

## Showcase of Ethiopian Heritage at African Day Parade in New York City

By: Berhane Tadese |

New York City a.k.a Big Apple is of mixture of people who have different heritages and cultural backgrounds. As a result there are many parades held each year that celebrates different cultures in the City. As a resident of the area, I enjoy watching several yearly parade performed by the Puerto Ricans, Greeks, Africans, West Indians carnival etc., as they celebrate with vibrant music, dance, traditional cloth, costumes, displaying their countries flags, or banners etc.. It is clear that the parade serves to honor culture, value, more importantly it gives



awareness to others that there are differences in culture and knowing that will help us to interact effectively. So it is no surprise to ask ourselves why we become always spectators of the parade each year instead of participant of the Parade?. Just like any other ethnic we have our unique identities. Just like any other ethnic, we have extensive history that can be proud of. Just like any other ethnic we immigrated to USA due to several reasons. In most immigrant cases, many people including us (Ethiopians) displaced from the country we love due to political repression, wider crackdown with arrests of people have difference political opinion by the autocratic regime on power. We have witnessed the actual mass displacement of Ethiopian started in late 1970's and continue till today. Consequently, we have different type of advocacy groups or political organization formed on behalf of us in all aspects our lives as we enjoy the American experience of freedom and hope.

Ethiopian Community Mutual Assistance Association (ECMAA) can be considered one of the advocacy group established in NYC since 1981. It assert that it is a not-for profit, nonsectarian, nonpolitical association. One of the objectives ECMAA is to raise awareness of our culture to young Ethiopian generation and others. Base on this aim ECMAA, in the past month reached out Ethiopians in New York City (NYC) area through the social media, web posting, and mass email to represent Ethiopian as part of the NYC African Parade Day. Their flyer is said something like that "...We invite all Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans residing in NYC metropolitan area to come out wearing traditional clothes and participate in the Africa Day parade and festivals. ECMAA believes participating in this parade will provide us an opportunity to increase our visibility, share our culture, tradition and history with the larger New York City community...." Sure enough on Sunday, October 19, 2014 (Parade date) Ethiopian living in NYC metropolitan responded and joined the African Day parade at Harlem in NYC.

The parade commenced approximately 2:00PM, each group lineup in order of registration marched from 134 street between 7th Ave and Lennox to 122nd street (along Malcom X Boulevard-Lennox Avenue... Ethiopian showed the uniqueness by wearing of variety traditional clothes, and they were waving Ethiopians flags GREEN, YELLOW, RED and displaying several placards that contain message about several Ethiopians facts. The placards carried by participant were so powerful both for what they

represent and because as birth place of Ethiopian have something significant at stake i.e. deep rooted history, culture and value that shall be pass on to next generation.

Before reaching the final destination where the public figures watching the parade, each group, if they have a dancing group they show their performance on prepared stage with the music of their choice. If they do not have dancing group, still the country's music of choice was played to recognize their participation. Artist Jacky Gosee Amharic Music song entitled "BANDIRAW" was played at this event. It was Spectacular!!!!

Being part of the parade gave us identification to be proud, and enhances better communication and understanding among all other ethnics groups. The Parade has raised awareness of Ethiopians own authentic cultures and pride on our own rich culture heritage, where eventually - as they say – "culture will be the uniting factor of the nation with all its rich diversity."

As we read on the internet or listen pal talk radio to some of the quasi elite political activists thinking, they advocate amputating the past history. They are campaigning in subtle way to destroy everything which represented the past. They have waged war on values long held by the Ethiopians. Any person and proponents of past Ethiopia heritage has been verbally attacked. We are seeing signs moving at a slower and more subversive pace, our history is being rewritten to accommodate narrow minded ethnic groups believe. But as we witness at this parade, deep down in each person body language, you can sense that the Ethiopia Heritage is not under siege, it is flourishing. The simple truth is: as long as Ethiopian continue to express their feeling and reiterates their message in this type of Parade or other means, the Ethiopian heritage will prevail.