



# The Impact of Pan-Africanist Political Rhetoric on African Public Policy: The Future of African-American Rhetoric

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## Abstract

This short paper aims to discuss the effects of African-American rhetoric on the developments of African public policy. There is an historic relationship between the civil rights struggle in the United States and the struggle for independence on the continent that was greatly influenced by the political discourse that emerged in the US during the 1960's. This examination or discussion will reflect an essay by Dr. Molefi Asante entitled, *The Future of African-American Rhetoric* and reference the developments in South Africa to mirror pan-Africanist ideology in an ever-converging world through globalization. As an advocate for a pan-Africanism movement, this paper seeks to simply open channels for further discourse.

## Subject Areas

International Relations, Linguistics, Politics, Sociology

## Keywords

Trans-Atlantic Discourse, Pan-Africanism, Public Policy, Rhetoric

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## 1. Discussion

Dr. Molefi Asante's reading [1] profoundly sparks many thoughts to the question of what is the future of African American rhetoric because of the effective influence it has on a global level involving African people throughout the world. Asante speaks about the basic components of African rhetoric primarily being its categories and its characteristics. Looking at both we begin to understand essentially what type of direction that we as rhetors can employ in order to progress

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historical and contemporary correctives of past oppression. In most cases, we have heard the debate about Afrocentricity being essentialist and the various criticisms that it faces by scholars who embrace a more post-modernity in their discourse. However, I could not help but reflect on Asante's essay as a similar foundation for assisting Africans progress as to what Paulo Freire writes about in his book *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [2].

## 2. Connection

Similar to Freire, Asante asserts not an absolute opposition to all of the principles of post-modernity, but does oppose all attempts to annihilate the African presence in science, history, and culture by defining us (Africans) out of existence.

Now, the critics of Afrocentricity in the approach that Asante offers do not in my opinion fairly address how by negating essentialism as a means to freedom that it actually represents at the core of the collective subjectivity of Europeanism. It would seem to me that European culture is the embodiment of essentialism and the dominance of European culture is rooted in that discourse. The evidence of this is not more apparent than what is happening in South Africa. In South Africa despite major socio-political changes *i.e.* the dismantling of Apartheid, there is still an overwhelming dominance of European culture even though it is an African country. Now I am sure that the white South African would define themselves as African, BUT more so than not, he or she is defining it within the context of their own European history, not in the context of the native. The same occurrence is here in the US, whereby white immigrants who became American still defined that relationship in the context of their European history *i.e.* English, French, Italian etc. The African American as Asante explains had a modification that other groups have not had and that the only way to transform the impact of our rhetoric is to in fact become essentialistic in order to maintain an order in our discourse that is most beneficial to our place in a world order.

An example of what Asante describes, perhaps in a harsher manner than how it is intended is that of African Americans and the Fourth of July. Postmodernism would see a relationship to African American history to this and say that essentialism is archaic, but do we look at the historical fact that African Americans were still in chains in 1776? The impact of these kinds of realizations is important because they force us to begin to critically place our history in its proper context. Certainly reflecting on our Kemetite history we do not lose touch with what our place has been, and by doing that we can begin to redefine our discourse, and the rhetoric we employ will be relevant and more impactful. Especially in the 21<sup>st</sup> century where the characteristics and categories of our rhetoric have evolved with major social events of the previous century and so on.

The future of African American rhetoric is very important, as I mentioned because of the global implications. For example, the experiences of South Africa

historically most mirror those experiences faced by African Americans here in the US. Just as the civil rights movement sparked the independence movements in Africa, the African American plays a very critical role as to how the rest of Africa, in particular South Africa will follow suit.

### 3. Conclusion

One can only imagine how this relationship reshapes the whole picture on public policy and development in the entire continent of Africa. As Asante asserts, that for the African American rhetorical theorist, there can be no genuine “African” approach to rhetoric without some attention to cultural issues that confront us as descendant or native Africans.

### References

- [1] Asante, M. (2003) The Future of African American Rhetoric. In: Jackson II, R.L. and Richardson, E.B., Eds., *Understanding African-American Rhetoric*, Routledge, UK.
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