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## Black Canadian Scholars form Association

Wednesday 13 May 2009

By Our Correspondent, Vancouver.

History was made in Vancouver recently when scholars and community activists of African descent from various parts of Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom formed the Black Canadian Studies Association (BCSA). The formation of the BCSA was the outcome of a three-day workshop held at the Simon Fraser University's Segal School of Business. The association will "encourage and to support research, publication, teaching, and understanding of diverse Black communities in Canada and the Diaspora." In addition, the BCSA aims to create a common forum for scholars and activists from the various Black communities to study, research, and share ideas to advance the interest and understanding of Black Canada and the Diaspora.



Workshop organizer, Dr. Afua Cooper of Simon Fraser University, Vancouver, was elected interim Chair. Dr. Cooper, who is Wynn Woodward Endowed Chair of the Department of Women Studies, will be assisted by two co-chairs, Dr. Charles Quist-Adade of Kwantlen Polytechnic University, Surrey, BC, and Dr. Charmaine Nelson of McGill University in Montreal. The three will coordinate and implement decisions and activities by an interim steering committee until officers are elected. The interim steering committee was constituted from of all participants of the workshop.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Cooper outlined several factors which called for the formation of Black Canadian scholars association. She lamented that while Black Studies has experienced rapid growth during the past decade, the field has failed to garner much needed institutional support in Canada. The consequence, Dr. Cooper observed, is the marginalization of Black Studies in the academy.

The BCSA set itself the following interim objectives: To create an institutional infrastructure of Black Canadian Studies in Canada, to support and facilitate interaction and exchange and networking between scholars, community historians and cultural workers of Black Studies here in Canada and abroad, to provide support for Black Canadian Studies scholars, academics, community historians and culture (and those of African descent regardless of research interests and foci), and to actively encourage and support subsequent generations of scholars, researchers, community historians and cultural workers.



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The rest of the objectives are: to encourage the collection, documentation and preservation of a material culture relevant to the study of Blacks in Canada, to encourage a reassessment and activation of existing material cultural collections (or parts thereof) as relevant to Black Canadian Studies, to foster collective action and to challenge the Eurocentrism of Canadian Studies, and to demonstrate the historical and ongoing relevance of Black populations and experiences in Canada.

The association plans to hold annual meetings, the first of which is tentatively scheduled to be held next year at the University of Alberta.

The workshop, the first in 10 years, saw spirited discussions on the state of affairs of Black Studies. Speaker after speaker stressed the urgent need for a united front to form and sustain a community of scholars and community activists to "produce and share knowledge" as a source of collective and individual empowerment and inspiration. "We must organize and never tire to organize, for organization decides everything," said Dr. Quist-Adade.

After the workshop, several participants expressed a deep sense of accomplishment, optimism, and gratitude to be part of what many described as "an historic moment." Here are excerpts from some of the participants: "I feel honoured to have participated in such a historic event. It was truly inspirational!"-Monica Wells Kisura.

"I feel honoured to be a witness to history in the making; the beginning of what will be a great contribution of African descended peoples to the development and creating of our great Canada."-Moussa Magassa, Human Rights Education Advisor, University of Victoria.

"It has been a privilege to be in attendance at the inaugural meeting of the BCSA. It is my hope that the BCSA will have a positive impact on Blacks studies for a long time to come."- Adrienne Shadd.

"It was an honor to attend the workshop and founding meeting of the Black Canadian Studies Association."-Greg Tourino- SFU

"An amazing sense of community and scholarship."-Jennifer Kelly, University of Alberta.

"It has been a great honour to participate." Hakim Adi, UK

"I am taking with me a rich experience, a sense of empowerment and a renewed collective spirit." Terry Roswell

"I am enriched in meeting and exchanging ideas with other people in the study of African Canadians- Tamari Kitossa.

"Organization, it has been said, decides everything. The formation of the BCSA is a testimony to this fact. I am glad to have been part of this unfolding story." Charles Quist-Adade.

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