

Occasionally Cheyenne welcomes visitors from Laramie who are UWYO faculty, members of its student body, or visiting scholars. These encounters bring moments of learning that change how we view our world.

Such was the case at the April 20 Africa MAAFA Remembrance Day at LCCC, sponsored by the college's History Department and organized by SANKOFA African Heritage Awareness. What was remembered that day was the scattering of displaced and enslaved Africans.

The event included ceremony, choral singing, dancing, drumming, and educational talks. A film documented the discovery of a forgotten "Negro Cemetery" in New York City, at a site lately chosen for a government building. The cemetery held the remains of enslaved ancestors of some present-day New Yorkers, and the descendants worked hard to see that those remains be accorded an honorable place in their city.

Lawrence Jackson is Professor of Dance at the University of Wyoming, where he teaches all levels of contemporary, jazz, repertory, partnering, and composition. At MAAFA he danced to "Motherless Child," a spiritual that dates back to slavery days, when it was common practice to sell children of slaves away from their parents. Mr. Jackson movingly expressed the feelings of "a motherless child a long, long way from home": The despair and hopelessness of a youngster torn from its parents. The song, originally recorded by Paul Robeson, has enjoyed distinguished attention.

Another dance presentation, choreographed by Mr. Jackson, used a later version of the 1939 Billie Holliday song "Strange Fruit." The song focuses on that most despicable aspect of racism, the lynching of African Americans. These lynchings occurred chiefly in the South, but happened in other regions of the United States as well. Three female dancers expertly expressed in movement what the song renders in musical fits of cries and sobs.

Also performing: members of the Wyoming African Students Association (WASA), an organization of about 75 individuals who strive to promote African culture and diversity. The group visits schools where it offers informational sessions of drumming and cultural shows about members' countries of origin. At the MAAFA event, members presented drum sessions as well as a humorous skit that brought comic relief.

WASA members hail from all over Africa, with most coming from West Africa, says Glen Ajeck Fru Kwende, its president "We have many Kenyan, Nigerian, and Cameroonian residents in Laramie, with an ever-growing Ivorian and Congolese population."

Glen is from Cameroon in West Central Africa. He has two sisters, one of whom also studies at UWYO.

"My parents make a lot of sacrifices to pay international fees for two children," he says. "It's a huge financial burden."

Glen hopes to pursue a PhD here when finished with undergraduate studies. "I have grown to love Laramie and Wyoming as a whole," he says. "The people are just so welcoming and

awesome.”

Another recent visitor to Cheyenne, Kalule John Bosco, is a lecturer at Makerere University in Uganda. He came to Laramie as a visiting scholar to study and share information about brucellosis. Having lost both parents at a very early age, “My five siblings and I found it very hard to go to school,” he says. Thankfully, a Christian family at a Presbyterian church in Seattle, Washington, helped through an orphanage mission in Uganda.

The couple paid for his schooling and upkeep. He graduated with a bachelor’s of veterinary medicine in 2005 and a master’s of medicine in microbiology in 2010.

The scholars left Wyoming before the MAAFA event, but Bosco and several African colleagues attended the Cheyenne Symphony performance of Handel’s Messiah. His Ugandan colleague Boma Paul went to a Rodger McDaniel “Bibles and Beer” session.

They describe Uganda as a small country in the eastern part of Africa with a population of 34 million. Its economy is mainly agriculture: ninety percent of its people live in rural areas. Malaria and AIDS are major health concerns, contributing to large economic losses. Malaria affects over 98% of the population, causing headaches, joint pain, fever, and malaise.

Uganda has about 30 million livestock and a high and variable wildlife.

“The human-domestic-wildlife interface is fluid. Transmission of diseases like brucellosis is common,” says Bosco, explaining that brucellosis symptoms are often mistaken for those of malaria. They can be differentiated only through laboratory tests. Lacking a laboratory network, physicians often treat on the basis of clinical signs for malaria.

His colleague Boma Paul, whose qualifications are similar to Bosco’s, states that his duties at home are to identify and characterize disease-causing organisms. His region comprises “Karamoja and Teso, a total of 16 districts within Uganda.” Another duty is to “determine the epidemiological factors associated with the diseases identified, and establish control measures.”

Both say they are thankful for the research and training opportunity at UWYO, “with many lessons learned in the epidemiology and diagnostics of brucellosis.”

We in Wyoming’s capital might be just as grateful for the lessons learned in our town through their visits. We tend to forget that our state, too, has its diversity. It’s good to note the information anew.

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