By Ethel L. Payne

DAKAR, Senegal — To this stately city by the sea last Oct. 2, scholars and diplomats, educators and scientists and old friends came to help President Leopold Senghor observe his 70th birthday.

For eight days and nights the celebrating went on, not in feasting and merrymaking, nor in paying tribute to a personality cult. Instead, this poet-philosopher-statesman presided over an extraordinary "Colloquium on Culture and Development" which gave a fresh look to an old idea.

More than 50 years ago, a group of eager, young students in Paris were avidly reading such American periodicals as "The Crisis," "Opportunity" and "Journal of Negro History.'

They included Senghor, Aimee Cesaire of Martinique and Leon Damas of French Guyana. In the U.S. there was a great flowering of black culture. with Harlem, New York as the fountainhead. The three transplanted Parisians of Afro-Caribbean background were greatly influenced by such writers as Countee Cullen, Claude McKay, Langston Hughes, W.E.B. Dubois, and Alain Locke.

The budding philosophers dreamed of establishing linkages with blacks wherever they might be in the diaspora. In a concept paper prepared for the Colloquim, Dr. Michael Winston, director of the Moorland-Spingarn Research Center at Howard University, defined the theory of Negritude as developed by the trio.

"It was the whole complex of civilized values which characterizes the black people or more precisely the Negro-African world. It was an effort to create a solidarity of the consciousness wherever peoples of African descent had been dispersed by the slave trade or modern imperialism.

"Initially, Negritude was a reaction to colonialism and European denial of the worth of black culture. As refined by Senghor in the last 20 years, it is a rejection of materialism and positivism. It is a philosophy which places culture above politics. Thus, the concept of Negritude is a turning point in the emergence of modern black consciousness that parallels the political independence of Africa and the freedom movements of blacks in the world."

Paris provided the climate for the growth of intellectualism. Here were novices exploring the thought process — what was it like to be black in a world dominated by Anglo-Saxon norms? If the whole is equal to the sum of all its parts, where was the Page 4

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Rediscovering Negritude

totality of blackness in this equation?".

For 50 years, Senghor and his compatriots have carried on a continuous quest for the fulfillment of the idea of

Eight years ago, Senghor sponsored the first world festival of black art and culture in Dakar. It was significant that the colloquim should be held as "Festac," the Second World Festival of African and Black Art and Culture is finally about to take place in Nigeria.

Some 40 Americans were among Senghor's invited guests. The list included a sizeable representation of the Howard University faculty led by President and Mrs. James E. Cheek and their daughter.

Dr. Lorraine Williams, vice president of Howard, serves as vice president of the Leopold Senghor Foundation, an international organization devoted to the extension of the arts worldwide. Leon Damas, now a professor at Howard, was present and played an active role in the preparations for the

For the poet-philosopher-statesman, the gifts presented to him reflected appropriately his scholastic background. books, paintings, musical records and a scaled model of the cultural center to be built on the island of Goree off the coast of Senegal.

The model was constructed at the University School of Architecture un-, with no reporters included. But der the supervision of Dean Jerome Lindsey. The center will have great historical significance, for Goree was a holding place for the flourishing slave trade in the 17th and 18th centuries. The fortress with its dungeons has been preserved as it was. The island which is reached by ferry, is a tourist attraction now.

One of the highlights of the celebration was an afternoon visit to Goree. The guests were entertained by a griot who gave an oral history of the entire African continent to the accompaniment of a kora band. For the Americans, it was a tie-in with Author Alex Haley's "Roots," the account of his 12-year documentation of the search for his ancestors that led to

This tiny country lies adjacent to Senegal and it is possible that many of our forebearers were brought from here to Goree before they were shipped to the New World.

Leopold Sedar Senghor is an intellectual in the true sense. Born in the small town of Joal, Senegal in 1906, he was educated in the system established by the French colonizers. He remains today a devout Catholic in a predominantly Moslem country. He once studied for the priesthood.

In his late teens, Senghor left for France where he scored high in his studies. He came in contact with other scholars from all over the world. He was the first black to be admitted to the prestigious French Academy of Arts. Senghor was a leader in the move to unite the Francophile countries in Africa, and later, he was a founder of the Organization of African

After serving as a member of the French Chamber of Deputies, Senghor returned to his native land to lead the struggle for independence. Since becoming its first and only president in 1960, he has survived an attempted coup and has achieved a record for stability on the African continent.

Rated as a moderate among African leaders, Senghor has played a quiet, low-profile role in the turbulent Southern African affairs.

Last May, Secretary of State Henry Kissinger visited him during his sixnation tour of Africa. Except for picture taking, the meeting was very private Senghor keeps in close touch with the so-called "Front Line Presidents" of Tanzania, Zambia, Botswana, Angola and Mozambique.

Commenting on the latest diplomatic effort by Kissinger, - Senghor said he would continue to support their position on a solution to the crisis. This includes returning power to the black majorities not only in Southern Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) but in Southwest Africa (Namibia) and ultimately in the White-ruled Republic of South Africa that is the bastion of

The presence of so many Howard University personnel was an indication of the strong alliance with blacks in the United States. There is an exchange program of Senegalese and American black students, as well as writers, artists and scholars who are attracted to the cultural advantages of

Howard and Morehouse in Atlanta have bestowed honorary degrees on Senghor. He was received at the White House in the Johnson and Nixon Administrations. Now, he looks to blacks in the Western Hemisphere to carry on the development of Negritude.

In Senghor's address to the opening session of the Colloquium, he warned of the danger of cultural imperialism which is subtlely subverting black culture to the status of folklore.

Politics, he said, should serve the interests of culture and not, as is unfortunately, the case in most of the Third World States that culture should subserve the ends of politics. Conscious of the inevitability of morality. he is calling for a new awareness of Negritude lest blacks lose their belief in their heritage and become mere

"The major problem of this last quarter of the 20th Century is not so much the new economic order as the new cultural world order to be established. UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) is well aware of this and has worked out a project for a 'Dialogue of Civilizations," he asser-

Senghor concluded that this can succeed only through a "Dialogue of Cultures." In this way, he said, blacks will not come empty-handed to the rendezvous. Senghor defines growth as the increase in the production, distribution and consumption of material things. Development includes growth, but goes beyond it, since it adds things of the spirit. The French philosopher, Descrats, refers to the trinity of thought, sense and will as a necessary condition for action.

Senegal is a poor country, but it leads the way in culture and development. In Dakar, not only will you find some of the world's most beautiful women, but elegance of thought. Theatre and art museums and the university give an added dimension to the capital.

U.S. Ambassador O. Rudolph Aggrey says Senghor invites criticism as a part of cultural development. He listens quietly, but there are few who are able to outbest him in logic. His ambitious program to improve the quality of life for his people includes stress on education and codifying the main dialects into an indigenous written language for the country that will rank in importance to the French language acquired under colonial rule.

But Senghor emphasizes that Negritude is not a philosophy of isolationism or nationalism. It is open to the infusion of other cultures without diluting its value.



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