

OPINION PAGES

Our VIEW

A noble process

UNL, tribes' roles in repatriation honorable

On Sept. 1, 1998, University of Nebraska-Lincoln Chancellor James Moeser delivered a somber apology to American-Indian leaders from across the nation assembled on UNL's East Campus.

"I want to apologize personally and on the behalf of the University of Nebraska for the insensitive and grievous treatment of physical remains on Native Americans done in past decades in the name of science," Moeser said.

Tribal leaders and members of the American-Indian community accepted the apology but saw it only as the first step in the process that would eventually bring their relatives' remains home.

On Friday, more than a year after the apology was made, the university took another large step in returning the first of the remains to the Ponca Tribe of Nebraska and the Southern Ponca Tribe of Oklahoma.

In doing so, university leaders surprised some American-Indian leaders who had been skeptical about UNL's apology last September and its promises to return the remains in a timely manner.

Since the revelation that American-Indian remains were being housed on UNL's campus, the university has made attempts to turn over the remains it can in accordance with federal law.

The university should be commended for returning the remains while keeping a watchful eye on the rules that govern their repatriation.

Credit should also be given to American-Indian leaders who weren't satisfied with spoken promises.

Instead, the leaders held the university accountable to its promises.

UNL still has several steps to take before the issue of repatriating American-Indian remains is over.

Remains affiliated with other tribes are going through the process of repatriation right now.

American-Indian leaders are trying to identify which tribes have ancestors in a group of more than 600 unaffiliated remains still housed at UNL.

It's likely that tribal and university leaders will have to be patient while wading through the bureaucracy that accompanies returning the bones.

A memorial to honor the place where American-Indian remains were incinerated in the 1960s by a former anthropology professor is still being designed.

The university should continue to pursue these projects with full force. Leaders and members of the American-Indian community should continue to be part of the process.

By working together, more large steps will be taken in the future.

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Obermeyer's VIEW



DN LETTERS

Out of Africa

AIDS in Africa

The misinformed view and paternalistic voice expressed in "Our View: Aids in Africa" (DN, Sept. 27) is typical of how most of the mass media distort African social realities. As Africans who have to live with the repercussions of these gross generalizations, we are offended and annoyed by this simplistic opinion.

For the DN to generalize from only one mysterious death of a Zambian minister as indicative of AIDS events on a continent four times the size of the United States is poor journalism.

Why didn't the DN also look at the majority of countries on the continent that are successfully combating AIDS? There are a number of intervention programs in Uganda that are significantly dropping the AIDS rate throughout the country. Other countries, like Zambia, Zimbabwe and Malawi, have slowed if not stabilized the growth rate of AIDS as well. The truth is that 16 million people in Africa are HIV-infected, not dead from AIDS. Actual AIDS deaths are about one-fifth to one-fourth of the HIV-infected numbers.

The DN says that Africans don't know how to prevent AIDS, and that they "don't even really know AIDS exists."

Did the DN bother to consult or even glance over any of the work done by several hundred organizations dealing with AIDS on the continent, both African-sponsored and internationally sponsored? Does the DN know that the very week this view was posted, in Lusaka (Zambia) the 11th International Congress of AIDS in Africa was held, and a representative of every country on the continent attended?

Apparently we do know that AIDS exists and are dealing with it at an institutional level and have been as a continent for at least 11 years.

A major reason for the spread of AIDS in Africa is poverty. Recently the international community acknowledged the direct link between poverty and ill health. Most African

countries have to pay one-third to one-half of their foreign exchange earnings toward debt servicing. What do you think would happen if all that money were directed toward health and education? If the DN wants to help analyze the problem of AIDS in Africa, debt cancellation is an issue it should report about.

Finally, to suggest that the World Health Organization should intervene in our behavior is insulting; almost as insulting as the paternalistic tone in which you address our continent. The status of AIDS in Africa today is the product of the colonial legacy and a function of international capitalism.

The true issue, therefore, is one of African capacity, not African character or corruption as the DN suggests. Please report on the basis of accurate knowledge.

"There is no darkness like ignorance."

Bell Solefack
president
African Student Association

Dark Picture

I am responding to the column by David Baker, "Flash causes trouble on train ride to Zambia" (DN, Thursday).

I am an African who has worked extensively as a journalist, covering the entirety of Africa and corresponding across other continents.

I viewed Baker's column as full of ethnocentrism and stereotyping. We all know that Africa as a continent is behind other continents in terms of "what the western world terms as western development." But to compare giving an African a few mangoes with saving Baker's life is incredibly pathetic.

It is not a big deal, an African seeing a mango. After all, they grow almost everywhere within the sub-Saharan region.

I'm concerned about the way some Americans and Europeans have painted a dark picture of the continent and its people whenever they pay a visit there. It is time that some

truths be known and such a malicious tendency, aimed at degrading the people and the continent at large, is stopped.

The fact is that while other races were still living in caves, our African ancestors had built great cities and civilizations. The big question now is: Where, how, when and why did Africa lose it?

This is what anthropology students like Baker should concentrate on.

Africa has been dragged down by the Western world, from the 15th century until today — through the slave trade and colonialization.

And when we Africans started claiming our rights 40 years ago, the Western scramblers packed their booty and left Africa to either swim or drown in its own sweat.

Then they set out a new system to ensure maximum exploitation of the continent. All that changed when they left was the packing of their belongings.

Africa is currently facing the most and worst exploitation by the West, "neocolonialism."

Africans have been termed barbarians, primitive people, people without culture and what have you, and it's a pity that today some are still attempting to classify us that way.

We are very optimistic the prospect for Africa's rebirth is being enhanced day after day and time after time. In Africa, what matters is the African mind and the black man's identity. It is not long from now that a story like "thugs stepping right in front of Baker's face, ripping his bag off and shouting at him, and then Baker saving himself by giving them mangoes" will be thrown in the dust bin of history.

As a word of advice, David Baker, try to become an impartial anthropologist and a more balanced-minded person if you want to succeed as an African expert.

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political science

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