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PA SEMBENE, UBILMA, SAYE LOKHO: *Je Suis Votre Fille Prodigue*

This paper is a direct exploration of the difficult subject of the current relationship between Africa and its ancient Diaspora. While some treatment is afforded the exciting outpouring of Africans into other regions of the world since the dawn of Independence on the continent, the greater part of the paper is dedicated to exploring the ties between modern-day Africans living on the continent and those who left forceably during the slave trade.

The choice of the title is a reminder to participants at the conference that not all Africans embrace either the concept of a return to Africa or the person wishing to return. For example, a great number of Africans, including the world-renowned filmmaker, Ousmane Sembene scoff at the idea of African Americans (in all regions of the Americas) as being African. That is, for those in this mindset, temporal distance has supposedly erased the cultural memory of people African descent in the Americas and as evidence, they remind us the fact that we cannot pinpoint our specific point of origin, our exact ethnic homeland. Many African Americans would agree with this way of thinking. On the other hand, there are Africans, as well as African Americans who argue that the cultural ties are still there despite centuries of separation. Even more would argue that it is not just a case of remembering the past, but also of renewing the present. That is, even though African Americans may not know the particular circumstances of their African past, and even though Africa is not the sole origin of their cultural or physical makeup, they nevertheless identify strongly with Africa.

This paper is a plea to those of the mindset of Mr. Sembene to welcome us back home even though we have never lived here before. By doing so, Africa gains. The second theme of the paper is to explore what Africans and African Americans can teach each other.

In the Americas, idealists would ignore the five-hundred year gap that has separated us, heralding *anything* African as being worthy of kings and queens. At the same time, there are those who reject the very notion of African-Americans; that is, they deny a connection between people of African descent in the Americas and Africans on the continent. Some would even have Africans apologize for the slave trade. What relationship *does* exist between Africa and its ancient Diaspora? How might Diasporans tangibly contribute to Africa's twenty-first century goal of becoming a significant actor on the world stage?

At every historical juncture from the beginning of a Diaspora to the present moment there has been a concern for Africa's fate. The involvement of Africa's



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Diaspora in Africa's affairs began when the first Africans left the shores of the continent for the Americas in the early 16th century, and never ceased. Yet, that involvement was sporadic and often ineffective. The turn-to-the-twentieth-century witnessed fruitful collaborations between Diasporan intellectuals and activists and their African counterparts as they struggled to arrest the onslaught of European colonization of Africa. While they could not avoid the "scramble for Africa," their constant pressures on European and U.S. governments nevertheless helped to pave the way for Independence decades later. There has never been a moment when the Diaspora did not participate in the dialogue on Africa's fate. Intellectuals, activists, idealists, pragmatists, Diasporans of all types, have invested some form of capital—intellectual, political, financial, artistic—in Africa's future. What, then, is the proper role for the African American at this new juncture?

This conference paper is the second in a series that I have developed in order to explore the collaborative possibilities between African and African Americans. The first paper was delivered at the 2003 Second Biannual Conference of the Association for the Study of the Worldwide African Diaspora (ASWAD), and was entitled: "The Diaspora, the African Union, and NEPAD: Difficult Questions and Harder Answers." Future papers will address related topics.