

editorial Not negro, not Black, but African

By Trevor Burnett

Although slavery was abolished over a century and a half ago and Blacks have been freed physically and mentally, many of us are still dead and the current debate over what to call ourselves is evidence of this.

Last Summer my friend Ajamu and I were selling T-shirts at the Canadian National Exhibition. Hustling T-shirts can be very boring (you can be standing up for up to twelve hours), so to amuse ourselves we decided to call out in Jamaican patois to every Black person that passed by "Yes Africans, come een," beckoning them to come and check out our merchandise.

People passed by laughing, and shaking their heads. Some stopped by to tell us they were not Africans. We asked them to tell us where Black Land or Negroidia were. We even told them that a White man, be he American, Canadian or British is still a Caucasian, and a person born in China or Japan is still an Asian. Even with all our explanations, we still didn't convince them.

One older man was so adamant that he was he was a "negro from Jamaica" heaven or earth would have had to pass away before he changed his mind.

Another man argued the point for about five minutes, asserting he was no African, he was a Jamaican. When he saw he was not convincing Ajamu, he got angry, and told Ajamu to "gu weh bwoy ya eediot," and stormed off.

Several minutes later a posse of Black youths passed by. I yelled out, "yes Africans come through", and beckoned them over. One guy got really pissed off. He yelled back "eh boy who you ah call African, go weh bwoy you ah pussy," he followed that by kissing his teeth and a yelling a series of Bombo, and blood clauts. The dude actually looked like he wanted to fight over it. I looked at Ajamu and shook my head. Ajamu said "he probably thought you were calling him ugly," I told Ajamu, "if I wanted to call him ugly I would have called him Shabba (Ranks)."

These incidents are not isolated ones, too many of us still consider ourselves everything but Africans. Those of us who are a bit more "aware" of what's going on realize this hatred of or distancing from Africa was something that was taught to us by White society. As Arnold Masters, a race relations consultant for the Toronto Board of Education, who spoke at York last February said, "when the slaves were brought to the New World they were vehemently taught to forget you are African, remember you are negro or Black."

Even Malcolm X would point out that popular media portrayed Africa as a land teeming with savages and cannibals with bones in their noses, naked and swinging on vines (anybody who has watched those old Tarzan movies would have to agree). When we see those images we didn't want to be associated with Africa - so we developed very negative attitudes about the place and in our distancing we rushed for refuge for any name, other than "African."

We must remember also that as Africans we have thousands of years of golden history. In North America or in the West we have less than a thousand years. Why then do we want to start our history in slavery? This is what we do when we denote ourselves, as being from these small islands instead of the continent of our origin.

I'm not advocating abandoning "Jamaican," "Trinidadian," "Canadian," or even "Black," (though it would probably help) because we will always be these things. I use the term "Black" and "African" alternatively because they are one and the same to me.

What I've observed though, is through denoting ourselves by small islands, there is an accompanying attitude of "forget Africa," and this is the problem. We should try to think of ourselves more as one people.

We aren't fighting for liberation as ethnic groups, but as Africans. Just as certain trailblazers got us to change from the terms, "negro" and "coloured" to "Black" to "African American-Canadian" we should use the term African more and more until it becomes completely acceptable to us.

Some Black people have said to me that indigenous Africans don't even think of us in the diaspora as Africans, while it may be true in many cases, we have to remember it is a result of the supreme divide and conquer job which is unfortunately still a long way from being rectified.

The name of one cold, short, month

by Jacen Braithwaite

No doubt some people were angry, enraged even, at the fact Excalibur's Black Writers Caucus chose to call this supplement the Black History Month rather than African History Month.

The decision was unanimous. However, we would like to remind anyone who is not comfortable with the title that this project has been in production since September, and the Caucus was open to all on campus.

One of the hopes of the Black Writers' Caucus was to reach a large audience, particularly Black youth. We felt that unfortunately at this point in history the level of consciousness in society does not allow us to identify with the term "African." The sad fact is that the title "Africa" might alienate some people from the true nature of the paper, and get them caught up in the title rather than the information we are trying to present.

We in the Caucus agree there is a need for Black people to identify with our African history. But like we said before, we also feel that the paper should reach a large audience. It is our hope that in the very near future we can title such a supplement without any type of debate over such trivial matters such as the title.



graphic • Derek Marshall

"A people without the knowledge of their past history, origins and culture is like a tree without roots."

Marcus Garvey



photo by Anthony Cohen

excalibur

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put this issue.
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