

**Presentations Commemorating Black History Month  
Northern Michigan University**

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Transcribed: June 5, 2002**

RM: This afternoon I'd like to welcome you to one of a number of presentations commemorating Black History Month. This event is sponsored by the History Department. This afternoon I have the pleasure of introducing Muhtu Ghatoi from Nairobi, Kenya. He is at the present time a visiting professor here at Northern Michigan University teaching a course on African History and Culture. He's going to be giving his presentation and providing us with some very interesting insights into Africa and his background. It's been a pleasure having him in the department during the semester because he adds a great deal to the whole process. Muhtu will give his presentation.

MG: I will read, because I want to be consistent. After this short reading, I hope, I want to invite questions. It's *A Child of True Courage*. I was going to add two words. In *A Child of Two Worlds*, True Courage, so I say, but who is not? Who is not a child of today, of yesterday? A child of his mother and father? Of your parents and society, of your generation, of your ancestors. But I am a child of contradictions, of a Tribal Africa, and a modern Africa, and I am an America. I wear no animal skins like my grandfather. I wear a tie and a jacket. I delight in teaching in America, hopefully passing knowledge and information, character, maybe laughter. I can hardly do these things in Africa.

But introductions first. My name is Muhtu ??? that is another contradiction. Unlike many ??? I have no western names from my parents. Translated into English, Muhtu means powder, flour, fine dust, clay. I'm named after my great-grandfather on my father's side. I'm told he loved to drink porridge made from flour of ???. ??? means son of. ??? itself means the great honey collector. That is another duality. Though I'm ???

and therefore, of the Bantu's, it seems we were related to hunters and gathers of Africa. The bushmen, the ????. But that may be a bit too far. ??? was used in the same way as you use Mac of MacDonald, for son of Donald. Or ??? in Dutch, for son of. No child is without a child. The mother is hardly ever in doubt. Ours was a patrilineal society. So most of our societies in east Africa and in Africa and general...

I was born and raised a proud little boy on the slopes of snow capped Mt. Kenya. The mountain of ???...which was named Africia by the Mediterranean people thousands of years ago. Both my parents were beneficiaries of European Christian Missionary Evangelization into Africa. At the request of ??? in Kenya, in 1910 my father was donated by his ???, his grandfather to the mission outpost. Together we had these groups that could be taught to read and write, to dress properly in tailored American cotton, and suddenly to be taught how to read the Bible. Of course the Tribal Chief changed his mind the very next day and returned to the mission post to reclaim his son. But ??? was not to be outsmarted so easily. ??? headed the tiny missionary outpost. On the hearing of the arrival of Chief ??? and Tribal warriors armed with spears and shields, their naked black bodies painted white with chalk, marching off to war, the missionary hid the boy in a cupboard. The Chief threatened, and promised to return when he got to know specifically which pink man had taken his son, and to where. ??? learned the white man's way and started school and catechism, only to return home when the chief had nearly forgotten that son of his seventh wife. But on weekends and school holidays, ??? and his converted ??? would visit villages teaching Sunday School to all ???. Teaching total illiterates the alphabet. Each new converttee would open a classroom in his own village. In turn, white missionaries would visit each little ramshackle school every

season. They would make sure to take with them translations of the gospels, glass beads, blankets, cups, papers, pencils, hats, any paraphernalia from the civilized world of the white man. The land far away. But the magic had won the natives. The magic of cutting letters, as it was dubbed then. The magic of reading stories off the book. The magic of the model A and model T and the train. In this way the white man was a welcome visitor. A good guest. The white colonizer or white trader, was not yet known or suspected. The ability or stupidity, I don't know. But now, my Christianized father and Tribalized mother and father, at the outbreak of the first World War became children of two courages. They both had been baptized on the 8<sup>th</sup> day from their birth. They were, at reaching puberty, circumcised at the river as demanded of all children of their clan and the tribe. How else would you know pain as of the knife. How else would they graduate from ??? to warriors, but through the highest of all initiation ceremonies. Yet, here they are teaching the Bible. They are brining up their children as members of their tribe in Christian ways. In western values, education, the bicycle, the car, cash crops, candy, shoes, the tie, the city, cinema, popular music. For a boy in the middle of Africa. Of course, when I started school in 1947 at the age of 10, I was one in a thousand lucky enough to get such an opportunity. Many in Africa don't to this day. It matters little that we first learned the alphabet by writing on our ??? with our forefinger and the sticks from the nearest bush. That is the same little roof and school, which was started by those chief donated converttee pioneer kids. Many countries in Africa where this state of affairs still remains the same. So some of us have come a long way.

Baptized as a child, like my two brothers and sister, I nearly missed circumcision as an adolescent because my tribalized teacher, father, farmer didn't think much of it

anymore. Circumcision for women is no longer practiced, considered primitive, against modern medical medicine, banned by law, but a laughingstock I would have been to this day, to the whole village and country if I didn't. You cannot even get a bride if you're not fully initiated. We are lucky that we do not suffer from split personalities. We stand astride in Africa, in America, in the world. God Bless Us. From high school I went to train as a teacher at a teacher training college, and taught at a school before I came to Northern Michigan in 1960-'62. The Mao Mao War then, against the British in Kenya in the 1950s did not do much to enhance our education. But it nudged and stoked our hopes and appetites. On seeking higher education and applying to many universities in America, UK, India, South Africa, I was accepted at 4 or 5 schools here. Northern turned out to be the least expensive. I had no money except for one year. I took a risk. I had to go.

As luck would have it, and in the nick of time, the money to secure ??? for African students all the way to New York. I drove in a Greyhound all the way to Marquette. For unknown reasons, I also survived the cultural shock, just took it as it came. Intending to read law, I transferred to another, but only managed to get a B in Master's Public Administration. I was back to mother Africa. During those days of African independence in the '60s we were so patriotic that we only applied for jobs in the new African lead government, not the private sector. We identified freedom and liberation. To participate in upliftment. But how things have changed. I got a job instantly as a broadcaster in a state owned tv and radio station. I was so Americanized that my own trained brother would laugh at me with my American twang of newsreading

the voice of Kenya. It was a challenging and involved time walking as a civil servant. Hope and expectations were soon shattered.

Africa had opened up to a sprint in the 1960s into the freshness of the morning. However, this last 30 years have been a great disappointment to many true sons of the African soil. Slowly but surely, the colorful continent had deteriorated and degenerated. The bouncing round faced baby lies sweating in convulsions sick with the malaria of the 1980s. By enlarge, Africa has receded to anarchy. The military rule. To ??? to poverty, degradation, not known since the days of slave trade. Yes I am a child of Africa. I can tell. I can see. 4 out of 5 news items out of Africa today is bad news. You watch CNN, listen to BBC, CBS, it is bad news. Famine and malnutrition continue to ravage Africa. Diseases plague children now more than ever. As population explodes due to reduced child mortality, quality of life takes a dive, a big dive. Hardly any 10 missions in Africa can have a GDP equal to or surpassing any one European country. Per capital income of \$400 US dollars is considered an achievement, that's for a whole year. Half of African school age children never see those 4 walls as I speak to you. Africa is a sad story after they took over from their own colonizers.

All this, in a vast and beautiful continent, full of largely untouched resources, the ??? of it all, the human resources, remains the most underdeveloped of anywhere in the world. The most ??? the poor. The ??? of Africa to me is primitivity, greed, and corruption. Africa's wars are really it's leader. Leaders of guile, greed, and ???. Remember, corruption starts from the top. It's never the peasant who planted his land, the lowly farmer knows no Swiss account, nor does he expect ever to ride in a Mercedes Benz. Ladies in the fields survive on subsistence levels. Provincial guards throughout

black Africa seize their monthly pay before ??? and before ???. A continent of contradiction. A continent that fills the vaults of Europe, that has ??? and diamonds secretly, ??? and gold, while others stock pile theirs for a rainy day. It is a continent in which leaders in civil disorder to discredit democracy. Inventing military intervention in order to rule by the gun. These are the Kenyans, the Zairaias, the Malawis, and Nigerians. The first born sons of mother Africa. They are the blood shattered streets of Mogadishu and of Juba. The ??? of shanties in Nairobi and Laigos. This Africa, lead by Africans, not Communists, not Capitalists, not even Harvard graduates or Oxfords. No. Only African dictators. Granted, it's the same, the world over some might say. Calcutta, Chicago, Rio. If that were only true. But two wrongs don't make a right. Nor two evils a virtue. Africa solutions lie fast with it's own sons and daughters. Only when it's own people rise to the basic moral threshold, will their conscious ??? them to some corrective action. Only when Africa accepts that there does exist a problem in their land, a problem worth discussing openly, will they begin the long journey toward a solution. A healthy, bouncing Africa. Only then will Africa begin to develop the vastness of it's human resource so as to generate solutions to other problems. Education and literacy must take priority in black Africa. No social, economic, or political infrastructure can be put up if a society is reverting back to the stone age. I think you might agree with me.

So my answer to some of these underlying questions or problems seems simple. Africans themselves. By looking at the problem in the face. But that means that they have to recognize and accept these problems. More importantly, have the political will to try to solve these problems. But the current crop of African leaders are neither able to decide, nor willing to write the blight that eats deep into Africa. ??? they raise a skeleton

in the cupboards of autocrats. The big men of Africa stand in the way of change, in the way of progress, for they hate and fear competition. They are the know all and do all who detest democracy because it is allied to free and fair competition. The other side of the coin, only educated and enlightened population know a ??? when they see one. Only a free people can make good use of free will and free choice. Therefore, education is an essential ingredient of free choice. Impoverished, illiterate ??? are easily duped with sweet things for temporary satisfaction. The ??? of starving villages is porridge for the day. That child with diarrhea, not family planning nor ??? But a trained mind exposed to ideas can help a bad disaster before it happens.

Ironically, it is Africa, out of which ??? is now a ???. Where it is needed most. I don't want to use myself as an example, but poor Africa. Africa more than anyone else, requires competence, good hands, good government, political and economic management to enhance human and natural resources. Africa needs to create an enabling environment to ??? the wealthy ??? and international investor. Not to scare them off with decrees and government, not to ever pass the hat around for donors or for a living. Africa needs more tractors and dams. Not more bullets and violence. Not national parades. Not presidential planes. Not prestigious office blocks that swallow farmers meager earnings. Not battalions of presidential guards or weekly guards of honor. These are the evils and luxuries that harm Africa. All of Africa, people are crying for democracy, or at least for justice and peace. For peace more than anything else. But can you hear them? Do you hear them from this far? Do you hear a people cry? With information age, you probably do. With television, the wires, the phones, the ???. This is not only fantastic knowledge, it is a new culture. You and I are in it whether we like it or not.

Africa's culture of democracy and legacy of solving her own problems was badly interrupted by colonialism, by slave trade profiteering, but your 200 years of democracy and ??? could help Africa a great deal. This is where you come in. The US western democracy have not only a moral, but a humanitarian obligation. And also historical reasons to ??? democracy. This time Africa needs your help to shake it out of it's slumber. To democratize it's ???. Have you not had the Kenya ??? at the time of general elections, multipartism was forced on us. Forced on Kenyans. That multi party democracy would bring tribal clashes. What nonsense. Tribes have been intermarrying across tribal lines and moreso in recent times than before democracy was introduced at independence. Elections have been conducted democratically now and before. No civil or tribal wars have erupted because of it. Not even in 1992. However, we know what military ??? wear camouflage ??? long distance to travel, using silencers, bows and arrows. The ways of evil empires. I must admit here though, the opposition in Kenya botched it up because the three opposition leaders, personal interest took precedence over national interests. The need to overhaul a 15 year old ???. They split huge votes 3 times so the loser won. Tribalism played it's part, but not any more than Irish, Italian, black, or any other minority or ethnic vote does in your great country. Who does not know of General ??? stubborn resistance to change in that giant of Zaire? He dared not allow democracy or free competition, lest he be prosecuted for past crimes. You do not ??? your rival's ??? do you? And absolute power corrupts completely. Is it not obvious that the military in Nigeria don't give democracy a chance, lest power got to the majority, where it belongs, to the people, not to the gun. Without the pressure from the outside world, without the assistance of America and a ??? community and Japan and the



Scandinavian countries ??? of democracy will not relent in Africa. They must hold onto power, for fear of jail, which is where many of them belong.

As I said, this is where you come in. Your voice matters. Morally we are all duty bound. The planet has now become more village ???. Let's nip the bud early. Prevent flash points before they ignite. My plan is no land is an island. Out of reach of ???. Major issues of the future will hear our effect and influence us more than ever before. There is nowhere to hide. No Amazon forest, no Berlin Walls, no walls of China. Apart from these moral or humanitarian ???, there is a case that during the Cold War when America and NATO and ???...

It is the ??? that suffered. When the two ??? fought the Cold War, it is Africa and the third world countries that suffered. Therefore, the regimes of Africa, the ??? of Somalia, the ??? of Zaire, the ??? of Kenya, Ethiopia, ??? of Liberia...and Sudan, ??? ??? Republic of South Africa. The idea was not necessarily to oppress or damned the African or democracy. The idea was that whoever was not with the Soviet Union was good enough for us. For US. Hence, the west armed and supported the democratic regimes to keep Communism at bay. Even military dictatorships of Nigeria, Namibia, Angola, were acceptable. Most uncharacteristic of American domestic policy. Even as we sit here, arms are busy trucking the globe. Obviously, to support employment and manufacturing industry, but creating a dilemma for administration committed to promotion of democracy and reducing regional conflict. Contradictions live with us.

On the ??? of the west and creating death in Africa there is a greater genuine reason for reparation and for the undoing of these misdeeds done on slave trade. Atlantic

and Arab slave trade during the last millennium, and the west's collusion with, and promotion of dictators in this century have to me, done more harm to Africa and afflicted more damage to the black man's image and self respect, than all events of the previous epochs.

Talking of slavery, I'm never too sure who is more to blame for African slave trades. Is it the white man who promoted, bought, and exploited slavery and slave trade? Is it the Arab who even went further and castrated male slaves? The forbidden fruit with black beauty? Or is it the corpulent African chief who, for military and monetary gains, attacked, captured, and sold his own brother? His own neighbor? Or is it a combination of all these? Where lies maximum guilt? Maximum blame? Apportioning blame hardly ever pays and possibly does more harm than good. However, I should think there is no denying who the major beneficiaries of African slave trade was. That America, United Kingdom, France, South Africa, and a few others benefited most from forced labor, from economic upliftment, from the cultural exchange, and industrial growth of Manchester, Marsaille, Johannesburg, and of course, their military might to this day. To this extent, therefore, and this is a large extent, the ??? of all Africa and the black man are ??? or something in return. Something to ponder about in Black History Month isn't it.

Still, you and I are children of this smaller planet earth because technology dropped us here, near the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. We have landed at station earth. You may not go back. Take an active and positive interest in matters of this colorful continent, in cultures of other people, in other people, in their misfortunes as well as in their pleasure. You will be the richer. The pleasure will be yours. Knowledge never hurts. Only a little knowledge does. I myself took this commuter shuttle to America from a distant galaxy

called Africa. I'll never regret it. We are all in the same space ship. We sail together, or we perish. While America builds super highways of information and technology, Africa roadblocks it's own daughters and sons. While America nudges you forward, Africa tethers you back. One uplifts, the other buries you deep in it's malice and ??? I bring these rather sad and mundane matters up because I believe we have to open up to one another. I'm not the one to hide my head in the sand. In Africa we build a house community, or at least we used to. The same Africa today urgently needs to revamp and ??? it's own house with the help of you and all people of good will. I wish to create neither alarm or ???. Only understanding. Only understanding. And truth is better told. I'm happy we met. God Bless You.

RM: We'll have some questions. I don't know how long you want to go.

MG: No questions. Ask any questions.

RM: Sometimes you hear that the French, above the other former colonial powers, assists their former colonies. Is there any truth in that? That the French are providing military and cultural assistance to their former colonies?

MG: I wouldn't agree with that. I wouldn't call it hogwash either. It's nearly that. France is not stupid. They have an economic interest in Africa, military interests, maybe even cultural now. They have kept a stronger tie with their former colonies, including military because they don't want to leave. Sometimes...if they leave somebody else will

take over. Maybe one of the despots of Africa or maybe another power. But the main reason is economic gain. It's a big market for France to sell their ??? and equipment, their textiles. It's big. It's good business. Why would you want to give that to the United States or Britain? Or to Russia? The ties between France and it's former colonies are so strong, even stronger than the ties that existed between the British colonies and Britain, or Belgium and Zaire because the French did not train Africans. They assimilated French Africans, and those were very few. The population enlightened in French Africa is miniscule compared to the British missionaries and what they did in Africa. The French would have run to ??? to help him when he was in trouble, and yet he is sacrificing his own brother. The same happened in many of the other, particularly west, African French countries. They send soldiers there to protect. Protect what? The same holds that the children of school going age can't go to school. They have beautiful streets. Some places are beautiful. But you go 10 miles into the land and you'd be shocked.

Student: You talked about our moral responsibility in the local village, how can we possibly do something in real life ??? (too quiet)

MH: I don't know. You find your own way of correcting a wrong. But I think it is possible to...for example, I know America is involved in may projects in Kenya. In a lot of Africa. Some are to help people who are starving, others for disease, agricultural programs for good seed and cattle, management, there is also trading of a lot of students, but not as much as there used to be. I do not think you can beat education. I'm not from

a missionary ??? . Let the people land. From writing, whatever it is, it should be increased. We should not be discouraged by the problems in Africa. We should not give up. I know there isn't enough funds going to help the continent. Why don't the Africans help themselves in the first instant? Of course there is that argument. But if we begin with education, we go a long way. We can go further. For example, help to stop erosion of land. To stop ??? of the continent. The first person to do that is the local man who is trained and is aware that there is a problem here. He is ??? and getting less from his heard. He will reduce and grow fatter and bigger cattle than if he is not educated. I cannot overstress education.

Student: ???

MG: No, not at all. Kenya is named after Mt. Kenya. Kenyata means a beaded belt, which Kenyata wore when he was a young man like you. But Kenya is named after the mountain. It's about 17,500 feet. It has snow on top.

Student: ???

MG: Well, they say that people have a government which is like them. The images shown on American television is maybe what the American people want to see. Never mind what the fact is. You can give very nice...as we were discussing yesterday in a class, drummer to some people. It might be better to make it very nasty so as to touch their hearts to get some money. They will donate. But it is a pity that there are not as

many wires, as many journalists from Africa, sending news this way. 90% of all the newspapers and tv and whatnot are western. So there is a bias there. How to write it I do not know. But they have the money. Whoever it is has a camera and a microphone and a dish to send the news, is able to telephone. You hardly get that from African journalists. It's not to say they're not there. There is a bit of dominance. It is a question of power and money. But I think the more we become a small village, the more we begin to see that image portrayed is not always the best. A question that came up in a class the other day, you may complain the image is not very good. But, go one step lower and ask why are these people dying in Sudan? What's the cause? What's the basic, historical, sociological, military, whatever it is, that never seems to come on television. It is a pity. In other words, the media is not very keen on analysis and philosophizing. They just want to splash it up. I don't know how we can improve on that. It's difficult.

Student: ??

MG: What more can I explain? I've been away for 2 months. General elections in 1992, December 29. What happened is there are three ???they were divided this way. This counts as 1.9 votes. Another is called ??? gets 1.1 another got 1.3 I think. Now, these people were forced to this party. Contradictions are democracy. Today, unfortunately, this party tried to buy people from here with money so that the parliament and congress wants to reduce it to 5. There are 15 here and reduce this. So when you come to the next general election you will get 2.3. Good planning. Maybe good politics. But not good for

the country. That's what is going on today at this minute as far as I can read from what I get from friends.

Student: ???

MG: I haven't read very much. In ??? and Zambia, I think there is hope. There is accusation of corruption and bad administration. But everybody has problems. But they are definitely better by far than ???. At least they have different groups that can talk and say now that is wrong. Before that you couldn't do it. You could not say something is wrong to ???. He may have been a good Christian, but that is nonsense. He was the man. One party, one man, one country. That is what he used to say. That was it. Today, ??? has problems because the economy of Zambia also went down the drain. They relied so much on copper that in the end they were not productive in other areas. They were not farming, they were not industrializing. The money was being spent on prestigious things. It didn't help. Now they have to wake up to reality and begin nearly from square one. It is difficult. It's very difficult...once you go down, to bring the people up is very difficult. That is not only there. One or two other places it is going on. In Ghana they have elections that are reasonable. They have to prop the economy. They have to bring it up. They did a lot of borrowing from IMF, from other sources, but there wasn't enough productivity and it is productivity that helps you repay your debts. There are many like that. Productivity will have to be thought of. A lot of this later, they just think about the big car they are driving, forgetting that the wealth of a country is it's resources, it's

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people. Thank you very much. I have copies of the speech if anybody wants a copy.

There are not very many, but I do have a few copies.