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JAHKENTE INTERNATIONAL, INC.
CONTACT RUFUS T. STEVENSON
COMBINED FEDERAL CAMPAIGN
CFC MEMBER CODE 43710

3807 NEW HAMPSHIRE AVE NW
WASHINGTON, DC 20011-7916
1.202.829.5922 Tel 1.202.829-9298 Fax
WWW.JAHKENTE.ORG
E-MAIL: JAHKENTE@AOL.COM

JAH KENTE INTERNATIONAL PRESIDENT WILL LAUNCH UNDER AFRICAN SKIES Storytelling Cultural Health Project Reaches Our Youth

Washington, DC, January 16, 2010 — *Under African Skies* will be the first children's picture book in the series "Stories by Brother Barksdale" published under the Nefu Books imprint of Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, Inc. of Cherry Hill, New Jersey. The stories will teach children ages 4 to 8 valuable lessons from the folklore of Africa and the African Diaspora. Roland Barksdale-Hall, president and co-founder of JAH Kente International Inc. of Washington D.C., is the author and concept originator. The illustrator of *Under African Skies* is nationally syndicated cartoonist Bill Murray. Publication is set for June 30, 2010.

Mr. Barksdale-Hall serves as president for JAH Kente International, Inc. that promotes the arts and genealogy throughout schools in metropolitan Washington D.C. area. His other pursuits are also his inspiration to write books for children. He is a founder and former executive director of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society (AAHGS) of Pittsburgh, a chapter of the national organization based in Washington, DC., and has attained status of AAHGS life member. In 2003 he was awarded the AAHGS National History Award for his consistent commitment and dedication to the documentation of African American history. Barksdale-Hall has traveled to West Africa and has researched the black family for more than 30 years. His research resulted in the Millennium Family Reunion, held in Detroit, bringing together more than 300 descendants of enslaved African ancestors. In 2009 he was recognized as one of the most accomplished graduates of the University of Pittsburgh. He was selected for his work in clarifying and documenting when the first African American graduated from the university. He received the Blue, Gold and Black: Color of Achievement Award for 2009, a special feature of the African American Alumni Council Sankofa Homecoming and 40 Years of Pride, Progress and Partnership at the university celebration. The award was given in honor of his outstanding level of professional and personal achievement and commitment to provide excellent community service. He has served as the national youth director for Frontiers International, Inc. He has served as the vice president of the *Buckeye Review* and on the executive committee of the Black Caucus of the American Library Association. Other professional memberships include the National Association of Black Storytellers. His family is the recipient of the 2001 Women in Ministry Shenango Valley Christian Family Award.



Bill Murray was one of about ten black cartoonists to participate in a collective protest organized by syndicated African American artists held in February 2008. The protest was in direct response to majority newspapers editors' perceived views of black cartoonists' work as esoteric and easily replaced. By fifth grade the native of Chicago had won the first of several place prizes for citywide cleanup posters



and had his artwork published in the *Chicago Sun Times* when many kids were out playing. Murray attended the Chicago Institute of Art and worked as a freelancer for the *Saturday Evening Post*. His first professional breakthrough was at Johnson Publishing Company, a major African American publisher of popular magazines in Chicago. Herbert Temple, a Johnson Publishing artist who drew cartoons for *Ebony Magazine*, made him an art apprentice. He was first syndicated by Sammie Davis Jr. Enterprises in the late 1970s. *Those Browns*, which Murray based upon his real life family, ran for five years during the 1970s. From 1981 to present Murray has been drawing *Sonny Boy* for the Sengstacke newspapers, including the *Chicago Defender* and *New Pittsburgh Courier*, major black newspapers. He formed his own comic book company BAM Productions, hired Kevin B. Eastman (creator of the Ninja Turtles) as a freelance artist and produced a line of comic books from 1985 to 1996. The comic books are now collector items being sold on eBay. Today, Murray is recognized as the creator of *Jet News*, whose syndicated political satire features a character named Archie Bumper, a “Black version of Archie Bunker,” and “*The Golden Years*,” appearing in more than eleven hundred papers worldwide.

Reviewers have high praise for *Under African Skies*. Karim T. Aldridge-Rand, a third grade teacher in Houston independent school district, said: “*Under African Skies* is reminiscent of Barksdale’s outstanding storytelling performance at the Eastmont Branch of the Oakland Public Library (2000), where he captivated an awe-struck audience. His elaborate use of verbal imagery, visual props, and didactic messages recreated a presence that breathed life into his stories. *Under African Skies* is a welcomed treasure to the rich corpus of children’s literature.” Itibari M. Zulu, Sr., senior editor of the *Journal of Pan African Studies* feels that “*Under African Skies* is a welcomed addition to the moral and ethical ethos of the African experience, and like the music, dance and other cultural life of Africa, this book will honor a tradition as old as the sky.” “Under African Skies promotes tolerance and provides a valuable anti-bullying lesson for our children. The storytelling cultural project is endorsed and supported by JAH Kente International, Inc.,” Rufus Tiefing Stevenson, JAH Kente International, Inc., executive vice president/treasurer, Africanist, curator, producer/actor.

Under African Skies is the first release under the Nefu Books imprint, and it will be available in two editions, hardcover (ISBN 978-0-9825842-7-9) and softcover (ISBN 978-0-9825842-8-6). Reviewers may request review copies and title information in February. Readers may place pre-publication orders in the company’s online store starting February. Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers (AHLP) Inc. is an independent book publisher in Cherry Hill, New Jersey. AHLP has five imprints and publishes scholarly nonfiction, literary fiction, autobiography and memoirs, popular fiction and nonfiction, and poetry for all ages. As a royalty publisher, Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers, Inc. employs both traditional and emerging business models to build their publishing program. Carolyn C. Williams, a native of Cherry Hill, New Jersey, is the president-chief operating officer and the founder of the company.

Contact information for publisher: SAN 914-4811, Africana Homestead Legacy Publishers Inc. 811 Church Road, Suite 105, Cherry Hill, NJ 08002, Phone: 856-773-0694 ext. 206, Fax: 856-382-0620, Web site <http://www.ahlpub.com>. To schedule an interview with the author, contact Roland Barksdale-Hall at barksdalehall@gmail.com. To contact Bill Murray at billmurray@billmurrays.com. For more information on JAH Kente International, Inc. contact Rufus T Stevenson jahkente@aol.com 1-202-829-5922 Tel 1-202-829-9298 Fax.