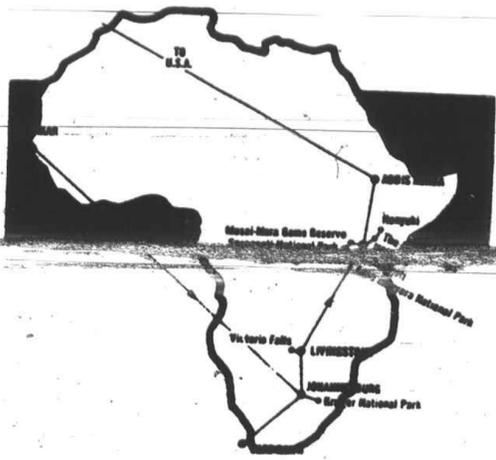


# African Spotlight



## The Ghana Empire: Government

Last week, we looked at the empires of the Western Sudan. We noted that the word 'Sudan' means - the land of black people in Arabic. This week we are going to look at the rise and fall of the first black empire - Ghana. Note that we are not here concerned about the modern Ghana. We are dealing with the ancient black empire called Ghana.

At the height of its power in the 10th and 11th centuries, the government of the Empire of ancient Ghana was very efficient. There was a Cabinet of imperial ministers. The majority of them were Moslems and others pagans.

The Court Interpreter and the State Treasurer, for example, were Moslems because literacy was necessary for these offices. The Emperor had flags which were carried before him as he rode round the city to receive the petitions of his subjects.

There were a court of justice and a court of appeals at the capital.

The Empire was divided into sixteen large principalities or voting province. A governor was appointed over each voting province. The governor was assisted by a chief judicial officer, a linguist, a treasurer and a number of subordinate officials.

The capital city Kumbi consisted of two townships about six miles apart.

The Moslem townships had twelve mosques and possessed many scholars, professors, theologians and priests. Arabic was the written language here and throughout the Empire.

The royal town, El Ghaba was protected by defensive wall. And the gold trade between Ghanaians and Wangaras was carried on at the imperial boundary.

Ghana's commercial relations with the outside world was very important. Traders from North Africa flocked to its famous market to obtain gold, slaves, ivory, kola-nuts, honey, gums and cotton. The traders imported into Ghana salt, copper, clothes and brocades and dried fruits. Gold was the principal export of Ghana.

The Emperor's revenue came from the Empire's prosperous trade. In the 10th century he charged duties based on what was imported into his Empire.

The fall of Ghana empire was not a sudden affair. It came in stages by repeated attacks by enemies. In 1020, Berber forces from the Sahara attacked the Empire but was driven back.

In 1032, the Almoravids attacked some of the outlying districts, and in 1055, they captured Audoghost - a vassal state of the empire, converted its people to Islam and made it their base. Then from here, Abu Bekr, the leader of the Almoravid forces captured Kumbi the capital of Ghana in 1076. Finally, the empire disintegrated as some of its outlying provinces broke away.

Some years later, the nomadic Almoravids left, the sacked city was rebuilt, and in 1088, Ghana regained its independence.

But the rich city soon attracted fresh invaders, and in 1203, it was captured by Sumanguru a Susu ruler of Kaniaga. Following this, the traders of Kumbi emigrated to Walata and other places.

Finally in 1240, Sundiata the ruler of Mali sacked Ghana. Sumanguru was killed and the remaining inhabitants of Kumbi fled. And so Ancient Ghana disappeared from history until recently when Cold Coast named itself Ghana.

# Drama Has Vitality And Life

by Chris Sherman

It doesn't seem to be happy stuff: the bedroom killing by a jealous husband; a fight promoter baiting the crowds; a prostitute being kicked across stage.

However, distorted a picture of ghetto life, those scenes indicate the cruel prediction of the Shaw Players' latest production, "Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death".

Despite almost persistent physical and personal violence, a spirit of wit and vitality bursts from the stage.

The flashy colors of street women, the sounds of a fine jazz band and comical clowning by winos, junkies, country boys and hardluck losers comes through cheerily, offsetting the violence.

The musical by Melvin Van Peebles is a kaleidoscope of cameo performances and sideline antics that has no plotline except survival of the spirit.

Sometimes, as in a Fellini movie, the two dozen performers are impossible to watch as much as you want, and yet keeping track of all three rings is crucial.

For instance, a very likable old drunk has just won his woman back and clumsily sings "You ain't no astronaut, but we've been out in orbit and walked further than the moon."

In an er corner, a tall gent in sunglasses peddles "Muhammad Speaks". Male and female lovers get together in a bar on still another part of the stage.

And then the killing in the bedroom rupts into general violence.

An earnest teenager gives up hope and grabs a rifle.

Through it all, the reunited couple are the only ones snuggling instead of struggling.

And even a choreographed riot, has parts that delighted

the audience, like when the hopped-up addict ran jerkingly by with a television, and another looter with a ham.

Earthy dialogue and action keep "Ain't Supposed to Die a

Natural Death" "good clean fun", but it is a life-force that contends successfully, at least for an adult audience, with more mortal sins.

A largely student crowd got considerable charge out of the throaty transvestite, although it became bittersweet than the blind beggar fell in love.

There are numerous excellent portrayals in the play, most spiced with musical

solos. The old woman who totes her shopping bags throughout the show almost without a word, is a forceful finale.

She wags her finger to "put

horrors of ghetto life, that may have brought the events of the play to happen.

Van Peebles has drawn criticism, particularly for recent movies that emphasize low-life as black culture, but this performance is a welcome addition to the local theatre.

The Shaw Players presented "Ain't Supposed to Die a Natural Death" November 9 through November 14.

## Welcome School Receives President's Fitness Award

Governor Jim Holshouser announced today that Welcome Elementary School has received the 1974 North Carolina State Champion Award from the President's Council on Physical Fitness.

Robert Ronkin is principal of the school, which is located in Davidson County.

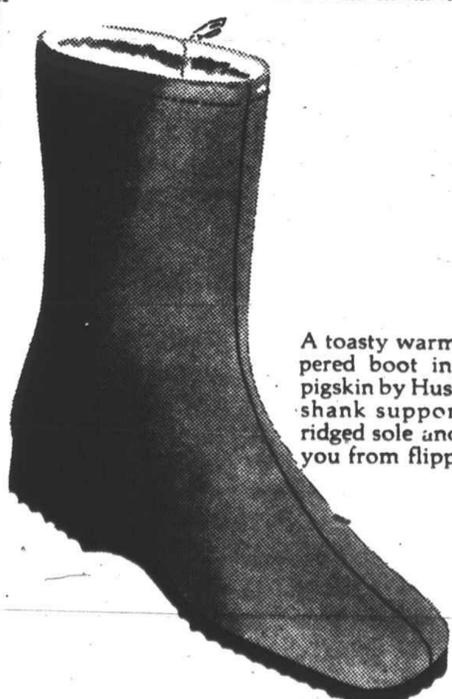
The award is based on the percentage of students who qualified for the President's Youth Fitness Award, admi-

nistered at the end of the last school year. To receive the award, a student must score above the 85th percentile on a battery of seven fitness tests.

Notification of the award came from Captain James A. Lovell, consultant to the President on Physical Fitness and Sports, who noted that "this award represents the highest achievement of its kind" by a school in North Carolina.



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