

U.S./Africa

Ethiopians, Eritreans Put On Notice

[AN] An estimated 2,000 to 3,000 Ethiopians and Eritreans in the United States face possible deportation as a result of a new State Department ruling.

U.S. officials have terminated "voluntary departure status" for this group, explaining the move as a response to the stabilizing political situation in Ethiopia. Some observers, however, see the move as part of a strategy to counter Soviet influence in the Horn.

A sense that the U.S. government is tightening visa controls in general has been growing in recent months among Africans from various countries residing here. "It's become very difficult for Africans to change from student visas to regular visas, and most people feel there is discrimination, although it is difficult to prove in each individual case," says Howard University's Professor of African Studies Nsongola Ntalaja.

But Ethiopia is a special case. Since the revolution against Emperor Haile Selassie began in 1974, the U.S. has allowed automatic one-year extensions of all visas for Ethiopians (including those from Eritrea, the territory annexed by Ethiopia in 1962 and the scene of a bitter independence war).

Then, after extensive discussions in the early months of 1981, the State Department advised the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) of the Department of Justice that it wanted a change. According to an official explanation issued earlier this month, the State Department concluded "that current conditions in Ethiopia are not comparable to the seven years previous and continuing granting of blanket voluntary departure status could no longer be justified."

In an August 8 letter, Deputy Secretary of State William P. Clark, who became President Reagan's national security advisor on January 8, notified the INS of State's new position.

The days of "bloody red terror" that followed the ouster of Emperor Selassie and the ensuing widespread and random violence had ended, the department concluded,

and therefore the handling of visa applications from Ethiopians should be regularized. Even so, conditions continued to be such in Ethiopia, that "there may be Ethiopian asylum applicants in the United States as well as Ethiopian applicants elsewhere in the world who can demonstrate a well-founded fear of persecution if they were to return home," Clark stated. "These applications should continue to be granted asylum or refugee status," he advised.

Following this notification, Ethiopians began to receive letters from INS telling them to prepare to go home as their one-year extensions expired. As word of the change spread in the Ethiopian community in the U.S., *Africa News* asked the State Department for an explanation.

One informed official, interviewed in December, said the action was sparked by a "gross level of abuse" of the voluntary departure status. "They may not like living in Ethiopia, but that is not sufficient grounds for political asylum," he argued.

In a January 4 column that drew public attention to the issue, *The New York Times'* Anthony Lewis argued that the action reflected "particular political callousness" and "hypocrisy" on the part of the Reagan administration.

"Last October 2, Jeanne Kirkpatrick, United States Ambassador to the United Nations, spoke in the UN General Assembly about what she called the 'savagery' of the Marxist regime in Ethiopia," Lewis wrote. "In graphic terms she denounced assaults on human rights that have occurred since Col. Mengistu Haile Mariam took over in the revolution of 1974."

After additional Kirkpatrick quotes, Lewis continued: "Powerful words. But at about the same time Mrs. Kirkpatrick spoke them, Reagan administration officials were preparing action to send 20,000 or 30,000 Ethiopian refugees in this country back to Ethiopia."

Those figures are apparently exaggerated. Sources in both the Ethiopian community

and the INS put the number affected at between 2,000 and 3,000. The INS reports that during the first ten months of 1981, 1,271 requests for asylum were received from Ethiopians resident in the U.S. The U.S. approved sixteen requests and denied 24 during that period.

Another 4,600 requests from Ethiopians abroad were received, and 3,500 of those were given "refugee" status, allowing them to enter and live in the U.S. as permanent alien residents. (Aliens already inside the U.S. cannot apply for refugee status.)

With the voluntary departure status now abolished for Ethiopians — it is in effect currently for Polish refugees — the only way most can remain in the U.S. is by obtaining political asylum. The INS and the State Department expect only a small number of those affected to qualify.

In his column, Lewis argues "there is every reason in common sense for the Ethiopian refugees here to expect trouble if they return home now. They are Westernized, highly educated, many of them children of officials in the Haile Selassie government overthrown by Col. Mengistu."

Bereket Habte Selassie, a former Ethiopian attorney general now on the faculty at Howard University (and no relation to the former emperor), says many of those affected "are students who were very active during the early and mid-1970s in the opposition to the emperor, and the majority of them supported the EPRP (a party which advocated a civilian rather than military revolutionary government) and participated in demonstrations against the military regime."

Bereket believes the visa change is part of a larger U.S. policy initiative. He argues that the State Department, by declaring that conditions are stabilizing, may be trying to improve the atmosphere of relations with Ethiopia. Chester Crocker, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, "believes that eventually Mengistu and the faction that supports him will either kick the Soviets out or considerably

Historian Advocates Black Emancipation

By Henry Duvall

It was 1919 when a young black faculty member of Howard University named Charles H. Wesley called for a "second emancipation" of black people — a "self-emancipation." He was addressing the congregation of Washington's Metropolitan A.M.E. Church who, Wesley recalls, reacted with shock and then applause.

The noted historian and educator recently celebrated his 90th birthday anniversary. Mayor Marion Barry of Washington, D.C., proclaimed his birthdate, December 2, 1981, as "Charles Wesley Day," and this month his fraternity, Alpha Phi Alpha, paid tribute to him at a ceremony at Howard.

His concept of self-emancipation was perceived as a radical idea in 1919; nonetheless, Wesley continued to share his

message through public appearances in the '30s and '40s. Today, Wesley believes that the concept of a second emancipation is still relevant.

Noting that the gains of black leadership have slipped a bit in recent years, he observes that emancipation must be continuous. "Some have broken away from this

idea, but it must be continued." It's a call for black leadership.

According to Wesley, the first emancipation of blacks was the proclamation of the white man, and the second was the burden of blacks to lead themselves and control their own destinies. Wesley says that blacks have to earn this leader-

ship through education.

The concept of self-emancipation was not meant to lead to separatism between the races, Wesley emphasizes. Blacks and whites should work together, "but blacks shouldn't be following."

In earlier years, there were those blacks who continued to follow

white leadership. Wesley notes, adding that some still do. He warns that if black people aren't careful, they will return to the "acceptance of white leadership."

"The leadership today — black and white — must go back to the basics of what's right

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Alphas Pay Tribute To Dr. Wesley

Dr. Charles H. Wesley, right, ninety year old historian and former college president, is greeted by Dr. James E. Check, president of Howard University, at a recent Alpha Phi Alpha tribute to Dr. Wesley. His wife, Mrs. Dorothy Wesley, looks on.

TONY BROWN'S JOURNAL

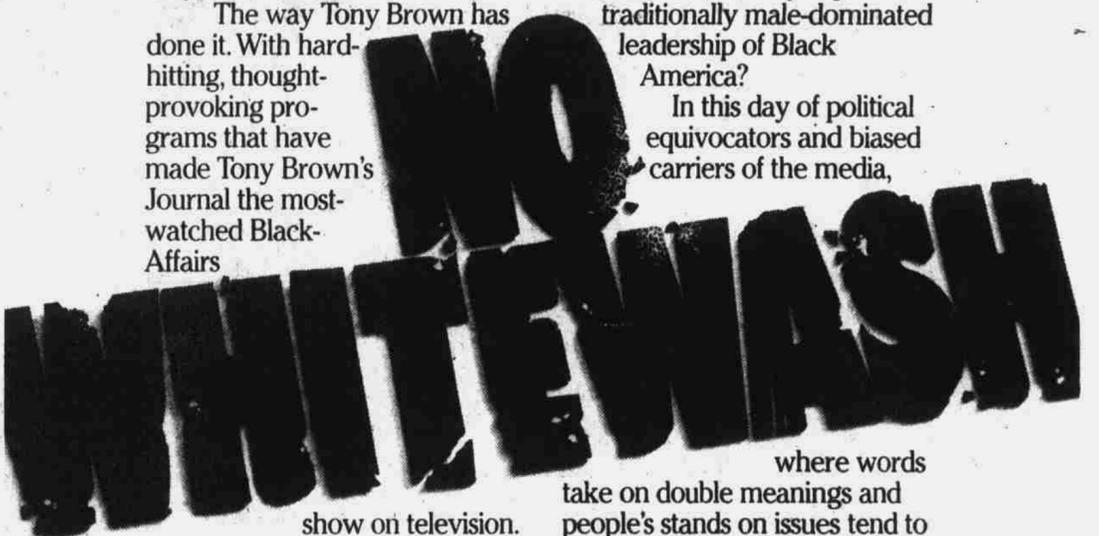
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