I therefore conclude by saying again how much we appreciate the initiative shown by the Film Institute and, repeating what I said earlier, that we do regard the film as an important agent in the vast educational work we have to do in the Colonies and we regard it as an important factor in creating in the minds of the people in the Colonies a new sense of values, a contribution for obtaining their co-operation and their goodwill in the great work which has got to be done, and as a vital element in breaking through mass ignorance and illiteracy and in training these people to play a larger part in the life of their own territories and to help us in the more effective and efficient discharge of the responsibilities we, as British people, feel in respect of the colonial territories under our control. I therefore wish the Conference all success, and I can assure the Conference that we shall study its conclusions with the greatest care and will do our best to implement the recommendations which you make today.



## THE FILM AND PRIMITIVE PEOPLES

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Nothing in the world is so striking today as the fact that the peoples of the world are on the move, not only physically but spiritually. One sees more than half the world restive in its illiteracy and half the world in various stages of revolt against the particular conditions in which men live. There is a challenge today to every department of every government and not least to those departments involved in the processes of education. The challenge goes out to every thinking citizen because it is nothing less than the result of the world's own riches, of man's collective technological advances and of the enormous gap in their distribution and enjoyment, the gaps that have so often challenged the processes of education and have so often failed to be understood by them.

Abraham Lincoln said that "Man could not exist half slave and half free". Julian Huxley, in one of his introductions recently, paraphrased this and said, "Man cannot exist half illiterate and half literate", and he said it for the good reason that the whole question of peace and international understanding depends in the last resort on access to the means and skills of the modern world for which people are reaching out with desperate hands; it depends on equality in the matter of race, in the matter of sex privilege, and in all matters of social benefit. It depends on them because you cannot have peace in a world where there are vast fields of frustration, whether it be on the economic or the cultural level, and where prides are hurt by the assertions and assumptions of some of our Western peoples. In fine, you cannot have international understanding while half the world, or more than half the world, either lacks the capacity for understanding or the will toward it.

What the film can do for international understanding therefore depends not on knowing how to film, how to stand behind a camera and turn a handle, but on our concept of social responsibility. Films are nothing unless related from the beginning to some sort of understanding of what they are about. The story of the documentary film in so far as it ever got anywhere is that we set ourselves to articulate, within the framework of realistic social processes, the problems or the particulars we had to teach.

If we talk about international understanding, we should therefore be clear about our purpose in this task, about the substance of the matter, and then the technical side will safely take care of itself. For Unesco the substance of the task is the duty of Fundamental Education. I am not brushing aside studies of what the African thinks of our American and British films, nor am I brushing aside the pictures, which can be pretty absurd, when we sit around in England and elsewhere and enjoy the romantic and exotic side of other people working for us. I believe the essence of the matter is an African matter in the case of Africa, and is a native citizen matter wherever the Colonies are con-

cerned. It is a case of using all our modern powers to establish others in equality with ourselves.

At Unesco's Mexico Conference in December, there was a definition made of the scope and purpose of Fundamental Education. It was laid down that Fundamental Education should be specially and immediately concerned with the less advanced regions of the world and with the under-privileged groups in industrialised countries, where the education provided falls below the essential minimum, where ignorance and illiteracy, disease and poverty, constitute a hindrance to human progress and a barrier to international understanding and world prosperity. The Conference went on to say that there had been a tendency, when the term "Fundamental Education" was first used, to regard it as no more and no less than a campaign against illiteracy, but it soon became clear that the skills of reading and writing were only of value as a means to a wider end.

This wider aim of Fundamental Education has now been defined. It is to help men and women to live fuller lives in adjustment with their changing environment, to develop the best elements of their own culture, and to achieve the economic and social progress which will enable them to take their place in the world. Fundamental Education should thus be designed to provide a first step to further education. While universal literacy may be a desirable ideal, the teaching of reading and writing is not the only, or even always the most immediate, purpose of Fundamental Education.

The work of the Mexican Cultural Missions provided a striking case in point. The whole life of one remote little Indian village, which was visited by delegates from the General Conference, was being transformed by a team of six "Fundamental Educators". They were teaching the peasants to pipe their water supply, to combat disease, to grow better fruit and crops, to build weather-proof houses and make decent furniture, to bake better bread and to weave and sew; but they had not so far taught them to read and write. However, the foundations of a village school had been laid. So it is with Fundamental Education: literacy teaching and the extension and improvement of primary schooling will take their place in a wider programme of community education for better living.

For Unesco this question is a world-wide problem. We are concerned with creating an information service as a link between all such experiments across the world (and there are many) so that each will benefit from the experience of the others, whether in technical training or in other ways. We are setting up a panel of some hundred experts across the world and are arranging to correlate the information they have and the information their various projects develop. We have set up three pilot projects in Fundamental Education, one in Haiti, one in British East Africa, and one in China. We are setting up another, probably in Peru, this next year. The point about these pilot projects is that we take an area, a fairly large area, a backward area, and there we bring all modern forces to bear on its development so that it becomes



an example of tested technique, not only for the wider areas about, but for the whole world.

Over and above that we have joined up with many associated projects across the world. There are experiments in China, in Latin America, and in the Southern States of the U.S. We are setting up one seminar on the positive experience of the Americans in developing the very high standards they have reached in some areas of Negro education. There will be another seminar on African problems this year in London, another one in China and another one in the Middle East. We are concerned in all of them with studies of racial problems and prejudices, questions of sex inequality in particular areas and, not least, we are much concerned in the study of the teaching of languages, how best to teach languages, not necessarily in the old way but in terms of the living interests of the natives themselves, and finally in the study of what has and can be done in mass communications to help this work of fundamental education along.

Our Unesco work in Fundamental Education is only one part of Unesco's programme and is limited by budget. Its success must depend on national effort. So we arrive at the paradox which some of us have known all our lives, that internationalism begins in the nations, and for many of our immediate tasks, it begins at home.

While this question of Fundamental Education is a world problem, the United Kingdom has some special interests and some special responsibilities in respect of the Colonies. We live today with shrinking horizons from the national point of view, and Africa, in particular, I would say, is one of the great privileges of modern citizenship so far as Britain is concerned. It represents an economic potential which is enormous, with power to extend not just the horizon of England's economy but the entire horizon of its national morale; with pioneering of all kinds there to be done, as always in the story of the British Empire, pioneering in the development of tropical agriculture and medicine, and tropical living in general.

The old Empire Marketing Board had something to do with the study of nutrition, medicine and agriculture in Africa. In Kenya and elsewhere it did something to establish a scientific future for the African communities. Enormous strides have been made in engineering, with new possibilities of water power supplies and community building in relation to the development of power. There are new possibilities in education, and I mean new possibilities in the sociological approach to education: in the relation of technological progress to health services, to community services, to managerial and other services.

There is another sort of challenge, and that is the challenge from within. I do not think that a nation which has gone through the last twenty-five years of social progress and has seen the enormous advances in the lives and prospects of British workers, can afford to put an iron curtain round the British Isles in respect of social progress.

The whole implication of British social history, of British social policy and political policy, demands recognition of the fact that we are

not a nation of 50 million people today, but a nation of 113 million people, white, black and others. We are a nation with a population rather larger than White Russia proper and only 25 million less than the United States itself. Our governmental responsibilities are not a question only of Grantham, Birmingham, Leeds and Hull, but also of Nyasaland, Nigeria, Tanganyika and Kenya, and of the other colonies outside Africa. The challenge from within, I think, will grow.

There is another challenge. Hitler, not of pleasant memory, once used the phrase of England's colonies, that we were allowing "cobwebs to grow in our treasure house". I shall not say much about that, except to emphasise that international criticism is growing on how we use and develop our work in the Colonies. We are, in particular, challenged from without in respect of fundamental education, and not least by the Soviet Union where, in a period of less than twenty-five years, illiteracy has been practically wiped out by a plan of education involving the use of 90 regional languages. The examples in Mexico, China and elsewhere are there also to challenge us to the effort of which, I am sure, we are increasingly conscious today.

Nor can we forget the United Nations. With the work of the Security Council, the F.A.O., the W.H.O., the I.L.O. and Unesco, it has established for the first time in history a world conscience in respect of what to do not only with health and with education, but also, and very fundamentally, what to do with the economic resources of the world so that the world's needs can be integrated and filled.

But our most profound challenge, and the one that will have to be met, whether we like it or not, comes to us from the native peoples themselves. The achievements of our own Negro populations, for instance, and those of the American Negroes in various fields of science and medicine, education, music and writing, are progressively creating a powerful body of world opinion. They have in many quarters an inspired voice, and stand to give notable support to the processes of Fundamental Education in Africa and America over the next generation. I find in France a new group under the title "Présence Africaine", in which the best writers of French Africa have got together to produce a review of the greatest things of note in all fields of negro expression. Groups like this represent not only an expression of culture, but a watch on the interests of the African in the course of our next generation's development.

My main proposition, therefore, is that it is not a question of films coming from outside, but of films being created from the inside by and for the Colonial peoples themselves. I am going to say directly that there is now no considerable body of knowledge in this field. Some experiments have been made, but in pretty piece-meal fashion. There is no body of knowledge, I think, because no sufficient interest has been created, no sufficient funds have been found, and no adequate organisation has been established for the task in hand. We start almost at scratch. I am not for a moment forgetting the pioneer work of the Colonial Film Unit, nor the experiments made by other countries. But against the



size and urgency of the task we have scarcely begun.

The first necessity is that we find a body of men who will make this their lifework, who will specialise in this as one of the inspiring tasks of our time, and begin with a proper knowledge of the Colonies. It is no longer a question of people dropping into Africa to make a picture, to "do something" for the natives as, only a generation ago, the Squire and his lady "did something" for us. That does not reflect the size or nature of the problem. We have got to create a body of men who live and work with the African problem, who are the African problem in its creative aspect, knowing it and living with it. It is essentially a problem of development on the economic, technological, social and cultural levels. It involves sympathy with the cultures in the areas we are concerned with. It involves planned, clear cut and intensive processes of technical training, of health education, of community training and management on the part of the natives.

We are faced by many patterns of development. In one area the Colonial Office is developing native communities within the tribal pattern. Other patterns involve the uprooting of the natives and their emergence in industrial colonies. In others again we have them landed rootless in the great metropolitan areas like Capetown and Chicago and Detroit.

As a matter of primary emphasis, I am going to ask you to consider the creation in Britain of a School of the Colonies in which we can mobilise and integrate a body of knowledge, not only in respect of colonial management but in respect of the relations between all the creative arts and the experimental forms of colonial administration. One of the most striking developments in the Soviet experiment was the establishment of a special corps of "soldiers of education and culture". These people went out into all the 200 different racial groupings of the U.S.S.R., asked themselves where education really and genuinely began, and did not always necessarily begin with teaching literacy. I think we ourselves need something of this sort in our own approach to the problem of Fundamental Education in the Colonies. We want, for this School, not only the experience of the Colonial Office; we also have to know what is being done elsewhere and bring world-wide experience to bear on our problem. We will need a first-class library, a growing and developing information service, an exchange of teachers and lecturers and other people interested in colonial problems.

The second project, I think, must be a considered and ambitious development of the Colonial Film Unit. I don't mean it should be developed as a British Unit, as a Unit resident here, but rather as a Unit truly decentralised in Colonial terms. It is not a question of making films here for Africa and bringing films out of Africa for the people here to see. It is a question of working with Africans and of creating a genuine African Unit that can work with native units in the other Colonies. It is a question of sending our experts to teach natives, help natives in the technical processes involved, and also a question of giving scholarships, bringing natives out from Africa and from the

Colonies so that they have the benefit of our technical experience here at home and in those other countries which have advanced in the techniques of films, film strips and other forms of simplified teaching of a visual order.

Finally we need to have a School of Film Experiment on Fundamental Education. I hope it will be an African School of Film Experiment. Walt Disney has made some films on health for the Indians of Latin America. Some other units have been experimenting in the teaching of language, particularly in relation to the spontaneous interest of the people concerned. Other relevant experiments have been made in simplified writing and simplified illustration; and no country has gone so far in certain forms of wall newspaper, display and exhibition as England. We have much to bring together so that our new problems of education can have the full benefit of the varied techniques which from one motive or another, have been developed in our time.

Above all, we should have a great concern for the psychological problems involved in the making of films in this particular field. Here I quote from a letter sent me by my friend, Richard Wright, the Negro writer of "Bright and Morning Star" and "Native Son".

"Undoubtedly, such an impact of Western ideas and methods upon African natives will mean a disruption of their communal, fragile, traditional, tribal and almost sacred institutions. Means will have to be found to enable a smooth and all but painless adaptation of these institutions to the Western method of working and living. Let me cite just one important psychological problem involved. In Africa, for the most part, individual will and initiative are almost unknown and are largely considered 'sinful'. All work and endeavour are done under the guidance of traditional ceremony. Now, with the introduction of vast schemes for increasing production, one will find that individual effort will not only be encouraged to come to the fore but must be rewarded. Indeed, the instilling of the desire for individual initiative in Africans can be a great gift which the Western world can offer to people slumbering in a kind of cosmic silence. And I can tell you that this lack of individual initiative in the Africans is deeply regretted by most educated Africans I have met; these educated Africans know that this is one of their great handicaps, and if the British programme can help in this direction, it will have made a lasting and proud contribution to the peoples of Africa. What I mean concretely, is that Africans must be drawn into the actual management and policy-making councils of these projected enterprises".

These are some of the problems and possibilities to which, I think, consideration should be given. The first of my propositions is that the heart of the matter lies in the subject matter; secondly, that appropriate machinery should be created: (*a*) in the form of a School of the Colonies; (*b*) in the development of the Colonial Film Unit with true regard for decentralisation and the part which natives will play in it; (*c*) in the form of an African School of Film Experiment.

These tasks seem to me not just minor tasks for Britain today but



priority tasks and among the most privileged which face the present generation of British men and women.

I conclude in the dark voice of Richard Wright and not in my own white one.

"I feel this will be the first time that a collective and scientific effort has been made by Western civilisation to meet the needs of colonial people. One need not be at all ashamed that the motives which are spurring the British are those of self-interest; indeed, such motives, in my opinion, can guarantee objectivity and rationality, and help rule out irrational racial fears on both sides. Such a project can be made into a model of colonial engineering for all other nations to emulate. . . I think that such a programme will be one of the big stories of the world. What is done by the British in Africa to help feed themselves can lift the level of life of millions of Negroes and will constitute a truly historic and magnificent undertaking".