

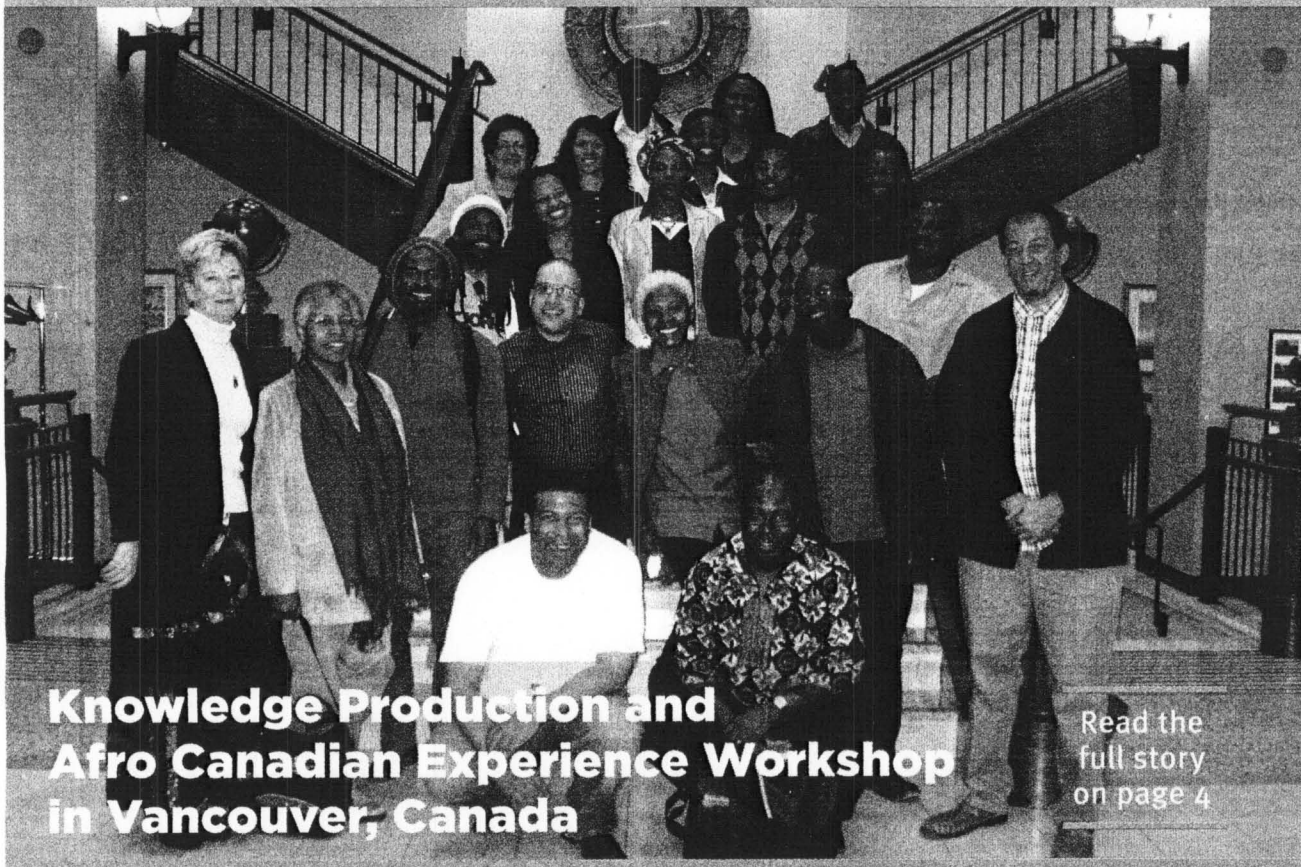
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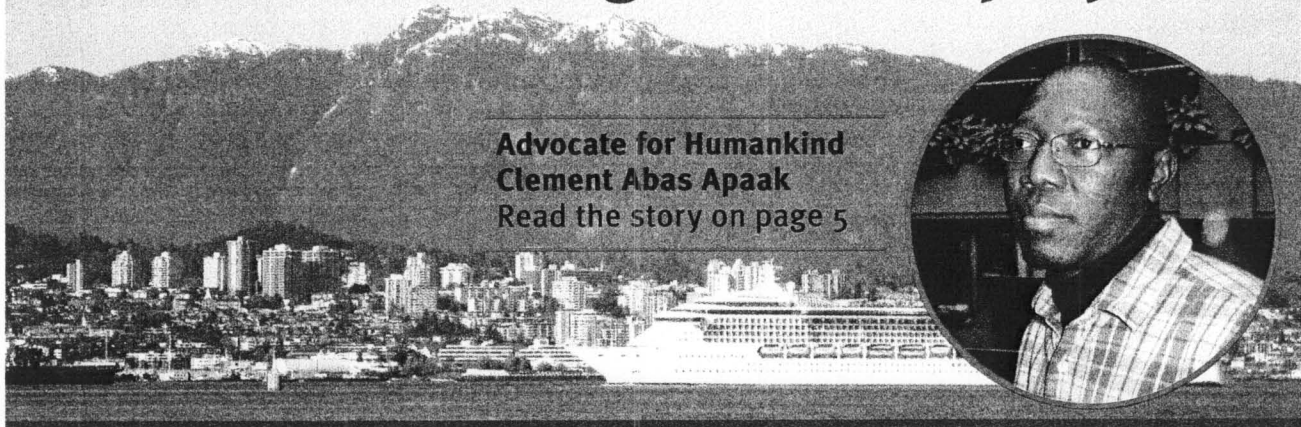
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Knowledge Production and Afro Canadian Experience Workshop in Vancouver, Canada

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Summer is here, go out and play!



**Advocate for Humankind
Clement Abas Apaak
Read the story on page 5**

Knowledge Production and Afro Canadian Experience Workshop in Vancouver, BC Sets the Trend!

By Joy Walcott-Francis, PhD Candidate, Department of Women's Studies, Simon Fraser University, BC
The Afro News Vancouver



Back Row (L to R) Monica Wells Kisura, Ikeyla Lombadisha, Henry Daniel, Afua Cooper, Hakim Adi
Middle Row (L to R) Terry Roswell, Isaac Saney Front Row (L to R) Greg Tourino, David Austin



Dr. Afua Cooper speaks at "Knowledge Production and the Afro Canadian Experience in Canada" 3 day workshop at Simon Fraser University on May 1, 2009

ON THE HEELS of her successful launch of the 'Black Communities in British Columbia, 1858 – 2008' exhibition, Dr. Afua Cooper has yet again caused our hearts to stir with passion and our souls to be fully charged as we press along in an uphill struggle towards greater Black achievement, success and recognition. The culmination of three days of thought-provoking and enriching discussions hosted by Dr. Cooper, brought with it a historic accomplishment; that of the formation of a Black Canadian Studies Association (BCSA).

The three day workshop, Knowledge Production and the Afro Canadian Experience in Canada, called and hosted in Vancouver by Dr. Cooper, the Ruth Wynn Woodward Chair, Department of Women's Studies at the Simon Fraser University, commenced on Friday, May 1, 2009, which fittingly earmarked May Day, a day when people across the globe recognize and celebrate the struggles and achievements of the 'working class' and might I interject here, those of Black people of African descent. The workshop brought together a diverse group of scholars and practitioners, nationally and internationally who work in the area of Black Studies, to engage in critical dialogue about the state of Afro Canadian scholarship.

A recurring theme over the three days emphasized the need for greater collegiality and networking among people in the field. Participants pointed out that an absence of a cohesive body of scholars in the field of Afro Canadian studies does have an impact on where, when and how scholarship in the area can take place. Major challenges in this respect relate to the problem of accessibility of funding opportunities as well as

to the vastness of Canada's landscape which tend to keep Afro Canadian academics geographically segregated. Of note, was that while various universities throughout Canada have over time offered single courses in Black Studies, to-date, there is no program on offer that provides students with a degree in Black Studies.

Presenters raised concerns about the void in the knowledge of African history that is being transmitted, pointing as well to the lack of coherence where knowledge production is



Group Members walk to Hogan Alley Old Black Community Site

concerned. Those present were cautioned that in as far as they move ahead in academic scholarship, they needed to be cognizant and vigilant about the resources that they have the librarians order, how they organized the curricula and the questions generated for discussions. And again the matter of adequate funding came to the fore as participants agreed that the Canadian archives were indeed full of Black history but alas, there were no resources to effectively access them.

What does it mean to be Afro Canadian? While there may be no straight-forward answer to this, participants found it important to stress that our lived experiences do reflect a diversity of cultural traditions and as such scholarship should reflect this ethnic diversity while at the same time examine the ways in which our lives have become embroiled in the Canadian history. Further on the matter of Canadian history, Dr. Cooper stressed the need for us to unearth the historical relationships that have existed between Aboriginal peoples and the Black settlers who came to the shores of Canada. This history, she said, "is an important piece of history and one that needs to be incorporated and written into our history as we seek to fill in the missing pieces... we therefore need to develop on how we are going to deal with it, both politically and theoretically."

Some of the other issues that were raised involved (1) looking at the relationship between academics and the community and how best to engage communities and community historians in the work that academics do; (2)

deconstructing the connection between crime, law enforcement and the African Canadian experience; and (3) the impact of Canadian policies on the lives of not only adult immigrants and refugees but their children as well.

On day three, after much deliberating and brainstorming, the resounding consensus was that the way to go forward was to begin the networking process from among ourselves, hence the formation of the Black Canadian Studies Association (BCSA),

A True Advocate for Humankind

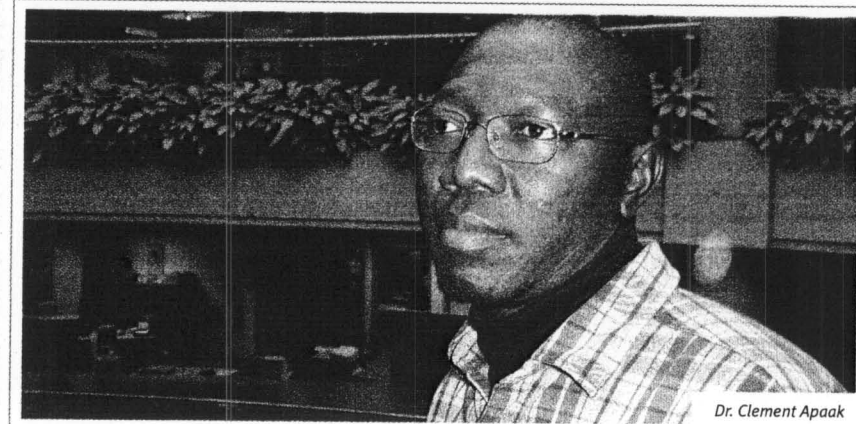
By Alexander Nkrumah, *The Afro News Vancouver*

IN BETWEEN WRITING HIS PHD DISSERTATION, being an archaeology instructor and hosting a show on CJSF 90.1 FM, Clement Abas Apaak managed to get elected as president of the Simon Fraser Student Society in 2005. He has agreed to be Student Convocation Speaker at the upcoming ceremony in June.

"I actually ran my campaign from Ethiopia. I was in Africa on field work and for some reason I chose to run for president." Apaak acknowledged this in a 2006 interview with *The Peak*, an Independent Student Newspaper at Simon Fraser University.

Apaak is one of Simon Fraser University's most recognisable personalities. He was born in the Upper East region of Ghana. His parents were both educators and social workers with tight connections to the church. With a nucleus like that, young Apaak had to fall in line at a very tender age. "My first major responsibility came after my mom realised I had been skipping classes in elementary school. I was immediately given the responsibility of the 'bell boy' (student in charge of calling breaks by ringing a bell)."

After graduating from Nandom Secondary School with flying colors, he enrolled at the University of Ghana in 1992, a time when his native Ghana was in serious political discussion about how to move from a Jerry Rawling PNDC military junta to a constitutional one. He joined the Vandals Fraternity with the Commonwealth Hall at the University of Ghana, a brotherhood that has produced important statesmen and respected civil servants right from its earliest years. As one of the chief vandals, Apaak was constantly paving a peaceful way for students and administrators on issues like student allowances, strikes, tertiary education reforms and so forth. This experience would harness his abilities to engage



Dr. Clement Apaak

people of different sides or opinions to find common grounds for the sake of progress and peace.

After receiving his bachelors degree from the University of Ghana in 1996, he left to continue his studies at the University of Bergen in Norway. He also holds a PhD from SFU. Apaak was the first international student to be elected to a university board in B.C.

He has since won numerous awards, and his immense contribution as a human rights advocate has put him in notable podiums with distinguished personalities like Senator Romeo Dallaire and Jack Layton of the Federal NDP. Apaak has also hosted or spoken at events with Human Rights Advocate and Miss Canada 2003 Nazanin Afshin Jam, as well as Olympic Gold Medalist Daniel Igali.

Apaak founded the Canadian Students for Darfur in 2004 to raise awareness for the bloodshed in

Western Sudan. The organisation has since raised over \$40,000 to bring aid to refugees in the region. His contribution to the Vancouver African community is shown through his role as a regular MC for African community events. He also holds a position as a founding member of the United African Communities of British Columbia, and is the host of African Connection, a show dedicated to African issues on 90.1 FM.

When asked what kind of message he intends to leave with his fellow graduates in the upcoming convocation on June 3, Apaak talks about the power of students to change the world. He expresses interest in creating opportunities for other people.

"Students should use knowledge and skills for progress, in whatever field they find themselves."

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which was felt by all present to be a timely and much welcomed step in the right direction. Dr. Cooper was elected interim Chair and will be assisted by two co-Chairs; Dr. Charmaine Nelson, McGill University, Montreal and Dr. Charles Quist-Adade, Kwantlen Polytechnic University, British Columbia. As its vision, the BCSA aims "to encourage and support research, publication, teaching, and understanding of diverse Black communities in Canada and the Diaspora," while its mission is "to create and sustain a common forum and space to study, research and exchange ideas that advance the interest, study and understanding of Black Canada and the Diaspora".

The workshop however ended on a more somber note, with a tour of Hogan's Alley, a historic Black community in Vancouver, located in Strathcona, between Union and Prior Street, from Main to Jackson Avenue. Known officially as "Park Lane,"

Hogan's Alley was once home to a large concentration of African-Canadian people who were drawn to the area because of its close proximity to the railway and the employment opportunities that came with it. Construction of the Georgia Viaduct in 1972 however destroyed several homes and businesses in Hogan's Alley, which eventually drove residents out. Today, all that is left as remnants of its past is the building of the former first African-American church; "African Methodist Episcopal Fountain Chapel" now sold to new owners.

Nonetheless, the three day workshop was seen as a success by all the participants, who thanked Dr. Cooper for conceptualizing such an event and for her resilience in her efforts at trying to restore and reclaim Afro Canadian history.

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Group Visit to Hogan Alley Old Black Community Site