Africa Looks To Colored America

Natives Regard DuBois, Joe Louis, Mrs. FDR As Heroes. Africans Ask For An NAACP Like Ours.

By BAYARD RUSTIN

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is last of a series of four articles by Bayard Rustin on modern Africa, its peoples and its problems.

The admiration of the West African for the colored American is astounding.

I talked with men and women in every economic and political group and found many of them measuring their progress by the Afro-American.

Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe put it this way: "In Africa the colored American is our standard of measurement. A scientist is not "excellent" or "brilliant," he is a budding 'George Washington Carver.' Roy Ankra is the next and 'Sugar Ray Robinson.' A singer of promise is a 'Paul Robeson.'"

In part his respect springs from the fact that the men who have voiced the people's desire for freedom are men who were educated in America. Both Azikiwe and NKrumah were graduates of Lincoln University.

Education For Revolution

The education of these men differred greatly from that of the average student in British universities.

In America they came face to face with jim crow, and they saw him countered by men skilled in struggling for freedom and justice.

Men like Walter White, A. Philip Randolph and W. E. B. DuBois inspired and encouraged the college boys, who now, mature men, will set Africa free.

They returned home with both the vision and skill equal to that task. They had seen black men overcome oppression. They told the people it could be done in Africa. Not only did the people act, they also remembered the names of the men set before them as examples.

When Azikiwe returned to Nigeria in 1937, he knew that a black man could run a newspaper that revealed the plight of his people, for, while an undergraduate at Lincoln, he had seen the effectiveness of the colored press in America.

He had worked for one paper and had gotten the feel of it, an experience England would not have afforded.

GI Joe's Influence

The presence during the war of colored service men in Africa is considered a major factor in the victory over African servility. Some people say that the colored GIs' contribution was as important as NKrumah's arrest.

The colored soldier had had much practice in standing up for his rights. He was not unaccustomed to voicing his opinion. He did not fear the British. He did not say "master." He encouraged his African cousin to stand up.

One night in Lagos, I spoke to a group of college students. In the course of the discussion I mentioned the NAACP.

After the question period, a student told me about a GI he had met while in Accra.

"You know," he said, "I know all about NAACP. We must have one here."

I questioned him further to discover that he actually knew very little about it.

"Why" I asked, "do you feel you must have an NAACP?"

He looked at me as if I had struck him in the face.

"Well," he finally said, "the colored soldiers used to tell us we wouldn't get nowhere till we had an NAACP." If the GI had said so, then it was so. This was the soldiers' effect in West Africa.

It was not only that these GIs "didn't take no stuff" from the British. He knew how to "get things done." He could follow through.

He had dug huge canals to free the cities of stagnant water, of mosquitoes, of malaria. He had introduced "swing," which the African took to "like white on rice."

He had showed them how to candy a yam. He had been one of the few strangers in four hundred years who had not come to exploit. He had called the African "brother" and "cousin."

Bayard Rustin, AFRO correspondent and author of the article on this page, is shown as he interviews Azikiwe the popular West African political leader, at his home near Lagos, West Africa.

He had introduced, for better or worse, a jive language that the African understood but which confounded "the masters." But most of all he had shown them that the little fellows could stand up and be men.

Music And Sports

One of the best known men in West Africa is Roy Ankra, 23-year-old Accra lad, who last year defeated Roy Clayton of England to become featherweight champ of the British Empire.

Roy came with his friends one day to take me for a ride in his modest car. We stopped at his home in the slums of Accra.

The stench of open sewers was sickening. But I never had a better time. We sat on low benches in the middle of the street. Within ten minutes, 150 people had gathered to ask their "American cousin," questions. No boy in American high schools could have been more interested in an array of popular Americans.

We discussed Joe Louis, Ezzard Charles, Sugar Ray Robinson, Louis Jordan, Louis Armstrong and Mrs. Roosevelt, who, incidentally, they thought was an important colored American. All during the discussion one of Cab Calloway's records was being played from a small house across the street.

The Big Shots

When the conversation shifted to more weighty matters I had an experience common throughout West Africa. The first serious question was always, "Do you know Paul Robeson?"

His name is perhaps better known than that of any other American, social or political personality.

Next, they would want to hear something of W. E. B. Dubois. Then they would ask about Walter White and Dr. Bond, who as president of the university that has produced the two most respected men in Africa, is considered "the most learned man in the world."

And learning is important to the African. I have seen classes for illiterates in which men over 80 sat with boys and girls of 9 and 10. The work with illiterates was begun by that grand old American, Dr. Frank Laubach, and is carried on by his pupils.

The accent on adult education has in large part been inspired by men who studied at Columbia, Chicago, Lincoln and Howard Universities.

American Grads Make Good

Following is a list of a few of the significant positions held by graduates of American universities:

Ten of the 80 most important legislators in Nigeria, two ministers in the Cabinet of the Gold Coast, editors of two of the largest newspapers on the Gold Coast and Nigeria, directors of three of the largest business concerns, an expert in the revival of village industries in Nigeria, two of the best doctors and several leaders in adult and primary education.

New Responsibilities

In the past some colored Americans have done what they could to be of service to Africa. Africans not only welcome us, they urge us to come and join them in their struggle. Already there are colored Americans throughout Africa making their contribution to social and business development.

In Accra I met a young engineer, a Mr. Mosley, who had been invited to the Gold Coast by NKrumah. His skill will be a great source of inspiration to young African boys, who up to now have seen few colored men as well trained as young Mosley.

A Philadelphian named Belcher is in West Africa because he knows that the natural resources there need to be developed. He is not only an idealist with a desire to help Africa, he knows that such an unexplored field is a good business proposition.

It's Good Business

A young graduate of Morgan College, Baltimore, has developed a successful business in Liberia recently. He is a man of refinement. Unlike the European, who often makes his money, but ignores the welfare of the country, this man contributed to the cultural life of the people and invests his profits to that end. Naturally, the people are fond of him.

One of the few broadcasting networks in private hands in West Africa is owned by a former soldier who had been stationed in Liberia, returning after the war.

But perhaps the most important colored American figure in West Africa is Eunice Johnson. Eunice was born in Toledo, Ohio. In 1948, she graduated from Wilberforce University. Skilled and ambitious, she studied at the School of Higher Social Sciences in Paris until 1950.

I asked her how she happened to go to Africa.

"I have had an interest in Africa since public school days," she said. "I knew there was more to it than I was taught as a youth."

When she got to Liberia she wrote to Azikiwe, whom she had not met, that she would come to Nigeria if he could find her a job. To her surprise he wrote back, "Come."

She arrived in Lagos penniless, but soon was working as Azikiwe's private secretary. By diligence, patience and perseverence, she is today general manager of the Associated Newspapers of Nigeria.

"Running four newspapers is not easy but it has been a great experience," she says.

By raising our horizons to include interest in, and service to, Africa, we can move a step closer to the position of struggling against injustice where it exists.

Thus we shall gain that perspective and spiritual power which will give us new insight, and energy for the battle of jim crow at home.

For, just as we have much to teach the African, so the African has much to teach us.

Seeing Is Believing

Traveling in Africa has meant much to me. To begin with, I discovered that my education kept me ignorant of Africa. Our history books did not mention it except for slavery.

The geographers have led me to think it a land that was the "white man's grave" (what that had to do with me, I don't know) a place of wild animals, disease and superstition—the "Dark Continent."

Today I have quite different views. I have visited a black king whose forefathers were using iron and making magnificent jewelry of gold, when the British were in the stone age.

I have seen women with simple sticks and a frame making cloth that Hattie Carnegie would give her eye teeth to acquire.

I have seen a system of decentralized democracy in which the degree of individual freedom is like unto nothing the west has yet devised.

I have seen ancient cities with drainage, roads and sewage disposal systems that rival anything the Romans did.

I have seen sculpture in wood and stone, done by men with unbelievably simple tools, that makes the realistic classical works of Greece and Rome seem cold and photographic.

I have seen modern cities. I have seen yellow men, brown men and men as black as coal. I have seen that there is not one Africa but several Africas—each having made a distinctive contribution to world culture.

Time To Act

You and I have a part to play in restoring Africa to her rightful place.

When the request comes to support the men going to jail in South Africa, give.

When the U.S. government supports imperialism in South Africa, protest.

When the next book is published on Africa, read.

When the opportunity comes to visit Africa, go.

When the business opportunity opens up, invest.

These things we must do, for as the African political leaders point out, we are as yet the freest voice that can speak for Africa.

Colored Americans have a great duty before them. They must discharge it with responsibility. There can be no rest until Africa, that ancient land afire with the love of liberty, is free.

Help Fight TB

Buy Christmas Seals

Because famine was threatening and in gratitude for the end of a strange sickness that killed many,

the first pilgrims went hungry.

Thanksgiving was a religious rite at first, turkey came later; Thomas Jefferson did not like this holiday, however it has persevered for over 300 years.

Thanksgiving table setting can be created to suit many of the holiday's moods. In this picture, fall foliage, fruits and vegetables with "company" silver and dishes, grace the family table for the big dinner. Make it buffet service to ease Mother's chores.

Thanksgiving is one of two great American holidays . . . the Fourth of July being the other.

Christmas, New Year's and Easter are observed in many other countries.

Despite general belief, Thanksgiving has not always been an autumnal holiday, and neither were the thanks always for a bountiful harvest as is common belief.

Authority for the 1621 date seems to inhere from a letter written by Governor Winthrop who told of a great feast which the colonists of Plymouth shared with Indians of the area. Incidentally, no one knows whether turkey was served at this feast or not.

Not Always For Food

Maryland's first official thanksgiving was observed in 1698, and not because of a bountiful supply.

There is, also, plenty of historical data to indicate that the first Thanksgiving was in 1623 and not 1621 as most of us have thought.

Celebrated In August

A booklet put out by an art dealer of New York, Marchal E. Landgren cites Carpenter's History of Massachusetts to show that the first Thanksgiving seems to have been held in August, 1623, and for a different reason than good crops.

During this month, says Mr. Landgren, Puritan emigrants arrived at Plymouth bringing food supplies with them.

Food was so low among the colonists at this time that they were living off of lobsters and spring water.

The thanksgiving at this time was for deliverance from impending famine, says the historian, and in gratitude for the end of a mysterious sickness that killed off many settlers.

For Peace

Thanksgiving as we know it was celebrated between the first one at Plymouth and President Lincoln's proclamation of 1864.

In that year, as the Civil War was drawing to a close, President Lincoln named the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day for the entire nation. The South refused to recognize it.

Of course there were presidents who were for and against the observance.

In 1789, President Washington, during his first year in office, issued a proclamation appointing Thursday, Nov. 26, for special observance in gratitude for "the opportunity peaceably to establish a constitution."

Six years later he issued a similar one to commemorate the benefits enjoyed under the constitution.

Jefferson flat-footedly refused to recommend that his countrymen give thanks for anything. He didn't want the government meddling in anything religious.

President Madison, who had seen his white House and Capitol burned by the British in September 1814, didn't wait until November to be appreciative of peace.

He proclaimed January 12, 1815, as a day to celebrate the signing of the Treaty of Ghent.

Always On Thursday

All these holidays had one thing in common. Their days of thanksgiving were always Thursdays.

Miss Velma Gibson, popular North Carolina A&T coed, holds the best of Thanksgiving dinners in her arms, 25 pounds of prize tom turkey and one of 200 at the college farm. Miss Gibson is a native of Greensboro, N.C., and was recently elected "Queen" by the campus chapter of Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity.

If you plan a dress-up party, by all means get out the silver and your loveliest lamps. Don't hoard eggnog for Christmas, serve it now. Add turkey and ham, the latter with brandied peaches, and you'll be a skilled hostess.