

AFROCENTRICITY

Stereotypes breed ignorance!

BY IVY KUSINGA

Having lived in the West as an African student for almost three years I am continually shocked, disgusted and disillusioned by the blatant display of ignorance and arrogance towards Africa and African issues, especially within the educational systems of these so-called "developed countries."

For years Africa has been accorded with western imposed images of "primitive tribes", "barbaric customs", "backward, poverty-stricken, starving people", images that in my view will persist because of the largely self-complacent attitude of the western public.

In Nova Scotia, Dalhousie and St. Mary's universities provide excellent case studies. Both possess libraries that contain tons of books littered with words such as "primitive and uncivilized" in association with anything that is African. Many of the professors, knowingly or unknowingly, speak in a Eurocentric language, a language that despises anything that is African. Many of the books that are supposed to provide references for students seeking to understand Africa, are written by white authorities who have spent precious little time

in Africa, but imagine they are authorities on the subject. *The Africans* by David Lamb, which is available at both libraries is an example of Africa through white eyes. It is a book that not only distorts the facts but also insults Africans by its audacity and misinformation.

I am not trying to suggest that Africa does not have problems. Africa has a wealth of problems most of which were, and are

imposed by the west and some of which are self imposed. This fact cannot be denied. What I find totally unacceptable is the bad press that Africa has abroad. Education is meant to expand one's horizons, not to enhance stereotypes. The truth of the situation must be given not only by western standards but more importantly by African scholars using African standards. To convince millions of people that

Africa has only poverty and starvation to offer the world is telling only one side of the story.

Conversations I have had with several Canadian students reveal to me how much harm has already been done. The superior attitude, the racist jokes and the supposedly amusing questions like, "Do you still live in trees?", which no doubt many African students have to suffer, are a clear indication of years of mis-education. Such attitudes have to go.

Much as I realize how damaging this western image of Africa is, I also realize that it will only change if more Africans seek visibility with confidence and pride in their cultural heritage. However, as a student who has to deal with this issue almost everyday, I think it is important that this is not be overlooked by the educational institutions and fellow students. There are some professors that are still mis-educating, loads of books which must be taken to task, television stations that care little about what they portray and a large ethnocentric western population. Africa has been a scapegoat long enough. It is time the whole story is told and heard.

Ivy Kusinga is an International Development student



We are the survivors!

BY WARREN ADAMS

In 1796, the Jamaican Government exiled 550 escaped slaves. These former people of bondage, known as Maroons, were exiled because of the threat they bestowed upon the British power structure.

The Maroons are least recognized for their importance concerning the building of Halifax's main line of defense the Citadel (only later to be denied admit-

tance onto these grounds and their descendents denied employment). The strong sense of pride these people carried with them created problems with the black population that settled previously. This, along with the harsh climate, forced many of the Maroons to join Thomas Peters and his Journey to Sierra Leone.

Those who stayed were given the poorest farmland in the country and weren't expected to

survive their first winter. Those who survived worked against all odds to make something out of nothing and in the end a decent settlement was created. This settlement is known as North Preston. It still exists today and judging by the sense of pride that continues to linger throughout the community, not a drop of Maroon blood was spilled in vain.

Warren Adams is a proud descendant of the Maroons

Listen to my words

BY ANNE-MARIE WOODS

Words. Words are so important, words are my tool. Words are how I express myself. Don't be mistaken by words of anger, for anger is a result of oppression. Don't take my words as words of protest, just take them, listen to them, work with them.

I have a right to use my words, for I live with here, grew up here, since the age of four. No one can understand my pain unless they've grown up in my shoes.

All too often, I've been hurt by ignorance! "Nigger", ignorance. "You're not Black, you don't act Black", ignorance. "I'm not prejudice, I have a Black friend." Ignorance, all ignorance.

If there is to be a solution to the problem we must work together, we must use words. We

can no longer remain oblivious to what surrounds us; racism, the system.

I work with children, and it hurts me when I ask them questions of their identity, and they know nothing. It hurts me when I say to a child, "What does it mean to be Black?" Response: "To be Black, is to be a nigger."

Words, the wrong words from our youth. We must correct these words. We must take away this negativity, and replace it. We must educate our youth to use the right words, words like Afro-Canadian.

I attend Dalhousie University. I went through the Transition Year Program and I'm proud of it. I love myself and my people; and it's evident. Everyday I look for myself, in the plays we read in class, in hospitals, on campus,

in books. I don't see myself anywhere. Everyday I hear my white friends talk in this type of "Black" Lingo. That's not how I speak. Don't they realize they're hurting me with their stereotypical lingo. My hurt runs deep, my hurt is my history.

Words. Words, I will use my words, someday. I will direct great plays and write for my people and about my people. With my words I will let people know about Martin Luther, Malcolm X, and Josiah Henson.

Words. Words are so important, and words are my tool. Words are how I express myself. Don't be mistaken by angry words, for anger is a result of oppression. Don't take my words as words of protest. Just take them, listen to them, work with them.

Sisters in struggle

BY NYAMBURA RUGOYO

When I look at the plight of the majority of the African women, I wonder what development is all about. The overall impact of the process of development for Africa has been negative for the majority of its population. Caught up in an international economic order that puts us on the periphery, we are worse off than we were two or three decades ago.

Our standard of living has, on average, fallen considerably while the cost of living has increased drastically. More people are living in poverty than ever before, and the majority are women.

In Africa, especially sub-Saharan Africa, most economies are agricultural-based and women are the backbone of that agriculture. They continue to do most of the agricultural work. As urbanization has increased, more men have moved to towns and cities in search of jobs and better wages. Women have thus been left behind to shoulder their domestic responsibilities. Yet ownership of land and control over the product of their labour has not shifted with the burden of agricultural work. These have remained in the hands of men. In addition, agricultural education and technology has been directed towards men under the illusion that it is men who do most of the agricultural work.

Formal education, in Africa, is considered to be the key instrument in the development process. Yet educational opportunities are not equally available to everybody. Women continue to lag behind in numbers and in the quality of education they get, when they get it. They therefore make up the majority of the illiterate population whose only hope for survival is to work in the sectors that do not require skilled labour, such as agriculture and the informal sector where incomes are low.

Formal education places an additional burden on women because children have to be away from home to go to school. Children in Africa have been an important source of labour in the household's economic activities. With the children away from home, women have had to find ways to cope with the additional work that is necessary for the survival against all odds.

The consequence of this struggle for survival by women

generally, are serious. Women have little time for themselves and for quality time with their families. They cannot engage in activities for their own self-advancement — they have no time. They have little opportunity to engage in political activities aimed at influencing policy decisions to their benefit. Indeed, they lack the elements necessary for such participation — literacy, education, wealth, etc. Their dependence on men continues to grow.

Do African women, therefore, have any chance of breaking through this cycle of poverty and powerlessness? Some of you might quickly say yes because a few of us like you and I have broken through. But I am not talking about tokenism, I am talking about equal opportunity for all regardless of class and sex. Men and women need to acknowledge the existence of these fundamental inequalities in our societies and to work together to remove them.



Past, present, then future

BY OJIKEME M. MBADIWE

One of the greatest questions facing African historians is: what role should history play in the lives of our people — both at home and abroad.

The traditional school of thought has it that history should be objective and scientific. That a historian should simply investigate the facts, report the results but make no commentaries, as to the meaning of the work. This is not only the correct academic point of view but, as professor Chancellor Williams has pointed out, "it is even beautiful if the historian represents a people who are not only in control of academia but, also in control of the world." For such a people could well afford the luxury of historical knowledge for knowledge's sake — the aesthetic satisfaction that comes from just knowing how things come to be.

However, the African historian and the African people cannot afford such a luxury. A people

under a perpetual stage of siege and fighting an almost invisible war for survival must not make the colossal blunder of walking in the footsteps of their oppressors.

To the contrary, the African historian's responsibility to their people goes beyond the role of the simple scribe to their master. Following the faithful documentation of our people's history, the African historian's real work begins. They must evaluate and interpret the work so that they can provide our people with the answer to their most critical question, that is: *What should we do now?*

History is defined by Webster's dictionary as "a branch of knowledge that records and explains past events as steps in the sequence of human activities." But history is more than just the recording, the explaining and the timing of past events. For the Africans in diaspora, history has a higher value, it holds a deeper meaning and

serves practical purpose. For the Africans in diaspora we have been too long denied a true knowledge of ourselves. Our humanity has been distorted, disguised and devalued by others, our contributions to world civilization have been systematically erased from the annals of human progress. History is both the substance and the mirror of our humanity.

According to Karenga, "it is not only what they have done, but also a reflection of who they are, what they can do, and, equally important, what they can become as a result of the past which reveals their possibilities." Thus, for the Africans in diaspora the recreation of ourselves must begin with the reconstruction of our history. For the Africans in diaspora the revitalization of the world can only be achieved with full knowledge of our reality in history. For the African in diaspora the road to tomorrow cannot be constructed until their bridge to yesterday is completed.

Question 1(a): What was the name of the first black recorded in Canada?
 Question 1(b): What province did he briefly settle in?
 Question 2: What was the name of the first "Black" newspaper in Nova Scotia, and who was the founder? Hint: It was founded in 1946.
 Question 3: Could you give the name of the black surgeon who developed the Hinton-Davies tests for the detection of syphilis? (A standard test for this disease)

ANSWER 1 (a): Matthew de Costa
 ANSWER 1 (b): Nova Scotia
 ANSWER 2: Clarion, Dr. Carrie Best
 ANSWER 3: Dr. William Hinton