

# Uprooting myths

## Africa replete with diverse civilization



**LESLEY OWUSU is a sophomore broadcasting major and a Daily Nebraskan columnist.**

I am the voice of Africa. Africa is my homeland. Africa is where I belong. I say this because Africa is where I spent the first six years of my life, so I will always be attached to Africa. It's the home of my family.

Americans seem to have false perceptions about the great continent of Africa.

I'm not sure if it is because some Americans are simply ignorant, or that they lack knowledge and understanding of the African culture.

As a student with African descent, I feel I can represent my people and act as a voice for Africans.

It frustrates me when I see the negative images of African people in the media being portrayed as "savages."

Africans regard the connotation of the word "tribe" and other words like "primitive" and "native" as derogatory.

People who are either uneducated, or simply naive, still believe most Africans live in the bush, fight, kill animals and roam around villages naked.

Believe me, this is not Africa today. The images you see on TV — with groups of Africans dancing — are just a part of the culture. It is the celebration of a traditional event, such as an initiation.

The reality of African culture is, sadly, not always recognized by people in the West. Only those who can fully appreciate the physical size and diversity of Africa can understand the culture.

Afro-centrists view Africa as the cradle and birthplace of civilization. They see Africa as a place of high culture.

Americans seem to have this perception that Africans are uncivilized. I think it's because of the way Westerners think that Africans live.

Just how organized and civilized is the United States with people in constant conflict and war?

Civilization is the total culture of a particular people, group and nation. Africans are civilized in every sense of the word.

I often worry about some African Americans. They regard themselves as "African" American, which is the title used to distinguish your ethnic classification. But just how much do they know and understand about Africa?

Some African Americans I've come into contact with know little or nothing about Africa.

A few weeks ago, I overheard an ignorant African American woman talking about African people. She said, "These people look straight-up African."

I couldn't help myself from interrupting. I asked her, "What do you mean by straight-up African?"

She replied, "You know what Africans look like."

I said "No, I don't. Do I look African?"

The girl had no response. I think she realized she offended me.

What annoyed me most was this girl's attitude.

For some reason, she had this perception that Africans have a stereotypical look — extremely dark skin, big eyes, a big nose and big lips.

Is this the perception that Americans have of Africans?

Africans are not "strange-looking people." They are just ordinary people like you and me.

African people look different because Africa is so diverse. Never be quick to judge any person of color. We really do not all look the same.

Every African is different.

Africa is a beautiful and rich continent. Where do Americans think most gold, copper and tea comes from?

Americans tend to view Africa as a single country instead of a continent of 50 different countries with a wide variety of people. It's a continent with many smaller countries, similar to Europe.

Africa is the second largest continent. It's 11.6 million square miles stretching 5,000 miles, from South Africa to Egypt, and nearly 3,000 miles, from Senegal to Somalia. It's 3.5 times bigger than the United States.

According to the 1996 Population Reference Bureau there are an estimated 732 million people in Africa.

Africans hold things like traditions, family values, morals and religion in high regard. Old people are respected as elders. They are leaders in the community and are inspiring to others.

Africa is full of diversity. Unlike Americans, Africans do

not speak just one language. There are hundreds of different languages spoken in Africa.

Africa also includes a collective group of very different groups of people.

My family is from Ghana, in west Africa. We belong to the Ashanti group.

There are at least 15 different languages spoken in Ghana. "Twi" is the language my family and I speak.

Names are very symbolic in Ghana. A child's name is determined by the day of the week that he or she is born. I was born on Thursday. My Ghanaian name is "Maame Yaa," which means "hope."

When I was younger, I was fairly shy and didn't really understand much about Ghana. I would often try to hide the fact that my parents spoke a different language whenever my English-speaking friends were around me. I don't why.

Now that I'm grown up, I'm proud of my African heritage because it has allowed me to increase my awareness of my culture and Africa.

I last visited Ghana two years ago. I was overwhelmed by some of the spectacular things I witnessed. Things like architecture, arts and crafts were spectacular.

Ghanaians are very welcoming. I was treated like a princess by all those I met. Africans are generally very hospitable. Any visitor is greeted warmly and with great respect.

Money is not everything to Africans. Human life and happiness are worth more. However, like any society, the rich get richer and the poor remain poor.

Never be quick to judge the African culture, and don't believe all you see and read about Africa. You really have to see Africa for the experience of a lifetime.

To me, Africa is about adventure, freedom, richness, individualism, culture and ancestral history.

One day, I plan to return to Africa and live in Ghana. But for now, I am happy enjoying my travels as I explore this wonderful world that has so much to offer.

Africa is where I am from. Africa is my home.



MELANIE FALK/DN

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