

SUB-SAHARAN AFRICA SINCE THE END OF EUROPEAN COLONIAL RULE

The following observations concern sub-Saharan (Black) Africa and Haiti, the only country outside of sub-Saharan Africa with a nearly completely black population. They do not concern North (Arab) Africa, the population of which is mostly white or whitish and which the French have called for centuries *L'Afrique blanche* (white Africa).

To put the observations below into context, some statistical background is necessary. In 1950, the *per capita* income of sub-Saharan Africa, calculated in 1993 dollars at purchasing-power parity, was \$1095; and the *per capita* income of East Asia, calculated on the same basis, was \$427. So, the *per capita* income of sub-Saharan Africa was 2.6 times that of East Asia.¹ In 1960, on the eve of independence, several sub-Saharan African colonies – Gabon, Senegal, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana – had a higher *per capita* Gross National Product (GNP) than South Korea. In 1963, Zimbabwe (then named Rhodesia) had the same GNP as South Korea. As late as 1970, sub-Saharan Africa still had approximately the same *per capita* GNP as eastern Asia. Twenty-three years later, one city in eastern Asia, Singapore, with less than 3 million people and no natural resources, exported products worth 74 billion U.S. dollars; sub-Saharan Africa, which then had 550 million people and vast natural resources, exported U.S.\$56 billion.²

Sub-Saharan Africa's economic collapse began about a decade after independence. Until the early 1970s, many whites and Indians remained, and black managers and professionals continued by rote the practices they had learned under European rule. Since the early 1970s the economies of Black Africa have been declining and the rate of decline has constantly accelerated.

¹ Page 195 of Stephen Sanderson, "World Analysis after Thirty Years," *International Journal of Comparative Sociology* 46.3, 2005, pp. 180-213

² Lubin Doe, "Economic Development of Francophone Africa: A Comparison with the Republic of Korea," *International Social Science Journal* 151, 1997, pp. 105-21; Paul Collier and Jan Willem Gunning, "Why Has Africa Grown Slowly?" *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 13, 1999, pp. 3-22; Peter Godwin, *When the Crocodile Eats the Sun*, Picador Africa, Johannesburg, South Africa, p. 153.

Between 1980 and 1999, Africa's share of the world's exports decreased from 2.5 percent to 0.9 percent.³ Between 1995 and 2005, the number of people in sub-Saharan Africa who were trying to survive on less than one USA dollar a day rose from approximately 200 million to approximately 300 million.⁴ By 2005, Africa was importing 18 billion dollars of food every year. (In 1960, Africa was a net exporter of food.)

Quoted below are observations on sub-Saharan Africa. Most are from the impeccably liberal *New York Times*, *New Republic* and *New York Review of Books*.

I have indicated deletions with three dots and my own additions with square brackets.

The Global Poverty Paradox

Commentary

October 2010, pages 16-23

By Nicholas Eberstadt, who holds the Henry Wendt Chair in Political Economy at the American Enterprise Institute.

In the article, Eberstadt tries to explain the “paradox” that while the rest of the world has enjoyed spectacular economic growth during the past half century, sub-Saharan Africa and Haiti have retrogressed economically. Eberstadt shows that the commonly offered explanations cannot be true. Incredibly, he does not see the most obvious explanation. (His footnotes are at the end of the article.)

... According to estimates by the late economic historian Angus Maddison, the world's *average* [Eberstadt's italics] per capita output quadrupled between 1900 and 1989/9¹ ...

[However,] ... countries with hundreds of millions of inhabitants today are not simply falling behind in a global march toward ever-greater prosperity: they are positively heading in the wrong direction...

Haiti is a particularly awful case in point. ... [B]etween 1950 and 2008 ... by Maddison's reckoning, per capita output in Haiti actually *declined* [Eberstadt's italics] by more than a third. ...

³ Marian Tupy, “Africa's War on Poverty Begins at Home,” *Financial Times*, December 20, 2005, p. 15.

⁴ Erich Wiedermann and Thilio Thielke, “Too Much of A Good Thing,” *Der Spiegel*, July 4, 2005.

[M]oreover ... statistics from the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) ... [indicate that] nearly two dozen countries suffered negative per capita economic growth over the course of the quarter century from 1980 to 2005. ...

[T]he epicenter of prolonged economic failure is sub-Saharan Africa. ... According to the WTO's numbers, Africa's overall per capita merchandise export revenues, adjusted for inflation ... appear to have been around 10 percent *lower* [Eberstadt's italics] in 2009 than they were in 1974. ...

The sub-Sahara is not simply an epicenter of economic failure; it is also the epicenter of a pervasive failure in what might be called human development. ... [I]t is not just that Africa's health and educational profiles are much worse than for any other major region of the world; they are also markedly worse than would be predicted on the basis of the region's woeful economic performance alone. ... [For example] sub-Saharan educational profiles in 2000 were even more modest than the region's very low income levels would have of themselves predicted: to go by World Bank data ... sub-Saharan Africans would have enjoyed fully one third more years of adult education, its low income levels notwithstanding, if only they had been living in a place more like other regions of the Third World. ...

The problem of sustained socioeconomic retrogression is all the more dismaying, and puzzling, when one bears in mind the phenomenal explosion of prosperity that has transformed the world as a whole in the modern era... In the half century between 1955 and 2005, by Maddison's reckoning, the planet's per capita income levels nearly tripled ... despite the unprecedented pace of population increase in the Third World over those same years. ...

Longer lives are now possible worldwide at ever lower national-income levels. No country on earth registered a female life expectancy at birth of 65 years before the end of World War I; the first society to breach that threshold was apparently New Zealand, somewhere around 1920. Today average female life expectancy at birth for poor countries as a whole is well above 65 years. Even places like Nepal are thought to have reached this once-impossible level of life expectancy...

[The] World Bank estimates ... [that] [i]f we take high-income economies completely out of the picture, average real per capita output for the rest of the world more than tripled

between 1960 and 2006. (By Maddison’s calculations, incidentally, per capita incomes in Brazil, Mexico, and Turkey are higher than they were in Scandinavia and the Netherlands in the early 1950s.) For the “low middle income economies” (countries including China, Egypt, India, and the Philippines), estimated per capita incomes rose more than fivefold.

...

[T]he political and policy prerequisites for eliciting enormous improvements in local incomes may be less exacting in our modern era than ever before. A few examples will suffice to make this point. Take Bangladesh, a country widely written off as a hopeless basket case at its independence in 1971. ... [O]ver the past four decades, the country has experienced dozens of attempted political coups, three of which overturned the seated government. ... Yet despite all this, per capita output in Bangladesh has roughly doubled since the early 1970s, according to both Maddison and the World Bank’s *World Development Indicators (WDI)*.

The case of the Dominican Republic may be even more instructive. In 1961, the country’s longtime dictator, Rafael Trujillo, was assassinated. A period of political instability ensued ... [T]he country’s “economic climate” might at best be described as mediocre: the country ranked 99th on the 2009 Corruption Perceptions Index, and 100th on the Fraser Institute’s 2009 Index of Economic Freedom. Yet over the four decades between 1965 and 2005, per capita income in the Dominican Republic more than tripled, increasing over these years at an average pace of almost 3 percent per annum. Between the early 1960s and the early 2000s, moreover, overall life expectancy in the Dominican Republic jumped by nearly two decades: today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, it stands at 74 years – just four years behind that found in the United States.

The Dominican Republic’s progress in economic development is noteworthy in its own right – but it is all the more striking when juxtaposed against the gruesome and prolonged developmental failure still underway in Haiti. The two countries, of course, share the Caribbean island of Hispaniola. ...

One diagnosis, insistently tendered in some parts of the academy and the international community, pegs the problem as a sheer insufficiency of foreign aid ... [However] [i]n today’s dollars, Haiti has received more than \$10 billion since 1960 in official development assistance alone (and vastly more if private aid, humanitarian assistance,

and security assistance are taken into account). Similarly, since 1970, sub-Saharan African states have taken in the current equivalent of more than \$600 billion of official development assistance...

[Another] proposition [is] that a local population's viewpoints, values, and dispositions might have some bearing on local economic performance ... [However] the record of historical efforts to predict and explain economic performance on the basis of cultural attributes is, let us say, checkered. Up through the 1950s and even into the early 1960s, for example, researchers and self-styled experts were offering confident and detailed explanations of why "Confucian values" constituted a serious obstacle to economic development in East Asia. A decade or so later ... the profession was still united in the consensus that the Confucian ethos mattered greatly in economic performance, but they had quietly shifted their estimate of that impact from negative to positive.

Footnotes to this article

1 Angus Maddison, "Statistics on World Population, GDP and per Capita GDP, 1-2008 AD" (March 2010), available electronically at <http://www.ggd.net/maddison>.

2 Robert J. Barro and Jong-Wha Lee, "International Data on Educational Attainment: Updates and Implications" (Harvard Center for International Development Working Paper No. 42, April 2000) – Appendix Data Tables, available electronically at <http://www.cid.harvard.edu/ciddata/ciddata.html>.

Going Back

The New Republic

June 16, 1997, pages 19-22

By Henry Louis Gates JR., who was chairman of the Department of Afro-American Studies at Harvard University when he wrote this article.

I first visited Africa a quarter of a century ago, and I had longed for that pilgrimage for years. ... The great year of African independence, 1960, captured my imagination ... I memorized the names of the new nations' presidents and prime ministers ...

Yale, where I became an undergraduate in 1969, sponsored one of those '60s programs that sent students to work for a year in the Third World immediately following their sophomore year. ... I set out enamored of Tanzania's president, Julius Nyerere ... I spent

six months in the [Tanzanian] village of Kilimatinde, the home of an Anglican mission hospital where I was trained to deliver general anesthesia and where I lived and worked with Australian missionaries. ... With my kinsmen [black Africans] ... we bonded over our common enemy, the white man, embodied for us in the pale faces of our pious missionaries, jockeying for eternity by sacrificing their lives for the benighted tribesman.

...

Last year I went back to Africa, twenty-five years older ... I was impatient to see Dar es Salaam [Tanzania's capital] again ... Dar was terribly disappointing: a once clean and lovely city is ramshackle now, its beautifully sited harbor polluted by the direct dumping of raw sewage. Robberies are routine ... An air of defeat hangs over the city. ... From Dar, we traveled up the coast to Bagamayo and inland to Kilimatinde ... The trip from Bagamayo took eighteen hours longer than expected because the train in front of us crashed ... An evil thing has happened to the village of Kilimatinde. The missionaries, with whom I fought so fiercely and so often about politics and their own racism toward the Africans in the village, were gone. ... A sleepy little village of 500 was now, a quarter of a century later, a desperately impoverished village of 10,000. ... To my surprise and dismay, I found myself – despite myself – longing for the order and the resources that the missionaries had brought ... Their residences, as well as the hospital buildings, were in great disrepair. ... Looking around the village, I realized that even if the West stood still for a thousand years, my friends in Kilimatinde would never catch up. And the West, of course, will never stand still.

Mobutu, Zaire's 'Guide,' Leads Nation Into Chaos

The New York Times

June 10, 1995

Section A; page 1; column 2

By Howard W. French

Zaire, which is as large as the United States east of the Mississippi, is drifting dangerously close to disintegration. ... According to the World Bank, Zaire's economy has shrunk 40% since 1988. Per capita income has fallen 65% since 1958, two years before the country gained independence from Belgium. ...

Kikwit, less than 300 miles east of Kinshasa, sits astride what was once a major transcontinental highway. ... Just two decades ago Kikwit was home to the world's largest palm-oil plantation. But the highway to Kinshasa ... has deteriorated so badly that only a handful of intrepid truckers ever take it anymore. ... Like nearly every region of Zaire, which was once the [world's] largest copper producer and a major exporter of coffee, Kikwit, a city of 500,000, now lives without industry. ... Fuel for the few cars in circulation is sold by the whisky bottle at the roadside, since there are no gas stations.

GRAPHIC: Photos: The deterioration of Zaire can be seen in Kinshasa, the capital, where garbage-filled roads dissolve into mud.⁵

“Lost Decade” Drains Africa's Vitality

The New York Times

June 19, 1994

Section A; page 1; column 3

By John Darnton

You don't have to be a detective to spot the decline in living standards in Africa. It hits you right away. It can be seen in the shantytowns that surround every capital city, sprawls of humanity living in hovels with no windows, open sewers and garbage heaped in mounds chest-high. ... And it can be smelled in the fly-infested corridors of hospitals ... Africa [south of the Sahara] ... is now the only continent where most poor people are getting still poorer and where health and education are deteriorating. ...

According to a World Bank report published in 1992, some 220 million Africans south of the Sahara – more than one out of three – now live in "absolute poverty," meaning that they are unable to meet their most basic needs. Some studies predict that half the population will be in poverty by the end of the century. ...

In ... the 1980's ... overall food production dropped to a level 20% below that of 1970. The downward trend continued into 1993. Per capita cereal production fell in 18 of the poorest African countries last year, by more than 5% in nine of them. One study in Zambia conducted by Oxfam, the British-based relief agency, found that the proportion

⁵ David S. Landes (*The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*, W. W. Norton & Company, New York, 1999, p. 505) pointed out, “Under Belgian rule in 1960, the Congo [which was renamed Zaire, and then renamed The Republic of Congo in 1997] had 88,000 miles of usable road; by 1985 this was down to 12,000 miles, only 1,400 of them paved.”

of children who are malnourished rose to 25% from 5% over the decade. [Under British rule, when whites owned Zambia's large farms, it exported wheat, maize, eggs and meat; and in 1955 its *per capita* Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was one-seventh that of Britain. In 2001 its *per capita* GDP was one-twenty-eighth that of Britain.⁶] ...

Diseases like a newly resistant strain of malaria, tuberculosis, fatal diarrhea, cholera and meningitis are all up. ... One of the most sensitive barometers of health care is maternal mortality rates, and data from the 1980's show that it is now mounting in East Africa, Central Africa and West Africa.

In Poor, Decolonized Africa, Bankers Are New Overlords

The New York Times

June 20, 1994

Section A; page 1; column 3

By John Darnton

For more than a decade the economies of Africa have been caught in a relentless downward spiral. ... It is hard to exaggerate the depth of Africa's economic crisis. Consider this fact: Excluding South Africa, the 1991 gross national product of all countries south of the Sahara – a swath of the globe that is home to almost 600 million people – was about the same as the gross national product of Belgium, with a population of 10 million.

Eighteen of the world's 20 poorest countries are African ... [By 2002, the UN's Human Development Report found that all of the 20 least developed countries in the world were in Africa.] ... Per capita gross national product declined by 2% a year throughout the 1980's. ... Africa's share of world trade has fallen below 4% and is now closer to 2%. That is so marginal it is almost as if the continent has curled up and disappeared from the map of international shipping lanes and airline routes ...

Yet, despite its desperation, Africa has great riches. It has the gushing oil fields of Nigeria, the thick veins of copper of Zambia, diamonds that flow down the rivers of Angola to settle in the alluvial seabed. Most of all, it has the world's largest reservoir of arable land – almost 2.5 billion acres, of which only one-fifth is cultivated. ... Virtually no strategy adopted by any African country – whether encouraging foreign companies or

⁶ Niall Ferguson, *Empire*, Basic Books, New York, 2002, p. 360

taking over their assets, whether trying to force industrialization or relying mainly on agriculture – has succeeded. ...

If the most optimistic growth forecasts prove accurate, it will take 40 years for the African countries to regain the per capita income level they reached in the mid-1970's.

Zaire's Rich Mines Are Abandoned to Scavengers

The New York Times

February 21, 1994

Section A; page 3; column 1

By Kenneth B. Noble

By the time the steel gate opened at dawn, the line of Zairians stretched around the corner and down a street. Some were as young as 8 or 10, some still teenagers, and not a few were young mothers with babies strapped tightly to their backs. Soon they were attacking the huge black mounds of slag heap with crude shovels and pickaxes, scavenging what few scraps they could from what is left of one of the world's largest copper mining operations.

Less than a decade ago ... the output of the factory here and other copper and cobalt mining operations in the Shaba region accounted for nearly two-thirds of Zaire's export earnings, and made the country the biggest cobalt producer in the world. ... Today... it seems more like an abandoned battlefield, with the grounds strewn with rusting metal and discarded machinery, the old furnace virtually disintegrated ...

The demise of the state mining company has brought harsh changes to the 800,000 inhabitants of Lubumbashi, Zaire's second-largest city ... no fuel has been delivered to the city's gas stations since last November ... food is scarce, there are no jobs and no money...

The company produced 450,000 tons of copper as recently as 1990. This year, mining specialists say, it is highly doubtful that Zaire will be able to produce the 60,000 tons of copper that Government officials have predicted.

Liberians Struggle in a Crumbling Economy

Johannesburg Star

June 19, 2002

Page 13

By David Clarke

Liberia, with a wealth of minerals and the world's largest rubber plantations ... has an 85% unemployment rate. ... In Monrovia [Liberia's capital] running water and electricity are dim and distant memories.

The Road to Hell Is Unpaved

The Economist

December 21, 2002

Page 66

Cameroonian roads have wasted away. In 1980, there were 7.2 kilometers of roads per 1,000 people; by 1995, the figure had shrunk to only 2.6 kilometers. By one estimate, less than a tenth are paved.

The Worst Place on Earth

The New York Review of Books

June 29, 2000

Page 61

By James Traub

Sierra Leone [was] ... once known as the source of some of the world's highest-quality diamonds. ... The average life expectancy is thirty-eight years. The infant mortality rate is 164 per thousand. Sixty-nine percent of adults are officially illiterate. Sierra Leone offers powerful proof of what can be accomplished by forty years of misrule. The English colonial regime ended in 1961 ... The English ... left behind a good university and an educated elite ... as well as a network of roads and railway tracks.

Come Back, Colonialism, All Is Forgiven

Time

February 14, 2008

By Alex Perry

Le Blanc and I are into our 500th kilometer on the river when he turns my view of modern African history on its head. "We should just give it all back to the whites," the riverboat captain says. "Even if you go 1,000 kilometers down this river, you won't see a

single sign of development. When the whites left, we didn't just stay where we were. We went backwards."

Le Blanc earns his keep sailing the tributaries of the Congo River. He's 40 years old, and his real name is Malu-Ebonga Charles ... [I]t is his job on the river, piloting three dugouts lashed together with twine and mounted with outboards, that has informed his opinion of the Democratic Republic of Congo's present. "The river is the artery of Congo's economy," he says. "When the Belgians and the Portuguese were here, there were farms and plantations — cashews, peanuts, rubber, palm oil. There was industry and factories employing 3,000 people, 5,000 people. But since independence, no Congolese has succeeded. The plantations are abandoned." Using a French expression literally translated as "on the ground," he adds: "Everything is *par terre*."

It's true that our journey through 643 kilometers of rainforest to where the Maringa River joins the Congo at Mbandaka, has been an exploration of decline. An abandoned tugboat here; there, a beached paddle steamer stripped of its metal sides to a rusted skeleton; several abandoned palm oil factories, their roofs caved in, their walls disappearing into the engulfing forest, their giant storage tanks empty and rusted out. The palms now grow wild and untended on the riverbanks and in the villages we pass, the people dress in rags, hawk smoked blackfish and bushmeat, and besiege us with requests for salt or soap. There are no schools here, no clinics, no electricity, no roads. It can take a year for basic necessities ordered from the capital, Kinshasa, nearly 2,000 kilometers downstream, to make it here — if they make it at all. At one point we pass a cargo barge that has taken three months to travel the same distance we will cover in two days. We stop in the hope of buying some gasoline, but all we get from the vessel are rats.

Even amid the morbid decay, it comes as a shock to hear Le Blanc mourn colonialism. ... Le Blanc isn't much concerned with that history; he lives in the present, in a country where education is a luxury and death is everywhere. Around 45,000 people die each month in the DRC as a result of the social collapse brought on by civil war, according to a study released in January by the International Rescue Committee. It estimated the total loss of life between 1998 and April 2007 at 5.4 million. For many Congolese like Le Blanc, the difficulties of today blot out the cruelties of the past. "On this river, all that you see — the buildings, the boats — only whites did that. After the whites left, the

Congolese did not work. We did not know how to. For the past 50 years, we've just declined." He pauses. "They took this country by force," he says, with more than a touch of admiration. "If they came back, this time we'd give them the country for free."

The Jewel of Africa

The New York Review of Books

April 10, 2003

Pages 6-10

By Doris Lessing, the Nobel-Prize winning novelist, who was raised on a farm in Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In 1941, at the age of 22, she was a founding member of the Communist Party of Southern Rhodesia. She moved to London in 1949 and joined the British Communist Party in 1951.

"You have the jewel of Africa in your hands," said Samora Machel of Mozambique and President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania to Robert Mugabe [who had just become Zimbabwe's first black ruler], at the moment of [Zimbabwe's] independence, in 1980. ... Southern Rhodesia [now Zimbabwe] had fine and functioning railways, good roads ... It could grow anything, tropical fruit like pineapples, mangoes, bananas ... temperate fruits like apples, peaches, plums. The staple food, maize, grew like a weed and fed surrounding countries as well. Peanuts, sunflowers, cotton, millets and small grains ... flourished. Minerals: gold, chromium, asbestos, platinum, and rich coal fields [abounded]. The dammed Zambesi River created the Kariba Lake, which fed electricity north and south – a paradise, and not only for the whites. The blacks did well too ...

But paradise has to have a superstructure, an infrastructure, and by now it is going, going – almost gone. ... Soon [after black rule began] free education, in some places, any education at all would be a memory. For education they did much better under the whites.

...

A fact about the white farmers that must be recorded is that most of them were very good farmers, inventive, industrious, with an ability to make do and mend, even when Mugabe would not allow the import of spare parts, supplies, sufficient gasoline. To visit a white farm was to be taken around by people proud of their resourcefulness. "I invented this," one of them might say, referring to a process in the curing of tobacco or a bit of machinery. ... Many built their farms from nothing – from raw bush. ...

The reporting of the transfer of farmland [to blacks] has been biased. ... As a result of his [Mugabe's] campaign of misinformation ... you meet people who will tell you, "The whites threw my grandparents off their farm and took their house." [But] at the time of the whites' arrival ... there were a quarter of a million blacks [in a country the size of Spain], and they lived in villages of mud-walled, grass-roofed huts. The women grew pumpkins and maize ... and gathered plants in the bush. The men hunted. When I was a girl you met men walking through the bush dressed in animal skins, carrying assegais [spears], people a step or two up from hunter-gatherers.

[The population of Zimbabwe is now 12.7 million. Between 1902, when white settlement was beginning, and 1930, the acreage that blacks cultivated increased from 550,000 to 1,378,000 and the number of farm animals blacks owned increased from 55,000 to over 1,500,000.⁷]

By now the expulsion of white farmers is nearly complete. ... The irrigation system has broken down. I remember another prophetic scene from the Eighties: a water tank of a certain school was not working. A valve had gone. No one replaced it. The women went back to getting water from the river, which was infested ...

The recent [black] settlers [on white farms] ... have no chance of getting their children into school because school (unlike under the whites) costs a lot of money; and how will they get money for clothes; even if they survive this terrible time, when there is nothing to eat and people are dying of hunger? ... Some white farmers are in Mozambique; they had to begin again without capital, implements, machinery. Skilled and hard-working, they will survive. They are in Zambia, invited by the black government: *white farmers in Zambia produce nearly all the food* [italics added] ... while the people in Zimbabwe are starving.

The latest news is that Mugabe, under a contract with a Chinese company, is importing Chinese farmers to grow food since the forcibly acquired [by blacks] white farms are not producing. He says this is because there is no farm machinery. Yet all the expelled white farmers had been forced to leave behind their machinery.

⁷ P. Duignan and L. H. Gann (editors), *Colonialism in Africa 1870-1960*, Volume IV, 1975, Cambridge University Press, New York, page 11

[As of 2009, Zimbabwe's Gross Domestic Product has decreased every year since Lessing wrote this article.]

Zim Farmers Working for the Good of Africa

Johannesburg *Star*

March 26, 2004

Section A; page 18

By Peter Fabricius

Zimbabwe's white farmers [were] evicted from their farms in their home country ... About 150 families have now settled in Mozambique [and] about 100 in Zambia. The few in Zambia have been widely credited with turning the country from a net food importer into a net food exporter. In Mozambique, President Joaquim Chissano recently visited the ex-Zimbabwean farmers ... and thanked them for re-establishing the country's dairy industry. This week ... Nigerian President Olusegun Obasanjo ... offered to let them farm in his country. ... The Nigerians candidly admitted that their farm industry was ruined, that they imported 98% of their food and that they desperately needed help.

Oil-Rich Nigeria Goes Downhill

Johannesburg *Star*

April 11, 2003

Section A; page 13

By Daniel Balint-Kurti

The average Nigerian is now poorer than at independence from Britain in 1960. About 66% of the population now falls below the poverty line of roughly one US dollar a day, compared with 43% in 1985, according to the World Bank.

Africa's Crisis of Democracy

The New York Times

April 23, 2007

Page A1

By Lydia Polgreen

... Nigeria, a nation of 140 million people.... It is rich in oil, exporting about two million barrels a day, but the riches that oil brings have not translated into meaningful development.

Kano [the third most populous city in Nigeria, was] a once vibrant manufacturing center ... In Kano's Government Residential Area, where the wealthy live, each household is its own power and water company. Plastic water tanks on spidery legs tower over the tiled roofs, each fed by an electric pump sucking water from a private well. The electric company provides light just a few hours a day, so the air is thick with the belching diesel smoke of a thousand generators, clattering away in miserable, endless unison.

The poor must manage however they can. With the decline of manufacturing and few formal jobs, many residents make a meager living off one another's misery. Idriss Abdoulaye sells water from a pushcart for 20 naira a jerry can, about 15 cents, to people like himself, too poor to have wells. He makes about \$2 a day, and cannot afford to send his sons to school. ...

Kikwit Journal; Once a Colonial Jewel, a City Hurtles Backward

The New York Times

November 15, 1991

Section A; page 3; column 1

By Kenneth B. Noble

The wheel of history, it almost seems, has come full circle here. ... Belgium, Zaire's colonial ruler, transform[ed] Kikwit into a provincial trading center. A paved highway was built to speed diesel trucks hauling cassava and corn to other regions. The Belgians ... installed an efficient colonial administration. In time, they introduced health care, water projects, education, telephones and power lines, helping to turn this once isolated village into one of the most affluent and best-tended cities in the core of equatorial Africa.

Today, the legacy of Kikwit's colonial past is swiftly disappearing. "Civilization is coming to an end here," said Rene Kinsweke, manager of Siefac, a chain of food stores ... "We're back where we started. We're going back into the bush." It is difficult to exaggerate the dizzying pace of decay in this city of nearly 400,000 people. Six months ago, the Siefac food conglomerate consisted of 21 stores in Bandundu Province. Today, a single store is left, and it is to close as soon as its remaining stock is sold, Mr. Kinsweke said

The main road to Kikwit is now rutted and crumbled ... Entire families now camp on sidewalks, in parks and even in cemeteries. Streets and backyards are littered with indescribable filth, and toward the edges of the city the roads crumble into dirty sand and then disappear altogether. Rats and flies are breeding as never before ... there is no electricity; nor is there running water.

'They Didn't Speak Our Language; We Didn't Speak Theirs.' United States Marines in Haiti

Smithsonian Magazine

January 1993

Vol. 23; No. 10; pages 44-55

By Frances Maclean

(Haiti, in the Caribbean, is the only country outside of sub-Saharan Africa with a nearly completely black population.)

In the 72-year period before the [United States took control of Haiti between 1915 and 1934, it] ... had had 102 civil wars, revolutions, insurrections, revolts and coups. Of 22 presidents, just one served a complete term. Only four died of natural causes. ...

What the [U.S.] marines first noted was that in the land Christopher Columbus had called a paradise, everything was in shambles. "In the street were piles of evil-smelling offal... the whole prospect was filthy," one wrote. Telephone and telegraph lines had been inoperable since 1911. Railroad tracks were sporadic and shaky. Lighthouses were lit with kerosene lanterns. Designated rocks and chunks of iron served as weights in the customhouses. Bridges were down. Holes gaped in the prison walls. Mattresses and pillows covered doors and windows to absorb stray bullets. ... Many of the country's 1.5 million people were hungry.

[During the American occupation] food and medical centers were set up ... More than 1,000 miles of roads and 210 bridges were built. The 200-year-old French irrigation system was resurrected and expanded. Haiti's telephone system was expanded and updated to link the island's cities. Old wharves were repaired and new ones constructed. Fifteen acetylene lighthouses were built. The barely existent sanitation system was overhauled. Parks were laid out and gardens planted in city centers and at municipal buildings. A number of theaters and schools were restored or built from the ground up. ... Hospitals and clinics were set up across the country ... American doctors came to train

Haitian doctors, and some Haitian doctors eventually went to the States to study. ... [Americans trained Haitians] in field-crop production and soil management, as well as ... in such things as cattle raising or tobacco growing and veterinary medicine [and] ... to operate simple assembly-line machines ...

On August 15, 1934 ... the last [U.S.] marines ... boarded ship for home. ... Lamented Franck Henriques, "Soon horse dung was back in the street."

When historian Robert Heintz ... arrived in 1958 ... he found the "telephones gone... roads approaching non-existence ... ports obstructed by silt ... docks crumbling ... sanitation and electrification in precarious decline".

[In 2000 Haiti's *per capita* annual income was \$225, a tenth that of Latin America, despite \$2.3 billion in American aid between 1994 and 1999 alone.]

Continental Drift

The New Republic

December 28, 1992, pages 15-20

Author: Robert D. Kaplan, author of books about Africa, Central Asia, and the Balkans

Abstract: Haiti's tragic history should be a cautionary tale for those now eagerly pursuing Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. Somalia and Liberia are only the first of many African nations doomed to go over the edge.

In 1915 an exasperated President Woodrow Wilson sent in the United States Marines to occupy Haiti. Over the preceding seventy-two years, Haiti had seen 102 revolutions and coups d'etat ... [it] had reached the point of complete anarchy. Wilson hoped a mere intervention would suffice. But the Marines didn't leave until 1934. By then Wilson was long dead and U.S. taxpayers had modernized Haiti, with new roads, a native civil service, a health network, a national guard, and many other infrastructure and bureaucratic improvements. Within a few years the political situation had deteriorated again...

Haiti's tragic history should be a cautionary tale for those now eagerly pursuing Operation Restore Hope in Somalia. ...

Let me start by defining what I mean by "Africa" ... I exempt Arab North African states bordering the Mediterranean, whose regimes are better organized than those to the south, and – with the singular exception of Libya's – neither odious like Zaire's nor incompetent

like Sierra Leone's. ... Cairo, for example, one of the world's most overcrowded and poorest cities, is also one of the world's safest and least violent...

Wherever there is an African society that works on a Latin American or a south Asian level, it is because colonial influence has been prodigious. Cote d'Ivoire (formerly the Ivory Coast) is the most telling example: here is an African nation with a capital city, Abidjan, that boasts paved roads, a reliable electricity current, international hotels, sophistication, and generally fine infrastructure. But Cote d'Ivoire's good fortune is directly attributed to the fact that the French colonialists never left. ... By the 1980s there were five times as many Frenchmen in key jobs in Cote d'Ivoire as there were at independence in 1960, with French nationals holding 80% of all posts requiring a university degree. Now, however, the French are trickling out of Cote d'Ivoire. ...

Then there is Kenya ... For decades it was primarily the Asians [i.e. Indians] who constituted Kenya's urban middle class: lying between the thin stratum of wealthy Africans above and the mass of African peasantry below. This is exactly the position that Jews occupied throughout Eastern Europe in the pre-Nazi era ... In fact, African prejudice against the "clever" and "shifty" Asians in Kenya and elsewhere throughout the continent mirrors exactly the prejudice against Jews in the ... pre-war Balkans. It is a spine-chilling hatred...

[The British first imported large numbers of illiterate, unskilled Indians into East Africa in the 1890s to build the railroad from Mombasa to Lake Victoria. When the Indian population of East Africa peaked in 1962, at 1.4% of the total population, they owned over three-quarters of the businesses. It is significant that the British found Indians to be so superior to Africans even as unskilled laborers that they took the trouble and expense to import them to a continent that was awash with cheap, unskilled labor.]

Beyond Cote D'Ivoire and Kenya, the picture becomes even bleaker. ... One thing I've learned in Africa is to never, never assume that things can't get worse ... Take Sierra Leone, a little country next to Liberia that is almost never in the news and thus assumed to be normal. ... The streets of Freetown [Sierra Leone's capital] aren't paved. Water and electricity services are sporadic. ... Crime is rising. A Lebanese expatriate community, like the Asian one in Kenya, props up the economy, and is therefore begrudged for it.

Peace Corps workers in the 1990s teach the same rudimentary farming techniques to the inhabitants that Peace Corps workers in the 1960s did. The literacy rate is 15%. ...

I suspect that Somalia will, like Haiti, slip back into chaos ... By then, however, U.S. troops will have been replaced by multinational troops and enough months will have gone by so that this stark truth will be overtaken by other events and news stories – exactly like our famine relief effort of 1984, which propped up Mengistu [in Ethiopia] long enough for him to perpetrate other famines, which received much less news coverage.

Dark Star Safari: Overland from Cairo to Cape Town

Houghton, Mifflin Company, Boston, 2003

By Paul Theroux, renowned author of novels, literary criticism and travel books.

Theroux was a teacher with the Peace Corps in Malawi in 1963 and 1964 and a lecturer at Makerere University in Uganda from 1965 to 1968. When he wrote the book from which I quote below he was still enough of a liberal to feel obliged to chastise white arrogance. He says about Ethiopia (p. 92), “When your barbarian ancestors were running around Europe bare-assed ... elaborately clothed Ethiopians were breeding livestock and using the wheel and defending their civilization against the onslaught of Islam.”

This is patent nonsense. The Ethiopians (barely) defended their civilization against Islam in the seventh century AD. Twelve centuries earlier Greece was producing the greatest drama, epic, sculpture and philosophy in the history of the world. (In a survey of professional philosophers conducted in 1998 as to who had made the most important contributions to philosophy, Aristotle was rated first, Plato second.) Seven centuries before the Ethiopians fought the Muslims, the city of Rome had a population of over a million and had cleaner water and more effective sewage disposal than any city in the world was to have again until the 1870s. Recently an observatory from 5000 BC was discovered in Germany. It consisted of four concentric circles, the largest of which was 75 meters wide. On the winter solstice someone in the center could see the sun rise and set through the southern gate. It is one of approximately 200 similar contemporary observatories in Europe.⁸ Moreover, Europeans were using the wheel well before even the ancient Egyptians. (The pyramids were built without the wheel.)

However, Theroux honestly recorded what he saw in his travels through Africa in 2003, which I quote below:

The whites – teachers, diplomats and agents of virtue I met ... had pretty much the same things on their minds as their counterparts had in the 1960s. They discussed relief projects and scholarships and agricultural schemes ... technical assistance. ... They did

⁸ “Circles for Space,” *Scientific American*, December 2003, pp. 13-14

not realize that for forty years people had been saying the same things, and the result ... was a lower standard of living, a higher rate of illiteracy, overpopulation, and much more disease (page 181).

A pattern in the African city ... [was that] the concept of stewardship or maintenance hardly existed. In Kampala [the capital of Uganda], the big, elegant Grindlay's Bank had become a horror, the National Theater had become a seedy monstrosity. ... [The] movie theater[s] ... where I had seen the early James Bond movies ... were closed. A new multiscreen theater had taken their place ... and was already falling into disrepair. ... Uganda has a good reputation now, yet ... everything was on the wane. ... Nor was I impressed with a new hospital donated by the Swedes ... a new school funded by the Canadians, the Baptist clinic, the flour mill that was signposted 'A Gift of the American People'. ... The projects would become wrecks, every one of them. Makere [University, where Throux taught from 1965 to 1968] looked a ghostly and decrepit place. ... The campus roads were full of potholes. ... I went back to the library ... What few books remained on the shelves were dusty and torn. ... What had been the best library in East Africa was now just a shell (pages 203-5, 208).

[In Tanzania] Kaolin was once a Tanzanian export. Roofing tiles, bricks, and pots were made from this useful clay. ... Another defunct industry, like the sisal and tobacco and the rice and the cotton and the apiaries ... started by Peace Corps volunteers, which had produced high-quality honey. The volunteers had gone home ... the beehives ... failed. ... Because no building was properly maintained, every structure in an[y] African city was in a state of deterioration (pages 254-5).

[Theroux visited the school in Malawi at which he taught while he was in the Peace Corps.] The school was almost unrecognizable. What had been a group of school buildings in a large grove of trees was a compound of battered buildings in a muddy open field ... broken windows, doors ajar, mildewed walls, gashes in the roof ... The library, a substantial building, had been the heart of the school ... ten thousand books ... The library was [now] in almost total darkness. One light burned. Nearly all the [book]shelves were empty. ... This used to be one of the best schools in the country. ... These flawed schools were ... like the big metal containers full of machinery or computers [from

foreign donors] that were distributed and used for a while and then broke down and were never fixed (pages 315, 319, 321).

[In Karonga, Malawi] In the 1970s, the Indians [who owned all the stores] ... nearly all left, and the few that hesitated saw their shops burned down ... But no one had come to take their place ... The shops were in ruins. ... The towns of Rumphu and Ekwendeni – places I had known pretty well – had also lost their Indian shops and not replaced them ... The commercial life of these towns ... had declined from main streets of busy shops to simple open-air markets of hawkers and fruit-sellers sitting in the mud. [A high-level Malawian bureaucrat told Theroux] perversely denigrating the Indians ... in a mocking voice. ‘They sit there, you see, and they have little pieces of paper, and have these columns of numbers ... One Indian is running the calculator, and another is counting the sacks of flour and the tins of condensed milk. ...’ What this educated African with his plummy voice intended as mockery ... was the description of people doing a simple inventory.

[The son of an African tribal chief told Theroux] ‘Indian traders had made it a practice of abducting very young African girls from villages. The Indians killed the girls and cut out their hearts. Using the fresh hearts ... as bait ... they were able to catch certain Zambezi fish that were stuffed full of diamonds. That is why the Indians have so much money,’ he said (pages 285-6, 288, 322-3, 344).

How to Restore the Good Name of Colonialism

The [London] Spectator

January 9, 1993, page 18

By Paul Johnson, the eminent British historian

The American intervention in Somalia will fail ... It rests on the baseless assumption that an honest and efficient government of Somalia can eventually be created from among the local politicians. That is a fantasy ... The helpless Somalis can have no hope of a safe, prosperous future except as a colony of one of the civilized powers. ... It is not a question of giving time to inchoate states to learn the art of self-government. One of the most miserable of them, Liberia, goes back to the 1840s (Haiti to the 1790s). ... The civilized world must go to Africa and govern.

My last quotation is from *Native Stranger: A Black American's Journey into the Heart of Africa* (1992), in which Edward Harris, a black American, narrated his experiences during a year's travel throughout Africa. Towards its end (pp. 299-300) he recorded a conversation he had with a black African who tried to convince him to stay in Africa:

I could never live in Africa, I told him. ... "You prefer to live with whites?" he said. He pointed his thumb to Justin. "His ancestors stole your ancestors from this place and took them to America as slaves. How can you live with them?" Thinking back quickly to all I had seen [in Africa] ... I turned to Justin and thanked him.