

PROJECT

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*Africans of New York City*

REWRITE:

SOURCE MATERIAL:

*Cecilia Dofora*

*68 W 117th Street*

*Mr. Dofora is a native African artist  
L. has lived in New York a number of years.*

Waring Cuney

Negroes of New York

## Africans of New York City

## An interview with Asadata Dafora

Asadata Dafora a native African who has resided in New York City for seven years was born in Free Town, Sierra Leone, British West Africa. He first visited America in 1929 when he was touring with a group of African Dancers from the Timini tribe into which he was born. This dance group appeared in France, England and the United States. Before the war Dafora and the dance group which he directed were known in Europe as exponents of authentic African dancing.

Since coming to live in America, Mr. Dafora who studied singing at La Scala in Milan, Italy, has worked both as a singer and dancer. He has been associated with Miss Happy Ross and Miss Margaret Upshur who as pianists have cooperated with him in the presentation of African dance dramas.

When the Little Theatre at the Harlem Y.M.C.A. was opened Zunga, a production by Dafora's dance group was presented. Other plays are "Kykunkor," and "Zungure" which employ dancing, singing, and acting to tell the story of <sup>John</sup> play.

Mr. Dafora worked with the Federal Theatre supervising the Witches' scene in its production of "Macbeth". He also appeared with Orson Wells in a radio play, "Trangama-Fanga" which he wrote in collaboration with John Carlyle of the Columbia Work-Shop of the Columbia Broadcasting System. "Trangama-Fanga" which means "Strong man and fine girl" followed the famous "Broadcast to Mars" program. The National Broadcasting System recently produced an

original sketch by Dafora on the Hobby Lobby program.

Asadata Dafora would like very much to present "patterns of African culture with a regard to artistic truth." He resents what he refers to as "the regular moving picture and side show idea of Africa." He refused work at the World Fair Savoy Ball Room because to him this show represents the "same old sterotype of African art." At present he plans to organize another small dance group which he would like to have sponsored by prominent Negro leaders. He is working also on a drama for the Harlem Suitcase Theatre "Africa Meet America." As an artist Dafora deplores that the fact that America has such a vast wealth of talent among the Negro people that cannot find channels avenues for expression.

There are in New York City about 700 native Africans. They live in various sections of the city but most of them reside in Harlem. Of the Africans who migrate to America only a few of them are women. The few African girls who come to America are students who attend Howard University, Hampton and Wilberforce, Morgan and other Negro schools. The colleges of New York city frequently have native African students in the graduate departments.

In 1937 Mr. Dafora's sister won a scholarship from Whitelands College, a girls school in Putnam, London to visit American Negro colleges. Among the schools visited were Hampton, Howard, Tuskegee and Scotia College a southern school for Negro girls. After her visit she returned to Free Town to work as a teacher. Soon after her return she was appointed to the Council of the city as the first Negro African woman to serve in such a capacity. Dafora pointed out that this achievement by his sister in Free Town

like the recent appointment of a Negro woman as judge in the courts of New York city represents a steady rise in the condition Negro and African people.

The Africans living in New York City have a cultural club which is called the Native African Union. It includes in its membership American-Negroes, West Indians, Africans, and people of mixed American Negro-West Indian or African parentage. The organization tho not very active now fosters better relations between Africans and West Indians. The Native African Union serves as a medium of adjustment of its members to American ways and life. It encourages its members to attend night schools, to master the English language, and to learn subjects and trades that will lead to jobs and security. Many Africans have found careers in industry as electricians and mechanic through the guidance of the Native African Union, which is non-political.