

Leon Clark
(November 15, 1935 - October 25, 2003)

In October 2003, Leon and his wife, Maria, were sightseeing at Great Falls, MD when Leon suffered an unexpected aneurysm and died on October 25. He is survived by his wife of 28 years, Maria Donoso Clark and by his by his stepson, Giri Clark. In addition to the funeral service that was held for Leon in Washington, Maria also organized a special gathering at their home in Virginia on November 15, to celebrate his work.

Leon was the founder of the ITEP program at American University where he spent 17 years as a professor. Prior to joining the CIE he had held a number of positions in the field of International Education. His love of international education grew from his years of teaching and community development work in Bangladesh, India, countries throughout Africa, and elsewhere. In his role as the deputy director of the Governmental Affairs Institute in Washington (GAI), D.C., Leon administered rural development programs overseas and he undertook direct responsibility for the training and evaluation activities. As a CIE student, Leon conducted research for his dissertation on *Population Education in American High Schools: Towards a Theory of Application*. Before his passing, Leon had a fellowship at his alma mater, Yale University, to write a book exploring the intersection of the Christian, Jewish, and Islamic faiths.

Long interested in diverse cultures, Dr. Clark wrote his first textbook, *Through African Eyes*, in the early 1970s. The book, a detailed study of African cultures and studies, led to others: *Through Indian Eyes*, *Through Chinese Eyes*, and shortly before he died, he and **Bob Pearson** (Ed.D. 1977) finished editing the 4th edition of their book, *Through Middle Eastern Eyes*. The books became part of the Center for International Training and Education's World Culture Series for college and high school social studies classes.

The following words from *Through African Eyes* capture what was perhaps the central commitment of his teaching and beliefs

Indeed, ethnocentrism is universal. Everyone begins life in a particular culture, learns how to behave in that culture and will probably continue throughout life to view reality through the lens of that culture. There is nothing inherently wrong with this type of enculturation. Without it we would fail to learn the rules of human social behavior. We would be lost in our own culture and we would probably lack any perspective for viewing other cultures. After all, we have to begin somewhere. But to



impose our rules on others -- to assume everyone should want to see life the way we do -- is an injustice to other human beings. Moreover, it is a false assumption that distorts reality, making it impossible to develop anything even approaching an objective understanding of other cultures. Maintaining an unself-critical ethnocentric stance has the effect of distorting 'the other'. We end up, as the Chinese say, simply seeing 'what is behind our own eyes.'...The goal is to counteract the negative distortions of ethnocentrism by looking at [other cultures] from the inside out, rather than from the outside in. Only by trying to accept other cultures on their own terms -- by listening to their own explanations of why they function as they do -- can we fully, if ever, understand them. (November 2003)

For a Word document containing messages of condolence sent at the time of his passing please click [here](#).