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By IKE MGBATOGU
Contributing Writer

COLUMBUS – Anita M. Diop is African–American born and was raised in America. But, she has a unique way of describing herself: "I'm an African born in America."

That uncommon Africentric, Pan-Africanist portrayal to which she declares speaks volume about a woman who is ferocious when it comes to her passion for African people and culture.

For starters, Diop is married to an African immigrant from Senegal. Her college education focused entirely on Africa. First, she obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Africana Studies and Speech Communications then a Master's Degree in African History with a specialization in Arts and Culture, all from Wayne State University in Detroit.

"I love myself and I love my people," she told the Call & Post in an interview last week.

And that's not a hollow cliché, either.

Indeed, Diop is profusely involved in a smorgasbord of activities which expresses that love.

She is the founder and executive director of the African Roots and Heritage Festival, a non-profit 501(c) (3) organization she established in 2008 out of the remnants of a startup group called the Black Cultural Festival she formed the year before.

The group's mantra is: "Celebrating Our Heritage, while Confronting the Challenges" of being Black in America. Its mission, as noted in its website, www.africanrootsandheritagefestival.org, is to promote African culture, arts, and the unity of all African people, under the umbrella concept of pan-Africanism.

It does that in a number of ways, including hosting cultural programs and festivals, providing workshops, seminars, photo and art exhibits, film festivals, dance, music and special events.

The group is currently planning a big cultural festival for July 16 and 17, at Franklin Park, 1777 East Broad Street.

Aside from holding cultural events, the group's other big focus is promoting the value of education among young folks.

Diop explained why.

"We strongly believe that creating forums for youth to develop, express, and enhance their talent is a great deterrent against negative social patterns and behavior. We strive as a model for becoming productive citizens in our community."

Recently, her group announced the Anita M. Diop Scholarship of Excellence award for high school graduating seniors and college freshman students.

Eligible students can start applying now for a chance to win a minimum of $500. Application form is available through the group's website. Contestants must be Columbus-area high school graduates in 2011 or entering as a freshman in a trade or vocational school, college or university to qualify.

Those who qualify must submit their application with a two-page essay due by the April 15 deadline. The essay should be submitted to: africanrootsandheritagefestival@yahoo.com. The essay is to focus on the theme of the contest, "Living the American Dream as an African American or African in America."

In the composition, students are required to discuss their roadmap for how they plan to achieve the American dream, explained Diop.

Successful applicants will be announced on or after May 15th.

As though she is not already involved in enough projects, Diop is also the Ohio Representative

for the 6th Regional Diaspora Caucus for the African Union, a cabal that represents all African people born outside of the African continent.

As for how you can help, Diop said that her group is still accepting speakers, vendors, entertainers and contributor's to the scholarship of excellence fund through PayPal.

For more information, contact the African Roots and Heritage Festival, at (614) 321-6390 or (614) 390-8864. The group's email address is amdiop@africanrootsandheritagefestival.org

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