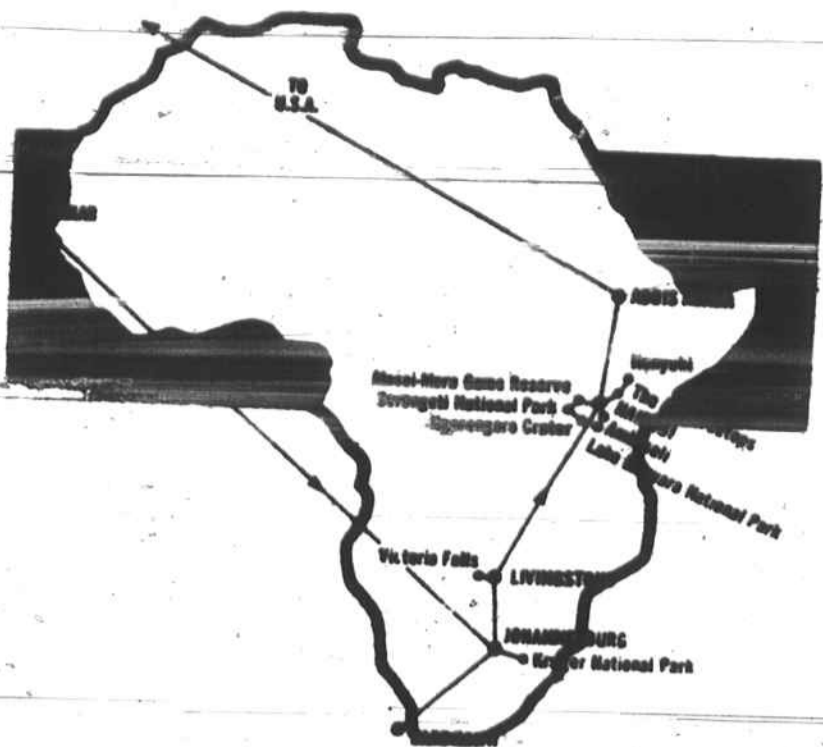


African Spotlight



The Empires

Of The Western Sudan

The word 'Sudan' meaning 'the country of the black people,' is the name given by the Arabs to the great belt of savannah country stretching from the Atlantic to the Red Sea. The Sahara is its northern boundary while south of it lies the tropical forest. We are concerned here with the Western Sudan, that is, that part of the savannah country stretching from the Atlantic to the western limits of the Hausa states.

Powerful black empires rose to greatness in this region during the period known in history as the Middle Ages. Three of these empires stand out in the history of West Africa. They are Ghana, Mali and Songhai.

The importance of these states in West African history is enormous. From the commercial point of view, these states are important for they acted as middlemen between the peoples of the forest countries to the south and those of the North Africa. These towns were the great markets for gold and slaves from the forest countries; for salt from the Sahara mines; for horses, cloth, swords, books and haberdashery from North Africa and Europe.

From the cultural point of view, they also acted as intermediaries for the spread of ideas. From the 11th century onwards, the towns of the Western Sudan were the main centres from which Islamic religion and culture brought across the Sahara from North Africa began to spread among the peoples of the savannah and sub-savannah country of West Africa.

From the point of view of History, the study of the history of these great black empires helps to dispel the false imperialist theory that the blackman has no past; that the black race is what whites made of it. For it is now well known that the great empire of Ghana flourished during the dark ages of Europe. By the 15th century, there was a university at Timbuktu. And even white people of European heritage bought their books from the book-stores of Timbuktu.

The thesis that Africa is what Western European missionaries, traders, technicians and administrators have made it is comforting to Western Europeans but invalid in the light of African true history.

The earliest known black empire of the Western Sudan in recorded history is that of Ghana. The Kingdom appears to have been founded by a Soninke dynasty about 300 A.D.

The original capital of the kingdom was Kumbi Saleh. The kingdom grew and expanded until at the zenith of its power in the 11th century, it stretched from Timbuktu on the Niger to central Senegal, then north into the Sahara and south to the Bawle River.

The king or emperor of Ghana was very powerful and ruled over several kingdoms. Popm and elegance characterized his person. He wore a head-dress of gold and sat on a throne round which stood ten horses in gold harness. The royal palace was adorned with sculptures, paintings and glass windows. When the people knelt before him, they threw dust on their heads as a mark of respect. The Emperors were pagans and lived in the pagan section of Kumbi.

Some of the great Emperors' names have come down to us. Kaya Maghan, the black Mandingo ruler, conquered Ghana in 770 A.D. and established a new dynasty.

Basi ruled in the 11th century.

Tenkamanin succeeded Basi in 1072. Though he could put 200,000 warriors in the field including about 40,000 archers, he lost the capital to Almoravid Berber forces in 1076.

[Next week Government]

N.E.



Bill Cosby



B.B. King



Helen Reddy

'Feeling Good' - - New TV Show

Three of the country's top entertainers -- Bill Cosby, B.B. King and Helen Reddy -- starred in the first episode of "Feeling Good," the new television series on health care for adults which was broadcast Wednesday, November 20 (8 p.m. EST, 7 Central).

They will join the resident company of the new series to help promote better health. Feeling Good, produced by CTW, creators of "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company," will be seen weekly on the 250 stations of the Public Broadcasting Service, most of which will repeat each episode each Saturday or Sunday.

(Country and western star Johnny Cash will appear in a segment on mental health, singing about the need for a "Helping Hand" in time of trouble. Cash said that it seemed important to him to do this program because there was a time when he needed help and was afraid to ask. "I was lucky enough," he said, "somebody sought me out and helped me. Not everybody has that." Appearing in this show is his way of offering help to those who need it, he feels.)

Bill Cosby and Helen Reddy take part in a segment on prenatal care. Cosby, suspended in air as an unborn baby, praises his mother for taking good care of herself -- thereby ensuring that he will be born healthy. He also chides his parents for selecting a name he does not like. (This fetal comedian wants to be called "the Avenger").

In a more serious vein, Helen Reddy sings of the changes a new baby brings to a woman's life. She also encourages women to start medical care as soon as they suspect they are pregnant. Of prenatal care, she says: "no baby should be without it, and no baby need be."

Later in the first one-hour show, blues singer B.B. King shows viewers the proper way to cook vegetables so that they retain their nutritive value. While he steams some broccoli, he sings "Too Much of a Good Thing," a number which is just two minutes long

-- the time it takes the broccoli to steam.

These stars are the first of many celebrities who will appear during the 26 weekly programs of the experimental series which has been characterized as "television's most ambitious attempt to both inform people and motivate them toward healthier living."

Others include Pearl Bailey, Ken Berry, Charlie Callas, Howard Cosell, Rosey Grier, Tammy Grimes, Jody Miller, Mel Tillis, Bob and Ray and Bill Withers. Cosby will be a regular guest star.

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