

CAROLYN COOPER I'm a 'bald head Rasta'

She is rootsy, highly likeable, Afrocentric and feminist. But did you know that Dr. Carolyn Cooper, University of the West Indies (UWI), Mona, Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies, was once an active youth leader and organizer in the Seventh-Day Adventist Church?

She does not attend church much these days, but remains appreciative of the moulding at the North Street Seventh-Day Adventist Church, central Kingston, during the formative years of her life.

"I believe that the Seventh-Day Adventist Church is entirely responsible for my radicalism. Everybody was going to church on Sundays. I was going to church on Saturdays... So deviance from convention was valorised. It was seen as something positive that you had the courage to do what you felt was right - and not go with the masses. I celebrate that upbringing for the kind of questioning spirit that I have had from I was a child."

Born in Kingston in 1950, Carolyn was one of three children born to George and Modesto Cooper. Her mom, who died in the 1970s, was a teacher at the Rollington Town Primary School, while her father was a tailor. Her dad, now 86, was an elder in the church, while her mother was

involved in the benevolence ministry.

Gleaner: So when yuh bruk out?

Cooper: I don't think I bruk out, you know. As I always tell my father when he is trying to win me back to the fold, 'The Bible says train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he shall not

example 'Love God and love your neighbour as yourself'."

As a graduate student in Toronto, she attended an SDA church there which mainly comprised West Indians. "I used to ask questions and get into trouble. There were people at the church who did not want to call themselves black.

They said they were coloured.

Black was seen as

are happy with the church as it is - leave the people with dem church. It is simple for you to leave than to be there constantly trying to reform them.

"I remember once the assistant pastor in the Toronto church saying to me something like: 'As people see you on the platform, your very presence becomes upsetting. You don't even have to open your mouth. They know that it is trouble.'

Gleaner: What is there about slackness and the erotic in Jamaican popular music that church people need to learn about?

Cooper: Well I am not going to tell church people what they need to learn about. But what I have been arguing is that some of this celebration of sexuality that people call slackness is part of the divine. It is part of the creativity that got us here in the first place. Maybe it is something we need to value. Some of what is happening in the popular culture is really an expression of a kind of spirituality that we don't often recognise as spiritual. Maybe because it manifests itself in the body - the separation between spirit and body that is made in some Western cultures may not be as valid in other societies including Jamaica. One person's joyful noise is another person's slackness."



Dr. Carolyn Cooper, Professor of Literary and Cultural Studies, in the Department of Literatures in English at the UWI, Mona. - Contributed

depart.' I say it is either I was not properly trained, or I am not old, or I haven't departed. I prefer to believe I haven't departed because some of the basic values stay with you - for

You were 'in Black Power' if you defined yourself as black.

"When I came back to Jamaica, I said, you know, I am too old for people to be calling me a trouble-maker. If people

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Professor Cooper describes herself as a "bald head Rasta". The problem, she says, is "I have difficulties with Selassie as God.

"I believe that Rasta represents a really important development for us as black people. One of the big issues for us in Jamaica is dealing with that whole history of enslavement and colonisation and for us to find a space in which we can

reclaim the dignity of being black. Rasta for me is the philosophy or the 'livy' that really represents a radical challenge to some of the mainstream Christian values that we were taught.

An excerpt of an article written by Mark Dawes of the Gleaner in September 2003.

Professor will present the Jagan Lecture in Vari Hall at York University on October 22.

The mentorship mission of Diana Alli

By Nicole Georges

Diana Alli recently coordinated a relief effort for the victims of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. It's one of the many volunteer projects she spearheads while being the Coordinator of Student Affairs in the University of Toronto's Faculty of Medicine. Alli is responsible for initiating several mentorship programs for at-risk children in collaboration with the university's medical students. It is her knack for inspiring the spirit of volunteerism in others that recently earned her the province's highest award, the Order of Ontario.

Alli has worked in the Faculty of Medicine for 35 years, and has become an iconic figure to many stressed out students looking for a little encouragement and warmth as they go through the rigours of studying for a medical degree. She describes herself as a humble and simple person, still in awe of the award that she recent-

ly received. "When you think about all the people in Ontario, that they could choose 29 people to honour and that I should be one of those! It's just amazing, I have to pinch myself," she said.

Alli's encourages university students to inspire other young people to academic excellence. "The whole idea is for my medical students to become better humanitarians. As a single mom who raised three kids on my own, you go through the challenge of caring and providing for them. So that's why I chose to dedicate my life to children, I want to clear the way for other kids, for their welfare," she said.

She co-founded three mentoring programs in 1994, 1995 and 1997 respectively, with her colleague, Dr. Miriam Rossi, former Associate Dean of Admissions and Student Affairs. One program targets Black and Aboriginal high school students from five district school boards and runs with help from the Association for the



Recipient of the Order of Ontario, Diana Alli and Mary Anne Chambers, Minister of Children and Youth Services. Photo contributed

Advancement of Blacks in Health Sciences. The summer program is a tutoring program for at-risk inner-city high school students. In 1997, she co-founded the St Felix mentoring program in Alexandra Park for students aged 7-12. All of the mentoring programs are now self sufficient, being run by medical students' clubs. "That's my definition of success; when I am able to start a program and have the volunteers run it effectively whether I'm there or not," Alli said.

Annually she receives \$15 thousand dollars in

donations from the graduating class of medical students to help with the programs. She is also responsible for starting two help-for-the-homeless programs. Volunteering is a vocation for Alli, an integral part of her belief system. As if she was not busy enough, Alli also stages an annual concert for the destitute children of the world called "Earthtones", featuring international music performed by health care practitioners and medical students. This year's concert will be held at the university's Convocation Hall on November 19.

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