—D.C. rallies

(Continued from Page A1)

possession, three counts for perjury which revolve around the Ramada Inn and the eighth count involving the Vista."

Mr. Reid, who also served as Mr. Barry's personal lawyer for many years, called the charges against the Mayor, "narrow, in the sense in which the evidence would have to be used."

As for the Mayor being forced to resign Mr. Reid said, "under the D.C. Code, the Mayor must maintain his qualifications as an elector throughout his term and the only way he could loose his qualifications as an elector is he would have to be convicted of a felony."

Even if Mayor Barry were convicted, "it would have to run the appeals route before he would be disqualified as an elector," Mr. Reid said.

While he was in West Palm Beach, Fl. the Mayor gained 20 pounds and was in good spirits according to Rev. Thomas Masters, pastor of the Macedonia Baptist Church in Riviera Beach.

Rev. Masters and other members of the community gave Mayor Barry a plaque honoring his contribution to Black history. Several weeks ago he addressed the congregation at Macedonia during Sunday services.

The Mayor's press secretary, Lurma Rackley, would not confirm that Mr. Barry would be entering Fenwick Hall Hospital near Charleston, S.C., but she did say, "that it would be a safer bet," to say the mayor was going to that facility instead of the Betty Ford Center in California.

While the Mayor has been away many community leaders like the Rev. Willie Wilson have come to Mayor Barry's defense over the way the story has been reported by some on the media.

In a weekend Lincoln Park rally for the Mayor, Rev. Wilson told the crowd of over 400 people that he questioned the sincerity of the government because, "this is the same Justice Department and the FBI that wire-tapped Martin Luther King, Jr."

Rev. Wilson also read a 40-count indictment against the federal government for what he called the governments misconduct and mocked the media by saying, "Mr. Sources say," alluding to numerous Barry stories which use unnamed sources.

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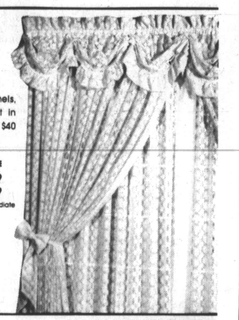

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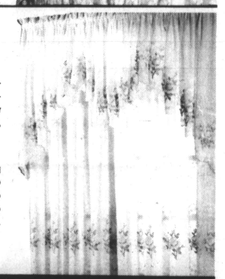

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The Afro-American Section B

METRO PROFILE

■ Lifestyle B2
■ Area Entertainment B4

Saturday, February 24, 1990

Keepers of the Culture

By Delfield S. Yoes, III
AFRO Staff Writer

"In traditional African societies, art plays an integral role in the transmission of ideas that are designed to teach and to preserve and perpetuate respected beliefs and values."
— Doris H. Ligon, Maryland Museum of African Art.

As Executive Director of the Maryland Museum of African Art, Doris Ligon thoroughly understands the importance of traditional African art and is absolutely dedicated to bringing African culture and civilization to the forefront of our consciousness. However, she was not always so enlightened.

As a teenager in the 50's, Ligon (then Doris Hillian) and most of her peers were exposed to false, stereotypical images of Africa, "the dark continent." To them Africa was the world of Tarzan, the great White "king of the apes," a world where cowardly Black savages trembled at the mere mention of his name.

And the school system at the time didn't do much to erase those images. "When we acted up in high school, our teachers would say we were acting like heathens, a bunch of Africans out of the jungle," explains Ligon. Furthermore, when Ligon, who claims a love of art dating back to her teenage years, questioned teachers about her chances of a career in art or as an entrepreneur, her inquiries were met with disdain. "In those days, you weren't encouraged to think about art as a profit making venture, that was impossible for Blacks, according to them (teachers)," says Ligon.

Doris Ligon, executive director of the Maryland Museum of Art, explains the significance of this wood carving. It represents the traditional values of family and the importance and interdependence of family members and the community. Male figure at base lends support and protection to family while sharing with his wife the nurturing and education of his children. While this is a contemporary carving, posts of this type were functional; they framed the entrance to the dwelling and were used to support the roof. Carving demonstrates conventions of the Yoruba people of Nigeria. The artist is Lamidi Fakeye, master carver.

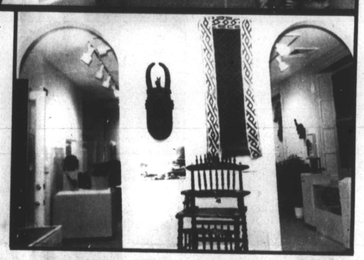
From eradicating the negative African imagery she had been exposed to as a young adult, to becoming executive director of one of only three museums in the country that exclusively features traditional African art, has been a lengthy, winding odyssey of education for Doris Ligon.

Shortly after her marriage at age 19 to Claude M. Ligon, a retired army Lt. Col. and a member of the MMAA board of trustees, Claude Ligon's military career took he and his wife to Europe. That's where Doris Ligon first encountered African art in various museums. As the Ligon's traveled to different locations here and abroad, Doris attended different colleges and universities, completing her college education and piecing together her knowledge of African art. However, the discovery of African art and its' far reaching influence didn't begin to dominate her life until she began taking classes at Howard Community College in Maryland.

Ligon took a course at HCC called, "Art in Man's Culture" and according to Ligon, there was no mention of African art in the course syllabus. "I knew African art was influential on Western art and I asked the instructor why it wasn't included in the syllabus," says Ligon. Her instructor didn't have an answer, but should that be a surprising revelation? For centuries, European historians, anthropologists, "scholars" from various disciplines, have denied, omitted, short changed, or even "rearranged" the contributions and influence of traditional African art on other civilizations.

"I began investigating and when I get into something I don't dabble, either I'm in or out," states Ligon. She continues, "The more I read, the more I realized how ignorant I was." Ligon's burgeoning awareness and love of the African aesthetic lead to eight years of volunteering at the National Museum of African Art in Washington, D.C.

The founding of the Maryland Museum of African Art in 1980 was the result of an ultimatum from her husband, according to Doris Ligon. "We would attend openings of exhibits of African art and I would always complain that this wasn't right, or that was inaccurate and my husband basically said, 'Either start your own museum or stop complaining.' So with his encouragement and financial backing the museum was founded October 7, 1980," says Ligon.



The MMAA's first full blown exhibit was in 1981 and for that first exhibit, the Ligons drew upon their personal collection of African art. The exhibit was called, "Traditional African Art from the Collectors Collection." "We were a museum without walls for five years. We had our exhibits mainly at Howard Community College and the Interfaith Center in Columbia and wherever opportunities presented themselves," says Ligon.

In those early days of the MMAA, Morgan State University, where Ligon received her degree, and private collectors like Celonia Walden, contributed greatly to the museum. The MMAA presented exhibits at Phelps Luck Elementary School for one year and exhibited at the Rockland Arts Center in 1985. Ligon claims that was when people really began to take notice and believed we could maintain the museum. In October of 1989, the MMAA moved to its' current location, in the spacious and very attractive Oakland Mansion, in Columbia, MD. and the response to the museum continues to be very enthusiastic.

"We have enough pieces and access to enough collections now that we can fill the entire building that the museum is housed in," states Ligon. She contends that the local community and other museums and private collectors have been extremely generous and supportive. Despite the growing popularity and success of the museum itself, probably the most important function of the MMAA is its educational outreach program to area schools.

Doris Ligon travels to different schools several times a week and in 1990, she still encounters some of the ignorance regarding African art, Africa in general, she experienced as a teenager in the 50's. During one of Ligon's presentations, one little girl was distraught about her resembelance to the Akua'ba (pronounced "assaba") figure, the emblem that symbolizes the MMAA. However, Ligon explained the darkness and sheen of the emblem is symbolic of power, beauty and good health. In another situation during one of Ligon's school outreaches, a little boy didn't want to admit he had lived in Africa, fearing the ridicule of his classmates.

So many people still have so many misconceptions and negative concepts of Africa and some of those folks may carry those feelings around for life. And by doing that, they carry around negative images of themselves.

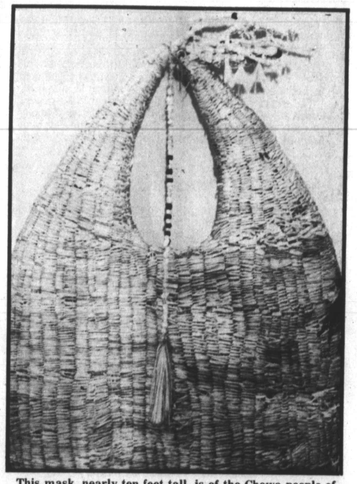
Through the MMAA, the public can explore African civilizations and culture through its' art and maybe people can begin to understand the professional significance and beauty of these cultures. And by going into schools, Doris Ligon is bringing the truth to young people, the truth about their heritage.

"I'll carry my art and you on my back to get my message across and still stand strong. I'm a woman on a mission," says Doris Ligon.

Mounted on the wall above the Nkukndembo, is a rare and much used dance outfit of webbed fiber, skins, pigment and cloth. It was worn by males at festivals. Because of its age and usage, parts of the outfit have been lost. Originally, the trousers and sleeves were full length.

This mask of the Chewa people of Malawi, is called Nkukndembo meaning "wild turkey" and when danced depicts movement of the bird in its natural state. It is made of wood, reed, crushed bark, fiber and pigment. The dancer positions himself in hollow body of bird and uses wood handle in neck of bird to move head resembling a puppet. This is a recent mask form of the Chewa people. This exhibit is the first showing of this mask removed from its natural setting where it was created, owned and danced by its original owner. The mask is danced as a demonstration of skill and for entertainment. The ritual significance of this mask, if any, is not known.

This body vestment of feathers with buffalo headdress of wood, originates from the Cameroon and is worn by males at the celebration of death for men of high status. The Buffalo, respected for his strength and the bird for its ability to soar above the earth, combine to suggest the transformation of men, at death, into the spirit world.



This mask, nearly ten feet tall, is of the Chewa people of Malawi and is made of bamboo, wood, reed and maize husks. It is called Kasiyamaliro and is danced by one male performer at initiation ceremonies and also at funerals of important males. Representing an antelope, respected for its beauty, speed and gracefulness, the lone dancer is covered by the lower hollow section of the mask as he twirls in rapid continuous motion causing the long, strap like section to extend in mid air.