

THE IMPORTANCE OF *PRIMARY RESEARCH*

By Prof. Manu Ampim

INFORMATION VIRUSES

The emergence of the internet in the 1990s has provided many people with unlimited access to the public and the opportunity to spread information, both true and false. However, most of the information on the internet is unreliable and false, and this is why most university professors do not allow their students to use the net for research projects. On the other hand, the average person in the public uses the internet without any training on how to evaluate the quality and accuracy of sources, and thus they often use the bogus information they find on various websites, or they forward some of the numerous internet hoaxes that are sent to their emails. Almost all internet users are aware of computer viruses that destroy computer systems, but they are far less cautious of the *information viruses* that destroy a person's credibility. An *information virus* is false information that is shared as a "Did you know?" email, which usually comes from a trusted friend or family member. These scam emails include false promises of money from Bill Gates by simply forwarding the email message to 10 people; a fake poem by Maya Angelou condemning various racists; a fake interview by Serena Williams denigrating Black men; a fake speech by Camille Cosby on the end of voting rights for African Americans; and a fake speech by "Willie Lynch" claiming to have a "fool-proof method" of controlling Black slaves. [See: www.TruthorFiction.com]

Many people indicate that they forward these bogus "Did you know?" emails, because they are not sure if the information is true or not, and they would rather pass it along in case the email information is actually true. These *information viruses* are so widespread that it is impossible to calculate the amount of collective time and energy spent by Black people on sending and reading these messages. However, people who often send out these email messages are probably not aware that many people on their e-list simply press the 'delete' button when they receive their messages, because they know that it is probably another bogus *information virus* being sent out by the person.

BEYOND THE INTERNET

The 21st century has become the Information Age, as we are constantly bombarded with more information than we can reasonably retain, so we have to constantly filter through this data to distinguish fact from fiction. On a daily basis, we have to filter through books, magazines, radio, TV, personal conversations, billboards, emails, letters, etc. Without a reliable filtering and evaluation process it is unlikely that people are able to determine the accuracy of information they receive. This is where learning the tools and techniques of primary research methodology come in. Training in *primary (first-hand) research techniques* is one of the most important skill sets that a person can learn in the Information Age, otherwise a person is doomed to believing in superstition and the widespread false information that is often promoted.

Primary Research is the greatest weapon against the distortion of African culture and history. Cheikh Anta Diop, Chancellor Williams and many others used *primary research* to correct the record on African

civilizations. One of the most important needs is for Black people to develop critical thinking skills and the ability to effectively evaluate information. The prevalence of internet hoaxes and Africentric books with bogus information on African civilizations clearly indicate that a large number of Black people have not been trained to locate and evaluate first-hand documentation. Most people have not been trained to distinguish *first-hand information* from secondary and tertiary levels of information. Unfortunately, they generally assume that a source is reliable as long as it is “true” to them. However, this is not a reliable way to evaluate the quality of information. The basic question that must always be asked is, “How do you know?” To answer this question requires that we get to the actual source(s) being used. A *source* is the authentic origin of the information, and first-hand research is when we go directly to the source because it is the most accurate form of information. It is well known that the further information gets away from the original source the more inaccurate it becomes.

PRIMARY RESEARCH TRAINING

Personal training in research methods is a fundamental skill set that more people should embrace, and this type of course I have designed to:

- Train you in the highest level of investigation: *primary research*;
- Assist you in answering your own questions about the world;
- Teach you how to evaluate the quality and value of information about any historical subject;
- Guide you through skill and capacity building exercises;
- Empower you while engaging in critical dialogue about historical or contemporary matters; and
- Give you the analytical tools to distinguish between email rumors and facts.

Once more adults have learned these type of skills, then they will be able to teach and train youth in first-hand research techniques. I start training in *primary research methods* at the 6th grade level (11-12 years), and there are elders in their 70s who are also learning these techniques. They all understand the difference between fact and fiction, and the real from the unreal. *Primary research methodology* training and critical thinking skills should be incorporated in all educational programs for Black youth, but to accomplish this task the adults must also be trained because as the African proverb instructs, “one who learns teaches.”

Lastly, for the past 19 years I have been learning and utilizing *primary research methods*, and more recently I have been training people in this methodology. Not only is *primary research* a weapon against distorting African history and culture, but I maintain that there should be a law against the spread of ignorance!

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