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# Clear-Eyed: African Immersion

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## Clear-eyed

Recent events including the World Cup in South Africa have done much to redeem Africa's global image. Early European visitors wrote about the beauty of the landscape, vegetation, rivers, lakes and mountains, but labeled the inhabitants "natives" and "sub-human." For too long, the continent was dismissed as an "exotic" place inhabited by "primitive" people considered misfits in the modern world, and as a result, some of the most vicious racial epithets have been detonated against them. UD's immersion experience educates our students and reverses these stereotypes by charging them to discover for themselves firsthand the African people.

Begun more than a decade ago, UD's immersion experience in Cameroon, as well as programs elsewhere in the world, adds practical and international perspective to the students' education. During the month that participants live with Cameroonian host families, they visit villages and urban centers, travel to industrial sites, and engage in service projects. Participants also meet with the U.S. ambassador and other American officials and leaders of major

educational institutions. In their most recent visit, the in-country Peace Corps director in Yaoundé, LaHoma Smith Romocki, urged participants to challenge themselves and "make good of this remarkable opportunity."

Cameroon is "an amazing place," she said. Then she added, "You must resist the temptation to examine this society through the lens of the United States."

Returned immersion participants sound a similar tone. During visits to sites such as the SONARA Oil Refinery, the Rubber Processing Factory and the Brasserie Du Cameroun, UD students saw engineers, office assistants, physicians, teachers, accountants, managers and other talented professionals. An intellectual exchange at the International Relations Institute of Cameroon challenged participants to broaden their understanding of global issues. At Seme Beach, students swam alongside Cameroonians. At a local nightclub, participants danced to Makossa, Bitkusi and rap music by artists such as Lady Ponce, P-Square, Justin Timberlake and Usher. At the Mars Restaurant in Limbe, UD students and Africans watched

Ghana defeat the U.S. soccer team, knocking it out of the World Cup.

And so it went. These are ordinary things done by ordinary people, and they thereby challenge widely held beliefs that the African people are somehow different. "People here are just like in the United States," one immersion participant said.

The UD immersion experience is about human understanding. In Cameroon, UD students learned social responsibility, diversity, respect for elders, tolerance of difference and community consciousness. As a result they are better able to understand the human capacity to endure, hope and dream.

In a world that has become increasingly cynical, violent and self-centered, immersion experiences can help us to more fully understand the interconnectedness and interrelated structure of the human family. For immersion participants and their advocates, perceptions of Africa and its people are altered forever.

—Julius Amin

*Amin is chair of the department of history at the University of Dayton.*

## Godfather

Alfred Kleine-Kreutzmann and I both came to the University of Dayton in 1967 to teach English. Our first year here we shared an office (with six other young faculty members). The University had expanded rapidly; it had 7,500 full-time undergraduates. Six years later, it had 5,000; the English department was only two-thirds the size it had been; and Alfred and I were pursuing new careers.

But those six years were a heady time, both turbulent and exhilarating. Alfred and I shared, besides an office, a dedication to quality and excellence in education — and a love of good food and drink. During those years, my two older children were born and Alfred became godfather to my son Mike.

Though born in Germany, Alfred spoke English with a touch of a British accent. I didn't know why; I didn't ask. The accent seemed appropriate given his love of English literature and of operettas of all sorts. And it added a grand touch to the most memorable pedagogical statement I ever heard. One day as we were diligently grading papers, he — overwhelmed by a mass of themes not-so-fine — threw up his

arms and exclaimed, "Everybody should have at least one native language."

Occasionally, a few of us (depending on the semester — Larry Ruff, Alex Cameron, Jim Farrelly, Alfred and I) happened upon a day without afternoon classes. We took that opportunity to adjourn to a local establishment such as the Park Row for lunch. Compared to the professoriate today, we were all relatively young; but I was the youngest and proud to be just part of a group, even if my contribution to the elevated conversation was merely to listen.

We also enjoyed dining with Alfred at many fine restaurants, in Dayton and Cincinnati. And my family and I traveled to his parents' Cincinnati home, where we ate our first roast goose and the finest red cabbage we have ever had.

Over the decades, his parents died, most of those fine restaurants closed and we moved on to our separate lives. I didn't move far, staying at UD to work in communication. Alfred returned to Cincinnati to work at the public li-

brary. He offered the opinion that he was qualified to be the head fiction librarian "since I've read all the books in the collection." Nevertheless in a fit of practicality he went off to library school and got a degree. Both credentialed and knowledgeable, he became the Cincinnati Public Library's curator of rare books.

As we pursued separate lives, Alfred sent his godson birthday cards. As Mike settled down in his career and began doing the things that settled down people do, like send Christmas cards, he sent Alfred cards. I saw Alfred little, the last time a few years ago. The occasion I forget. A memorial service perhaps. We had dinner at the Hickory Bar-B-Que on Brown Street, not the fanciest restaurant, but a surviving, thriving, enjoyable one.

Since then my wife and I have said several times, "We should get down to Cincinnati sometime to see Alfred." One day Mike called, and I heard Suzanne say, in response to something inaudible to me, "We had been meaning

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