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01/27/2009 - Wrapped In Pride Exhibition

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EIU's Booth Library to Host "Wrapped in Pride" Exhibition

Jan-27-2009

For more than three years, a semitrailer has crisscrossed the nation, hauling three tons of special -- and very colorful -- freight to museums, schools and libraries.

Eastern Illinois University's Booth Library has become the most recent stop in the series, and now invites all interested persons to the national traveling exhibition, "**Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African-American Identity**," scheduled to be on display Feb. 1 through March 10. Special commemorative guides will be available at the library.

In addition, several exhibition-related events are being planned.

"Wrapped in Pride" examines both the art and symbolism of kente cloth in Ghana and its expression of identity in African-American communities.

The cloth called kente, made by the Asante (Ashanti) peoples of Ghana and the Ewe peoples of Ghana and Togo, is the best known of all African textiles. It is hand-woven in one very long strip that is cut into identical lengths and sewn edge-to-edge to form a larger fabric.

This strip-woven cloth began as festive dress for special occasions, traditionally worn by men as a kind of toga and by women as an upper and lower wrapper. In addition to its well-known use as spectacular apparel, kente also appears in many other important forms of regalia among the Asante and Ewe, including drums, shields, umbrellas and fans.

Over the past 40 years, the cloth has been transformed into hats, ties, bags and many other accessories worn and used on both sides of the Atlantic. Individual kente strips are especially popular in the United States when sewn into religious and academic robes or worn as a stole. Kente patterns have developed a life of their own, appropriated as surface designs for everything from adhesive bandages and balloons to beach balls and Bible covers. Kente, for many, bridges two continents, evoking and celebrating a shared cultural heritage.

The Booth Library exhibit is divided into two broad sections. First, it traces the roots of kente and its widespread use in Africa as garment and ceremonial cloth. Second, it explores kente as a meaningful document of dress, art and identity in American cultures, especially among African-American communities in the U.S.

"Wrapped in Pride: Ghanaian Kente and African-American Identity" was made possible through NEH on the Road, a special initiative of the National Endowment for the Humanities, and was brought to the EIU campus by Booth Library and the Mid-America Arts Alliance. This version of the exhibition was developed by the UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History in Los Angeles, and is based on an earlier exhibition co-organized with the Newark Museum, Newark, N.J.

More on the national exhibition can be found at <http://www.maaa.org/nehotr/Exhibitions/kente.php>.