



Of Syracuse University

ACTIVITY REPORT FOR ACADEMIC YEAR 2008/2009

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ABOUT THE AFRICA INITIATIVE OF SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY

The Africa Initiative of Syracuse University is a University campus-wide project located in the Department of African American Studies in The College of Arts and Sciences. The purpose of the Initiative is to focus on Africa as an important site of knowledge by highlighting teaching, research and publication work by Syracuse University scholars representing a variety of disciplines including the arts, humanities, social & natural sciences, mathematics, engineering and others.

The Initiative aims at spearheading a revitalized interest in Africa, which has been on the wane in many institutions of higher learning since the end of the so-called "Cold War." In this respect, it is important to note that Syracuse University once had a vibrant African Studies Program that no longer exists, although notable resources accumulated during its existence, such as the East African Collection at the Bird Library, remain. Moving forward from this history, the Africa Initiative of Syracuse University plans on building upon relevant aspects of this previous experience, while adopting fresh approaches and charting new directions as dictated by the present global affairs.

The Africa Initiative's presence in the Department of African American Studies reinforces a critical site where the bulk of academic work on Africa at Syracuse University is done and where the Continent and the Caribbean are perceived as concomitant parts of the department's Pan-Africanist vision. In bringing together Syracuse University scholars from various disciplines, the Africa Initiative aims at not only promoting interdisciplinary exchange, but also reinforcing the university's ongoing effort to diversify and internationalize the educational experience of our students. In this regard, the Initiative places great emphasis on study-abroad programs in Africa, as well as the provision of financial resources to give students exposure to the Continent.

At The Africa Initiative of Syracuse University, we believe that such critical interventions, interactions and discourses will help alter the dominant perception of Africa as a continent ridden with perpetual crises and despair by providing an alternative vision and platform for constructive discourse on Africa and African peoples. Just as important, and in furthering this commitment, the Initiative offers a significant pool of experts specializing in various aspects of an extremely diverse and richly endowed continent.

FALL 2008

The semester activities began with the A.I. Reception held at 219 Sims Hall. This was followed by the first Eduardo Mondlane Brown Bag Lecture on October 1st, delivered by Dr. José Cossa who discussed his new book titled "*Power, Politics, and Higher Education in Southern Africa: International Regimes, Local Governments, and Educational Autonomy.*" In addition to the Brown Bag Lecture Series, the Africa Initiative organized, hosted, participated in or co-sponsored the following activities and activities in the Spring of 2009.

1. Africa Week

In partnership with the Africa Student Union (ASU), A.I. hosted campus wide events to celebrate the Africa Week, including bringing to Syracuse University Thomas Mapfumo, the Zimbabwean artist whose music on social justice and criticism of Robert Mugabe's administration earned him exile. During his visit he spoke in an African music class on October 21st at 10am and participated in a public dialogue in that afternoon with Dr. Micere Mugo, distinguished professor, author and poet at Syracuse University on the question of "African Culture and Liberation." Several members of the A.I. committee were also present in this well-attended event held at the E.S. Bird Library's Peter Graham Scholarly Commons. Thomas Maphumo performed live in concert to a larger audience on the night of October 22nd at the Auditorium of Setnor School of Music. The audience included students, professors, staff, and individuals from the community, the media and other fans of Mapfumo's music.

2. Congo Week

A.I. partnered with the Congolese Community in Central New York and the Africa Students Association to celebrate the Congo Week/ This occasion was marked at Syracuse University by hosting a public lecture by a keynote speaker, screening and entertainment activities. The day's events included the screening of a documentary on the assassination of Patrice Lumumba, a dance by Congolese children, as well as a speech by Cyprien Mihigo as representative of the Congolese Community in Central New York. The keynote speech was delivered by the distinguished Congolese Scholar Dr. Nzongola Georges, Professor of Political Science at North Carolina University at Chapel Hill. Having delivered on his chosen topic of "From Lumumba to reconstruction in the Congo," a question-answer and open discussion followed.

2. Public Lectures

On November 11th Professor Salah Hassan of Cornell University discussed the complexities that surround the Darfur crisis and various initiatives that have been put in place by governments and organizations to deal with the situation. Held in the Peter Grahams Scholarly Commons at the Bird Library, the event was open to members of the University and Syracuse community.

Both the A.I chair and the graduate assistant represented Africa Initiative in other Africa related campus events and activities held both on campus and the community. This included, the Africa Business Forum hosted by the Whitman School

of Business, dinner and lecture by a Sierra Leone former child soldier Ishmael Beah (author of Long Way Gone), community events hosted by the Pan African Community of Central New York.

SPRING 2009

The semester's activities began with the Spring Reception on January 15, 2009 held at The School of Social Work's Atrium, Sims Hall 319. In addition to outlining the forthcoming events, the Director welcomed and thanked all those in attendance including members of Syracuse University staff, faculty and students, as well as members of Syracuse community. Noting that Syracuse University was set to host the 33rd Annual New York Africa Studies Association (NYASA) Conference in April, the Director invited increased participation of members in the planning of the conference as well as encouraging them to take advantage of the opportunity that the conference would bring to the community. Syracuse University campus catering provided snacks and refreshments

In addition to the Eduardo Mondlane Brown bag Lecture Series, the Africa Initiative organized, hosted, participated in or co-sponsored the following activities and activities in the Spring of 2009.

1. *Symposium on "Obama and Africa: Which Way"*

In collaboration with the Center for African Studies, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, the Africa Initiative of Syracuse University hosted the above symposium from January 22nd- 23rd 2009. The purpose of the symposium was to offer alternative approaches, views, analyses on how the US could engage Africa in 5 key subject areas namely:

- i. Foreign Policy and the role of the State Department
- ii. International Economic Policy (USAID, World Bank, IMF, Treasury, Commerce, US Trade, OPIC, Ex-IM Bank, Agriculture)
- iii. Health and Human Services (HIV-AIDS)
- iv. National Security (DoD, AFRICOM and War on terror)
- v. Energy and African oil

The keynote address focused on the theme of health and wellness in Africa. Dr. Patricia Rodney, Professor at the Morehouse School of Medicine and Director of the Master of Public Health Program, delivered the address. Professor Rodney rejected as a myth the notion that the policies of the Bush administration in relation to HIV&AIDS prevention benefited Africans. Her presentation highlighted the inherent contradictions between the goals of securing better health in a context where the policies of the IMF and the World Bank supported the closing of health facilities in Africa under the onslaught of 'structural adjustment programs' that had the direct blessing of the United States.

The distinguished attendees at the Symposium included foreign policy analysts, African Affairs specialists and scholar-activists from both the academia and the non-profit sector. They convened with the purpose of inspiring new research and policy

priorities for the US in Africa. They hoped to link with other constituencies for Africa and with the peace and justice movement with the aim of making language of change a political reality.

A complete report on this symposium is available upon request, in either print or soft copy.

2. *The 33rd New York Africa Studies Association Conference*

From April 3rd-4th, A.I., on behalf of the Department of African America Studies, hosted the above conference whose theme was "*Reconstruction, Peace and Transformation in Africa.*" The conference featured scholars from across the United States and abroad who presented a series of discussions on the political, social, economic, and cultural issues affecting the African continent. Among the highlights of this conference included:

- ❑ Over sixty papers presented
- ❑ Nineteen Panels and two Special Plenary Sessions
- ❑ Spectacular display by undergraduate and graduate student presenters
- ❑ Included a special Teachers' Conference
- ❑ Included a book display including newly published as well as important canonical texts
- ❑ Over a hundred participants including scholars, community members, undergraduate and graduate students
- ❑ A combined Banquet and Awards Ceremony attended by more than eighty people, including artistic performances from individual students, student groups, and community members.

3. *The Inaugural Africa Teachers' Workshop*

In the Spring of 2009, the Africa Initiative of Syracuse University hosted the 33rd annual New York Africa Studies Association (NYASA). This conference was unique in the sense that for the first time it included a special one-day workshop for schoolteachers who teach Africa in schools in the Syracuse city school district and surrounding cities. This professional development workshop was organized along the theme of "*Africa is not a Country*" and brought together over thirty teachers (librarians) from Rochester, Buffalo, Syracuse and other surrounding cities in New York. It included discussion on the tools, skills and information that teachers can use to teach about Africa. Each participant was given a kit with information and resources to aid in their class preparations. Following the success of this pilot workshop, and the feedback from the conference participants, A.I. plans to regularize this as an annual event moving forwards.

4. *Public Lectures*

On February 19th 2009 A.I. hosted a public lecture on the theme: "*Fabricating terrorism in Africa.*" Professor Jeremy Keenan, author of "*The Dark Shadow: America's War on Terror in Africa*" and Professor Abdi Samatar, Head of Geography Department at the University of Minnesota gave lectures on the political, security,

human and moral implications of the so-called 'war on terror' for the people of Africa. The following day on Friday 20th February, Professor Samatar gave another lecture at the Syracuse University Sheraton Hotel under the title: "*Prospects of Change and Peace in Somalia and Horn of Africa.*" Both speakers agreed that the war on terror was a front for US imperial interests in Africa. The large audiences included members of the Somali community in Syracuse, students, faculty and staff from various disciplines and departments in Syracuse University.

A.I. collaborated with the Maxwell Africa Caucus (MAC) during the latter's 2nd Annual MAC Africa Symposium. Africa Initiative's co-sponsorship of the conference saw Professor Howard Stein, Professor of Economics at the University of Michigan deliver the closing lecture on March 25th 2008, titled: "*Structural Adjustment and Health in Africa*" at Maxwell School of Citizenship & Public Affairs.

5. A.I. in the Community

i.) In collaboration with the Pan-African Community of Central New York (PACCCNY), A.I. hosted a community conversation along the theme of "*Celebrating Change and Making it Real: Assessing efforts for peace, social justice and reparations*" during which Patricia Daley, a Professor of geography at Oxford University, UK, spoke on how to answer President Barack Obama's Call for Change. She expressed hope for a new American policy regarding the violence in Africa. The event was held on Saturday, January 24th at the Community Folk Art Center in downtown Syracuse, a facility owned and operated by the Department of African American Studies at Syracuse University. It brought together local artists, community members and leaders, faculty, staff, and students, and was moderated by Professor Horace Campbell, the Director of the Africa Initiative and Professor of Political Science and African American Studies at Syracuse University. Participants included members of both Syracuse University and Syracuse community.

ii.) Black History Month Activities at Beauchamp Library

The Africa Initiative partnered with the Onondaga County Library system to hold a series of events to mark the 2009 Black History Month in February. Among other partners include the Office of Multicultural Affairs, the African Students Union, and the Caribbean Students Association. The first event was on Saturday February 7, 2009, was an open dialogue that explored the topic of "*The Nature of Education in Syracuse*" and was facilitated by Dr. Zaline Roy-Campbell of Syracuse University's School of Education and Jackie Grace Rasheed, the Principal of Roxboro Road Elementary School in North Syracuse. The participants included representatives of 100 black men, Jawaad Rasheed, Junior Frontiers, Lambda Kappa Mu Sorority, Dr. Marcelle Haddax (Syracuse University) and Walt Dixie of the National Alliance Network among many others attending in their own capacity.

The second event was Saturday February 14 "*Afro-Latin America: A New Cultural Renaissance.*" Professor Kwame Dixon of Syracuse University's Department of African American Studies showed films from Brazil and Cuba to highlight the long

struggle for visibility at the level of the national media in Latin America. Professor Dixon used Video clips and film clips from Brazil and Cuba to bring home his point about the stereotypes about black peoples in South America. Professor Dixon used the life and experiences of the Cuban filmmaker Sara Gomez to highlight the ongoing struggles of black people in Latin America. By focusing on the evolution of the soap opera genre in Brazil, Professor Dixon showed the reality that for over four decades the only role that blacks could play in the soap opera was the position as a house servant. Hence the position of blacks as servants or as people without rights was represented in the media.

On Saturday February 21st, the community listened to the renowned elder from Buxton, Eusi Kwayana on *"Pan-Africanism—Building Links: Bridging African Cultures."* Mr. Kwayana spoke on an array of topics:- fragments of the history of Syracuse in the anti slavery rebellion, Pan-African connections and Marcus Garvey, the significance of Obama's victory and his potential, race relations in the United States, race in Guyana, and the politics of the 1960s British Guiana were also covered.

The final event on Saturday February 28th covered the theme of *"Changed International situation; Black History month and the terrain of contestation."* In his presentation professor Horace Campbell started out with the context of a summary of the events of Black History Month so far. He highlighted the changed international situation and the challenges posed by the emerging economic recession. In his conclusion he sought to inspire the memory of past challenges and how the black community and the peace and justice sectors of the community overcame difficulties and provided crucial political guidance on ways to network to build new sources of political power.

A.I. PUBLICITY

As part of an effort to update and synchronize materials, Africa Initiative revised the list of its committee members and its brochure to better reflect its current composition and activities. The Africa Initiative website was also thoroughly revised and updated, with the addition of the "Events" section to better inform on current or upcoming events. The website was redesigned and organized by Dr. Herbert Ruffin of the Department of African American Studies. His invaluable skills contributed to the well-designed posters to publicize A.I events. During this year there was an improvement in the distribution of A.I events press releases thanks to Ms. Judy Holmes, the Communications Manager at Syracuse University's College of Arts and Sciences. The staff of the Electronic Publishing Center has been instrumental in sharpening our publicity through guidance and good quality publicity materials.

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