

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

NNPA FACT-FINDING MISSION TO THE REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA

As our world continues to come closer and closer together as a global community, we are faced with breaking down the barriers of mistrust, misunderstanding, fear and centuries of prejudice and racism. Even though we all realize its inequities, each of us has a responsibility to make this world a better and more productive place. As members of the media we know, unfortunately, that we all live in a world driven by images that often distort, mislead or misrepresent reality.

The recent Black Press of America delegation to the continent of Africa grew out of our 167-year-old mandate that no one speaks better for Black people than us. As we move further into the Information Age we seek to provide first-hand information to Blacks versus how the white-owned press distorts pictures of Africa with accounts of war, rioting, famine, wild animals on the loose and continual jungle warfare. We know that only media such as ours, can successfully speak to and for Black people of the world. All too often white-owned media's reports of Africa appear without perspective and cultural insight. As people who's ancestry is from the continent of Africa, we believe that honest dialogue and representation must accompany the images we see about the world's second largest continent, one which has 600 million people, represents 12 percent of the global population and covers 22 percent of the world's land area.

With the connections and linkages the Black Press of America is making with similar professionals and organizations in Africa, we have moved to tell the real story about a continent that has been internationally damaged by shallow reporting and horrifying images. Our basic goal is to tell real stories of Africa to Black readers in simple and clear human terms. Our goal is not to drive up television ratings. To the contrary, our goal is to provide Americans, in general, and Black Americans in particular, with an authoritative link to Africa which helps to eliminate negative images that continue to prevent our brothers, sisters, uncles, and aunts and other people of good will from assisting and talking with, and to each other.

Most Black Americans could not point out Nigeria, Zimbabwe or Niger on a map without some consultation with an informed source. We, as the Black Press,

are becoming that source, providing the types of consultation that helps our readers identify the areas from which they came, as well as show with whom they are linked by color and culture. Africa embodies the past, present and the future. Its rich history and ancient past provides a firm foundation of the present. This foundation is enhancing the transition of traditional Africa to a modern society. The strong sense of family values and dignity in Africa is something urban Americans would do well to know and emulate. Their reverence toward their children is strong. They place education above all else. Youngsters learn the strength of the family. The young are imbued with a sense of duty and respect toward their elders, and each generation is cherished and carries forward the lessons of the past. In Africa, the future walks hand in hand with the past and present. Unfortunately, in too many American minds stereotypical images of Africa being the "dark continent" cause this country to miss the fact that Africa is a land of civilized people and an extremely important part of the planet's future.

The future of Africa, and the world, cannot be fully realized without Nigeria. Surely, the emergence of Black people around the world cannot happen without Nigeria and its God-given abundance of mineral resources, soft crude oil, and good lands for fields of food and nourishment. With a population of 100 million people, Nigeria represents one of every four Black Africans and one in five of Black people on the planet. Therefore, a Black Press of America delegation departed for Lagos, in the Republic of Nigeria, on Tuesday, September 26, 1995, on a mission designed to take a first-hand look and analysis of the social, political, human rights, and economic situation in what has been labeled a "troubled country," by the general media. In light of the negative images that have been painted of Nigeria, our specific emphasis was on the status and prospects for democratic and free elections, results of the Constitutional Convention and to conduct interviews with citizens and leadership individuals and organizations in that country. With media groups such as CNN, Reuters, Washington Post and New York Times continually making reports that many in America's Black community felt

were offensive and questionable, our collective objectives were to: 1) Enable the Black Press to legitimately enter the discussions and reporting on the Nigeria issues; 2) Become a positive force resolution of issues in Nigeria; 3) Position the Black Press as an influential voice on national and international issues affecting Black People; 4) Establish linkages with Nigerian media controlled by Black and people of color; and 5) To accurately report issues and events transpiring there.

As we were departing for Nigeria, the situation was: 1) US/Nigerian relations were at an all-time low; 2) New diplomatic sanctions against Nigeria were being called for by some groups, while constructive engagement and dialogue were being called for by others; 3) A demand was being made for the release of what were being called "political prisoners;" 4) It was a country accused by many of being the largest drug trafficker in the world; and 5) a country labeled as "in turmoil," and led by a dictatorship on the verge of economic collapse and rife with corruption.

While we were in Nigeria we met with the Head-Of-State, cabinet members, state administrators, local council members, traditional leaders, business people, religious leaders and journalists. Among the people we met were wealthy and mid-class people, and regular working-class individuals. We met people inside and out of government. We met with people in the oil industry, those who till the soil and those who drive taxis and work as civil servants. What we found were: 1) People wondering why they were being targeted by the U.S. government in unfair ways; 2) People resentful of what they termed "racist" restrictions imposed on them by the United States; 3) A group of administrators and government officials eager to talk with anyone in the U.S. ready to talk with them; 4) Concessions by Head-Of-State Gen. Sani Abacha toward individuals who he, and the majority of people interviewed, presented laws that illustrated their documented crimes; 5) Laudable efforts to curb what could hardly be 80 percent of the drugs being made available to America's drug users; and 6) A country hardly in social turmoil, except for when pedestrians become motorists and take to the streets of Lagos.

We traveled to Lagos, the capital city of Abuja, Kano, Port

Harcourt and Ife. While we will be providing a series of reports on particular subjects through our news service in future, in summary, we found that much of the present, and past, reporting on Nigeria has been unfair and probably racist. We found allegations that 80 percent of the hard drugs consumed in the U.S. comes through Nigeria are not true. The restrictions around drugs imposed by American officials are hardly equitable when viewed along with maintenance of trade, diplomatic ties, and other agreements with known drug supplying countries such as Pakistan, China and numerous South American governments. We found that those governing in Nigeria being labeled in the United States as "the most corrupt and brutal dictatorship in the world" were actually encouraged and installed by a broad-section of Nigerian citizenship, including many who were being held in detention. We found startling facts that, for instance, Chief M.K. Abolia was one of the principals in encouraging General Abacha to take control of the government. We found that, in reality, General Abacha's military government is hardly the first one in Nigeria's 35 years of independence from colonial rule. That in searching for a way to assure governmental representation of its 200 diverse groups of people, Nigeria's government has been run by military people 25 years of its 35 years as a republic. We found that had the people who distort the image of Nigeria gone there, as we did, and spoke directly with the people involved, as we did, they would have found that the Abacha regime came to be because the Interim National Government (ING) failed and the military was invited to take power. We found that in a record time of one year the National Constitutional Conference has made a series of resolutions that, hopefully, will satisfy the democratic yearnings of a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural society like Nigeria. We talked with numerous members of the conference. We found that Nigeria is hardly in economic chaos. The country is one of the only nation's in the world where there is no mass begging on the streets. We found no violence on the streets, human rights abuse, universal corruption, nor abuse of power.

What we found were people seeking to dialogue and trade with Americans. We found that Nigeria surpasses South African as America's largest trading part-

ner on the African continent. We found that Nigeria is truly a "giant" of a country, almost ready to eclipse countries such as South Korea and Taiwan on the world scene. We found centuries old tradition of African home-grown democratic practice. We found a high, and growing literacy rate, as well as a group of people with whom we could communicate with directly in English. And, we found a lawful society where millions of people are living in peace, except if you insist on condemning the millions of motorists who run traffic signs and lights consistently.

As a concerned group, we wish to say that everyone in America who has an interest in Africa and Nigeria should start to look to the pages of Black newspapers across the country. We are armed with first-hand information about Nigeria and Africa and plan to forge ahead on these issues in a progressive manner. We have formed agreements with the Pan African News Agency (PANA), the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ), and others, to bring you more accurate Black and human value and perspectives on issues. We intend to be an authoritative voice on these subjects.

In Nigeria, the government has presented a time-table illustrating that it intends to return the country to democratic rule. Scholars around the world will tell you that every democracy had its teething problems. To this point, Nigeria has made three false starts at emulating foreign democracies, we conclude that we should not impose folly upon folly by trying to impose an alien democracy on that country as some in America demand be done. Let home-grown democracy take place in Nigeria in stages leading up to presidential elections in three years. Is there any sound reason that we shouldn't?

In the minds of the Black media group that accompanied me to Nigeria, we collectively think that the things that can unite us with Nigerians should be pursued with greater vigor than those that divide us!"

Delegation was led by President of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), Dorothy R. Leavell.

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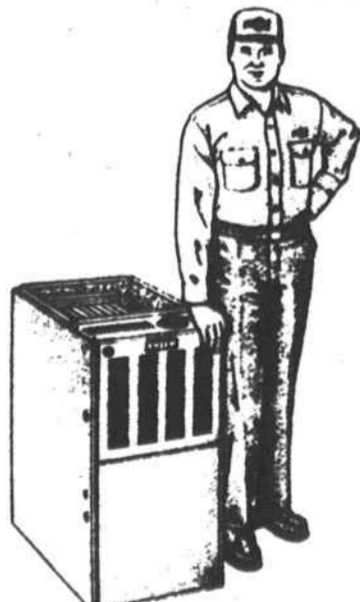


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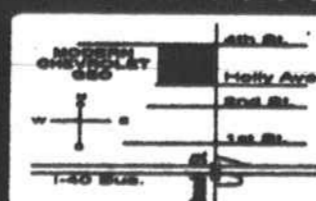
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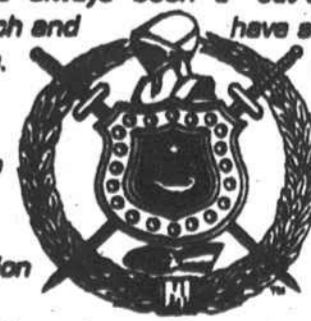
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