



# Columbus and Slavery:

*An interview with John Henrik Clark*  
by DAVID AUSTIN (The McGill Daily)

DR. JOHN HENRIK CLARK IS PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF AFRICAN AND PUERTO RICAN STUDIES AT HUNTER COLLEGE, NEW YORK. HE IS THE AUTHOR OF A NUMBER OF BOOKS INCLUDING MALCOLM X: THE MAN AND HIS TIMES AND HIS MOST RECENT BOOK, AFRICA AT THE CROSSROADS: NOTES OF AN AFRICAN REVOLUTION. THE DAILY INTERVIEWED DR. CLARK LAST AUGUST AT HIS HOME IN HARLEM.

*Daily: I suppose I should start off with the most basic and fundamental question. Why should we not celebrate the anniversary of the presence of Columbus in the Americas?*

Clark: The main reason why you should not celebrate the 500th year of Columbus' alleged discovery--because Columbus did not discover anything--is the fact that you are celebrating the life of a rapist.

The question itself is out of order. You're almost asking me to celebrate the birth of someone who raped his mother and murdered his father. Christopher Columbus and his European thugs reduced the indigenous American popula-

tion to a point where they felt it necessary to call on the Catholic Church to sanction the increase in the African Slave trade. This resulted in the expansion of the slave trade for the next 300 years, creating the greatest singular act of protracted murder in human history--the African holocaust. We have much to memorialize, but nothing to celebrate.

*When you say rape, what precisely do you mean?*

I mean not only the physical rape of the body, but the rape of the culture, the rape of the religion, the destruction of the gods until it became inconceivable to worship a god other than the white one. The worst kind of rape: the rape of the

mind.

*Many apologists for Columbus say it's unfair to judge Columbus based on present day values and that he should be judged according to his time. What do you say to that?*

I say they're wrong both ways. You judge him both ways. You judge him according to his time and you judge him according to the reverberations of what he did that still affects the time in which you live... You still have European domination of the world economy.

I'm saying that what he did did not pass. What he did is still with us. The long-range impact is still with us. So Columbus is in both the past and the present and he needs to be judged both ways. There are no free nations in the Caribbean. There's no free mentality in the Caribbean. They're imitations of Europe.

There's no African religion in the Caribbean.

*I've heard you mention that in one of Columbus' diaries he mentions...*

That he sailed up and down the Guinea Coast for 23 years. The Guinea Coast is West Africa, which proves he was in the early Portuguese slave trade.

*So before he arrived in America he was directly involved in the slave trade?*

Yes. There's nothing else he could have been involved with at that time. There's nothing else going on in relationship to whites there.

*At that time it was the Portuguese who were experimenting with slavery?*

Yeah, and some of the slaves were being taken to the Canary islands, especially an island called Madeira.

*I've also heard you say that it was the Africans on the*

