

The Introduction of Saint Lucian Students to the Ancient World African Community

by

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This article is a revised version of a paper the writer presented at the Seventeenth Cheikh Anta Diop Conference, convened September 30 to October 1, 2005 by the Association for Nubian and Kemetic Heritage (ANKH) in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA. It reports on a project in which the writer has introduced the history of the World African Community to people in Saint Lucia in the Eastern Caribbean. The project covers the history from the beginning of human life in Africa to the coming of members of the Community to the Caribbean and other parts of the western hemisphere. The paper marks the 10th anniversary of the launching of the project at Vieux Fort Comprehensive Secondary School (VFCSS) in Saint Lucia in May and June of 1995. Since then, the writer has introduced the history directly (in lectures and special presentations) and indirectly (through teachers of history) to more than 1,500 young learners in secondary schools, directly (in lectures) to more than 250 learners in adult education programs, and indirectly (through newspaper articles and radio and television appearances), to other audiences, in Saint Lucia.

The writer dedicates the article to the late S. Wayne Louis. With fellow history teachers Sylvester Clauzel and Lydia Sadoo, he collaborated in the launching of the project at VFCSS. Up until his passing almost three years later, he was extremely active in the promotion of an understanding of the history among students in the school, students in other schools, and the general community.

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Abstract

Over the past decade, in Saint Lucia in the Eastern Caribbean, young students in secondary schools, older learners in adult education, and other persons in the general community have given their reactions to their introduction to the early history of the World African Community.

The reactions of the younger students suggest that their education system may provide this introduction by (1) helping them understand all aspects of the history, (2) preparing them to appreciate unexpected aspects of it, (3) preparing them to understand lessons they may learn from painful aspects of it, (4) making available resources they need as they secure details of it, and (5) developing approaches to establishing, certifying, and rewarding their mastery of it.

The reactions of the older learners in adult education and the general community suggest that the system may serve them by presenting the study of the history as an experience that gives voice to their unstated but extremely highly internalized sense of the existence of the history.

Introduction

Since the islands of the English-speaking Eastern Caribbean assumed direct control of the formal education of their citizens, they have tried to reshape that education in a number of ways. First, they have established local agencies -- such as community colleges (Peters, 1993) -- that they believe meet the needs of the citizens better than those they inherited from their colonial dominators. Second, they have established regional agencies -- such as the Caribbean Examinations Council -- that they believe meet the needs better. Third, they have reshaped the education to make it focus more on the region than on other parts of the world (for example, see the *Caribbean Primary Social Studies* series published by Heinemann).

On the other hand, to many observers, it seems that their education systems have taken few steps in the area some may call deep heritage studies -- the study of the history and related culture of people of other lands who migrated to the region and have shaped the story of the historical Caribbean and the culture of the contemporary Caribbean. Actually, the region has been engaging in "deep heritage studies" for centuries, but it has focused for the most part on the history and culture of Europeans who have had the ability to shape its systems of formal education. The need is for the greater formal study of the heritages of those immigrants whose descendants have not had that ability (or who have not had it until quite recently). This could be part of a program to realize an elaboration of "deep heritage studies" that indeed is inclusive of the heritages of all immigrants to the Caribbean.

The pursuit of these studies could cultivate among People of African Descent (PADs) in the region a perception of their location in historical and contemporary global social space that is as comprehensive, as multi-faceted, and as profound, as the reality of that location. Hilliard (1992) probably would argue that such a pursuit could have a certain “utility” today, as he proposed that it could yield a source of philosophy, a basis for group identity and unity, a basis for group creativity, a basis for group independence, and an inspiration for resistance to alien domination. He spoke of these possible consequences among PADs in the United States, but the possibilities also are applicable to PADs in the Eastern Caribbean and to others in the Greater Caribbean.

This report is on a continuing project that seeks to contribute to the movement of the curriculum in secondary schools in Saint Lucia in the Eastern Caribbean in this direction. The project first sought to do so by introducing students in Form 3 (most of whom were 13, 14, and 15 years old) at Vieux Fort Comprehensive Secondary School in Saint Lucia to ideas on the beginning of the universe and information on the early history of the World African Community. It has expanded to include the introduction of students in other secondary schools, learners in adult education, and other members of the general local community, to the history. It has focused on the period from the beginning of the story of members of the Community in Africa to their coming to the Caribbean and other parts of the western hemisphere.

The writer of this article, who conceived, planned, and coordinated the initial phase and has conducted the follow-ups to it, anticipates that the project will provide its students with a more well-rounded account than they have had before of the history in Africa that preceded the history of the African component of Caribbean society. He also anticipates that: (1) it will stimulate in the students an interest in the fuller study of this African history later in their lives; (2) he will report on the conducting of the project, the conclusions he draws from it, and the implications of the conclusions, with other educators that serve the Caribbean; (3) the reports will stimulate the conducting of similar projects in the region and the generating of other reports and treatises related to the teaching of the history; and (4) the projects, reports, and treatises will stimulate the integration of a comprehensive deep heritage studies program into the education systems of the region.

One of the major focuses of such a project consists of its outcomes in the lives of students, and one of the major indications of these outcomes consists of the comments these students share about their introduction to the history. This report presents comments from the young students in the original execution of the project, and describes how much these comments are similar to or different from those from other young students, older learners in adult education programs, and other older members of the general community, in later its executions.

In addition, it offers what the writer views as insights that the comments offer into the impression of the history developed by these recipients, and the lessons that arise from the comments and insights and are important in the integration of World African Community Studies in education in the island and region.

Content Imparted and Execution of the Project

The first stage of the project was the conceptualization of it as one that introduces students to the history after they have received an introduction to the ethnic composition of the region and the origins and arrivals of its constituent ethnic groups. The writer also conceived of the project as one that traces the main currents that culminated in the coming of members of the World African Community to the Caribbean and other parts of the western hemisphere. He especially conceived of it as one that places the members of the Community at the center (not at the periphery) of these currents, and one that acknowledges that these members and their descendants are very authoritative sources of information on these currents.

The project presents its essential content in five parts. The first part reports African ideas and other views on the beginning of the universe. It also presents the explanations scientists have provided for the beginning of the universe, the beginning of life on earth, the beginning of human life in Africa, and the development of other human beings from those that began in Africa.

The second part covers the building of early collectives, communities, and societies by People of the African Continent (PACs). It covers the evidence of early collectives in different parts of the continent, including the Great Lakes, Upper Nile, and Sahara areas. It especially covers the evidence of early communities and societies in the Nubia region of the Nile Valley, and the development, maturing, and decline of the most advanced civilization of ancient times, the one whose African founders, leaders, and citizens called Kemet (but many now call “ancient Egypt”).

The third part describes how People of African Descent (PADs) have built and contributed to other collectives, communities, and societies outside Africa. It covers the location, initial formation, development, highlights, challenges, and demise, of these groupings, in locations such as Southwest Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, Eastern Asia, Europe, and North America. It especially notes that we seem to see the PADs in Asia at the dawn of many ancient civilizations.

The fourth part describes how many People of the African Continent migrated to many parts of Africa after the ends of their first wave of societies. It covers the routes of the migrations, the relations between the migrants and other Africans in the routes and destinations of the migrants, and the new societies the migrants and the others developed. Of course, it covers the locations, initial formation, development, highlights, challenges, and demise, of these societies, such as those in the Nile Valley, the Congo Basin, Atlantic Central Africa, Southern Africa, and West Africa.

The fifth part describes the coming of members of the World African Community to the Caribbean and other parts of the western hemisphere. It describes when they have come, how they have come, and the evidence of their presence, activity, or influence. It especially describes how they have come many thousand years ago on their own, several thousand years ago on their own, a few thousand years ago on their own, several hundred years ago on their own, a few hundred years ago under the domination of others, and in recent times as cultural and other ambassadors.

Some sources of the content presented in the project are articles, chapters, and books written by members of the World African Community. They include the volume on the origin and development of the human species and human societies, titled *Civilization or Barbarism* and written by the eminent Cheikh Anta Diop; the survey of the history of the ancient World African Community, titled *Introduction to African Civilizations* and written by the eloquent John Jackson; the survey of the history of People of the African Continent, titled *The Destruction of Black Civilization* and written by the insightful Chancellor Williams; another survey of the history of People of the African Continent, called *The World and Africa* and written by the eminent William E. B. DuBois; and the *Journal of African Civilizations*, edited by Ivan van Sertima of Guyana, which features clarifications of details of the history and syntheses of ideas and findings on it.

Other sources that feature members of the World African Community include video taped presentations. Two of these presentations, *Free Your Mind* and *Master Keys*, feature Fuller E. Calloway Professor Asa Hilliard of Georgia State University, and trace the development of the human species and the early history of the World African Community. Another such presentation, *When Black Men Ruled the World*, features historian LeGrand Clegg and focuses on Nile Valley African civilization. Yet another, a two-part series, *The Imhotep Factor*, features Charles Finch and describes the highlights of the history of science and medicine in Africa.

The sources also include works from experts who are not of African descent. These include the surveys of African history by Basil Davidson and descriptions of the relationships between African history and European history by Martin Bernal. They especially include the descriptions of evidence of the early presence of African peoples in the western hemisphere from Raffique Jairazbhoy and Alexander von Wutheneau.

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The planning and execution of the project may be divided into six stages. In the first stage, the writer developed the idea for the initial execution of it and received support for that execution from the teachers of history at the Vieux Fort Comprehensive Secondary School in St. Lucia. In the second stage, the writer filed an application for support for the project with the University of South Florida and received the support. In the third stage, the writer prepared the content for the first execution -- the text, photographs, and maps that contain information the project imparts. In the fourth stage, the writer and cooperating teachers introduced students to the history in five parts the writer described earlier in this report. In the fifth stage, the writer and teachers secured reactions of students to the project by asking them to answer questions the writer describes below. In the sixth stage, the writer has followed up on the first execution at VFCSS by conducting similar executions in three other secondary schools, making one-time presentations to students in four other secondary schools, making presentations to four mature rural audiences in adult education, making other presentations to general audiences in five other rural communities, and presenting highlights through radio programs, television programs, and newspaper articles.

Reactions of Students to the Project

At the conclusion of the first execution of the project at Vieux Fort Comprehensive Secondary School, the students provided their reactions to the introduction it had provided them to the history. They described (a) what information they thought was the most important and that students in other secondary schools should learn, and (b) what information they thought was the least important and that students in other secondary schools should not learn. The remainder of this report focuses on the comments written by these students, as well as the oral remarks made by these students in the class meetings in which they studied the history, by these students outside these class meetings, and by other secondary school students, mature learners in adult education, and mature members of the general community, in later executions. It describes the degree to which the reactions provided by students in the original execution have been similar to or different from those provided by the later responders. In addition, it spells out the major implications of these reactions for the policies and practices of educators that serve these audiences.

One common general reaction from the students in the original execution was surprise that there exists information on the history of the World African Community. That reaction had two components: one was surprise that there indeed was information that describes the long history of any of the groups that make of the Community; the second was surprise that there was information that helps connect the histories of the groups and thus supports the conceiving of them as a community. That probably may be explained by the possibility that their education had not informed them that such information does exist and that it is formally organized.

Among the mature learners in adult education and adult members of general audiences, there seems to have been a different reaction to the introduction to the history. These adults greeted this introduction with the nodding of heads that indicated that the story of their ancestors resonated within them and even that they believed that the story always has existed. Indeed, one question they asked repeatedly and passionately was why that history does not have a greater presence in their schools, their communities, and the minds of their “educated” people.

A few students in the original execution of the project indicated that they had difficulty in understanding, imagining, and thus appreciating, the unfolding of the story of the members of the World African Community over long periods or great distances. That may have been because of their youth, because their education and experience had not prepared them to think in terms of these expanses, or because they had developed the tendency to think of members of that Community in a few specific localities (for example, in Africa, their own island, the Caribbean, and a few other locations outside the Caribbean) and not over large expanses (around the world).

But the reaction seemed different among the mature learners in adult education and mature members of the general audiences. These older students revealed through their eyes, their faces, or their remarks a certain unstated knowledge of the elements of the story, a certain recognition of the physical representations of major players in the story, and a certain recognition of representations of the members of the societies that were homes of these players. It seemed that listening to the story of the Community awakened a sleeping self knowledge within and among them.

One common reaction among the young students in the first execution of the project was a quiet absorption of information from the lectures that introduced them to the history. That may have been because they wanted to maximize this absorption. It also may have been because they did not have specific knowledge or experiences that provided bases for contentions. But among the mature learners there was a greater appearance of eagerness and excitement at the possibility of the acquisition of the knowledge. They communicated this enthusiasm through their fixing of their eyes on the presenter, their attention to the visual displays that were parts of his presentations, and their questions and comments on several aspects of the history of the Community.

Among the young students in the first execution of project, there were two departures from the quiet absorption of the information on the history. One seemed to be rooted in their religion and had to do with explanations of the origins of the Universe. The other seemed to be rooted in science and had to do with explanations of the full development of the Universe.

One reaction that seemed to be rooted in religion came from many, but not all, of these young students. It was a strong opposition to the presentation of the creation drama that was developed by Nile Valley Africans and is described by Cheikh Anta Diop in *Civilization or Barbarism* and by Theophile Obenga in *Ancient Egypt and Black Africa*. The account of the beginning of things that appears in that story is different from the teachings of the religion of the students on the nature of the Creator, the relationship of the Creator to time and matter, and the role of the Creator in the beginning of the Universe and the birth of humanity. To the opponents, the Nile Valley creation drama was an unwelcome departure from “the truth” that came from the teachings of their religion (Christianity), and the story of that drama should be removed from an education on the explanations that African peoples have developed for the beginning of the Universe.

A few of these young students had a different reaction to the Nile Valley African creation drama. They said they realized that the story was different from, or even contradicted, the one with which they were familiar. But they added they recognized they needed to understand ideas with which they were not familiar or with which they did not agree, and respected the rights of other people to develop their own ideas.

In contrast, there was among these young students a certain widespread acceptance of the explanations scientists provided for the development of the natural and human universe after their beginning. It seems there are two reasons the students may have accepted these explanations. The first is that their study of the sciences prepares them for the explanations. The second is that the explanations seem to complement the description of the role of the deity that is at the center of the teachings of their religion. It is likely that to them, the explanations provide details that the religious teachings do not give.

Many observers probably would expect the adult education learners or mature community members to express grave misgivings about the introduction of students to the Nile Valley African description of the creation of the Universe. But at one lecture in which the writer presented the description and the reactions of students in the original project to it, none of the mature members of the audience expressed support for the removal of this relating of “creation.” This seems to indicate that they understand the description, realize it is different in several ways from what their sanctioned religion teaches, but do not want the controversy over the differences to jeopardize their exposure to the history of the Community. It also may be because they realize that a call for the rejection of the description of “creation” from the Nile Valley is comparable to a call for their rejection of the accounts of “creation” from their own traditional stories and beliefs. Among the young students in the original execution of the project, one subject for inclusion in the studies of secondary school students was the set of explanations scientists have developed for the differences in the physical appearances of human beings.

These explanations have to do with why members of the World African Community may have hair that is more curly, noses that are more broad, nostrils that are more wide, skins that are more dark, and/or lips that are more highly developed, than those of other peoples.

The explanations stress that the features are the results of the adaptation of members of the Community to their environments, and that the differences in other peoples are the results of their adjustments to their environments. Students seemed to consider these issues important because the discussion of the physical features and the scientific explanations for them led students to conclude that the tendency to devalue the physical features of members of the Community constitutes evidence of ignorance. They also seemed to indicate that the discussion provided them with ammunition they could use in their responses to the devaluations of their own physical features by others.

The explanations for the differences in physical features of human beings and the use of these explanations in the response to devaluations of the physical features of members of the Community received a perhaps lukewarm response from the more mature audiences in the study of the history. They offered few or no reactions to the explanations, and indicated that they wished to discuss other matters. That may have been because they did not have the understanding of the physical or biological sciences that prepared them to appreciate the explanations. It also may have been because they found it difficult to revise a perspective they had internalized all their lives and for which the physical evidence seemed “obvious” and “overwhelming.” In addition, it simply may be evidence of the power of the devaluing colonial education they had received.

Other common candidates for inclusion, in the opinion of the young students in the original execution of the project, included the first societies in Africa, the first societies outside Africa, later societies in Africa, and the coming of members of the World African Community to the Caribbean and other parts of the western hemisphere. Among both younger and mature students, there was a great deal of interest in the last topic. That may be because it covers a period that is close to the contemporary period, and because the contrast between the older information (that speaks of the comings only on slave ships in the last few centuries) and new information (that speaks of these comings as taking place over thousands of years and with the Africans to a much greater degree in control of their trajectories and destinies) on the topic sparked their interest.

But among a few students in a later execution of the project in a secondary school, there was the hesitation or even refusal to accept the idea that People of the African Continent had developed, maintained, and advanced complex, integrated, and achieving societies. For example, some of these students would not accept even pictorial evidence of these achievements, such as the structures at Great Zimbabwe.

They did not attribute the structures to other peoples, but said they needed to see the structures with their own eyes, and indeed would have preferred to have been present during their construction, in order to give PACs any credit for them.

With regard to the idea that these structures were the creations of PACs, they repeatedly gave the reaction, "Sir, I don't believe that." But these doubters were the exception. In addition, in the mature audiences that received information on these ancient societies, there was no such reaction. There instead was the close attention to, and the acceptance of, the textual, oral, and pictorial information.

Among the young students in the original execution of the project, by far the most common subject for exclusion from the education received by students in other secondary schools about the history was information on Nile Valley African ideas on the role of a supreme being in the beginning of things (there were dissenting views, noted above). Three present but minimally mentioned other candidates for exclusion were the study of the ancient societies of PADs in Asia, the end of the second wave of societies of PACs at the hands of outsiders, and the contributions of the multi-genius Cheikh Anta Diop to the study of both PACs and PADs.

The few students who proposed the exclusion of the study of ancient societies of PADs in Asia complained that the project did not give them enough information on the day-to-day lives of members of these societies. The few who proposed the exclusion of accounts of the conquest and subjugation of the second wave of societies of PACs indicated that these accounts made them sad. The few who proposed the exclusion of the coverage of Diop said the project did not give them sufficient information on which to base a solid appreciation of his contributions.

The comments the student opponents wrote about the societies in Asia and about Diop suggest that the students want to secure about certain subjects in the history a great volume of information that helps them understand the subjects fully. That in turn suggests they may develop an initial curiosity about an uplifting subject and that curiosity may evolve into a desire for the full understanding of it, ownership of it, and identification with it. One possibility is that when they are not able to satisfy that desire, they may see the subject as not worthy of substantial effort or emotional investment. The comments the opponents wrote about the later wave of societies in Africa suggest that they may develop an initial curiosity about a painful subject, and that curiosity may remain minimal because the details of the subject may intensify their pain. Thus their statements on the subjects for exclusion suggests they may be inspired by the uplifting aspects of the history and may need much help in seeing the value in the study of the painful aspects.

The mature adults had different reactions to these topics. They appeared satisfied with the oral, textual, and pictorial introductions to the ancient societies, and especially the difference that the introductions made to their understanding of their global history. It is likely that they were satisfied with the information on the histories of ancient societies in Asia because “deep within” they “knew” that the history existed, because their maturity helped them “understand” or see the implications of even the most basic and minimal information on the history, and because they did not have in other histories a background that could have sparked reservations about the history. These adults also indicated that they drew from the stories of the ends of the societies in Africa two major conclusions: that their ancestors were the objects of continual attempts at conquest and subjugation; and that this conquest and subjugation helps explain the condition of the descendants of these ancestors in the Continent. In addition, the basic introduction to Diop sparked in them a keen interest in securing more information about him as well as about local and non-local researchers who are of African descent and have shared their findings on the history.

Final Comments and General Implications

The younger students in secondary schools, and the older students in adult education and the general public, had another common reaction to a comparison of information in the project with information they had learned earlier. They noted they had tended to devalue members of the World African Community (that is, PACs and PADs) but information in the project led them to revalue these Peoples. And they indicated they saw the contrast between the devaluation and revaluation as a painful indictment of the sum of what they had learned in the past.

This indictment is related to one proposal a few of the young students stated in writing, other young students stated orally, and many adults stated orally. It is to include the history among the subjects that the youth study in secondary school and in which they write their final, end-of-secondary-school examinations administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC).

The responses of the younger and older students were valuable in that they indicated the interest of almost all of these students in the history, the value of the understanding of the history to them, and several implications educators should note in the teaching of it to them.

But there were important differences between the reactions of the younger students and those of the older students. The younger were less inclined than the older to accept information that seems to contradict the beliefs of their religion about the role of a Creator in the beginning of the Universe, although their awareness of the existence of different religions in the world should have prepared them for this information. They also showed less readiness than the older to appreciate information that described a World African Community, even though their exposures to the contemporary mass media should have prepared them for the information. In addition, they showed less interest in the daily lives and ultimate fates of PADs in Asia and the contributions of C. A. Diop, even though they were being trained in the use of educational resources in the securing of a full understanding of human affairs. But they accepted the aspects of Nile Valley creation stories that seemed to be complemented by their study of the sciences, developed a strong interest in ideas that they can use in their attempts to counter devaluations of their physical features, and even proposed that the study of the history become a part of the body of knowledge on which they write final end-of-secondary-school examinations. All this suggests that the younger students develop an interest in issues in the heritage when they have a personal stake in the issues and when their education system prepares them directly for, provides them with a great deal of information about, and develops methods of testing (and, perhaps, rewarding) their mastery of, these issues. Their inclination toward understanding the heritage seems to be highly personal and helpful in the defense of their psyches, and external and related to the resources and rewards their formal environment places before them. The older students seem to develop an interest in the heritage as a means of securing information that may give voice to their unstated “self-knowledge” of the existence and breadth of the heritage. In addition, the interest of both groups in the coming of members of the World African Community to the western hemisphere indicates that both groups have a strong interest in matters that are close to the contemporary period and therefore probably have a certain immediate importance.

The project seems to suggest the need for those education systems that claim that they serve the young students to support the education of them on the history through cognitive antecedents that prepare them to understand it, attitudinal antecedents that prepare them to appreciate the unexpected or painful aspects of it, resources that help them secure the details they would like to obtain about it, and a procedure that assesses and rewards their mastery of it. It also seems to suggest that the systems may serve the older students of the history by presenting the study of the history as the source that gives voice to the unstated knowledge they apparently have harbored about not only the existence but also the breadth and fullness of the history.

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