West Africa in the '80s: The future is now

By James C. Moore, Ph.D.

Twenty - two years ago, Ghana, under the dynamic leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, led a long list of African states granted independence — jubilation rung from the Gold Coast in the West to Mount Kilimanjaro in the East. Never before had prosperity, peace and freedom loomed so vividly.

Now in its third decade, much of post colonial Africa's hope for a better life is in a state of political paralysis, plagued by a multiplicity of health problems and haunted by astronomical inflation, low wages and substence living standards by the majority of its people.

Excluding South Africa, there are now forty - five independent African nations south of the Sahara. A view of the West Coast (August 1979) reveals that these states range from peace and tranquility in the Gambia and Senegal; to an alleged government of brutality in Ecuatorial Guinea; to military rule in part has created leaders multiparty democracy in Upper Volta; to national unity in the Cameroon; and, to an economically booming Ivory Coast.

Throughout Africa, less than a dozen states are governed by a multiparty democracy. Most have denounced the colonially entrenched democratic institution, and have restructured their political systems around a one party government (some with a justifiable rationale) and a president designated for life, which in part has reated leaders vulnerable to coups d'etat, and bureaucra es subject to mamanagement, corruption and deceitful accountability to the people.

During a recent work - study visit to West Africa, this writer had the opportunity for consultations and observations with key governmental officials, business leaders, university professors, civic workers, youths, village chiefs, villagers, ethnic groups and religious leaders, to dicuss socio - economic issues and political problems pertinent to Africa.

Particular attention was focused on U.S. Policy Toward Africa and the African's Perception of that Policy.

Despite the multitude of negative reports pouring out of that vast continent on "Faded dreams" and "unfulfilled promises," hope is alive and optimism runs high. Everywhere, the drumming theme is Unity! Unity! One Nigeria! One Ghana! Harambee! (let's pull together) - to wipe out corruption, Neo - Colonialism and ethnic differences.

"Africans have had two decades of on the job training (OJT) for running governments and managing their domestic affairs," said a key Nigerian official. "Some painful lessons have been taught through some forty - four coups d'etat, and several civil wars." He continued, "We must profit from our past mistakes - THE FUTURE IS NOW." This appeared to be the captured sentiment of most Africans this writer interviewed.

The whole continent is potentially an economic giant, and many Africans now know this. It could well become the mineral - kingdom of the world, considering its wealth of mineral deposits. As one aging

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cocoa farmer in Ghana reached down slowly for a handful of soil and raised his head to the sun and cautiously said, "Africa has everything right here."

He slowly turned to this writer almost in tears saying, "But we need help, massive aid and technology to assist us in analyzing this soil. . . what's under this soil?" he asked. The latter question best sums Africa's past, and alludes to the contemporary problems of today. The farmer was right, it is the elements in the African soil that were responsible for the colonization process; it's what's in the African soil that was responsible for The Scramble for Africa, it's what's in the African soil that was responsible for the Berlin Conference (1885), it's what's in the African soil that is responsible for How Europe Underdeveloped Africa, it's what's in the African soil that is responsible for Neo - Colonialism today; and it's what's in the African soil that is responsible for Neo - Colonialism today; and it's what's in the African soil that may lead to a "racial war in the near future that will endure for generations."

In brief, it is estimated that Southern Africa alone produces 62.5 percent of the world's output of diamonds, 60.8 percent of the gold, 50 percent of the vandium, 45.7 percent of the platinum group metals; 36.2 percent of chromite, 35.3 percent of cobalt, 24.4 percent of managanese and 18 percent of copper. Africa, south of the Sahara, has become a leading exporter of oil, particularly Nigeria and Gabon. To put it another way, it's what's in the African soil that may eventually bring economic parity and stability to the continent.

What follows is a country by country report of contemporary events in several West African countries visited by the writer during the months of August - September, 1979:

Liberia (Monrovia)

Founded in 1847 by former American slaves under the auspices of the American Colonization Society, Liberia has gained the reputation of Peace Mediator between African states, and continues to be a troubadour for total liberation in Southern Africa. Proof of this conviction emanated at the 28th session of the Organization of African Unity Liberation Committee.

Liberia, at the 14th OAU Conference in Gabon, presented to the Liberation Committee a check in the "modest amount of $608, 009 for the sacred cause of African liberation."

Notwithstanding her own economic woes, which include an astronomical rate of inflation, which led to the $40 million civil disorders (race riots) on April 14, 1979, the killing of thirty people and the injury of some three houndred, President Tolbert, at the young age of sixty - six, continues to maintain credibility within his government. Upon arriving in this nation of 1,577,000 (1976 - E) citizens covering some 43,000 square miles, this writer found. President Tolbert carrying out a Carter - type "Cabinet Shake - up."

However, not for the lack of loyalty, but for alleged charges of corruption, such as "bribes and kickbacks for the purchase of government supplies and the awarding of government contracts." Areas under investigation included the Ministers of Finance, Agriculture and Public Corporations. These investigations were seen by most Liberians as restoring public confidence in the Tolbert Administration, a position he has enjoyed for eight years.

Nevertheless, high officials in the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Labor pointed out that Liberia's foreign policy is the "bedrock" for West African development. Already there exists inter - African cooperation on bilateral, subregional, regional and Continental levels.

With her neighboring states, Guinea and the Ivory Coast, joint commissions have been created, which provided an institutional framework for economic cooperation in all areas, an example of which is a hydroelectric project being built by the governments of the Ivory Coast and Liberia along their southernmost borders.

Officials here further pointed out that President Tolbert's role as peace mediator in Africa has in part been responsible for bringing Guinea out of isolation, and augmenting the recent meeting between Presidents Carter and Seko Toure, held in Washington (August 1979).

Furthermore, Liberia and Guinea have established the Mifergui Project for the development of the two countries mineral rich iron ore industry. They also signed in January 1979 nonaggression and mutural defense treaties. Other agreements reached, covered trade, fishing, cattle, payment, extradition, and telecommunication. Similar economic cooperation exists with Sierra Leone.

Finally, an historical milestones was reached in Liberia during this past July, when the Summit Conference of the Organization of African Unity returned to its roots. It was in 1959 when Liberia's President William V. S. Tubman met with Ghana's Kwame Nkhrumah and Guinea's Ahmed Sekou Toure to map out a plan for a united Africa - which eventually molded into the OAU.

Hosting the 16th OAU Summit was costly for Liberian taxpayers. Officials for planning and development approximated the cost at "$100 - 200 million over the last five years." Major projects included: a new terminal and runways for handling the Jumbo 727s at Roberts International Airport, the OAU Conference Center, the Hotel Africa, and fifty - one chalets called OAU Village.

Reactions to such massive spending range from dismay to dissension among citizens. However, OAU officials informed this writer that "Liberia has been building over the years, with not so much the OAU in mind, as with our general plans of needed development, with emphasis on promoting tourism and international conferences in our Capitol City." Even with this explanation, "it seems too much to spend for a two - week conference, considering Liberia's annual budget, which is slightly over $300 million," said a key civic leader.

However, according to post evaluations of the summit, it was a tremendus success. And most of the forty - nine nations in attendance had high respect for organizers and planners within the Tolbert Administration.

As the OAU's new chairman, President Tolbert pledged to work diligently toward guiding this multi - ethnic organization from unfulfilled prosperity to new goals with tangible results. Priorities include: A Human Rights Policy for the OAU, the Middle East Settlement between Egypt and Israel, a just solution for the Zimbabwe - Rhodesian Civil War, Economic Cooperation in Africa and the Western Sahara.

Most political and civic leaders this wrter conversed with expressed a positive attitude about the new directions of the 1980 OAU, under the chairmanship of President Tolbert. One political representative went so far as to say that the OAU would have its most "stable and productive year" in its (sixteen-year) history, under the guidance of President Tolbert.

Liberia's foreign policy is the bedrock for West African development, but there is a great need for economic cooperation between the countries.

Ivory Coast

Picturesquely overlooking the Atlantic Ocean, this former French Colony represents an economic giant in West Africa and is frequently referred to as the Paris of Africa, because of French investment.

From an urban perspective, this writer observed a booming commercial development in Abidjan, San Pedro, and Daloa and Bouake that is unparalleled anywhere in West Africa. A key official in the Foreign Affairs Office proudly called it an "Ivorian Miracle."

The Ivory Coast is often referred to as a neocolonial state, because of the French presence and its close economic ties to France. This appears not to dissuade President Houphouet Boigny and his Ivorian Planners. What is important, said a high level officials in the Ministry of Finance, is that our "people are at work," including some French nationals.

And, there is still a need for more technical workers; as a matter of fact, he pointed out, "even migrant workers are essential to our labor force," citing figures from 1977 reports, he said, "of the 2,000 enterprises surveyed by the Ministry of Finance, there were 200,300 employed persons, of whom 140,600 were Ivorian Africans, 78,300 were non - Ivorian Africans, and 10,300 were Europeans."

The most pressing problem found by this writer was rural unemployment and poverty - which has forced people to flood Abidjan in search of the "Promised Land."

Abidjan's current population is approaching the two million mark and according to this writer's observation, serious problems will soon be developing, unless something is done to stimulate economic development in rural areas. These problems may take the form of protest or civil disorders, the like of which could have broad implications for Ivorian - French relations.

'We must profit from our past mistakes, the future is now...'

Nevertheless, these observations and predictions were discounted by planning officials. They pointed out the country's Five Year Plan is designed to offset any future unrest. The plan, which ends in 1980, has three objectives: "to continue the high rate of economic growth, to modernize the food and agriculture sector, and to gear industry to exports."

In this writer's travels and observations, in the Ivory Coast, one thing became clear. French Nationls are not found in highly conspicuous roles, although it is generally known that they are behind the scenes in vital advisory capacities.

A member of the Ministry of Planning verified that "there are some 50,000 French in the country, compared to around 12,000 at independence." And furthermore, he said, "the Ivory Coast may require even more French to ensure continued growth and development in the 80s."

Discussions with university students and civic leaders provided mixed reactions to the question of "French Neo - Colonialism" in the Ivory Coast. Their general reactions were tense. Tension over elitism, underdevelopment in the north, foreign personnel (French and Mossi from Upper Volta) and the growing urban unemployment.

Finally, whatever economic development "French Neo - Colonialism" has brought or retained in this twenty - year - old nation, by - in - large, is not preparing young Ivorians specifically for the multitude of technological problems they must face in the future.

Jewish group backs voting bill in Md.

The head of the American Jewish Congress last week strongly reprimanded D.C. Delegate Walter Fauntroy for his trip to the Middle East last fall while simultaneously criticizing efforts by the Maryland legislature to link that trip with ratification of the D.C. voting rights amendment.

Henry Siegman said in a statement that the Jewish community will continue to support the amendment because of its " intrinsic merit, " despite Fauntroy's " regrettable flirtation " with the Palestine Liberation Organization and its leader Yasser Arafat.

After being taken to task on his trip before the Maryland legislature while lobbying for the amendment, Fauntroy later met with four Maryland delegates and agreed to draft a statement clarifying his position on the PLO. However, news sources reported that Fauntroy had agreed to denounce his meeting with Arafat and criticize the PLO in exchange for the bill's passage in Maryland.

Fauntroy refuted that charge in a press conference, calling the suggestion " the height of political arrogance. " Fauntroy said he would draft a statement " reaffirming " his position before the legislature.

While some Jewish leaders clearly do not approve of Fauntroy's trip, and may take it out on him politically, they are generally in favor of the voting amendment.

When the amendment passes," Siegman said, " Mr. Fauntroy will have to stand for the office that is then created. At that point, voters in the District will have the opportunity to evaluate his fitness for office in terms of his whole record, including his regrettable flirtation with the PLO. "

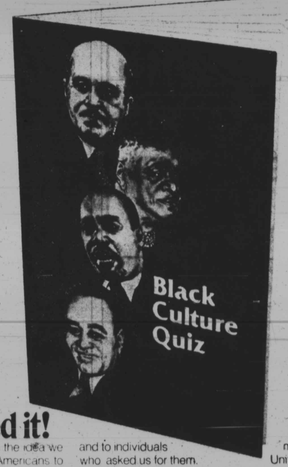
Fauntroy's " deplorable " actions in associating with the PLO, Siegman said, " does not diminish our support for a measure which we regard as essential to enfranchise residents of the District of Columbia.

Siegman called attempts by the Maryland delegates to use the amendment as a political tool against Fauntroy " misguided " and " distasteful. "

" The D.C. voting rights amendment is supported by the American Jewish Congress and most other Jewish community relations organizations because it is necessary to the democratic process, " he added.

The Chancellor Williams Historical Society of Howard University will present a special Black History Month reception and autograph party in honor of world-famous historian and author Chancellor Williams, Monday, Feb. 18, in the Haramba Supper Club of the Harambee House Hotel.

We thought you'd like this book.



You loved it!

Back in 1971, with the idea we might assist Black Americans to learn more about their heritage, we published this Black Culture Quiz booklet. It contains some 100 brief descriptions of achievements by and for Blacks in this country. It was developed for us by Dr. Roscoe C. Brown, now president of Bronx (N.Y.) Community College.

We printed a modest number of the booklets that year, and gave them away at conventions and to individuals who asked us for them.

We were surprised (and pleased) to find that we had a long-running hit on our hands. We've revised and updated it three times. More than 175,000 copies have gone to schools, colleges, church groups, businesses and individuals.

Perhaps this little booklet is our most visible involvement with the black community, but it is only one way we offer encouragement. We also support the United Negro College Fund, work closely with Opportunities Industrialization Centers (our vice chairman, Frederick A. Collins, Jr., is a member of OIC's National Advisory Council and chairman of the New York Council). We support the black press through advertising and, of course, we are actively seeking minority employees – as we have been for many years.

The Sperry and Hutchinson Company

George William Frederick McMechen, 1871 - 1961

They didn't want him to live on McCulloh Street

George W. McMechen

By Ida Peters

In 1910, George William Frederick McMechen, a lawyer, and his family were stoned by white neighbors when they moved to a new home in the 1800 block of McCulloh St.

He refused to run. The neighbors got the city council to pass a residential segregation ordinance. He fought it through the council and on to the Court of Appeals of Maryland which declared that municipal residential segregation ordinance unconstitutional.

It is hard to believe in 1980 that one had to fight to live on McCulloh Street. However, in 1910 white Baltimoreans were not as civilized as they are today, and people like George McMechen were pioneer fighters.

George W.F. McMechen was born Oct. 29, 1871 in Wheeling, W. Va., the son of George and Mildred McMechen. Educated in Wheeling public schools he came to Baltimore in September, 1891 to attend Morgan College which was then Centenary Biblical Institute located at Fulton and Edmondson Aves.

Centenary was organized by the Washington Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1864 and 16 black churches supported the college and preparatory school for teachers. The name was changed to Morgan College in 1890. George McMechen, in 1895, was the first class to graduate from Morgan. He was the one and only person in his graduating class.

Mr. McMechen told the AFRO in 1944 that when he attended Morgan, tuition was $1.50 per month; room rent, $3 per week and board $1 per week.

After graduation, with a powerful will and a strong ambition, he registered at the Law School of Yale University and graduated in June, 1899 with a bachelor of laws degree.

He practiced law in Evansville, Ind. for five years where he met and married the former Miss Anna Mason of Sparta, Ill. They were married for 50 years and produced four daughters. She died in 1950.

The McMechens came to Baltimore in 1904 where he formed a partnership, Hawkins and McMechen, with his brother-in-law W. Asbie Hawkins at 12 E. Pleasant St. in downtown Baltimore.

He soon became identified with the civic, educational, community and fraternal life of Baltimore.

In 1919, he became the first Baltimorean elected Grand Exalted Ruler of the Elks of the World and served two terms until 1921.

In 1921 he was elected a trustee of Morgan College and was the first Morgan alumnus to contribute $1,000 (cash), something he did several times during his lifetime, before the college was taken over by the State in 1939.

He served as manager of Morgan Alumni Athletics from 1920 to 1950 and recommended the employment of such coaching greats as Dr. Charles Drew, Bill Taylor and Eddie Hurt.

When Morgan College became a state institution the old Board of Trustees formed the Morgan College Corporation and Mr. McMechen served on this board from 1939 until his death. This group built the Morgan Christian Center the present campus.

In 1944, Mayor Theodore McKeldin named him to be the first black to serve on the Baltimore Board of School Commissioners. He served six

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—Reflect on Black Heritage

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being of the
greatest value, it shall ever be our duty to
vindicate our brethren, when oppressed, to lay
the case befor the publick. We shall also
urge upon our brethren (who are qualified by
the laws of the different states),
the
expediency of using their franchise; and of
making an independent use of the same. We
wish them not to become the tools of party...

So wrote John B. Russwurm and the Reverend Samuel E. Cornish 153 years ago. Their clarion call provides a rational and urgent basis today for an action-oriented and results-focused human agenda for 450,000 black Baltimoreans and 30 million black citizens throughout the United States.

Positive and enduring economic and political change can occur in Baltimore if college educated and informed bblack Baltimoreans will identify with and support the legitimate aspirations and concerns of the b road majority of local blacks who have not "made it." Black middle and upper income Baltimoreans, by and large, are either mute or non-involved in the substantive life and death issues (viz., jobs, education, health care, etc.) which weigh so heavily on most black Baltimoreans.

What Baltimore's black middle-income residents must come to understand is that as long as the vast majority of our Brothers and Sisters live in misery or bleak circumstances our own future is not assured or secure. All of us, a tragic and persistent thread of institutional racism, still, to an overwhelming degree, are judged by the majority white society by the lowest echelon of our race.

Real progress, therefore, given this stark reality, is made as the group moves forward collectively and confidently.

It is clear that plaintive cries and exhortations to the Mayor and City Council will not effect the kind of solid and pervasive socio-economic change needed for blacks and the poor in this city.

Politicians understand and appreciate political muscle as reflected in votes; they tend to be contemptible toward moral platitudes and preachments.

The ancient admonition, 150 years later, of Brothers Russwurm and Cornish can be given practical meaning in Baltimore if Baltimore's "Black Silent Majority" will bestir itself and dare to plead its own cause.

By Samuel Banks

Blacks and the Church

A Tradition of Social Commitment

Rev. Samuel E. Cornish—
Co-founder of the first Black Newspaper, Freedom's Journal, March 16, 1827.
He extended the message of hope and freedom from the pulpit into the community. In so doing, he gave voice to an entire race of people.

Rev. Martin L. King, Jr.—
Founder of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference.
As a minister and social activist, he became the drum major for the dreams and hopes of a people — "for justice, for peace, for righteousness."

Msgr. Emerson J. Moore—
Pastor, St. Charles Borromeo, First Black Monsignor in the Archdiocese of New York.
He invited the Pope to Harlem, and the Pope responded "Yes". The visit was unprecedented in the nineteen hundred years of Church history.

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Morton Frozen Foods • Gwaltney Meat Products
Wonder & Hostess Baked Goods • C & C Soda

Unemployed People Are Worth A Fortune.

Unemployment among blacks is the highest in the nation. It creates poverty and despair. But within this poverty we can find wealth. Through job training and education we can provide new hope for people to accept the challenges of tomorrow, today.

Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America, Inc. (OIC), is an organization involved in solving these problems of unemployment, job training and placement. Since 1964, Gulf Oil Corporation has been a partner with OIC in training minorities to qualify for careers in fields ranging from vocational to managerial. With Gulf's aid we are getting people not only trained, but hired. In Pittsburgh, OIC placed Scottie Trammel as a Field Technician with Gulf. And in Houston, Gulf hired Ruby Lair as a Data Machine Keypunch Operator upon completion of her OIC training.

With companies like Gulf and OIC working together, many more such people will be trained and employed. And a lot less employment applications will be rejected.

OIC offers new faith and direction. To give people the chance to discover their talents and reach these goals. Together we can keep on seeking, educating, and training America's greatest resource: Human Energy. It's worth a fortune.

Leon H. Sullivan
Pastor and Chairman of the Board, Opportunities Industrialization Centers of America

Gulf Human Energy: America's Greatest Resource
Gulf Oil Corporation

"One way to help some parents with big problems is caring for their little ones"

"In our town of Hickory, North Carolina, a lot of parents would gladly take jobs if some one could help them take care of their preschool kids. A community day care center was badly needed.

A few of us started to put one together. Folks pitched in and cleaned up an abandoned high school. Business and individuals made contributions of money, merchandise and time. We got funding from various government agencies. We were almost finished when we hit a big snag. We were short a few thousand dollars.

I knew my company had a special fund for employees doing community work. It's called the IBM Fund for Community Service. I applied. Within days, we had a check.

In September, 1978, we opened the Community Day Care Center. Its enrollment is about eighty children. But it has a big waiting list. So we've got more work to do. That's okay. By helping the little kids, and their parents, we're taking a big problem and trying to make it smaller.

IBM encourages its employees to get involved in their communities. The IBM Fund for Community Service is just one of the many programs we have to help them.

Lawrence Chatman, IBM Systems Engineer

IBM