

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

38 Westmoreland Place
St. Louis 8, Missouri
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Mr. Walter S. Rogers
Institute of Current World Affairs
522 Fifth Avenue,
New York 36, New York

Dear Mr. Rogers:

For the past two years I have been something of a novelty--an American studying in sub-Saharan Africa on a Ford Foundation grant without clusters of academic letters following the name on my calling card and without being confined to a narrow, academic field. Instead, I have been moving through areas of the sub-continent more or less at will, staying in one place for a few days or several months, talking to important and unimportant people in politics, industry and education, and learning how people live, vote, think and feel in countries like South Africa, the Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, the Belgian Congo and the Gold Coast.

The question that inevitably arises at the end of such a two-year period is: Was it worth it? Would it not be better to have given the money I spent to a man of science who could have examined something more concrete in greater detail and who would, at the end of his foreign study, have produced a book or thesis which would fall under that noble heading, "A contribution to human knowledge"?

It's a hard question to answer. I can, in summing up, give only my side of the picture. In our new era of shrinking globe and expanding destructive and constructive power, it seems vital to me that ordinary people begin to look around them and learn something of the problems that exist in other parts of the world. The problems may be similar or different; they may be simple or complex; they may be complicated by factors of climate or geography. But, it seems to me, the time when such problems could be dismissed or ignored by ordinary Americans simply because they are "foreign" is past. The difficulties of Native administration on the Northern Rhodesian Copperbelt may seem to be no concern of the factory foreman in Cleveland. They become his concern, however, when his income is cut by a copper shortage or when expansion of world Communism affects Central Africa.

Specialists in political or social science are probably better able to evaluate and understand the Native administration situation in Northern Rhodesia than I was. But the information they would have gained never quite reaches the Cleveland foreman. It is destined to be printed in technical language in a book or journal of limited circulation or passed on by word of mouth to other sociologists or political scientists. Perhaps it finds its way to the State Department and causes a change in United States policy towards Northern Rhodesia. But only rarely does it seep down to the ordinary man--he is left in the dark, unable to form intelligent opinions on United States foreign policy.

That is where people like me step in. As a professional journalist I have, and will continue to have, access to media of

public information. I am in a position to tell the Cleveland foreman just what is going on in the world around him and how it affects him personally. It is up to me, not only to pass on this information, but to pass it on in such palatable form that he will want to read it. Without the knowledge I gained during the past two years, I would be greatly handicapped in such a position.

The argument has been raised that perhaps the Cleveland foreman shouldn't be interested in Native administration in Northern Rhodesia--that it is better to leave such matters in the hands of experts. This was, perhaps, true in the kind of world we are leaving behind us--the kind of world in which the United States was isolated by impassible barriers of air and water. But in a world where it is possible to deliver a cobalt bomb or an ideology anywhere in a matter of minutes or hours, it is dangerous and foolhardy to leave the opportunity to gain and spread information in the hands of a small expert clique.

How did the past two years help? The most important feature of the fellowship was time. I wasn't compelled to rush through a country scraping the cream from the political and social situation, forming snap judgments, throwing them down on paper and then hurrying off to another part of the continent to do the same with another set of facts and a different situation. I had time to live in the country I was learning--to get to know its people, its problems, its climate, its farms and its politics from the inside. Not being a specialist, I was able to take an individual, talk to him, get to know him, become his friend--and then look at political, social and economic conditions through his eyes. Of course, I did research. But I came out of each country with more than a collection of facts and figures. I had something that, to me, was far more valuable. I knew how Ken Cunningham, Piet du Plessis and Joseph Apiiah felt about these facts and figures. The problems of a country are the problems of its people--I don't see how a man can say he knows South African problems without adding, "I also know South Africans."

Without this knowledge a writer and interpreter of foreign news is lost; he must rely on the opinion and interpretation of others. A speaking acquaintance with ordinary men is also important to the specialist in anthropology, medicine, political science or sociology. But it is not vital. Field research is necessary, but the training a specialist receives enables him--and sometimes forces him--to divorce a situation or a set of facts from their surroundings.

It behooves the journalist not to divorce the facts from their environment. It is not enough to say "the Boers of South Africa are intolerant." To be accurate and fair, it is necessary to point out that they are intolerant because of their ideas of racial purity, because of their fears of being blotted out as a national entity, and because of their history of religious fanaticism and feelings of persecution. The Afrikaners (Boers) perhaps deserve condemnation. But a man who condemns without knowing and publishing all the pertinent facts is doing a disservice to himself and his readers. Without the benefit of the past two years I would be as guilty of this disservice as any.

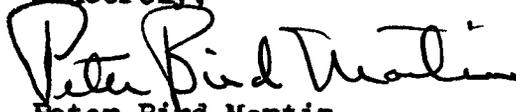
Another important aspect of the past two years comes under the

vague heading, "Foreign Experience." I learned how to go about asking questions and getting answers; who to see to find the answers to particularly departmental questions; and how to evaluate the information once I had gathered it. It is experience that cannot be gained anywhere but in the field and it is experience that has already stood me in good stead since my return to the United States.

The only way I know to measure the benefit I received from my stay in Africa is by weighing future achievement. The proof of the value of experience and knowledge is the use to which they are put. The scientist-specialist uses his knowledge to teach a select few to become scientists and specialists like himself. The journalist spreads his more general knowledge more, perhaps dramatizing it to make it more readable. Both the scientist and the journalist are in the same business--learning and teaching; the difference of opinion arises when one compares the audiences of the two. I will not say it is more important to pass on information to the ordinary man than to the class of potential experts. But in many ways it is at least as important in this shrinking world.

Gaining this experience has been a rare and valuable opportunity, one which could not have happened without the fine idea and ideals behind the Institute of Current World Affairs and the breadth of vision of the Ford Foundation which has supported it and me. To both I offer my sincere thanks and wishes for continuation of an unusual program of giving both specialist and non-specialist the benefit of seeing beyond himself.

Sincerely,



Peter Bird Martin

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