

25th July 1970

GJ-6

Americans in Africa

Mr. R. H. Nolte
Institute of Current World Affairs
535 Fifth Avenue
New York 10017

Dear Mr. Nolte:

The American population in Kenya numbers over 3,000 according to unofficial sources. The 3,000 figure represents Americans who are working or studying on a semi-permanent basis -- those beyond the tourist visa. Some of the more noted groups functioning on the African scene at present are: United States Embassy, United States Information Service, United States Aid to Independent Development, Peace Corps and a host of missionaries (who make up the bulk of the population). During the summer months, the number of Americans coming from all parts of the States almost doubles itself. In spite of the geographical diversity however, these summer visitors share the common objective of attempting to learn more about the African peoples in an abbreviated period of time. Their interest in the African population encompasses such things as: their daily habits, political aspirations, social enjoyments, educational pursuits, and their opinions of the world situation in relation to their own developing country. The processes by which these objectives are pursued differ according to the particular area of specialty of the groups involved. Some of the groups with whom I have had contact thus far include: Institute of International Education, Tennessee State College, Western Michigan University, American Institute for Foreign Studies, and Crossroads Africa.

Initially, one is often tempted to write about the American community in East Africa, but after investigation it is clear that there is no one community but many isolated sub-communities who share cultural experiences, have a considerable degree of interpersonal contact and live in proximity to each other. The entire American population when charted on a map shows a great diffuseness of living areas. The occasions for total collective experiences have been quite limited thus far in our stay of seven months. The two events which have grouped the majority of the population have been the appearance of the Deep River Boys and the 4th of July celebration.

The Deep River Boys, acclaimed as an international singing group after having performed over three decades in North America, Europe, Asia and Africa, came to town very recently with much publicity and fanfare. The Deep River Boys were given formal receptions by the U.S. Ambassador to Kenya, Robert McIlvaine, as well as the President of Kenya, Mzee Jomo Kenyatta. In addition they made several appearance before civic groups.

A command performance given by the group at City Hall was received with much appreciation by the American as well as African public. Their repertoire included rock, pop, ballads, and, most applauded, Negro spirituals. The performance of the Deep River Boys not only offered entertainment to the standing-room-only crowd, but also served to give financial assistance to the "Garissa Boys Town. The Boys Town is an orphanage located in the North Eastern Province of Kenya. The program was highlighted by a guest appearance of about 25 boys from the school.

Prior to their arrival in Kenya, the group had performed in Nigeria, Tanzania and Malagasy. The next stops after Kenya included Uganda and Ethiopia. The Deep River Boys were hosted by the United States Information Service of Kenya.



HARRY DOUGLASS and THE DEEP RIVER BOYS

(Courtesy of the U.S.I.S.)

The 4th of July celebration unlike the concert given by the Deep River Boys offered more audience participation and was indeed more American oriented. On the afternoon of the 4th of July, over 1,000 Americans and their guests gathered in Jamhuri Park, approximately 7 miles from downtown Nairobi, to hold an annual Independence Day picnic. The highlight of the day was to have been the treat to hot dogs flown in by Pan American World Airways from the U.S.A. Although the hot dogs were savored with much delight by the Americans and their friends (one man was purported to have eaten one dozen) the high point of the day was the extemporaneous address given by the Ambassador. The content of his speech was timely and the presentation outstanding.

The Ambassador seemed to understand the subconscious group feeling of isolation from the confrontations presently taking place in the U.S.A. for he took the opportunity to remind people that it is a **must** that they "turn towards the homeland." He went on to say that, "it is obvious to all of us that something is painfully and poignantly wrong with our society...we are in the recession of the spirit--more conscious of what pulls us apart than what holds us together. A sort of psychic downturn so pronounced that the mood itself may be the real crisis we face."

The Ambassador in closing reminded the group that no progress is made without a certain amount of struggle and crisis--the answer lay in the opening of dialogue. He went on to say, that "as a result of the whole terrible experience, a new day will dawn in which beliefs will have a truer ring--and a more valid meaning for all segments of our society."

For those of us who remain very much alert to the apparent struggle in the States, Ambassador McIlvaine's speech reaffirmed our conviction that separation does not necessarily mean uninvolvedness. After this very inspiring speech, the festivities of the afternoon commenced.



The Ambassador (lft) & M.C.



Above: The
Ambassador's wife



Lft: Fellow-
countryman

(both enjoying
the 11,000 mile
hotdog)



The
Games



The highlights of the afternoon included many novelty races. For the younger more athletically-minded, there were several dashes. For the older participants, softball and touch football occupied their time, that is, when they were not indulging in the offerings of the snack bar. Other attractions of the day included a performance by the Kenya Police Band and a very exciting raffle drawing.

For most of the youngsters, the 4th was truly a grand and glorious festival day; for the adults, it had flashes of former picnic delights. For all, it was a reminder of the official beginning of summer season and the hosting of summer tourists and relatives from back home.

Although Nairobi is considered a growing metropolis, it has many features of a small town. Long term residents for example can recognize the newcomer.

Curious as to what is happening in the States from direct sources, I have latched on to members of two of the groups, the American Institute for Foreign Studies and the Crossroads Africa delegation. Somehow however, we really never got around to discuss these interests but became more involved in the why and wherefore of their safari to Africa.

The first A.I.F.S. sponsored group, consisting solely of college students, travelled abroad in 1964. At the present time, however, there are well over 10,000 students, both college and high school, spread around Europe and Africa. The objective of the A.I.F.S. is to give students an academic experience in a foreign country followed by a general tour of the area. The only requirement is that the individual be a bona fide student in college or high school and that the fee for the six weeks program be paid in advance. Students have a chance of going to places such as France, Germany, Italy or Spain where subjects are taught in the native language, or to an English speaking country like the United Kingdom. This year represents the first attempt to have students on the African scene. The experimental program asked the University of Nairobi to accept 150 people -- 135 students and 15 chaperones. At the opening of the program, however, there were 190 students and 20 chaperones.

The academic program for this group consisted of African History (compulsory), Introduction to Kiswahili, African Music and Dance, Geography and Geology. All the subjects are geared to the environmental and social milieu of the area. Besides getting information pertaining to the immediate area, the students are instructed by Kenyans who come from a variety of tribal groups. This too becomes an added learning experience.

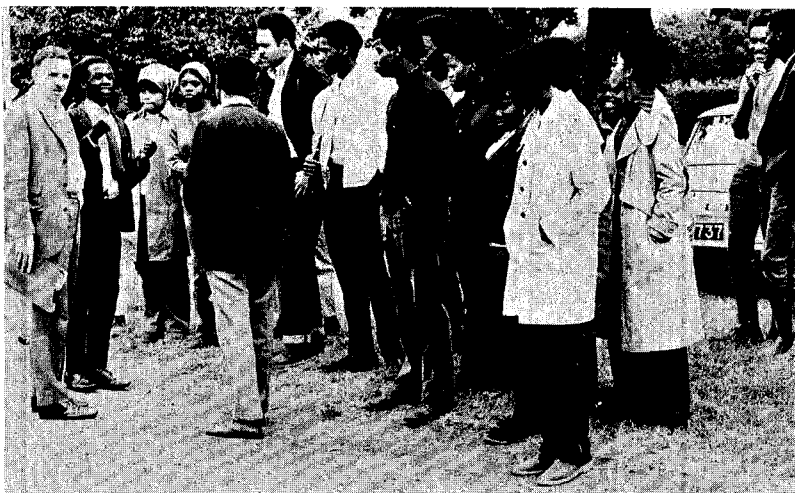
For one of their field trips, some of the A.I.F.S. delegation travelled to a Harambee School located in the small rural town of Embu, which is located north of Nairobi. I had the privilege of accompanying this group of 20 youngsters (all from the west side of Chicago) on this field trip. The group, although comprised of a mixture of college and high school students, had two features in common: they were all black and they all had struggled for months to meet the fee obligations for this trip to Africa. The chaperones of the group reported that the majority of the students had to hold down two jobs for many months in order to prove to parents and the community that their desire to travel to Africa was more than whimsical. One girl sewed 300 pillows in order to earn her share. Eventually, the Chicago public, impressed with the drive of these young people, began rallying around their efforts to see Africa first hand. No less than three-fourths of the parents of these young people took on an extra job themselves to defray the costs. In addition, the parents spent many weekends preparing chicken dinners and selling them to the general public. "Pretty soon," reported one of the students, "it looked like the whole of Chicago got in on the act." Ebony magazine sent donations, the Chicago papers ran articles soliciting funds, and the television program For Blacks Only offered specials concerning these youths and their endeavours. Each student needed approximately \$1300 to make this trip.

Much to my delight, I was amongst a group of students who were in Africa because they truly wanted to get the African experience. On the basis of the enthusiasm and the keen interest shown in their subject matter and the manner in which they conducted themselves on the trip to Embu, I would venture to say that the energy expended to get them here was well worth it.

When the group arrived at the Harambee school, (GJ-3) they were given a brief welcome by the headmaster and then assigned tour guides to take them around the residential school. Each guest had at least three guides--at one point I counted as high as fifteen African students around one of the Chicago youngsters. Although the group appreciated the bucolic scenery offered by the school setting it was obvious that the two groups were more concerned with each other--they wanted to clear up the many misunderstandings harbored about one another. In the vernacular of the youth, they "rapped" for almost three hours in these small groups. As it happened, to end it, the chaperones and I physically pushed people into the vehicles. The hugs, the exchanges of addresses, the chatter through the windows and the prolonged waves were positive indications that this phase of their program will be one of the most memorable.

In order to get an idea of the tone and area of interest on the part of the African students, I later queried the Chicago students as to some of the questions which were posed to them. Some of the common questions involved the Black Panthers, the United States Government and its help to black people; tribalism in the United States, the percentage of blacks in the governmental structure welfare programs, natural hairstyles, black women, Afro-American music (especially James Brown), Malcolm X, Dr. King, Vietnam and soul food. Students were asked if they really liked Africa and, if it were possible, would they enjoy living here. This query was generally followed with the question as to whether they could adjust to the African cultures as it now exists. Although I did not go into how these questions were handled by the A.I.F.S. group, as I reflect on the departure, it appeared that both groups were most satisfied. One of the students described the African students as being "wrapped tight." I suspect that is the highest compliment which can be extended to another human being in the jargon of the younger set.

After an adventurous five weeks in Kenya, the group will leave for Tanzania and then on to home. Most of the group expressed a strong desire to spend more time here in Africa at some stage in their career but right now wanted to get home to share all these fabulous experiences with their Chicago community.



The Chicago A.I.F.S
group being briefed



Dialogue &
confrontation



The Chicago group has made very favourable impressions on the Americans as well as the Africans here in Kenya. Many of the students have promised to maintain communication upon their return to the States-- we shall look forward to this exchange.

The Crossroads Africa contingent offers a somewhat different flavor in terms of their African experience. Their mission of cultural sharing is being manifested through work projects, as opposed to the study situation of the A.I.F.S. group.

Operation Crossroads Africa had its inception in 1957. It was originally financed on a private basis and used the work-camp study seminar technique as its modus operandi. Students make up the bulk of the population of Crossroaders but the program also includes teachers, professors, doctors, nurses, and other specialists. According to one of their documents, Crossroaders represent all religious, ethnic and racial backgrounds. Some of the activities in which the Crossroads groups have participated include: building village schools, churches, clinics, market places, playgrounds, small recreation halls; digging wells; teaching English classes and physical education; providing inservice teacher training for the undereducated; contributing to medical services in hospitals and village clinics; and teaching agricultural methods. As a part of their requirement the Crossroaders study the language of the country to be visited and are also required to do extensive reading culminating in a term paper. In addition to these fundamentals, each student upon his return to the States must give at least 25 speeches within a two year period of time regarding his experience. It thus becomes clear that the Crossroads participants have a dual role of representing the Americans while in Africa and acting as "ambassadors" from Africa upon their return after an involved summer experience.

In order to get a first-hand view of the Crossroaders in action, I travelled to Machakos, a small township approximately 30 miles from Nairobi. As a part of their two week stint in Machakos, this group have taken on the construction of a Harambee school.

The fifteen or more workers related that their beginnings in the township, although approved by the town council, were very uncertain. The townspeople were quite suspicious and very cold. When the group did not deluge them with questionnaires and general surveys "leading to an understanding of their cultural habits" but became engrossed in the task of hauling bricks, slinging mud and an all the other activities associated with the construction of a building, the people warmed up and subsequently could not do enough for the group. As a matter of fact, around the third day of their stay, the town organized a community dance with native costumes and presented gifts to the group. The gifts consisted of a goat, fruit and vegetables, and carved statues made in the area.

With this new acceptance the group began branching out in their activities. Some began tutoring in the school during the day; others began evening recreational programs for the 100 youngsters in the area.

Although the Crossroaders take the opportunity during the weekends to travel to the Hilton Hotel in Nairobi to have hamburgers, french fries and a coke, the remainder of the week is spent living and eating in the community. Many of the group said that they were not particularly fond of roughing it but the gratitude of the people for their efforts made the project something most important to complete. One of the workers from Harlem very articulately said, "when you see the sisters (Africans) out there handling bricks and slinging mortar from the crack of dawn until nightfall you feel pretty sh ----when you even sit down to rest. I never thought I would be caught up in this kind of bag."

Because the group wanted to complete the project before the two week tour of duty an afternoon work crew had been established. These young people have given up their proposed free time to work along with the "wananchi" (The people).

The workers in this group were from Massachusetts, Ohio, Colorado, New York, Alabama, California and South Carolina. One pleasant surprise was to meet one worker who was a member of the class of '71 at the United States Military Academy at West Point. The Point had given him the summer off to get involved with the Crossroads Africa Project in connection with his pursuit of a social science degree.

CROSSROADS AFRICA



The laborious chore
of cooking



Lft: Progress through
cooperation

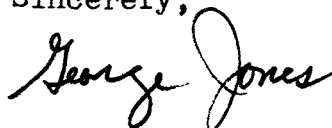
Below: "The sisters"

Below lft: The
Westpointer in action



It was most heartwarming to see and briefly to participate in this activity of the Crossroaders. One of the towns people summed up this experience most succinctly by stating that these young people have won a place in Machakos whenever and however long they wish to remain.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "George Jones". The signature is fluid and stylized, with the first and last names being clearly legible.

George Jones

Received in New York on August 10, 1970.