

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

JBG-3
Oxford to Date

7, Longwall Street
Oxford, England
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 18, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

These last three weeks I have been reading books and scanning Colonial Office documents, trying to select a thesis topic so that my studies next term may be better organized. As a student "reading" toward a degree I shall enjoy a number of privileges not normally accorded to non-degree residents, and I will incur no obligations to interfere with my basic studies of East Africa. I also have the impression that the faculty tends to show more concern for students with formal scholastic goals.

The degree I plan to read for is Bachelor of Letters, in Political Science (Colonial Government). In applying for it I will not tie myself down to a narrow specialty, and need not worry about whether I complete it or not. If I want I can later, with the approval of my supervisor, convert to a D. Phil. and do heavier research. Reading for the degree is a means in itself; actually receiving it can be another matter, contingent upon changes after I get to East Africa. Naturally I will not let this delay my departure for my area, which I plan not later than next summer. The opportunity as I see it is one of killing two birds with one stone and no additional effort.

The thesis subject I am going to try to sell, provided you approve, is "Regionalism in East Africa." I do not know for sure that it will be accepted but Mr. Robinson, my tutor, put me on the track of it some weeks ago. It is a very live issue today; the forces for and against a regional union of Kenya, Tanganyika, and Uganda include everything of political significance in the area. It touches all the racial, political and economic subdivisions of the population, and I think it would permit a point of emphasis to be later selected which would fit in with almost any idea I could get after planting my feet on East African ground.

Because I was "matriculated" only a few days ago, as a result of arriving just before term time, I have just been informed of my acceptance as a Probationer-Student for the degree B. Litt. This was fortunate in that it allowed me some time in which to read a little of my prospective topic, but unfortunate in that it has delayed my application for formal candidature until now. Mr. Robinson, who would have approved my plans without delay, is now in Africa and I am getting a new tutor for Hilary Term, 1950. Miss Margery Perham is the new tutor and her reputation as an expert on Africa, as you know, reaches from here to there.

The advantage of having Miss Perham available as my tutor will outweigh any difficulties caused through changing tutors after a first term. (The tutor being at Oxford the all-important figure for the individual student---the only appraising authority, the only link, aside from examiners, with the University itself.) If she is more exacting in requirements it may make trouble for me as an Oxford student, but I am sure I can learn more about Africa from her than from any one else at the University. For one thing she is more of an East African authority than Mr. Robinson, his experience having been mainly in Nigeria and bordering areas. She knows Kenya, I believe, better than any other academic authority. She is of course greatly sought after by all scholars and prospective scholars of African affairs; and I think my assignment to her must be a result of the Institute's prestige. (I asked Mr. Robinson if she would be available as soon as I learned of his African trip.) My only concern now is that she might insist on my taking a narrow thesis topic which would not be compatible with the broad knowledges I wish to obtain. And this is a small bridge which I can cross when I get to it. As a result of the conservative social policy I have adopted here I have not yet met Miss Perham, which may be all to the good. Better to have made my little errors of University protocol with Mr. Robinson, who gives every evidence of being a very reasonable guy. Now that I've learned a few things about the University, the Colonial Service Club, and the subject of colonial government itself, I will probably be able to do something more than nod and smile at many of the names and ideas Miss Perham brings up during tutorials.

So that's the scheme. I'll apply at the beginning of next term for full research status and for acceptance of my B. Litt. thesis plan. Miss Perham, if she approves the plan, will guide my efforts through the Hilary and presumably the Trinity term. It might become possible in the meantime for me to undertake, as a by-product of my advised grounding in African academics, a heavier study of regionalism aiming towards a D. Phil. Should this occur I will try to obtain "statutory" residence credit for the first nine months I spend in Africa. This would enable me to receive a B. Litt. or a D. Phil. at my convenience later on. On the other hand, should I find the research requirements too exacting, or should I at any time decide that I have milked Oxford dry of the intelligence I need of my area, I can chuck the idea and finish out my residence at Oxford on an informal basis.

Trinity term officially ends on July 8th. Since I have no exams to take I'll be free at least a week earlier; but I may have a certain amount of reading to finish or a few visits to make here in England. Accordingly I have allowed several weeks leeway in planning my departure, and I now have a travel agency checking on reservations for sea travel to Mombasa or Dar-es-Salaam sometime during late July or August. If I should not use up this leeway in putting out my fires at Oxford, I wonder what you would say to the idea of taking a quick look at Europe. Do you think it would be useful? (I feel that it would be very useful indeed if only I could speak French. If I am to become an authority on Colonial Government in general

as against East African affairs alone, I can't leave out at least a basic survey of the workings of the Belgian and French colonial offices and systems. But for the time being, while I am still tied up with the first-priority investigations of East African structures, the only value I think such a trip would have would be in its general contribution to my international background.) Or should I confine my European travel to the week's trip Dick Nolte and I are making to Paris this month, and a short, later visit during Easter vacation? One thought is that sometime, after two or more years in East Africa, it might be useful to take a sort of sabbatical into nearby Belgian Congo, study French for a while and observe the administration in operation and then, contacts permitting, go on to Europe and take a close look at the Belgian and French Colonial Offices. At the present time this notion is definitely in the realm of the fantastic, but I think it is worth keeping in mind. A number of the British Colonial Service Officers I now know are scholars of the French and Belgian administrative systems as well as their own, which is to me a sort of challenge. I hate to think of my knowing less about colonial government than a man who is required to do it at the same time he studies it.

I guess this gives you a rough picture of my academics side. In the words above I am sure you will detect a strong suggestion of the farm boy awestruck by the possibility of attaining a graduate degree from the world's most famous educational institution. I have already taken counsel with Phil Talbot regarding this feeling, and I think I am now viewing the matter more correctly, making sure that I shall not be swerved off the path by according undue importance to what he properly described as a "union card." I'd like to hear what you might have to say about this and the other aspects of my plans, though....

I have taken the liberty of postponing the specific newsletters I mentioned in my last letter to you, in order to go to Paris for a few days with Dick Nolte. The idea is to give Dick a brief rest and change of scene after a long session of grinding away at Arabic, and to give me a quick look at France and a chance to talk to Mr. McCarthy. So I'll sketch an even rougher outline of my non-academic experiences since last writing, and leave the rest until I return from Paris in a week or so.

First there is my circle of acquaintances in the Oxford colonial service group. The circle is widening nicely, and now includes all the veteran officers here from East Africa, plus a number of cadets and experienced men from other areas. All of them have given invitations for me to visit them at their stations, and I think they mean it. Some are big game shooting enthusiasts and have offered to guide me through the wilds of their districts. In the homes of several of the married officers these offers have been repeated by their

wives. I was invited to a dance given by the Colonial Service Club on the 5th, and I have just been told unofficially that I am about to be invited to become an honorary or regular member of the Club. (Since it is the Colonial Service Club of Oxford I believe I'll accept with thanks. In Africa, where native and Indian contacts will be very important, I'll probably have to decline such offers unless I can also accept memberships in native associations.)

From what I saw at the dance I can well believe Elspeth Huxley's assertion that East Africa is the only section of the Empire left where men continue the custom of wearing dinner jackets for cocktails and then change into tails for dinner. More than half of the men present were wearing white ties; the minority was apologetic about coming in dinner jackets. (By happy chance my tuxedo had been packed in the footlocker I had already received.) Rhodes house was well decorated for the occasion; there was a lot of gaiety and considerable drinking but no drunkenness---the officers and their ladies apparently carrying their liquor with the same grace with which they wore evening clothes. It was a good party, and I'll have to keep a close eye against the possibility of acquiring an emotional bias in favor of these attractive people. After all, they do represent an extremist faction in African politics....

My friend Stevenson, a Scotsman studying anthropology in preparation for acceptance of a professorship at Glasgow, took me to the Oxford-Cambridge varsity rugby match at Twickenham (he had already taken me to the London-Scottish-Oxford game here) and I am now a confirmed rugger fan. I missed the forward passing of American football, and was incredibly confused by the fact that the game kept going on after the ball would be stopped through tackling or fumbling, but I could really appreciate the fine running of men like Oxford's Van Ryneveld and Cannell. And the no-substitute rule which requires that every man play until he drops dead gives the game a punishing, endurance-testing nature---and no padding or helmets for the backs and most of the forwards.... We had seats on the fifty yard line, tea waiting in the car parked near the stands, and I spent two nights at the beautiful, 16th Century home of Stevenson's father-in-law. My connection with Steve dates from Burma. I never met him there but he commanded a group of Kachin Levies who supported us. He had been a District Officer before the war, and says that he resigned after the war in protest against the government policy regarding native war veterans. (Oh yes, almost forgot. We won the rugger match, 3-0.)

I have received, and thank you for, the two books and the clippings from Science magazine. I hurriedly scanned General Anthropology and passed it on to Dick Nolte with the request that it be given to me later for careful reading. It is the very thing I need, and I am sure it can satisfy my present and foreseeable needs for anthropological methodological data by itself. If this volume is to be forwarded to another I should like to have a copy sent to me for my own library.

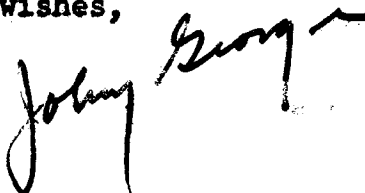
I have read the lectures in Reflections on Our Age as far as H. E. Wilson on Education. Some of the passages were full of keen ideas and startling new scientific facts; but several times, after I had waded through awful bogs and tangles of what I would call pedantic jargon, I found nothing more than the expression of a simple and obvious idea in vague and complex terms. (Maybe I missed the whole point.) I liked the one by Pettersson, The Submarine Underworld, best; and I learned what I think are some very important and useful facts from De Almeida's The Physiology of the Nervous System.

The clippings I have just received; I'll take them with me to Paris.

For the last few hours I've been aware of unusual silence here in my room. And if I'd looked at my watch I'd have seen why. The traffic on Longwall Street stops whining, roaring, and grinding past my window never before midnight,--the motors giving off a rising or falling sound depending on the direction in which the vehicle is moving. Those going south are decelerating preparatory to merging with the heavy stream of traffic on High Street; those northbound are accelerating to the insane speed which makes the pedestrian and cyclist lives in Oxford not worth a sixpence. Either type sound is amplified many times by being confined and reflected by the wall of Magdalen College on the far side of the street. The noise has been over for a long time; it's three o'clock in the morning now. Since I'm to be at the station at 10:15 to go to Paris, I'd better close.

I did not realize until I looked at my letter file today that it had been so long since my last letter to you. There is really no proper reason for such a delay, and I won't let one occur again unless it is unavoidable indeed....

Best holiday wishes,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Johnny George", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Received New York 12/19/49.