

Defenders of ROM's Africa exhibit distorted reality

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by Omond Obanda

Judith Hellman's appeal to the *Excilibur* to reopen the debate over the ROM's "Into the Heart of Africa" is the same as calling for a debate with the holocaust-deniers. It would be tantamount to helping the neo-Nazis rewrite history and exonerate the culprits. Hellman's is a futile attempt to rehabilitate the reputation of "Into the Heart" curator, Jeanne Cannizzo who, like others before her, inter-

pret colonial and slave history from the oppressor's point of view.

It is a distortion of reality to even imply that Cannizzo wanted Canadians to be ashamed of their imperial past. Cannizzo, Hellman and any other human being over five years of age, who lives in this racially stratified and oppressive society, must be fully aware that Canadians are very proud of their imperial past and murderous racist present! (Our cops are tops you know — especially when it comes to shooting unarmed African women and children).

Hellman states that her impression of the exhibit was "of exquisite beauty of the African objects and music on display, and on the other hand, of outrage and shame at the racist and imperialist attitudes of the Canadian soldiers and missionaries who had collected those articles."

This kind of reaction (that Cannizzo knowingly or unknowingly elicited) was the essence of our protest at the ROM in the summer of 1990. Assuming that Hellman was one of the most "informed" and "bigotry-free" viewers,

all that the exhibit achieved was to evoke a token of appreciation of objects and music of Africa. There is no reference to the people who made and used those objects. And to add insult to racist injury, she only felt outrage at the soldiers and missionaries for collecting the objects, not at the white slave dealers, not at the colonialist, not at the present murderers in Toronto, Montreal, Los Angeles, not at the KKK, the police abuses and the applauding condoning public. This is an apology for savage profiteering from slavery, colonialism and today's racism and neo-slavery (reparation for which Africans now demand).

mirror to make them see the ugly racism will not mean a thing. To them, bigotry is beautiful and normal. To show them a picture of a White woman enslaving an African woman is to evoke in their hearts the feelings of a glorious past.

Last but not least, to reopen the debate now would be to aggravate the precarious situation the ROM Eleven are in. It is a cruel attempt to create doubts as to the nature of the

It's time Canadians dumped the Queen

by Paul Notley

One of the more depressing things about this country's intellectual history is that since confederation there has been practically no republican or atheist currents. I am not an atheist but clearly the chauvinist and philistine elements in our churches deserve all the slander they can get.

I am a republican though, and was particularly struck by the absence of republicanism in this country while reading the horribly fawning press coverage of the visit of Charles Windsor, the Prince of Wales. How grateful we were that his singularly uninteresting wife should interrupt her shopping for a few days to say a few platitudes at our hospitals.

Why do we have a monarchy? Obviously many people support it merely because it's always been there, like death. But the classic argument for it is that without it we would have the same person as head of state and head of government and that the monarchy protects us from a Nixon-like demagoguery.

Of course there is the obvious objection that Germany, Greece and Israel have separated the two functions without the need for monarchist sycophancy. There is the unnerving objection that what sort of democracy are we if we have to depend on an aging, mediocre woman 4000 kilometres away with no special interest in our country?

But still some ninnies have thought that restoration would be just the answer to Eastern Europe's problems (usually these are ninnies who don't



have to live in the new monarchies).

Last month *Time* had a column proposing the Romanovs be restored to Russia. Right, just the thing to put Poland and the Baltic states at ease. The columnist also stated that the Churchill thought that if the Weimar Republic was a constitutional monarchy we could have avoided Hitler.

Well for once Churchill was a twit, since a statement like that is not much of an improvement on saying rattlesnakes would be harmless if we were immune to poison. The essential reason why Weimar collapsed was that various elites, such as business, the army, the (Protestant) church, the aristocracy and especially the universities, so despised the new republic that they turned to the first demagogue who could get rid of it.

In the same vein of stupidity, some

people earlier suggested that Romania could be saved if they restored its royal house, under whose previous rule Romania had been the most corrupt country in Europe.

So when you consider how Ulster Loyalists hack up Catholics in the name of the Queen, when you consider how close Prince Philip was to the worthless Greek royal family (a bunch of Danish puppets whose penultimate king married a Nazi and whose last king, the playboy Constantine, arbitrarily removed the first post-war liberal premier and was indirectly responsible for the coup of 1967) — when you consider that the Restoration nearly had Milton executed, and that the Glorious Revolution fired Dryden as poet laureate because he was Catholic, and when you consider that most of our rulers have been dull non-entities who have showed no interest in their (or anyone else's) culture, you just have to agree with Oscar Wilde who said that if this is how she treats them, her Majesty doesn't deserve to have any prisoners.

The ROM exhibit was meant to reinforce the distortion, denigration and stereo-typing of the African person and rationalization of White peoples' unforgivable past and shameful present.

The debate on the ROM (a transparent effort to help Cannizzo get her job back) is an effort to reverse the gains already made in trying to rectify the Lies About Africa. The issue is dead. The exhibit was another racist piece, period.

The patronizing White liberal who think that Africans need their assistance in interpreting (or for that matter fighting) slavery, colonialism or racism should first cleanse themselves of all feelings of superiority (rescue-mission attitude) or SHUT UP about Africa. The least they can do is to recognize our ability to demystify the myths about ourselves in our own way.

Racists do not need a special school where they can be taught how not to be racists. The school is the society. If they cannot see the injustice going on, then holding a

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exhibit and portray the protestors as violent, lawless and hyperactive individuals. The case would then be depoliticized and white supremacy would reign as usual. Such statements by Hellman that some of her students had protested without seeing the exhibits are calculated to achieve that end (just at the stereotypes would have it).

Omond Obanda is a York student and member of The Coalition for the Truth about Africa.

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