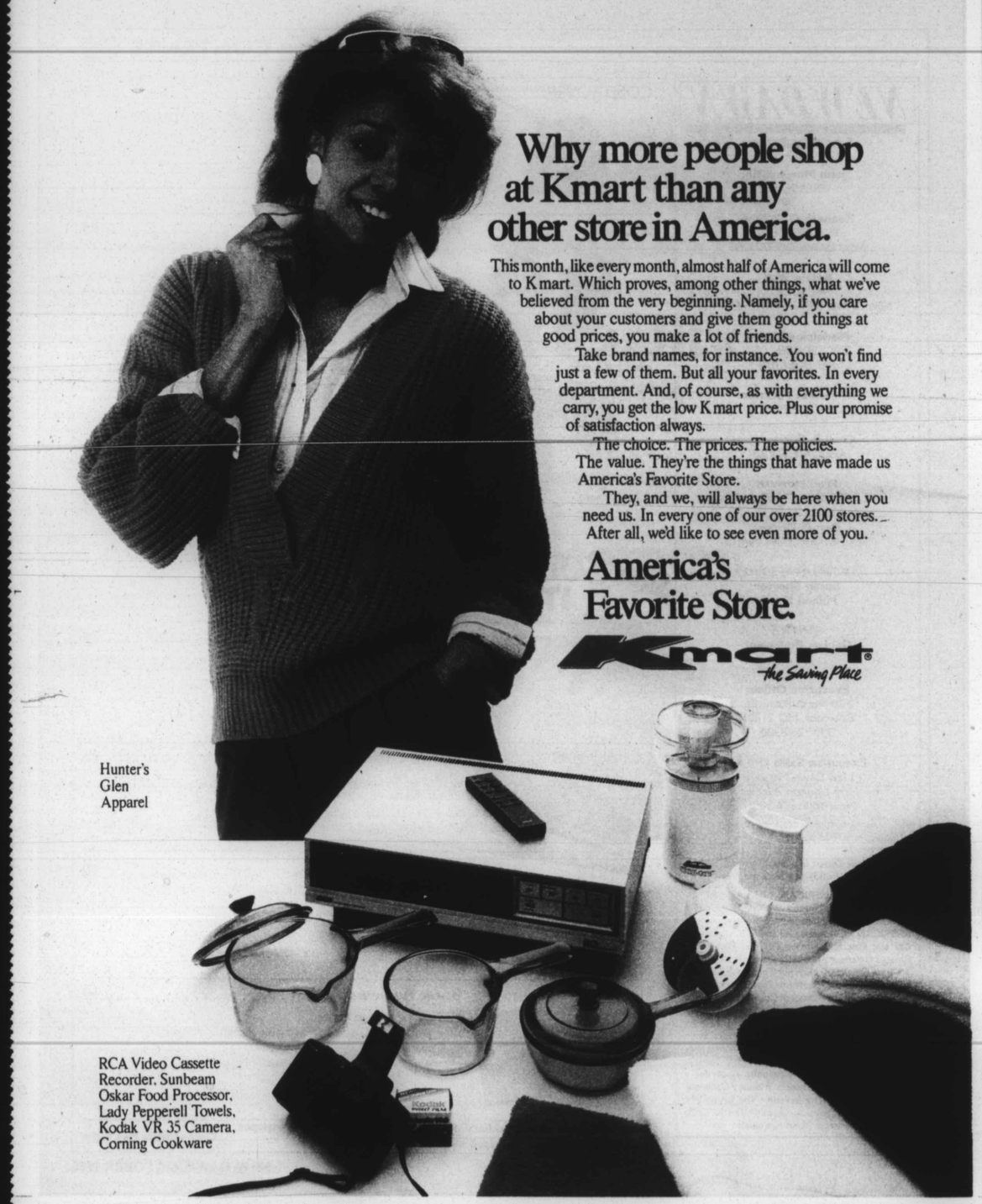

BY SHELLEY MOORE

"The series degenerates into an anti-white diatribe", says N.E.H.

THE AFRICANS

PBS brings the African Continent to Television

The "dark" continent, the "mysterious" continent. A land of jungles and wild beasts. Tarzan and Cheetah. "Shaft in Africa." Many Americans still hold these images of Africa. But thanks largely to a new series on the Public Broadcasting System this fall, many people will soon become intimately acquainted with the **real** Africa — its people, its problems and its promise.

"The Africans," a nine-part documentary series co-produced by WETA-TV in Washington, D.C. and the British Broadcasting Company, begins October 7, 1986 over PBS stations throughout the country. Written and narrated by Dr. Ali A. Mazruis, a professor at the University of Michigan and Nigeria's University of Jos, "The Africans" explores just about every conceivable trend and issue that has impacted Africa throughout its history: nature, religion, colonialism, the slave trade, war, independence, technology.

"The Africans" practically brims over with factual detail. There is almost too much information. Yet, there is **never a boring moment.** Dr. Mazrui keeps pulling his audience back to his central theme of the "triple heritage." Today's Africa, according to the Kenya-born professor, has been shaped by three main influences: its own traditions, Islam and Western civilization. The film illustrates this heritage with vivid images gathered from all over the continent. Indeed, "The Africans" is one of the most visually exciting productions PBS has ever presented.

Filmed in 16 African countries, Europe and the United States, the series has many fascinating contraditions. A young East African man sunbathes on the beach with a "walkman" headset at his ears. Algerian women put their full-length robes and veils back on before leaving their high technology factory jobs for the day. A diesel truck crosses a desert where only camels once traveled. A village leader in Nigeria, dressed in traditional Islamic robes, steps into his chauffeured Mercedes. Senegalese Muslims, who are prohibited by Islamic law from eating pork, raise hogs for European consumption. Catholic husbands take on extra "wives" and children.

Perhaps the most appealing subject in the series is the African dedication to family that exists throughout the continent.

"The Africans" is guaranteed to stir a lot of debate among its viewers, for Dr. Mazrui raises a number of sensitive issues concerning religion, politics and the role of women, to name a few. Dr. Mazrui also expresses his ideas on what Africa must do to become a thriving and self-sustaining continent again.

Many of these ideas will be carefully examined by college students all over the United States this fall. Funded by The Annenberg/CPB Project for use as an educational tool, "The Africans" is being presented as a credit-bearing course at several colleges and universities across the country. A textbook and study guide are available to students who enroll in the television course, and a teachers' guide has been developed for use with students in grades six through ten.

Additional funding for this series was provided by the National Endowment for the Humanities (NEH), public television stations and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. NEH, however, recently rejected WETA's request for promotional funds for the production and asked that its name be removed from the program's credits.

According to NEH, the series "degenerates into an anti-white diatribe" and violates the funding body's standards of balance and objectivity.

"The Africans" is the most comprehensive television study of Africa ever attempted and the first series on Africa ever hosted by a renowned African scholar. The executive producers are two seasoned professionals in documentary and public affairs television: Charles Hobson, a Black Senior Vice-President at WEAT-TV, and David Harrison of the British Broadcasting Company. The Nigerian Television Association assisted in the production, and African film crews were used in several locations.

New Dawn will be listening to what people will be saying about "The Africans" and the controversy that is unfolding about its viewpoints on sensitive issues. Look for our follow-up report in a future issue.

For a general viewers' guide or information about the college course offering, contact The Annenberg/CPB Collection at 1-800-LEARNER. (In Illinois, call (312) 878-2600). For the teachers' guide for grades six through ten, contact WETA-TV at (703-998-2709). ■

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