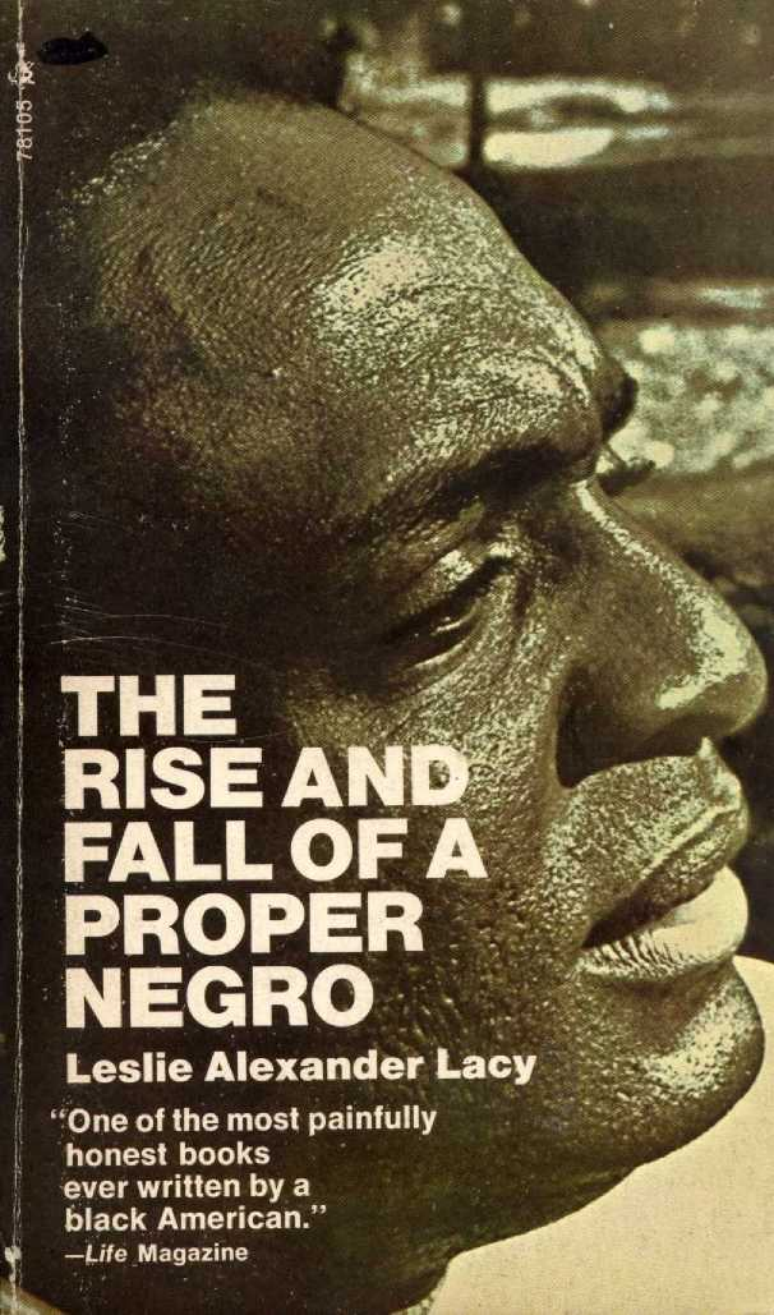
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THE RISE AND FALL OF A PROPER NEGRO
Leslie Alexander Lacy
"One of the most painfully honest books ever written by a black American."
—Life Magazine

# *The Rise and Fall of a Proper Negro*

an autobiography by

*Leslie Alexander Lacy*

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*For my father.*
*Now only a memory.*
*But what a man!*
*A special brand of humanity:*
*A good and honest soul*
*And such strong hands—*
*Yet gentle like the touch of children.*
*Nathaniel Lenard Lacy, Sr., M.D.*
*Loved his work,*
*Loved his family—and we shall miss him.*
*We loved him very much,*
*Very much . . .*

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The black glassmaker
whose countless eyeballs none has ever seen
whose shoulders none has overlooked,
that slave all clothed in pearls of glass,
who is strong as Atlas . . .
A thousand particles of glass
fall from his hands
but rebound towards his brow
shattered by the mountains
where the winds are born.
And you are witness of his daily suffering . . .
but you pity him no more
and do not even remember that his sufferings begin again
each time the sun capsizes.

JEAN-JOSEPH RABÉARIVELO

came—like moving the television into the kitchen to see such things as the Bolshoi Ballet. They grew on Mother like they grew on me. Mother saw me changing, but did not worry, because I got A's in school. She also figured, as I had at first, that I had the best of two worlds. I could fight the war on imperialism and also return to my life of splendor. Lillie (they called Mother by her first name, like they did their own parents) was sometimes great. Once while we were at my house the telephone rang. It was Judy. She returned crying—as I remember, everyone cried—because some colored man on the land down South in Louisiana had been electrocuted. His living had become our cause. We were not lawyers, but we knew about the natural laws of Mississippi. We had circulated petitions at school (Mother had done some of the typing), and had sent five thousand telegrams to the governor of the state. And quiet, studious Sidney—who spoke in verse and read fifteenth-century philosophy—had suddenly come down to earth and hitched to a place near my home to console the condemned man's family. What he told them we will never know. The State killed him too.

## VI

## Black

Gradually I dissolved all of my relationships with middle-class Negroes. Reading E. Franklin Frazier's *Black Bourgeoisie* helped. As a black sociologist at Howard University, he could view the social organism at close range. He threw a hard left at the salient values of our group and exposed its illusory pretentious autonomy in the overall body of American institutions. The shallowness of the bourgeoisie, which he deplored, coupled with my reading Marx, Simone de Beauvoir, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, just to mention a few, gave added intellectual and political strength to my growing sense of radicalism.

I finally left the University of Southern California with a

M.A. in political science. I saw little value either politically or intellectually in the degree, and potential employers tended to agree. Partially from pressure at home and partially from my indifference to pursuing my studies of American political parties, I went to northern California and enrolled in law school. I was still very much involved with Judy, but her disapproval of my law studies, greater involvement with her art, frequent visits to New York, and the distance from Los Angeles to San Francisco placed the relationship on a telephone-and-letter basis.

Some unfortunate person, probably a Supreme Court jurist, said that the law is a jealous mistress. It took five months for me to discover that the law did very little to protect her lover; that the study of contracts, torts, crimes, real property, was concerned not with justice, but with clever rules set out to protect vested interests. And Perry Mason's finding-the-crook ethic was an anomaly in the real legal bureaucracy. Special concentration, however, is necessary to see the layer of contradictions. Most believers get lost, hopelessly inundanted by the rhetoric. How beautiful it sounds: law is the harmony of the universe; it is the perpetual rose in the garden of man's universe; its special fragrance is justice for all. Once or twice I reminded a law instructor that the rule of the rose was suffering from a lack of fertilization. He quickly —and once defensively—in his acute Texas accent, reminded me that the law had been followed in the state. If I had an ethics objection, I could raise it in the third-year equity course, or—as a stopgap measure—I could see the chaplain who was located in the school of divinity across the Bay.

On a full-time basis I continued my radical politics. No longer was I merely interested in protesting specific grievances; I was now quite actively working with political groups which espoused explicit socialist alternatives to capitalism. Indeed this new activity was an extension of my political commitment in southern California. The young birds of California's south were (probably) both in moral temperament and political orientation very similar to the early Marxists of Europe: idealistic, humanistic, secular moralists. As intellectuals—or not far from it—they were concerned with man's alienation, spiritual fulfillment, and abstract rights and correlative duties which they thought each individual should possess. They held up socialism as a general answer to the

exploitation under capitalism, but were highly critical of its institutionalization in eastern Europe. Not wanting to be confused with the liberal, they disliked the proclamation of the grand ideal, but tied their ideals very closely with a rational analysis of world societies. Some of their families had been in the Communist party or one of its many front-runners; although the birds would work with them, especially on issues of loyalty oaths and discrimination, they were generally indifferent but not hostile to them.

The San Francisco flock came from another nest. They were not alienated students fighting specific evils. They had organized themselves (or joined other groups, parties, or fronts) on a working-class basis with some degree of consciousness and were attempting "to make articulate the miseries of a larger proletariat," one far beneath them in income and education. During my three years in San Francisco I met radical organization men from the far communist left to Christian Socialists on the right. I was, however, closer to, but did not join, the Socialist Workers party (SWP), a group which had broken away from the Communist International in support of Leon Trotsky after he had been expelled. They ranged in age from one day (born recruits) to (a few) in the seventies; most were over thirty-five. They came from a cross section of American social and economic classes, but most tended to be from the working proletariat, usually skilled artisans. All the ethnic groups were represented, with the Jews forming the largest minority bloc. Broken down on ethnic lines there were approximately 50 per cent WASP, 40 per cent Jewish, 2 per cent Catholic, 7 per cent Negro and Mexican, 1 per cent foreign-born—and one Apache.

A university professor would not have called them intellectuals in the conventional sense of the term, even though, sometimes extremely elegantly, they could quote and interpret much of the Marxian and related socialist-communist literature, which they had painstakingly absorbed over a period of many years. From their perspective, they had an image of themselves as "professional revolutionaries" and had party affiliations, foreign travel, FBI dossiers, proletarian involvements, and libraries full of the "people's literature" to prove it. They could explain *everything* in history, especially modern phenomena, in terms of Marxist ideology. In fact, as I heard so often, "The history of all human society, past and

present, has been the history of class struggle." Their confidence in the coming revolution was their main appeal. It was coming in five years. "The class struggle between the owners of production and the workers will have sharpened the inherent contradictions in the capitalist system, and the workers shall rise up to usher in the new order." One guy who had been in the movement for twenty years had inside information; he assured me that the five-year prediction had been based on "revisionist dialectics"; the Real revolution would arrive in three years and four months.

Even more than their southern California allies, they deemphasized personal grooming. Suits, haircuts, ties, hairdressers, perfumes, and deodorants were a part of the bourgeois ethic and should therefore be avoided at all costs. As in all movements which breed conformity and eccentricity, there were a precious few who refused to adopt the revolutionary dress, figuring—unlike their teammates—that they would have time to get changed into uniform before the revolution came over the Bay Bridge.

Beyond these general sociological characteristics, the San Francisco-Berkeley "professional revolutionaries" could be specifically divided into three units. There were the "out of it" people—withdrawn, otherworldliness orientated, usually young, timid, passive, subdued—who appeared to be hiding; who, like the Boston Strangler, had gone insane because they could not confront the evil which they had been a part of; who, like the present-day hippies, had been beaten down by their inability to stop feeling *guilty* and had nothing left but a guitar and a few memories and sustained themselves on a little food and the occasional pot and wine. Then there were the strong ones, the organizers, the picket-sign carriers, the ones who kept the party together. Last came the intellectuals—political intellectuals—the ones who talked most about the revolution they all wanted. They would have all been offended if you had told them that they had divided themselves into *classes* and sooner or later would have their own *struggle.*

Every year the Revolution got farther and farther away. Each year, another year was added, even though the five-year figure was constantly repeated. The contradictions had not sharpened; the working class was still divided; and most distressing of all, the police were getting stronger. Strangely

enough, most of my comrades were unmoved by these objective conditions. How they believed in the coming order! Not for a second did they relax their orthodoxy. If an objective condition called a socialistic postulate or prediction came into question, it passed as though it never happened. If someone had the courage or insight to argue the point, he would commit political heresy and would be certain to be labeled a "revisionist" or a "bourgeois intellectual." When I pointed out to one of the party's leading theoreticians that Lenin was the first revisionist, he accused me of being an FBI agent. They were very critical, but always within the context of "accepted truths." Sometimes it was absurd—like the time I listened for three hours to four otherwise intelligent people who were convinced that the struggle of the Mexican farm workers against the large Californian farmers was a logical extension of the Stalin-Trotsky debate. A lone dissenter, who sat quietly with me during the whole affair, whispered in my ear after the talk, "They are all wrong. It's the Spanish Civil War."

Fighting on another front, and inspired by a non-materialistic conception of history, were the black graduate students at the University of California at Berkeley. I knew most of them individually but had little to do with them politically. They wanted to change their relationship to the university. Individually they had encountered at a very high level of subtlety every conceivable form of white intellectual racism. Highly sensitive and very perceptive, these students saw then what others were to know later: that American education was a European mixture of *poppycock* and *what works,* neatly arranged and called intellect. They saw—under the leadership of Donald Warden and Henry Ramsey (two men I respected)—that this mixture was not enough: first, because it made them strangers to each other, and second, because besides their professional skills, which were dubious, they had been furnished with little in the way of social information which they could use in those communities to which they were destined to return. Donald Warden (who resembled a picture of Marcus Garvey) one day suggested to a group what he called "a retreat to the bush," and I listened.

"Black students must come together in an attempt to work out this academic death." Donald and Ramsey had already formed the Afro-American Association, and he now reminded the five hundred people listening that it was *only* through

groups like this that black dignity could be achieved. His knowledge of American history and his ability to marshal the facts were incredible. "We are Blacks," he shouted with passion. "We are not Negroes. Where is Negro land? There is none. We are from Africa, brought here as slaves. They—the Whites—called us Negroes, nigger, boy, colored. But we are Blacks, people of African descent, Afro-Americans. In Africa we had our own language, culture, God; and that's where we were free. Imagine getting your degree from a racist.

"We must return to that freedom—physically or spiritually or both. We must leave these corrupt white people. We must leave them alone! The Honorable Elijah Muhammad tells us that this so-called civilization will be destroyed. We must separate. Build our own land."

Thus spoke Donald Warden, early 1961. The nation of liberals, progressives, and radicals was leading us to integration, and Donald was talking about separation.

Over the months, the Afro-American Association gained chapters and supporters at every college and university in the Bay area. And by the end of the fifth month it extended its appeal into southern California. And again and again Donald Warden, the Phi Beta Kappa from Howard University, bombarded his integrated audiences with his notion of separation. When accused of preaching hate and separation, he quoted from the world's reservoir of black thinkers, but ended in the tone of the Negro Baptist preacher:

"Let me bring you home. You call me a hater. Negative. Do you hear me? [The Blacks in the audience would reply, "Yes, we hear you, brother—preach on."] I am an anti-hater hater. They say I preach separation. Well, I say, go to Harlem, go anywhere where there are black people, and you'll see that we're already separated."

In spite of the trend toward integration, Donald and his Afro-American Association had a tremendous influence on the black students. (In fact, after listening to Donald, and especially Ramsey on this issue, I stopped using the words "Negro" and "colored.") They were brilliant, articulate, and some of them had gone to black colleges, which gave them another experience to share. But more important, Donald was respected by the sometimes embarrassed Blacks he lectured to, because he had the courage to say publicly things they felt privately.

Mr. Warden also shook up white academia. The segregationists agreed with his call for separation, but without the added dignity, pride, and sense of history which Donald thought Blacks should have. The liberals were outraged: "We have been working with you people, fighting the bigots, and now you tell us we can't even join your Association. Why . . . that's racism in reverse." The progressives (including my comrades) were really up tight. Profoundly they shared the liberal's rage; agreed with Donald's overall thesis, but thought he was wrong because he preached nationalism, "a regressive step in the building of socialism." This is a very interesting point. Following the Soviet line on "national liberation movements in Africa," the radical left in America and Europe regarded Blacks like Donald as "bourgeois nationalists," historically necessary but dangerous because they might come to power before the trade unions were ready to lead them. Much later that year the Soviets changed their position toward "bourgeois nationalists," and naturally the American comrades followed.

But Donald was not impressed: "Surely we are against the system, a white system. Colonialism is white. Imperialism is white. We in the Afro-American Association do not make intellectual and political distinctions which have no meaning. We know that all white people are not 'the oppressors.' But all white people benefit from it either politically, financially, emotionally, or psychologically. The others are indifferent. All Blacks suffer a correlative burden. . . . Now, let me be understood. By white people I mean everyday white people, going-to-church white people (the most segregated hour in America is from eleven to twelve on Sunday), foolish white people, smart white people; liberals, conservatives, racists, Trotskyites, Stalinists, any ists; progressives; good, bad, indifferent—all the whites, 'cause they're all devils."

Right around this time I had an additional concern: the draft. Given my political convictions, I was unalterably opposed to service in an imperialist army. My Louisiana local draft board had refused to give me the usual student deferment and had not accepted my alternative conscientious objector appeal. The unemployed white sharecroppers who controlled the board were unable or unwilling to make a distinction between a man of peace and an "unpatriotic coward." To add to my confusion, my comrades accused me of lacking

political integrity. "Tell them that you are a socialist and that you refuse to support a capitalist war machine whose job it is to put down people's wars of liberation. . . . You will go to prison for five years, but it's the price you must pay for freedom." Beautiful. I believe you; but not for me. Some fine young men had paid this price; I respected their courage, but I was not psychologically prepared to spend that length of time inside. I saw the contradiction, but I did not have the necessary inner strength to sentence myself to confinement. If this says something about the kind of radical I was, perhaps future events will absolve me.

Desperate and guilt ridden, I searched for advice from among the Afro-Americans. Donald and one or two others had successfully avoided Uncle Sam, and I needed some new directions. I could not find Donald or Ramsey, and there was a cloud of secrecy surrounding their whereabouts. The young long-haired students at the headquarters could not be convinced to be cooperative; I was "with the Devils" and could not "be trusted."

"Why have you come way over here to get help from the brothers? Have your devil revolutionaries run out of predictions?" He was cynical and cold.

"No, they haven't, but I want to find a way to beat the army and jail."

"Just tell those devils to kiss your ass and don't go."

"But it's not that easy. I want to know what you guys are doing."

"We're not 'guys'; we're *brothers, black brothers,* soldiers only for Africans and people of African descent. If you left those *devils* alone and got your mind together, you would know what to do."

"And how does one do that?"

He laughed, and I laughed too. "For me it was easy. I just had to be myself. For you, since you have a white mind, it will be more difficult. First of all, you have to love black people."

"But I do."

"Nigger, stop lying! Your mind is white. When was the last time you had some good soul work?"

"Well . . ."

"Just as I thought. You've been fucking those blue-eyed

beasts so long you've probably forgotten how to fuck. . . . And that's the second thing you have to do—get you a sister. But before you do that—"

"What about the draft?" I interrupted. I was a little uneasy.

"You want to change the subject? That's what white people do," he said indignantly.

"I don't mind talking about being black, but you're so self-righteous that you wouldn't believe anything that I said anyway."

" 'Self-righteous' is a white term. What you hear is pride, baby; pride."

"Did you ever have white friends?"

"A white friend is a contradiction in terms! I knew some white people. They called themselves progressive, but no matter what they call themselves they're all the same *motherfuckers.* In fact, I got an idea." He started to laugh. "Go to prison, and when you get out you will be an important man; might even get a position in the government."

"Why do you say that?" I was puzzled by his remarks.

"Now, I'm surprised at you! Don't you know the revolution is coming in five years? By being in prison you will avoid the bloodshed and be a hero in the socialist order when you get out. Dig it! Can you see it—white Marxist soldiers storming the prison to let you niggers out. I hope that the SWP wins, 'cause if the Socialist Labor Party comes to power, you might go to Mississippi and work on a state farm."

The next week I got my notice to report for April induction. I had still not worked out a strategy, so I wrote my draft board—my files had been transferred to San Francisco—that my aunt was ill, and since there was no one to care for her, I would report the next month. When I received the second notice, I wrote another letter:

Dear Sirs:

I am ill. My schedule has been heavy, and I have come down with a serious case of the flu. I hope you have not been inconvenienced and look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely yours,
Leslie A. Lacy

In two weeks I received my monthly attempt-to-reconvert visit from the FBI. Although the agent knew about my draft status and assured me that they would come to get me next month if I did not show, now he was concerned with my participation in the Fair Play for Cuba Committee. The committee had been organized in New York by friends of the Cuban revolution, and a chapter had been established in San Francisco by representatives from all of the leftist groups.

FBI agents are very friendly at *your* house (but never go to theirs to be questioned). My comrades always ordered them to leave ("Subpoena me if you want to talk to me!"), but I couldn't; my early conditioning, both culturally and socially, always got in the way. With great passion he assured me that he knew I was busy and didn't want to disturb me, but he was only doing his duty.

"You are a nice fellow, Mr. Lacy. You come from a fine family. You are going to be a fine lawyer. You must separate yourself from these communists. They are ruthless people who are bent on using you. The Fair Play for Cuba Committee is subversive. We all respected Fidel Castro in the early period. Cuban society was in need of a change. Subsequent events, however, have made us reverse our stand. Castro has been duped. He is a communist being controlled by the Russians."

This time, like always, I said very little to the man in the brown flannel suit. And when he finished, he left with a smile.

Without a supporting demonstration, I reported for induction on receipt of notice three. I dressed Brooks Brothers head to toe—sharp, as clean as an Easter coat. I hadn't looked that way for nearly five years, hardly recognizable. My style was offset by two books: under my left arm I had a copy of Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto,* and I was reading Eric Lincoln, *The Black Muslims in America.*

I was two hours late. Most of the young inductees-to-be, among them an American Indian with cold black eyes, had already moved through the first phase of the physical examination.

"You're late," shouted the white Southern sergeant.

I looked slowly up, and contemptuously, at the cracker, and said softly but firmly, "My ear passages are extremely delicate. If you must speak to me at all, modulate your

sound. Otherwise I might suffer permanent injury." I placed my induction notice on his desk, continued reading, and waited for my instructions.

The sergeant's face read: "That's all right, boy; we'll get you straightened out later." His voice said cynically, "Yes, sir, Mr. Leslie Alexander Lacy. Follow me this way."

We marched to the first examination room; he gave my records to the white Southern doctor and made a few remarks I could not hear. The room had the usual medical equipment and three men, who apparently had to be re-examined.

"Take your clothes off," the doctor ordered indifferently.

I ignored him and continued reading.

"Did you hear me, Lacy? This is the army. Put that book down and follow my instructions," the cracker said angrily.

"Please don't shout—"

"Yes, I know," he interrupted. "You have delicate ear passages. Okay, Prince Charming. Please, pretty please, take off your clothes."

"May I be taken to a private room?"

"A private room?" he shouted.

I closed my book, put it with the other between my legs, and put my hands over my ears. When he calmed down, I continued reading.

"Why do you need a private room?" His voice was calm.

I looked at him for a while and then said, "There might be homosexuals here. They are strange people; you never know what they will do."

This continued until his disgust led him to go to the resident colonel for assistance. The colonel arrived quickly. My God! Another cracker. Weren't there any Northerners in the army? We were indifferent to each other, and after his short discussion with the doctor, I was taken to a private room.

I took off my clothes. It took me fifteen minutes. I walked to the center of the room, knelt down as though I was going to pray, and urinated. I stood up, shook my penis three times; stopped; then three again. Then I told the doctor that he could begin. When he got within arm's reach, I began screaming and grabbed his red neck. Within no time the room was filled with police. I stood against the wall with the stethoscope around my neck and a long scalpel in my hand. The colonel broke through the wall of police, demanding an

explanation while rushing to comfort the urine-soaked doctor gasping on the floor.

Saluting the colonel, I spoke right up. "This inductee fails to conform to army regulations. I tried to examine him, but he refused. Then he seemed to go mad, coughing and urinating on the floor."

So accustomed was the colonel to military procedure that it took him a minute or two to realize that the real doctor was in his arms.

"Why, you. . . . Arrest that maniac," the colonel shouted to the police.

After I fought the four policemen, I was taken to see a psychologist or a psychiatrist. We had a lovely conversation—after I disarmed him by telling him that a white "healer" who had been in the army for twenty years probably did not believe that Blacks had sophisticated psychological problems—about my fish eggs. I choked him too, and we went through the same process again. Later that day I was released and ordered to report the next morning.

I was tested for six hours. I was really sick. Finally I got the word: "Dear recruit: We are sorry to inform you that you are not qualified for acceptance under the present standards."

Meanwhile Donald and his zealots stepped up their campaign to recruit more Blacks into their Association. Like a prophet calling for the millennium, he walked and preached through the streets of Oakland, Berkeley, and San Francisco, in and out of schools and colleges, office buildings and coffeehouses, telling black people wherever they were: "The time has come to break with white America."

I joined the Afro-American Association after much inner probing. I thought that they had a positive program, although I still had reservations about their long-term objectives. The white left in the meantime had not achieved its predicted victory over capitalism, and besides, I thought I had had enough of its pussy, poetry, and politics. I still believed in socialism, but I also felt a need to assert my blackness. Later that year, partially because I wanted to convince my new comrades that I was trying and partially because I supported the idea, I had a debate with Wesley Johnson (Black) at San Francisco State. Resolved: Black Nationalism Is a Solution to the

Negro Problem in America. I supported the resolution. Here is how George Irizary of *The Golden Gater,* State's daily college paper, described the proceedings:

> A mixed audience, including interracial couples, black nationalists, Muslims, and an outspoken white Baptist evangelist with a bagful of religious literature, left a campus debate Saturday night after a lively and sometimes emotional question period. . . .
>
> Medical biology major Wesley Johnson argued black nationalism was a deterrent to the Negro problem in America, that it is unrealistic to the situation. The "whys" are the challenge, not "withdrawal" said Johnson.
>
> Black nationalist Leslie Lacy, the other debater, said the Negroes should look for a place in history. "Personally, I'm going to Africa," he said.
>
> "America is a sick society," argued Lacy. When Johnson replied that Negroes as a part of American society are probably sick too, Lacy rebutted with, "There would be enough medicine in Africa to cure it." (American sickness). "Integration would be a combination of Negro inferiority, white liberal guilt, patronization, and paternalism, despite the morality of civil rights. This is the freedom of self-negation," said Lacy.
>
> "Amens" were intermittently voiced by the Caucasian Baptist evangelist in the audience, who has recently located on campus. The evangelist's "amens" followed most statements in favor of black nationalism. At one time he yelled out to a black nationalist across the lounge, "We'll give you George Washington if you give us George Washington Carver." "I'd like for you to take him," said the black nationalist.

Both the comrades and the Afros criticized my presentation. The former said I had been duped; the latter's criticisms were expressed by Gerald X in the same paper, in a letter to the editor a few days later:

> Both participants did a thorough job of representing the "Negro," or the product of the white man.
>
> Les Lacy represented the bitter "Negro," an individual who appeared to be angry at the white man, but perhaps more angry at himself and his black brothers. Angry at his black brothers because they don't act right and achieve their dignity, and angry at himself because *he is caught in the web of white-*

*ness.* That is, he would like to see dignity restored in the black man, not so that he can associate with and appreciate his *own kind,* but so that he can associate with his white comrades and hold his chest out and say, "Man, now I have dignity too."

This criticism was mild in comparison to later ones. I constantly lived under a sense of pressure. Although I spoke for the cause of black nationalism, I continued *openly* my association with whites, and Judy was still my girl.

I was also under fire from the air; less formally, but with equal power, the birds told me that I had gone over to the enemy—the "reactionary racist provocateurs."

Nevertheless, I continued working on both fronts. I was the sinking universal man foolishly trying to bring the diversity to harmony. "No, Leslie, no," each side shouted (listened to itself). "State your preference. Are you for or against?" And now that Judy was in town, I was even more confused.

How could I know? People can tell you that you are "duped" or "white loving," "fucked up" or "brain washed," as Gerald X summed up, "a duped Negro, fucked up by white-loving comrades and brainwashed against your own people." But I couldn't help believing that if you are honest, an honesty which develops out of your zigzag history, it is hard to be *one thing* (even if that thing is what you should be) if in fact you are possessed with many things, as I was. Political movements demand conformity, and those who serve them are never willing, if able, to understand the complex patterns of a personal evolution. And why should they? It's not a problem if you know where you belong. I guess people who are sensitive and ask much from life will inevitably suffer from a lack of consistency. And the frightening thing, the thing that could have driven me mad, is that I thought I was consistent.

I needed both worlds. Politically the Afros offered Blacks like me a revolutionary alternative to an inflexible and doctrinaire white left. For a long while I had been dissatisfied with the politics of comrade revolution, and with the comrades' inability to be creative and do some serious thinking about the profoundly changing nature of contemporary politics in general but particularly America.

Also, my racial consciousness and emotional anxieties were far from settled. Ironically in a sense, my identity crisis had been augmented. The radicals, true to their humanity, creed, and ideals, wanted to eliminate such distinctions. I was reminded often, until I started to believe it, that I was not a Negro, but an individual: "Please stop saying he's white, black, Jewish, or Mexican—people are just people, only individuals." The imperialists had created those distinctions, and we had to eliminate them. It was easy for me to accept, since it was my color which had made people hate me.

But their "democratic crucible" had a witch standing over it. The problem of America went deeper than a class analysis. And what was a Negro or a Mexican supposed to be in the period between now and assimilation? Their idealizations were far too neat. Sartre (in *Anti-Semite and Jew*) had already told the Jews to beware of the "democrat," for unlike the anti-Semite, who wants him eliminated as a man, the democrat "wishes to destroy him as a Jew and leave nothing in him but the man, the abstract and universal subject of the rights of man and the rights of the citizen . . . separate from his . . . ethnic community in order to plunge him into the democratic crucible, whence he will emerge naked and alone, an individual and solitary particle like all the other particles." By implication I was also much more than an individual. All my mental and psychic projections were an expression of everything that I had been, and for a long time I had been an American Negro. I had changed, rejected, grown up, discovered America and part of the world. I was becoming a man. But, however tenuous, I still had roots, memories, and a history I was just beginning to understand.

The political culture of the left I knew was unequivocally Jewish, or very much influenced by Jews. There was nothing evil about this. They were the major intellectuals, the major participants, and it was natural that their movement reflected and glorified their history. I had intimately embraced this history and discovered its meaning and beauty. I had learned very much. I had felt a profound sense of freedom and commitment and discovered a great deal about the human heart. I believed in socialism and its capacity to help man. My leftist comrades were some sort of the finest people I knew, and I know that some of me will always be there.

But what they could not know was that a world revolution

*must* be based on a world culture. Until then, each culture for itself. Hence what I needed was a political culture which not only would extend and express my radical convictions but which also addressed itself completely, but not necessarily exclusively, to my brand of human alienation. Marcus Garvey, Donald Warden, and Kwame Nkrumah may have been "bourgeois nationalists," but they had a special historical meaning for me because they were black. I had to be free to know what that meaning was.

But I soon discovered that the Afro-American Association was not as viable an alternative as I had anticipated. Indeed, they were black: ate it, slept it, bought it, read it, loved it, and said they loved it. But like so many radicals fresh out of the womb of enlightenment, they unfortunately thought that history began when they became aware. You were either "together" or "shaky," and there was no real place for stumblers like me.

Politically and economically they were capitalists. And a capitalist without money was a strange breed. Marx was white, and Adam Smith . . . well, strangely enough, he was not. Du Pont *et al.* would have white America, and Donald Warden—who later came to Ghana and established an Afro-American chapter—would rule black America. And of course, the question of where we would get the resources was one that only a "Negro so-called ex-Marxist" would ask.

But the Association's weaknesses should not obscure its many virtues. The group was very relevant. They raised many important issues about the future of Blacks in America. They explored the racism in white America and made the white left more aware of itself. They did things which the comrades never thought of, like going into the black community each week and effectively explaining to the people what was happening in the world. And to extend their community efforts, they set up night schools which taught African history, English, and current thoughts on black affairs. But more important, the Association helped the alienated black students feel a part of the stagnant intellectual community and provided them with a weekly forum in which they could express themselves, and to my knowledge, were the first Blacks in recent history to demand a reshaping of a university curriculum with an addition of a Black Studies program. When the history of black protest is accurately written, the

members of the Association will have an important place in it. They had the best qualities of their generation: intelligence, radicalism, courage, and indifference.

But I had decided to go to Africa. Flying from the birds to my new black nest had not been easy. I had had my wings clipped, learned new political songs. I learned all the rhetoric, said things which were black, attended all the Association's meetings; and once or twice, when other speakers could not be found, I had been allowed the privilege of speaking to my people at street rallies. Yet I did not quite feel at one with this Leslie. The brothers and sisters knew I still saw my leftist friends, and constantly reminded me that only a clean break with the "devils" would free my soul. The meetings were off limits to Judy, yet I always had the fear that she might defiantly stop by the office or wait for me outside. The earnest questions I raised during the meetings were branded as "white"—therefore not worthy of reply. I believed in what I was doing, yet from their frame of reference, they were right in finding fault with me. When I look back upon those moments, I am almost tempted to make some sort of apology to the black people to whom I spoke, because my whole heart was not there. Such was the existence I led by way of seconding my commitment to the movement.

I could not reconcile the contradictions of my life. And instant conversion was impossible. I had made the intellectual decision and I had applauded a speech in which President Nkrumah said he was black first, African second, and socialist third. My emotions, however, did not follow intellect. I needed too many days, perhaps years, to work out my inner confusion. I needed a community of people that could afford to be patient, and I did not believe that I could escape the taunts and attacks of America's racial madness in another American city. And Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois had made my decision clear. He was black and radical, and in his life was the back-and-forth political pattern which was beginning to characterize mine. I had recently heard him at a peace rally. He was going to Ghana. "A socialist Africa is the future," he said.

The Blacks respected Nkrumah, but I should fight *here* not *there*. Why take my white hangups to Africa? I couldn't solve *my* problem by running.

The birds, on their side, were dismayed. Why Africa?

Strange. They hadn't questioned me last year, when I went to Spain, or the year before, when I went to England. And had I questioned them when they returned to the lands of their forefathers? No. I was beginning to see the subtle racism in these comments. But to me it was obvious: where else could a black man go to discover his dignity? Drinking beer in English pubs or discussing existentialism by the banks of the Seine had little to do with my present evolution.

Before I left for New York I wrote the Association the following letter.

Dear Brothers and Sisters:

I am going to Ghana to live. Some of you—and you may be right—will say that I ran away. If that is true, please forgive me. But I cannot continue. I love you all. I will never be that far. We will always together be a part of the same revolution. Goodbye, Donald, Ken, Ramsey, Belvie, Jim. Again, I love you.

Ghana, Ghana here I come,
Right back where I started from;
Open up your heart to me,
Ghana—here I come.

Leslie

## VII

## Exile to Search

*Senegal*

Dakar, Senegal, was my first stop. It was 7:00 A.M., and hot, very hot, like New York in the middle of August. The Atlantic Ocean had been my universe for ten sleepless days and nights and the fish had eaten well the food my unsettled stomach had thrown out to them. The ocean had never been my cup of milk, but I had the foolish and romantic uncon-

fessed notion that I had in some distant gene been brought from Africa by ship, and that on my return, I should travel likewise. A word of caution to those who come to Africa: fly if possible, and if you have to travel by sea, leave your ulcer at home.

I had all kinds of fantasies during my seasickness, which I am told is psychological. I remember only one of them. I imagined myself in the "middle passage," being beaten by President John F. Kennedy. That was relatively easy because on the ship was Rev. John Kennedy, fresh out of missionary training and using my lost soul for his apprenticeship. Because he had never really listened to black voices in America, he assumed (and I did not correct him) that I was African. If you like missionaries, his credentials were impressive: white, young, Mississippi—cracker-born, -reared, and -trained —and the Lord had sent him to Africa to contribute to its development by translating the Holy Book into "native dialects." I was surprised that he was going to Nkrumah's Ghana. Kennedy's wife (and let us not forget about his screaming children, the only other passengers on this American freighter, which was called *The African Princess*) cannot be described. She had given up her humanity to her Baptist church, but she looked forward to new vitality teaching English in the Ghana school system.

Playing pagan was fun. It took my mind away from my stomach. I created horrible stories about missionaries missing in action de-ee-*ee*-ep in dark Africa. The children, of course, were happy, because they thought that hunting "lions and natives" would be fun. But the Holy One was quick to remind his offspring, "You should never make fun of uncivilized people. That's why we are here." Naturally, my stories did bother him. He was afraid for his little Southern woman. He had heard about those uncivilized Mau Mau in Kenya. Finally he had to confess that if the Lord was busy watching out for fools and babies in Latin America, the American Embassy in Ghana would stand *in loco parentis.* His racism was balanced off by his dramatics. Rev. Kennedy threw his Bible overboard to prove to me that he had free will, only for me to discover that his other Bibles were packed away below. A very nice captain suggested that maybe the fish could now pray for him. Damn, that's no fantasy: he was a real phantom. A white missionary in 1963 Africa.

Dakar at last, and a cure for all of my illnesses: America, ocean, and Rev. Kennedy. I walked down the gangplank looking for my Senegalese friend Jean Paul, who was supposed to meet me. My feet felt good on the African soil. I wanted to kiss it, but I was saving that act for Ghana. But even if I had tried, it would have been virtually impossible, because I was surrounded—completely mobbed—by the smiling faces of Senegalese stevedores. They grabbed my arms, took my bags, and seemed excited to see me. What a welcome! Africans coming to meet a returning son. I was stricken by elation. I held each one's hands and put my arms around the shoulders of each—all fifty of them. But how did they know I was coming? Then I thought, Jean Paul had told them. He thought of everything.

Finally I greeted them. "Brothers, I'm so glad to be home. This is the greatest moment of my life. It was worth spending every hour in America just to be able to live this moment. You have made me very happy. They tell black people in America that the Africans don't want them. I know now that they were lying to keep us apart. Black people in America belong on this continent, and I bring you greetings from all those who cannot be here. I am truly happy."

"Give us dollar," the man in front said enthusiastically.

"Dollars? But I don't understand." I was confused.

"Yeah. You from America. You got plenty dollar. You be Big Man. American. Rich country. This be poor country. We need dollar. You give dollar."

Suddenly it was as clear as the hot sky above. They had not come to welcome me. They had come for "dollar." I felt hurt and stupid. My heart dropped in me like an anchor. I needed one thing; they wanted another. Their welcome meant more to me than the money they needed, but I did not want to relate to them on that basis. They persisted and persisted. Once or twice I almost gave in, but my hands would not respond to my brain, for I was thinking about Donald in California. Finally it was over. Convinced that I was not a Big Man, they left in disgust to unload the ship.

Then I saw Jean Paul standing a short distance away. He had seen everything. Knowing Jean and the way his mind functioned, I knew he would never rescue a friend from a situation if he thought that his friend should experience it.

I had met Jean at the University of California at Berkeley

when I was in law school. He was studying medicine, but had left America rather mysteriously. He had a kind and gentle spirit and a tall, beautiful black body to project it. Also, he was clever—brilliant. He spoke twenty-two languages, twelve European and ten African languages, including Swahili and Arabic. And when he learned a language, it was his. He spoke French with a perfect accent, and of course his English was Oxford. In his spare time he had become an authority on Islam, and had read every book a black man had ever written. He shared many of my political convictions, but he turned many people away from him because of his "aristocratic" manner. Once he had explained to me in California, "I'm glad I'm that way. My own life is a constant reminder that we need a revolution."

"Well, ole chap, I see you made it. You're looking fit. How are you getting on, Leslie? It's damn good to see you." He put his arms around me affectionately, and then pushed me away with his strong hands to get a good look at me. He smiled with pleasure.

I was glad to see him too. "I'm glad to be home." My words came slowly because I did not want to cry.

"Just cry. Let all that sickness out. In a week or so you'll be as good as you were four hundred years ago. No. I must be accurate; it was three hundred and sixty years ago."

We laughed. Jean could always be pleasantly cynical when it counted. The laugh was good. I dried my eyes, cleared my choked-up throat, and got myself together.

"What's the political scene like in the States?" Jean was serious again.

"So-so. Very little difference since you left."

"What's happening with the Afro-American Association?"

"It's moving ahead."

"Has Donald worked out an alliance with Rockefeller yet?" We laughed, because the few socialists in the Association were critical of Donald's explicitly black capitalistic orientation.

"I think Donald will have to become more radical." I was not trying to defend Donald, but I felt that he would see the weakness of his position.

"Maybe. I hope so anyway. How is your family?" Jean asked with concern.

"Fine."

"Did your brother go to medical school?"

"No," I said, embarrassed. "He became a minister."

"What!" Jean was a little surprised, but he was never really shocked about anything. He had a lot of ideas, a life-to-death commitment to a black world revolution, but very little faith in the present generation to achieve it. "What faith? I hope it's Baptist; at least he'll have some cultural rewards."

"No, it's not Baptist. It's probably Methodist."

"Same difference. Say"—Jean was laughing—"what ever happened to the white fellow student who used to predict that the revolution would be coming in two years?"

"You mean Phillip?"

"Yeah, I think he was the one."

"He went to jail for a draft conviction."

"Good. Those people are absolutely mad. Tell me, Les, what's happening with you and Judy?"

I hesitated to answer, but not for long, because Jean and Ken were the only two friends that I could really talk with now. "It's about over now. We broke up . . . got together again, then broke up again. When I left for New York the break was rather final."

"Politics?"

"Yeah, I guess you can say that." I paused. "But it was a lot of other things too."

"Like what?"

"Well . . . I don't know. I think we had just reached that point. We couldn't talk any more. The black-white issue constantly came up. Every day, we had an argument. It was just too much. It became too complicated. . . . Look, Jean, maybe we ought to change the subject. I'm in Africa now, let's not talk about America . . . it's too unpleasant."

"Whatever you say. You're the boss." He smiled.

"Wait! Before we change the subject, I've got something to show you." Hurriedly I opened my briefcase and removed an envelope. "Look, Jean, I've got a surprise for you."

Jean opened the envelope in his usual meticulous way. "Wow! Whose picture is this?"

"Eve Garden."

"And *who* is Eve Garden?"

"Well, I guess you can say that she's my new girl. In fact I think I'm beginning to love her. I met her shortly before I left Berkeley. She is from New York City, and while I was in

the city I saw her almost every day. She is very nice, isn't she?"

"Leslie, you still don't know how to describe a black woman. She's more than nice. She is absolutely ravishing. And rather elegant. Is she clever?"

"Very."

"Wonderful, ole chap. And she's black too. We'll have you yet. . . . Is she a student or what?"

"She graduated with a degree in French. She wants to study African history."

"What about her politics?" He hadn't taken his eyes from the photograph.

"She is radical, but tends to be practical."

"That's good enough. Can't have them too radical. How are her other qualifications?" he asked, smiling.

I smiled too, because I knew that he was talking about sex. "Well that's working itself out."

"What you mean is that you haven't slept with her."

"Not yet."

Jean shook his head in disgust while looking at Eve. Then he put his arm on my shoulder, like a father getting ready to advise a son. "Damn, Leslie, you must stop this waiting nonsense. You take your training too seriously. Look at your life: The girls that you grew up with were *too nice* to fuck, and the other black women were *beneath your station* in life, so you didn't fuck them. So much for that stupidity. Now you go to Boston and don't have any of the white middle-class ass there, and then go to California, and after two years, *finally* a white Jewish surrealist Marxist has to almost drag you into the bedroom. At last you have a black woman, the movement of the earth, and you're still acting stupid. Leslie Lacy, you are absolutely rare. *Amazing. You have lost your African heritage.*" He laughed and then sarcastically added, "Are you sure your dick is still black? Look, my dear brother, let me tell you a story. There is an African Catholic priest here. Can you relate to that: an African priest in Muslim country. Poor chap. He gets about one convert every ten years. But anyway, back to the story. This chap replaced a French priest who had served predominantly Europeans. One of the older European women had an 'illegal fuck' with an African and went to the new priest for absolution. As the story goes, when she arrived he was giving 'absolution' to an-

other woman in his bedroom, and had to dress quickly to perform his religious duties. The sinful woman was very depressed and cried incessantly as she told him her story. His first question was, 'Was it good?' The moral there for you is never take yourself seriously. . . . By the way, where is Eve now?"

"Europe."

"Europe? Why don't you have her with you?"

"She's coming. I'm supposed to meet her in Guinea."

"Well, I'll straighten you out before you meet her." While he talked he put his arms around my shoulders and we walked toward his car. "You'll be in fine shape; don't worry about it. Tonight you will have your first black woman. Just think of it, you can lay between the legs of Mother Africa—no talking, no politics, no repression, no poetry—just natural fission."

Dakar! Dakar, Africa? My God, it's Paris! French culture hung over the city like the smog. Independent since 1960, and I saw General de Gaulle's official picture everywhere, including the new government building. French soldiers walked proudly and dignifiedly through the streets, and their overfed officers, with other French and European "Big Men," sat happily in sidewalk cafés, eating, drinking, and ordering the frightened waiters around.

Where were the Africans? They lived outside the Paris mainstream. Those inside, except the ruling African elite (who resided in the European section), lived in the "inner city," surrounded by modernization, which according to Jean, kept them from seeing out while allowing the Europeans the illusion that they were really home.

Now, after three weeks of seeing and hearing, I had land sickness. What Africa was this? But then, what did I really know about Senegal? I knew it was independent; that it occupied 76,000 square miles and had a population of about 3,490,000, mostly Muslims. The French had established this colony long before others on the Atlantic coast. Somewhere I had read that France had not considered Senegal or any of her possessions colonies in the general sense of the term, but in her imperialistic arrogance had considered them an extension of herself; that as soon as the "natives" could be civi-

lized in the French language and culture, they could become Frenchmen. Its president, Léopold Senghor, was a distinguished scholar, and as a poet, he had helped to promote a black renaissance in Paris. He was Catholic and married to a Frenchwoman. I knew that Dakar was the capital, with a rapidly growing population, and that many of these people were unemployed. In Berkeley, radicals, both black and white, said Senghor was conservative in comparison to Kwame Nkrumah and that he was very interested in a stronger relationship with France. Indeed, he was usually described as a "tool of de Gaulle." Beyond that, I tended to believe the opposite of what was said in the Western press, without knowing whether or not what I opposed was real.

It was a very strange sensation. I saw something which I only vaguely expected and for which I was only partially prepared: I could accept neocolonialism in theory, but not in practice.

But isn't this universal? Does not the sensitive man who knows that others are poor know something different once he sees the poverty? Probably. But that man has not been prepared in advance to identify with what he sees, and that is true even if he takes on their misery immediately. It was my problem. I was not looking at a frightened waiter, but at myself. My revulsion had nothing to do with Senegal; it was with *my Senegal,* the one I had created back home. I began to realize it when I noticed that the Senegalese who were disturbed by the same reality were never as mad as I was. Several times I thought my reactions were out of proportion. Later on, after I got to Ghana, the concept became much clearer.

I could feel that Jean Paul sensed my outrage, but—and I was confused by this—he never related to it. He was essentially a guide. As much as possible he avoided the French sights. We traveled outside of Dakar and observed how the *real* half was living, but I got no real feeling for the culture because my mind was always possessed by the *occupied city.* And although the majority of the Africans were still on the land, a land full of culture, known and unknown, Dakar was where the action was—where all major decisions affecting the republic were made, where power resided, and where the plans for nation building were being formulated.

Jean's family was very good to me, and in every sense, I was treated like the returned son. It was a fascinating house-

hold, and although Jean was not the head of the male-dominated family, he had a strange status. I think we would call him the translator. His father, the head man, was a professor of German at the University of Dakar. Sometimes his father had difficulty understanding the language he was born to. His sister, on vacation from Europe, spoke French *exclusively*. His mother always spoke Wolof. Jean did all the *unnecessary* translation, including giving instructions to the servants, who spoke Arabic. He could relate to everyone and tried in vain to keep the traditional values alive in a rapidly changing urban Senegalese family structure.

The night before I left, Jean and I had our first *real* discussion. It was perhaps rather a lecture, because I had seen very little in three weeks.

"How do you like our *glorious revolution?*" He was quite serious.

"It's interesting." I answered that way because I felt that he would continue to act like the guide.

"Rubbish. It's awful." He got up and walked around the floor. "Our real leader is in jail. Our president is Professor Senghor: poet, lover, philosopher, man of the people. In fact, ole chap, the president is a socialist. You may see, my brothers, the French are here (all praises due to de Gaulle) to help us carry forth our rapid industrialization. Your trouble is that you are a frustrated American socialist who always overreacts. We happy citizens of the republic are democratic socialists. And what is democratic socialism? I'll tell you: a system of government which gives a Big Man the opportunity to take money from the state without a receipt. It's not stealing, you see, because he gives it to his family, friends, enemies, and keeps half of it for old age. The ideology upon which the ingenious order works is fifty per cent Gaulist, ten per cent American, thirty per cent Catholic, five per cent symbolic logic, and five per cent Negritude. The Africans—very backward people—are excluded because they must first learn how to identify with power. Our exports go to France because Africans are basically humanistic and traditional and have no real need for a modern decadent society.

"The University of Dakar seems consistent with the Professor's plans for development. Ninety per cent of the staff and students are French. That's our revolution. . . . Wait, I almost forgot the French troops. They are necessary to keep

the traitors from becoming subversive." Jean Paul smiled slightly, and said softly, "Now you'd better go to bed. Your plane is at an early hour."

Leaving was hard, but my three-week visa had expired. We had tried to get it extended, but could never find the "right" official to do it. Before I boarded the plane I received a present from Jean. He had gone to considerable trouble to get me an English translation of Frantz Fanon's magnum opus, *Les Damnés de la Terre*. With it, he gave me a letter, which I opened on the plane:

Dearest Leslie,

Promise me that you will be well. Head high. Your history is my history, and we must tell ourselves that it will not continue. My heart is heavy with my country, but it loves and I share it with you. Take care of Eve. Don't be too hard on her. Have children . . . do not let your heart die.

Don't become a Big Man in Ghana (smiles).

Fanon is good. We cannot use him now. Maybe some day, *oui?*

Jean Paul

*Guinea*

Like the average man in Senegal, the everyday citizen of the Republic of Guinea was poor. But for a different reason. Conakry, the capital, was not a French treasure chest. The 3,500,000 people of the country faced a difficult task of nation building. Their president, Sékou Touré—the grandson of Samory Touré, the nineteenth-century Islamic nationalist who delayed the spread of French imperialism—had been a stubborn man. In 1958 his country was the only French territory which rejected Charles de Gaulle's proposed *communauté* (community). Now, Charles didn't like that—who did that African think he was anyway? Mr. de Gaulle had visions of being very generous: besides giving Mr. Touré his own country, he was allowing him to have self-rule in all matters except *defense* and *foreign policy*. After all, African nations don't need an army. There's always South Africa to protect them. So, provoked by the politics of this 98,865 square miles, Mr. Charles quickly withdrew all colonial officials and

economic aid. The grandson had one reply: "We prefer poverty in freedom to riches in colonial servitude."

Unlike Senghor, Touré was not a product of a French *lycée*. His roots were in the working class, and he had come to power through the militant trade unions. And with the help of Kwame Nkrumah's $30-million loan, the man who had defied a general was still in power.

After spending the first day in a Guinean jail, I must confess that I was less impressed with this militant history. I had committed a crime: I had entered the country without a visa. I had hoped to get one at the airport, but was arrested instead. My American passport was a liability. I thought about calling the American Embassy, but the thought of being *saved* by white Americans from Guinea was too ironical to be seriously considered. Sékou Touré had a lot of enemies, and his *very* efficient security police were taking no chances. In fact, the attack was not on me but on my passport, and I was glad to see black men challenge it.

Eve came to my defense. She had been in the country for two weeks and had met some of the influentials. With their help, her good looks and charm, she had gone right to the top, and I was free on one condition: twenty-four hours to leave.

I spent half of that time with Eve, putting into action my newly acquired African values.

The other half I spent seeing the city of Conakry. There was a bustling seaport, but hardly any industry. We were told that there were large amounts of iron ore, bauxite (perhaps the richest deposits in the world), and diamonds, but their economic potential was far from realized.

I was happy to see that the steps between politician and citizen were not that large: the governing officials had not forgotten about the common man. The highly disciplined party had brought its boot down on corruption and was walking quickly with the people toward full re-Africanization of the country.

I found out what had happened to the "Black Jacobins." They all are in Guinea. Thousands of skilled and progressive Haitians (many who have taken up Guinean citizenship) have settled there because they could not function in Duvalier's government. They are very critical of political conditions at home and see very little hope of ever returning. So they fight the poverty and the unbearable mosquitoes, trying

to give some meaning to their lives. Funny, we had come from white power; they had come from black power.

We left the next afternoon. Farewell, Guinea; good luck, Sékou; courage to the Haitians, my countryless brothers.

*Sierra Leone*

Freetown—the capital settled as a refuge for freed slaves sent out by the Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade in 1787—reminded me of Franklin without the added annoyance of Town One. And Prime Minister Albert Margai, who had led his people from a British protectorate to independence in 1961, reminded me of my Uncle Samuel, who owned a night club in Port Arthur, Texas. I told this to John Akar, the Minister of Broadcasting, and he assured me in his Oxford English, "Ole chap, I am sure that the physical similarities of our dearly beloved head of state can be found on any peasant in the world. He is truly a man of the people."

Tongue-in-cheek Akar was an extraordinary man. Naturally he was the only qualified person in the country to lead the 2,290,000 people to glory, but the legislators did not share his opinions of himself, so they had passed a special law to restrict his political ambitions. John Akar, or as he called himself, "Mr. World," was kept out of his "rightful seat" because the law said that only a "pure" Sierra Leonean could be president. It was said that Mr. World was of mixed ancestry.

John (probably the most arrogant man on earth) and his lovely Afro-American wife were very kind to us. We met all the important government officials except the president. I spoke on the national radio, and strongly criticized America's racial and economic policies both at home and abroad.

For two wonderful months we did nothing but relax. We had the best of everything. Some Africans we met were very Westernized, and of course, we were reminded to beware of the "natives." I did not like this look-down-on-them attitude; it reminded me too much of the Negro history I had left. Also we were warned about the "dictator Nkrumah"; in fact, advised not to go to Ghana.

In the first week of the third month we said goodbye to our friends. I kept thinking how much like Franklin it was.

*Liberia*

On the short plane ride from Freetown to Monrovia, the capital of Liberia, I was thinking about the young students I had met at the universities in Senegal and Sierra Leone. Without exception, they had all been very critical of their governments. And because they were afraid to express their discontent openly, most of them had become professionally cynical and hopelessly pessimistic. For Eve and me this was extremely demoralizing. In America black students were beginning to look at Africa with new eyes, with a new vision which was not dilated with notions of "primitive peoples"; and although they had read about the inroads of neocolonialism, most of them tended to be positive and surely optimistic. I had tended to be critical of Dakar and some of the negative foreign influences I had seen, but the fact of independence was sustaining enough: a great leap forward—a necessary precondition to real nation building.

Liberia, like Sierra Leone, tends to have a special significance for black Americans, because it was settled in 1822 by the American Colonization Society as a "home" for slaves from America, and in 1847 it became the first black republic in West Africa. This is true even though politically thinking Blacks are critical of William V. S. Tubman (president since 1943), his dependency on Firestone and Goodyear rubber plantations, and his inability to move toward a more pan-African direction. It is potentially a rich country, ranking sixth in the world in output of gem diamonds, ranking eighth in rubber production, and also having high-grade iron deposits. But the wealth in the country is divided between the exploitative American industries and descendants of the slaves. A very little gets down to the two million inhabitants.

For me, Liberia had a special significance. Most of the African students who had come to Palmer were from Liberia, and a fellow called Edward Greenfield, a Liberian who had graduated in my Palmer class, was coming to Roberts Field (Liberia's only airport) to meet us.

Edward took us directly to his mansion. Then the last thing in the world I expected happened. While we were waiting in the spacious living room, which looked more like a

museum, Dr. Edward Greenfield—a twenty-four-year-old physician—changed into his Palmer Memorial Institute jacket. He ran into the living room and insisted on doing some Palmer football cheers. Reluctantly, after ten minutes of his enthusiastic persuasion, I got up to join his ritual. But I just stood there and watched. I had neither the will nor the memory to participate. Eve was pretending to be fascinated, and annoyed me with her encouragement. He was absolutely amazing. Not only did he remember each song, saying, and yell, but also who wrote them, who said what, when, why, and so on, and so on, including esoteric details which I had never known. Edward was not satisfied with silent participation; I thought in his euphoria he had not seen. He was convinced—absolutely serious—that what I needed was the proper context, and excused himself and enthusiastically ran upstairs.

Down again, with record-breaking speed, he handed me a Palmer jacket. My God! Was he selling them?

For two weeks, in order not to hurt him, I had to wear a wool Palmer jacket. All of his friends had one, so I was right at home. Eve was luckier; she got a Palmer hat. What a two weeks!

Exhausted and hoarse, we left the third week, with fair Palmer—its sons and its daughters—giving cheer.

*Ivory Coast*

Their ivory and manganese are for the French; their diamonds are for the South Africans; and their cocoa belongs to America and Britain. Independent since 1960. Another French playground.

The capital, Abidjan, reminded me of Atlanta, Georgia, in 1950. Horrible place! I have talked about Dakar, so there's no need to repeat, except to say Abidjan's worse.

We were going to stay a month. But we stayed two days. How would you like to be discriminated against in a "free" black society? I wished the *people* well.

# VIII

# The Political Kingdom

Ghana. We had finally arrived. Nervously I followed the crowd—Eve next to me, holding my hand—down the landing stairs. I wanted to scream, "Ghana, Nkrumah, I'm here!" But not yet, I thought. The afternoon warm air felt good in my lungs; conscious of every breath, sucking it in, letting it out, gently—like a kiss. I took off my coat, pulled down my tie, and looked straight up at the sun until I could not see; looked down again, and walked slowly, counting each step into the terminal.

Police, security men, and soldiers occupied most of the space in the small airport waiting room. We had heard in Freetown that another attempt had been made on President Nkrumah's life. Everyone moved quickly and quietly, opened all bags, and waited to be inspected. No exceptions, no exemptions; everybody obeyed, especially the trembling Europeans, who knew this was not Dakar. I received in my head a fresh flow of blood from seeing white men wait, uncomfortable, not knowing what to expect from Blacks who did not move when they spoke. Give them hell, brothers; give them hell.

I moved to the inspection table. A captain my own age smiled, said good afternoon, and requested my passport. At the same time two other, older soldiers went painstakingly through my small bag, turning over and over all the new shirts and underwear I had happily gotten on my new, unpaid charge account at Sterns department store in New York.

"Afro-American?" the young captain asked rhetorically.

I shook my head in approval, for I was too twisted inside to say, "Yes, sir." I was free to go. So I stood next to the wall, waiting for Eve.

"Captain," shouted one of the older security guards, looking through Eve's baggage. The guard thought that Eve's

tampax were explosives. He was from a small village and the women there did not use tampons. Eve's were the first he had ever seen.

The captain graciously apologized to us and quietly explained to the old soldier, in his own language, what was happening. The old man's laugh was very long. We all laughed. A Ghanaian woman next to us explained essentially what was said: "Old man, this is not a bomb. . . . It is a blood catcher not blood producer. . . . It will be all right."

We were free to go, but I could not move my body. I was paralyzed by the sight in front of my eyes. I was looking at the captain—a black policeman. He was so proud, so efficient, stronger in one sense, an important sense, than I could ever be. He could never imagine the intense joy that his presence as a black policeman established for me. No man or woman born could ever know what that sight means to a black man who has never seen it. Nor could Eve, my woman, understand. It is a restricted type of social and psychological alienation. I claim that only a black male American can understand and appreciate the meaning of a black policeman. Because in America the police are white, evil. They stop you, search you, intimidate and beat you, and if there is any manhood left to stand up for more, they will kill you. A special relationship exists between you and the policeman: you can function, even argue with him, up to the point when he gets mad; to go beyond that point, which in essence is to change the nature of the relationship, is to invite death. He must always be dominant. He represents American white male chauvinism and racism over and against your erection. He is law and history, and you can never identify with it.

Once when I was in a friend's apartment in Oklahoma, the police forced their way in. An Algerian student, fresh from fighting, whose frail body was held together by wire, jumped up *immediately* and ordered the police to leave. Our inability to be that spontaneous was a loss of manhood. We stood up minutes afterwards, but then it was too late. And each time it happens you lose a bit more, until something other than what you should be exists. The relationship did not exist between the Algerian and the rednecks. The latter were not dominant, because the Algerian had learned from his own war how to be spontaneous without being stupid.

"Leslie, let's go," Eve said impatiently.

"Sure, sweetheart, whatever you say." I was fine now. We moved out of the building.

My first days in Ghana were wild and beautiful; nights filled with tenderness and my growing love for Eve. I walked the streets of Accra, kissed and put my arms around strangers, calling them brother and sister, sometimes mother, many times father; they looked at me in bewilderment, but always smiled. I ate strange food, too much, too hot, got sick, threw up and ate more, ignored my ulcer, forgot about the pain. Eve watched with her cool self, each day getting more beautiful as the sun fought her cosmetics to make her more natural.

One day, alone, I took a bus to the Elmina Castle. I wanted to see the slave castle. I sat next to a market woman. She spoke to me in Fanti (a language of western Ghana); I shook my head, pretending to understand. I was passing, and I felt no need to be recognized.

I tried to relax, but that's a middle-class luxury, a wishful thought on a Ghanaian bus, or as the people call it, "transport." I had been on a crowded subway, but this was a totally new adventure in traveling. Once you take your seat, if you are fast enough to get one—it's like the New York subway at 5:30—it is impossible to move, as every inch is occupied with objects ranging from live chickens to small pieces of lumber; and you are constantly amazed because at every stop more people with more goods can be accommodated. No one seems inconvenienced or annoyed by the miniature market place or the gigantic heat this situation creates. I tried to suppress my headache and raging thirst and looked quite pleased with the box of cackling chickens in my lap. Also, I had little faith in the driver: passing other cars on hills I could not see over was not my idea of proper driving. Thousands of unrelated images, mostly about America, popped up in my mind, but like little bubbles which fly up and burst, they quickly vanished, except for my persistent impression: the city of Accra.

It was really an African city. Unlike Senghor in Dakar, the president of the ex-British colony was not keeping his peasants on the land. Their presence gave to this capital the touch of a confused boom town, crowded and noisy, everybody and his mama trying to sell you things from their sidewalk showrooms—very similar I guess, to a California gold

rush town at the turn of the century, or maybe like Mencken's Baltimore, Maryland, in the eighteen-eighties. Things seemed pleasantly unorganized, but behind the confusion there seemed to be a logic and sense of direction. No, it was not a California boom town. It was a Southern black town without the lorries, with an African food-trading market, and beautiful African dresses and robes. The people of "Negro" Birmingham and every other black community which I had passed through in the South (and perhaps part of the East) had forgotten about the things I was seeing and hearing. They no longer spoke this language or carried this culture from generation to generation. But the spirit or character—something about the black people on these Accra streets —gave me, and also Eve, a feeling of belonging which I had only gotten in America from the dusky people who could still remember loud laughter, lack of European "refinement," festival nights and days, the bend of a black woman's buttocks; what Léopard Sédar Senghor had seen in Harlem, "humming with noise, with stately colours and flamboyant smells," saying to New York, "Let black blood flow in your blood that it may rub the rust from your still joints, like an oil of life." The historians who had said that there were no African survivals in the New World had not understood this, or if they did, had not appreciated its significance in the life of the New World Negro's culture.

But in an ever-changing city like Accra, tradition and modernization walk hand in hand, sometimes with a stride which inevitably leads them into confrontations. A mammy wagon (an old truck with wooden benches crammed inside to haul passengers) would cause a traffic jam because the driver had gotten out to talk to a distant cousin or because he had forgotten to fill up the gas tank. A political minister on his way to an important state meeting is understandably perturbed when there is no room for his new Mercedes-Benz to pass. The truck driver is not consciously indifferent to state affairs, but he has not seen his cousin in three months. So the minister and the other mammy lorries, trucks, cars, and taxis have to wait until the cousins have finished updating their extended family affairs or until a policeman comes from his shaded hiding place to get things moving. In the midst of this confusion are the market men and women, students, and Europeans, going about their business as usual.

A sudden stop brought me back to the reality of the bus. I sat up, adjusting the sleeping chickens in my lap, and looked around the bus. Like the chickens, everyone was asleep—except the reckless driver, who was happily entertaining himself by singing a Ghanaian song.

The countryside was beautiful. If only my brother, Nathaniel, could see this landscape; he would love the thick green trees, perpetually green in an everlasting summer. Some looked old, timeless, like the first in the world; others were young and defiantly erect, like the young men who had planted them; and together they stood spread out as far as I could see, a perfect loveliness between the ocean and me.

The bush and the trees are natural allies—a primeval condominium—like lovers perpetually in heat who constantly make war on the road. Everything grows fast in the tropics; procreation is part of the air. If you cut the growth, beat it back, the next week—sometimes the next day—you'll have to fight it all over again.

"Elmina. Everybody out for Elmina," said the driver indifferently, in English.

I returned the chickens to the market woman who had asked me to hold them, and when she reached for them I saw her mother's breast and refreshing smile; my heart swelled. She thanked me in Fanti. Still passing, I smiled back acknowledging her words, and stumbled over people and goods to get out of the door.

The lorry driver was annoyed because I had delayed him, but smiled when I smiled before he closed the door. He drove away singing, almost hitting a parked car. And I hoped that I would have another driver when I decided to return. Moments later, as the bus passed out of view, I was standing on the beach with my shoes in my hand.

Now it was afternoon, and cool; the sun was hot like always, but the ocean was stirring in her eternal movement and the breeze from her face gave me relief. It was Sunday too. I had heard the bells from the bus. Half of Elmina was asleep; the Christian half was in church. I was alone in an unbelievable silence—a stillness so intense, so complete, that I did not hear the waves. "O water, voice of my heart, crying in the sand," splashing upon and forever changing the prehistoric biology. I felt strangely detached and I tried to push my consciousness to the point where I would not remember my

whole life. "O water, crying for rest, is it I, is it I?" Lines from "Of Our Spiritual Strivings" did not help. Arthur Symons could not write for me. I was a rare kind of nigger. Not a Bigger Thomas, nor a manchild in a promised land. Maybe I had experienced too much of the nausea of life to have an identity. And what I had internalized ached within me. Maybe Du Bois would help when I saw him soon. An old man helping a young man to answer a question about the soul of a black man. "How does it feel to be a problem?" A question he had not answered all his life long. Now he was dying, while I was living like "unresting water . . . crying without avail."

Where is my father? Where is my mother? San Francisco, I know that I am not supposed to miss you, but I do . . . I do. Eve, Eve, my black woman. And nobody understands you. Crying from a history of rejection which shapes your expectations. . . . I tried not to think of Judy. Outside, I was in a drunken frenzy and felt something like liberation. The beauty around excited me—the hell with alienation! I flexed my toes in the sand and threw smooth stones back into the great ocean. Then I ran. Fast at first, then slower, and when I got really tired, too nervous to stop, I walked and talked to myself and waited for the tropical breeze to fill up my lungs again so that I could scream and run back to my youth, a new youth. Oh, to be a child again—a little boy, twelve and romantic, looking on a seashore for smoother rocks, innocent and full because he has fallen in love. Was I being false? Maybe. Sorry. It didn't matter, nothing matters when you are trying real hard to be happy. . . .

When I opened my eyes I was in the fifteenth century, or so it seemed, standing before a castle next to the sea: Elmina Castle. A slave castle; the first European civilization in Ghana. The architects were Portuguese (had probably gotten lost on their way to Angola). They called themselves missionaries but had neglected to tell the natives that they had lost faith in their own civilization.

The gates of the castle were open and protected, but the guard was asleep. Why not? He's hot and tired, and besides, now there was no one inside to escape. Vacillating between contempt and anger, I gave myself a guided tour. Once inside the stone walls, I was outside of Africa. The sizes and shapes of the granite rock, a great temple defying the sky, did not

express the African's conception of space and density. African chiefs and kings could not have ruled here. These structures did not express their way of life; the context was too restricted, un-African, emphasizing only brute muscles and power and not concerned with expressing feelings and modesty or with giving beauty and solemnity to faces and figures which paid homage to the gods they worshiped. Each tribe would no longer have had a separate universe and would have been forced to worship the granite instead of sacred art and natural gods. Elmina Castle was a place without beauty in comparison to the world outside. The cattle, color, humanity, and religion would have suffered, because in this place of European order, there was no room for the innumerable stools, masks, dolls, figures, pots, drums, rings, bangles, and decorative art—that endless treasury of Africana through which an immense love of life is expressed.

The castle was a place of business, a human stock exchange; a place of rest, waiting for the sun to rise, for the gates to open, and ears to close to the suffering sounds of naked feet. Elmina Castle was ancient, cold, regimented, a great host for shining people—like a wax museum, filled with dead things; built by rugged men with horrible smells, who did not trust the ocean, who did not like the sun—a naked sun, a yellow sun which made their white turn red.

Elmina Castle—a prison. Large rooms reserved for the officers; smaller ones for the men; holes for those who could not run fast enough. I saw each room, each rock, and was not surprised that the hole in which they had kept the female captives was next to the officers' quarters. My journey finally brought me back to the main courtroom. I stood there trying to figure it all out, where the granite men had sat waiting to pass judgment on the womb of Africa: these men of another mankind, strong, with big guns (too big to bring on one ship), men from the north who found the pathway back to where all life had come from; men with blue in their eyes, profit beating in their veins—these men, in this courtroom, had created me.

A distant Lacy, a poor farmer perhaps, named . . . well, any name but Lacy, had stood here—or on some spot like it in one of the many castles on the West African Guinea Coast —chained and pained, wondering why he and others who

looked like him were leaving their perpetual summer to go beyond the land they loved. God was in heaven; he saw it all: the branding, the identification, the separation of this life from its womb. But his wrath of justice could not pierce the granite hell which he had built and blessed. He was committed in his eternal goodness to save these soul-stuffed natives once they had been whipped into shape, converted, and rehabilitated. So, after these pagans were organized, they moved from where I stood—the spot in the courtroom, the spot in African history, the beginning of Negro slavery—to be sold into a slavery which made their slavery look like small boys playing with sacred mythology.

We were tired and hungry—miserable, like orphans with nobody to care for us, but like God, who moves in mysterious ways—they moved us into the auction room. Each man, in single file, cut from his group, entered the room alone.

There was something sinister about this room. Someone was hiding behind the makeshift partition. . . . They could see us, but we could not see them. Bad for our psyches: our people, our kith and kin, were selling us to these strangers. "Five George Washington beads fer der nigra. . . . Do I hear six? . . . Nigra going once, going twice—sold!" To Mr. Lincoln.

Yes, the white men *sold* what the Africans *brought* to them, sometimes for beads and trinkets; the Ashanti held out for gold and guns. . . . "That's it fer today." The blue eyes had enough for today—more nigras tomorrow.

Then we were dropped into a hole. Fifty feet. Damp, dark. We tried to escape. Some found death. Tomorrow we would leave, leave the land we knew, our mothers' breasts, our rivers and fields; sweet mangoes, fu fu, thousands of years of being ourselves; giving up "beating . . . blood of the tom-tom, tom-tom blood and tom-tom," giving up our lives to sleep the long sleep of the nigger. But my distant gene, a summer's man, did not become a nigger. The Louisiana winter killed him and the granite God on his high white throne rejuvenated his witchcraft and made him over into a Negro, a proper one. So instead of dying, he gained energy and became younger. Funny—what a cycle. From Africa to Louisiana and back.

I pulled myself from my thoughts and ran back to the sea. I slept on the beach, a deathlike sleep over the blood-soaked sand, and I dreamed of black birds carrying me away. And when it was evening I awoke to the touch of the high tide and walked slowly back to the town—the remote cause of Town Two, the beginning of Essie Maes, Miss No Names, and others, throughout the world—believing in my heart that soon, probably not tomorrow, not even the next day or month, but one day soon, I would again be a summer's man . . .

like
the
face
of
a
god
in
a
shrine.

Four Sundays later I left my state of euphoria, and on the same bus, with the same driver, I returned to Accra. That Friday, after spending five days seeing more of the capital, arguing constantly with Eve, and finally moving to the University of Ghana at Legon, some eight miles north of Accra, I met Wendell Jean Pierre, an Afro-American lecturer teaching French literature of African expression at Legon. Eve had met Wendell on her trip to Paris, for Wendell, like other Blacks from both America and the Caribbean, had lived in Europe for many years. And like the others who had come out to help President Kwame Nkrumah achieve his socialist revolution, he had become increasingly embittered by the rising current of French racism since the end of the Algerian revolution—a racism which had flowed into every level of French life.

I liked him immediately. He was warm, radical, a home boy, and although he was nearly fifteen years my senior, we had traveled much of the same ground. The major difference, and constantly a problem for Eve, was that Wendell was very much married to and in love with a Frenchwoman who had given them two wonderful sons. He extended him-

self beyond the usual niceties to make us comfortable at the university, a pleasant but adjusting change for most people who are accustomed to the technological efficiency of American life. Although the university was as modern as, and perhaps more beautiful than, most in its class in the States, it was connected to the wider world of Ghanaian life that was characterized by periodic breakdowns in social services which most people in a "developed" society take for granted. Sensibly, you prepared yourself for inevitable breakdowns. Weeks, sometimes months, you were without hot water, even if you were fortunate enough in the first place to be living in accommodations which had a hot-water heater. Even if you adjusted to cold showers, as I did very quickly—and liked them once I got used to them—there was still no guarantee that you would finish your shower. So you had a bucket of water near you, just in case the water was suddenly turned off in the middle of your soaping. And if there was no running water at all, one bucket of water per person was all you got. You were also wise to buy candles, and keep soft pieces of paper around, just in case of a blackout or a toilet-tissue shortage. Added to these minor irritants were the heat, rust, mold; malaria mosquitoes; harmless foot-long lizards everywhere; snakes; dishonest taxi drivers (who didn't bother me that much, because I could at least get a taxi); and the general inefficiency. Yet we were fortunate, because life in this nonindustrial society was far better at Legon than most other places in the nation.

Eve, like most women from the West, was constantly disturbed by the order of this existence. But unlike the white women, who despite the mechanics of this situation, generally lived at a higher standard than they had in Europe, she (like most of the other black women from America and the West Indies—many of whom I did not meet until after Eve finally returned to her middle-class comforts of hot baths plus racism) did not complain openly. For the Ghanaians, although they complained themselves, viewed criticisms as an expression of your disapproval of them as people, coupled with a general contempt of Ghanaian culture as a whole. Nevertheless, Eve was incessantly annoyed, and little personal differences between us were usually exaggerated; once or twice we almost exchanged blows.

This is not to say that I did not share many of Eve's ad-

justment neuroses and was not as guilty as she was in creating the tension in our personal lives. I was not an ascetic and had always been somewhat cynical of those individuals who claimed that they could practice without serious difficulty a life of asceticism. Rather, I was so profoundly elated to see black men with power and authority that I tried to ignore, suppress, and avoid inconveniences, complaints, and situations I felt that I could not deal with. That is, the psychological—and for a while, the political—benefits outweighed, overshadowed, if you will, made irrelevant the lack of effective social services, which intellectually I accepted as an inescapable consequence of nation building.

Beyond those neat rationalizations I had been cushioned by the romantic ruggedness of the American left. On a temporary basis extending, once, over a period of six months, I had lived in conditions in America which I can only call uncivil and ungracious, indeed harsh, but I had enjoyed it—again not *totally* liking them—because I was with people with whom I was deeply involved, individuals who had made a frontal assault on the very culture of efficiency which was missing in my present state of exile. Also, and perhaps more important, I felt that I needed to be in Africa, and I surely did not want to join either overtly or covertly the gang of European expatriates, who, as I discovered later, were complaining from a much more deep-seated level of grievances.

Wendell shared freely what he had to make us forget, including his two years of experience in the country. And Eve, although she adamantly opposed his "ugly white wife," found it increasingly easy to accept his wife's offers to let her use her bathtub and share whatever female articles she could not buy in the shops. In the meantime, Wendell was slowly—with tremendous patience—exposing Eve to the secular ethics of a coming-of-age revolutionary.

One day Wendell suggested that I, Eve, and he should drive to northern Ghana in order to get a feel of the whole country. I hesitated, because I wanted to see Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, but Wendell, who was a prominent personage in the community of Afro-Americans in Ghana, a community I had not yet been exposed to, assured us that he could arrange an audience when we returned.

Traveling by car from the west coast up through the great

Ashanti kingdom to the northern territories can be quite dangerous. Many people are killed each year in all kinds of unbelievable and freak accidents. One is forever, unless of course you have a death-wish, driving defensively on those new and very modern highways, trying to avoid stalled lorries or those parked by drivers who had gotten out to do their bush toileting; the half-naked peasant with his goods on his head, going to market; the occasional snake scooting across the road; and the important personality in government, whose underpaid chauffeur, like the bus drivers, *may* finally have learned to steer and shift (after his tenth kill) but still does not understand modern horsepower, safe speed, and why it is not nice to pass on a blind hill.

For Wendell Jean Pierre, Eve, and me, the trip to the north included these hazards, plus others. I was driving a British car, with an American learner's permit I have never used. I was not used to the British style of driving. An American driver instinctively wants to get on the right side of the road, which from his perspective, is the *coming* rather than the *going* side. Moreover, we were trying to make this trek during the season of the rains, when the roads are forced to submit to the lust of tropical storms. But we felt young, alive, and drunk on Ghana.

In order to reach the town of Tamale by nightfall, we detoured from the main highway to a dirt road (a bush road, as it is called) right outside of the modern city of Kumasi, the capital of Ashanti. Kumasi was a passing political headache for Kwame Nkrumah's notion of nation building, since the historical developments in that region had created political and social conditions which made the Ashanti leaders more disposed to a federal structure with wide-ranging regional autonomy rather than the strong federal unitary government which the Convention People's Party under Nkrumah had proposed shortly before independence.

And what a big detour! One moment we were in one world, which we understood and accepted; the next moment, with a single turn of the wheel, we entered another reality, another history—a road back to the past. A quiet road, except for the noise made by an occasional bush which broke under the impact of our fast-moving car. You could see that the men who cleared the highway had not been there for months. Now that was nice in spite of the constant obstruc-

tions to the car, because the inner bush had stretched over, and in some places, completely covered, the outer bush, and the inner growth is even lovelier than the outer—a twilight of history reaching out to be touched, vulnerable to the naked knife in a farmer's hand. I saw shapes, forms, trees, and birds too multicolored to be described; flying too fast from their eternal green to be apprehensive of the stalk of the hunter. The colors came at you like the lights of a carnival: greens, blues, reds, yellows, and colors I did not think of often—they would have been heresy for the artist who could not accept the natural integration of the original canvas, the Garden of Adam, the birthplace of Eve.

My Eve was watching too. And now that Wendell was driving, I did not have to view her beauty from the rearview mirror. She was quiet, and she looked very pensive. Her beauty kept calling to my eyes, as it had never done before. I had hardly recognized her when I met her in Guinea. Her hair was natural, her clothes plain, and I had noticed for the first time her pretty little ears. Now she was tired, fatigued, like us, by the heat, but too aware to close her large window-like eyes. The heat was long and piercing and true to what we had heard: that northern Ghana was unbearably hot and always humid.

The red mud was dead dry in spite of the previous day's rain. I had never experienced such heat and physical discomfort, not even in the place I thought was the hottest of the universe: Route 66, on which I had traveled to see an Indian reservation, from Los Angeles through Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas in mid-July. And strangely enough, this little nameless road looked and felt like one of the narrow dirt roads my father had traveled (before he became an urban-based doctor) to see his country patients. There are many nameless roads in countries like Ghana, a connecting footpath between the two Africas: traditional and modern. Ghanaians from the modern life would call them "proper bush highways," paths of life, supply routes between two changing cultures, which depend on each other and are trying to merge.

On both sides of this living highway, through the high bush, were living people: village and tribal people, young and old, chiefs and ju ju men; people who could not read English or French but who could speak of man in their own tongue

—a language without cold wars, from a culture free of our problems; adjusted and natural people, who got from their land a subsistence; a beautiful people, who did not yet know about the power of the "Omnipotent Administrator" but who loved life nevertheless; a people who believed in Adam but not his stepson Smith; nor did they worship Marilyn Monroe or need Malcolm X

Indeed, the new route brought us closer to the Westernized version of Africa: it brought us face to face with bush Africa, naked Africa, the Africa which is *developed,* although social scientists tell us it is *developing.* An Africa which is more concerned with subsistent compassion than with sophistication.

Suddenly Wendell jammed on the brakes, and we were thrown in disarray, for the car had almost turned over.

"What's wrong *this* time?" Eve asked.

Before Wendell could reply, we saw the reason for his action. To the right of our car was a Ghanaian woman who had apparently seen the car coming and was waiting near the road's edge until it was safe to pass. Wendell had stopped suddenly because it was difficult to tell from her movements whether she was going to wait or take the chance.

The road woman was very black, like ebony after it is shined. Except for disfiguring tribal marks, she was beautiful; indeed, she was exquisite, a picture of self-containment, a perfect form of the environment which had produced her.

"Well, Wendell, what are we waiting for?" Eve said impatiently.

But Wendell couldn't answer. His eyes were fixed on the road. As another black man, I could tell by his face (eyes wide open, with just a slight smile) what was going around in his mind: Goddamn, just look at that. . . . My God, she sure is fine. . . . What in the hell is she doing out here?

That is a strange kind of thought; in fact, rather contradictory (perhaps even a little chauvinistic), because in effect you are thinking, she does not really belong here because the men couldn't be foolish enough to let her out of their sight. Also, and perhaps more important, Wendell was thinking, as I was, as any sane black man would be, If I only had a woman like that. . . . Her man can't possibly be treating her as she should be treated.

Knowing Wendell somewhat, I decided he was probably (I

was trying to be fair, because he was a happily married man) figuring out how he was going to get back there.

I thought she was near forty, but Wendell assured us (very emphatically) that she was nearer to twenty. Hard work, little leisure, well-defined female roles, inadequate diet, endemic diseases, and recurring malaria had robbed her of some of her youth, but whatever the culture in the bush which had made her older while she was still young, it had not made her ugly and tired out, like some of the Indian women I had seen on their concentration camping grounds in America. And she was a proud woman. She did not look at us, although I could tell by her bit of outward anxiety that she knew of our eyes on her. She was unbelievably human. She was pregnant, at least six months, and tied to her back with a piece of cloth that matched her dress was a sleeping child who appeared to be about two years old. And on her head, with a little pad of matching cloth, she carried at least two hundred pounds of wood, with the grace of a traditional Japanese dancer: more wood than I could have carried in my arms. She did not smile, and she was not angry, but seemed a little impatient, as though she was trying to tell us that Sunday was not a day of rest for her. Finally she looked quickly in our direction, adjusted the cloth around her child, and with much effort, crossed the road and entered the world of the bush. As we drove off, I thought about Senghor's lines, "When shall I sit at the table of your dark breast . . . ? Perhaps, beloved, I shall fall tomorrow, on a restless earth. . . . And you will weep in the twilight for the glowing voice that sang your black beauty."

Now it was miles from our sudden stop. We were passing through a dense forest and we saw a strange and unwelcome scene. There, in the middle of a clearing, in the middle of Ghana, in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the twentieth century, next to a forest infested with mosquitoes, we saw a white South African family—Wallace, Beastina, and their two children—having a picnic.

They flagged us down, and Wendell, a civil man, stopped to see what they wanted. The insipid-looking white man was attired in white Bermuda shorts, white knee socks, and an Albert Schweitzer-type colonial hat. His wife was indescribably hideous, and it was quite obvious that her blotchy skin and

blond hair were unsuited for this climate. She was also pregnant. (According to a Ghana gynecologist we had met, white women seem to be able to have more children in Africa; he had cynically added, "Probably the force of the sun.") When they discovered that we were Americans they seemed relieved.

"Americans. Fine; we love America," said the white man.

"We are Afro-Americans," Wendell replied quickly. "And believe me, that's quite a difference."

"We like all Americans. Thousands of Americans come to South Africa every year. We have very friendly relations with your country."

Wendell was impatient. What in the hell did they want anyway? Eve was looking around in disgust, and I was thinking about a devil who had come to another garden to pervert Adam and Eve.

"What do you want?" Wendell asked with tremendous hostility.

I felt no need to say anything to this devil, because I had already proven to Eve that I could not whip every white man I met. If Marcus Garvey, from whom she quoted so often, said that every black man could beat any ten white men, then I was still very much *colored.* For I had not been able to beat even one. The fight had occurred on a New York subway in the heat of the rush hour. Some white man pushed Eve and apologized five times, but was reprimanded by her nevertheless. Then I stepped in, not so much to tame the beast as to prove my manhood to Eve. And this white man, twice my size, with underground working experience, had a good time on my head, then threw me off the crowded subway, whereupon the police finished opening my skull.

"Might we use your automobile lift? We don't mean to trouble you, but we have a flat tubeless."

The man was afraid. Wendell hesitated for some time. The tension mounted. I thought Wendell might kill them all and bury them in the forest, but I guess he gave the man what he asked for because he did not wish to stain the African soil. With no conversation from us, and with amazing speed, this white man fixed his car, and we continued our drive north.

Frankly, I was rather shocked to discover that a South African White was working in Ghana. I had seen and knew about other European expatriates working in various capaci-

ties, but a South African was another cup of tea. I was even more outdone when Wendell explained that this flat-tire man was not alone. Other South Africans ran a big gold field near Kumasi, and there were a few others, doctors and teachers, working in the country. The government had nationalized three of the five mines now operating in the country, but the biggest, richest, and most productive were in the hands of these people. And, in fact, H. M. Basner, a white communist from South Africa, had a daily column in the *Ghanaian Times* (privately owned but government controlled), and it was common knowledge that he wrote speeches for Nkrumah and sometimes acted as a special consultant.

It was difficult to ascertain whether Wendell disapproved of these arrangements. Anyone who talked to him for two minutes could vouch for his militant black nationalist views. He was vociferously critical of France, more critical of America, a champion of Nkrumah's dream of a United States of Africa, and had been constantly taken to task by his university students, who called him Mr. Negritude and the Black Racist. But in the car (and on other occasions) he was never critical of President Nkrumah, and by extension, very cleverly rationalized the presence of those South Africans in the country. Most of them, he said, were very progressive and had struggled for the Blacks in South Africa before they were forced into exile; they had done good work for the government, and from all appearances, seemed loyal. Nevertheless, I felt that he had some serious reservations. Eve confirmed my suspicion later and assured me that he disapproved completely but did not feel disposed to take us into his confidence. Besides, she felt that Wendell thought that the President basically knew what he was doing.

Unfortunately for this trip, we did not reach the northern territory. The rains had destroyed the main road, and it was virtually impossible to continue. I was naturally disappointed, but looked forward to meeting Dr. Du Bois.

# IX

# Dusk of Dawn

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois had been the intellectual and political model of many in my generation.

He had become still more significant for the Blacks in the early nineteen sixties, because he left for Ghana (after many years of trying to get his passport returned for having "defied" the State Department). To the surprise of many, he became a Ghanaian citizen; denounced America, saying that there was no hope for social justice without radical changes in the basic institutions and that socialist Africa was the future of mankind. The radicals among us, with much less understanding of the American political culture than our intellectual leader, were coming to the same conclusion, especially after Robert Williams, leader of the Monroe Movement, was framed by United States government officials and forced into exile. Yet one question about Dr. Du Bois during this period had remained: Why had he joined the Communist party? I intended to ask him that question when I spoke with him.

But seeing the Old Man was not as easy as Wendell had anticipated. A great deal of security clearance was involved, because Du Bois was in close, indeed intimate, contact with the President. Being an Afro-American around that time was not necessarily an asset. I did not understand until I tried to see the Old Man why there had been signs around Accra reading "BEWARE OF AFRO-AMERICANS." From a reliable source we learned that certain Ghanaian officials had reason to believe that several Afro-Americans—possibly working for the Central Intelligence Agency, possibly not—had been involved in a conspiracy to assassinate Kwame Nkrumah. I do not believe that any of these officials entertained the notion that the same fate was in the works for Dr. Du Bois, but the security hand had been extended, and everyone remotely concerned with the Ghanaian revolution was touched by it.

On another level, Du Bois was being protected from tourists whose only serious business was to take the historical picture for the scrapbook back home. The Old Man loved people, and if it was left solely to him, would have met everyone; but his health was failing, and he needed all of his remaining time to devote to one of the major projects which had brought him to the country. For, at the age of ninety-four, he had founded and become director of the Secretariat for an Encyclopedia Africana in Accra. From America we knew about this proposed and long overdue project. In March 1962, not long after the Old Man arrived, work was begun. It was sponsored by the Ghana Academy of Sciences, and the government of Ghana had underwritten the cost of starting the efforts. The objectives of the Secretariat were to plan, guide, and coordinate the work of assembling, organizing, and publishing research which was *authentically African in viewpoint* and (as their monthly publication, *For Cooperation Toward an Encyclopedia Africana,* had said) "at the same time a product of scientific scholarship. . . . The Secretariat, the Director wishes it understood, is not merely a dream or a project, it is a directorate."

Because of President Nkrumah's personal interest in the project and Du Bois' presence in Ghana, Accra was the logical site at which to prepare the encyclopedia, in which despite the fact that many detractors had called it "Nkrumah's political history," all Africa was to participate equally. Advice and counsel of eminent scholars in various African states had been sought. The editorial board included Africans from other states, and in due course, funds for research and publication would come from other independent African nations. At the same time, it was the intention of the Founder, the Proximate Cause of Pan-Africanism, that the African scholars would draw on the skills of non-African scholars who had already advanced *accurate interpretation of African civilizations and culture.*

Favorable reactions to these endeavors had come from all over the world, including some from many well-known scholars: Dr. E. Franklin Frazier of Howard University; Dr. Melville J. Herskovits of Northwestern University; George M. Johnson, president of the University of Nigeria; Basil Davidson, free-lance historian and journalist in England; Kuo-Mo-Jo, Academy of Sciences, Peking; The Honorable Jamal Mo-

hammed Ahmed, ambassador of the Republic of the Sudan, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia; and Dr. Horace Mann Bond of Atlanta University, whose nephew Max Bond became the personal architect of Nkrumah.

On December 18, 1962, the year before I arrived in the country, W. E. B. Du Bois, ninety-four and ailing, formally launched his project in an historic speech at the University of Ghana:

> I wish to express my sincere thanks to those of you here who have accepted the invitation of our Secretariat to participate in this conference. . . .
>
> Had there been any doubts in your mind of the importance of African studies, I am sure the papers and discussions of the past week have dispelled them. The wide attendance of the First International Congress of Africanists attests the almost feverish interest throughout the world in the hitherto "Dark" continent. Remains, therefore, for me *only to lay before you the importance of an encyclopedia Africana based in Africa and compiled by Africans*. . . .
>
> Some of you ask if an encyclopedia Africana at this time is not premature . . . too ambitious an undertaking for African scholars to attempt . . . enough scientifically proven information ready for publication. . . . Our answer is that it is long overdue. Yet, it is logical that such a work had to wait for independent Africans to carry it out. We know that there does exist much scientific knowledge of Africa which has never been brought together. We have little-known works of African scholars of the past in North Africa, in the Sudan, in Egypt. Al Azhar University of Sankore made large collections; *Présence Africaine* has already brought to light much written material in the French language. We can, therefore, begin; remembering always that an encyclopedia is never a finished or complete body of information. Research and study must be long and continuous. We can collect, organize, and publish knowledge as it emerges. The encyclopedia must be seen as a living effort which grows and changes—which will expand through the years as more and more material is gathered from all parts of Africa. . . .
>
> It is true that scientific written records do not exist in most parts of this vast continent, but the time is now for beginning. The encyclopedia hopes to eliminate the artificial boundaries created on the continent by colonial masters. Designations

such as British Africa, French Africa, Black Africa, Islamic Africa too often serve to keep alive differences which in large part have been imposed on Africans by outsiders. The encyclopedia must have research units through West Africa, North Africa, East, Central, and South Africa, which will gather and record information for these geographical sections of the continent. The encyclopedia is concerned with Africa as a whole.

It is true that there are not now enough trained African scholars available for this gigantic task. In the early stages we have need of the technical skills in research which have been highly developed in other parts of the world. We have already asked for and to a most gratifying degree been granted the unstinted cooperation and assistance of the leading institute of African studies outside Africa. Many of you who have gathered here from distant lands can, and I believe will, make valuable contributions to this undertaking. And you can assist us in finding capable African men and women who can carry the responsibilities of this work in their own country and to their people. For it is African scholars themselves who will create the ultimate *Encyclopedia Africana.*

My interest in this enterprise goes back to 1909, when I first attempted to launch an encyclopedia Africana while still teaching history at Atlanta University in Georgia, U.S.A. Though a number of distinguished scholars in the United States and various European countries consented to serve as sponsors, the more practical need of securing financial backing for the projected encyclopedia was not solved, and the project had to be abandoned. Again, in 1931, a group of American scholars met at Howard University and agreed upon the necessity of preparing an encyclopedia of the Negro, using this term in its broadest sense. There was much organizational work and research done in the preparation, but once again, the undertaking could not be carried through because money could not be secured. Educational foundations had doubts about a work of this kind being accomplished under the editorship of Negroes. We are deeply grateful to the president of Ghana and to the government of this independent African state for inviting us to undertake this important task here, where the necessary funds for beginning this colossal work have been provided. After all, this is where the work should be done—in Africa, sponsored by Africans, for Africa. The encyclopedia will be carried through.

Much has happened in Africa in the last twenty years. Yet, something of what I wrote in the preparatory volume of the *Encyclopedia of the Negro,* which was published in 1945, will bear repeating now. I quote: "Present thought and action are all too often guided by old and discarded theories of race and heredity, by misleading emphasis and silence of former histories. These conceptions are passed on to younger generations of students by current textbooks, popular histories and even public discussion. . . . Our knowledge of Africa today is not, of course, entirely complete; there are many gaps where further information and more careful study is needed; but this is the case in almost every branch of knowledge. Knowledge is never complete, and in few subjects does a time arrive when an encyclopedia is demanded because no further information is expected. Indeed, the need for an encyclopedia is greatest when a stage is reached where there is a distinct opportunity to bring together and set down a clear and orderly statement of the facts already known and agreed upon, for the sake of establishing a base for further advance and further study."

For these reasons and under these circumstances it would seem that an encyclopedia Africana is of vital importance to Africa as a whole and to the world at large. I now have the pleasure of declaring opened this Conference for the Encyclopedia Africana.

Against this background it was easy to understand and accept why the Ghana government unofficially was shielding a great talent from unnecessary interruptions. I was more than honored to wait like everyone else.

Indeed, politics in Ghana was proving to be an interesting but confusing experience. Perhaps a brief glance at modern-day Ghanaian political history might help to further elucidate some of my observations. The Second World War was a great impetus to the cause of African liberation. In Ghana, as elsewhere in the colonial world, a predominantly nonwhite world which had been under European rule (primarily British and French) since 1885, the colonial regime had been weakened. Britain and France tried to recoup their lost strength by introducing wide social and political reforms in their colonies. But it was too late. Colonial rule was at an end. The colonial culture itself had created a new African, and the results of the war had given this new class even more

reason to believe that Africans could always govern themselves.

In Ghana, and again elsewhere in the new world arising, political groups emerged to give explicit expression to this intense anticolonial feeling and also to chart a course for the new day when African nationalists would govern and rule. The United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC) was Ghana's official nationalist group, organized by wealthy middle-class lawyers and traders. Lacking the organizational skills to create a nationalist party, Kwame Nkrumah, then a student radical in England, was invited to be organizing secretary. When Mr. Nkrumah arrived in Ghana in December of 1947, he was thirty-eight years old and had been out of the country twelve years. Almost immediately, the young, active secretary was at odds with the men who had hired him. In his autobiography, *Ghana: The Autobiography of Kwane Nkrumah,* he said that he regarded the UGCC as a movement "backed almost entirely by reactionaries, middle-class lawyers, and merchants."

Kwame Nkrumah had a different brand of political ethics. Influenced very much by George Padmore, C. L. R. James, Dr. W. E. B. Du Bois, men with radical, Marxist, and pan-Africanist orientation, this young man wanted to organize a party with a mass-base national character and socialist objectives. In a bitter controversy with his employers, he broke away from the UGCC and formed, with the help of certain sections of the labor movement and other groups, the Convention People's Party (CPP). Carrying out brilliant and well-calculated moves, the CPP won the elections of 1950, 1954, and 1956, forcing the British in March of 1957 to grant independence to the first African state in Africa south. Nkrumah emerged a popular nationalist and international hero, particularly for Blacks, inside and outside Africa, who were still resisting various forms of colonial oppression. By 1959 he had become a progressive force in the revolutionary world of colored people. And Ghana's plans for economic reconstruction had become a model for other African, and non-African, leaders who shared his views of socialism and rapid plans for industrialization. Ghana became the tongue of the oppressed elsewhere in Africa, and freedom fighters from all over Africa flocked there for leadership and assistance. Moreover, Ghana had evolved a militant left-leaning foreign

policy, which became highly critical and condemnatory of America for her attempts to strengthen existing colonial regimes. Last, but surely most important to people of African descent in every white racist society, Nkrumah called for the elimination of racial discrimination and prejudice, a United States of Africa, the restoration of African history, black consciousness, and the creation of a modern African personality.

This had been his glory outside of his political kingdom, a name given to Ghana because Nkrumah had declared that he was "a Marxist-Leninist, a nondenominational Christian," and said, "seek ye first the political kingdom, and all other things will be added unto you." Now that I was inside, it was obvious that sections in the population did not share my image of this great leader. The middle class had never forgiven him for bringing all those "uncultured" men into power, and general complaints about corruption, one-party rule, detention camps for security prisoners were heard.

At this point I had no real opinions. I would wait and see. Then, too, I was more immediately concerned about the status of Afro-Americans in Ghana. (At the insistence of President Nkrumah, all Blacks from America were referred to as Afro-Americans.) Because if our guys were involved in an attempt to murder Nkrumah, all of us *in* or *coming into* the country were probably being watched. We had heard in Freetown that half of the population was working for the government as security agents, and we had been cautioned to be wary of individuals who became "too friendly too soon." But given the pro-British character of the Sierra Leonean political culture and the overtly conservative sources from which these rumors had come, I completely ignored them. For if half of the population was needed to eliminate subversion, then more power to them.

Now, however, I became exceedingly paranoid, even though I had nothing whatsoever to hide. I constantly looked over my shoulder, under the bed, remained in my room when the stewards were cleaning it, and was very careful about what I said. In fact, Wendell told us—and his words made a deep impression on me—that except for a selected few, the Ghanaians were more suspicious of the Afro-Americans *who were most critical of America,* on the theory that profes-

sional American agents might try to infiltrate by identifying with existing anti-American feeling in the country. Things became so confused in my mind that I even suspected Wendell of being an agent for Nkrumah. Maybe I shouldn't even try to see the Old Man; or tour the country; or write home; or ask questions.

Two or three times I thought maybe I shouldn't be there. For the psychology of a black American exiled in an African country, you dig, creates a strange mixture of irrational reactions if his legitimacy is in question. Put simply, you are there because you hated America; given this hatred—blind and complete—coupled with the knowledge that the CIA is constantly subverting, embarrassing, confusing, disrupting governments which carry out or are thought to be carrying out policies which *seriously* jeopardize American interests, either in that country or elsewhere, you want to do anything within your power to help the country you have temporarily adopted. But if you think that you are being watched (which you are), it becomes difficult to function honestly and creatively. And you find yourself making statements, doing things —sometimes exaggeratedly—all in the hope of proving that you are really loyal to the revolution.

In any case, these were my feelings, and probably Eve's. Actually we never discussed it, and one day I hated myself because I suspected her first of being an American agent and then of being an agent for the Ghana government. I should emphasize that the fact that you have a clean conscience is basically irrelevant. Your beingness is interpreted and judged by men and women who may not understand *you,* and if they do, they may want to make political capital out of your bankruptcy. But more important, you have come a long way, and more than anything on earth, want to belong; be liked; eventually loved.

Finally, but only momentarily, my sanity(?) was restored: we were given an audience with Dr. Du Bois.

The night we were scheduled to see the Old Man I became very nervous. Added to my other concerns was a thought which hadn't occurred to me before: that the man we were to see shortly was almost a hundred years old, and what can a twenty-four-year-old ask of a century? I had a lot of questions, but somehow none of them seemed real or significant.

Dr. Du Bois lived in the Cantonment. By Ghanaian stand-

ards it was considered plush; by American standards it measured up to the homes lower-middle-class whites would own in a very small Northern community. But it was the Sugar Hill of Ghana, because members of the cabinet, high court, parliament, high-ranking civil servants, professors, and important European expatriates lived there. Also Cantonment was the area where most of the diplomats lived, except the Chinese, Russians, and Americans, who all lived closer to the president's office.

If you were Ghanaian or an expatriate working for the government, the rent was next to nothing. The low rent (plus a loan to purchase a car) was a part of your salary. The houses—put up for British personnel during the colonial period—were simply built, usually with inexpensive lumber, and surprisingly modest. Most had two bedrooms, bath, a large living-dining area; some had a study. At the end of a large yard was a small, very small house with two closetlike rooms for the four servants and their ever-increasing families. To protect the (smaller) families in the big houses from mosquitoes, moths, June bugs, snakes, and other insects, of formidable size, which buzzed or crawled around at night, there were porch screens, and just in case of emergency, mosquito canopies. For the poor servants, without even a bathroom, no such amenities were provided.

Since independence, very little had been done to change the natures or relationships of these colonial domiciles. The house in which Dr. Du Bois and his charming wife Shirley lived was typical, or perhaps a bit more elegant than most because of the pretty green hedges surrounding it.

They were standing on the screened porch as we drove up. In most homes like this one, the servants would have greeted us, but Dr. Du Bois' servants did very little domestic work, spending most of their time studying courses he had prepared for them. In fact, the Old Man did not want servants, but like a *few* others in the country—both Ghanaians and expatriates—who felt that having them was at variance with their conception of a "people's revolution," he accepted them as part of the natural order of life, aware that, since the government hadn't yet expanded its industrial base, this source of employment gave landless peasants in an urban economy subsistence pocket money. To rationalize his conflicts, he de-

mocratized the relationship, taught the servants useful skills, and unlike most other "masters," paid them a living wage.

Dr. Du Bois did not look well. Nevertheless, he was a gracious host. He was very interested in all of his guests, and I reminded him that I had met him before, in San Francisco at a peace rally. That led him into a discussion of American political history, and for nearly an hour he held us in absolute silence. His mind was clear; his words were lucid; and with tremendous honesty and modesty, he re-examined many of his earlier political positions. He reviewed with amazing accuracy his relationships with leading men and women of yesterday's history, and said nearing the end of his talk, "I think that maybe the greatest difference between Booker T. and myself was that he had felt the lash and I had not." Dr. Du Bois did not discuss his motives for belatedly joining the Communist party, and for a number of reasons, I was not compelled to ask why.

Two days later, August 27, 1963, when hundreds of other Americans were marching on Washington, D.C., demanding reform, William Edward Burghardt Du Bois died, believing that such reforms were impossible. The news of his death was brought to the marchers who had gathered before the American embassy in Accra—to protest there what others were protesting back home—by Julian Mayfield, who would now become the political head of the community of Afros. With tears in his eyes, he managed to say, " 'The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color line.' The Old Man is dead. It is an end of an era."

A century was over. The marchers stopped. They had known Du Bois, of his illness, but did not want to believe. Maya Maka, an Afro-American teaching music at the university, came forth and sang the Old Man's favorite spiritual, "Let Us Cheer the Weary Traveller." Then, as they thought Du Bois would want them to, the protestors continued their march.

The next day, from early in the morning, hundreds of people entered the Cantonment to view his remains. Du Bois was dressed in the kind of brown suit Chinese leaders wear and was surrounded by all the traditional symbols which are always present at the burial of an African chief. Everyone passed the open coffin, which had been placed in a makeshift African hut. All looked in; a few prayed; a Muslim leader

chanted a prayer in Arabic; a market woman put a flower on his chest; a few cried; most were very quiet. Even the cold war was relaxed, as the Russians, Americans, and Chinese came to the same historic spot to pay their last respects and comfort his mourning wife, Shirley Graham Du Bois.

The American representative, a Southern cracker, was obscene. For the second time in my life, I entertained thoughts of murder. What in the hell was he doing here? As if I didn't know. Immoral. Motherfucker. Representing a government which could never accommodate the likes of Du Bois. An evil white hand, which hit him while living, now, for political reasons, extends the same bloody hand around a widow it has not earned the right to touch. The cracker's presence desecrated the meaning of the sacred service. The Chinese were making their own political show, but it was a different kind of performance. They were there all day. They helped. They were not artificial and frozen. They were relevant—they understood the hurt the Great One had suffered.

Then, almost from out of the sky, I saw the President—Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah—standing in the hut over his dead mentor. Security was good that day. My first look at Nkrumah and my last look at Du Bois came together in my skull and hammered home with unmistakable clarity that the black man did have a history. Here was a part of it happening before my eyes. I wish every black soul in the universe could have seen that sight. It was beautiful. Do you hear me? Beautiful. My feelings, which began to kill the white man in me, were expressed by the Senegalese poet, David Diop: "In your presence I rediscovered my name. . . . And that turns love into a boundless river."

And then, with tears in his eyes, Kwame Nkrumah reached into the living soul of black folk and kissed him. Closed the casket and gave "the sign of brotherhood which comes to nourish the dreams of men."

William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, born February 23, 1868, died August 27, 1963, was laid to final rest, with full military honor, on the afternoon of August 29 at a spot some fifty yards from the pounding ocean, in a special grave next to his friend George Padmore, just outside the walls of another slave castle at Osu, residence of the President of Ghana. The state burial brought thousands and thousands of people. Some understood, but for those who did not (the lit-

tle boys and girls standing by the road, watching the coffin go by) it was not important; some day they would know that that dead man had started a history which had made this very day and others to come possible . . . "days sparkling with ever-new joy."

Directly following the interment, Du Bois' last words to the world were read:

> It is much more difficult in theory than actually to say the last goodbye to one's loved ones and friends and to all the familiar things of this life.
>
> I am going to take a long, deep, and endless sleep. This is not a punishment, but a privilege, to which I have looked forward for years.
>
> I have loved my work; I have loved people and my play; but always I have been uplifted by the thought that what I have done well will live long and justify my life, that what I have done ill or never finished can now be handed on to others for endless days to be finished, perhaps better than I could have done.
>
> And that peace will be my applause.
>
> One thing alone I charge you. As you live, believe in life! Always human beings will live and progress to a greater, broader, and fuller life.
>
> The only possible death is to lose belief in this truth, simply because the great end comes slowly, because time is long.
>
> Goodbye.

Messages of condolence from institutions, organizations, and individuals in all walks of life came to his widow by the thousands. Kenya's Honorable Mr. Jomo Kenyatta wrote, "News of the death of your husband and my old friend has brought great sorrow to me and the people of Kenya. The world will always remember his long life of dedication to the cause of complete freedom of Africa and his vision of pan-Africanism. Our loss in this great statesman can never be replaced."

And the evening following the burial, Kwame Nkrumah made a special broadcast to the nation:

> We mourn the death of Dr. William Edward Burghardt Du Bois, a great son of Africa. . . . Dr. Du Bois in a long life

span . . . achieved distinction as a poet, historian, and sociologist. He was an undaunted fighter for the emancipation of colonial and oppressed people and pursued this objective throughout his life.

The fields of literature and science were enriched by his profound and searching scholarship, a brilliant literary talent, and a keen and penetrating mind. The essential quality of Dr. Du Bois' life and achievement can be summed up in a single phrase, "intellectual honesty and integrity."

It was the late George Padmore who described Dr. Du Bois as the greatest scholar the Negro race has produced and one who always upheld the right of Africans to govern themselves.

I asked Dr. Du Bois to come to Ghana to pass the evening of his life with us and also to spend his remaining years in compiling an encyclopedia Africana, a project which is part of his whole intellectual life.

We mourn his death. May he live in our memory not only as a distinguished scholar, but a great African patriot. Dr. Du Bois is a phenomenon. May he rest in peace.

## X

## Black Bodies in Exile

Peace for Du Bois. . . . But no peace for me. First, Eve returned to America. Her decision to leave was not sudden but was the culmination of our growing inability to decide on what we wanted from each other, and ultimately, I imagine, what we intended to do with our lives. Eve stood closer to the level of decision making. What was missing in the relationship was a basic sense of direction, which we agreed should come from me. I loved her. And like most women who can share in this wonderful emotion, she wanted to get married. But every ingredient in marriage I had grown up with had been thrown in disarray.

Rightly, Eve defined this confusion as irresponsibility, insecurity, and a lack of motivation to take what we mutually

had and create something positive. I agreed. But my apprehensions went much further. My only conception of marriage had come out of the wilderness of my American experiences. I had seen the right and the left, the Negro, black and the white. From there, not only was I beginning to question the effectiveness of such a relationship but also to reject most of the values which went into making such a situation possible. I had seen beautiful individuals enter the sacred togetherness, only to end up hating each other. I rejected such statements as "Well, he [or she] was not the *right* person," "What they needed was a little more understanding," "Well, they just didn't love each other enough."

Certainly there was some truth in these characterizations, but at the bottom of them all, I saw what I thought was a far more fundamental dilemma, which challenged the very nature of the institution itself. How was it possible to have a reasonable, healthy, and creative marriage in a society which programed you into neurosis? How could I function in a world of competitive and inhuman values and then function sanely at home with a set of compassionate ones? And given the awareness and acceptance of this objective reality, what secret power could I muster in my private strength to fight off the inevitable bitterness and hostility which hung over the threshold of American households? Add to these problems my black skin, and the level of human alienation must rise. How was I as a black male to give credence to my manhood in a white male racist chauvinistic society?

What I could not explain was that the crisis of the Western marriage, especially for Blacks, was not substantially a result of personal inadequacies, but the inability of its members to create new norms which were consistent with their political and social experiences. Our society had trained us to have *dates* but had not prepared us to form meaningful relationships. What should be the definition of "love" for people who have been oppressed? Is black manhood an American myth? What is the role of the black female in such a situation? Education of the children? And more important, since none of these questions can be answered in one generation, what kind of marriage can we have in the interim?

Eve accused me of rationalization and an inability to surmount the personal hostilities I had internalized as a result of my mother and father, and alternatively offered me the black

guide to the human heart. I agreed but attempted to show her that the failure of our family and most of the other families I knew was in part a manifestation of these very problems. As far as her black guide was concerned, I was only beginning to find my way. But then, how can you convince a woman in love? In any case we could not come to terms, and Eve arrogantly left, saying that when I was ready to deal with her, she would return.

In those days it took me a while to recoup from such setbacks. The little peace I found was suddenly interrupted. Eve hadn't been gone a week before I was visited by two agents from the CIA. Naturally they didn't call themselves that; as I remember, they represented themselves as having some vague connection with the United States Information Service. And as I was an American national, they were "concerned with my safety and protection." I must admit that at first I tended to accept their obvious credentials. My status in the country was rather tenuous: no contacts, no immediate job prospects, no return ticket, and a temporary visa which was up for expiration. Later, after they questioned me exhaustively, I had every reason to suspect them of being with the CIA.

The talkative agent was black (better call him colored) and the note-taking agent was white. (Political integration in the tropics.) They knew almost everything about me, even treasured trivia which had gone from my memory. They asked such questions as "Why are you here?" "Who sent you?"; questions about Du Bois and other people, whom I did not know; and a thousand other questions which made little sense to me. I answered only one question directly. "Why am I here? To get a nice sun tan."

At the end of the inquisition they cautioned me to "stay clear of the dissident expatriate element in Ghana" and *strongly recommended* that I leave before I got myself in real trouble. Finally they left.

Now I was puzzled and a little anxious. Why had they really come? Suppose they had been seen visiting me by the Ghanaian Central Intelligence? I walked around in my university room for almost four hours, trying to figure everything out. What would I do? . . . Wendell was out of town. . . . If only Eve were here. . . . Eventually, without coming out for dinner, I worried myself to sleep.

The next morning, bright and early, I went to visit an Afro-American who was subletting a professor's bungalow until school started in October. I wanted to share my experience and get some general advice. I had met a few members of the Afro-American community, but except for Wendell and a man called Preston King, most of them had said very little about politics.

"Hello. Anyone home? It's Leslie Lacy," I said as I knocked on the screen door."

"We're here. Come in," the woman replied rather indifferently.

In the room with the Afro woman were two South African friends. I had not met, except in the States, any black South African. I had heard from summer students at the university, and also from Wendell, that Ghana was a political sanctuary for South African freedom fighters. Nkrumah, consistent with his belief in African unity, had restored their dignity by giving these landless revolutionaries jobs, free social services, and a lively political environment in order to continue, from Accra, their efforts to overthrow the white fascist government in South Africa. Also, it was common knowledge that the South African refugees and the American Afros had a very close relationship both politically and socially. In fact, one of the prominent Afro women was married to one of the political intellectuals in the Pan-Africanist Congress, an all-African freedom movement which had successfully cut itself from the African National Congress, a group comparable to the American Communist party, at least ideologically.

I was quickly introduced to the South African brothers, who did not smile when I smiled, and the sister asked me to sit down.

"Well, Mr. Lacy, what brings you here at this hour?" Her words were very businesslike, and her eyes looked into mine.

"Let me say first of all that it is a pleasure to meet genuine freedom fighters. As you probably know, we have a lot of brothers in the States who preach revolution but very few men like yourselves, who are willing to make the personal sacrifices you undoubtedly have to make."

"Get to the point, Mr. Lacy. The reason for your visit?" Her voice was sweet, but I had the feeling that she was very impatient.

"Sure." I quickly responded and lit up a cigarette. "Well,

yesterday two white men—one black, the other white, and both American—came to see me. They asked me a lot of questions, mostly about the political situation here, and I have reason to believe that they were working for the Central Intelligence Agency."

"How do you know that?" asked the sister. "Has your experience endowed you with the vision to spot the CIA?"

"No, not really."

"So how could you tell?" She was now just a bit cynical.

"Well." I paused. "I just thought they might be."

"Okay. So two asses from the CIA came to see you. What does that have to do with your visit here?"

"I just thought I should tell somebody."

"Why us?" She sounded like the Negro fellow I had tried to introduce myself to in the lunchroom my first days in Boston.

"Well, because you are in the Afro-American community, and I was a little anxiety ridden and had no one else to talk with."

"What Afro-American community are you talking about?"

"The one here in Ghana."

"Have you ever seen it?"

"Not exactly."

"Does it have officers and a constitution?"

"I don't know."

"Then, Mr. Lacy, how can you speak about an Afro-American community?"

"Well, because it's common knowledge that there is one." I was somewhat uneasy at this point.

"Did the CIA tell you that?" Her voice was deadly serious. They all stared at me intently.

"Now, wait a minute. Why are you playing games with me? Two men came to my room and questioned me, and I felt that you could give me some advice."

"Mr. Lacy. That is your name, is it not?"

"Yes, it is." Now I was just a little annoyed, but underneath, I was a bit frightened.

"No one is playing games," she continued. "I just find it rather strange, quite strange, that you would come here to tell us about the CIA."

"Maybe this is the season for recruiting agents," the South African called Joe said sarcastically. The others laughed.

"Then why would they come to me?"

"Now, you can answer that better than we can."

"I resent that tone in your voice."

"First of all, Negro, you don't come into my house and resent anything. If there is any resentment here, it will come from me." She was firm and combative.

"But—"

"We have," the sister interrupted, "to go now. I suggest you take your problem to the local authorities, or better still, to the American embassy. Good day, Mr. Lacy." She got up and showed me out the door.

Nervously I returned to my room, to nurse a now worse case of paranoia. That evening a group of men from the Afro-American community came calling. I happily greeted them and instantly repeated—this time without interruption—my encounter with the CIA. They believed only one thing: that I got excited when I talked. They listened like indifferent men who are convinced of your crime and pretend to be concerned, hoping that you will confess. That was enough for me. I showed them out.

Months passed, and before long, a lively and healthy bunch of students returned from their between-term holiday. I enrolled as a graduate student in the Institute of African Studies and got a job as an instructor in the Department of Political Science. I assumed that my political loyalties had been confirmed, and from time to time I had seen and had had friendly informal conversations with different members of the community of black bodies exiled in Ghana.

Black bodies in Ghana? A Ghanaian friend of mine called us that because he said we were weird. "Weird" may not have described us, but we were probably strange to some, disjointed to others. On the whole I think we were a rather fascinating group, joined together in an amorphous community to express from different points of experience and knowledge our dislike and outrage for American racialism. Out of that madness we had come to this West African state, pressed by the words of Countee Cullen—"What is Africa to me?"—hoping to find for an incurable American sickness a drug of identity, a feeling of kinship with Africa and its "strong bronzed men . . . women from whose loins I sprang."

Consciously and unconsciously our presence was not just a second to that motion which had indicted America. More sig-

nificantly, we were a confirmation, of immense importance, of those black voices—some loud, like Marcus Garvey, some adventurous, like Paul Cuffee, clever, like Martin Robinson Delany, some speaking about the pyramids as our dear Langston did, crying "among the skyscrapers"—which (however romantic, forgotten, or denied) have always, since the first day, damned the New World and cried out for the Old. And in rejecting America, for whatever reason, we had carried forth this glorious history. No, we did not speak Hausa, Twi, Akan, or Ga; our language and values had come from the States, from reservations of America, which had never become *America* because we were of African descent; and that fact—and that alone—established our historical legitimacy. Without arrogance, our presence in the country forged the link between the New World and the Old and made Ghanaian political independence complete. That occurred to me when I saw Du Bois. One of us had made all this possible. Because he had started it. True, there had been slave revolts, other men, other causes, and other forces, past and present, traditional and modern, which produced the complex pattern of independence. But as *Ghana* was the autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah, *African Freedom* was the autobiography of W. E. B. Du Bois. And we were a part of him. Strange, isn't it? I had more history there than I had in America, and by extension, more involvement in the revolution than the average Ghanaian.

It was beautiful—a day-to-day history, a living history. If you entered the country, you probably would see a group of Afros drinking beer at the airport hotel. If you stayed in that hotel or another and watched a television program you liked, you'd have to thank Shirley Du Bois because she was the director. If you wanted a book or speech written or to talk to the editor of the country's leading magazine, the *African Review*, the man to see was Julian Mayfield. Need Julian's magazine in the French edition? See Richard Wright's daughter Julia—absolutely beautiful—but don't touch, because she's got an Algerian husband. Trouble with language? Don't worry, because there's an Afro to teach you at the Institute of Languages. Need an artist? Got three: Tom Feelings, Ted Pontiflet, Herman Bailey. And if you don't like artists, what about a sculptor? Just ask for Ray. Designer? Architect? Max Bond (M.A., Harvard School of Design), Jerry Bard (M.A.,

University of Paris). Advisor for a president? Go to Legon and ask for Preston King. Want to have fun, real fun—need a dancer, singer, poetry? See Maya Maka at the Institute of African Studies. Need someone to build what Max designs? See Frank Robertson and the other brothers at All Afro; they deal in heavy industry. Need a good doctor who is developing new techniques in tropical medicine? See Julian's lovely wife, Dr. Ana Livia Corderia. Want a creative children's book? See Jean Bond. Historian? Dr. Lewis. Have bad teeth? See Bobby Lee, and if you don't like him, his pretty wife, Dr. Sarah Lee, is right next door. Business? What kind?—legitimate, illegitimate, honest, underground, some other kind? Well, ask me, and I'll whisper it to you. Need a man of honor and integrity? Got a lot of them, but you can start with Jim Lacy, my namesake. Want a scholar? Well, now, there's Dr. St. Clair Drake, and if he's too radical, see Dr. Martin Kilson. Want some soul? Ask for Jerry Harper. Want a real pretty girl (Southern too) with a lot of talent? Ask for Miss Lucretia Collins. If you want to go back to the States, go see Curtis Morrow; every hurt in our history is in his face. Want to see a happy Afro family? Go to Legon and ask to see the McCleans. Want charm, beauty, and intelligence? See Sylvia Boone; we all love her. Need a French master? See Wendell, he's a good friend of mine and a fine scholar. Want to start a revolution? See Vicky Garvin and Alice Windom. And for the women, how about a lover, a sixty-minute man replete with an authoritarian discussion about the history of China? Go to Tema and just ask for Max; he'll fix you up. Need a quick course in journalism? See the director at the Ghana School of Journalism; he is a brother too. Need a photographer who talks a lot? Well, go to Job 600 and get Earl Grant. Want to laugh, have fun, and see black people who have gotten the white man off their backs? Go to the YWCA in Accra any day at noon; you'll find them, sitting at their same table with their Ghanaian friends, having a ball, and you'll probably find me there too.

These people, and many others I have not named, were our tribe in Ghana. Like most tribes, clans, ethnic groups, or whatever, we had leaders and followers, assorted interest-class differentiation and political attitudes. Although each of us had the final say over his individual fate, there tended to

be three distinct sectors in the community: the Politicals, the Nonpoliticals, and the Opportunists.

For lack of a better description, the Politicals can be called professional protesters. Many of them had been influenced by the same revolutionary ideology, and most had had similar activist experiences, in France, America, or England. The Politicals had had, as I did before coming to Ghana, connections—ties or membership involvement—with the white left in the countries they had come from. But they had dissolved or modified these connections for a more pan-Africanist perspective. Most of the men were married to European women, and the black women, except two, were single or divorced and faced the usual problem of chauvinism in a male-dominated society. The majority of the political exiles were near or over thirty, well educated or highly talented in literary and artistic ways. All were religiously loyal to Nkrumah, zealously rationalizing his political moves, and generally, if not always ostensibly, following the ruling party's line.

From the point of view of the government and from the vantage point of their various jobs, this minority in the community had a considerable amount of power. What they said or didn't say carried weight. When the government or party (a procedural distinction, since in substance they were synonymous) wanted an official statement, they were the ones who were consulted. Moreover, since, as a West Indian writer said, "They walked in the corridors of power," they had direct access to the mass media and could be as critical of any political position as they wished—just as long as their stand was not at variance with the prevailing party ideology. Like only a very few others in the country, they had a direct line to the President, as well as intimate associations with some of his key advisors. The President used their skills, including their literary talents, for speech writing; took their advice rather seriously. In every sense, they identified with and were a part of the Ghanaian ruling elite.

Such benefits of power usually carry correlative burdens; and so it was with this Afro elite. They were watchdogs in the community and generally responsible for the activity within it. Negroes believed to be working for the CIA or carrying out subversive activities against the state always sent waves of fear and anxiety through the group. Its position of trust and power was always vulnerable. From inside and outside the

party, Nkrumah's enemies were always trying to discredit the Politicals, either to weaken their position as an expatriate force or to embarrass the government. They were also attacked from the inner circle, by Ghanaian and European friends of the president who resented or hated them for their ideology, privileges, or more often than not, simply because they were Afro-Americans. Beyond all this, their power rested upon the overall stability of the CPP. Any day, hour, second, power can shift right or left, depending upon the exigencies of the moment, the strength of the opposition, or unrest in the army. A move to the right would have decreased their power, and a move to the left could have had the reverse effect. Either way, your position would change, and you would inevitably take on more friends or more enemies, probably both.

Being on guard against both external and internal forces coming at your heart produces a strange kind of head. You *must* suspect everyone, since you can never be sure. Everyone, Afro-Americans, even ones you rallied with in Harlem, are potential CIA agents or potential enemies. Every change in government or army and every presidential trip abroad is another headache to consider. In time, therefore, as an exile, you develop what I call a "refugee" mentality. The moves you make appear to reflect political acumen, but in reality they are based on acute anxiety, blind acceptance of an ideology you vaguely comprehend, a confused fusion of the political rhetoric you learned back home (which of course has nothing to do with the present political culture), and equally irrelevant, what you read in the daily newspaper. Naturally, you call all this nonsense "revolutionary," and are so smothered by this cloak that if real agents like the CIA . . . if CIA agents came to the country (as I'm sure they did), they could probably move around freely, because nothing in your political training would have prepared you to detect them.

I should say here that this group had a close alliance with the group of South African freedom fighters, which suffered from the same disposition. Small wonder that fascism still rides herd in our country. By default, Julian Mayfield was the unofficial leader of this neurotic contingent. He was very much aware of the psychology of his flock. But little could he do, since he spent most of his hours watching out for the knife against his own neck, trying to convince his immediate

supervisor that a monthly magazine should come out each month, and doing his own writing. He worked on the average of fourteen hours a day just to keep ahead.

In the Politicals' behalf—one of their many virtues—they were honest, individuals of integrity, and in spite of their lack of revolutionary sophistication, devoted to their work. They could be trusted and did only what they believed. Also, they believed that Nkrumah was honest and committed and that some of the problems of political change—inevitable in these countries, given the world situation in which independence occurred—would be solved. If more of the Ghanaians had possessed their sense of history and honesty, at the very least there would have been much less corruption.

The Nonpoliticals would have faced the same problems, but fortunately they were not interested in "what was happening." I found that rather amazing, since what was happening would nevertheless affect their lives. Younger, they were the "hippies" of Ghana, and unlike the white hippies in America, had seen the worst in America, the side which had twisted and broken much of their spirit. Psychologically, Africa was good for them. It allowed them moments to think, relax, and feel a sense of development in a changing culture. Unlike the Politicals, with very few exceptions, they lived among the people and learned considerably more about the "real culture" than their radical brothers. Neither were they dogmatic believers. Conditioned by the hard steel of American racism, they were also hard, tough, and cynical; they had patience, a wait-see, or as the Ghanaians say "wait-small," philosophy which gave them a comfortable home among the urban masses. Most were artists and unpublished writers, a few students, and one, maybe two, did nothing. They were for Nkrumah, too, but expressed their support by loving the people they met. They taught the Ghanaian high school youngsters (who always flocked to them because they were "cool") black American music, especially jazz.

Tom Feelings, a talented artist from Brooklyn, led the Nonpoliticals, although neither he nor they wanted, needed, or would have approved had they thought of themselves in that way. But he stood out like a happy little boy, always joyful, always smiling, and drawing the happy children who smiled back. You could see the change in his work. His Brooklyn children looked angry, as our children feel as they

grow up. Africa allowed Tom to live his youth all over, and this time he would be black, strong, and free. Tom did not know about their insides, their hurtings, their lack of nourishment—black bodies deformed by malaria, bodies which would not get old. Tom saw what he wanted and needed to see, and that was beautiful, because he created something, made them happy when they saw themselves; and that made him part of their lives.

And Ted Pontiflet, a fine artist too, became the model for many Ghanaian children. When he talked to them about music, I pretended to read, but listened too. The thought of coming to appreciate Charlie Parker, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Horace Silver in Africa blew my mind, because I was learning from men, brother men, beautiful men whom I probably would not have met back home. I had come from a mansion; Tom, Ted, Ray, Curtis from tenements, but they were giving and I was taking, because they, collectively and individually, were always closer to what we all were.

Naturally and understandably this group resented the power of the Politicals. Not out of envy, but because the existence of power creates pressures, conformity, obedience, and all our hippies wanted was a new sun, an undiscovered humanity, and as Ray said, "a little time to be me."

The Opportunists were many, always coming, always leaving, always stealing, never feeling—just going along with the tide. When business was right, Nkrumah was right; when business was bad, Nkrumah was bad. Men like these are always around. They are seen in American communities, and they look and smell the same out here.

Leslie Lacy was shaped by the Toms and Julians. (And once or twice I sold some dollars on the Lebanese black market.) Whatever failings they had, I had. I was of both sectors. Sometimes, through me the community could express a wholeness. Both groups were honest, naïve—each in its own way trying to find itself. When Smith of Southern Rhodesia declared "his country" (isn't that a laugh?) unilaterally independent from Britain, Nkrumah called for the mobilization of a people's army. The Political males stayed up all night convincing me that I should join up with them, even if it meant the loss of citizenship. Finally I felt that it was the logical extension of what I said I believed in, so I—and all the Politicians—signed up. Heading the list were the brothers from the

world of music and art, the first volunteers in the country. The Politicals were surprised. I was not.

Most Ghanaians viewed us, the Afros, as a community, and as far as they were concerned, we were the same breed. The more politically conscious Ghanaians, including some students and intellectuals, were aware of our political differences and levels of involvement and related to us accordingly. But overall, given their own ethnic orientations, they tended to view us as a group, because like any other tribe in the country, we spoke the same language: a language which was critical of America, a language which defended Nkrumah, a tongue which constantly spoke of brotherhood, which never complained about inefficiency or the corruption we knew about. We wanted so much to ask for love that we sometimes lied in order not to hurt someone's feelings; and sometimes we did a little Uncle Tomming (seems strange, doesn't it?) to convince the Ghanaians that, in spite of everything, we were glad to be Home.

And sometimes we didn't want to be around any Ghanaians. Blacks passing through or newly arrived invariably accused us of segregating ourselves from the people. We just said, "Okay, man," or, "Whatever you say, sister," and kept on doing our thing.

## XI

## The Case of Wendell Jean Pierre

Nearing the turn of my first year at the university, a year full of new discoveries, there developed a bitter and protracted struggle between the university and the government. The character of this particular confrontation was new, but the cause was the result of years of government-university controversy about the objectives of education in a developing society. For almost two weeks the university had been under constant attack from the government press. Not a new occurrence, but now it was coupled with irate threats to specific

staff and students. The *masses* (CPP activists, screaming market women, trade unionists, and idle streetwalkers that they had picked up on their way) had stormed Ghana's highest institution of learning, breaking windows, carrying out acts of physical violence, making political speeches about socialism, and screaming and shouting, "Deport the expatriates; discipline the Ghanaians."

In the middle of this scary confusion, Wendell Jean Pierre paid me a sudden visit. He had a strange look about him, like a man looks when he brings you tragic news, news which has affected him, news which he does not understand but is forced to tell you nevertheless.

"Have you heard the news?" Wendell asked, smiling just a bit to cover his real look.

"I guess everybody has," I said indifferently. "From the looks of things, Nkrumah's people will take over the university."

Wendell walked around the room, and as he always did, looked at me in a questioning manner. "That's not what I mean. I'm talking about me."

"What about you?"—again indifferently. I fumbled through my notes on the thesis I had just started.

"I'm being deported."

"Yeah, and so is Nkrumah," I said jokingly.

"It's true, Leslie. The Ghana government is deporting me. I have twenty-four hours to leave the country." He handed me the deportation order, which read:

> Dear Dr. Pierre,
>
> Your presence in the country is injurious to the health and welfare of the Ghanaian revolution. You are no longer welcome in our People's Republic. You have 24 hours to leave the country.
>
> By order of the President,
> Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah

"They have to be kidding. Look, Wendell, somebody's playing a joke on you." I handed him back the deportation order and continued looking through my index cards.

Wendell came up behind me, gripped my shoulders, and in a voice I had never heard from his lungs, said, "Les, this is not a joke. Police have surrounded my house, abused my family. It's dead serious."

I was shocked, confused, but because I knew Wendell, my belief still was not complete. There must be some mistake," I said with authority. "Look, have you told Julian about this? What about Preston? Have you told him?" But Wendell did not hear my questions. His eyes were fixed on the wall in my little room in Mensah Sabbah Hall. His crying was disturbing, irritatingly disturbing. But what can you tell a man who is being put out of the country he has come to love? Who would do something like this to him?

"Les, my whole life will be ruined."

I put my arms around him and tried to assure him that the Afro-American community would do all that was in its power to make things right. After a few minutes he got himself together and went home to see after his family.

That was the beginning of an ugly experience. I could not for a moment believe that Wendell Jean Pierre, the Wendell that Eve had met in Paris, the Wendell of Legon, whom I had heard over and over in his university classes trying desperately and painstakingly to get his students to understand the revolutionary thoughts of black men in the Third World —this Wendell, a man I knew, respected, and loved—could be working for the Central Intelligence Agency. There had been a gross error, a tragic mistake that a man—a man like Father—would make if he had lost his mind and developed in his insanity the unmitigated gall to accuse Malcolm X of being a CIA. The accusation would be absurd and heretical, and if you had a gun, you would probably kill the man. Certainly Wendell (or for that matter, any of us) was not Brother Malcolm, but I was unequivocally certain that Malcolm would have trusted him as I did. Fortunately, and shortly after Wendell left my room, I received a telephone call from Preston King informing me that the twenty-four hour deadline had been extended. Now we had time to work on a defense for Wendell, which we hoped would go through our channels directly to the president. The first thing was to rally support in the Afro-American community. Wendell had been an effective and serious voice at every level of life in our tribe. In French, he and Preston could discuss their letters to Fanon's wife, and with the "hippies" he was equally as responsive and involved. But the Afros, individually or collectively, did not come to his defense. We knocked on door

after door, phoned until our ears were full of clicks and rings, and the response was always negative: "He's gone for the weekend." "Never did like that nigger." "Should'na got mixed up with that devil." "Told you so." "My name is Hess and I ain't in this mess." "I knew that nigger couldn't have believed all that shit he was saying." "Well, Pierre is all right, and I'd like to help, but . . ." And so it was, on and on.

I could understand, although I had to condemn it, the self-interested attitudes of the few, very few (brothers and sisters) who were afraid to get involved. Preston and I were both being watched, and the white cloud of guilt by association was beginning to form. But the overwhelming majority of our tribe members refused to form a defense committee because they were convinced of Wendell's guilt. Now, that was odd. Yesterday, the day before, all the days of their lives with Wendell, such a thought would have offended them, and if anyone of them accused him, the accuser would have found his neck on the block. With the exception of Julian Mayfield, who wrote a letter to the President in Wendell's defense, every other soul was on ice.

Because the Ghana government had accused him, he was guilty. Who were we to question the sovereign and progressive black government? We had never worked for the CIA, and did not, therefore, know its member agents. Maybe Wendell had infiltrated? But these doubts—questions however true, probing—did not enter my head. All I know was that the day before Wendell was cut down, he was my friend, our friend, a militant and understanding giant in the Afro-American hierarchy. Now the Ghana government had said that its judgment was clearer than ours and we had given him up.

Fear can cause people to do strange things; it is the timeless excuse for having acted irrationally. But our tribe was affected by a deeper illness, a sickness which went far beyond our inability to stand up for a principle, and in a very real sense, defined the twisted meaning of our black bodies in exile and the overall existential content of our human alienation. We had come from America because we hated it too much. Feeling ourselves sinking in a world of all-absorbing nations, worlds, parties, creeds and spirits, we, like others all over the damned earth, desperately needed something to hold on to. Nkrumah's kingdom was our promised land, a cubistic panacea for our lost souls. And in it, we lived honestly, did

our jobs and whatever was our thing. It didn't matter if it was leaking, standing, falling, growing, or stopping; it was here, and we were in it.

Black, yes. But like most Americans, we were bent over by pragmatism, mixed up by poppycock. Because we saw the pragmatism and rejected the poppycock and ran into the kingdom's door, we thought we were free at last. And we were. But rather than do something un-American—like think—we simply got a robe from the kingdom keepers and covered over our self-hatred. We had power, prestige, and other things America could never give us; in addition, we had new norms, which we happily believed in. But we never used any of these things to create an effective ideology which our presence would have made useful to those of us still in America. We never understood power politics, least of all the Ghanaian kind. We could not be critical, as all creative revolutionaries must be, from a point of commitment. (We confused that with disloyalty.)

So when the government said, "Put Wendell out," we retreated, not so much in fear, but because we had not developed the tool to view Wendell in the changing complexities of an African political culture. We did not know about political deals; right and left movements; you take this and I'll take that; political envies and jealousies, suspicions, disputes; international economy, American pressures—all the dirty work politicians all over the world do every day. For the first time in our lives, we had power, black power, real power—not screams from the road. Nkrumah needed us, as we needed him. For we were a radical extension of thirty million other people in a country he constantly attacked. If the widow of Dr. Du Bois, Shirley Graham Du Bois, had said no, deals would have been made, and Wendell might have remained. Like a chief in Ghana said later, "They sold you once and they'll sell you again."

Preston King, his devoted wife Hazel, Julian, and I put Wendell and his family on the plane. It was evening, the air filled with mosquitoes and suspicion. Waiting to hide from the sun.

The black bodies in exile. . . . We were the believers, the affirmers of Nkrumah's justice. And from that perspective, Wendell Jean Pierre was a guilty nigger who had come to Africa to help the white man. We had not ascertained his

guilt. We knew nothing about it. And if Nkrumah or any of his irretrievably corrupt ministers called for Julian Mayfield's blood the next morning, Shirley Graham Du Bois' the next day, and the beautiful person called Jim Lacy the day afterward—until we all had been asked for—we would have all left, blaming the white man as usual, never questioning, never knowing. Always believing.

## XII

## The Ghanaian Revolution

And the revolution went on. Wendell was one of four university teachers who were deported; finally, after many years of the party-university dispute, the CPP had achieved a victory. The Irish vice-chancellor, Conor Cruise O'Brien—who had defied the United Nations in the Congo crisis and had exposed Western imperialism operating there in his book *To Katanga and Back*—put up a protracted fight, but he and the university staff which supported him were no match for a government bent on creating a university which paralleled its political objectives.

To the extent that the government wanted to make the University of Ghana at Legon an African university, or as Kwame Nkrumah said, a "socialist university," it was indeed supportable. In Ghana, as elsewhere in Africa, the university had been established as part of the British plan to extend social and political reforms at the end of the Second Great War. Up until that time, Ghanaians who went on for higher education traveled to Europe, especially England and France, or went, as the President had, to America. The training the Africans received, both abroad and at home after the war, was essentially European in content, character, and orientation, and created the usual problems of cultural and intellectual alienation when the skills were finally applied. That is to say, university training, although useful in that it produced needed skills—in medicine, for example—was producing Eng-

lish gentlemen (crudely called black Englishmen) whose manners and orientations often set them apart from the people their training had prepared them to serve. Naturally then, since African independence implies a return to, or revitalization of, African art, culture, and values (which colonial universities had dealt with superficially if at all, since from their racist perspectives, Africans had no history), a new African political culture demanded a complementary intellectual culture, which would serve the new order.

Even before the government-university crisis of 1964, Kwame Nkrumah had moved in this general direction. In 1961, the University College of the Gold Coast had become independent of its mother body, the University of London, and had become the University of Ghana. To strengthen its intellectual autonomy and stabilize its new character, the government had reorganized and established the Institute of African Studies. Yet serious problems remained. The university was still staffed with colonial intellectuals, who still controlled the professorships in most of the departments and ultimately had power—which if not procedural, was indeed substantial—to decide the nature of the courses that were offered. Even in departments like those of economics and African studies (which was still in the hands of "radical and progressive Europeans") there was, given the all-embracing conservative bureaucracy, little anyone could do.

Ghanaian intellectuals formed an interesting elite. There were two main groups and some odd individuals who would no doubt have called themselves "independent thinkers." The pro-government "scholars" were a fascinating lot. Their hearts were in the right place, but their minds were products of schools like New York University, which, even in America, had little functional value. Through their minds, the Party was able to see the inner dynamics of the institution, which of course meant that they were seeing nothing. More often than not, the educators of Ghana's youth simply repeated, but at a higher level, illusions which the party's political intellectuals already had.

To the right of this group stood those who opposed. These gentlemen intellectuals, for the most part well trained in Oxford habits and letters, had never (since they were the heirs apparent to British rule, and of the class Nkrumah had defeated at the national polls) been committed to the politics of

Nkrumah's one-party government. In fact, most of them hated him not only for his "improper" American education but also because they considered his all-embracing power abusive and described his political norms and behavior as "medieval and rather Machiavellian." One professor once said to me, "You know, ole chap, *that* man down in Flagstaff is really unsuited to rule us. He doesn't really have a university education. At Oxford we surely wouldn't take his *training* seriously. . . . The situation, ole boy, is rather frightful. . . . Unlike Ghandi—you remember him, the man in India—Nkrumah with his bushlike tendencies really thinks he is an *Osagyefo*."

These gentlemen of English culture wanted Nkrumah out of the way (he was an embarrassment to "sane and responsible civil government") so that they could have a *proper society*: peopleless politics, acceptable standards of government. *Probably* most wanted British passports, and more than one political party, somewhat along British lines. What was amazing, sometimes a bit tragic, was that in spite of the intense tropical heat, they looked unperturbably comfortable in imported British gray flannel suits. I was constantly amused and never thrown off, because it was Palmer, but on a much higher level.

The best feature in the intellectual desert of cultural exchange was the students. Coming from all parts of the country, proudly bringing their culture with them, they were highly motivated, clever, and strong. Yet they had little faith in the future. Symbolically they were being trained in England, from Oxford high table. (This simply meant that in the dining room of each hall—the halls were designed by a Brazilian architect, after those of Cambridge University—one long King-Arthur-type table, with complementary shields decorating the wall behind it, was reserved for the *fellows* of the hall, who looked down from the little stage it was placed on, onto the future of Ghana, who ate Ghanaian food at low table.) Their *education* was further confused by the presence of the omnipresent Convention People's Party, and student informers to complement the pro-government staff. The students did not generally accept the practice, or what they understood of the ideology, of mass party rule, and considered the practitioners corrupt opportunistic men and women completely lacking a sense of history.

Most of the students were afraid to express their grievances openly, for fear of arrest or the loss of government stipends, on which most depended. They registered their contempt for the Party, which many of them, and their families, had supported while they were in secondary schools, by using party newspapers as supplementary toilet tissue. And at every opportunity they embarrassed the inept government officials who dared speak at open forums. Lacking better models, they tended to express the anti-government sentiments of the Oxonians in their classrooms. To that extent they were practically opportunistic, for they accepted the maids, dining-room stewards, loans, and other privileges which only their government could provide. And they looked forward to a big job, car, and house when they completed their course.

The government, as I have already explained, considered the university a "hotbed of reaction," and by extension, it considered the students "reactionaries." Now, a reactionary person in a socialist context is one who opposes that program, presumably to return to the former or another order, which in the Ghanaian context, could only mean colonial or neocolonial politics. Hence the party was intending to get these "hotbedders" over to its side.

Some clarification is necessary here. First, the Convention People's Party was not a socialist party. It was anticolonial and nationalistic, with certain socialistic and Marxist features, never clearly defined. Outwardly it was similar to parties in Eastern Europe. It represented all the levels—classes if you will—in Ghanaian life, and to that extent, its major appeal, preindependence, was democratically based. But since 1961, when it started losing its support, not only from the intellectuals but also from the populace at large, it had been plagued by serious structural contradictions. Roles, functions, and Party objectives had not been clearly defined, and there was no overall institutional control to get things moving again.

Much of this, one suspects, was inevitable. Nationalist parties struggling for independence, given the general activist nature of their struggle against colonialism, must securely tie down sound ideological and political programs for change. Depending primarily, sometimes exclusively, on political slogans and the general discontent in the society, a nationalist party can—if it is able to deal with other parties and work

out some agreement with the colonials—come into power without a great deal of difficulty. Once there, the problems become more numerous. The party has to stabilize its power, and sometimes that means, as it did in Ghana, and elsewhere in west Africa, suppressing the parties that oppose its program; then the first enemies are created. Also, the party (now government) must now deal with the world, a big world of economics, power politics, and supergovernments, in which you have no *real* say (in spite of your shiny new seat in the U.N.), and a world generally not interested in your new flag, new power, or in you personally. Everything you need or want (or think you need or want) comes from cities you, in your colonial status, helped build, but which you do not control. The money you need to buy these *things* is called dollars, gold, or pounds, none of which you have. Since you are not Cuban or Chinese, the only way to get "dol-lah" is to see what you have and hope the white man will give you a meaningful price. Which, of course, he won't because, again, he is not interested in your development.

Somewhat simplified, but nonetheless true. The best, most skilled, most devoted nationalist leader faces at independence an imperialist and hostile world. If you criticize the order of things, as Nkrumah did, and turn to the communist camp (which in some cases is not an alternative), the imperialists make things that much harder.

Externally and internally the CPP faced the problems I have described. Alone, it could do little against the external problems, and given its structure, little was done with the internal ones. To appreciate what was happening in Ghana, add to these problems two others: corruption and anti-intellectualism. I am not in a position to say that Nkrumah was corrupt, but certainly his ministers and Party chiefs were. And since he did very little about the situation—a situation which ultimately cost him his throne—his personal morality became irrelevant. Now, if that was the case, the student reaction was not to socialism, because it did not exist—except possibly in the mind of Nkrumah, who was described by a sympathetic student as being a "father who heads and loves his family but never figures out how to care for them." Beyond that, even if the Party had been honestly socialist, it still would have encountered opposition from the students. Unquestionably the students were politically conservative.

Being good products of their education, how could they be otherwise? But an honest socialist party with a meaningful program could have involved the students, who were, in spite of their political persuasion, culturally and spiritually very much African. They were young, dynamic, and ready for change, having come to awareness since the Second Global War. They did not want to look back to Britain and had serious reservations about America.

But they had no leadership. In Ghana, and elsewhere, nationalist parties are understandably (given their experiences under colonialism) anti-intellectual, anti-students, and so on. Many in the rank and file are insecure, because they were deprived of education during the colonial period, and also because education in the West, and by extension, in its colonies abroad, is elitist in nature and breeds contempt and snobbery for those below. If the CPP leaders had understood this and worked out a forum in which these conflicts could have been resolved, its brand of nation building (assuming its honesty) would have had more prospects.

Against this background Harold Duggan (an undergraduate student in economics from the Virgin Islands, and the first West Indian, like I was the first black American, to get a degree from the University of Ghana), Lebrette Hesse (a Ga from Accra and a third-year student of law), and I organized, three weeks after the deportation, the Marxist Study Forum. Presumptuously and optimistically we resolved that if we could develop a program in which radical and socialist ideas could be expressed openly, we would be helping the government and at the same time motivating the students to join the Party in an effort to reform it. We had a lot of gall and were insanely young enough to think that we could get away with it. By then we had a rather firm knowledge of politics in the country, and what we didn't know was researched. When we had worked out our program, we took it over to Dr. Preston King, the only person we felt we could trust at this point, for advice. In a very real sense he was the intellectual and moral force behind us, without which we would not have been able to achieve that success which we did.

We knew that such an organization as we had in mind would eventually create controversy, so we had to plan very carefully. Understandably, Hesse was a little anxious during

the planning phase: at the worst, Harold Duggan and I would be deported, but poor Hesse would be spending the rest of his years in a security prison. On the positive side, I had considerable experience in organizing. I remember telling two associates about the two communists who had infiltrated a Booker T. Washington club McDaniel had organized in Boston. (Their strategy amused Duggan, who, being young and impressionable, made it his official strategy, which he egotistically called Dugganism.) These two white boys, also students in the Boston area, wanted to join our club. Over the opposition of Mac, they were allowed membership. One day the one who did all the talking suggested that we type up and duplicate the minutes so that they could be distributed at each meeting in order to save time. Being lazy Negroes, naturally we protested, until they happily agreed to do it themselves. After several months Mac brought me some interesting information. Comparing the written minutes to the duplicated ones, we noticed slight and subtle differences. Where we had the word "Negro," the typed copy read "human"; where we had "civil rights," "human freedom"; where we had "deprived," they had "alienated"; where we had "advance," they had "struggle"; and on and on. With this and other tactics, they took over the club in six months.

We chose the name "Marxist" for tactical reasons. We couldn't have called it the Nkrumahist Forum because no one except the CPP students and staff would have come; while that would have been all right, we wanted a much broader base. Also, it would have been assumed that we were working for the Party. The Party would probably have preferred the other name, but we assumed that it would leave us alone if we seemed to be going in its general direction. And the university officials, while not totally approving of our "improper grouping," would probably allow us to function, given their vague rhetoric about academic freedom.

Even so, people assumed all kinds of weird things: some of the students, predictably, thought we were with the Party; others thought we were crazy; the university officials were confused; the government thought we had been put there by Moscow; the American Embassy thought we were Chinese agents; the Afros thought we were CIA agents; and someone from the Chinese embassy came out every Monday at 8:00 to find out in person. Possibly there were a thousand other

assumptions, but they created the necessary protection, and we were allowed to survive.

Our first order of business was to make the club *leftist* and *respectable*. Given the political and intellectual climate at Legon, we became respectable first. Our first speaker was an Englishman. A distinguished scholar from Oxford, teaching economic history at the university, Dr. Kay (whom I moved in with for a short time to update my own political personality) spoke on "Dr. Erich Fromm's Concept of Freedom." What resulted? Well, all of his two hundred students came and took notes (thinking that these might answer exam questions). All of his colleagues were present; fifty other students; members of the diplomatic corps; conservative professors, both Ghanaian and foreign; Chinese; Americans; Afros; CPP officials; and God knows who else. Everything was quiet and academic, and it allowed for different opinions to be expressed. Very Oxford, we served tea and cake after the question period. Everyone left looking forward to the next week, when a distinguished Indian mystic (Oxford, of course) would speak on "Freud, Gandhi, Marx." Everyone was pleased. And who got all the credit? The Marxist Study Forum. The next week we had ten new members: all Dr. Kay's students.

We moved slowly and cautiously. All the members prepared assiduously for each meeting although the Big Three (and Preston) selected the topic, speakers, and made all the arrangements. We advertised in the school and local papers three days before the talk, and the evening before each speech all the fifteen hundred students who sat down to eat in the dining rooms of Legon's five halls read the *Marxist Forum Newsletter* before the steward poured their soup. Each newsletter gave four things: our aims and objectives (ha, ha!); what occurred the past week; the topic for that week; and activities planned for the future. We paid for this out of our pockets and quickly got it back when we started collecting dues. Our private lives had to be just right: (1) talk to *everybody;* (2) be civil; (3) never mention the CPP; (4) go to all the school's socials, church occasionally; (5) do well in school; (6) stay clear of scandals; and (7) be all-around nice guys. And it helped that Duggan was good in soccer and cricket.

In time we virtually controlled three of the newsletters

each hall published weekly, and the two we didn't control were oblibed to publish articles which we wrote each week. Moreover, we became an effective force in student politics. By the end of the year we were five hundred strong.

But let me not exaggerate our good fortunes. We still had an uphill battle. Out of the five hundred, nearly a hundred accepted some variation of socialism as the most rational approach to solving political, cultural, and social problems in new states and tended to look to Cuba as a model without the Soviet strings. The others were more diversified. Some were sympathetic but uncertain; many liked the intellectual freedom the forum achieved; and some joined because it was the most "enjoyable" group on a campus which had very few social and cultural activities. I should also mention that it was hard to know how many students (and also staff) were actually converted by our efforts. I am certain that we converted some, but I am equally certain that many had previously accepted our point of view but had been unable to express it without fear of being identified with the unpopular party.

General observers at the university who may have come to one or more meetings tended to express either of two points of view. Most found the meeting interesting and were somewhat convinced that we were not working for Nkrumah. More specifically, about 30 per cent of the Ghanaian staff approved of our efforts because they had not been government inspired, motivated, or controlled. In fact, many of them liked the forum precisely for that reason. As one professor put it, "At least you chaps have something which is free."

Another 50 per cent were actively opposed for ideological reasons, and half of this group never gave up the idea that Nkrumah was behind us. The others were indifferent, for any number of reasons—like other people, elsewhere in the world, who look askance at political activities. European staff (in a sixty-forty majority at the university) generally did not participate unless invited to speak. Only a few speakers returned to hear other guests. My guess is that Europeans at Legon became a little apprehensive about political activities after the deportations. Nonetheless, about 5 per cent were actively involved.

We had many European speakers for several reasons: they taught the students, and the students respected them; and

most Ghanaians approached to speak were apprehensive. As the forum became more secure and consistent with our original plans, we depended primarily on other Africans and West Indian scholars in the country. We had three speakers from the Afro-American community: Julian Mayfield, who spoke on "Robert Williams and the Monroe Movement"; his wife, Dr. Corderia, who spoke on the "Revolution in Puerto Rico"; and Preston King, who gave a lecture on "Pan-Africanism and Marxism."

## XIII

## The Coming of Malcolm X

"Malcolm who?"

Julian was shocked by my question and looked at me in disgust and disappointment. A second before, he was in a different mood. He had just jumped out of his yellow convertible Sprite, intensely elated, very un-Julian for that time of the morning. I could only think that he was coming to tell me that for once his monthly magazine was coming out on schedule. Before I could work up a complementary state of mind (a necessary adjustment if Julian Mayfield is to converse with you when excited), he had shouted, "Malcolm X is coming! We've got to get ourselves together!"

Now, emphatically enunciating each syllable, Julian said, "Malcolm X. Remember him? He's our leader from Harlem. Now, Harlem, in case you've forgotten, is in that sick society we just left. . . . But, that's right, you probably never went to Harlem. . . . You've been in universities all your life."

"Okay, brother," I interrupted. "I guess I deserved that. Is Malcolm really coming to Ghana?"

"That's what I hear."

"Who told you?"

"That's not important right now."

"When is he coming?"

"I don't know exactly, but he's definitely making it, and we've got to be ready."

"Maybe the Marxist Forum can present him," I said enthusiastically.

"Maybe."

"Why do you say 'maybe' like that?"

"Because we have to be very careful. . . . Must consider Malcolm's image."

"Right. I get it. His followers back home might not understand why a nationalist was presented by a Marxist forum."

"Les, you meet with your group and tentatively work out a program. But please, de-emphasize the socialistic rhetoric and concentrate on nationalistic themes. . . . Remember, Malcolm has his own stuff to run down. All we have to do is provide him with a platform."

"Wait a second." I hesitated. "Maybe the Marxist Forum shouldn't present him at all." For the first time in a long time I was thinking about my own experiences in America.

"In a sense you're right," Julian said as he paced the floor, thinking. "But you have the biggest and best organization on the campus, and you're closer to the problems which Malcolm will probably speak about. Handled very carefully, I think we can pull it off."

For the next two hours, over some early morning gin, we planned our strategy. By midday, half of the Afro-American community, representatives from all the sectors, were at Julian's house—twenty short feet from the house where Du Bois had lived. (Or as Julian used to say, "Twenty short feet from my own history.") Getting a group of the Afros there was not easy. Some were married to white women, and we wanted them without their wives, not so much out of respect for Malcolm, but primarily because of the sisters. So, painstakingly and discreetly, we visited these brothers, greeted their wives, took them outside, and ran down the program. They all understood and promised to come alone.

What a meeting! The sense of Malcolm brought a consensus which was rarely apparent in our exiled community, and out of this unanimity came the Malcolm X Committee, with Julian as the chairman, Maya Maka as vice-chairman, Vicky Garvin and Alice Windon as secretaries; naturally, given my success at the university, there was no doubt about who was to be the organizer. We arranged a busy speaking schedule

and contacted our friends in the communications media. They promised us their "finest" hours. We worked twenty-four hours a day calling Afro-Americans throughout the country, telling them that the "tall, red man from Harlem" was on his way. Nothing was left to the innocence of spontaneity. Watching CPP activities, we had learned something about organizing a public meeting, so in the spirit of Nkrumah's political myth making, we were prepared to pack the halls with party activists, trade unionists, political opportunists, screaming market women (replete with their baskets and chickens) and Ghana's non-English-speaking street citizens if an overflowing crowd was not apparent for any of Malcolm's scheduled appearances. Our leader had to have the broadest possible exposure; even an audience with the president was not beyond our reach.

We waited. The first day, then the second, but Malcolm did not arrive; in fact, fifty of us slept in at Julian's place, hoping to greet him. Predictably, someone suggested that he had been kidnaped by the CIA. Naturally, that comment caused some concern, but most of us did not fret, because a thousand other explanations were equally as tenable.

The sight of all those black faces idly talking, waiting, was probably one of the most hilarious in history. An outsider would never have thought that among the serious watchers-for-Malcolm were some of the heaviest drinkers, night-lifers, and women chasers that had ever assembled in one country. Notwithstanding our political involvements, our private lives stood in open contrast to the life that Malcolm X had been leading since he joined the Nation of Islam. Ironically, we looked like the proper Palmer graduate, without the commensurate Palmer training. Out of respect for our disciplined leader, we had temporarily made truces with our inner drives and promised each other that we would abandon our habits until Malcolm left. Giving up a lifelong vice is never easy, especially if the abandonment is abrupt. But we endured, as I imagine a drug addict does, sweating and shaking away his first night in a Muslim mosque.

We all knew that the new-found austerity was temporary however. The red-eyed drinkers who grudgingly poured quarts of lemonade into their systems would return to the cause of their red eyes. The night-lifers, who kept us up all night talking and laughing, would again return to one of the

many Ghanaian open-air clubs; and the women chasers (called "womanizers" by the inhabitants) seemed content with their present celibacy and past memories, undoubtedly dreaming of glorious conquests ahead. (I should add that the Ghanaian women were so beautiful that even bona fide celibates and married men constantly found their vows being tested.)

On a typically hot afternoon of the third day, our waiting came to an unexpected end: He had arrived. Like an army marching toward a review stand, we hustled ourselves into shape, cramped our bodies into the available cars and hurried over to the Ambassador Hotel to meet him.

Acting as if the Lord himself had come, we stormed into the government-owned hotel not only like we owned it but also like we were going to take it over. As usual, it was filled with European businessmen and expatriates, a few Ghanaians doing "business" with them; although undisclosed, the regular security men were undoubtedly present too. All eyes turned to us. Contemptuous glances. We responded accordingly. The whites in the hotel, and also more significantly, the Blacks, represented many in Ghana who hated us because we constantly reminded them that their country had, in spite of itself, radically changed since the "good ole days of British rule." By an ingenious extension, they held us responsible for what was going on in it. A few of us were hopelessly mystified; the rest had no illusions about our status: we were tolerated out of sufferance of Nkrumah, and if they could kill him at eight o'clock, our fate would be his at eight-thirty. A Ghanaian whom I saw that day, and every day, in this or some other hotel had once summarized the prevailing attitude: "You Afro-Americans are too arrogant. You think you are better than we are because you are more civilized. You may fool the common illiterate on the street, but we who know better are not so easily fooled. A few of your people are okay, fine chaps, but most of you and those so-called freedom fighters from South Africa are wasting our precious pounds, and taking jobs that are not rightly yours. If that crazy man who calls himself Osagyefo could be put out, we would put all of you out too. . . . We like the West Indians because they are more like us."

Seeing his face today brought to mind the conversation that had followed.

"Why do you think we are too arrogant?" I had asked.

"Because you think you are. You act like you own this country. You think you are better than we are," the man replied quickly and angrily.

"But that just isn't true. We don't feel arrogant. Most of us came out here to get away from America, to get the white man off our backs, so to speak. . . . The U.S. is a racist society—"

"It may be racist," he interrupted, "but at least you're better off than you are here."

"It depends on what your values are. If you mean that black people have a higher material standard of living, then perhaps I could agree. But that's only a part of what makes a life meaningful. The other parts—peace of mind, sense of dignity, freedom from discrimination—are even more important, because they will determine the *real* value of the few material comforts Blacks receive."

"Rubbish. Tell that to a man in the street, and if he understands your nonsense, I can assure you that he will laugh at you. For in this society money is the difference between living and dying. You say that America is a white country, and being black, you have little freedom. Now take me. I'm black and everything around me is black. Yet even if I had the money to go abroad, I would need both a passport and an exit visa. They are hard to get if you are not rich and powerful; it is a waste of valuable time to try. How long did it take you to get your passport?"

"Two weeks."

"Two weeks! Did you say two weeks?"

"Yes."

"Well, I know Ghanaians who have been waiting for two years. Why? Politics. Look, old chap, there is no freedom here either."

"Why is it so important to travel abroad?"

"If your government had told you that, you would have picketed the passport office. If I did that here, I would be in jail the same day, and then you would have no one to educate you to the real Ghana. Look, Lacy, traveling is a basic freedom. I should have the right to travel, if I can afford it. Why should I let some corrupt official whose wife spends her holidays in the United Kingdom and whose children are too

good to go to the local schools, but not to go to the English schools, tell me that I do not have the same right?"

"Much of what you say is probably true. But sometimes in new states such precautions are necessary for the good of the country. Don't you feel that things will be better in the future?"

"Hell, no. What future? Half of my family is in jail. They are called 'security prisoners.' Some politicians didn't like them, so they were locked up. Look Lacy, before you start talking about the virtues of Ghanaian politics, just talk to some of the ordinary people . . . just talk to them—they'll straighten out some of this nonsense."

Pushing that history to the back of my mind, I smiled when that same Ghanaian's eyes met mine, because on this afternoon, I did feel arrogant. Malcolm's presence (peace be upon him) excited our souls, and those among us who were violent wanted to throw all the Europeans out in the streets.

When Malcolm saw us walking over to him, although we looked like any other group of Ghanaians, he instinctively knew who we were and shook the hand and heard the name of each of us before he took his seat.

"So this is the famous Afro-American community of Accra. Brothers and sisters, I'm very glad to see you and I wish every black man in America could be sitting where I am. I bring you greetings from all those who cannot be here." Malcolm's words comforted all of us and we sat quietly, like children, as he talked about his trip, the political situation in America, then happily showed us pictures of his wife Betty and their beautiful daughters.

Malcolm was dressed like most tourists: he wore a white sport shirt and tropical gray pants, and he carried an inexpensive camera around his neck. He looked relaxed and refreshed, unlike the Malcolm X I had seen in photographs and on television. His long hair and neatly trimmed goatee made him look older; and the effects of the sun on his skin gave his face power, added masculinity and distinction. As he shared his experiences with us, I realized that I was seeing and hearing another Malcolm X. Or maybe he had always been sensitive and compassionate in his private moments. I knew the public Malcolm—argumentative, fiery, analytical—now, on the patio of this European-infested hostel, he sounded like a poet describing the Africa he had seen; his imagery was bril-

liant, his verse elegant, and I was touched deeply by his honesty and perception. Perhaps this Malcolm should not have surprised me, for I was sure other intimates had seen it, and much more. Failing to have imagined that a political leader passionately involved with the common man could be sensitive, elegant, and profound was another blow to the proper Negro still playing havoc with my intellectual development. Julian's cynicism was partially right. I knew where Harlem was, felt a part of its tragedy and genius, but I had never been there. My political liberation had come from universities and student protest movements, which had given me some historical indication of the importance of the Harlems of the world; and now I knew that a further liberation was yet to come.

"How many of us are out here, Julian?" Malcolm's question made us all sit up.

"About three hundred."

"Beautiful. That's beautiful. . . . What are we doing?"

Julian smiled, and some of us laughed. "All of us are trying to help the President from different levels of involvement. We are represented in most institutions in the country."

"That's what I call making a real revolution."

We laughed with relief at Malcolm's reply, and believe me, fifty Harlem voices are not easily accommodated in a British-African hotel at tea time!

"Malcolm," Julian said, "let's leave this place and go over to my house. Ana Livia has prepared lunch for us. Besides, this is not the best place to discuss issues!" Julian did not like the Ambassador, and in his five years in Ghana, had been there very few times.

As we walked out of the hotel, Malcolm turned, looked at the patio we had just left, and remarked, "When I get home, I'm going to tell all those Negroes who still want to integrate that they should come to the Ambassador Hotel—'cause that's where the action is!"

Finally we were back at Julian's house. Most of the group had to return to their jobs; only ten of us, including the Malcolm X Committee, had lunch. Without exaggeration, it was the best meal of my life.

We laughed, slapped hands, listened to Bessie Smith, talked some more, ate Ana Livia's curried goat, looked at Malcolm and *felt good,* looked at each other and *felt good,* listened to

Miles and *felt good,* and talked about Harlem, West Oakland, Chicago, ate some more; and finally, after all that Soul, we sat down to talk to our leader.

"Well, Malcolm, what do you have in mind?" asked Preston King.

Malcolm thought for a few moments, took out his notebook, and began to talk. "I would like to talk to my black brothers in Ghana. I want to explain to those who may not know the evils of American racism and its implications for black people everywhere. I am going to be here for four days and I'll do whatever I can during that period. . . . I look to you to give me some ideas about the political situation here and some of the things which I should expect and prepare for."

All of us shared our knowledge and experience with him, and ironically enough, Malcolm taught us much about Ghanaian life, just from the questions he asked.

Eventually, Julian said, "Malcolm, we thought maybe your first major speech should be at the university. Les here has helped to organize a Marxist study forum, and his group has tentatively arranged plans for your address tomorrow night. Do you have any objections to speaking to a Marxist study forum?"

"In Europe or America I would have some reservations, but out here I think I can deal with it. I assume that the forum is run by black people?"

"Yes, it is," I said emphatically.

Malcom looked at me strangely and remarked, "Your name is Les Lacy?"

"Yes, I'm Les Lacy."

"Wait a minute." Malcolm looked through his pockets and brought out a crumpled sheet of white paper. "I met a brother called Larry Jackson in Lagos. He told me to tell you and Guy Johnson hello. I like Larry. He seems to be a good brother."

"He is. How's he doing?" I asked.

"He's doing fine. Trying to stay out of the way of white Americans. Otherwise he's in good shape."

After another two hours Malcolm's exhaustive schedule was ready. We left so he could rest for a few hours. Much later in the evening Malcolm held a press conference at the Ghana Press Club. A few American reporters asked the

usual ridiculous questions, and Malcolm used this occasion to expose their subtle racism while at the same time bringing his message to the black people he had come to address. The next morning the *Daily Graphic* (privately owned but government influenced) carried the following story.

Help U.S. Negroes—Malcolm X

Mr. Malcolm X, the great Afro-American Moslem leader, declared in Accra yesterday that the struggle by Negroes for civil rights in the United States should be switched for a struggle for human rights, to enable Africans to raise the matter at the United Nations. Addressing pressmen at the Press Club, the Moslem leader said that the 22 million people of African descent in the United States were living in prison.

He described the U.S. as the "master of imperialism" without whose support France, South Africa, Britain and Portugal could not exist.

Mr. Malcolm X appealed for support from all Africans for their brothers and sisters in the United States. He praised Osagyefo the President and said as a result of his able, sincere and dedicated leadership, America feared Ghana. The Moslem leader pointed out that whenever a mature African leader, like Osagyefo, tries to unite the people of the continent they always label him as a dictator in order to discredit him.

Meanwhile, the Marxist Forum prepared for Malcolm's address at the university. As expected, a few university officials tried to sabotage our efforts, but we outmaneuvered them without too much difficulty. These officials had made peace with the forum but did not consider Malcolm's politics within the scope of the forum's objectives. Their prime concern was that the government and the press might use Malcolm X against them in the power struggle, and make it seem like the prominent university officials were anti-Malcolm. This may have been true; however, the university's grievance was primarily against Kwame Nkrumah, not Malcolm X.

I had tried without success to meet Malcolm earlier in the evening so that I could explain in greater detail the government-university dispute. I knew that living at the Press Club and being constantly surrounded by party officials and supporters would surely give him a distorted picture of the actual situation. I was right. Malcolm came to Legon that evening with the government's conception of university politics.

Hesse, Duggan, King, and I met Malcolm at the entrance to the Great Hall and walked down the aisle with him to the podium as the audience stood and clapped politely. We took our seats. The atmosphere was tense. A massacred soul had come to speak to a demoralized youth. . . . What would Malcolm say? Had the Party given him instructions? It was too quiet. Duggan's breath heaved like a wounded gland. If only someone would cough. The world was our audience; every aspect of international politics was represented. . . . Someone said fifty CIA agents were there. No one knew what to expect.

I wish Preston would get up and introduce him, I thought. But he can't. Even though the hall is packed, it's only seven-forty-five . . . got to wait until eight.

Finally, finally, the man from Georgia with an upper-class London accent did his thing.

Sit down, I kept thinking. You're talking too much. I give you . . .

Then came Malcolm. The audience was still again, waiting. Suddenly the television Malcolm spoke out. He praised the president of Ghana, the party, and struck out at their detractors. I hoped he would not go on that way. . . . He spoke of Nkrumah like he spoke of Elijah Muhammad; then he gave his address:

> . . . No condition of any people on earth is more deplorable than the condition or plight of the twenty-two million black people in America. When we are born in a country that stands up and represents itself as the leader of the free world, and you still have to beg and crawl just to get a chance to drink a cup of coffee, then the condition is very deplorable indeed. . . .
>
> I don't feel that I am a visitor in Ghana or in any part of Africa. I feel that I am at home. I've been away for four hundred years [Laughter], but not of my own volition, not of my own will. . . .
>
> This is the most beautiful continent that I've ever seen, and strange as it may seem, I find many white Americans here smiling in the faces of our African brothers like they have been loving them all the time. [Laughter and applause.]
>
> . . . But actually what it is, they want to integrate with the wealth that they know is here—the untapped natural resources

which exceed the wealth of any continent on this earth today. . . .

The President of this nation has done something that no American wants to see done . . . and that is he's restoring the African image. There is probably no more enlightened leader on the African continent than President Nkrumah, because he lived in America. He know what it is like there. You come there and take off your national dress and be mistaken for an American Negro, and you will find out you're not in the land of the free. [Loud applause.] America is a colonial power. There is a growing tendency among black Americans today . . . they are reaching the point where they are ready to tell the Man no matter what the odds are against them: it's liberty or death.

The students loved him. They cheered and they chanted. They shouted at the top of their voices songs of praise in different Ghanaian languages. Lebrette Hesse called that the Ghanaian "violent elation." I felt very good that night, because in a way I was responsible for those young voices shouting for Malcolm—voices the government called "reactionary." One student ran up and kissed his hand. A female student stood in front of him and cried, but said nothing. Only the CPP-ites seemed annoyed. A bloodless war with the university was over—they had lost the last round.

That night a crisis developed in the Afro-American community. Malcolm had returned to his place of rest. A few of the males in the community wanted to talk with him—needing, you might say, a soul session. The sisters who watched over him like mother hens would not hear of it. As one sister said, "Malcolm is tired and has no time to be concerned with your foolishness." Malcolm was tired, completely knocked out. The brothers understood but were having problems, severe ones, and they wanted the master's advice. If Malcolm had known of their needs, he would have come, but the sisters were having none of this "foolishness." On the surface I supported the sisters. Underneath, the situation was far more complicated, because ultimately it had nothing to do with Malcolm.

The Afro-American women in our community, at least the unmarried ones, were going through a difficult period in Ghana. Aside from the normal adjustments, they had emo-

tional ones to make too—to the benefits and burdens of a male-dominated black society. Since there were no rigid rules, male chauvinism prevailed. They were exceptional women, so they survived, but not without its costing them some of their emotional strength. Balance that off with the fact that some of the brothers were married to white women and that the others tended to prefer the local ones. They had Ghanaian men, but these invariably had other women. Again, they could deal with that, but only a very few liked it. Around this time I wrote, "Black woman, you, my sister, are a sadness. . . .

"You cry for men, strong men, and your voice grows stronger. . . . You hate and you blame, because your security has been threatened; a tragedy grips your consciousness—a history of rejection shapes your expectations. . . . We let them open you—your sexual outhouse . . .

exposed,
blamed.
We gave the white woman
your place, our
name,
and believed
that our children from her
would grow up
black,
beautiful,
brave,
big,
American,
and free,

". . . and would marry the children which we gave to you out of wedlock. But our children grew up absurd,

hated you and
your children
'cause they were
black,
and we were mixed with
fear,
dreams,
a mood of freedom,

blood
from a devil's cup,
where life is perverted,

". . . and with apologies to Hughes—deferred. Now you are here—here in Mother Africa. Home.

Forced to hide your beauty,
forced to hide your anger,
forced to bed with small boys
with big voices,
commercial manhoods
who dominate but
do not love you.
Who blame you but
do not fight to free you.

No love for you, black woman,
No love for you,
No love for you,

". . . until a new manhood is born out of violence and revolution which loves you, respects you, marries you and closes your sexual outhouse for ever and ever. Amen, black men, Amen."

Malcolm represented that new black man: strong, responsible, angry, compassionate, and committed. They knew that they could not have him though. He was "had" already. Betty was waiting. They were just watching. Why bother with men who are only enjoying the pleasures of exile, anyway?

The following day the brothers and sisters relaxed their differences and turned their full attention back to Malcolm. We read with interest the reports of his Legon address. "Negroes Need Your Help" was the title of the article published the following day about the speech in the *Daily Graphic*. "Mr. Malcolm X, the militant Afro-American nationalist, has called for concerted efforts by African states on the governmental level to bring pressure to bear on the United States government to solve the racial problem of that country. Mr. X was speaking at the University of Ghana on the 'plight of the 22 million Afro-Americans in the United States.' . . ."

The article highlighted Malcolm's speech, but interestingly enough, did not mention the exceptional student reactions, which were anything but "reactionary."

Pushing through our hectic schedule, we next accompanied Malcolm to Parliament House, where he had been granted an audience with the members of Parliament. The *Ghanaian Times* was there to cover the story.

Malcolm X Addresses MPs

In keeping with the policy of getting to learn facts on every issue, Members of Parliament yesterday granted audience to Mr. Malcolm X, the visiting militant Afro-American Black Muslim leader, at the lounge of Parliament House, Accra.

Mr. X spoke on the degrading status of the Afro-American in the United States. A lively discussion followed his address, during which the MPs asked questions of topical interest.

His last engagement was at the Nkrumah Institute, a political indoctrination center where the students were stuffed with Nkrumahisms which were to prepare them for eventual political activity. Malcolm was tired—the Afros had encircled him during his few free moments—but he was as eager and excited as he had been on his first day among us.

He left for North Africa the next day.

## XIV

## The Return

His second coming caught us by surprise. Why was he back? Hadn't he read the Ghanaian newspapers? He had been severely criticized for his Legon speech. Two days after Malcolm's first visit, Mr. Basner had written a highly critical article in the *Ghanaian Times.*

Mr. Basner, better known as H. M. Basner, was a professional Marxist from South Africa. He was white. He had practiced law in South Africa before coming to Ghana, and