

BRAVE NEW CHILD

Liberating the Children of Liberia – and the World

Lessons in Peace Education
From a War Torn Country

Based on the Book and Curricula
Why Is Everybody Always Picking On Us?
Understanding the Roots of Prejudice

(YPL logo) A Youth Peace Literacy Project
A Cooperative Effort Between
The Atrium Society USA and The Common Ground Society Liberia

You've Got To Be Carefully Taught*

You've got to be taught to hate and fear,
You've got to be taught from year to year,
It's got to be drummed in your dear little ear,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught to be afraid
Of people whose eyes are oddly made
And people whose skin is a different shade,
You've got to be carefully taught.

You've got to be taught before it's too late
Before you are six or seven or eight
To hate all the people your relatives hate
You've got to be carefully taught...
You've got to be carefully taught.

*From *South Pacific* © 1949 Lyrics by Oscar Hammerstein II
Music by Richard Rogers

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Introduction to Brave New Child

"Till at last the child's mind is these suggestions, and the sum of the suggestions is the child's mind. And not the child's mind only. The adult's mind too – all his life long. The mind that judges and desires and decides – made up of these suggestions. But all these suggestions are our suggestions... Suggestions from the State."

Aldous Huxley – From Brave New World

Aldous Huxley wrote in his famous novel about a state controlling its citizens through conditioning, also called brain washing, programming, inculcation or socialization. But no matter what you call it, it is the same. This is what this book is about hence the title Brave New Child. But here we are talking about 20 brave children and their courageous teacher, Marvin Davis, in Buchanan, Liberia who has introduced these young people to the underlying causes of the 14-year civil war they have grown up in. This is an amazing story about how these children are liberating themselves from the confines that have time and again driven the human race into war. They are brave NEW children because they are questioning the conditioned mindset that caused such terrible violence in perhaps the worst civil war in recent history.

Political upheavals beginning in 80s and the brutal civil war brought a steep decline in the living standards of the country, including its education, social and economic infrastructure. The civil war in Liberia was one Africa's bloodiest, claiming more than 200,000 lives and further displacing another 1 million internally and more than 150,000 into refugee camps in neighboring countries.

Over the next fourteen years that followed, life for most Liberians has been hell. The entire country lacked electricity and safe drinking water. All major roads in Liberia were in disuse and many parts of the country became inaccessible thereby making it impossible for relief organization to provide relief assistance to people living in rural communities. The breakdown of central authority because of the war meant people had to find individual ways and means to stay alive. Fighters that roamed the countryside constantly disrupted farming cycles. Even after the war, unemployment stands at 80%, and Liberia's staple food rice cost US\$30 per bag which more than the monthly salary of a civil servant. Nearly all of Liberia's 3 million people live in desperation, or close to it yet Liberians are not daunted by the hopelessness that engulfed them.

Against all these odds Marvin Davis having fled Liberia under the threat of death came back to his country to help these children of war to understand the roots of prejudice that created it in the hope that they would not carry over the tribal vengeance that still is a seriously dangerous and inflammatory concern there.

Searching the Internet for peace educating organizations that would help him he found the Atrium Society in the U.S. Out of this search he began a friendship with the progressive child peace educators Terrence and Jean Webster-Doyle and through their Youth Peace Literacy Program received the training and materials in their internationally acclaimed, award winning peace educating programs to do what he wanted in Liberia. Working together as a team the three of them helped establish the Common Ground Society Peace School of Liberia.

This is what this book is about. The Lessons that follow come out of the Atrium Society's peace educating program entitled *Why Is Everybody Always Picking On Us* –

Understanding the Roots of Prejudice, a program that was created by Terrence Webster-Doyle and that Jean Webster-Doyle trained Marvin Davis in. Through the teaching of this program these 20 children who have been raised in war have begun to change their conditioned, prejudicial attitudes. The Lessons speak for themselves. They are demonstrating that if these 20 children of war can change the conditioned way they have been programmed to think then anyone can.

The most fundamentally significant thing they have learned in these Lessons is that the world they have been conditioned to see is the outside picture of an inward condition. In other words, projection makes perception. In these Lessons these 20 young people have been taught to change their mind about the world and therefore in so doing change the world. As anthropologist Margaret Meade said, “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” And this could never be truer than with these *Brave New Children* freeing themselves from their divisive tribalism to emerge free of its influence to create a new world, a world that is peaceful because they have understood what has prevented it.