



AFRICA in Today's World

By CHARLES I. WEST, M.D.

THERE IS AN ANALOGY between the recent post-election crisis in Nigeria, which threatened to tear apart Africa's most populous nation, and the recurrent agitation to divide the most heavily populated state in our own union, California. Simply stated, the underlying cause for dissension in both cases is "tribal antagonism."

The recent reapportionment decree of the United States Supreme Court again brought forth old arguments that southern and northern California have so little in common that it might be well to slice the state in two and give each its own government. Similar talk has been heard in Nevada.

In Nigeria, the situation is even more acute because the regional or "tribal" division that led to the government crisis as a result of the recent national election is four-fold.

Just as in California and Nevada, most of the talk in Nigeria about breaking up the nation is political malarkey or plain hot-air. But the idea has enough basis in reality to cause considerable concern in Lagos, according to Associated Press correspondent Kenneth Whiting. In a recent dispatch from the Nigerian capital, Whiting points out that even before the national election, President Nnamdi Azikiwe told his people that if Nigeria must disintegrate, "then in the name of God, let the operation be a short and painless one."

Azikiwe said that the present chaos in the Congo "will look like child's play if it ever comes our turn to play such a tragic role." Happily, this dire prospect seems to have been averted, at least temporarily. After distributing copies of a speech in which he said he would rather resign than try to form a government on the basis of the recent election, Azikiwe canceled the speech and is attempting to carry on his pro-Western administration as long as possible.

COMPOUNDING AZIKIWE'S PROBLEMS in his country of 55 million persons are the usual afflictions facing new African nations--employment, lack of money to develop resources, low literacy and widespread health deficiencies.

About half the population lives in the bush, and most of these are outside the money economy. They wrest a living from jungle farm plots with primitive tools.

Nigeria was a slave shipping center early in the 19th century. Its steaming coastline became known as the white man's grave until medical advances in recent decades.

"The mosquito was our most important ally," say Nigerian nationalists. Malaria-carrying mosquitos prevented the British from settling as they did in East Africa and elsewhere.

British businessmen and civil servants employed by Nigeria still come "on tour" for 15 or 18 months.

Only a handful of foreigners have settled there. Most are Syrian and Lebanese merchants. As a result, Nigerians were trained earlier for higher-level jobs than most other colonial peoples in Africa.

PHYSICALLY, NIGERIA IS ABOUT THE SIZE of Texas, Louisiana and Oklahoma combined. It is tucked under the vast bulge of West Africa and surrounded by French speaking Dahomey, Niger, Chad and Cameroons. It possesses no strategically important resources not found in abundance elsewhere.

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EDITORIAL

Negro Conductor Inspiration to Handicapped

HISTORY IS REPLETE with heart-warming stories of men and women who conquered adversity to become great successes in various worthwhile fields of human endeavor. A reporter on the New York Herald Tribune, John Molleson, recently introduced us to one of these "never-say-die" individuals whose rise to the top of his chosen profession should be an inspiration to every person who has suffered physical affliction--especially Negroes.

For James Anderson DePreist, 28, the high point of his young life came last month when he was announced by Leonard Bernstein as a winner of the Dimitri Mitropoulos International Music Competition. He was one of six winners, chosen by a jury headed by Mr. Bernstein, from among 37 aspiring conductors representing 18 nations.

The low point, one would imagine, was when Mr. DePreist was felled by polio in Bangkok two years ago while on a State Department mission training Thai musicians in techniques of Western music.

But polio, though it eventually hindered the use of his legs, didn't get Mr. DePreist down. His favorite word, to judge from an interview in the New York apartment of his aunt, Marian Anderson, the celebrated contralto, is "positive."

FAR FROM HOME, in a Bangkok hospital, the fever and paralysis were not exactly positive things, but they did not present "an emotional problem," he said. "Perhaps that came from a religious upbringing, to the faith I learned from my mother and Aunt Marian--if you are able to accept the positive things, you must also be able to accept the negative."

Up to then there had been many "positive" developments--early music training in percussion, prelaw studies at the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, leadership of

a college jazz quintet and brass ensemble lecturing on jazz and other contemporary American music, two years at the Philadelphia Conservatory of Music studying theory and composition (but not conducting), a commission for a ballet score, which gave him a chance to conduct members of the Philadelphia Orchestra.

Mr. DePreist became seriously interested in music at the age of 14 when his aunt gave him some classical recordings, together with the orchestral scores. Miss Anderson never pushed him into music, he said, but she made him aware of it and was "as ideal an influence as there could be. Of course, I never had any hope of remotely achieving her stature. People tend to connect me with my aunt, and that was one of the reasons I wanted to enter Mitropoulos competition--to prove that I could do something on my own."

MR. DEPREIST was flown home from Bangkok the first time in a plane with wounded servicemen from Viet Nam. "They had been through much more than I had," he said. His four months as conductor of the Fine Arts Orchestra in Bangkok involved practice sessions from 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. five days a week--matchless experience for a promising conductor. He had given one command performance for the King and Queen of Thailand and was preparing another when, on Aug. 13, 1962, polio struck. By then he had vowed to become a conductor.

He was strong enough in February, 1963, to enter the first Mitropoulos conductors' competition. Competing with 55 conductors from 27 countries, he reached the semi-finals and had the thrill of leading the Symphony of the Air. "The object of conducting is to be clear and precise," he said, "and I found that the men in the orchestra were the best teachers in matters of clarity and precision."

Mr. DePreist was paralyzed from the waist down when he entered Magee Memorial Hospital, Philadelphia, for therapy. While in the hospital, he completed a ballet score and fell in love with his therapist, Betty Childress. They were married last August. A month later, at the request of the State Department, they left together for Thailand--one year to the day from the other Sept. 4 when he had been flown home from there.

DURING HIS SECOND TOUR in Bangkok, Mr. DePreist worked with three orchestras, conducting an average of 25 hours a week for six months. He learned to conduct while seated, adapting some of his former gestures so that he could always be seen by the musicians. He does not use a baton because "the hands are capable of greater variety in shaping the music."

Mr. DePreist was preparing a series of concerts in New York with the Cosmopolitan Young People's Symphony when the entry blanks arrived for this year's Mitropoulos competition. He wrote a letter saying he was too busy, but never mailed it. Instead, he filled out the forms, entered and won.

The other night in New York's Philharmonic Hall, his tall, commanding figure emerged slowly from the wings, walking with the aid of a cane. He seated himself on a high chair in front of the New York Philharmonic, placed the cane underneath it, raised his hands and began Schubert's "Unfinished" Symphony. It was an apt choice for a gifted young man whose own career is far from completion.

History Week Events Set

NEGRO HISTORY WEEK, starting Monday, Feb. 8, will be commemorated by a series of programs being arranged by lady Elks of Paran Lodge 1508. All members of the community are invited to attend the various presentations free of charge.

Already scheduled are a play at Zion Methodist Church on Feb. 8 at 8 p.m.; a Youth Night Program at Bethel Baptist Church on Wednesday, Feb. 10, at 8 p.m.; a Who's Who in Negro History program at Second Baptist Church on Friday, Feb. 12, at 8 p.m.; a work shop at Kit Carson School on Saturday, Feb. 13, from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m., and a musicale at Kit Carson School on Sunday, Feb. 14, at 3 p.m.

Anyone desiring to participate in this project may contact Mrs. Minnie Wilkins at 642-5185, Mrs. Helen Anderson at 642-7042, Mrs. Myrtle Banks at 642-4171 or Mrs. B. Valmore at 384-7706.

Nigeria is a federation centered at Lagos with four powerful regional governments: northern, eastern, western and midwest.

The current election dispute grows directly out of regional-tribal differences. Under colonial rule, three complete administrative units grew to serve these regions. These regional regimes--the midwest was carved out of the western region last year--reinforced tribal separation and prevented the formation of the strongest possible central government at independence in 1960.

The north, east and west regional governments have their own newspapers and radio and television outlets.

Ibadan, the largest indigenous African city, with 1 1/2 million population, is the center of the Yoruba Tribe in the western region. The Yorubas were among the first to come into contact with whites. Thousands of Yorubas were shipped to North and South America in chains from the slave port of Badagry in the western region.

(To Be Continued)

Las Vegas Voice

A WEEKLY NEWSPAPER (Published every Thursday) DEDICATED to the INTERESTS and ASPIRATIONS for a BETTER LIFE of the NEGRO CITIZENS of the STATE of NEVADA

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