

# PSU professor compares Blacks, Africans

By Nathaniel Scott

Portland State University's Black Studies program has a number of professors and assistant professors who are specialists in their fields. Assistant professor Malaku Lakew is one such person.

Lakew was born in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in 1945. After completing high school, he came to America on an Ethiopian scholarship and began his studies in pursuit of a doctorate in economics at the University of California at Riverside. He has a master's degree in economics and is writing his thesis for his Ph.D. His area of teaching at PSU is economic relationship of the African and the Afro-American. Married and the father of one child, he is concerned about the plight of the African and the Afro-American. In this interview, the *Observer* posed a number of questions to him, relating to the Afro-Americans and the African Black.

*Observer: What are your observations of the economic status of the Blacks in Portland?*

*Lakew:* I am a new arrival to Portland, Oregon and I haven't studied the Black economic situation specifically, but generally speaking, what applies in another state might reflect here in Portland as well. The Black economic situation is always subservient to that of the economic performance of the nation. To put it clearly, the Blacks are always the first to be fired and the last to be hired. They are also at the lower rung on the ladder of income groups within the nation.

*Observer: Compare and contrast the Afro-American and the African Black.*

*Lakew:* A comparison between the Afro-American and the African Black is essential, because the Blacks in Africa seem to have what we call constitutional independence. Yet their dependant relationship with that of the advanced countries, puts them in a similar position as that of Blacks here in America. The Black people in America have always been subjected to white economic dominance and their community has physically depended on the economic performance, or the business man's decision to invest in the community and create jobs. The same thing applies to the Blacks in Africa. The Blacks have yet not established an economic base that would make them self-sufficient.

Therefore, they are dependent on what we call a multi-national cooperation, who come with the finances and invest in the most profitable areas, disregarding the interest of the population of the area. Disregarding the general interest of the Black people in Africa and as a consequence, the multi-national cooperation will get the most profit at the expense of the Black country. Basically the situation is the same.

*Compare and contrast the educational system of the two.*

*Lakew:* Comparison of the two educational systems is very hard to make. But to give a general remark, I would like to start with the education that is provided in Africa in a general format, compared to the education here in the Black community.

In Africa the education seems to be much more profound. The educational system is meant to produce well rounded students that can understand what they learn more substantially. In America my observations are that much of the education is mass production. Student learning is not well established or what is required of them. The student who finishes high school in Africa is equivalent to the student who finishes a junior college in America; as for as their capacity for thinking and their capacity for creative advancement are concerned.

*Observer: What necessary changes are needed in the community and the educational system?*

*Lakew:* My area is economic, but I don't see economics divorced from the other disciplines. Every discipline seems to be related to one another. First we have to see the community by-and-large.

What does the community lack? What composition of people live in the community? Would they be able to get the necessary requirements for making the education effective for their off-spring? And further more, we have to ask the question, can the Black community be self-sufficient by itself? We have to create our own identity. We have to be creative enough to be imitated, rather than imitating someone else. The community has to take the quality of education in its hands, rather than leaving it in the hands of someone else. In general these types questions need to be raised, if we have to tackle the problem of education here in the Black communities of America.



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Benjamin Montgomery, a Black slave owned by Jefferson Davis, invented a boat propeller before the Civil War.



Ed Hopper (right), Vice President of Liberty Cable Television, accepts the 1980 Employer of the Year award from Jim Shields (left), Chairman of the Governor's Steering Committee on the Handicapped.

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