

Celebrating Ourselves

BLACKS ON BLACK

I have mixed feelings about Black history month. Part of me rejoices because there is so much activity that reflects my history and culture, but another part of me is angry.

I am angry because I realize that the contributions of my African ancestors are not included in textbooks on Canadian history, and what little is there is told from the point of view of Europeans.

There is a myth that Canada was settled and built strictly by White people. Blacks and other people of color are recent immigrants that have no claim to Canadian heritage except through the benevolence of Canadian immigration agents who "let in" a quota each year.

This myth of two founding nations (the British and the French) is insidious because so many people believe it, yet it is so lacking in foundation. People from a variety of races

and cultures built this country, though you would not think so if you looked at the curriculum in many schools.

That is why it is necessary that Black history month exists. It helps dispel the

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lies and stereotypes about Black people. When Carter G. Woodson began the first celebrations of "negro history week" in the 1920's, he was responding to the lack of historical materials about Black people.

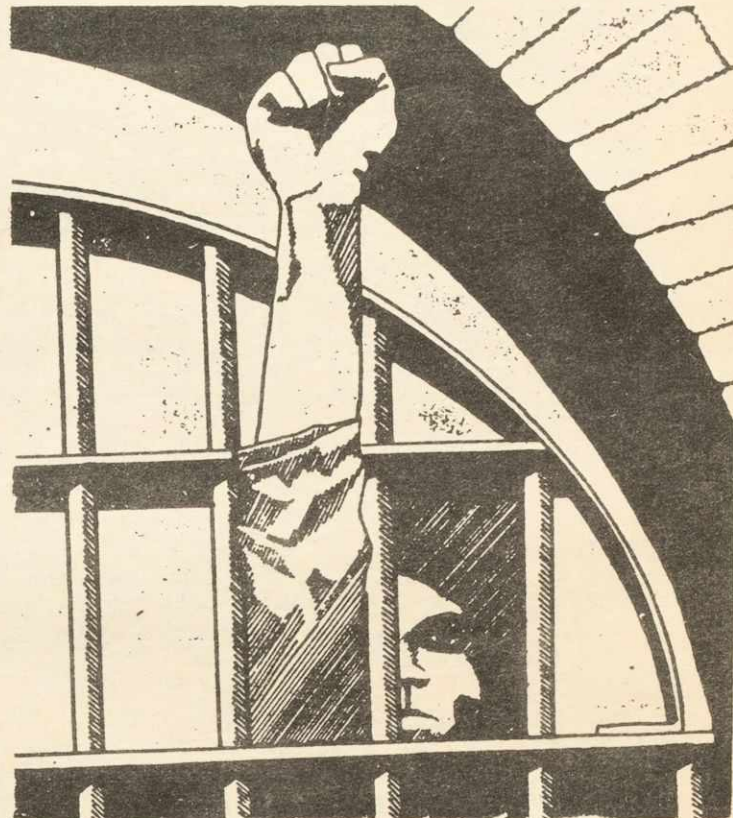
I have heard it said that racism is

due to ignorance and backward attitudes that can be eliminated by education and progressive legislation, like affirmative action programs and civil rights laws.

This has always struck me as a very superficial grasp of the issue. Racism is not simply due to ignorance; it is ingrained and reinforced in many of the institutions in society like the schools, where the writing of Canada's "national" history renders the accomplishments of non-White people invisible and therefore unimportant.

But reflecting on our history, though important, is only one avenue of struggle. The popularity and promotion of Black history month activities by the dominant society while positive on one level, is a reminder that we cannot afford to rest. The dominant culture will support excursions into our past because it is old and therefore safe. An excessive historical nostalgia is just as unhelpful. We cannot afford to forget our history and culture, but we must also ensure that this knowledge is used in the service of today's problems.

John Burchall



My Spirit

*When time and life pass by my door,
When Dizzy's horn is heard no more,
Since Cow-Horn Abeng no longer plays,
Peace comes to us in Charlie's day.*

*The guy called Charlie, is just so cool,
The jobs, opportunities he gave to fools,
In time each fool spoke of his wealth,
Forgetting honesty! Killing our health.*

*And then one day Blacks made a note,
To learn, listen, read, vote;
Frederick, Marcus, Martin, Malcolm
The rights of slaves to live as men.*

*Racism, recession, ridiculous strikes,
Don't mess with us, since now we fight;
Give me my propers,
Give me my dues,
I am Black and Proud — Unafraid of you.*

*Honesty will make things right.
Four hundred years later, I deserve the right,
To work each day, to live my life
Give Blacks their due, or deal with strife.*

*The very next time that you and I meet,
Respect my right or we hit the streets.*

~Harold MacPhee

What Will it Take

*What will it take to get the real truth?
And who amongst us, will provide the proof
What will it take to get from others?
That which was stolen from our fathers and mothers
What will it take for us to unite?
And thus relieve us from our terrible plight;
What will it take to keep food on our plate?
It's not just a job because there's much more at stake
What will it take to stop this genocide?
We must stay strong, no time to run and hide
What will it take to gain control?
Death and murder has taken its toll
What will it take to correct the wrong?
That answer, won't come from singing a song
What will it take for us to acquire some wealth?
First we must start with a knowledge of self
What will it take to gain respect from others?
We must begin to show respect for our sisters and brothers
What will it take for us to organize?
One common goal for us to realize
What will it take, we need a remedy?
But don't expect a cure from your open enemy
What will it take for us to get power?
When it occurs, it will be the "shock of the hour"
What will it take, our futures and our lives are at stake?
It seems that organized revolution is the only solution*

~Robert X Lyons

IMAGES OF AFRICA

By MONA KIRAGU (TUNS)

Africans in Canada live in constant fear of being on the news because we know the image will be a negative one. If it is not one of our brothers and sisters starving in Somalia, it will probably be one of Africans fighting each other in South Africa, or of Blacks killing Blacks in North America. Let's face it, if it's Black African and it's on TV, it's bad. The images of Africa portrayed in Canada have led to generations of Canadians who are either totally ignorant or extremely misinformed about the true African experience.

Most Africans are often left speechless by the amazing level of ignorance displayed by many Canadians about Africa and its Diaspora. We waste precious hours trying to explain that Kenya is not in South Africa or that we do not live in trees. We struggle to stay calm as we deny living right next to dangerous animals. We live with the shame of being called primitive and savage in our classrooms by so-called experts in Anthropology.

Where are all the positive images of Africa? The Africa Africans have experienced. Why don't we ever see the warmth and hospitality of African Culture portrayed? Why don't we see the great African poets with their intense imagery and symbolism portrayed in any literature books here? Why don't we see the discoveries by African herbalists or discussions by African scholars? Where are our successful African business women portrayed? The answers to these questions are not simple ones. The important point, however, is that Canadians have been denied a large portion of knowledge about Africa and continue to be mis-educated. The solution is a complete revolution of the educational system and the media's outlook. Canada must remember that the days of Western-enforced supremacy are almost over and without doubt Africa will someday be a major player in global affairs.

