

PERSPECTIVES



by McKinley Burt

Last week I introduced you to General Napoleon Bonaparte who sparked a "New European Renaissance" in 1798 by bringing back from Africa a treasure trove of culture and technology. We also met his Haitian born Black general, Alexander Dumas, who reached that rank at age 35 while Napoleon was only a major (Almanach National, Anll, 1797). Napoleon was ever dependent upon the fearless Dumas for his military successes, but spiteful and jealous of the public adulation received by the Black man, he finally abandoned him in an Italian misadventure.

Much more of Napoleon's vaunted military reputation was underwritten by the stellar performance of his large corp of African generals from the colony of Haiti: The aforementioned Dumas, plus generals Rigaud, Besse, Leveille, Clovalotte, Belle, Pelage, Petion, Chanlatte, Barthelme, Villate, and Mentor. (See Napoleon's Correspondence, Vol. IV, p. 252, 1801)

While these Black men commanded white troops, Napoleon also had his favorite elite regiment that he kept close around him in battle, these troops forming his Royal Africans. When other Africans were not available to replace casualties, he restored the ranks with Greeks and Turks stating that "they are the same skin color as the others". They didn't tell us any of this in school, did they? (See Carter O. Woodson, Negro History Bulletin, May, 1938).

Moving to another aspect, we may say that the African contribution to France (and the world) extends far

beyond the importations of the 1898 expedition to Africa. The narration cannot be complete without inclusion of the magnificent literary works of the son and grandson of General Alexander Dumas.

To the son Alexander Dumas I, we are indebted for many famous novels and plays; 300 novels and 25 volumes of drama in all. They are still popular after almost two hundred years, with motion pictures and movies-for-television shown today. The world still enjoys his **The Three Musketeers, The Count of Monte Cristo, The Man in the Iron Mask, The Corsican Brothers, and The Black Tulip**. This is the Black man who was voted the greatest gourmet the world has ever seen, owned a yacht and theatre, and told a pregnant mistress, "I doubt if this miracle is mine, but if it comes with a head of kinky hair I'll be convinced."

Of no less importance are the works of the grandson Alexander Dumas II (1824-1894). His classic novel, "The Lady of the Camellias" made him famous throughout France. His rewrite into a play made him famous throughout the world. Two world famous operas are adaptations of his work: "La Traviata" by Verdi, and "Camille" by Forest. In 1874 this younger Dumas was made a member of the famed French Academy of Arts and Sciences and was later elected its president. He next received the second most prestigious honor of France, **The Grand Cross of the Legion of Honor**.

We return now to the African-dominated events of a most volatile period in both Europe and the Americas, the end of the 18th century. America is gravely threatened by empire hungry European powers who already occupy over half the continent, and we find a fascinating intersection of famous lives and deeds. The principal stage is the West Indies island of Santo Domingo. One half (Haiti) was a French colony, and the other half Spanish. The 40,000 white inhabitants lived in a luxury supported by the slave labor of 450,000 Blacks in the sugar cane fields.

In 1789 Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803) was the brilliant Black leader of a successful slave revolt in Haiti. This event struck fear into the hearts of white colonialists throughout the world, and soon would change the map of the United States, a slave-based economy, even more frightening, Toussaint proved to be a capable and enlightened administrator, winning many friends in France. But, again, a vain and jealous Napoleon decided to get rid of a stronger Black man; Frenchmen were even saying that Toussaint was "the greater leader". They remembered General Dumas.

Napoleon sent an army of 35,000 men to crush this Black who threatened this dreams of empire in the New World, but before that was accomplished the freedom fighters had reduced that number to 11,000. And it was only through the trickery of a false truce that Toussaint was captured and sent off to die in an Austrian prison. American Historians like Commager or Current would claim that it was yellow fever rather than the slaves fighting ability which, then, enabled them to win the island under the leadership of the ferocious African, Jean Jacques Dessalines (Two grammar schools in my Saint Louis ghetto were named after these heroes of freedom)

Napoleon himself puts the denigrations to lie when dying as a prisoner on the island of St. Helena, he wrote "my folly was to get rid of Toussaint...I lost my army and then I lost Haiti". In 1803 a fearful American president, Thomas Jefferson, was unaware that Napoleon was ready to get out; thoroughly disillusioned by the African freedom fighters of retaining an empire in the Americas. In consequence, when Jefferson sent emissaries to France, feeling lucky if they were able to buy only Florida, the discouraged Napoleon sold them the entire Louisiana Territory—from the Mississippi River to the Rocky Mountains, doubling the size of the United States.

Continued next week.

BLACK COLLEGE PUBLIC RELATIONS DIRECTORS MEET THE PRESS

Historic Media Seminar sponsored By Philip Morris Shows Importance Of Public Relations to Black Institutions for Image And For Fund-Raising

Public relations officials from 30 historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) joined recently with scores of communications professionals for an unprecedented seminar titled, "Working effectively With the Media."

George Knox, Staff Vice President, Public Affairs, Philip Morris Companies Inc., set the tone for the two days of meetings at the Hyatt Regency Hotel.

A graduate of both Tuskegee and Harvard Universities, Knox, told the group: "An institution rises or falls on its reputation. As a consumer marketing company, we know that public relations is not an add-on -- it is essential to a company's success."

Sponsored by Philip Morris Companies Inc., the seminar for the public relations officials from public and private institutions in 11 states, grew out of numerous discussions between officials of black colleges and the company's communications staff.

The result, said Reese Stone, Manager, corporate Media Relations, Philip Morris Companies Inc., was that the seminar sought to "provide information on, and insight into, the workings of the press to improve relationships between college public

relations officials and the media.

We also wanted to help broaden the visibility of HBCUs through discussions of how to highlight the accomplishments of Black schools to a wider audience," Stone said.

While much of the seminar was on media relations, the workshop on "Your Image: Affecting Your Bottom Line," dealt with the importance of an institution's image to its fund-raising. Speakers from business corporations and foundations strongly emphasized that "your image is your equity," making it clear that financial support is directly influenced by the reputation of the school. Although the college and university officials were offered considerable advice from the media and public relations practitioners, some sessions featured speeches and discussions led by the HBCU representatives. These HBCU officials shared unique and successful efforts that could be made to work on other campuses.

One of the most spirited events was the "Idea Exchange" where college officials talked directly to one another on how to better promote their institutions.

Another was the back-to-back dinner speeches by Dr. Sybil Mobley, Dean, School of Business & Industry, Florida A & M University, and Gary Thornhill, Director of Admissions, Sojourner-Douglass College in Baltimore. Dr. Mobley told of bringing numerous top chief executive officers from American business firms to her campus and Thornhill told of building a strong base of inner-city community support for his college.

Other prominent speakers at the seminar included: Patricia O'Flynn Thomas, President of the National Newspaper Publishers Association; Jody Powell, former Press Secretary to President Carter and currently Chairman, Ogilvy & Mather Public Affairs; Wanda Lloyd, Senior Editor for Operations, USA Today and Jack White, Senior Editor, Time Magazine.

THE COCA-COLA COMPANY IS SALUTED FOR SUPPORTING AFRICAN DEVELOPMENT

Africare, a U.S.-based African development organization, has awarded its 1989 Distinguished Service Award to The Coca-Cola Company for corporate excellence in the cause of African development.

The Company was recognized for its programs in 1988 that aided victims of apartheid, and its funding of student scholarships, survival forums for children and refugee assistance in Soweto.

In addition, the Company was lauded for supporting the African culture and arts productions of new African plays, art exhibits, museums and research centers.

Accepting the award on behalf of the Company, senior vice president Carl Ware said, "The Company is honored to be chosen by Africare to receive this award. We look forward to participating in other successful programs in Africa in the future."

In the last decade, The Coca-Cola Company has supported a variety of projects in Africa, among them the Foundation for Peace and Justice; the Institute for a Democratic Alternative for South Africa; the Presiding Bishop Fund for World Relief; the UNICEF and Zimbabwe Committee for Child Survival. In addition, the Company is a partner in the Africa Growth Fund.

Africare is committed to the improvement of the quality of life for Africans with more than 200 programs, spanning areas of agriculture, water, health and environmental management, implemented in 21 African countries.

HOWARD PLANS MAJOR CONFERENCE ON NATIONAL ISSUES

A major conference entitled "One-Third of a Nation: African American Perspectives" will bring together hundreds of scholars and policymakers on the Howard University campus November 8-12, 1989, to discuss various solutions to a range of problems affecting the nation and minority populations in the United States.

"Our approach will be to analyze conditions in order to make recommendations for improvements that can be carried into the 21st century," said Howard professors, Dr. Lorenzo Morris and Dr. Ura Jean Oyemade, who are cochairs, of the university's Task Force on One-Third of a Nation, a group of more than 100 faculty members formed to oversee development of this meeting.

The conference is an outgrowth of various recent studies detailing the declining status of U.S. minorities. In particular, the Task Force has focused on a special Congressional Report, "The Future of African-Americans to the Year 2000," and the report "One-Third of a Nation" done by the Commission on Minority Participation in Education and American Life.

Thirteen specific areas of study will be covered at the conference, which will consist of 52 sessions in the form of roundtable and panel discussions as well as several keynote addresses by national leaders.

The main areas to be addressed are: Voting and Political Participation, Substance Abuse, Immigrants and Immigration, Employment Labor, Education, The Role of Religious Institutions, Economic Development, Science and Technology, Health, Black Family Life, Housing, Media, and Historically Black Colleges and Universities.



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