

Africa and America: Why Ferguson is the Congo

By [BK Kumbi](#)

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As Africans, our eyes are often turned towards America because for some of us there is an illusion that attracts us – but for others the eye focuses on how the Black man is staged in the American reality.

For many Black Americans, as for the majority of Americans, Africa is a land of savages; and this idea has a particular resonance among the Afro-American population because it shows how they were taught to hate themselves through the figure of the so-called original man, one that is sub-human.



This elder came to Mike Brown's funeral on Aug. 25 to demonstrate to the corporate media that the Black community in St. Louis supports the youth, who demand justice and demand to be seen as human beings. She and many others had to stay outside the church, which was filled to capacity with 4,500 mourners. Inside, speaker after speaker emphasized the humanity, the dignity of Michael

Brown and all Black people seen by police as targets. – Photo: JR Valrey, Block Report

However, when we look at things more closely, one has to ask whether there is a real difference in the way we are treated. Imperialist policies affecting African populations are the same as those applied to the Black population in the United States – precisely because the underlying principle is that the Black body shall be exploited alive or dead. It must generate profit.



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I come from a country, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where more than 6 million people were murdered and where the killings continue so that the world benefits from the wealth of this country, especially from the coltan, a mineral used to make cell phones. It is also used to manufacture weapons that kill other Blacks thousands of miles away from my land.

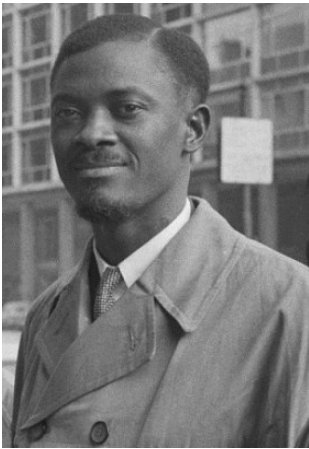
Media coverage of this tragedy in the Congo is absent from the majority of the American channels. When it is presented, it is to demonstrate that there are Blacks who kill Blacks. There is no question raised about the people or the countries who arm those Blacks – and for what purpose. Instead, the corporate media prefer to broadcast stories on gang leaders of our region that the United States has hired to do the job and fuel the Black on Black killing theory at an international level.

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What is striking here is how the story is structured – or the fact that often there is no narrative at all about this issue, just silence. What I want to point out here specifically is the question of how our bodies became objects of spectacle. While silence generally surrounds the Congolese tragedy, there is nevertheless one aspect of this conflict that is portrayed more than the others.

The issue of rape used as a weapon of war is the beloved subject of a certain American

“intelligentsia” and it has helped raise the image of some American “celebrities.” The mutilated bodies of Congolese women have become an image that is made pornographic and that it is diffused freely under the banner of a feminist fight and the narrative of this tragedy is assumed by white feminists who actually fight for their own rights in a capitalist environment.



This is not done to help Congolese women. It is also done to spread the idea that this is a femicide and not a genocide. The story of Congolese women is a way to raise funds for these organizations to write and produce documentaries that will also generate money and – and this is perhaps the most important – it’s a way to reaffirm the idea that the Black man is a savage, a predator whose violence is atavistic, mad. He is therefore the sole instrument of the eradication of his own Black being.

Is this not also the narrative that is used to explain to Afro-Americans that they are the very instruments of their own annihilation and their own poverty? Is that not what is said when the corporate media uses false images to claim that Mike Brown had stolen something in a store and that was the reason for his death?

We all need to have our eyes open about the way we are treated and portrayed, and I say “we” because the image that is conveyed of the African man in Africa necessarily affects the way the Afro-American man is perceived.

For those who are looking at us, as if we were in a cage like Patrice Lumumba said, there is no difference between a Black African and an African-American. (Lumumba, the first democratically elected prime minister of the Congo, wrote in 1960, in his last letter to his wife before his assassination at age 35: “Dead, living, free or in prison on the orders of the colonialists, it is not I who counts. It is the Congo, it is our people for whom independence has been transformed into a cage where we are regarded from the outside.” – ed.)

In the Congo, Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba noted shortly before his assassination, “independence has been transformed into a cage where we are regarded from the outside.”

We are the ones making this difference because we think that for the white man there are good Blacks and there are bad Blacks. We don’t look at ourselves through our own eyes but through the eyes of another person who has defined us as not human.

When Rep. John Lewis said that Ferguson is not the Congo,* he shows how he is very much inhabited by this idea. He shows that for him there are good and bad Negroes. When one really reflects on what is happening in Ferguson, one sees precisely that Ferguson is the

Congo.

The lesson of this tragedy is how we must all rebuild our own histories, how we must teach our children to see their lives and the lives of those who look like them as valuable, how we must teach them that they are human beings and that they are part of this world even



though some want to deny them this right.

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*On Aug. 14, Congressman John Lewis, hero of the Civil Rights Movement, said "People have a right to protest. They have a right to dissent. They have a right to march in an orderly, peaceful, nonviolent fashion. Ferguson, Missouri, is not the Congo, not China, not Russia. We can do better."

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