

INSTITUTE OF CURRENT WORLD AFFAIRS

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First Impressions

c/o Barclay's Bank
Queensway
Nairobi, Kenya
August 3, 1953

Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

The BOAC Hermes took off from Cairo's International Airport at midnight, bound for Khartoum. It had been hot and humid in Cairo. Once aloft, the plane quickly cooled off. I have been in Africa nearly three weeks and I have not seen hot weather again.

The plane was almost filled to capacity. Many of the passengers were Britons returning to business and government posts after home leave in England. Some had their wives and children with them, but for these people, Africa would never be home. Then there was another type of white man aboard. One of these was a young farmer who had left England after the war to settle in Southern Rhodesia. He was returning from a short visit in England. When I asked him his nationality, he replied, "Rhodesian." And also aboard were three young Africans who had taken a look at the West and now were going home, eager to put their new knowledge to work. Two, from Uganda, had studied in England and the third, a Tanganyikan, had studied in the United States. Many of the Europeans in Africa would regard them as trouble-makers. Their fellow Africans might look to them for salvation.

We landed at Khartoum in the pre-dawn darkness and had breakfast in a frame cottage at the edge of the field. While the plane was serviced and re-fueled. After breakfast, as the sun arose, I watched three Sudanese pushing a handtruck across the field. I asked a young Briton who was returning to a postal service job in Uganda if he thought it would be cheaper in the long run to employ three men to do a job that could be handled much better by one man using a motor-driven baggage truck of the type you see at U. S. airports.

"It might be cheaper to get a motor vehicle, but I'll tell you one thing, if you gave those natives one, the first thing they'd do is run it into a plane and cause £10,000 damage," he said.

"I came out here feeling sorry for these Africans and determined to help them as much as I could. But three years here have convinced me that the native is just stupid. He can't learn anything. You've got to watch him all the time or he'll do his job all wrong."

The Nile, visible now with daylight, grew smaller as we flew south to Entebbe, Uganda Protectorate. For hundreds of miles there was nothing but occasional native huts, the vast expanses of the Sudanese cotton fields and the twisting river that gives life to them. At noon: Entebbe. African askaris, wearing khaki tunics and shorts, red fezzes and knee-length stockings, were lined up at the edge of the field awaiting the arrival of the Queen Mother, who was to land at Entebbe in an hour on her way back from Rhodesia. An African police band, conducted by a European, was tuning up. Crowds of coal-black Africans pressed against the airport fence waiting impassively for a glimpse of the great white mother. Europeans in the terminal building chatted excitedly about the approaching event. The Tanganyikan African was served lunch in the airport dining room, but at a separate table. European passengers sat together at two large tables. The young Rhodesian said to me: "No color bar here. They mix them all up here. We have a color bar in Rhodesia. There is a color bar in the United States, isn't there?" Before I could answer, he said, "No doubt about it, there is one in the United States!" I let it go at that. Entebbe, with an altitude of 3,863 feet, was just pleasantly warm. It is only a few miles north of the equator.

We flew across the edge of Lake Victoria, then climbed above heavy rain clouds, which blotted out any view of Kenya. In less than two hours, we dipped down through the clouds to a sunless and chilly Nairobi, 8,500 miles from Chicago.

The airport bus took us through Karikor, an African slum area on the outskirts of the city. Conditions there were quite bad. More about slums and what is being done about them in a later newsletter.

Downtown Nairobi looks something like a north Florida town. Stores are generally of a pastel color and many have arcades over the sidewalk. Kenya's agricultural economy is reflected in the large number of farm implement and auto concerns.

One is struck immediately by the numerical inferiority of the Europeans here. Walking down Delamere avenue you see only a few Europeans but scores of Africans and Asians. The population of this rapidly growing city is estimated at 166,500---15,500 Europeans, 56,000 Asians and 95,000 Africans.

The tension continues although it is regarded as having lessened somewhat in recent months. The Europeans are not relaxing their guard. Police stations are ringed with barbed wire and sandbags and each is a little arsenal. British troops, African police and soldiers and Europeans in the Kenya Regiment, the Kenya Police and the Kenya Police Reserve are seen everywhere. The Africans are armed with rifles and shotguns. The Europeans have pistols, revolvers and Sten guns.

Many of the Africans are Nandis, a tough warrior tribe. There are men from other tribes, too, including a few from the Mau Mau-ridden Kikuyu. Kikuyus generally are distrusted by the Europeans though. The African forces range in rank up to sergeant-major and are always commanded by European officers. There are few Asian police. The only ones I have seen have been in charge of Africans at up-country roadblocks.

Many European male civilians carry side-arms and not a few women have small-calibre weapons in their purses. Hotel guests leave their weapons in the office safe. Weapons are never left in rooms for fear that the African hotel help will steal them. The government is determined to keep arms from the Mau Mau and a European can be fined heavily and/or sent to jail for losing one. The stiffness of the penalty depends upon the degree of negligence.

A Kikuyu has just been sentenced to death at Nyeri for possessing a .45 calibre Webley revolver. It was the first time the death penalty had been imposed under the Emergency Regulations on firearms and ammunition.

It was at Nyeri where the latest Mau Mau murder of a European occurred. A nine-man gang entered the farm home of Mr. James MacDouglass, a 73-year-old arthritic cripple, and hacked him to death with pangas. Because of his condition, he could not get up from his chair for a weapon. MacDouglass was Nyeri's oldest settler, having arrived in Kenya in 1903 after the Boer War. It is said that he walked the 100 miles from Nairobi to Nyeri and there made his home.

Dragnet round-ups or "screenings" of Africans in Nairobi's slum locations have turned up weapons, ammunition and men wanted for Mau Mau activity and other crimes. Ballistics tests have showed that some weapons have been used in several Mau Mau attacks. One weapon was traced to six attacks.

On the advice of practically everyone I have met, I purchased a pistol. "The Mau Mau wouldn't ask to see your U. S. passport first," one acquaintance said. A rather bloodthirsty but otherwise charming European woman clerk in the gun shop said, when I commented that the Beretta equivalent of a .22 is rather small: "If you're quick and hit the brain or heart, it's all right." She wore a small revolver on her belt. "It's because we have a lot of money in this store," she said. Like many Europeans in Kenya, she is separated from her husband. He lives on their up-country farm and has been threatened with death by the Mau Mau several times.

Mr. H. S. Potter, Chief Secretary for the Colony, reported in the Legislative Council the other day: "The position is still one of danger, but it is improving." The settlers, ever critical of the colonial government, have been demanding more drastic action against the Mau Mau, including the death penalty for oath administrators.

African labor is cheap and, generally, inefficient. When I drove a rented car into a gas station, 10 Africans swarmed around to "service" it. Others stood by watching. Two of the Africans did nothing but wipe the windshield with dry, dirty rags. Frowning with the seriousness of men bending over a microscope on the verge of a great discovery, they stroked the windshield lightly for several minutes. When they finished, the spots were still there. A young Indian collected the money and brought the change. A European owns the gas station and sits in the office. He said Africans can be taught to pump gas and fix flat tires but that few have the ability to become skilled mechanics.

Hotels abound with African waiters, bellhops and cleaning men---called collectively "boys." Because there are only a few Europeans in charge, non Swahili speaking guests are left pretty much to sign language and their own devices. The "boys" make 50 shillings---\$7---a month and have to depend on tips for their very existence. Most Europeans are not inclined to over-tip.

Most of the "boys" (some may well be grandfathers) pad around on the cold marble floors with bare feet. An African told me they would like to own shoes, but cannot afford them. They have never worn shoes in their lives and their feet have toughened to the point where the cold floors do not bother them. But they still want shoes as they want to be like the Europeans, he said.

This is winter in Nairobi. July is the coldest month of the year and February and March are the hottest. Night temperatures from June through August are usually in the low 50s; for February and March, in the high 50s. During the day temperatures rise to 85 or more in February and March and to only the low 70s in June, July and August. Woolen clothing is a necessity here, 5,452 feet above sea level and only 100 miles south of the equator.

Britishers here complain that the African is lazy. The Indians make the same complaint about the British. An Indian merchant said to me, "I am at my shop every morning at 7:30. I don't leave till 5:30. I work very hard all the time. The Englishman gets to his store at nine and at 11 he runs out for tea. At 1 he goes home for lunch. Maybe he gets back to work at 2 and at 4 he runs off for tea and golf." Whether the duka keeper has his hours right or not, there is little "American efficiency" here. And most stores and offices are locked from 12 or so till 2 while the employes have lunch.

The British complain bitterly that the Indians own most of Nairobi and have a stranglehold on the economy. "They live off the smell of an oily rag, saving every penny they earn, while we live up to our incomes." I have heard this, and in the same words, from several Englishmen. Then they usually add: "And they breed like flies." Indian under-selling has been given as the reason for the failure of many British business firms. The British sourly predict that the Indians, who came here as coolie labor on the Uganda railway project, will wind up owning Kenya someday.

The three major communities here---European, African and Asian---live in separate worlds. As far as I can see, the European's dealings with Africans are only those of master-servant or employer-employee; with the Asian, those of business.

A wealthy young Indian, Kenya-born and educated at Cambridge, complained that dirty looks bar him from dining at the European hotels. An African leader has remarked that the only way an African with curiosity can get to know Europeans is by offering himself as a "boy" on the European's house staff. Some efforts are being made to break down color barriers, though, and an inter-racial school is to start in Nairobi this September.

Some Europeans display a genuine desire to help the African to progress---it varies in intensity with the individual. Others have what seems to be a thorough hate. When you mention education to these people, they say, "Then you'd have hundreds of Jomo Kenyattas."

One European, a former district commissioner, told me: "These people should realize that they're utterly dependent on the African---in business, agriculture, manufacturing and for servants. All it costs them to stay here is a little good will. The Africans have a tremendous amount of good will. You can't stay here forever with rifles and hand grenades."

Some of the "hate" displayed by Europeans toward Africans is traceable to exasperation---particularly on the part of second-raters who haven't the wisdom to have patience.

One difficulty stems from the language barrier. Few Europeans dealing with Kikuyu employes speak the Kikuyu language, so they resort to Swahili. But Swahili is not the native language of the Kikuyus either. L. S. B. Leakey, in his book "Mau Mau and The Kikuyu," blames this for many of the present difficulties between Europeans and the Kikuyu and compares the situation to that that would result if a German tried to convey ideas to an Englishman, using French as a medium.

Another difficulty is the ignorance and habits of the African himself. A garage keeper I dealt with had to teach his African helper to enter a car through the door---not through the window. When we got into the garage keeper's station wagon, the African piled in through the window. "Use the door, man, use the door," the garage keeper growled in his north country accent. Africans with whom I have come in contact have displayed an almost pathetic eagerness to do what you want once they understand.

Last week I paid a visit to the Africa seen by the first explorers and missionaries. It's only a few miles from the traffic jams of Delamere avenue to the magnificent Royal Nairobi National Park. Its 44 square miles are, to borrow a phrase, "beautiful beyond the telling of it." There are deep, dark forests, sweeping sun burnt plains and, in the distance, purple hills. It was late afternoon when I arrived---the time of day when game emerge from cover---and the clouds in the west were splashed with incredible shades of blue, brown, yellow, red and purple.

Giraffe nibbled at tree branches along the winding dirt roads and moved cautiously away whenever I stopped for photos. Herds of zebra, wildebeeste, hartebeeste, Grant's gazelle, Thompson's gazelle, ostrich, eland and impala grazed on the savannah. Baboon sat under trees and stared challengly at the car. Hyenas, jackals and foxes darted across the road. Guinea fowl fluttered up from the grass. Deeper in the forest are the rhino and buffalo and in the lakes lie the crocodile and hippo.

I was looking for lion. The lion population has been variously estimated by park rangers and officials at between 20 and 32. They come and go, spending part of the time in the adjoining Masai plains. Some met death there from spears at the hands of the Masai morani, or young warriors. Mervyn H. Cowie, director of the Kenya National Parks, told me that one lion was struck and killed by a train recently and that another wanderer was shot and killed by a farmer when it ventured into his chicken yard. When a lion ventures into a settled area, park rangers try to drive it back by throwing firecrackers at it and peppering its backsides with BB shot. If simba turns on his annoyers, he has to be shot.

It was almost dark as I drove along a twisting, dipping two-rut forest track toward the spot where lion had been seen earlier. The road finally led out onto a plain and, rounding a hairpin curve, I sighted my first cage-less lion. It was an old lioness and she was sound asleep---sprawled across the road.

I stopped, switched off the ignition and heard a series of snorts in the tall grass alongside the car. In a few minutes, five lions filed out onto the road. The old lioness roused herself and all six walked around the car, inspecting it.

They sniffed at the tires, rubbed their heads on the fenders, stared, blinking, at the headlights and now and then put an inquisitive nose within inches of the car window. (The glass, it hardly needs to be said, had been tightly rolled up.) The lions in the park are completely used to cars, I was told later. It is believed that they do not associate the head, shoulders and arms of a man in a car with the full, upright man they might see in the field. The car, further, is nothing more to a lion than a hard, nosy critter that eats no grass and kills no game and gives off a strange odor. This may be true. The lions though were certainly aware that something alive (!) was in the car as they followed my every movement with their huge, amber eyes.

The lions quickly lost interest in the car. After all, they had seen many of these creatures before. While the old lioness and another elderly lioness watched indulgently, the four others, all younger---two males and two females---frolicked in the road like kittens. Stars were appearing in the sky by now. Finally the old lioness called a halt to the fun by starting off down the road. The others hurried after. For a while they walked shoulder to shoulder, six abreast. I followed only a few feet behind in the car. They seemed unconcerned by the headlights, but every now and then the old lioness would drop back a few lion-paces and, without stopping, turn her head around with what might be construed as a disgusted expression---as if to say, "Aw, beat it, will ya!"

A large dead tree loomed up at a bend in the road. The lions halted their march. One by one, the scene illuminated by my headlights, they stretched their massive bodies up the side of the tree and sharpened their claws for a night's kill. The group waited till the last lion had finished then they resumed their journey. At the next dead tree, two of the young lions honed up again.

About a half a mile from where we had started, the lions halted. They sniffed the air. Then they filed off into the grass, led by the old lioness, and disappeared into the night. In the morning, the hyenas and buzzards would be feasting on the remains of a zebra or other animal, and the lions, only here the true kings of the jungle---protected from their one real enemy, man, with his rifle---would be sleeping in some remote den.

A half hour later, I was hunting a parking space in Nairobi.

This letter is written from the Mawingo hotel, 7,000 feet up the slope of Mt. Kenya and near Nanyuki. This cold forest region, three miles south of the equator and 125 miles north of Nairobi, is a Mau Mau center. Driving up through the fertile but overcrowded Kikuyu Reserve, I stopped at a filthy Indian duka in Fort Hall for lunch. Several young men of the Kenya Police Reserve, drinking beer with Sten guns on the bar, told me that the Mau Mau had just ambushed and killed an African district officer and a chief.

The air is rarified here and charged with tension. The manager of the hotel, a genial and scholarly Irishman, had an African room "boy" some time ago. The African had a few years of schooling. He could speak English and could read and use arithmetic a bit. He was well liked. Then, on information that the African was active in Mau Mau, the manager fired him. The African is supposed to be a "brigadier" in Mau Mau now. Frequently he writes letters to his old employer, telling him he will kill him. The manager wears a revolver all the time. His wife has a weapon on her belt while she plays with their two children on the hotel grounds. Above looms the majestic mountain, sealed off now by troops and police. Africans have been told they will be shot on sight if they venture into the forest region. Higher up are rhino, elephant, buffalo and furtive Mau Mau gangs. Higher still, the 17,000 foot ice cap. Perhaps among the forest terrorists there is a certain "brigadier" who looks down with hate and jealousy at the plush hotel. Perhaps he thinks of the rich food, soft beds, marble bathrooms and roaring fireplaces that he had seen so much of, but never enjoyed. And perhaps he thinks, too, of the clever Red Strangers whom he also had seen much of, but about whom he knew little.

I went horseback riding along the edge of the forest with a Kikuyu guide. We rode for an hour. "Mau Mau hapa?" I asked. ("Mau Mau here?") "Ndiyo, Bwana," he replied, smiling. ("Yes, mister.") We cantered on a ways, then I stopped, turned the horse around and pointed in the direction of the hotel. "Ndiyo, Bwana," he said, smiling, as he turned his horse around.

Then I went trout fishing. The trout are plentiful now in the famous streams of Mt. Kenya as there are few fishermen. "Be careful," said the manager. "Stay close to the hotel. If you see an African, even if he is dressed up in a policeman's uniform, get your gun out. The Mau Mau dress up as askaris to trick you."

I climbed down the thick brush in one ravine and cast a few times in the roaring water. Then I heard a loud crack in the brush above me. Ambush? Circling around, I climbed up cautiously and saw a small animal dart away. Back in the ravine and a few more casts. Crack. Out with the pistol again. Again no one. I gave up and went back to the hotel a half mile away.

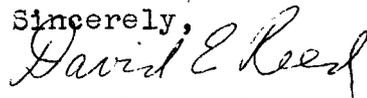
The police have learned that a Mau Mau oath ceremony, with all its sexual perversions and mutilations of animals, took place recently a short distance from the hotel.

This morning a British Army captain and I hiked three miles up into the forest, looking for big game and on the lookout for Mau Mau. He had a Sten gun and we each had pistols. Every time we heard a noise in the brush, we would stop and listen. Pointing to one acre-large clump of brush, he said, "That's what makes this war so hard. You can hide 100 men in there and you'd never know they were there unless you went in. That always gives them the first shot. It's a good thing they're such bad marksmen or a lot of chaps wouldn't be here today."

We came to a burned-down shamba or farm formerly occupied by forest squatters. A few cornstalks still grew next to the charred remains of the hut. The captain ripped them up. "Food for the Mau Mau," he said. We proceeded through mixed brush and grassland. "We better not talk now, we're getting into the rhino, buffalo and elephant country," he said. "The wind is behind us and we might get a charge." We saw no game nor Mau Mau.

At night the Europeans in the hotel sleep close to pistols. Six African askaris armed with spears patrol the grounds. The mountain looks even bigger.

Sincerely,



David E. Reed

Received New York 8/7/53