

opinions

BLACKS ON BLACK

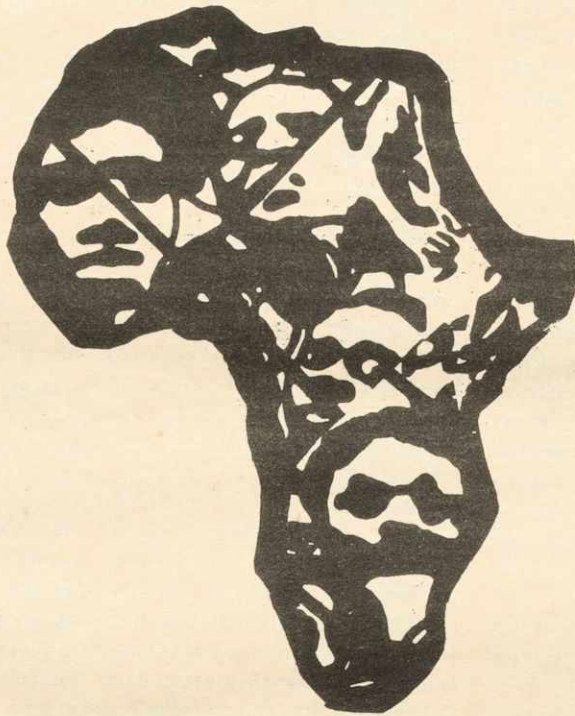
Diversity - the only reality

Lately, there seems to be a growing debate amongst Black people on what it means to be "Black." The fact that "Blackness" is being defined both disturbs and puzzles me. For so long society has put on blinders, and has viewed Black people through a constricted view.

Some white people close their eyes to the diversity amongst Black people. The other day, I overheard two people referring to a white person as "acting Black." I am sure we all know the stereotypes, so there is no sense in delving into a description. These narrow views of Blacks, that have fostered stereotypes and prejudices, are further reinforced through popular media (mostly owned by white people). This is why you hear more about Mike Tyson, 2 Live Crew, and Arsenio Hall, than you hear about Arthur Ash, Mahalia Jackson and Bernard Shaw.

Some Black people have also felt the need to stereotype. Stereotyping amongst Blacks is predominantly contained to the commitment of Blacks in the struggle for Black empowerment. It is based on narrow exterior guidelines, such as professions Blacks choose, activities they engage in, political leaders they follow, etc. The "definers" seem to feel that Black people who do not meet a criteria based on the above guidelines have "soldout" or forgotten that they are Black.

Being Black is a compilation of many different things. It is based on personal beliefs and values, as well as life



experiences. These develop from our families, the communities we live in, and incidents that occur in our growing process. I do not have to look far to understand what being Black means to me. The history of my family, living in Ghana, parts of the U.S., and Nova Scotia, have fostered my understanding of who I am, and have fueled my commitment to the struggle. The way I choose to live and fight oppression are based on the lessons I have learned in my child and adult years.

So it is with all Black people—each with a different lineage, each with a different way of empowering our people. Whether it means being a lawyer or political leader; a follower of Malcolm X or Winnie Mandela; Christian or Jewish, we all have a stake in ensuring that blacks are economically and politically empowered, and we will all do our part to realize this destiny. We should not neglect those brothers and sisters who choose to express their "Blackness" in different ways. Our personalities and interests are as diverse as the color of our skins.

So to those who continue to define "Black," please stop. This will be viewed as a token of your appreciation for the diversity amongst Black people. After all, it is better to encourage diversity, than to demand the conformity of our people, and place us under narrow definitions - whether it means being Black to us or not.

Hermie Abraham

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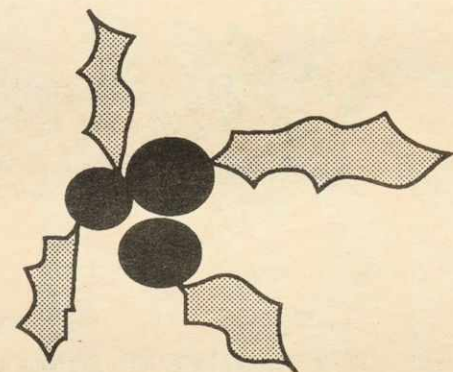
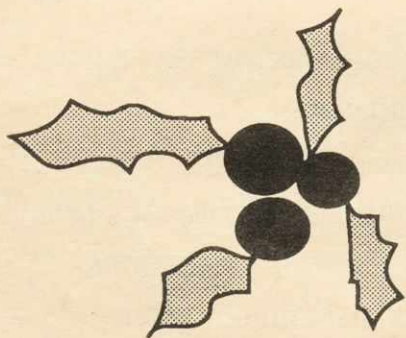
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