

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

U.S. Embassy
P.O. Box 30137
Nairobi, Kenya
16 February 1970

GJ-2
Dakar, enroute to Nairobi

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

Dear Mr. Nolte:

Finding the right superlatives to describe our feelings while disembarking in Dakar, Senegal, especially after experiencing the snowy and sub-zero weather of New York, was nigh impossible. The balmy 68 degree early morning (3:15) was in itself a most effective sedative for the four traveled-weary vagabonds from the States - let alone our being five and a half hours closer to our destination. The tranquil atmosphere while it lasted, was savored with much appreciation, however, its duration was most abbreviated.

A brisk trip from the plane to the immigration area broke the spell with a supercharged atmosphere. There was an overabundance of excitement, a flurry of activity and a multitude of passengers vying to be the first through the maze of stations. In retrospect, however, one realizes that a meagre amount of actual work was accomplished. In deference to all these officious looking workers, however, I admit to a certain amount of exaggeration. The level of fatigue coupled with the level of stimulation of finally being in Africa tended to give every situation more tension and focus than normally would be the case.

The process of filtering through customs was most difficult because of our limitation with the French language. The ritual with its pomp, although obviously being enjoyed by the airport personnel, began to wear thin after sixty-five minutes of explanations. The one station out of the multitude which later left us chuckling -- but at the time most perplexed -- was that of the health certificate examiner.

The Health Officer after many minutes of scrutinizing our records, informed us that it appeared that we hadn't completed our shot requirement; we were lacking a yellow-fever supplement which was a requirement of this particular country. He also voiced some perplexity over the fact that while counting four certificates, he only counted three people in the party. Obviously, finding this red-tape too taxing and awfully boring, our youngest child, age 2, had taken off. Not knowing which of the critical issues to tackle first, my wife and I decided after a quick division of labor, that she would search the premises for Greg, while I

remained and rechecked our certificates with the official. The remembrance of the painful aftermath of the yellow-fever shot we had received a few weeks prior to our departure was enough of a motivation and incentive to spend as much time as was necessary to clear up the oversight. In the same light, losing a member of the family amidst all the confusion of the airport was equally as disconcerting.

Happily I report that the situation soon cleared itself and we were permitted to pick up our luggage and head for our hotel. The health officer had simply by-passed the yellow-fever section of our health certificate and Greg was found in the company of two gentlemen whom we assumed to be Muslims, but who looked very much like they were straight out of The Arabian Nights. My wife later related that had it not been for the seriousness of Greg's wandering, the scene would have been a priceless film strip for the movies. Our two-year-old whose speech pattern hasn't quite developed to the point of intelligibility was hovering between these two men, jabbering away for all he was worth - and getting a response. The fact that the response was in French didn't seem to bother him. My wife further iterated that the icy stares of these two men and the sobbing of our young one made her feel as if she was interfering in something preplanned and crucial as she marched him away.

Finally, after a short scrimmage between two competing taxicab companies, and after having to tip five young men who had put our fourteen pieces of luggage into two cabs, we wearily sped for the center of Dakar and our hotel.

Dakar, the most western city of the continent of Africa, geographically speaking, offers a natural stopping off place and respite center for weary travelers jetting across the Atlantic. Its population of over 500,000 continues to grow at a rate of over six per cent each year. Being in such a strategic position, it would appear that tourism would constitute a major source of income for the country. However, from my own brief observation during our six day visit, I would venture to say that the tourist is certainly welcomed, but he isn't catered to as is the case in many other countries. Most of the catering is turned inward; the Senegalese as well as the French residents seem to know how to enjoy the offerings of the day.

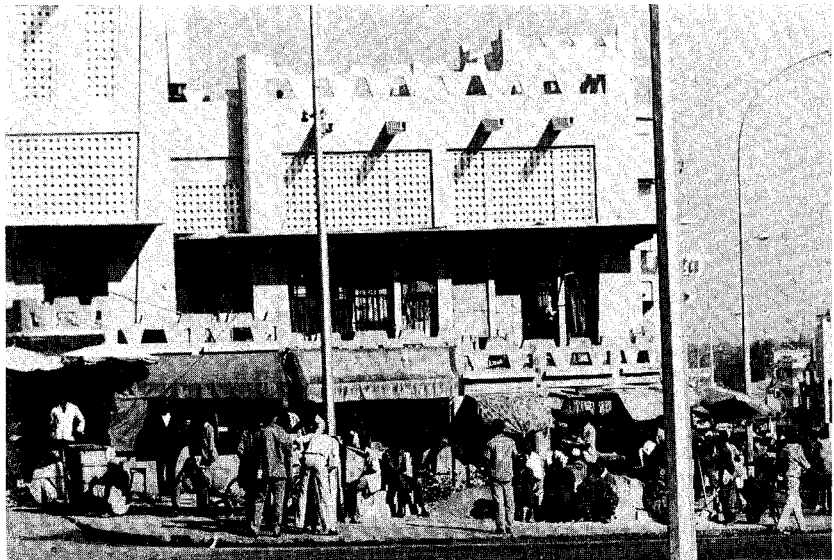
In contrast to this "present-oriented" attitude, official agencies such as the Trade Union and the Union Progressive Senegalaise are slowly attempting to plan for the future of Senegal as they complete almost a decade of independence. When one mentions independence however, many of the Western-oriented Senegalese will quickly respond with a statement usually to the effect that Senegal is the only west African republic enjoying a well-worked out agreement with France. This is an agreement which has indeed allowed Senegal to continue to align itself with France's economy, as well as to benefit from all the other amenities associated with the French community.



Above: Going to the Market

Left: Typically dressed Senegalese woman

Below: The outskirts of the Medina



The argument pro and con concerning this particular arrangement is very much in evidence. Many wonder if it will be at all possible to become truly Africanized with this type of functional relationship. The more eclectic in response to this question, simply shrug their shoulders and say, why not.

President Senghor sensing a need to exert some pressure towards a truly autonomous government has endorsed the development of a new four-year plan which is aimed mainly at increasing the economic viability of his country through sources other than the production of ground nuts which at the present is the main source of income. Actually, the new plan is a follow-up of previous four year plans inaugurated in 1961 and 1965. Although the new plan has not been officially introduced to the populace, it is most certain to be similar in content to the previous plans with a few changes in goal anticipations.

The goals of the previous reports according to the Labor-relations attache of the American Embassy, centered around five areas of interest: 1. increase private consumption by three per cent. 2. effect an annual growth of six per cent in gross domestic product. 3. attain the highest possible rate of investment subject to the need to preserve an overall equilibrium. 4. maintain a balanced budget, and 5. provide an allocation of investment to each sector of the economy in predetermined proportions.

According to the records, eighty per cent of the goal had been met prior to the initiation of the new planning program. However, many of the economic specialists feel that although the planning has met with great success, it has yet to tackle the critical issue of unemployment. The President in response to this thrown gauntlet issued a statement to the effect that "It (unemployment) will only be overcome by means of a systematic, determined effort to achieve industrialization".

I became quite aware of the need for employment as I wandered around the main areas of town. I observed hundreds of people simply sitting or meandering aimlessly. The area where this situation was most pronounced is called the Medina, the African ghetto.

Upon further inquiry, it was stressed that unemployment cannot be attributed solely to the lack of jobs. There is a dire need for skilled labor and also for managerial staff. This abyss is caused by the still unfinished educational system, according to some of the ancillary school program people. Each year, over 30,000 students leave primary school who can barely read and write. Schools continue to be mainly for the production of clerks and other types of office personnel rather than for the more manual and skilled persons for whom positions are available. In light of the drop-out crisis, the constant migration to the urban center by young people who find the farm-life

somewhat unrewarding and difficult, and with the natural growth of cities, it becomes almost redundant for the specialist to proclaim that employment will be the crucial issue for the next five years.

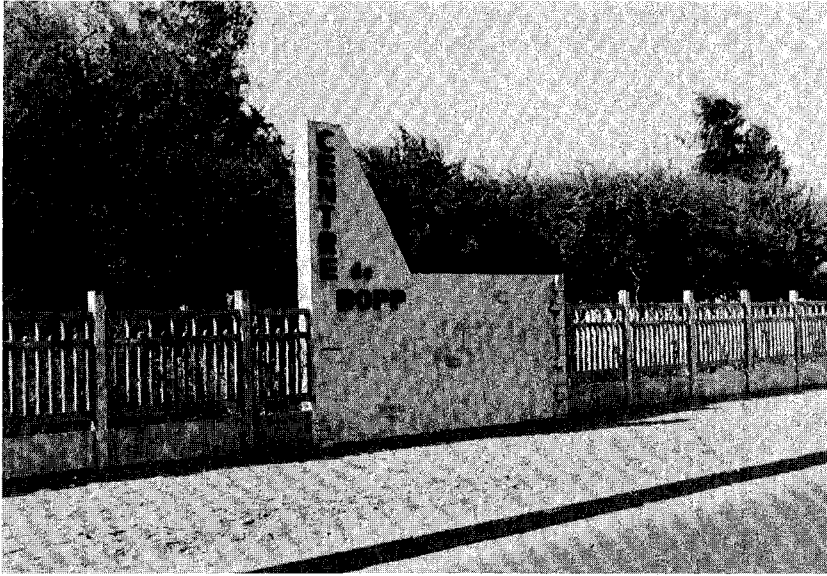
Prior to our short visit to Dakar, we were encouraged to visit a special program undertaken in part by the World Council of Churches towards ameliorating some of the problems of illiteracy and also to supplant the dearth of manual skills. In place of the usual academic programs, skills which will allow people to be more proficient making domestic repair are taught.

The school, Centre de Bopp, or the human workshop, as they like to be referred to in order that they might offset the traditional image of strict academia, began its operation in 1956. At that time, the thrust was one of strict medical attention; giving aspirin and taking temperatures. Feeling the hopelessness of this perfunctory task, Miss Irene Poznanski, the present co-director, along with some of her colleagues who were then assigned the task of treating the residents of this area, appealed to Cimade, the French Protestant sector of the World Council of Churches, to add manpower so that they might become more involved with the problems of the current scene. Miss Poznanski, as well as some of the original pioneers, had been intimately familiar with problems of unemployment and illiteracy through their former contact with the Kibbutz of Israel as well as European camps that were initiated in the post-World War II days for displaced people.

The whole philosophical tenet which these people maintain and are insisting that the workshop population hold to, is the great psychological benefit deriving from self-help. The staff exists solely to assist; the program itself has to be the result of creativity and hard work on the part of each client.

The program begins at 9:30 am, and runs continuously until 8:00 pm in the evening. The morning and afternoon sessions are usually devoted to mothers and unemployed young men. The evening classes are directed mainly towards the men who are employed but who might derive greater benefits from learning to read and write.

While we visited this creative facility located on the outskirts of Dakar, we were invited to participate in a sewing class. Sensing by casual observation that the women involved were not in the least amateurs, we soon learned that this particular class was composed of a very select group of women. They had been chosen by cooperative organizations in their respective communities to represent them at the centre. They have been commissioned to pick up as many additional skills as possible so that when they return to their communities, they in turn can impart their newly acquired skills to their friends and neighbors.



Human Workshop Center



The daughter of a Senegalese student



Literacy training classes

Needless to say, it is a great honor to be chosen; therefore "goofing off" is unheard of under these circumstances. The majority of these students are purpose-oriented and will work as hard as it is humanly possible to accomplish all that they set out to do.

There are no formal entrance requirements as such, the program is available to all who are interested and who will abide by the informal rules that have been established. Women must be at least fifteen years of age before participating in full activity, whereas the men start at age seventeen.

One of the unique features of the program is that the instructors who manage the bulk of the classes are recruited from the centre. Interestingly, the majority of the instructors who were responsible for teaching reading and writing were young men between the ages of 19 and 25.

Although we noticed several young men showing interest in the skill of tailoring, the sewing area was dominated by women. Like the young men who were involved as instructors, many young women also assumed this role. They taught sewing to the novices while continuing to learn advanced techniques themselves. In many of the districts, the women have in fact developed their own cooperatives. Money which is earned from their sewing is placed in a central fund of the district for the purchase of more equipment or to be used towards defraying the residence costs of other representatives being sent to the centre.

It was stressed repeatedly by the director that the literacy training embedded in activities in sewing, health practices, nutritional planning and homemaking, are all secondary to the methodology implicit in establishing social relationships. The presentation of self is extremely important in this environmental setting.

During our visitation, students as well as their instructors were free, outgoing and most congenial. The shyness which the stranger usually evokes was not in evidence. Their social relationship training also emphasized the importance of sharing as well as being appreciative of that which was given. This very special training program, in the long run, promised its participants the potential necessary for community involvement both as participants and as future leaders.

When asked about the number of enrollees at the school, the officials merely threw up their hands. On the books they have officially registered around 400, whereas, in actuality, people just seem to come and go regardless of legalities and formal arrangements.



Medical services play an important role in the operation of the center - usually the first contact.



Above: Center instructors holding a seminar with a foreign visitor

When asked about the question of tomorrow, the director replied that she was more worried about today. As with most programs of this nature, which are frightfully few, the critical issue becomes one of securing enough money to keep the program in operation. The few francs which are brought in by the participants are merely tokens of pride which give the students the feeling that they are contributing to their own welfare. The director expressed a dire need for more financial assistance. The program as it now exists, receives one per cent of its budget through the Senegalese government and the remainder through donations from sources such as: UNICEF, churches of Holland, West Germany, and from Czechoslovakia.

Attempting to draw some parallels between this program and the program of the Tufts-Delta Project (GJ-1), I inquired about the possibility of a food cooperative using farming as a modus operandi. Her response was enthusiastic in terms of need and potential, but she was most pessimistic concerning the financial requirements and the lack of farm machinery which is necessary to begin such a program. She assured us that this idea has been with them for quite some time and as soon as they can get past the financial barrier, it will indeed be an active part of their program.

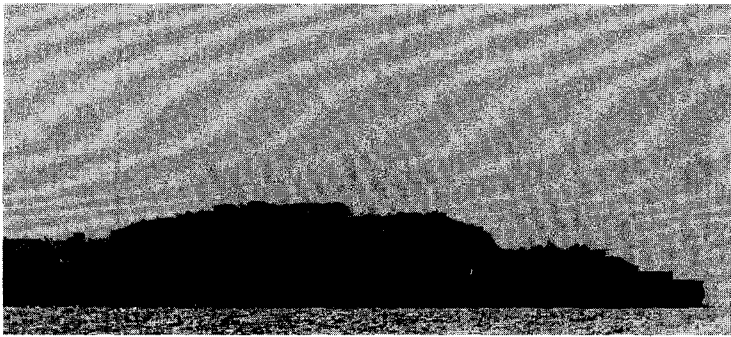
After a brief but active basketball game with some of the older students and after taking a few pictures, we took leave to continue the exploration of Dakar with its multitude of interesting sights. The Centre de Bopp has indeed etched its mark on many people of Dakar, and if inspiration and motivation are criteria of success, they will eventually play a most important role towards assisting in the employability of many residents while also opening up many more sources of employment.

The one remaining highlight of our stay in Dakar was the Island of Goree. Pre-conditioned by the historical account of the island as a central warehouse for slaves being readied for the long voyage to the colonies and by its strategic position as a French stronghold, we were not quite ready for the existing microcosm.

Located on the Island are several schools, shops selling curios, many fine restaurants, a museum, and a local prison. Thinking the prison was a part of the museum and not realizing the nature of this fine building, housing uniformly dressed men who looked to be caretakers of some sort, we obtrusively barged in on one of their work areas. Some of the prisoners in their faltering English managed to tell me about their present stations in life and were quite open in their details about prison life. As our conversation began to become interesting and most informative, I was told by a guard that I was intruding. Sensing his earnestness, I quickly departed.



The library - a most popular spot



The island of Goree



School activity on the island



International language



Two young residents
of the island

The island itself appears to be a haven for the residents of Dakar who enjoy the sand and sun, and for those military historians who enjoy rummaging around the intricate underground network of previous wars. The island is a welcome change of pace from the bustling metropolis of Dakar some fifteen minutes away by ferry.

After a French meal and a five mile hike around the island, we were all pretty happy to return to our hotel and contemplate our next objective which will constitute our final destination, Nairobi, Kenya.

Our departure for Nairobi, while filled with much anticipation of finally reaching our target, made our ordeals with the Immigration people upon our arrival in Dakar seem almost benign.

To begin with, the plane scheduled for 5:15 A.M. meant arriving at the airport at 4:30 in order to honor their request to arrive there forty-five minutes prior to take-off time. The trip from our hotel to the airport would take at least twenty minutes, not counting the time to load suitcases. Rather than carry this mathematical exercise all the way, I will say briefly that we decided not to sleep that evening but be somewhat astute by arriving at the airport well ahead of the crowd. Quite sleepy, we arrived at the airport around 3:30 A.M.

Much to our dismay, we found that our check-in area didn't open until 4:30. The time ticked off very slowly, but it did finally reach the zero hour. Being the first in line, our luggage was naturally taken first, weighed (kilograms), and promptly sent to the plane for loading. From the weighing station, a little tag with the tickets were then shuffled to a second window where the boarding pass was to be issued. Looking at the little tag passed on to him, the gentleman there began thumbing through several books while making many numeral notations on a pad. After a few minutes of an ingenious display of arithmetic wizardry he announced that we were approximately 80 kilograms above the required limit and that it would cost us \$360 extra.

Not wanting to be too impolite and laugh right then and there, I simply told this man that evidently he had made an error; our purchases in Dakar over that which we started with in New York consisted of two items, a drum for which I laborously bargained for at the artisans' market, getting the shopkeeper down from \$30 to \$8 and a table cloth which my wife had had woven at the same place.

Unmoved by this confusion, the clerk went back to his calculations and after finishing again said he was sorry but his figures were accurate and we would have to pay.

By this time the line had become extremely long which meant any protest with this man would bring much pressure to bear upon us from the other passengers. So rather than hold the line up we asked to see the morning supervisor and stepped aside. Glancing at my watch, I became aware that our exchange thus far had taken twenty minutes.

To spare you all the anxious moments and the perplexity of the situation, I'll simply state that at 4:55 our bags were brought back from the plane so that we might sort out that which we chose to leave behind. One gentleman from New York, seeing us frantically opening eight suitcases and sorting through a profusion of items offered to loan us the money if we so desired. Very much moved by this generous offer, we declined with the explanation that it really wasn't a matter of money (ahem) but the principle. This extra cost was not a part of our **priorities** at this particular time. Increasing our hand-luggage to six bags and leaving my drum behind, we managed to get our weight down to \$80 worth.

At 5:10 we boarded a very crowded aircraft and had to separate as a family group with our hand-luggage going in three different directions.

At this point, I could only think of our beginning and now our ending in relation to that overworked saying, "Cheer up, things could get worse". And so I did, and sure enough, "Things got worse."

Sincerely yours,


George Jones

Received in New York on March 2, 1970.