

Ethan Zuckerman



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## What do you know about Africa?

December 29, 2005

Jorn Barger, who is kind enough to regularly amplify posts on my blog on his weblog "[Robot Wisdom](#)", wrote to me a few weeks ago with a great suggestion: An online quiz that helped readers figure out what they did and didn't know about Africa and helped them learn more.

I shared the idea with some of the great bloggers behind [BlogAfrica](#) and the sub-Saharan Africa section of Global Voices. We spun the idea around a bit and came up with a quiz that tests your knowledge of Africa and the African blogosphere. The answers to [the quiz](#) include links to African and Afroophile blogs that have commented on key issues in 2005 – check 'em out and find some great blogs to add to your blogroll.

[Try it out!](#) Feel free to use the comments section on this post to let me know how you did, gripe about the questions or otherwise give feedback.

If folks like the quiz idea, I'll put together another one closer to Jorn's original vision, which tests knowledge of African current events and links to news stories and blogposts. And perhaps other Global Voices editors will want to do similar quizzes to feature bloggers in their region – let me know, guys, and I'll set up an instance of the quiz tool on GV.

Thanks to [Sokari Ekine](#), [Andrew Heavens](#), "[Black River Eagle](#)", [Ory Okolloh](#), [Ndesanjo Macha](#), and "[Sleepless in Sudan](#)" for their great questions – bad questions and question selection is my fault, not theirs.

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Thanks, everyone, for the great response to this post. I think we'll be doing a variety of quizzes on Global Voices in the near future – clearly, they're a fun way to test your knowledge. In an ironic twist, the BBC released [a quiz about African news](#) on the same day as I posted my quiz. I swear that I didn't know about theirs, and the timestamp more or less guarantees that they didn't know about ours. A fun quiz, if a little less blog-centric than this one. And if you do as well as I did on it, evidently you should run the AU... :-)



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### 32 thoughts on "What do you know about Africa?"

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#### STEPHANIE RIEGER

December 29, 2005 at 2:10 pm

Wow, an embarrassing score of 50%. I must admit, I get all my news from the BBC and having spent much time in Asia I avidly follow Asian news but am guilty of regularly missing news from Africa. (What little there is that is broadcast in my timezone—I used to get more African news watching BBC and TV5 in Bangkok than I now do in Canada.)

Most of my friends watch Canadian or American news and the only time they hear (incredibly short and sensationalistic reports) about Africa is during a coup, civil war or famine. And as none of them have stepped foot on the continent, it's hard to relate.

Thanks for the quiz, your blog, and Global Voices. The world needs more of this if we're ever going to understand each other.

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#### COLIN

December 29, 2005 at 3:56 pm

Good quiz, and interesting idea. I got 50%. I would have liked to see a question or two relating to geography, since I suspect most Westerners have no concept of internal African borders. A better mental map would help people remember what few African news stories they hear, and also appreciate just how big a place it is. Aside from Tunisia there were no questions on North Africa, and nothing on HIV/AIDS, both of which would have been good.

But I have to wonder just how useful a quiz like this really is. Are North Americans more familiar with news of this local nature that comes from Europe, Asia or Latin America (or any other permutation of that sentence)? I suspect not. And if you assume that Westerners only have so much bandwidth to receive African news, is it better to fill it with stories about a Nigerian governor's sartorial scandals, or a broader picture of Africa's social, economic, and political issues?

I suspect you would argue that the only way to get Westerners interested in Africa's bigger issues is to draw them into a more personal relationship with specific Africans and African events (in



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### ETHAN

December 29, 2005 at 4:09 pm

Fair points, Colin – I think the next quiz I'm planning will be more hard-news oriented, will include some geography, etc. This one ended up being more about the blogosphere... which spent a lot more time on Bayelsa than on other issues you'd like to see covered more thoroughly. It was also intended to be fun, which meant a balance between the hard stuff and the funnier stuff.

On the HIV/AIDS point – you might want to glance back at [a post I made about the Africa panel at Pop!Tech](#). AIDS didn't come up in the discussion until the moderator brought it up, and several of the panelists were pretty pissed that he forced the issue onto the table. Some of my colleagues feel that Americans tend to be obsessed with HIV in Africa, and that Africans, left to tell their own stories, will tell different stories. That said, AIDS is part of the picture of contemporary life in Africa and another quiz will certainly have a HIV/AIDS question.

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### JOHN POWERS

December 29, 2005 at 5:01 pm

The question I missed was the one about cell phones, which surprises me because the rapid increase in the number of cell phones in Africa is a point that I keep making to others.

Colin makes a very good point about "trivilizing" African news. However something I truly love about your blog is your joyfulness about Africans and Africa.

To read the news without a sense of connection with lovely, funny, enterprising, and a whole bunch of other positive adjectives, Africans leads to despair.

Your blog, Global Voices, Taking it Global, Baobab Connections, and plenty of other sites that are using the Internet to connect people together. These connections lead to hopefulness.

I like the quiz. It's hard to make good test items. While some of the incorrect choices made me laugh, for example thinking of Museveni dressed as a woman, I could see that the test questions, nor the quiz itself, were not made as satire or as a political statement. Anyway, it's good to see that you are interested in making future quizzes even more serious



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But by choosing 1% of Africans owning a cellphone rather than 10% even while cellphones are a subject I'm interested in, reveals stereotypical thinking on my part. A quiz that addresses common misconceptions might be interesting and useful.

Thank you Ethan Z! I've heard you described as "my hero" several times. My reaction has been to roll my eyes, but darn it, am coming around to that point of view. You clearly love life and it's your celebration of humanity that so cheers me.

Happy New Year!

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### ALLEGRA

December 29, 2005 at 5:17 pm

Fun quiz! I pretty much flunked (only one I knew for sure was the Weah question) but my mom got 80%.

Interestingly enough, she gets all her news from non-online sources, such as radio (NPR's The World and the BBC) and newspaper. The radio probably played a bigger part in keeping her up-to-date on African news than the newspaper did.

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### ETHAN

December 29, 2005 at 5:35 pm

Allegra – props to your mom. 80% is awfully good, if you don't aggregate African blogs for a living. It's great to hear that she's able to be this knowledgeable based on NPR and BBC, both of which are doing a damned good job of covering key Africa stories.

John, thanks so much for the kind words. The quiz is an experiment, and I'm learning a lot already about it as a technique. I'm glad you liked the cellphone question – it's the question I'm happiest with, as it explicitly addresses a preconception that many of us have about the continent. (My wife, who spends a lot of time with me in Africa, got it wrong as well... :-)) I like the idea of an "all preconceptions" quiz – if you can think of good questions for it, please email them to me.



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who are working blogs into their curriculums. I'm going to talk to the Americas contributors about setting one up. The links at the end really make you want to learn more about the region.

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### JAMAL

December 29, 2005 at 9:13 pm

good idea. clearly more needs to be known about africa. im going to do the quiz myself now!

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### QUIXOTE

December 29, 2005 at 9:58 pm

Aack. 50%. And that was only because of a few lucky guesses. (There were also about three unlucky ones, so maybe that evens out.) Great idea. Do it again!

I checked out one of the links—to Sleepless in Sudan—and have just come back from an hour or so reading that blog, simply overcome. Quiet, levelheaded, humorous (humorous!) and full of information. Thanks for the links, Ethan!

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### COS

December 30, 2005 at 2:07 am

I'm surprised I got 80%. I really haven't been following Africa nearly as much as I normally would, in 2005, and when I saw the questions tended to be about events of the past year, I figured I'd get around 30%-40%. It turns out, interestingly, that having some general background helped me deduce answers to some questions, such as the one where the answer was the World Cup. Some questions probably did almost require that you'd heard about the actual event – for example, bananas and oranges (but I knew that one, because there's a special spot in my attention for Kenya, the only African country I've been to as an adult). But take the one about bloggers' languages – of the four countries listed, only one of them has an African language that you could reasonably expect a majority of the literate population to know.

I wonder if the quiz's creator consciously sought to include questions you could deduce the



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### NDESANJO MACHA

December 30, 2005 at 8:42 am

Ethan, maybe there should be more than one quiz a year. It is an excellent idea. A fun way of learning about Africa. Sad news: despite my gospel about cellphone revolution in Africa (and that bloggers should not be worried about limited computer penetration since cellphone subscribers, even in the remotest town or village, will soon be reading us) I somehow missed that one! I thought the 10% would apply to specific countries but not to the continent as a whole. Well, great job.

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### BLACK RIVER EAGLE

December 30, 2005 at 10:52 am

Great job on the Africa Quiz Ethan. I scored an amazing 90% and what was really cool is that I didn't have to guess at any of the answers except for Question Nr. 1 (which I got wrong!).

Much of the information needed to answer the questions correctly I had obtained by reading posts from various great blogs about Africa. Online news sites, TV news, and radio broadcasts are increasingly playing a "supporting role" vs. what the world's bloggers are serving up daily, minute-by-minute.

Let's do another Africa Quiz soon.

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### MJ

December 30, 2005 at 12:30 pm

Ethan,

Thanks for this, some good stuff.

While I do agree with much of Colin's post above ....

(I am a U.S citizen, and got 60% on the quiz — low, perhaps, but I do wonder if I would have scored 60% on a comparable quiz about Mexico or Canada — to something of a class like



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... a regular quiz like this would (for me at least) be a great digest of what's being bandied about in the African blogosphere.

I don't think such a thing would contribute to 'trivializing Africa's news' — outside of expatriate communities and perhaps some university settings, the only news one usually sees fits neatly into one of the four 'WDFC' categories: war, disease, famine, corruption (with some sports news thrown in the mix in Olympic and World Cup years).

An 'all pre-conceptions' quiz would no doubt serve a good and worthy purpose. But implicit in such a construction seems to be a sense that 'you should know more about Africa than you do.' Fair enough — but there are a lot of things I should know more about!

If you offer this sort of thing regularly (as part of Global Voices or whatever), you might want to use it (per Jorn) as a way for people to get a sense of what Africans are actually talking about with each other on the web, while taking to include some light or fun items. This might help engage more of us in the conversation (even passively) than the type of quiz one remembers from 10th grade geography class (although that sort of thing certainly has its place as well).

Just \$.02 from a random guy who chanced upon your blog today.

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### CHIPPLA VANDU

December 30, 2005 at 1:40 pm

I got 90%. Fair enough for me. The quiz is a great idea.

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### JEFF MSANGI

December 30, 2005 at 8:47 pm

Ethan,

Thanks for such an amazing idea of the quiz. I feel down that I got 80% apart from the fact that I closely follow the continent's news and development issues. Surely, there should be more than two quizzes a year! Great job.



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[Go Chop Your Dollar' at naija jams](#). Ridiculously catchy. (Incidentally, I found the lyrics [here](#).)

I was surprised to find that I scored 80% as well. And I can say for sure that most what I know about Africa has come through blogs, particularly by way of GVO and Blog Africa. I knew the answer to the question about Kiswahili in Tanzania because Paul Kihwelo explained that story to me, in person, at the summit... Global Voices is rad. :)

I hope there are more of these quizzes as well, perhaps about Asia or South America.

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### KAKA PORI

December 31, 2005 at 5:16 am

Hey! 70% I scored from the quizz means that I still need to learn more about Africa. In Tanzania [my motherland], i believe there's a need of promoting blogging.

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### TIM WORSTALL

December 31, 2005 at 6:25 am

80%. I know more about the place than I thought I did (but was embarrassed to miss the Tanzania/Kiswahili thing)..

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### BRIAN

December 31, 2005 at 9:09 am

I got 70%. Would've been 80 if I'd stuck with Tanzania instead of changing to Nigeria on the blog question. Good quiz.

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### RANDY PAUL

December 31, 2005 at 6:11 pm

80%. I missed the cell phone question and oranges and bananas question. Good quiz.



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**SEVIA**

December 31, 2005 at 6:27 pm

Despite being forced and threatened (By Ndesanjo) into taking this quiz, it was very fun! Unfortunately, I only got 50%!!! Too much pressure! Too much pressure!

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Pingback: [Global Voices Online » Blog Archive » Africa Quiz](#)

**BEN TREMBLAY**

January 1, 2006 at 3:24 pm

Hey Ethan ... happy '06!

I just blogged the quiz ... ["kinda reminds me of the stuff I was producing in the 70s, or when I put the International Education Center online ... "DevEd", doncha know." ... and realized I didn't have you on the blogroll I'm cutting together for my new blog.](#) I looked for a feed link but found none. Hope you have one.

cheers

ben

p.s. haven't cut pron from Global Voices Wiki recently ... a friend shut his wiki down because of it ... hope it is well.

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Pingback: [Kenyan Pundit » Happy New Year!](#)

**JANET**

January 3, 2006 at 4:03 am

Lord, 60% only. As others above have noted, nothing like having someone point out your ignorance to inspire a little online research. Would be great to see Global Voices do a quiz like this for each region. I'll bet there are some great partners out there (Transitions On Line, MediaNet.kz) who could jump in with questions.



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seeing both sides of humanity tells us more about the truth of life lived even in the direst circumstances.

I thought the format was excellent and learned a lot from the presentation of the answers. In particular thanks for informing me about Corneille Ewango.

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### OWEN

January 7, 2006 at 12:20 pm

PS How do you reconcile the notice "Mail (will not be published)" with the fact that whenever I hover the cursor over a comment-poster's name I see their e-mail address?

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### OWEN

January 7, 2006 at 12:39 pm

Except for some reason my own!

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### OWEN

January 7, 2006 at 12:40 pm

Apologies – I've just realised that they're web addresses – sorry for being such an idiot.

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Pingback: [Steve Ntwiga Mugiri » what do you know about Africa?](#)

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Pingback: [article software](#)

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### JENNIFER

June 9, 2009 at 12:45 am

Hey there. I hear wonderful things about this quiz that you made about Africa and I was wondering if you could post it on your site again. I would like to share it with my students if



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Comments are closed.



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