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Many Hands Can Lift the Heaviest of Burdens': A Guide and Resource Book to Assist in Teaching and Learning about Africa in the United States

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**'MANY HANDS CAN LIFT THE HEAVIEST OF BURDENS': A GUIDE AND
RESOURCE BOOK TO ASSIST IN TEACHING AND LEARNING ABOUT
AFRICA IN THE UNITED STATES**

**By Prexy Nesbitt
(8/00)**

*I've known rivers:
I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the
Flow of human blood in human veins.*

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

*I bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi when Abe Lincoln
Went down to New Orleans, and I've seen its muddy
Bosom turn all golden in the sunset.*

*I've known rivers:
Ancient, dusky rivers.*

My soul has grown deep like the rivers.

*("The Negro Speaks of Rivers"
By Langston Hughes)*

INTRODUCTION- This book is for teachers. It is for teachers who teach in classrooms. And it is for all those others who teach outside of classrooms. This book has a strong bias; it is unashamedly pro-Africa. It is written by someone who loves Africa; a person who has a deep and abiding connection to that ancient, beguiling continent. It is written for people who are deeply, even mystically drawn to Africa. Many Hands Can Lift is a book that is intended both for those who have never taught about Africa and for those who have been teaching about Africa for a long time. For the former this resource book will provide direction, resources and helpful hints. For the latter, those whose years of teaching constitute, in and of themselves, an invaluable

resource, I seek to make available in one place many of the rich articles and stories, thoughtful essays, comprehensive bibliographies, accessible statistics and useable maps available.

I have written this book as a symbolic installment payment on a long term debt which I incurred during my various travel, work and study in Africa. My first trip to Africa was in 1965 and I landed at the Nairobi airport en route to a year's study at the University College of Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania. Since that occasion I have made more than sixty-odd additional trips spending time in nearly all the nations of continental Africa with the exception of Guine-Bissau, Cámeroun, Gabon, Rwanda and the island nations.

It is not simply that I have met fantastic and wonderful people throughout these years. It is not merely an acknowledgment of all that I have learned. I owe Africa for my humanity, for my veritable being. The race and class contradictions of growing up, living and working in the United States would have rendered me a raging madman had it not been for lessons I received from my African experience(s). I would long since have been jailed for just picking up a gun and going after "some white folk," as they have done with us, were it not for the vision and discipline which years of engagement with Africa instilled in me.

My exposures in Africa and because of Africa are extensive and impressive. Dr. Eduardo Mondlane, founder of the Mozambique Liberation Front(FRELIMO), invited me to join him as a teacher at the Mozambique Institute in Dar Es Salaam in the pitched years of FRELIMO'S armed struggle, 1968-1969. I spent three months in London volunteering with the Anti-Apartheid Movement and the Committee for Freedom in Mozambique, Angola and Guinea. Thereafter I did famine relief work in Northern Kenya for the Christian Council of Kenya for about two months, until I was unceremoniously declared a prohibited emigrant for writing an internal memorandum about the corruption within provincial government structures in the Northern Frontier District.

Finally, in late 1968 I arrived in Dar Es Salaam at the very height of FRELIMO'S disastrous internal struggle. Including the culminating weeks around Eduardo's February 3, 1969 assassination, they were some of the most trying years of the Mozambiquan people's long struggle for independence. Relationships forged during those difficult days are the ones that have sustained me all my life; are the well-spring for the root values by which I conduct my life. It was in this period that I was tutored and schooled by people like Amilcar Cabral, Walter and Pat Rodney, Jorge and Pamela Rebelo, J.B. Marks, Josiya Jele, Pallo Jordan, Z.K. Matthews, Edward Hawley, Gabriel Simbine, Marge and Simon Mbilinyi, Samora, Josina and Graca Simbine Machel, Irene Brown, Terence Ranger, Ann Seidman, Marcia Wright, Patricia Lanfranconi, Lionel Cliff, John Saul, Giovanni Arrighi, Eduardo Mondlane, Julius Nyerere, Walter Begoya, Abdulrahman Babu. Agostinho Neto, Lucio Lara, Marcelino and Pamela dos Santos, Bill Sutherland, Lifford Cenge, Ruth First and Joe Slovo, Albie and Stephanie Sachs, Alan Brooks, Polly Gaster, Margaret Dickinson, Basil Davidson, Selma and C.L.R. James, Bloke Modisane, Hidipo Hamutenya, and Charley, Cathi and Cimi Junior.

Historically, and even to the present, “Africa” is an unknown entity for most Americans. It was never that way for me. Long before I physically landed in Africa, my family had talked to all of us children about Africa. As we were weaned, we learned of our great uncles who had been avid followers of Marcus Garvey- one of them may even have had a membership in Garvey’s Universal Negro Improvement Association(UNIA). My father and aunts took me to listen to W.E.B. DuBois lectures. I can recall feeling my father’s great pride as we stood watching Mayor Richard Daley host Kwame Nkrumah, Ghana’s first President, on his official visit to Chicago. I yet have a book report I authored about Alan Paton’s Cry the Beloved Country which I must have written only days after the book’s appearance when I was but a seventh grader. I grew up with Africa as a known family member.

But for most Americans “Africa” is perceived and discussed as one country, an undifferentiated tropical, steamy land mass consisting of Egypt and South Africa. And in its most exotic application the word is used as much as a verb as a noun. If US citizens know anything at all, it is usually a negative point. Actor Sidney Poitier emphatically makes this same point in his autobiography, This Life(1980), when he discusses his first filming trip to Kenya and how fearful he was anticipating Africa’s snakes. He was under the impression that snakes would be every where and that he would have to leap out of bed every hour searching for the snakes!! Asking himself where did all those impressions come from, he answers, “... it arose from the whole mythology of Africa found in Western literature, that characterized it as wild, primitive, infested with dangerous animals.” Answering the same question, Poitier probes his own thoughts more deeply and asserts:

(Also)... “let’s (not) let off the hook all those dumb-ass Tarzan movies, and the white hunter Bwana movies, in which lions, elephants And alligators are always chasing the hapless African gun bearer up a Baobab tree, and the most sinister purveyors of African culture, the Jungle Jim-type comic strips that represented the initial exposure of many black American children to ‘what it must be like in Africa.’”

The roots of these attitudes and others like them are very deep. A 1990 special edition of Africa News noted that the inaugural issue of the popular monthly, National Geographic magazine of 1889 featured an article by the magazine’s founder which asserted a view yet prevalent in the USA, namely that African people only developed a degree of “civilization” after being contacted by representatives of Western culture. Cut off that contact and primordial barbarism surges forward.

Much of what is known about Africa in the United States consists of images. African-born, Asian journalist George Alagiah pointed out in the July/August, 2000 issue of the New African magazine that “for most people who get their view of the world from TV...Africa is a faraway place where good people go hungry, bad people run government and chaos and anarchy are the norm. Most Americans today yet subscribe to nineteenth century explorer John Speke’s stereotypical description of African men as working their wives, selling their children, enslaving all

they can and, (otherwise) contenting themselves with drinking, singing and dancing like a baboon to drive dull cares away.” (New African, July/August, 2000) Another rendition of the same motif in the minds of many today is that all African men are just sitting around waiting to pass on their HIV viruses to young African women (and any others foolish enough to relate to them)

For centuries words like “gold coast,” “ivory coast,” “diamondland,” “cocoaville,” “coppertown,” conveyed the impression that Africa existed solely and simply to provide raw materials and commodities for the West. School textbooks, travel writings, films and theater, childrens literature, especially comic books, all conveyed the impression of a continent abounding with gold, ivory, oil, rubber and other wealthy raw materials while teeming with ignorant savages incapable of utilizing the riches of their lands.

In 1955 renown author, John Gunther, a regular contributor to the Reader’s Digest and creator of the “Inside” series from Harper and Row, finished a major tome on Africa entitled Inside Africa. While it contributed to making Africa less “mysterious” for the average American reader, it also reproduced basic bigoted views about Africans and their beliefs and desires.

Distinguishing between the “more advanced American Negroes,” and Africans, Gunther advances some perspectives that could easily have come from his contemporaries like Joel Chandler Harris and Governor George Faubus. For instance, in the opening chapter, Gunther states:

“I like Africans but they are not easy to know or get along with. The friendlier a European (or American) is, the more suspicious the African may be. It is often a risk for an African to be friendly. Some have a strong note of childishness. They are sometimes truculent, schizophrenic and full of inferiority and insecurity which they may express by Exaggerated superiority.” (p.9-10)

Clearly, Gunther did not write out of a desire to transform white American racial attitudes. His was simply a quest to open up a “dark continent.” Gunther was in step with many others since from the earliest days of contact to the present, general white American concern with the African continent has not been derived from strong and identifiable humanitarian instincts. Rather, it has grown out of a type of exoticism fixation and/or out of base and materialistic thirsts for King Solomon’s mines, for Africa’s “hidden treasures.”

Then, with the end of slavery, the slave trade and de-colonization, the images change to reflect new constructs, new roles that are intended for Africans and Africa. For example, a recent image of Africa projected in a US fashion magazine was a photo of a head chopped off sitting on a dining room table with the caption, ‘a too familiar sight.’ This imaging fits entirely with the presentation of the African continent as having nothing to offer but violence and conflict.

Magazines like Time, Newsweek, Harper's in the United States and Europe have played a leading role in shaping how people throughout the world, including in Africa itself, feel and think about Africa and Africans. The prestigious British magazine, the Economist (May, 2000), for example, editorialized recently that while poverty, wars, government-sponsored thuggery, floods and pestilence were not exclusively African "since brutality, despotism and corruption exist everywhere, African societies, *for reasons buried in their cultures, seem especially susceptible to them.*" (emphasis added)

The marketing, television and cinematic industries too, have played an inordinate role in shaping popular Western perceptions of Africa. Africa equals "Elephants, gorillas and "George of the Jungle." Africa is "Elsa the Lion/Born Free" and "Out of Africa" with land-rovers and blonde, Banana Republic-clad safari guides and sleek, single word-uttering black servants, like the single word-uttering red Indians in the cowboy movies. The cinematic representations, more and more, offer a sex siren like Bo Derek playing Jane opposite Miles O'Keefe's Tarzan. Not to be outdone by Hollywood, the winter 1998 swimsuit issue of Sports Illustrated sinks to a new low of combining sex, race and exoticism in a story about some of their "super-models" encountering some pristine, raw Masai tribesmen in the middle of Kenya.

Lastly, there is the most recent *en vogue* image of Africa, i.e., the one that sees Africa as nothing but negativity and despair, war and violence. It is the image of the emaciated figure with the bulging eyes, the reddening hair and the swelling elbows. Maybe there's a child on the back but there is definitely an extended hand, palm up. The January 17, 2000 issue of Newsweek with its cover story of "10 million Orphans from Africa's AIDS epidemic" faithfully reflects this theme. This Africa, the Africa of despair and loathing, more and more frequently has been conveyed by the image of the child soldier with the gun. With a deeply black cover (remember we're discussing "deepest, blackest, 'black Africa!'") silhouetting a young but brawny, black soldier effortlessly wielding a bazooka launcher, the May 19, 2000 edition of the Economist, previously cited, is an example of the Africa self-destructing paradigm.

But the clearest example of editorially prescribing Africa's demise was a June 16th (ironically, the day for commemorating the Soweto massacre of 1976) 1997 edition of the New Republic with the cover story headline: "Africa is Dying: What Will Be Born?" and a dramatic photo of a shabbily-clad, emaciated African woman and her terror-stricken daughter fleeing some unidentified horror. Inside this issue, the editors argue that "what is happening in Africa today is nothing less than Africa's exit from international society." Moreover, that all the problems ripping across Africa today, i.e., wars, AIDS, corruption and debt, have resulted from Africans doing it to themselves. Therefore, "Africans," say the editors, "need to shape up or ship out!"

The media, especially the US media, is a major, if not the major determinant of how people, including people in Africa, perceive Africa. Hollywood has shaped generations of Americans views of Africa. The Africa Policy Information Center (APIC) in a June, 1999 letter pointed out

that "Tarzan is still the image that defines Africa for millions of Americans." The letter went on to quote journalist Rita Kempley who had written the following in the June 16 1999 Washington Post about the latest Hollywood incarnation of Tarzan:

"In the new version(of Tarzan) there is no racism... There are, in fact, no Africans. While earlier movie versions of the tale have included unflattering portraits of native folk, here (it) has been politically corrected to such an extent that no indigenous peoples appear on screen."

Internationally renown entertainer, thinker and activist Harry Belafonte, in a recent collection of interviews edited by theologian Cornel West, recently recalled how Tarzan movies not only evoked in him a negative image of Africa. They also imbued him generally with negative feelings about black people in the United States, including himself and his family:

My earliest knowledge of Africa was really through the Tarzan movies. The very first Tarzan movie I saw was in 1935, Tarzan and the Apes. I went to see this film about this place called Africa, with these people of color who were steeped in ignorance, steeped in folly, steeped in the absence of any articulation whatsoever and were not redeemable except when the great white hero came swinging through the trees and landed in the midst of them to give them direction and to describe life as they should aspire to it. For a long time I thought of Africa as a place I really did not want to be. Those were people that I would just as soon not know. And it was strange that so many people in my own community looked like them or something like them. And how lucky they were to have white leadership to help them.

(Belafonte, in West, Cornel, ed., RESTORING HOPE)

Mr. Belafonte's comments recall a critical challenge integral to teaching/ learning about Africa. Reduced to its essence, it is the aspect of "race." Race presents itself in various ways all the time. Race and race issues invariably appear as well in terms of teaching/learning/experiencing Africa.

An excellent 1997 study by Richard Dyer, entitled White, opens with the observation: "Racial imagery is central to the organization of the modern world... **Race is not the only factor** governing these things(i.e., the myriad decisions that constitute the practices of the world) and people of goodwill everywhere struggle to overcome the prejudices and barriers of race, **but it is never not a factor, never not in play.**"(p.1)(Emphasis mine)

Thus, one cannot discuss Africa without discussing race. One cannot be in Africa without being cognizant of race or cognizant of the minimization or absence of racial dynamics and racism.

(Unless, of course, as many tourists to Africa do, one simply sees, inter-acts with and discusses the wild animals and the game parks, an approach which is in and of itself rife with racial implications).

Race does not appear the same way in all parts of the African continent. Like a chameleon, it comes in different forms with different histories. Stronger in some places and less evident in others, race and racism manifest themselves most patently in the former settler colonies of Algeria, Kenya and the various Southern African countries. And while there are differences and permutations, there are also commonalities. In John Reader's Africa: A Biography of the Continent (previously mentioned) the basic pattern is succinctly outlined in a chapter appropriately labeled "the Invention of Africa."

"It was not without consequence that the 'European movement into Africa coincided with the nineteenth-and twentieth-century peak of racism and cultural chauvinism in Europe itself...
 ...The colonial assumption of superior knowledge in all things things was based first on the convictions of late nineteenth century Europe, and second on the belief that Africa had no history or culture worthy of the name until the European colonizers accepted the "*sacred trust of civilization*." (Italics mine)
 ...Given that Africa was assumed to have had no history before the arrival of the Europeans, it is hardly an exaggeration to say that Europe *created* the image of Africa that the colonial period bequeathed to the world. Having drawn the boundaries of nation states and undertaken to establish a civilizing government in each, with hierarchical administration and military support, Africa and the lives of its inhabitants were restructured to fit the European idea of how it should be." (p.612)

Former Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs in the Kennedy administration, G. Mennen Williams (arguably one of the most popular US officials in Africa) fully appreciated the significance of race in Africa. He used to regularly assert that "race touched more people than Marxism."

It's little discussed but US corporate leadership involved with Africa (including those doing their best to avoid Africa as they avoid "inner-cities") have long had a sophisticated acquaintance with race and Africa. This is especially the case with those who have long been engaged or interested in the Southern African region, e.g., the Coca-Cola Corporation. Some of what informed and informs the approach to Africa of some US multinational business leaders was revealed in a February 1984 comment by businessman William Coors of the Colorado-based brewery. Addressing a Denver meeting of minority businessmen, he said:

"One of the best things slave traders did was to drag the ancestors of American blacks over here in chains

because today American blacks are exposed to greater opportunity than African blacks.”

Mr. Coors also reputedly said Zimbabwean blacks “lack the intellectual capacity to succeed, and it’s taking them down the tubes.” His remarks assume more significance when one remembers that Coors funding is a major pillar behind key organizations which lobby for and work with Republican administrations, namely, the Heritage Foundation and the American Legislative Exchange Council. We see in this little saga then the locking of arms of two historic forms of racism, one from the USA context, the other from the African experience of slavery, colonialism and apartheid.

The most reliable source for understanding race in Africa is what Africans themselves think and say. Former South African President Nelson Mandela has persistently noted for the world the enduring impact which race and racism not only has had but continues to have in the global arena. Ten years ago, on June 21, 1990, during a speech to more than a 100,000 people in Harlem, New York, the newly released political prisoner Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela in one of his first public speeches after his release stated powerfully the following:

The kinship that the ANC feels for the people of Harlem goes deeper than skin color. It is the kinship of our shared historical experience and the kinship of the solidarity of the victims of blind prejudice and hatred. To our people, Harlem symbolizes the strength and beauty in resistance, and you have taught us that out of resistance to injustice comes renaissance, renewal, and rebirth...

...At the turning of this century, W.E.B. Dubois, with

great foresight, predicated that ‘the problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.’ As we enter the last decade of the twentieth century, it is intolerable and unacceptable that the cancer of racism is still eating away at the fabric of societies in different parts of our planet.

It remains as one of the most important global issues confronting all humanity, black and white. It is a struggle that must involve people of different colors, religions and creeds...

...For us the struggle against racism has assumed the proportions of a crusade. We, all of us, black and white, should spare no effort in our struggle against all forms and manifestations of racism, wherever and whenever it rears its ugly head.”

(Nelson Mandela Speaks, p.30)

II

Almost all people who have spent any time whatsoever on the African continent or who regularly keep up with African affairs recognize that Africa is little understood and largely ignored by most of the world. Many people, relatively uninformed and unsophisticated about global racial and ethnic questions, realize that Africa consistently gets short shrift in the world's media coverage. Loyola University (Chicago) political scientist Peter Schraeder pointed out in 1998 that from 1955 to 1995 seventy-three per cent of the authoritative New York Times' Africa-related articles provided negative images of Africa dwelling almost exclusively on politico-military crises like coup d'etats, civil wars and assassinations.

I am not arguing herein that the New York Times and other major media should cease publishing news of Africa. In fact, there are key gloomy items that they consistently miss, e.g., the US Government's National Intelligence Estimate of January 2000 found that **"by 2010" nearly 42 million children in 27 countries will lose one or both parents to AIDS; 19 of the hardest hit countries will be in Sub-Saharan Africa.**" By any standard, this is a stunning piece of information and should be publicized. What I am arguing is that it is equally important to tell the positive story-even if it doesn't get as many sales or the best ratings- of the amazingly inventive, resourceful and plentiful ways that ordinary African people, especially young people, are trying to combat HIV/aids throughout the continent.

A 1995 Special Report by Africa News Service based in Durham, North Carolina points out that the only time that Africa gets substantive news coverage in the US media is when there is a crisis involving a lot of deaths. The Report cites another finding by a University of Washington scholar, James Larson, who looked at the period between 1972 and 1982 and found that while African stories were noticeably less likely to be on network television than stories from elsewhere, of those that did appear, they were 11% more likely to be about crisis.

The recent book by John Reader, the British photo-journalist who lived in Cape Town and Nairobi in the 60's and 70's, and who I cited earlier, summarizes cogently how Africa and African contributions are either stigmatized or totally negated:

Humanity simply does not recognize its debts and obligations to Africa. **In Western imagery, Africa is the "dark continent."** A synonym perhaps, but also the potent symbol of a persistent inclination to set Africa and its inhabitants apart from the rest of humanity. The double meaning of the phrase is clear. The "dark continent" does not refer only to the depths of Africa's equatorial forest, to the density of its tropical shadows, to the

blackness of African skin, or even to a widespread lack of knowledge concerning the continent. Above all, the phrase tacitly labels Africa as the place where a particular form of darkness is found- **the darkness of humanity**. [italics mine] In this context, Africa is where people do terrible things, not because the aptitude for such behavior is a characteristic of all humanity, but because **Africa is believed to be inherently more barbaric and less civilized than the rest of the world**. [italics mine]

(Reader, Africa: A Biography preface p. x)

I am also writing this book because of my belief that an enhanced knowledge of the African continent, its history, culture and politics better enables us to more fully understand the United States, especially its various citizens of African origins. As US citizens, we believe that in better understanding Africa, we better understand ourselves. Ignorance of Africa and the detrimental ways that Africa has been taught in the United States is intimately linked to the patterns of racism that have so deeply permeated and shaped American society. A recent excellent article in the April, 1998 issue of Essence magazine illustrates the point very well. The author, Dr. Deborah Toler of the San Francisco-based Institute for Food and Development Studies, opens up the article with the following observation:

In this part of the world, a child is born into poverty every 34 seconds and 30 million people suffer chronic hunger. **"It's Africa,"** you might guess. **But you would be wrong: It's the United States."**

Dr. Toler then follows up her point noting:

There's no denying that some very real problems exist in Africa. But the media and various policy and humanitarian and /or relief organizations often present the causes of problems as unique to Africa and as Africans own fault. Even their language describing events and issues on the continent is biased. What is called an "ethnic conflict" in Bosnia becomes "Tribal warfare" in parts of Africa, no matter who's fighting.

(Toler,D., "Secrets and Lies: De-bunking the Myths About Africa" Essence, April, 1998, p.74)

Popular ABC television host Ted Koppel, too, has pointed out that there is serious inattention to Africa and its situation by the US media. He believes that international news in general, gets scant attention and that Africa is particularly poorly covered. And he believes that "there still is a fundamental racism in this country(the USA)" which explains why half a million Ethiopians dying doesn't provoke the same response as would the deaths of half a million Italians. Koppel and others would do well to examine the record of some of their colleagues' coverage of Africa.

I remember vividly when Shaba Province in then-Zaire exploded with one of the regular incidences of anti-Mobutu uprisings. Walter Cronkite opened the May 19, 1978 6:30 evening news with the words:

**“GOOD EVENING. OUR WORST FEARS IN THE REBEL
INVASION OF ZAIRE’S SHABA PROVINCE REPORTEDLY
HAVE BEEN REALIZED. REBELS BEING Routed FROM THE
MINING TOWN OF KOLWEZI ARE REPORTED TO HAVE KILLED
A NUMBER OF EUROPEANS.”** (Emphasis mine)

The mistake was caught and by the next run of the evening news, the suggestion that white deaths mattered and black deaths did not had been removed. I remember this incident well for I quoted what Cronkite had said in an educational documentary on Kenya and was nearly sued, along with documentalist, David Koff, by CBS for information defaming Cronkite’s character.

The Cronkite incident is not so exceptional. On April 17, 2000 the Daily Mail of London ran a front page headline in the following manner: Under the banner **EXECUTED**, a sub-title, “White farmer shot as Zimbabwe teeters on the brink of civil war.” Like Walter Cronkite’s dramatic commentary, this was deliberate racialization of an African episode. It was asserting that the story had assumed meaning since white people had now lost their lives.

Scholar Dr. Beverly Hawk has discussed a related pattern in US newspaper coverage of African conflict situations. Looking at American newspaper coverage of the war in Zimbabwe, what was then Rhodesia during the 1970’s, she noticed that routinely papers like the Washington Post, the New York Times and the Los Angeles Times referred to the killings of whites as “murders,” “massacres,” “slaughters,” and “atrocities.” Blacks just died. They died in greater numbers; usually much greater numbers. But theirs were just deaths. Because of the role these and other media reports play in shaping how Africa is imaged in the West, I believe and hope that Many Hands will be a contribution to not only enhanced understanding of Africa in the USA but also to the undoing of racism in the USA.

The extensiveness of the ignorance of the general US public about Africa cannot be over-stated. And it is not just US relations with Africa that suffers from this ignorance. In some respects the primary victims are the US people themselves. So many features related to Africa are so impressive and mere knowledge of them becomes a source of a certain empowerment.

Africa’s age alone should mean that the continent would be accorded more respect by US audiences. The earliest known evidence of human life on the planet, an estimated 3.6 billion years old, is to be found today in Africa. Human beings first evolved into walking upright on the African continent. The first systematic manufacture and use of stone tools took place in Africa. In a certain sense we, all people living today around the globe, have African roots.

The sheer size, diversity and heterogeneity of the African continent should also move the USA

populations into wanting to know more about Africa. Africa is the world's second largest continent. The number of people living in different countries goes from as few as 500,000 in the island nation of Cape Verde to more than 90 million in Nigeria. The fifty-six countries, 2700 different peoples and 2500 separate languages and dialects making up Africa often vary widely in history, culture and structure. Africa's so-called "jungle" terrain actually occupies less than one tenth of the African continent's 11,700,000 square miles. Far from being seemingly endless rural bush, desert and savanna, with 30 cities having at least one million population, Africa today confronts many of the same urban problems that the United States and the rest of the world face.

In fact, the African land mass is characterized more by differences than similarities. Most of Africa consists of a vast array of different climates ranging from savannah grassland to rainforest to desert. Bear in mind that the African continent is so vast that it defies even Hollywood's imagination and resourceful talents. China, India, Argentina, New Zealand, Europe and the USA can all fit at the same time within just the African coastline. Journalist John Reader, cited earlier, has noted that "the Sahara alone is as large as the continental United States." The Republic of Angola alone can contain an area two and a half times the size of Texas. And the coastline of Mozambique is longer than that of California and Oregon combined.

In many respects Africa's potential and power remain to be fully measured, let alone appreciated. Producing 80% of the world's gold, 98% of the world's diamonds, and being the second most important global provider of oil, it is well-known that Africa has some of the world's richest deposits of oil, gold, diamonds, copper, manganese and various other minerals. What is less well-known are other findings like Mozambique having some of the world's largest natural gas deposits. Many know that rivers like the Niger, the Congo, and the Nile are amongst the world's longest. The Congo, for instance, four thousand kilometers long, drains a basin covering 3.7 million square kilometers, an area larger than all of India. Few realize the power potential of rivers like the Congo and the Zambezi. An impressive new book by Adam Hochschild, King Leopold's Ghost, points out, for instance, that during the 220 miles that the Congo descends to sea level, "so great is the drop and volume of water that the hydroelectric potential equals that of all the lakes and rivers of the United States combined!"(p.17)

What this all means is that Africa, its size, its majesty, and diversity should not be relegated to simplistic and rhetorical renderings. As a recent children's book put it: **AFRICA IS NOT A COUNTRY!** Teaching about Africa necessarily involves beginning from a fundamental and pre-requisite recognition that Africa is big, complex and challenging. While it is not easy to teach "Africa" because of its scale and complexity, it is ultimately extremely rewarding to see students learn about Africa, maybe experience it and ultimately teach it themselves..

There are additional reasons for this book. Far too many people, especially in the United States, believe that Africa has no value. Sadly, the remark by conservative North Carolina senator, Jessie Helms, that giving aid to Africa is like "pouring money down a dark hole," cannot be simply dismissed as the ravings of a lone, deranged and racist fanatic-who incidentally is the

head of the US Senate's Foreign Relations Committee. Many people in the United States hold the same view or similar ones. It is now common knowledge that some of the top decision-makers in the USA have had decidedly racist and bigoted views, especially towards Africa.

While the 1998 presidential trip of William B. Clinton to Africa must be hailed as precedent-setting and historic, the over-all attitude of US presidents and other government officials towards the continent of Africa reflects the racism so omnipresent in American society.

Despite his 1957 trip to Ghana while Eisenhower's Vice-President, Richard Nixon, for instance, constantly used the words "nigger" and "Jigaboo" or "jigs" in his phone conversations. And several people have reported Nixon's phone call to Henry Kissinger calming a jealous Henry down about the extensive coverage which his underling, Secretary of State William Rogers, had received during an African trip. Nixon calmed Kissinger with the words: "Henry, let's leave the niggers to Bill and we'll take care of the rest of the world." In fact, Nixon was not able to just relinquish Africa. He had very strong opinions about Africans and their capacities and skills. He reportedly once told his aide, H.R.Haldeman, that "there had never in history been an adequate black nation and they are the only race of which this is true." During the 1960's, despite having finished his term as Eisenhower's V-P, he once publicly re-assured Portugal's Foreign Minister with a statement that, unlike the Kennedys, he believed that "independence was not necessarily the best thing for Africa or for Africans. Later-Christmas, 1971 to be exact, backing up his beliefs while President, he granted war-weary Portugal \$436 million in assistance, including military help, as payment for the US having access to the Azores islands.(this assistance included items like napalm. Little wonder that later I would be asked by Mozambicans why the Americans had bombed them during their war of independence. "Didn't the US people fight for their independence ,too?" they would say) Four years later, in 1975, the Nixon administration relaxed restrictions on US arms flows to South Africa as they closed down the US AID office in Nigeria.

Nixon's underlings maintained his postures and posturing towards Africa. Various authoritative sources, including commentator Roger Morris and journalist Seymour Hersh, have discussed how White House National Security Council meetings were often entertained by former Assistant Secretary of State, Alexander Haig beating his hands on the table, as if it was a drum, and hooping whenever the subject of Africa came up. Occasionally, he would vary his response with a few choice Tarzan jokes to accompany his drum rolls. (O'Reilly, Kenneth, Nixon's Piano, p.292)

The more liberal administrations too showed consistent duplicity in terms of Africa, especially in the actual decision-making they did. As Roger Morris once described it in the New Republic magazine(June 26, 1976): "Through the 1960's the public face of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations was to deplore the racist regimes at regular intervals at the UN and elsewhere while doing discreet business with them on the side."

Far from believing that Africa is the continent of negatives, we write this book out of our conviction that Africa has made and continues to make singularly rich and profound contributions towards solving some of the abiding problems facing the world at the commencement of the twenty-first century. I am including in this collection, for instance, some original writings from some of Africa's premiere and visionary political thinkers and philosophers. Many of these writings have seen little circulation to US audiences. Some have never been published before. All are characterized by the depth and humanity which resonates in the thinking and actions of some of Africa's foremost leaders like Tanzania's former President, Mwalimu Julius Nyerere, South African Nobel laureates Chief Albert Luthuli, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and President Nelson Mandela.

It is my contention, for instance, that, impressive as it is, the 1997-98 South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) with its seemingly novel levels of non-racialism, generosity and embrace, did not emerge in a vacuum. The TRC, as is widely known in Southern Africa, was in part, based upon African National Congress(ANC) policies and initiatives including its own self-critical review of actions taken by the ANC and its armed unit, Umkhonto we Sizwe(called MK) while it was a liberation movement. Specifically, during 1992-93, the ANC created the Stuart, Skweyiya, and Motsuenyane Commissions to look into alleged violations of human rights that had taken place in ANC training camps in Angola and Tanzania.

It is important to note herein that in 1980, the ANC's then-President, Oliver Tambo, made a historic appearance at the headquarters of the International Committee of the Red Cross(ICRC) in Geneva, Switzerland where he publicly committed the ANC to the 1949 Geneva Conventions in terms of how the ANC and MK would treat members of the South African defence, police, security forces and civilians caught in the violence of war.(The full text of the statement is appended to this introduction).

On June 25, 1985 in Lusaka, Zambia, President Tambo re-stated the ANC's basic war strategy and its view of civilian targets saying:

“We have said that as the conflict intensifies, there is going to be more bloodshed on both sides. That's inescapable. What we have

not done is just to look for civilian targets and attack them. People would be pleased but that is not the way the ANC wants to do things.

We will confront the armed police and the soldiers and anyone else

identified with the police or soldiers.
But we will not go unto a football
field and explode a bomb to kill
players or in a cinema.”

(See the July 24, 1985 USA Guardian
for an excellent summary of the ANC's
Over-al 'Call for Insurrection.')

Thus, the TRC is the product of a continuum of political and humanitarian thinking that has characterized the liberation struggles waged on the African continent in the latter half of the twentieth century. Some of the documents, papers, speeches, and poetry I have included in this resource book illustrate this historical pattern and are part of the reason that we believe that regions of Africa are taking steps and doing things from which the world has much to learn. British historian David Birmingham wrote a book in 1995 entitled the Decolonization of Africa. He opened the book with the two sentences below. We are closing this brief introduction with the same two sentences for they convey a sense of the values and convictions underlying the Africa behind poet Langston Hughes' poem, 'I've Known Rivers,' which heralded this introduction:

“The decolonization of Africa was one of the turning points in the history of the post-war world. It captured the imagination of a new generation of idealists who enthusiastically proclaimed their belief in racial equality and individual liberty.”(Decolonization,p.1)