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WE AFRICANS ARE DANCING” – THE APOLLO PROGRAM REFLECTED IN AFRICAN
CULTURE**Abstract**

The Moon landings were perhaps the most important event of a generation not only for the Americans but also for many people across the globe. The quest for technological superiority between the Americans and Soviets impressed many Africans, from the commoners to the leaders of the newly independent nations. The Americans are going to the moon! The Russians are going to the moon! We can't go to the moon!” – lamented Tanzanian leader Julius Nyerere. While the Americans are going to the moon, we Africans are dancing”. Indeed, the first Apollo moon landing coincided with the first Pan-African festival in Algiers, where African culture was being celebrated while the American astronauts were accomplishing a technological feat on our celestial neighbor. Yet more music and dancing followed in Africa, this time in honor of the Apollo astronauts.

This paper will showcase the African reactions to the conquest of the Moon as reflected in the African popular art of the late 1960s – early 1970s. In Congo, the youth began dancing Apollo dances” many years prior to Michael Jackson's MoonWalk”, while in Mali and other Mande cultural areas an entirely new musical style, signifying modernity, was named Apollo” in honor of the most important event of the age – with shouts of Apollo!” being uttered by many griots. In Timbuktu, women began wearing clothes depicting the Apollo astronauts on the Moon, in the tradition of the African occasional textiles. In Ghana, space travel was featured in songs such as Ayen” by AB Crentsil, while in Nigeria the Moon landings became the theme of a musical duel between two very popular Hausa singers of that age, Alhaji Mamman Shata – favourable, in his song, Kumbo Apolo XI” to the Moon landings, and Muhammadu Gawo Fillinge who expressed a dissenting opinion in his music.

This presentation, intended to feature samples of the music analyzed, follows previous papers of mine at the International Astronautical Congress on the theme of the cultural impact of the conquest of space, such as the one presented in Toronto examining the reflection of the Moon landings in church hymns.