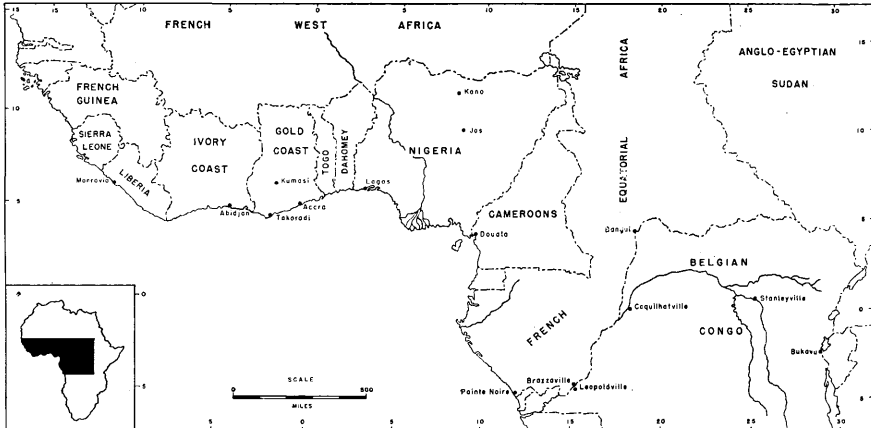


THE PROGRESS OF NATIONALISM IN WEST AFRICA¹

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There is always the possibility, of course, of a complete and thorough democratic nationalism in West Africa. Will it be achieved in a short period or will it never be attained? Recently I traveled in West Africa to ascertain what were the factors for or against such attainment. I read freely in the field and in reading found two types of writing; one of the imperialistic type writing about the African as a white man's burden and given little space to the African's opinions and the other dealing with the aroused sentiments of the black man and often written by Africans themselves. As a result of my reading I presume I went on my journey with a pre-conceived notion that to an extent at least the West African was growing up politically and spiritually but at a different rate under the various political regimes and his stature was far less than the requirements put upon him by modern civilization.



I must correct these opinions in part. The leaders among the Africans are highly intelligent, though at times their judgments are governed by their emotions. The men are educated in French, British and American universities and have a greater political maturity than the average student because they came to the universities with a definite purpose. But once again in their homeland and assuming their leadership they are faced with a number of difficulties. First, back of the coast is a zone reaching to a maximum of two hundred miles which is covered by rainforest. Upon this modern ideas break and have great difficulty in penetrating, and there are millions of natives living without sufficient contacts with western democratic worlds. Good roads can in part overcome the difficulty and there are some trunk roads into the interior. But three, five or ten miles at right angle to the roads the villages are still primitive—the villages and the ideas of men. True, the life in the more primitive villages which has little contact with the white civilization may have a well-disciplined life of an ancient African

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culture but mostly the men of the villages have just enough contact to acquire the white man's gin bottle. Read Joyce Cary's "Mr. Johnson" to understand what extent has the African taken on the ways of the Britisher in Nigeria.

By roads built there is better education of the African and he is intensely eager for his training. It is not for an immediate uplift for the economic situation, a bigger income, but something far greater that attracts him. He realizes that greater education is the hope of his race. The primary education has been carried on mainly by the missionaries, first in the vernacular and later in European languages. There are institutions of secondary education and technical schools and a few colleges and institutions, some partly supported by missions and partly by the governments. There are always more applicants than can be accepted. But the intelligent student is seldom sufficiently trained and there are few who are able to carry on the work of education of the masses. And the masses of people in the back country are in overwhelming numbers. If nationalism grows apace it will outdistance the educational schemes. Imperialism will be set aside by nationalism long before the Africans can depend on their own efforts in education and, indeed, in civilizing the back country. Higher and the more technical phases of education will for the immediate future be in the hands of the white man.

One type of mission work is being practiced to a greater or lesser degree in various regions. It is of founding areas in the interior, after among the most primitive peoples, of communities which teach western ways of life, their situation, improved agriculture, industry and literacy. I visited one notable community which was founded by George Way Harley under Methodist auspices in 1926 in the interior of Liberia, indeed 200 miles from Monrovia by rough trail. Harley went prepared to teach brick and tile making, lumbering and wood working, sanitation, schooling, medicine (he was a doctor), and, of course, Christianity. He built the first wheel in the back country. Emory Ross, who knows Africa thoroughly, in his *African Heritage* tells of a going experiment in Angolo. It was begun in 1909. Gradually the direction has taught a new approach to the land, one that stresses good health, literacy community organization, recreation, seasonal festivals, family life, music and worship. The result is that they are receiving material goods and western ideas and ideals of good self-government. There are many other examples of civilizing work by the missions in the lands of West Africa.

Particularly the missions must remain because the African has not arrived at a state of spiritual maturity. I asked the question of Dr. Schweitzer as to the spiritual maturity and he was quite right in saying the African was very far from the goal. On the other hand, I would have obtained slightly different answer from the neighboring missions nearby where they were working to that end. The African has learned to govern himself in part but mainly, in the case of the under officials, through corrupt methods.

There is another feature important in nationalism for the African. This is the urbanization which is sweeping the continent and amounting to a revolution of the former simple ways of the native. Under his bucolic regime he was guided by the elders of the tribe or village, under their regulations and disciplines. In recent years a great many of the young men have flocked to the rapidly growing cities, so many that the population statistics are incorrect as soon as they are published. The new influx of men from the countryside permits them to think more freely about political matters but also permits a great deal of corruption and immoral thinking. It has undermined many of the Africans until they are far from being spiritually ready for a political independence. They would seem to be hardly ready for an expression of nationalism. But there are the separate regimes imposed from above under which the African has advanced at different rates.

In the Belgian Congo we have an example of the best run colony from the point of view of the imperialist. It is on the surface a country of content. The

native is given a chance to rise to a position of a white collar clerk or a skilled workman and he is essentially an *evolué*, a superior African, who has special living quarters and is under no color bar theoretically. But actually yes. He dares not go to the hotels. Furthermore he was not educated in a higher sense of the word until recently. There are a handful now permitted a higher education. Actually the Belgians are worried lest he be educated politically and, that it is figured the Belgians can maintain the color superiority for thirty years more. The land is essentially run by huge corporations or wealthy individuals which own concessions. But no agricultural concession owned by a corporation or an individual may operate without establishing medical dispensaries and schools. Also the Roman Catholic Church is in charge of the public schools and is doing the task very well. And the great mining corporation of the Katanga Region, which I have not seen in operation, is performing a task of a complete social science among its workers and it is a highly intelligent program. Personally, I have seen the native mistreated. The individual, at least in cases, will have an attitude toward the black man which does not speak for a continued happy relation.

The French have used a different method of raising the African to a higher political status. They are permitting individuals when they have acquired enough of French culture to become Frenchmen, *evolvés*, black citizens of France. Some of them move to France where they are happier or on staying in their homeland assume a superior tone in their way of living. They are free of a color bar and, indeed, may have a greater bar between them and the other Africans than exists between them and the French. The French are forcing the *evolvés* to accept a ready-made nationalism instead of permitting them to erect one of their own in which they would take a great pride. I am inclined to think that the Africans of French territories look wistfully upon the British subjects who have achieved or are struggling to achieve a near-completion of their nationalism. But in French Equatorial Africa there is a large jungle to strive against. Vast areas are very slightly populated. The mass of people can not be reached so isolated are they in the deep forest. And the French are endeavoring to give a program of human rights, as conceived in France, to the African and the imperialists experience a sense of moral rectitude thereby. According to Emory Ross it is impossible to pass on a concept of human rights. You can only educate people to a stage where they will evolve a program of human rights as they conceive them. But the French are fearful of self-government by the African.

Nigeria is a land which has gone far in transportation having a network of roads, many of them well paved trunk lines and two railroads crossing in the middle courses. Also British agents and the British and American missionaries have been there so long and have been so active that the Nigerians are many of them educated up to and some beyond the eighth grade. Some of them have gone to British and American universities and recently their own university. The British are doing an excellent and disinterested task. They are finally aware of their progress of nationalism and what it means but because of tribal and regional disagreements are hardly ready for it. The Gold Coast is inhabited mainly by related tribes who have been well educated for a considerable time. But both the Nigerians and the Gold Coasters have regulations which are aids to political independence. They do not allow the white man to own any considerable land—there are no plantations of size or concessions. This is very important. The palm oil, cotton, peanuts and cacao are grown on two to four acres under peasant farmers.

Lastly there is Liberia. Until recently they were under an imperialistic system, the imperialists being the Americo-Liberians, most who had never been on Liberian soil until they came as conquerors. But today's nationalism is because they were convinced that by a strong political reformation they would take their place among the free nations of the world.

But, in spite of my contact with many Africans eager to begin self-government and capable of it, I still remember the inefficiency and perhaps the corruption of the police in Monrovia. I remember many times when a European had to fairly shout directions out to a servant to be sure he understood it. The Africans are cheerful as servants but at times I believe them to be amoral. And I think of numerous tales when a man or a woman without relatives is in danger of being eaten. Indeed, I know of a missionary in the back country for many years to have never known a native who has been buried. Christianity is then the beginning of civilization. Yet at another mission conversion was slow because men who adopted the teaching were in danger of having their skins hung on a wall.

This of course, is far in the interior where civilizing movements have just begun. But the Africans in the coastal towns in accomplishing national liberty will have a difficult time in teaching the people of the hinterland, the principles of democratic nationalism.
