



## 'Pictorial Pan-Africanism and Apartheid'

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# Pictorial Pan-Africanism and Apartheid

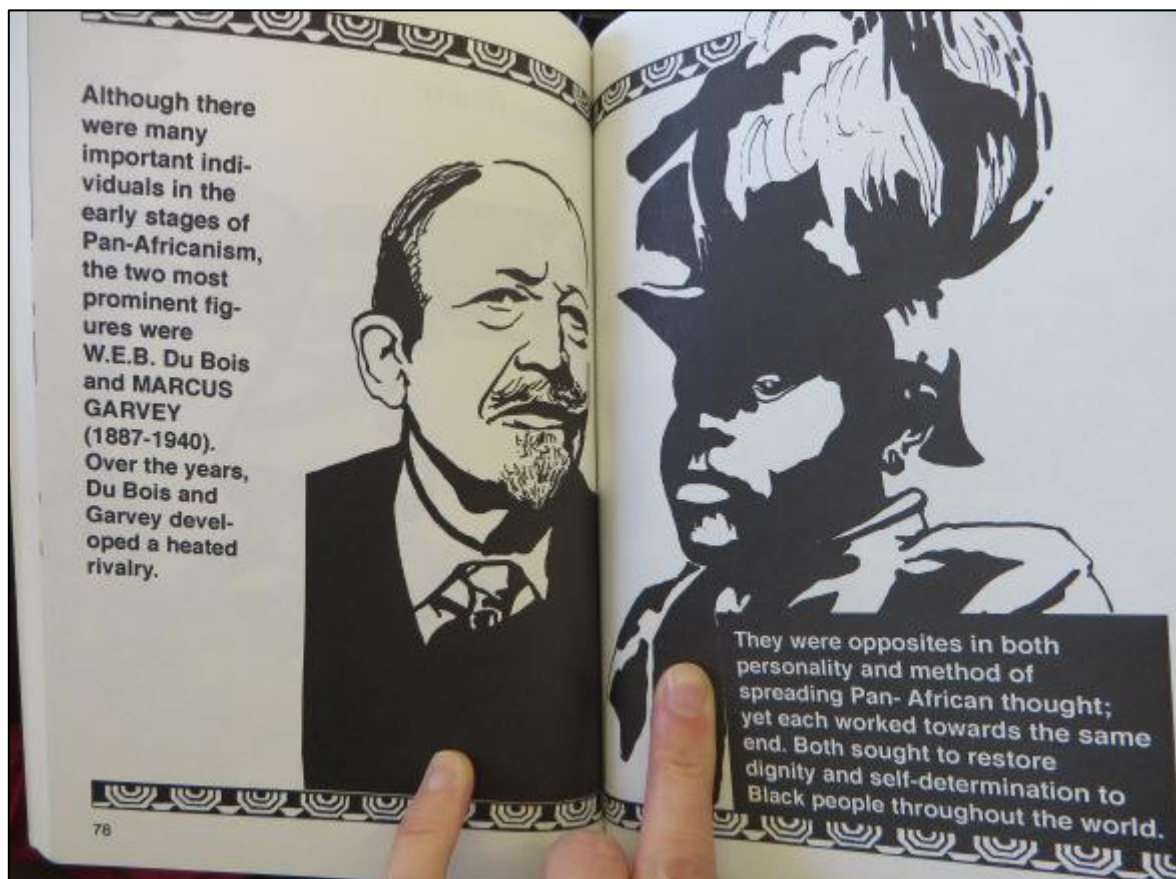


## The Roving Reader Files

Posted on [12/10/2016](https://aiucentre.wordpress.com/2016/10/12/pictorial-pan-africanism-and-apartheid/) (<https://aiucentre.wordpress.com/2016/10/12/pictorial-pan-africanism-and-apartheid/>)

Many of us may not be aware of some basic facts and trends in history. Who can know it all? Certainly not me. But all is not lost. From time to time I come across fascinating books in the Centre that really help me out.

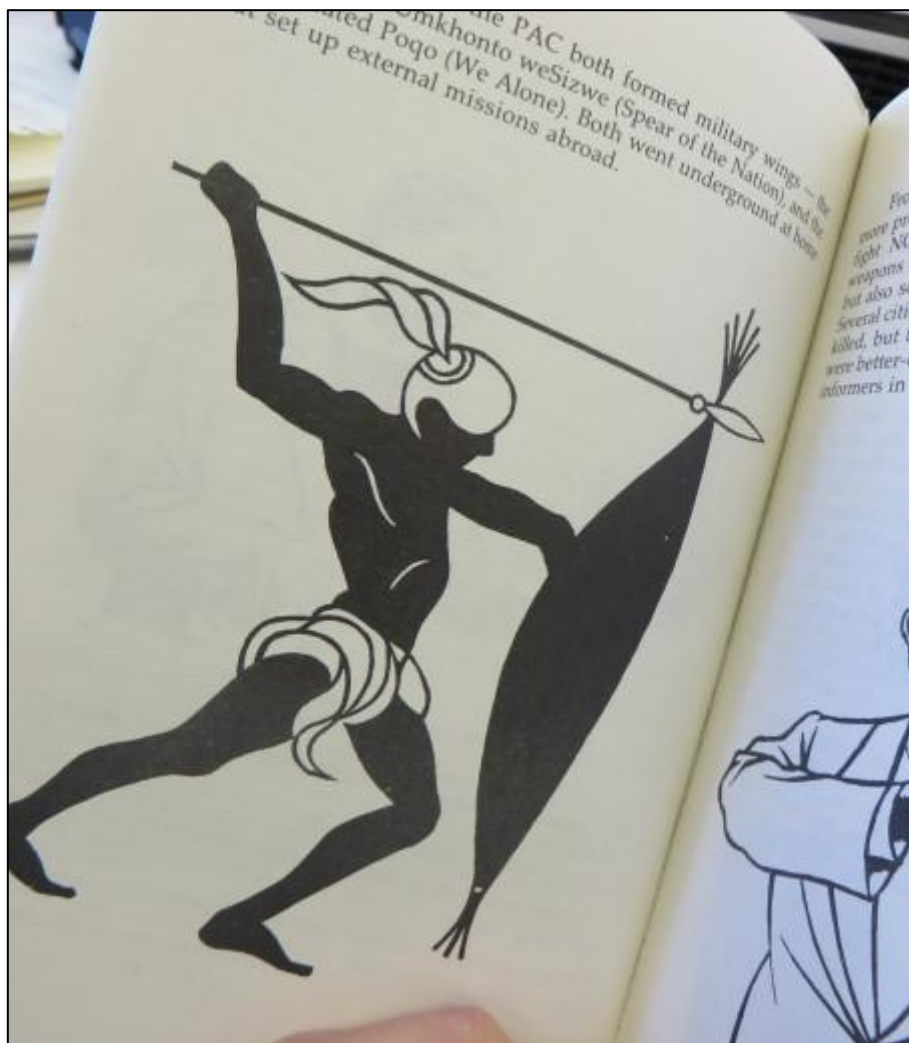
Take 'Pan-Africanism' and 'apartheid'. These words are bounced around everywhere like tennis balls at Wimbledon. But do most of us really understand the concepts and worldviews they represent? Poring over a couple of illustrated beginners' guides, I began to get a clearer idea. And do you know what? The illustrations made it a whole lot easier.



Take ***Pan-Africanism for Beginners*** by Sid Lemelle (published 1992). He says himself it's difficult to bring together and explain in a coherent way all the strands that fed into what was really the meeting of a number of significant trends in Black thought during the past couple of centuries. He's quite right. Significant names, significant events, significant philosophies. It's all so significant it can swim around the brain like competing shoals of fish. It's been known to give me more than a significant headache...

Reading Lemelle's book, what saved me from drowning were the illustrations, provided by Ife Nii Owoo. In bold black and white, and featuring newspaper-style images of individuals mentioned in the text, Owoo's approach melded words and pictures together in a stream of collages, patterns and textures that seemed to reflect the journey of people of African origin through the complex times the book presents.

Owoo had studied printmaking and illustration in the United States. Moving to London, she'd sought ways to use her art to encourage political change. With others, in the 1970s she created flyers and posters to support the work of the African Liberation Movement. Her varied experiences came together to make *Pan-Africanism for Beginners* the memorable slim volume it became.

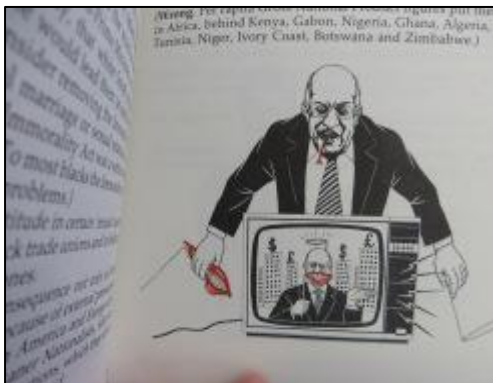


In 1999 Owoo was nominated for Best Woman Illustrator, Delaware Valley Artist Guild Award in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. If I'd been there, I would have cheered her on...

But Owoo was not the only gifted illustrator working with writers during the 1980s and 1990s. Have a look at ***Apartheid – a Graphic Guide*** (published 1986) by Donald Woods. Written before the release of Nelson Mandela and the re-creation of South Africa as the Rainbow Nation, its white writer had been a journalist and editor of the Daily Dispatch until he was banned by the South African authorities and forced into exile in the UK for challenging apartheid.

Woods' text presents the winding road of apartheid's development with clarity, humanity and insight. But, again, for me the illustrations capture something extra that words cannot convey. Mike Bostock had also studied illustration, graduating from Bath Academy of Art. This was the first major commission in a career providing images for successful children's books, such as award-winning *Think of an Eel* by Karen Wallace.

In *Apartheid – a Graphic Guide*, Bostock's images are all in black and white with the occasional strategically-placed splash of red. Some are simple angular line drawings, whilst others present more detail, lending to the Black characters a sensitivity and complexity lacking in the narrative apartheid tried to impose. Reflecting a symbolic yet emotionally poignant quality complementing the impact of the text, Bostock's illustrations set the atmosphere, emphasising the damage done to all parties in the tragedy that was unfolding...



So next time you want to make that learning process easier, just get your hands on books with wonderful illustrations. The Centre's brimming with them, and all you need to do is take a look.

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Sid Lemelle's *Pan-Africanism for Beginners* was published in 1992 and illustrated by Ife Nii Owoo. Donald Woods' *Apartheid – a Graphic Guide* was published in 1986 and illustrated by Mike Bostock. You might be interested to know that the Centre's archive contains a small collection of material relating to the 5th Pan-African Congress, held in Manchester back in 1945 and the 50th anniversary celebrations in 1995. If you'd like to find out more about this, just get in touch. And on a similar note: [From the Horse's Mouth](#) .