

FROM WHENCE WE CAME

A visit to St. George's Castle, Elmina

By Misbahu Rafal

Coming down Liverpool street (named after a British town), which is the main street of this old colonial town, following the curve that skirts the bay leading to the hill of St. Jago, with all the old massive colonial houses and across the river, one finds fisherman busy with what has become the neans of livelihood for this town. A town that reminds one of 500 years of robbery and the destruction of the legacies of an entire segment of the human family, Africans raped by Europeans.

The magnificence of the edifice that one visualizes between the river and the sea betrays the deeds that were hatched and conducted behind its walls. Even though there had been other forts built by

Europeans in African Muslim lands, there had never been any that was established in order to have a permanent naval and military base, never been one so large as this and never been one built in Africa and in the tropics. This castle served as the prototype of all other castles and forts built after 1482, long before Columbus sailed to the Caribbean.

This site (then called Fanteland), was chosen because it was "a firm ground with a succession of headlands and bays that provided sheltered anchorage, invariably opposite a village of fishermen or cultivators. Here, too, ivory could be bought and gold ornaments were being worn in a profusion astonishing to European eyes — for at that time, all Europe

(The oldest in the Tropics)

suffered from a scarcity of gold." And because it appeared to be rich in gold, the Portuguese, (first Europeans to come into contact with Africa, south of the Sahara) called it "the Mine" (El Mina).

The construction of this castle began on January 21, 1482 under the command of Diogo d'Azambuja. The main feature of the building then was "a two-storyed rectangular block containing a courtyard under which was a cistern lined in brick. (This brick cistern is the only part of the original structure which has survived intact).

A church of St. George was built in front of the castle (this was later moved into the castle

for security reasons). It was ministered by Franciscan friars. These friars introduced the cult of St. Anthony of Padua to the town. The cult later became a powerful fetish of the town as fragments of its mutilated statue was worshipped by the local people. They called it "nana ntona."

The St. George castle (commonly known as the Elmina castle) gave the Portuguese a monopoly of the West African coastline for over a century. From this castle, they explored the entire coast of Africa and were the first of the Europeans to get to India through this sea route and had begun the colonization

of Brazil by 1530. Their monopoly of Elmina was further enhanced by the building of a fort in Axim (60 miles to the West of Elmina) in 1508 and Shama (20 miles to the West) in 1560. The main trade was first in gold and ivory. This was soon overtaken by the slave trade. It does not mean that the trade in gold and ivory preceded that of slaves. For the first Portuguese voyage to West Africa in 1441 had left the coast carrying with them a number of slaves who were sold in Europe.

The plantations of the Americans only heightened the intensity of demand for slaves from Africa. In fact it was the experience from some of the slaves sold in Europe that made the Europeans to see the strength of Africans. The Elmina castle, being the largest,

accommodated most of the slaves taken from the West African coast before their shipment to the Americas. It was the seat of the Governor (representative of the King of Portugal). This governor administered all other Portuguese forts from this castle.

Among the officials in the Castle was a Priest and two other chaplains. As part of their cultural robbery of the continent, the Portuguese (and later other Europeans) engaged in an open rape of African women whose offsprings were called mulattoes and whose trace could still be found in Africa. Part of the duties of the Priest and chaplain was to teach these mulattoes and proselytize the Africans under the patronage of St. Francis of Assisi.

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ENTERPRISE

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in Mississippi and the Rio Grand Valley each received \$40 million in grants and tax breaks.

The remaining 95 winners were designated enterprise communities, and all except four, Boston, Houston, Oakland and Kansas City, received \$2.95 million.

Anticipating fierce competition for the designations, Las Vegas, North Las Vegas and Clark County applied together and created a 10-year development plan for the combined area. The strategy worked, and Southern Nevada was designated an enterprise community by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development.

In addition to the \$2.95 million, the SNEC has preferential treatment over other cities for federal grants issued during the next 10 years.

"It doesn't guarantee that you'll get the grants," said Douglas Bell, manager of the Clark County Community Resources department, "but it gives you a leg up on the grant."

In the last two years alone, local officials have gotten 16 different federal grants to fund enterprise community ventures.

The designation has also helped officials attract private enterprise to the areas. Should the proposed domed stadium become a reality, over \$1 billion has already been earmarked to go into the enterprise community

within the next 10 years, and most of the money comes from private investors.

"I would say private investment has been our main focus," said Bell, "because the real answer for the development of the community has to come from the private sector."

By increasing economic opportunities, officials hope residents of the surrounding areas will experience a rise in income levels. To insure fair hiring practices occur, new businesses are given incentives to hire a percentage of the work force from the surrounding neighborhood.

Development does, however, come at a price. The new businesses coming to the area

are not necessarily black-owned, and they may be in direct competition with black-owned business.

For example, Thrower's Market has served the West Las Vegas community for years, but it's now in direct competition with Vons. The West Las Vegas community needed a larger grocery store, but in the long run businesses, like Thrower's Market, may not have the financial strength to survive. Spectators have voiced concerns black-owned businesses could become a niche market in predominantly black neighborhoods, if mainstream businesses are creating the

primary economic opportunities.

"If we expect to empower ourselves," said Ernest Fountain, president of New Ventures Capital Development Company, "we must focus on setting up our own infrastructure, which would consist of first establishing our own financial institutions. That's the only way."

By creating economic opportunities in areas like West Las Vegas, the hope is to attract people with a higher income levels to the areas, said government officials. Many of the people who have the income to take advantage of these new opportunities may not be black. What this represents is

integration in its truest sense.

"You want to make the neighborhood attractive to everybody in the community," said Bell. "When you have real integration, you don't need school buses. It saves money."

With more businesses coming in, people living in the area can expect more employment opportunities; however, residents will be employed by outside interests, unless blacks open the new businesses.

"This is a great opportunity, because of all the growth in the area," said Fountain. "We as black businesses should take advantage of that."

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