

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

www.BlackCommentator.com

Contents of Issue

[Click here](#)

September 24 , 2009 - Issue 343

[Home](#)

**In Praise of
Eduardo Galeano's Mirrors:
Stories of Almost Everyone
Represent Our Resistance
By Dr. Lenore J. Daniels, PhD
BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board**

Click on the back button of your browser to return to non printer friendly page of this article

[Click here](#) to get helpful hints for viewing and printing this printer friendly plain text page

Life is a message – listen to it. Life is a belief – trust it. Life is a gift – accept it. Life is love – think about it. Life is an adventure – dare it.

-Northern Sotho proverb from South Africa

The Great Spirit is in all things; he is in the air we breathe. The Great Spirit is our Father, but the Earth is our Mother. She nourishes us; that which we put into the ground she returns to us.

-Big Thunder - Algonquin

Last spring, at the Summit of the Americas in Trinidad, Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez's gift to U.S. President Barrack Obama is a copy of Eduardo Galeano's book, [*Open Veins of Latin America*](#), (*Las Venas Abiertas de America Latina*). *The Guardian*, April 189, 2009, reported the incident:

A classic work in left-wing circles, Galeano's book analyses five centuries of

unequal relations with Europe and the US. It contends that Latin America has been abused as industrialized nations plundered its natural resources, ranging from gold and silver to cocoa and cotton.

"A classic work in left-wing circles" that *contends* "Latin America has been abused..."

Chevez, the rogue-state president, offers this author's book to President Obama as a gift, so Galeano must be a rogue author - at best, a left-winger, with, therefore an absurd contention. Latin American has been "abused" by Europe and the U.S.!

The military coup in Honduras is a left-wing conspiracy, too! What coup? What abuse? If you believe Europe and the U.S. "abused" Latin American and that the Honduras is experiencing a "military coup," then you must adhere to the perception of those advocates in left-wing circles.

Twenty five percent of the world's population with racial privilege and capital gained by *plundering* the majority of the world's people, suggests to the world that Galeano's voice, his work offers, at best, a *slanted* history and a *perspective* of the world in opposition to the norm.

What is the norm? The norm is an acceptance of *universal* history in which is recorded human progress: Europe brought civilization to the savages.

Columbus knows best. He, the *human* among the savages, recorded the great encounter between civilization and savagery:

"I was very attentive to them [the natives of San Salvador], and strove to learn if they had any gold. Seeing some of them with little bits of metal hanging at their noses, I gathered from them by signs that by going southward or steering round the island in that direction, there would be found a king who possessed great cups of gold, and in large quantities." For "of gold is treasure made, and with it he who has it does as he wills in the world and it even sends souls to Paradise." (*Open Veins*)

The great *discoverer* of the Americas "gave the natives 'some red caps and strings of beads, and many other trifles of small value.'" But most important, Columbus brought history to the savages, and the *universal* voice of *history*, speaks of the long and laborious process of civilization! "Abuse" is not a feature of the universal history of civilization and abuse is not the half of it nor is abuse - the violence and exploitation of humanity against humanity and Mother Earth - the whole story.

What if we start again, and at the beginning, Galeano asks, what will we find?

Life!

Humans existed and humans recorded their encounter with Life - and it was good:

Life was alone, no name, no memory. It had hands, but no one to touch. It had a tongue, but no one to talk to. Life was one, and one was none.

Then desire drew his bow. The arrow of desire split life down the middle, and life was two.

When they caught sight of each other, they laughed. When they touched each other, they laughed again.

So begins Galeano's telling of history in [*Mirrors: Stories of Almost Everyone*](#), (*Espejos: Una Historia Casi Universal*).

Mirrors begins with this gem of an image: Life, alone, desiring substance in the form of humanity. Life splits "down the middle": A man and a woman, emerge, both symmetrical in behavior - recognizing, touching, laughing - desiring the possibility of more Life.

Life desired harmony among humanity.

At one time, Life nurtured indigenous peoples. Life shared its wisdom among the indigenous peoples.

The world's first peoples and its first civilization believed in Life and the continuum of Life in its various forms. They valued Life so much that the *living* conferred with Life past and future. Galeano tells us that our Grandparents (in Africa) recognized their ancestors in the spirits that lived in the tree beside their homes or in the cow grazing in the field.

The great-grandfather of your great-great-grandfather is now that stream snaking down the mountainside. Your ancestor could also be any spirit that decides to accompany you on your voyage through the world, even if he or she was never a relative or an acquaintance.

The family has no borders, explains Soboufu Some of the Dagara people: 'Our children have many mothers and many fathers. As many as they wish.'

And the ancestral spirits, the ones that help you make your way, are the many grandparents that each of you has. As many as you wish.

Life is abundance.

Of the 600 vignettes in *Mirrors*, the story of Life begins the journey through unions of legalities and enforced hierarchical divisions. In "Origins of Beauty," Galeano thinks: maybe the *mystery* of the caves' beautifully painted walls and ceilings were not the work of a "wild beast with his bare hands," but maybe it was a *she* - a *she*!

The "beautifully painted walls and ceilings," Galeano suggests, reflects the upside down world in which we are asked to recall that the social ordering of humanity marginalized Life itself!

And the journey to stifle Life did not end there, Galeano notes.

People "discovered the words 'yours' and 'mine,' [and] land became owned, and women became the property of men and fathers the owners of children," Galeano writes in "Brief History of Civilization." Gold stifled the life of conquerors and their benefactors, the civilizers. The civilizers traded away Africa, the birthplace of humanity, for "30 pieces of gold." Columbus is the hero who put his eyes on gold and laughed!

The right to explore the possibilities of Life stifles freedom. Freedom is the worship of Death, and the worship of Death makes sacred greed. It is profit at all cost. Profit is Life! The culture of greed, Galeano shows, determines human relations.

Humanitarian missions from Europe brought civilization to savages and barbarians, and it did so by imposing a regiment of discipline and punishment to produce docile bodies for work in the mines and fields of their native lands. Civilization made us forget. It has made us forsake Life for living dead in the world of "mine" and "yours."

Subversive? "Left-wing" history?

"Commonplace," writes Mark Kingwell, professor of Philosophy opining in *The Globe and Mail*. In "The Commonplace Is Not Profound," Kingwell writes that "Eduardo Galeano tells us the 'truth' in his short stories, except that doesn't make the effort of reading the book worthwhile." I take it that Professor Kingwell means he knows the facts. He is knowledgeable about *history*, and he is not in need of another re-telling, particularly from someone from Uruguay. Professor Kingwell has properly learned his history from the source of history - European and U.S. trained/degreed historians.

What can Galeano, poetic vignettes tell him about Columbus, of Spain, of Isabella? Kingwell knows of the Inquisition, the forced exodus of Jewish people, the Christian crusades against Islam, the exploitation of China and India, and, of course, he knows of Africa - the theft of its people, resources. He knows of the shipping of human beings west from Africa and the shipping of the Indigenous peoples of the Americas resources east to European nations for the elevation of the ruling and middle classes. All "commonplace" accounting of human atrocities!

In the name of *the* God, *civilization* hurled flags on foot, atop horses, above on bombers, on sea on ships. Ignorance and fear, conquest and brute force, witch hunts, communist hunts, terrorist hunts, capitalism, the Maafa, the Inquisition, the Holocaust, the genocide of Indians, Armenians, Rwandans, the Nakba, the wars to end all wars proclaims civilization and strips from the Earth's people freedom and justice.

In the West, monuments of heroes remind a certain population of their invisibility. But the monuments that glorify the executioners really glorify fear. Galeano writes in "The Torturer's Confession," "in the torture chamber the powerful do drop their masks. By torturing, they confess that fear is their daily bread." "Today's cities are immense jails holding prisoners of fear, where fortresses masquerade as homes and armor as clothing" ("The Devil is Poor").

Commonplace?

How sad.

And yet it is the tragedy of this profound commonplace acceptance of violence which is a rejection of Life that is reflected in Galeano's *Mirrors*. Recognize, Galeano says, the *sacredness* of the civilizing process as *the* God *humans* placed before us. The gift of Life on Mother Earth gives us each other - men and women - equality, abundance, possibilities. Sadly, those in control mistakenly interpret the resources for living on Mother Earth as the gift to the exclusion of humans, and their interpretation of this mistake becomes *the* history that becomes fact, commonplace.

The rulers played god and re-structured Life in their own image!

In "Euroeverything," Galeano writes: "Europe looked in the mirror and saw the world. Beyond that lay nothing." If something appeared beyond its borders, the Europeans recorded the anomaly: Out there, "monsters swarmed, the sea bellowed, and the earth burned" (from "Bestiary"). "A few travelers had been able to overcome their fear. Upon their return, they told their stories."

These stories, read *lies*, Galeano asserts, became the substance of history.

Sitting Bull knew this. Asked to give a speech in favor of the Northern Pacific Railroad, he ended the speech and looked at the audience. He said: "I hate all white people. You are thieves and liars." Galeano writes that the interpreters translated: "We give thanks to civilization." And Sitting Bulls' audience applauded. The representation of the rebel, Jesus, is devoid of laughter in mythical representations of him. Jesus, who rejected the socially-engineered hierarchies, the destructive economical exchange of gold for "trifles of small value," the overwhelming oppression of the poor, is made a central figure of a "pagan festival, which celebrated with hilarity the resurrection of spring."

In the modern era of civilization, we are subject to laughing lies that mock the struggle to stand for Life. After the slaughter of thousands of Iraqis, mostly women and children, after activists for Life stood up and said no to war - Bush confessed that "the weapons of mass destruction never existed." But says Galeano, "the most lethal weapons ever devised' were his own speeches."

"In my childhood, my mother used to tell me that a lie has no feet. She was misinformed."

But there is nothing profound in Galeano's *Mirrors: Stories of Almost Everyone*, writes Kingwell. *He* has no time for the "commonplace," and he finds it difficult to know to whom the author "imagines as the audience for his actual book."

Mirrors is for anyone willing to confront human atrocities as the criminal process of civilization. Did the "tall doorway without a door...an empty frame...[on which is] poised...the deadly blade" - did this image represent democracy? No, of course not, Professor Kingwell would say. But are not the torture chambers, the tourniquets, the sacrifices of humanity in the name of *God* or for gold - or the golden liquid, oil, now - a continuation of the practice that imprisons, literally or figuratively, Red, Black, Brown, and Yellow people now? What of the poor and the working class? Are they treated better now in our modern civilized era of corporatization? *Mirrors* is for everyone to read and to see themselves as they live in contorted forms on Mother Earth. As a product of Life's desire for substance, everyone's story of human possibility is here.

In *Mirrors*, Galeano begins again and again, to record the story of Life, always present, struggling, sometimes sadly, sometimes tragically overwhelmed, but always returning again and again. In the face of the destructive forces, Life still shows us possibilities, Galeano records, if we only remember a Life we have yet to see, and have yet to imagine. Look to the conquered people, to their collective spirits, to their building in memory of monuments of resistance. There you will see Hatsheput, daughter of the Sun and Falconer, Abu Ali al-Ma'arri writing his poetry, Boukman free of the flames, Queen Asantewaa upon the sacred throne, Crazyhorse saying No to the selling of the

land, Zapata on his white horse, Lumumba speaking against the "empire of silence,"
Che riding Rocinante.

In *Mirrors: Stories of Almost Everyone*, words build monuments to blues of Betsy and Billie as well as to Kafka, to Nijinsky, to Django Reinhardt, to Louis Armstrong. It builds monuments to the Tango and to the Samba and to the West African sculptors who "always sung while they worked" so the music inside the carvings "keeps on singing." Living, breathing monuments built of sweat and blood show Life as a sacred possibility.

There is Hope if we remember and employ the ancestors as our guides. For, then we, too, acquire the poetic vision to see a time when Life was no longer alone, without a name, without memory.

The ancestors are our guides. Recognize them. Touch them. Laugh, once again, with them and remember:

We are puny humans:

exterminators of everything,

hunters of our own,

creators of the atom bomb, the hydrogen bomb, and the neutron bomb,
which is the healthiest of all bombs since it vaporizes people and leaves
objects intact,

we, the only animals who invent machines,

the only ones who live at the service of the machines they invent,

the only ones who devour their own home,

the only ones who poison the water they drink and the earth that feeds them,

the only ones capable of renting or selling themselves, or renting or selling
their fellow humans,

the only ones who kill for fun,

the only ones who torture,

the only runs who rape,

And also

the only ones who laugh,

the only ones who daydream,

the ones who make silk from the spit of a worm,

the ones who find beauty in rubbish,

the ones who discover colors beyond the rainbow,
the ones who furnish the voices of the world with new music,
and who create words so that
neither reality nor memory will be mute.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member, Lenore Jean Daniels, PhD, has been a writer, for over thirty years of commentary, resistance criticism and cultural theory, and short stories with a Marxist sensibility to the impact of cultural narrative violence and its antithesis, resistance narratives. With entrenched dedication to justice and equality, she has served as a coordinator of student and community resistance projects that encourage the Black Feminist idea of an equalitarian community and facilitator of student-teacher communities behind the walls of academia for the last twenty years. Dr. Daniels holds a PhD in Modern American Literatures, with a specialty in Cultural Theory (race, gender, class narratives) from Loyola University, Chicago. Click [here](#) to contact Dr. Daniels.



[Contents of Issue](#)
[Click here](#)

[Home](#)

Click Here To
CONTRIBUTE TO **bc** NOW

Click Here To
CONTACT **bc**

Your comments are always welcome.

e-Mail re-print notice

If you send us an e-Mail message we may publish all or part of it, unless you tell us it is not for publication. You may also request that we withhold your name.

Thank you very much for your readership.

Website Design and Hosting provided by



Copyright © 2002-2009
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved