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DIRECTOR
OFFICE OF
INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Professor **Uliana F. Gabara**, Director
International Education
University of Richmond
Richmond, VA 23173

Dear Professor Gabara:

The full extent of the benefits of the African seminar will probably not be completely evident for some time. Each day it seems that I see something with greater clarity and understanding when I am reminded of some forgotten or **unremarked** experience in Africa that adds new dimensions to whatever I am experiencing, whether it be a news item, a speech rhythm, or a passage in a book.

The journey back to Africa was a journey that I have always dreamed about and attempted to imagine. In some respects, I had been preparing for it all of my life. In other respects, of course, there could be little preparation for it (despite all of your efficient and practical planning). I am still wrestling with my often ambivalent responses to a number of experiences and will, long after this **letter/report** is written, still be attempting to analyze precisely what my response is to this trip and what it **all meant/means/will** mean to me.

In Africa, I kept reliving previously encountered pages of history and chapters in novels and lines in poems and scenes in plays and conversations with those who had had the African experience. I kept being reminded of African-American and Caribbean music and speech and voices and rhythms and beliefs and rituals and gestures and crafts and arts and so on ad **infinitum--and** viewing them with a new appreciation and awareness. In other words, to put it briefly, this trip fleshed out cultural icons for me, giving fuller meaning and validation to me as a person, to the experiences and history that went into making me, to the material that I attempt to teach. A sense of **tastes, smells, textures, sounds, colors** that had been abstract to me in the literature are now a part of experiences that I have had and can attempt to share with my students. I have tasted the kola nut, sipped the palm wine, stood under the baobad tree, seen the craftsmen at work. It would not be possible to list the ways in which my teaching of almost every Black work that I treat will be touched by this journey. My work on folk narratives, folk beliefs, folk arts and crafts will certainly be enhanced by what I saw and heard and experienced there. There are many issues that frequently occur in my teaching that I had hoped this journey would give me **the** answers to. It didn't. But I do have some new insights into some of those concerns that frequently come up in dealing with Black literature--polygamy, the extended family, the role of women in African society, the feminist movement in Africa, the sense of racial identity and pride, etc., etc.

I can't claim to have developed any authoritative body of knowledge about any area, but I did learn a bit more about a number of subjects that are important to me in my attempts to teach the folklore and literature of the African diaspora and to be generally informed about the culture that produced them: religion, history, politics, economics, social structure, family organization, philosophy, language, arts and crafts, proverbs, music, foods, fashions, etc. I have expanded my awareness of sources to seek further information and even added a few important volumes to my library. I also now know some individuals to whom I can write for specific information and material.

A visit to three nations and glimpses of a few people are hardly adequate to draw any broad conclusions about Africans, but I am happy to have met some Africans and to have observed among some individuals their pride in their history, their delight in their resistance to European colonialism, their strong commitment to their traditions, their determination to restore their nations to their greatness (I also observed Africans who offered opposing views to all of these). Though most present-day Africans may never have visited a slave fort and may never think of what went on there in bygone years, I shall never forget the righteous indignation, the sarcastic wit of one man whose life is dedicated to making sure that the world will never forget the pain and the suffering of those waiting there to be sold into slavery in America or the impact of that slave trade on the continent of Africa. There were countless brief encounters similar to this one that created lasting impressions and made me reflect with Octavia Butler's protagonist in *Kindred*, "These people were my relatives, my ancestors. And this place could be my refuge."

On a very subjective level, my responses to Africa were a mass of contradictions--of joy and sadness, pleasure and anger, comfort and pain, fulfillment and disappointment, delight and disgust, pride and shame. It was at times an emotional roller coaster, made all the more difficult because of the plethora of restraints that constrained me from an unselfconscious expression of my emotions. Might I be perceived by others or by myself as being too American, too Westernized, too assimilated, too alienated, too middle-class, too eager, too inquisitive, too inhibited, too uninhibited, too objective, too subjective, too angry, too frightened, too friendly, too unfriendly, too emotional, too sentimental, too reluctant, too tightfisted, too gullible, too, too, too For a brief moment one day, I closed myself to all those other eyes and ears, and gave myself to Africa. I listened to the voices of Ama Ata and Paule, Kamau and Langston, Wright and Dathorne, and the echoes of the *Sundiata*; and I did not suppress the emotions that opening up to those voices released. I enthusiastically kneeled on the soil and scooped up a handful; I gazed in the distance at Gorée and shed the tears I could not let others see and uttered the execrations I could not let others hear. I ran to my room and grabbed a bottle of wine, uncorked it and standing on my balcony I offered my libation to the ancestors, unknown but not forgotten, and I begged that they would not forget me.

This then is what I think sums up the ultimate meaning of this trip for me: **memory**. Everywhere in Africa **memory** is valued. People are judged on the basis of what they remember and how meaningful that "rememory" is in their lives. Equally as important is the concomitant obligation of testimony, requiring, obviously, Nommo, the power of the word. Almost all the Black folklore and literature that I teach deals ultimately with giving voice to memory and the salvation that comes from the knowledge thereby derived. **As** a result of this trip my testifying/teaching will be more enlightened and inspired and

passionate and energized. After this trip I feel even more strongly the accuracy of Karla Holloway's declaration: "Telling is testimony that recenters the spirits of [people], mythic and ancestral, into places where their passionate articulation assures them that neither geography nor history can separate them from the integrity of the essential Word" (*Moorings & Metaphors*).

I do not wish my report made available to other faculty members. If there is some section of it that you wish to share or cite, I shall be happy to discuss that with you.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Daryl".

Daryl Cumber Dance