

Visit to Ghana brings home connection between African-Americans and Africa

by NaKeisha S. Sylver

If I had ever considered taking the position that "African-American" is an inaccurate term for Black people born in America, I certainly wouldn't now.

During my recent journey to Ghana, West Africa after being awarded a scholarship to participate in Delta Sigma Theta's Habitat for Humanity International Build project, I *felt* the connection between myself and my African/Ghanaian sisters and brothers that I always knew existed.

I am not sure what I expected Africa to feel like. Perhaps I had some romanticized notion that it would feel like an exotic paradise, or that I would feel some type of electrical charge when my feet first touched the soil walked hundreds of years ago by my ancestors. At any rate, I certainly wasn't prepared for what Ghana—a western African nation juxtaposed between tall, majestic mountain ranges, and the playful waves of the Atlantic Ocean—actually felt like to me: incredibly and intensely familiar.

I guess "déjà vu" is a good way to describe what I experienced throughout my nine-day stay in Ghana. Whether I was standing outside my hotel talking with new friends, touring the breathtakingly beautiful, lush, and in some places tropical vegetation of the countryside, or working on one of the forty homes my sorority financed and came to help complete and then dedicate, I saw sights, and heard sounds that seemed familiar to me somehow.

Watching children play "grown-up" by imitating their parents, listening to men approach the women in our group with the same "lines" men use at home, and hearing middle-aged parents complain to one another about the strange way their teenagers talk all made me feel right at home in Ghana.

At first I marveled at this. I had never before left the continental United States, much less traveled to Africa. I had certainly never been to Ghana. The landscape of the country, the customs, and the values of the people can in no way be compared to that of mainstream America, yet bits and pieces of everything I saw in Ghana began to remind me of home.

I always knew that African-American culture has managed to retain some connections with the culture of our African ancestors, but it was awe-inspiring to see some of the subtle similarities in action.

On several occasions, I was sitting in a Ghanaian village enjoying a traditional dance performance, when all of a sudden one of the young Ghanaian

dancers would break into a dance move that friends of mine in America would have declared they invented. At times, I even saw the exact formations and steps that I have seen used in numerous Greek step shows.

When I learned the Ghanaian handshake—which is used just as frequently and in much the same way as the handshake we use in the United States—my mouth dropped open. The handshake, a series of grips and snaps, is much like the ones we often use in African-American culture to greet or congratulate one another.

While standing in the Cape Coast Slave Castle, however, I felt the connection between African people and myself, an African-American woman, more completely and intensely than ever before. As our Ghanaian tour guide toured us around the Castle he told us the story of how the ancestors of African-Americans spent their last moments on their beloved continent before being forced off to an unfamiliar and undesirable world to toil in agony as slaves; I wept because I knew he was telling my story as well as his own.

I stood atop Cape Coast Castle and looked out at the shore from which many of my beloved ancestors were literally packed into the bottom of slave ships and taken off to a country and a land that meant them only evil and pain. I thought of how they were forced to leave their families and friends behind forever. Those left behind had to go on with their lives and create future generations in their native Ghana, just as their brothers and sisters had to do in a hostile and cruel America. As I cried, the line separating my American and my African family members became more and more blurred.

Of course, not all of the men and women brought to America as slaves came from Ghana. Ghana is but one of the western African nations from which African-Americans descend. Each African country has its own culture and history. The connection, however, between all of those who left the Continent by force, the families they left behind in their native land, and the new families they created in America is clear.

Many Black people in America seem to feel an unjustifiable sense of detachment from their sisters and brothers

who were born on the Continent. Before I left for Ghana, many people told me how poor the country was and how "underdeveloped" I would find it to be. "That's nice of your sorority to build homes for those poor people," many said to me.

Since they had never visited Ghana, however, they couldn't tell me anything of the pride with which even the poorest Ghanaian citizens carry themselves. No one told me how hard working the people are, or that the poverty they faced is the result of economic oppression (they don't get fair prices for their number one export, cocoa). The economic problems I saw in Ghana are not just Ghanaian problems. Ghanaian/African people are the family members of African-Americans. That makes it *our* problem too. It wasn't just "nice of" Delta Sigma Theta to build homes for forty hard working Ghanaian families who couldn't otherwise afford them; it was a part of our *responsibility* as a sisterhood of Black, college educated women. As Black people in America, we are inextricably bound to our family members in Africa.

Burnim's five-year plan to have far-reaching impact on ECSU

by Latisha Edwards

Where will ECSU be in the year 2001? Although no one knows the answer to that question, Interim Chancellor Dr. Mickey L. Burnim and Dr. Deborah Fontaine, assistant director of sponsored programs, are hard at work on a strategic plan to help ECSU meet the challenges and demands of the new century.

The five-year plan will have far-reaching impact on the University's academics, communications, organizational structure, and enrollment.

In an announcement to the University family on Jan. 16th Burnim declared that the objective of the plan is to "clarify our mission, enhance decision making and communications, increase student enrollment and strengthen the quality of all academic programs and services."

According to Burnim ECSU needs to develop a "well-focused" strategic plan that will direct decision making for the next five years.

"Planning allows you to take a proactive response to changing circumstances," said Fontaine, ECSU's strate-

gic planning coordinator. "This institution must acknowledge its weaknesses and deficiencies as well as its strengths. That way, we can exploit our strengths and minimize our weaknesses."

In an effort to charter the direction of the University for the next five years Fontaine will implement the Work Plan for Strategic Planning which authorizes the University to develop its five-year plan.

To solicit input from faculty, staff and students, Fontaine has asked all departments to submit operational plans and budgets for the next five years. Twelve institutional goals have been established, said Fontaine. They are designed to:

- offer a high-quality undergraduate degree program in all disciplines.
- attract and maintain highly professional faculty
- enhance administration efficiency and effectiveness,
- offer a master's degree program,
- develop a campus-wide technological network
- increase the annual level of exter-

nal funding

- attract a highly motivated student body,
 - develop an outstanding academic support system
 - implement a comprehensive program for academic programs
 - improve review and assessment
 - broaden educational and community outreach
 - improve educational experience and employability of undergraduates
 - enhance the quality of student life.
- Dr. Olive Wilson, Director of Testing & Counseling Services, will coordinate the University's student opinion survey.

"The results will affect our decisions and plans for the next five years," said Fontaine. "It's important to ask our consumers—our students—what they think."

The survey, which will involve 1,250 students, will ask questions like "What do you think of residence hall rules and regulations?"

"The more information we have at our disposal," said Fontaine, the better decisions we can make.