

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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The Exceptional African...
A Comparison of Policies
With Those of the Congo

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c/o U. S. Consulate
Lagos, Nigeria

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Dear Mr. Rogers:

The exceptional African has become one of the biggest problems in colonial Africa today. How are these educated and ambitious men going to fit into the scheme of things? What role are they going to fulfill in colonial society? Are they going to become productive and reasonably well contented individuals? Or are they going to become embittered "agitators," bent on destroying the status quo that created them in the first place?

There are two situations that give rise to this embitterment. One is the color bar. The other results from the fact that numbers of semi- and fully-educated Africans sadly overestimate their own potentialities. Humility and modesty are not overshadowing human characteristics, but these Africans seem to have even less of them than other people. To them only white malevolence or what they mistakenly regard as a color bar stand in the way of their rising to the topmost levels of society. Actually they would find it difficult to realize their inflated ambitions in any society, colonial, black independent or white independent. This egoistic attitude is perhaps explainable by the fact that they have taken a tremendous leap over their fellow Africans by acquiring any education. And determined egoism can be the compensation of a man who at heart feels he is inferior to others.

Europeans may find that these types of Africans often are disagreeable as persons, but they are a force which must be taken into consideration. You cannot expect to have stability in a colony if you ignore the "cheeky upstarts" and shower paternalistic affection on the simple, and therefore noble, savages. The number of exceptional Africans in a territory is usually small, but their potential political influence over the still-backward masses is considerable. It was just such a small group of men, the embittered exceptional Kikuyu of the 30s and 40s, who played a major role in paving the way, if not actually assisting in, the later rise of Mau Mau.

Various governments in Africa have adopted various policies for dealing with the exceptional Africans and some governments have adopted no policy at all. South Africa belongs in the former category. There the policy is crystal clear, if somewhat unrealistic. Under apartheid, the exceptional African, along with all other Africans, is not going to be allowed to contaminate white civilization. If he is a professional man, he will be allowed to practice only among his own people. If he is just an ordinary laborer, he will be shunted off to a reserve, to be tapped from time to time to serve white labor needs but otherwise to

be left to "his own culture"---one that is just about completely dead. For those who don't like the arrangement, the Afrikaner cop and his sjambok, or whip, have been provided.

Kenya represents a different situation in that its white minority is too small and too hampered by Colonial Office control to do what it would like to do. Furthermore in recent years the influence of the white settlers on the government has been declining sharply. Yet there is no definite policy, one way or another, toward the exceptional African. No niche is assured him in society. Kenya's colonial officials, ever fearful of offending someone or other, are determined not to face any hard facts.

In the past, when the Kikuyu were still running around Nairobi in blankets, it was easy to say they would be accepted as equals once they had become educated and had adopted western culture. It seemed inconceivable that this could happen in the foreseeable future. But it happened and within a generation some Kikuyu had secured university degrees. A new attitude then emerged---"There's more to civilization than just book learning." An outside observer finds it hard to suppress a sardonic smile when he hears this from a white man whose own attainments are slight, but for the African with the university degree it spells deadly frustration.

It may be true that Kenya Africans had and have it better than those in the Rhodesias and the Union of South Africa. But discontent is purely relative and what drives an American workman to think he must strike might seem like industrial paradise to a factory hand in the Orient.

Since the start of multi-racial government in Kenya, a vague notion is being expounded---and not without a little involuntary quaking---that exceptional Africans will mix with the whites and Indians at whatever level their training and abilities permit. But although the color bar has eased considerably, there still is practically no mixing and various barriers still keep the exceptional African from getting on an equal footing with the immigrants.

There is just no real place in the status quo for these Africans. When Mau Mau erupted, it became painfully clear that the other tribes were not going to fight it wholeheartedly. There seemed to be little in the status quo that would make them want to defend it with vigor. Taking the Kikuyu tribe alone, there seemed to be much that made them think it should be destroyed. It does little good to say that Africans are ungrateful or to point to the half-baked aspects of their aspirations. If you want to live in Africa, and no white man really has to, it would be to your advantage to come to terms with your neighbors.

The number of exceptional Africans in the Belgian Congo probably is less than in other territories, but the Belgians seem to be more keenly alive to social change and more disposed to work out policies to meet those changes in advance. Accordingly the Congo has embarked upon a program under which exceptional Africans can become immatricules, or matriculants, those with a legal status of "Europeans." No sentiment is wasted on the program and no lofty doctrine is preached. With their characteristic realism, the Belgians point to the Congo---

one of the largest and richest pieces of real estate on the African continent---and say they want to keep it peaceful and prospering. One way to do it is to make sure that the exceptional Africans don't bump their heads on color barriers. You can't really lick them---the thought goes---so you join them with you.

As far as long-range policy is concerned, the Congo has ruled out South African ideas of permanent white dominance. Belgian officials state without the hedging that one hears in Kenya that full equality between all individuals, white and black, is the ultimate goal for the Congo. The idea is to have the African millions, along with a few white associates, governing an independent Congo that has something approximating Dominion status with Belgium. That day is a long way off, though, and the officials won't even hazard a guess as to when it will come. The matriculation program is one step in what the officials conceive to be a long and evolving process leading to that far-away Dominion goal.

The Congo's matriculants do not have full European status at the moment, as some evolved Africans are reported to have in the French territories. But they have come a sizeable part of the way and the Belgian officials are quick to state that the program is still experimental and that changes are being made all the time.

Matriculants are allowed to patronize European hotels, restaurants and bars. A well-dressed and well-behaved non-matriculant might be allowed into them as well, but the matriculant is in a better position to demand it. Matriculants send their children to European schools, they can borrow money from banks and they can drink whisky if they choose. (Non-matriculants send their children to native schools, are not allowed to borrow money from banks and must stick to beer.) In Leopoldville there is no enforced residential segregation, but the two races keep pretty much apart. Matriculants are allowed to circulate in the European-occupied areas all night while other Africans are required to return to their own areas at 10 p.m. (Europeans are barred from African areas after that hour.) European-patronized cinemas are the only public places still closed to Africans, matriculated or not, and officials say a decree is being prepared to open them at least to matriculants.

At the same time, matriculants take on new obligations. Native civil law no longer applies to them; they are obliged to appear in European courts and under European procedure. As "Europeans" they will sometimes get stiffer fines for misdemeanors than they would as "Africans." An income tax operates equally on both races, but the matriculant must pay European-scale special taxes, which are higher. The tax for owning a radio set, for instance, is 40 francs (\$0.80) for an African and 240 francs (\$4.80) for a European or a matriculant. Matriculants, however, are not considered citizens of Belgium, as are the Europeans in the Congo. The matriculants remain Belgian subjects and do not have the right to a passport for foreign travel.

If an African wants to matriculate, he applies to a European court. He has to be literate in French and he has to be living in what is described as a European manner. His house must be of a European type and with European standards of cleanliness. Careful investigations

are made of each applicant and these include surprise visits by government officials to the applicant's home. The candidate's wife must approve of the change in status and the matriculant must not be, or later become, polygamous.

In the two years the program has been in operation, only a handful of the Congo's twelve million Africans have applied for matriculation and the majority of applications were rejected. There are between 80 and 100 successful matriculants today in the whole territory and most of them are in Leopoldville. Some 400 to 500 applications were rejected and 60 to 80 are under consideration at the moment.

An official, defending the high rejection rate, said: "We want to establish parity between the races at the highest level, not the lowest." High standards, another official said, are essential to the success of the program. There was considerable opposition to it from some Europeans, chiefly settlers around Lake Kivu in the eastern Congo. "We don't want any of the matriculants to slip back," the official said. "We don't want these Europeans to have a chance to say, 'That's what you can expect from Africans---they're all the same.' It is difficult to change the ways of the Europeans at once. We have no economic color bar in the Congo---Africans can rise as far as their abilities take them. Whites and blacks have gotten used to working together. We can't obtain the same results in the social plane all at once."

He said the relatively small number of applications indicates that the mass of the Africans are waiting to see how the program develops. If it is successful, there may be a flood of applications, he said.

Will the program succeed in eliminating or at least in minimizing discontent among the exceptional Africans?

It is too early to give any definite prediction. Then, too, the number of exceptional Congo Africans appears to be slight in comparison with other territories. Education at other than the lower levels and other aspects of African advancement are still fairly new in the Congo---they came after World War II. Only a handful of Congo Africans have ever been permitted to go abroad to study. Most of these have been priests, all have gone to Belgium and all have been carefully watched. The dangerous political doctrines of the western democracies have not had a chance to infiltrate into the Congo yet.

They will come, though. In fact, there are rumblings in that direction already. But at the same time there are several factors that may keep down discontent among the exceptional Africans and among the others as well. The matriculation program is one thing---it provides something of a safety valve to frustration. Among the other factors is the fact that no one, black or white, has any political rights in the Congo.

There are no elections, no political parties, no legislative councils. Councils do exist but they are advisory, their members are appointed by the government and, in recent years, the membership has

included Africans as well.

Looking back, it can be argued that one of Kenya's bigger mistakes was the premature grant of elections to the white settlers after World War I. It plunged them into politics, put them into a position of power and whetted their appetite for more. The Kikuyu and other Africans, meanwhile, were confronted with a settler coup d'etat. They had no representatives of their own at the time and when they finally did get them, more than two decades later, they were not allowed to elect them. They still are not allowed to do so. African politicians were forced more and more into a position of hopeless opposition. Their fears no doubt were aggravated by the fact that the settlers made open threats to seize all the power by "direct action." Such a situation does not make for social stability and African contentment.

Tanganyika and Uganda have had their Legislative Councils too and in former years they were heavily stacked with non-official Europeans. But those councils were wholly appointive and, without elections, the Europeans were never able to get one jump ahead of the other races. African fears, on the other hand, were never exacerbated by the grant of special political privileges to the whites.

The Congo government has a different attitude toward its white settlers than that of the Kenya government. Kenya governors used to dance attendance at settler political meetings and they still keep an apprehensive ear cocked to catch even the faintest howls from the White Highlands. The Congo settlers, particularly those about Lake Kivu, are described as "noisy"---white settlers are apt to be like that all over Africa---but government officials are openly hostile to them. One ranking official said to me: "Our policy is to tell the settlers: 'If you don't agree with things, we will not be angry with you. We will be happy to say goodbye to you and you can go someplace else.'"

The Kenya government finances a program to attract more white settlers to that colony, but the Congo is not eager to have any more of them. Neither does the Congo want white working class immigrants---who, as in Rhodesia, might demand special privileges at the expense of native workmen. "We want immigration in quality, not quantity," an official said. "We don't want white artisans coming here unless they come to teach trades to the natives. Why should we pay high wages for white artisans when, potentially, we've got all the artisans we need right here?"

Two important foci for African discontent are always jobs and housing. What I saw in the Congo in these two fields was impressive. "We don't want a man to have any reason to be dissatisfied with his job," an official said, and this policy seems to be put into practice vigorously.

There are separate wage scales for Europeans and Africans, but there seems to be no ceiling on how far an African can rise. There are few if any poor whites and few Indians in the territory and jobs that might go to these two groups are held by Africans. With the exception of a few whites at scattered desks, banks and business offices are staffed entirely

with Africans. A large number of Africans are employed as clerks in stores, working side by side with a few white clerks. In a store in Leopoldville, I saw something that would occur in few African territories ---an African male clerk selling dainty underthings to a white woman. Employers I talked with said they are always glad to replace a European, who demands a high wage, with a lower-paid African.

The native areas of Leopoldville have the best African housing I have yet seen. Even those for manual laborers are as good, if not better, than the best African housing in Nairobi. While touring the native city with an official, I picked out a house at random and asked if we could see it. The occupant, a minor government clerk, was at home and he graciously showed us around. He had a four-room house, made of concrete blocks with a corrugated metal roof, and it was equipped with electricity and a modern bathroom. The last item in particular would be unheard of in a Nairobi African housing scheme. The Africans in Leopoldville can either rent their houses or buy them on long-range, low-interest plans.

Belgian officials say with pride that there are no strikes or other labor unrest in the copper mines of the Katanga area. Those just across the border in Northern Rhodesia are plagued with recurrent troubles. "The economic is the basement, the social order is the walls and the political is the roof," one pedantic official said. "We don't want to put a roof on the house first."

Another official said: "When one of our natives goes across the river to Brazzaville, the natives there say, 'Look at me, I am a citizen of France! I elect deputies to Paris. But you---you are nothing.' Hmm, that fine citizen of the Republic doesn't even own a pair of shoes."

But the Congo house is going to need a roof, too. I had dinner one evening with two English-speaking matriculants in one of the better restaurants of Leopoldville. They were the only Africans in the place. The maitre did not seem to be too happy about their presence, but he said nothing. We had a drink and I asked them how they felt about their new status. They sort of shrugged.

"Well, what's wrong?" I asked.

One of them complained that his pay had not been raised but that he now had to send his children to expensive European schools and had to pay the higher European special taxes.

"Well, that is a grievance," I said.

"I have complained to the government about it," he added.

"Are they going to do anything about it?" I asked, expecting from the expression on his face to hear him say no.

"Oh, yes, they will probably raise my wage in June," he said.

"There still is a color bar," the other African said. "We are not allowed in the cinemas."

"Do you think that will change?"

"Oh, yes, the government is going to abolish that."

Those two grievances seemed on the way to being settled. "What else?" I said.

One of the Africans pointed to an African waiter. "If I get into a fight with him, they will take me into a European court and make me pay a big fine. He won't pay anything."

I wasn't particularly impressed by his plight. We had another drink. Then we got to the bottom of the situation.

"We are the owners of the land," one of them said. "When the Belgians came here, we used to greet them. We need them to teach us things but then we want to run the country ourselves."

"You want it like Nigeria and the Gold Coast?"

"Yes, that is what we want."

I asked them what the other Africans thought of their new status as matriculants.

One of them said: "The people say, 'Oh, you are Belgians now, are you? Well, when the Belgians leave you can just leave with them.' But I always say, 'No, I'll be helping you then.'"

The Belgian officials are aware of nascent political stirrings of this type in the Congo. "We try to keep one step ahead of things," one official said. Accordingly plans are being worked out to establish elective city councils in Leopoldville. There will be two councils, one for the European areas and elected by Europeans and one for the African areas and chosen by Africans. The more advanced Africans will choose their representatives by direct ballot and the others will probably select theirs by acclamation, the official said. Above these two councils will be an Urban Council, with equal black and white representation, to administer common services of the two areas. The official said a two-thirds majority will probably be required "so that Europeans and Africans get used to cooperating with each other in governing themselves."

The officials admit openly that they know that local government will not satisfy political stirrings forever. As part of the policy of keeping "one step ahead of things," plans are already being discussed for the step to be taken after that. Representation on the Governor-General's Advisory Council will be changed so that unofficial seats will be shared equally by Africans and Europeans. European unofficials outnumber the Africans at present. "Our aim is to go as soon as possible, but as slow as necessary, to a general ballot system and to give Europeans and Africans living in this country full political rights," an official said, adding that matriculants and non-matriculants would be on an equal footing as far as political matters are concerned.

The Congo is also taking the plunge into higher education. A university called Lovanium was opened last year on a hill a few miles from Leopoldville. The government official who took me to see it said, "We think it's better to educate them here at home. They pick up too many ideas when they get off to Europe by themselves."

Lovanium is run in association with Louvain, the famous Catholic university in Belgium. There are 21 students in the university proper at the moment---18 Africans and three Europeans. Another 12 Africans are on campus undergoing a one-year prep course before beginning their real university work. There is no segregation of the races in dormitories, dining halls or anywhere else.

The faculty numbers nine in all and is headed by Father Gillon, a priest on leave from Louvain. He is a former member of the Belgian Atomic Energy Commission and has done post-graduate work in nuclear studies at Princeton. "We could have many more students," he said, "but we are striving for quality." The facilities are planned for handling 1,000 students eventually. At the moment there are three faculties---Pedagogy, Science (medicine and agriculture) and Administration and Economics. African students in Administration and Economics will become Assistant District Officers after graduation. An engineering school will be set up in two years. The engineering course will be a five-year one, medicine will take seven and all others will be four-year programs.

On the drawing board, Lovanium is rather impressive, comprising a couple of dozen buildings grouped around a campus. At the moment, however, only two residence halls have been completed and they serve as classrooms and faculty offices as well. The science building and the medical school are under construction and the other buildings will follow. The university might be a bit late when compared with other African territories, but now that the Belgians have gotten around to it, they are doing it in a big way. A first-class tarmac road has even been built for several miles through the bush for the sole purpose of providing easy access to the university from the city. The cornerstone on one of Lovanium's new buildings bears the dates 1425-1954, the former being the date of the founding of Louvain. It makes one wonder if both will be in existence in another six centuries or, if not, which might survive.

The Congo has come a long way in recent years and an even more startling distance since as recent as 1931, when some tribesmen indulged in an old proclivity by killing and eating a Belgian administrative officer. My two matriculant friends told me that Africans of the Bangala tribe, the riverbank cannibals of the old days, still boast that they used to eat Europeans. The matriculant's assertion, "When the Belgians came here, we used to greet them..." could be modified by the addition of "and sometimes eat them." Now the old cannibal feast has been replaced by religious processions and football games and, soon, by election night celebrations and convocation ceremonies at Lovanium.

The Congo has laid its economic foundation and now is embarking cautiously into the uncertainties of political life. "Where will it end---won't equal rights lead to a swamping of the whites and a black Parliament?" an aide to the Governor-General was asked.

"We know it has to come," he said. "If there are people able to do it, then fine!"

Sincerely,



David E. Reed