Brazilian scholar-activist Abdias Do Nascimento, wrote an open letter to the Dakar Festival excoriating its organizers for excluding Afro-Brazilians from the Brazilian delegation, while he also sent a message of solidarity to the attendees.²⁷ Although the Algiers Festival—which occurred a mere three years later—was not without its detractors, too, few could criticize it for a lack of revolutionary credentials. It proved to be an important meeting ground for the emerging generation of activists and artists of the continent and diaspora.

**“There Was a Battle in Algiers...”:
A Clash of Culture and Politics at the
First Pan-African Cultural Festival of 1969**

There was a battle in Algiers in late July, with lighter skirmishes both old and new, and emerging signs of struggle which now lurk ready to boomerang around the world in the years (and months) to come. The troops came together, African generals and footsoldiers in the war of words and politics that splashed against the calm waters of the Mediterranean Sea—in the First Pan-African Cultural Festival—from everywhere in greater numbers than ever before; from San Francisco to Senegal, from Dakar to the District of Columbia.²⁸

—Nathan Hare, “Algiers 1969: A Report on the
Pan-African Cultural Festival”

The idea for the Pan-African Cultural Festival first took shape in September 1967 at a Council of Ministers meeting of the Organization of African Unity (O.A.U.) in Kinshasa, Congo, when attendees decided, “There is an urgent need to undertake common measures that would assist in the popularizing, development and refinement of the various cultures obtaining in Africa.”²⁹ The O.A.U. passed a resolution to “sponsor an All-African Festival of African Drama, Folk Song, and Instrumental Music.”³⁰ Not long afterward, the Algerian government, with assistance from the O.A.U., went about publicizing the July–August 1969 gathering. Anticipation was quick to build, as the African press—as varied as *Fraternité Matin* of the Ivory Coast, *L’Effort Camerounais* of Cameroon, *Jeune Afrique*, a French-language pan-African magazine published in Paris, *La Semaine* of Congo-Brazzaville, *El-Ayam* of Sudan—along with many magazines and newspapers throughout Europe, America, and the Caribbean announced the approaching First Pan-African Cultural Festival.³¹ In one example, *Jeune Afrique* magazine dedicated an entire page to the festival under the title “L’Art Africain Descend Dans La Rue” [“African Art Goes Out Into the Streets”]:

This summer, from July 21 to August 1, there will be a unique Festival in Algiers, a Festival like none ever seen before: the First Pan-African Cultural Festival... It will be nothing like those very specialized cultural festivals that happen a little bit all over the place during vacation, and which are practically reserved for elite tourists. Most importantly, the Algiers Festival will be for the people. But, this large festival for the people will have all the importance and weight of a celebration of liberation.³²

In the United States, the African American press played an important role in publicizing the festival. *Muhammad Speaks*, the weekly paper of the Nation of Islam and one of the most widely circulating African American papers of the day, ran several articles in anticipation of the festival. One such article, titled “Algerian Festival to Spotlight Africa’s Vast Cultural Heritage,” reported:

Massive preparations are under way for the First Pan-African Cultural Festival... Black artists from America and 15 African nations will attend and

museums throughout the continent are sending works of art—some hundreds of years old—to the cultural festival, which promises to be the greatest event in the history of Africa, if not the entire world.³³

In addition to publicity in the press, travel agencies began organizing and advertising group tours of Africa that centered around the Pan-African Festival in Algiers. *Africa Tourist and Travel Agency*, based in New York City, printed out brochures for a tour they organized specifically for the festival and that they called the “Organization for African Unity Cultural Festival Tour.”³⁴ The tour was to last a total of 21 days, from July 21 to August 11, 1969, would include travel through Morocco and Algeria, and was to be hosted by a “tour personality,” renowned Jazz pianist Ahmad Jamal. Other travel agencies and Black activist organizations likely organized similar group trips to attend the festival.

Michele Russell, an African American woman living and working in Washington, DC, described how she first heard of the Festival:

My trip to Algeria actually began in May with a note in my mailbox at the Institute for Policy Studies in Washington, D.C. where I was working. Typed across the top of the page was the legend:

WE ARE AN AFRICAN PEOPLE

And as if to test that assertion, an announcement followed of a group trip to Algeria, being planned to attend the First Pan-African Cultural Festival...³⁵

The eagerness of the attendees of the Festival mirrored the triumphant language of the newspaper and magazine announcements of the approaching event. Dave Burrell, a young Jazz pianist who was invited to play at the festival, described his and his bandmates’ preparations for their departure:

Before we went, we got as African as we could get in New York... The dashikis had just come into vogue, and we were sort of very much in the vanguard of the movement... [We had] to run around New York and get African material and make the dashikis and the different skullcaps and to have the Black Power sign... I remember [Jazz musician and bandmate] Sunny Murray saying to me, ‘Hey, I joined the [Black] Panthers.’ I said, ‘What?’ He said, ‘Yeah, don’t tell anybody.’ He showed me a little membership card.³⁶

Sunny Murray was part of a growing number of Jazz musicians that became Black Panthers and who were dedicated members of the Black Power movement. The anticipation was felt among all who were going. Henri Lopes, a budding writer and Minister of Education for Congo-Brazzaville who was helping lead that country’s delegation to the festival, was also quite eager and excited, as he recounted:

My arrival in Algeria was met with great emotion, in large part because our political consciousness... was cultivated as a result of our knowledge of the Algerian

war for independence. And so, for us, it was the country that had obtained genuine independence, more so than most African countries, and to arrive there, it was like going to a Rome or a Mecca... Secondly, the artists—the creators in Africa—each one of us was isolated in our countries. Africa was not a society that took the artist very seriously. And the Festival gave us all the opportunity to meet one another, to exchange ideas with another, and try to get to know one another. We [French-speaking Africans] didn't know very well the literature of South Africa and the English-speaking [African] colonies... Thus, the Festival represented a tangible image of what could one day be a united Africa.³⁷

In the months leading up to the festival, the Algerian government remained busy solidifying its plans, including meeting with and confirming appearances by delegations from all over Africa, and finishing construction and renovation of facilities throughout the city of Algiers (e.g., cinema, theater, and national gallery).³⁸ The Algerian national newspaper, *El Moudjahid*, also contributed to the preparations by publishing articles on topics such as African history, art, and culture, the African American freedom struggle, and the writings and ideas of African intellectuals. This was part of an initiative in mass-based education for the Algerian public, meant to provide social and historical context for what they were going to witness in the streets of their capital city, Algiers, in a matter of only weeks.

The festival opened on July 21, 1969, with a speech from Algerian president Houari Boumediene, which began:

Algeria is happy to welcome the First Pan-African Cultural Festival on behalf of our entire continent. The importance of this event and the joy and enthusiasm which it has aroused and is still arousing, the diversity and quality of the manifestations to which it will give rise, should not make us forget to what an extent this first Pan-African Cultural Festival is concerned, not only with our values and sensitivities, but also with our very existence as Africans and our common future.

This Festival, far from being an occasion for general festivities which might momentarily distract us from our daily tasks and problems, should rather be related to them and make a direct connection to our vast effort of construction. It constitutes an intrinsic part of the struggle we are all pursuing in Africa — whether that of development, of the struggle against racialism, or of national liberation.

Our continent, three-quarters of which is liberated, but which is fully master of its destiny, is undertaking the task, with this First Pan-African Cultural Festival, of holding the greatest artistic and literary reunion at a continental scale in history, commensurate with all facets of its expression. By the same token, it takes a further step forward in the continuing struggle against all forms of domination.³⁹

He ended by saying,

Now that the Festival is beginning, I should like to join you in expressing the hope that this meeting will be the beginning of a new era for our culture and that our efforts will be crowned with success.⁴⁰

El Moudjahid was quick to find peoples' first impressions of the Pan-African Festival, questioning people on the street and publishing the responses in an article titled "Le Coeur d'Alger Bat Au Rythme Du Festival" ("The Heart of Algiers Beats to the Rhythm of the Festival"). A young Algerian painter named Abdout responded:

The Algerian Festival is presenting itself in a serious fashion compared to other festivals around the world. It will be more complete. It will show the new height of African art. It will also be an occasion to discover African music. It will allow our artists to become more familiar with the realities of African culture. Most of all, it will present the opportunity to exchange ideas and points of view with African painters and artists. In my case, I hope to see as many expositions and performances as possible.⁴¹

On the very same page in that issue of the newspaper, there was an article titled "Quand Le Jazz Se Veut Arme De Combat" ("When Jazz Looks To Be A Weapon of Combat"), in which was reprinted a poem by the African American poet Ted Joans called "Behind the Smile of Black Jazz." Each and every day over the period of two weeks, *El Moudjahid* covered in great detail the events and happenings in Algiers. There were daily symposia around issues of critical importance to the social, political, cultural, and economic development of Africa, as well as musical, theatrical, and dance performances throughout city.

One of the festival's most popular symposia presentations was made by Stanislas Adotevi, professor of Philosophy and Commissioner General for Culture and Youth of Dahomey (present-day Benin). His speech set forth a devastating critique of the concept of Négritude, a concept that had reigned at the 1966 Dakar Festival but that was increasingly coming under attack. Adotevi, who would a few years later publish the incisive text *Négritude et Négrologues [Négritude and Negrologists]* (1972), argued at the festival: "There's no longer any need to speak of Négritude, because the Negroes of Africa know that they are Negroes and that they are at the center of current drama in Africa.... Négritude is a vague and ineffective ideology. There is no place in Africa for a literature that lies outside of revolutionary combat. Négritude is dead."⁴² Much of the audience interjected with applause throughout his presentation.⁴³ Indeed, the Pan-African Festival became one of the first large-scale public forums at which Négritude was harshly criticized by a wide range of African intellectuals and activists. Many of the festival's speakers chose to address what they saw as an ideology that had outlived its utility. This fundamental shift in ideas about the role of culture in social movements that emerged center stage at the Algiers Cultural Festival "marked a political and generational break."⁴⁴ No longer were words alone enough, they had to be tied to concrete action and had to speak to the pressing social and political issues of the day.

One of the more popular attractions at the festival was the "Afro-American Center," located in the heart of downtown Algiers on Rue Didouche Mourad. Housed in a building lent to the Black Panther Party by the Algerian government, this Center was a direct bridge between the freedom struggle in the United States and the young Algerian crowds that flocked to visit it. Black Panther Party (BPP) Minister of Information Eldridge Cleaver, who had announced his presence in

Algiers at a press conference at the opening of the festival after more than eight months in hiding in Cuba, also decided to establish the first and only international chapter of the BPP in Algeria.⁴⁵ There in Algeria with Eldridge was his wife, BPP Communications Secretary Kathleen Cleaver, as well as Minister of Culture Emory Douglas and Chief of Staff David Hilliard. After accompanying Kathleen to Algeria to meet Eldridge after months of separation, Emory Douglas returned to California to gather as many materials as possible to have on hand at the Afro-American Center. When finally set up, the Center was totally covered with photographs of Black Panther members, as well as the captivating artwork of Douglas. Aided by their French-speaking comrade Julia Hervé (Wright), daughter of African American novelist Richard Wright, the Center hosted informational lectures and discussions, and handed out plenty of Party material and memorabilia. Emory Douglas recalled:

We had all of these materials that people wanted to see... We would just give them posters, newspapers, all of that. We were just giving all of that away... [And the response] was just overwhelming. People from all over the world were there... I would hand them literature. All on the streets of Algeria we would hand out posters and they were grabbing them and stuff like that.⁴⁶

The Black Panther Party was so well received in Algeria that the government eventually accorded it official status as a liberation movement and provided support similar to that which it provided for other revolutionary movements from around the world, such as FRELIMO of Mozambique and the South African ANC.⁴⁷

Although the prevailing mood at the festival was one of optimism and excitement, there were a number of attendees who felt either cynical toward the festival's purported aims or who were dissatisfied with the way it was managed. Joseph Okpaku, a Nigerian playwright and university professor, was one of these people. Writing in *Africa Report*, he explained, "After several days of sitting in plenary sessions at the Pan-African Cultural Festival at Algiers, I wondered whether I was in the right place or had... strayed into an international cocktail party."⁴⁸ He went on,

Art is not diplomacy and the artist is not a diplomat. The very nature of the festival demands that the politicians, after organizing it, disappear through the back door as soon as the guests arrive. Instead, the artists stayed in the galleries and were forced to listen to politicians officiating at the ritual of cultural diplomacy.⁴⁹

Okpaku concluded that the "festival failed to discuss how culture can progress in the midst of political turmoil" and "failed to make a clear distinction between a government's minister of culture and the guardians and bearers of culture."⁵⁰

Despite such criticism, the festival was also the site for important moments that embodied the sort of ideas and ideals around which the Festival was staged. In one of two documentaries that American expatriate filmmaker William Klein shot while at the festival, titled *Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther* (1970), Cleaver expresses

rather succinctly what a gathering such as the festival meant for him and the Black Panthers:

When I left the United States, I had no idea that I would end up in Algeria, but I think that I was very fortunate coming to Algeria at the time of the festival and to receive an invitation to participate in the festival, to have the opportunity to establish the Afro-American Center which we opened for the festival, which gave us an opportunity to make ourselves known to the other liberation movements who were brought together by the festival. The stage was set. People came here specifically to check each other out, to see what was going on, and to get some idea as to which movements they could relate to.⁵¹

At another moment in the film, for which Klein "organized a meeting between Black Panthers and African revolutionary movement leaders at a restaurant,"⁵² a representative of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU) articulates rather remarkably the degree to which there was understood to be a common struggle between African Americans and Africans. The Zimbabwean freedom fighter declared:

We are following the struggle of our Afro-American brothers in the United States and I am sure they are also following our struggles. The people of Zimbabwe have taken up arms and we are facing a common enemy, and it is this common enemy which we must all crush. If our Afro-American brothers score success in the United States, that success is not only theirs, it is ours too.⁵³

**"Algiers Was the Black World Coming of Age...":
The Significance and Legacy of the Festival**

*It is evident that since its staging in July 1969 in Algiers, the First Pan-African Cultural Festival has not yet, one the hand, been the subject of as much interest as it would normally merit, and on the other, been subjected to critical and profound analysis. Outside of promotional articles, brief informational articles, or violent verbal responses, no sort of collective or individual position has been taken on the continental or international implications of the Festival or even the problems that were debated there.*⁵⁴

—*Souffles: Revue Culturelle Arabe Du Maghreb*
(*Souffles: Arab Cultural Review of the Maghreb*)

The above excerpt from a 1970 editorial in the North African journal *Souffles* captured quite strikingly the dearth of critical reflections on the Pan-African Festival, not only in its immediate aftermath, but also in the decades since. And yet, there is little question that the festival represents a watershed in the history of linkages between the African American and African freedom movements, and serves as an important window onto the cultural politics of the era. It occurred at the height of the Black Power Movement, whose proponents closely identified with the African liberation movements and wrestled with ideas about the role of culture in the global struggles for freedom. At the same time, African nations (three-fourths of whom

had won their independence) were preoccupied with building stability and autonomy, while also often closely following the developments in African Americans' own valiant struggle for full human rights. The First Pan-African Cultural Festival gave voice to these realities and provided the context for important transnational political linkages to be forged. Rarely, if ever, had there been such a broad range of African, African American, and Afro-diasporic artists and activists in conversation over the future direction of their common struggle for justice.

Personal reflections from attendees of the festival help shed considerable light on its significance and legacy. Having traveled to Algeria, experienced the festival, and been transformed by it, their ruminations on the moment's meaning bring the event to life and provide great insight into the unique impact that it had on all who were present. South African poet Dennis Brutus was in London, England, when he first heard news of the impending festival. He wrote to the Algerian government telling them he was very interested in the event and subsequently received an official invitation. When asked to reflect on the festival, despite mentioning the elation the moment evoked, Brutus recalled being struck by the degree to which the Algeria he had come to know through hearing of the courageous struggle for independence, was in fact very much in crisis even only seven years after its triumph:

We had this great festival. But, I had a sense that the resistance movement in Algeria, which had been very important for the whole continent—it inspired people from all over the continent—I had a sense that in the society, already there was beginning to develop a division between your middle-class, really affluent Algerians, and the people in the Casbah. So, you had the people who had fought in the resistance, and they were tough, but they were still having a hard time... When I went into the Casbah, you know, I had that sense of on the one hand you have an elite and on the other hand, people are struggling. So, although Algeria was important for South Africa [since] many South Africans in the resistance trained with the Algerian army... one had the sense that, while there had been a struggle, the struggle was not yet over. And, in fact, the French were returning [to Algeria] because their need for Algerian oil, you know. Even while they were hating the Algerians, they still wanted the Algerian oil and you had this conflict developing as a division in this society.⁵⁵

Michele Russell, who traveled from Washington, DC, to attend the festival, was also struck by the apparent failures of the Algerian revolution and the fact that the nation did not quite live up to the image she held of it. However, she left the festival while it was still at its "height," allowing her to carry with her a sense of admiration for her ancestral continental homeland, just as her experience there was a rite of passage that, as she described it, "was helping me return to myself":

We had seen the film 'Battle of Algiers' in the States. Now, wandering the city, each street came upon us with the shock of a double exposure. Neon signs became the flames of bombed cafes. Women in veils became saboteurs. Taxi drivers, the incarnation of dedicated cadres careening around corners to

unknown rendezvous... Now, seven years after victory, the liberation struggle has just begun. It goes on in their faces. In almost imperceptible hesitation when they are addressed in Arabic and respond in French. Now, seven years later. The resistance...

I left Algeria at the height of the festival. I left her at the point where I would have the most to come back to. And I felt I would come back, if not this land, then to some other part of the Continent that was helping me to return to myself as well. I left for home. I left at the moment I knew that wherever I was I would be, forever, home.⁵⁶

For Barbara Chase-Riboud, the world-renowned African American novelist and sculptor, the festival represented an artistic breakthrough, for although she was not exhibiting any of her own work there, she had something of an epiphany while amidst the festivities. She explained the specific developments in her artwork that grew directly out of her experiences in Algiers:

[The Festival] was wonderful. It was stupendous. And, at that time, I made a big change in my own work, in my own sculpture... I had been, sort of, in a kind of surrealistic mood, with elongated figures and so on. But, they had been getting more and more abstract and I couldn't figure out away to get them off the legs and off the pedestal. And suddenly, like a light bulb over my head—and it was in Algiers—I realized that I all I had to do was to make them into objects that could be moved by something. And, that something turned out to be silk. That's when I began to do those Malcolm X [sculptures].⁵⁷

Chase-Riboud's famous series of sculptures in memory of Malcolm X were indelibly shaped by the addition of silk to her artistic repertoire, an idea inspired by her experiences at the festival.

Henri Lopes, the celebrated Congolese novelist, also attaches artistic significance to the Pan-African Festival. Prior to the festival, he had only published a couple of poems, but not long afterward, he began publishing what would become prize-winning novels. He recounted:

The importance that the Festival had for me, personally, was that after my presentation [at the symposium], a lot of people began thinking of me as a writer. Oh, I had barely written. I had published a few poems in the journal *Présence Africaine*, but no novels. And, I had the impression of being—how does one say it?—an 'impostor' with that title [of 'writer']. And, when I returned home, that's when I began writing my first work, my collection of short stories, *Tribaliques*. That was after Algiers. I did two things: I quit smoking and I wrote my first book.⁵⁸

For another writer, Don Lee (now known as Haki Madhubuti), the festival held a very different meaning. A Black Arts Movement poet and publisher, Madhubuti was struck by the sights and sounds of the historic gathering, but his experiences there

only made him more aware of the work that had yet to be done in Black communities in the United States. He recalled:

The level of conversation, the level of dialogue, and the level of interaction was very political, highly charged, and most certainly, our conversations were struggle-driven. And, the level of dialogue was very intellectually stimulating, primarily because everybody was reading the same books... But, this is a very difficult time because COINTELPRO is coming on strong, the red squads in Chicago, and the Panthers had been driven all out of the country, I mean, Algiers, as well as Cuba and so forth... I mean, I knew Kwame Ture [i.e. Stokely Carmichael] and Eldridge Cleaver and people like that. So, to go and see them in other spaces and being received royally, was very good. But, also, it just spoke to me loudly that the work that we needed to do here [in the U.S.] was just not being done, because if we were doing the proper work here they wouldn't have to leave, they would have protection. And so, it just... to my heart, it said, 'Go back to Chicago, go back to the States, and just move the work up another volume.' And, for me, the volume was, essentially, developing independent Black institutions.⁵⁹

Lastly, for Hoyt Fuller, an African American educator and editor of *Negro Digest* (later renamed *Black World*) who had traveled widely on the African continent, the First Pan-African Cultural Festival of 1969 represented the realization of a long-standing pan-Africanist ideal, bringing with it new possibilities and new challenges:

Pan-Africanism is an idea whose time has come. That fact is, for me, the central meaning of Algiers 1969... That was what it meant to me to have Africans from all over the world assembling on the soil of Frantz Fanon's adopted country to consider the direction the peoples of the African continent should take. Houari Boumedienne, host to the First Pan-African Cultural Festival, said that the nature of the problems affecting the African continent, and the choice of solutions to meet those problems, necessitates a maximum of organization and preparation and a high level of consultation and coordination regarding the decisions and the initiative needed to reach a common goal: the final liberation of Africa, the achievement of economic independence and the hastening of development to bring happiness and prosperity to people of Africa. The singing and dancing in the streets, the pageants and the parades, were more than mere spectacle and entertainment: the festivities were designed to illustrate that for Africa (in Boumedienne's own words) 'culture is a weapon in our struggle for liberation'... Algiers was the Black World coming of Age.⁶⁰

To ensure that the festival would have a lasting impact, a manifesto was drawn up that summarized the event's proceedings and included 40 recommendations for "the dynamic utilisation of the elements of African culture."⁶¹ The recommendations were many, and their practical application varied in quality and kind. One successful example was the creation of a continent-wide collective of filmmakers who called themselves FEPACI, the Fédération Panafricaine de Cinéastes [Pan-African

Federation of Filmmakers]. This group, which still exists today, committed themselves "to the notion of Pan-Africanism... and believed their prophetic mission was to unite and to use film as a tool for the liberation of the colonized countries and as a step toward the total unity of Africa."⁶² Their work supporting the development of African cinema over the past 40 years has been invaluable.

These kinds of traces of the impact of the 1969 Algiers Festival are a testament to the deep commitment of that era's artists and activists. At the time of the festival itself, in both Africa and African America, the issue of what role culture was to play in the freedom struggles was often under debate. However, despite disagreements over whether its role was to take form in Senghorian *Négritude*, Fanon's "literature of combat," the Black Panthers' revolutionary art, or Maulana Karenga and the US Organization's cultural nationalism, culture nonetheless remained central to the notion of liberation. The First Pan-African Cultural Festival of 1969 was an event that both symbolized and helped invigorate the transnational connections between the many African and African American activists gathered there, just as it served as a site for the vigorous debates of the 1960s and 1970s around the question of the relationship between culture and politics.

Notes

1. Transcription taken from footage of the Festival in William Klein's documentary film, *Festival Panafricain d'Algier* (ONCIC—Office National du Commerce et de l'Industrie Cinématographiques, 1970), as well as from the sound recording, Archie Shepp, *Live at the Panafrican Festival* (BYG-Actuel 529351, 1969).
2. The Tuareg are one of many ethnic groups that comprise the Imazighen (or Berbers), the indigenous peoples of North Africa.
3. Archie Shepp, *Live at the Panafrican Festival* (BYG-Actuel 529351, 1969).
4. "Deux Jazzmen Nous Parlent de la Musique (Archie Shepp et Grachan Moncuri)," *El Moudjahid* (Dim. 3—Lun. 4 Aout 1969): 5.
5. Boutkhil Alla, "Festival Culturel Panafricain," *Jeune Afrique*, no. 444 (July 7–13, 1969): 58.
6. Larry Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," *Drama Review* 12, no. 4 (Summer 1968): 29.
7. William Van Deburg, *New Day in Babylon: The Black Power Movement and American Culture, 1965–1975* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 189.
8. *Ibid.*
9. For a discussion of some of these tensions, see: Philip G. Altbach and Salah M. Hassan, eds., *The Muse of Modernity: Essays on Culture as Development in Africa* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 1996); Dominic Thomas, *Nation-Building, Propaganda, and Literature in Francophone Africa* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002).
10. Sékou Touré, "The Political Leader as the Representative of a Culture," (address to the second Congress of Black Writers and Artists, Rome, 1959). Quoted in Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 206.
11. Quoted in Henri Lopes, "Negritude: A Sober Analysis," in *New African Literature and the Arts Vol. III*, ed. Joseph Okpaku (New York: The Third Press, 1973), 82.
12. "National Liberation and Culture," in *Return To The Source: Selected Speeches by Amilcar Cabral* (New York: Monthly Review Press with Africa Information Service, 1973), 41.
13. Larry Neal, "The Black Writer's Role," *Liberator* (June 1966): 8.

14. Larry Neal, "Any Day Now: Black Art and Black Liberation," *Ebony* xxiv, no. 10 (August 1969): 54.
15. Neal, "The Black Writer's Role," 8.
16. See: Samir Meghelli, "From Harlem to Algiers: Transnational Solidarities between the African American Freedom Movement and Algeria, 1962–1978," in *Black Routes to Islam*, ed. Manning Marable and Hishaam Aidi (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 99–119; Brenda Gayle Plummer, *In Search of Power: African Americans in the Era of Decolonization, 1956–1974* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013); Brenda Gayle Plummer, *Rising Wind: Black Americans and U.S. Foreign Affairs, 1935–1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996); Penny Von Eschen, *Race Against Empire: Black Americans and Anticolonialism, 1937–1957* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997); Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates and the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Robyn Spencer, "Merely One Link in the Worldwide Revolution: Internationalism, State Repression, and the Black Panther Party, 1966–1972," in *From Toussaint to Tupac: The Black International Since the Age of Revolution*, ed. Michael O. West, William G. Martin, and Fanon Che Wilkins (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 215–231; Fanon Che Wilkins, "'In the Belly of the Beast': Black Power, Anti-Imperialism, and the African Liberation Solidarity Movement, 1968–1975" (PhD diss., New York University, 2001); Fanon Che Wilkins, "The Making of Black Internationalists: SNCC and Africa before the Launching of Black Power," *Journal of African American History* 94, no. 2 (Fall 2007): 468–491; and Besenia Rodriguez, "Beyond Nation: The Formation of a Tricontinental Discourse," (PhD diss., Yale University, 2006), among others.
17. René Lemarchand, "The C.I.A. in Africa: How Central? How Intelligent?" *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 14, no. 3 (1976): 401–426; Ellen Ray, William Schaap, Karl van Meter, and Louis Wolf, eds. *Dirty Work 2: The CIA in Africa* (London: Zed Press, 1980).
18. See: Mercer Cook, "The Race Problem in Paris and the French West Indies," *Journal of Negro Education* 8, no. 4 (October 1939): 673–680; F. Abiola Irele, "The Harlem Renaissance and the Negritude Movement," in *The Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* eds. F. Abiola Irele and Simon Gikandi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 759–784; Tracy Sharpley-Whiting, *Negritude Women* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2002); and Brent Edwards, *The Practice of Diaspora: Literature, Translation, and the Rise of Black Internationalism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), among others.
19. Larry Neal, "Sterling Brown and the Erection of a Whole Literary Tradition," in *Sterling A. Brown: A Umum Tribute* (Philadelphia, PA: Black History Museum Publishers, 1982).
20. Neal, "The Black Arts Movement," 39.
21. *Ibid.*, 31–32.
22. Nathan Hare, "Algiers 1969: A Report on the Pan-African Cultural Festival." *Black Scholar* 1, no. 1 (November 1969): 3.
23. *Ibid.*
24. Neal, "The Black Writer's Role," 7.
25. See: Neil Sheehan, "5 New Groups Tied to C.I.A. Conduits," *New York Times*, February 17, 1967, 1, 16; John M. Crewdson, "C.I.A. Link to Cherno Unit Is Denied," *New York Times*, February 21, 1976, 11; John M. Crewdson, "Worldwide Propaganda Network Built by the C.I.A.," *New York Times*, December 26, 1977, 1, 37; Hugh Wilford, *The Mighty Wurlitzer: How the CIA Played America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 197–224.

26. William Keorapetse Kgositsile, "Paths to the Future," *Negro Digest* xvii, no. 11–12 (September–October 1968): 40.
27. Abdias Do Nascimento, "An Open Letter to the 1st World Festival of Negro Arts," *Présence Africaine* 58, no. 30 (1966): 208–218.
28. Nathan Hare, "Algiers 1969: A Report on the Pan-African Cultural Festival." *Black Scholar* 1, no. 1 (November 1969): 3.
29. *All-African Cultural Festival Handbook*. (Algiers, Algeria: Organization of African Unity General Secretariat, 1969), 1.
30. *Ibid.* There were also follow-up resolutions at subsequent assemblies; for these, see: "Organization of African Unity Conference," *International Relations* (not dated), in *Documents, Papers & Memoranda on the Growth of the Pan-African Movement Since 1952* ed. Colin Legum, (Todmorden, England: Altair Publishing, 1993), Microfilm.
31. "La Presse Africaine et Le Festival," in *Alger 1969: Bulletin d'Information* 4 (15 Mai 1969), 40–43.
32. *Ibid.*, 42. Translated from the French.
33. Kenneth C. Landry, "Algerian Festival to Spotlight Africa's Vast Cultural Heritage," *Muhammad Speaks*, July 13, 1969, 31.
34. Copy of original in author's possession.
35. Michele Russell, "Algerian Journey," *Freedomways* (4th quarter 1969), 355.
36. Dave Burrell, interview by James G. Spady, date unknown, Philadelphia, PA. Tape recording in possession of James G. Spady.
37. Henri Lopes, interview by author, June 13, 2003, Paris, France. Translated from the French by the author.
38. Boutkhil Alla, "Festival Culturel Panafricain," *Jeune Afrique* no. 444 (July 7–13, 1969): 58.
39. Boumedienne, "The Algerian Festival: Inaugural Address," 1.
40. *Ibid.*, 9.
41. Nourredine Hocine, "Le Coeur d'Alger Bat Au Rythme Du Festival," *El Moudjahid* (Vendredi 18 Juillet 1969), 5.
42. Transcribed from speech shown in the film: William Klein, *Festival Culturel Panafricain d'Alger*, produced by ONCIC (Algerian National Film Board), 1970. Color, 35mm (from 16mm).
43. *Ibid.*
44. Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *Black Paris: The African Writers' Landscape* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 73.
45. For more on the International Section of the Black Panther Party: Kathleen Cleaver, "Back to Africa: The Evolution of the International Section of the Black Panther Party (1969–1972)," in *The Black Panther Party Reconsidered* ed. Charles E. Jones (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1998), 211–254. See also: Meghelli, "From Harlem to Algiers."
46. Emory Douglas, interview by James G. Spady, November 10, 2007, Philadelphia, PA. Tape recording in possession of James G. Spady.
47. Sanche de Gramont, "Our Other Man in Algiers," *New York Times Magazine*, November 1, 1970.
48. Joseph Okpaku, "Artists and Politicians, Algiers: The Wrestling Match that Never Took Place," *Africa Report* (November 1969): 41.
49. *Ibid.*
50. *Ibid.*
51. *Eldridge Cleaver, Black Panther*, directed and filmed by William Klein; produced by ONCIC (Algerian National Film Board), 1970. Color, 35mm (from 16mm), 75 minutes.

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid.
54. "Le Festival Culturel Panafricain D'Alger 1969," *Souffles* (4e trimestre 1969/Janvier-février 1970).
55. Dennis Brutus, interview by author, February 14, 2004, Philadelphia, PA.
56. Michele Russell, "Algerian Journey," *Freedomways* (4th quarter, 1969), 355-364.
57. Barbara Chase-Riboud, interview by James G. Spady, November 14, 2003, Philadelphia, PA. Tape recording in possession of James G. Spady.
58. Henri Lopes, interview by author, June 13, 2003, Paris, France.
59. Haki Madhubuti, interview by author, February 14, 2004, Philadelphia, PA.
60. Hoyt Fuller, *Journey to Africa* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1971), 94-95.
61. "Pan-African Cultural Manifesto" (Organization of African Unity: First All African Cultural Festival, Algiers, Algeria, July/August 1969).
62. Manthia Diawara, *African Cinema: Politics & Culture* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 39.

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