

The 1964 African Women's Institute

JEREMIAH E. ELLIS

In the summer of 1964, the Hugheses' ten-acre enclave in Maplewood became a literal bridge between the local Black leaders and the African continent.¹ Under the direction of Dr. Dorothy Dodge, Macalester College hosted the African Women's Institute, an intensive program for fourteen selected women students—ages eighteen to twenty-one—hailing from nations including Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Sierra Leone, Tanganyika, and Southern Rhodesia.² While the students spent their weekdays immersed in rigorous coursework on politics and sociology or tutoring at Como Park Junior High, their weekends were spent in the homes of St. Paul's leading Black families.³ James and Frances Hughes, alongside families like the Strowders, Pattons, and Williamses, served as hosts, providing the students with what the *St. Paul Recorder* described as a “closer view of community life.”⁴

The highlights of this cultural exchange often centered on the Hughes residence, where the spaciousness of their suburban lot allowed for large-scale hospitality.⁵ In late June, the entire group of students was entertained at a picnic supper at the Hughes home, an event that combined local leisure with a tour of St. Paul's new high-rise developments for the aged and the Gibbs Agricultural Farm Home.⁶ These gatherings were more than mere social outings; they



African Women's Institute at Macalester College, circa 1964. Photo courtesy of the Macalester College archives.

were strategic opportunities for the students—who were studying at prestigious US institutions like Cornell, Spelman, and Notre Dame—to gain “working knowledge of ideal community conditions” before returning home to lead similar initiatives in their own countries.⁷ For the Hughes family, hosting these future leaders on their hard-won land was a powerful assertion of Pan-African solidarity and a demonstration that the excellence they cultivated in Maplewood had a global resonance.

NOTES

1. “African College Students Attend Women's Institute At Macalester College,” *St. Paul Recorder*, July 2, 1964.

2. Margaret Morris, “14 Young Africans Help Liven Up St. Paul School Institute,” *Minneapolis Sunday Tribune*, June 28, 1964.

3. “14 African Women Attend Institute at Mac,” *The Mac Weekly* vol. 1, no. 1, June 19, 1964.

4. “African College Students Attend Women's Institute,” *St. Paul Recorder*.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Ibid.*

7. *Ibid.*