

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

CJP-12

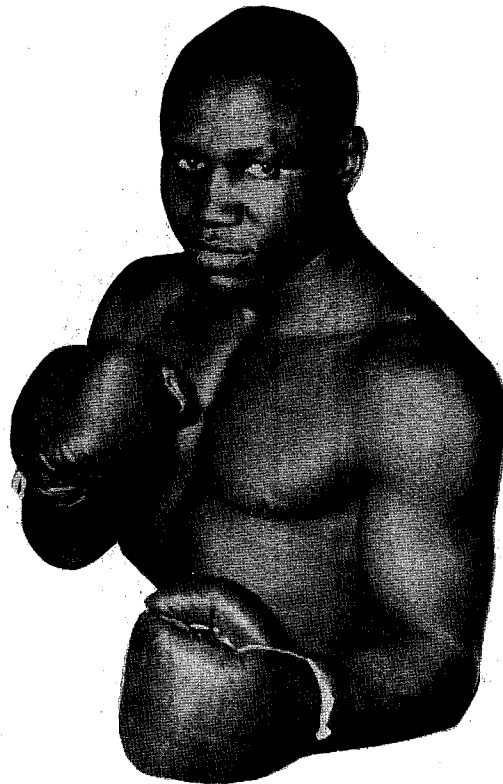
August 17, 1963
University of Ibadan
Ibadan, Nigeria

" Tiger don kill am "

Mr. Richard H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
366 Madison Avenue
New York 17, New York

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Carrying the "**prestige** and honor of Nigeria" on his gleaming, dark shoulders, Dick Tiger climbed in the boxing ring at Liberty Stadium, Ibadan on August 10th., and savagely defended his world middle-weight boxing championship against the onslaught of the former holder, Gene Fullmer of Utah. Battered and bleeding, the Morman challenger was not able to answer the bell for the eighth round of a scheduled fifteen. Although severely punished by Tiger in their first fight he had gone the distance. In their second fight he had survived fifteen rounds for a disputed draw.



GENE FULLMER

DICK TIGER

+/+
This time there was no room for doubt.

As soon as the fight ended, thousands rushed from the stadium to break the news to the even larger crowd outside. They sang and shouted, "Tiger don kill am" and the great

crowd of outsiders joyfully joined the refrain. Their glowing diamond-hard faith in the "power of Dick Tiger" had been gloriously sustained.

There had been few, if any, Nigerian reservations about the ultimate victory of the Tiger, but there had been serious misgivings about the weather, the attendance, the real worth of the government's financial investment, and the amount of prestige and honor the nation would really accrue from a professional prizefight.

The weather was marvelous. In the midst of a record rainy season, August 10th was one of those periodic days of rare beauty, when the sun and the sky flash through drifting clouds and sweetly buss the earth below. It was the kind of African day that shames the morbidity of the cliché "the Dark Continent".

For the beauty of the day and night the rainmakers of Nigeria claimed the credit. Prior to the fight, a serious jurisdictional dispute had occurred. The rainmakers of Lagos, eighty-nine miles from Ibadan, were reported to have demanded one-thousand pounds (\$2,800) from the Federal government as payment for a guarantee of fair weather for the night of the fight. This report, carried in two of the four national newspapers, made the rainmakers of Ibadan unhappy. According to the Daily Times, they angrily proclaimed: "The jurisdiction of Lagos rainmakers does not extend to Ibadan."

Reporters for the Morning Post informed their readers, "that while the harangue between Lagos and Ibadan goes on, rainmakers in Eastern Nigeria report that they are going all out to see that there is no rain in Ibadan on the night of the fight."

The Post went on to report that "while the rainmakers quarrel about who will share the booty, all of them are agreed that the weather will be fine. It is said that yesterday's heavy down-pour was a good indication of this.

"One rainmaker said: "We have caused all the rain that should have fallen on Saturday to fall now."

It is not certain whether the rainmakers really did receive some "booty" from the Federal government. There have been no financial statements from any of the rainmaking jurisdictions involved. As for the Federal government, the closest thing to a public announcement came from Chief Joseph Modupe Johnson, Minister of Labor and Welfare, (sports included) and "father of the fight".

In an interview the day before the fight on Western Region Television, when asked if the government had actually used the services of the rainmakers, JMJ gave an equivocal answer. He said that when so many people believe in the efficacy of rainmaking it was wise for one in politics to pay attention.



FULLMER WITH NIGERIAN BOXING FANS AT HIS UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN TRAINING QUARTERS

Whether or not financial attention was paid, Dick Tiger did defeat a bleeding Gene Fullmer under a clear starlit sky

While the weather was fine the attendance was not. Approximately one third of the 45,000 seats in Liberty Stadium were empty. The seating pattern of those who were there was a quick and accurate indicator of social and economic

stratification in Nigeria.

The crowd outside the stadium, far greater than the one inside, was composed of Nigerians who could not afford the cheapest seats. Inside only the \$1.50 seats were filled. There were vast empty spaces in the \$3.00 and \$9.00 rows. Free tickets given to soldiers and policemen saved the \$15.00 ringside section from emptiness. The \$30.00 ringside seats were filled with Federal and Regional Ministers, one Governor-General, foreign diplomats, senior civil servants, newsmen and expatriate businessmen, teachers, government employees and boxing promoters. There were also members of Parliament, members of the House of Chiefs, members of the Senate, members of the regional Houses of Assembly, as well as premiers from the Eastern and Western Region, and judges from federal, regional and customary courts.

The unsold tickets, promised by JMJ "to schools, orphanages, and other charities", evidently were not distributed. Only the disciplined forces, the Army and the Police, seemed to have received unsold tickets, and these, interestingly enough, scattered them around the ring as a kind of buffer between the \$30.00 class and the \$1.50 mass.

Perhaps this was accidental and of no significance. Still, the men of discipline did get seats, and the poor outside, remained outside, happy in "their" victory and neither aware or bothered by all the empty seats in the \$3.00 and \$9.00 sections.

This vacuum, as well as the prevalence of freeloaders in the \$15.00 section, could argue the absence of a Nigerian middle class, or, just middle class rejection of the whole fight mythology.

Although the middle class is a relatively small segment of Nigeria's estimated population of 40,000,000, it does exist and is expanding. Hugh and Mabel Smythe, in their book, The New Nigerian Elite, found a burgeoning "lower middle class in the areas in which some education or special skill opens opportunities for work with some prestige - minor civil service workers, elementary and secondary-school teachers, practical nurses." They saw a growing "upper middle class", composed of lawyers, labor leaders, business people, and college

and university teachers, that shades into the prestigious group of \$30.00 seat buyers.

The "lower middle class" group helped swell the crowd in the cheapest seats. The upper middle class stayed away in droves, and it was from their ranks came the most vociferous criticism of the government's involvement in a professional prizefight; a very slender reed, said some of them, on which to hang the nation's prestige.

Another social group was conspicuous by its absence, the Moslems of Northern Nigeria. All the political office holders from the South were at ringside, including the Governor-General, the two regional premiers and the regional governors. The Northern Prime Minister of the Federation, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Premier of the Northern Region and Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, and the Governor of the Northern Region, Sir Shettima Kassim, were all missing. However, like the other two regions, the North did contribute 15,000 pounds to the fight guarantee. Sir Abubakar sent his prayers for Tiger's success, Sir Ahmadu said all Northern civil servants who had tickets could take the day off, and Sir Shettima prayed to Allah for a Tiger victory. There were a few Northern style turbans and robes around the ringside, but on the whole this was a Southern spectacle for which the Sardauna and his strongly tradition-bound followers had no emotional need. Who needs Dick Tiger when he has Islam?

As for the ringsiders, the masses inside and outside, their heartfelt need for a Dick Tiger victory in Nigeria was loud and clear. At the end of the fourth round, in which Fullmer suffered the most severe pummelling of the fight, a united cry of "Tiger, Tiger, Tiger" split the night and shook the impartiality of many non-Nigerian observers. So much raw emotion, faintly chilling to foreign onlookers, was heady wine to those federal ministers who had been most instrumental in securing the fight for Nigeria.

In addition to Chief Johnson, these prime movers included two others, T.O.S. Benson, Minister of Information, and Dr. K.O. Mbadiwe, Minister of State. Described by one university lecturer as the "showboy ministers", they "showed" at the fight. All of them, popularly known by nicknames derived from their initials, moved around the ringside between rounds amidst shouts of "TOS", "JMJ", or "KO".



FULLMER AND TIGER IN LAGOS
BEFORE THE FIGHT

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does not need to be a politician, scientist, or even a cosmonaut. Dick Tiger has projected the Nigerian and African personality in the world of Boxing today".

Speaking for the stay-away middle class and intellectuals, Tai Solarin, school principal and columnist for the Daily Times, issued one last blast at the rationale of the Bensons, the Johnsons, and the Mbadiwes.

"It was Great Britain and the United States of America that "found" our Dick Tiger. It was they which gave him the prestige which we have now practically torn off his back to make an umbrella for our 40,000,000 other Nigerians.

"Would our dear prestige have suffered in any way had the fight been staged in Camberra, or Tristan de Cunha or Honolulu or

Their garments, their gestures, their fly whisks were flamboyant and crowd pleasing.

Whether Nigeria's international prestige was enhanced by "the first world boxing championship in Africa" is dubious. That the "show-boys" and other Southern ministers were in deep spiritual unity with their poorer followers is certain; as a ritual of nationalism and nationhood the fight spectacular brought them all into the closer communion of "Nigeria". The staying power of this flash communion is uncertain, but at least, for the while, much of the country has received its money's worth.

As Tos Benson put it, "In order to assert the Nigerian and indeed the African personality, one

San Francisco when we would not have been called upon to foot the bill?

"With the £ 120,000 that must have disappeared, into our prestige, (which, in any case, was there without our stir) we could take 40,000 young Nigerians through a three-year course in our universities.

"We did not have, and we will not have for a long time to come, the plethora of money to put into a world title fight. We have gone out of our way to look for a prestige which, paradoxically, must have been worn threadbare by our flamboyant and our most ostentatious search for it.

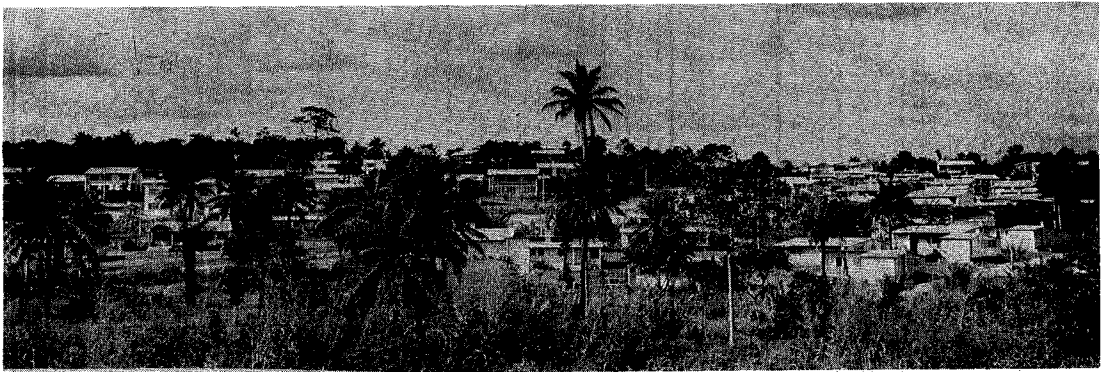
"Foreigners must be trying their desperatest not to laugh publicly at our profligacy! We would have, were we in their shoes."

Still, nobody laughed when Negro Americans spent thousands of their hard earned dollars to see "Ol' Joe" Louis devastate a "bum of the month", or "see Jackie Robinson hit that ball". The naked hope of being "somebody" is just not that funny.

Sincerely yours,

Charles J. Patterson

Charles J. Patterson



TWO SECTIONS OF IBADAN, CENTRAL CITY AND SUBURBS