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Commentary, analysis and investigations
on issues affecting African Americans
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July 9, 2009 - Issue 332

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Advice for President Obama on His Trip to Ghana

The Substance of Truth

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President Obama is expected to make an historic visit to Ghana this weekend. His trip to the West African country will be the culmination of a busy week in which he is scheduled to touch base in Russia, then on to Italy for the G8 meetings.

As expected, news of the president's decision has already generated mild hostility between some neighboring countries, including his ancestral home Kenya, which feel snubbed by the popular Western leader. But the cantankerous disputes are irrelevant when faced with the bigger picture looming over our horizon.

Obama's trip to Ghana is significant. The presence of a Black president on Black land is nothing new to Africans, but a Black American president is. Many had come before him, but bore the shades of former colonialists. They pledged their support for AIDS, Malaria, Poverty, and other *exotic* diseases, but the promises soon turned up futile. The most important question, which must be asked, is if President Obama would, like those before him, speak with the same forked tongue of imperialism and condescension, wrapping up lofty ideals in opportunistic advances.

It may be a long road from query to answer, but if Obama's [2006 Speech](#) at the University of Nairobi, delivered upon his historic trip after being sworn in as U.S. Senator, is any indication, the answer might not be so farfetched. Sure much has changed in the last three years, but attitudes rarely do.

In late August 2006, when Obama returned to the land of his Father's birth, he was greeted more prestigiously, it seemed, than a shining prince. Kenya's peoples

celebrated him as a native son, a long-lost brother who never really left home. Obama enjoyed the charity and compassion of his cousins, receiving warmth and welcome at every turn. On August 28, 2006, he gave a speech titled, "An Honest Government, A Hopeful Future."

The problem with Obama's hell-raising speech was less about his remarks, and the veracity of them, and more about the hypocrisy with which they were delivered. Obama railed against corruption and embezzlement, but as one whose alliances with notorious slum-lord Tony Rezko was made infamous a mere year later, it seemed as though he was in no position to pass judgment. As the political godson of Illinois Senate President Emil Jones Jr., a man [known](#) for his entrenchment in Chicago old-school politics, he was perhaps the least qualified to dictate to Africans what corruption is and isn't, and how to get rid of it.

Obama began, as he always does, with the personal narrative which has attracted so many *followers*. He told of his first trip to Kenya in 1987, and the revelations it brought forth:

I learned that my grandfather had been a cook for the British and, although he was a respected elder in his village, he was called "boy" by his employers for most of his life. I learned about the brutal repression of Operation Anvil, the days of rape and torture in the "Pipeline" camps, the lives that so many gave, and how my grandfather had been arrested briefly during this period, despite being at the periphery of Kenya's liberation struggles.

Soon after, he lamented the "contradictions of Kenya, and indeed, the African continent as a whole" - a reminder "that the hopefulness of the post-colonial era has been replaced by cynicism and sometimes despair, and that true freedom has not yet been won for those struggling to live on less than a few shillings a day."

Obama asked why Kenya is not today as prosperous as South Korea, when in the early 1960s its gross national product "was not very different from that of South Korea." He explained that the "legacy" of colonialism, the burden of national boundaries, and inter-continental free-trade draconian policies, are the *true* culprits; but Kenya must "do its part. It cannot wait for other nations to act first. The hard truth is that nations, by and large, will act in their self-interest and if Kenya does not act, it will fall behind."

Obama was *now* ready to drive into the lane he desperately sought after. He was now prepared to call into question Kenya's, and consequently Africa's, inability to "create a government that is transparent and accountable. One that serves its people and is free from corruption." Obama informed Kenyans that their "freedom" was being threatened by "corruption"; not corruption among Western countries and armies, but corruption solely perpetrated by their own government. Corruption "stifles development - it siphons off scarce resources that could improve infrastructure, bolster education systems, and strengthen public health," he said. In an unforeseen twist of irony, President Obama, almost prophetically, declared: "What's worse - corruption can also provide opportunities for those who would harness the fear and hatred of others to their agenda and ambitions. It can shield a war criminal."

Yes, corruption *can*, indeed, shield war criminals, and if Obama took himself more

seriously, he might hold far different ideas on torture and state secrets and wars, than he currently does.

Before long, Obama, again as he's *infamous* for, turned to the Youth in the audience, urging them to "learn" from the "mistakes and disappointments" of their Fathers and Mothers. They must "muster the courage to fulfill the promise of our forefathers and lead our great nations towards a better future," he insisted.

His work was about done at this point. Mission accomplished. One way or another, he had delivered the message he sought to - *corruption is a bad, bad, bad thing. It is the greatest factor holding back Africans from achieving their destiny. If they would elect smarter leaders, and less corrupt ones, all their problems would vanish at-once, opening up new avenues of prosperity and promise.*

But I hope President Obama's address in Ghana this weekend will not follow the same dreadful pattern. I hope he will be a lot more sincere than he's been in times past. I hope HE will *muster the courage* to speak candidly against European influence in African governments, against Western arrogance on African shores, against ongoing colonialism in African land. I hope he will tell our beloved Ghanaians about his [AFRICOM](#) agenda, and what it means for their sovereignty - which they so cherish. I hope he will open up the window of transparency into his foreign policy, revealing why Africans better get wise fast before they're suckered into wars they should want no part of. I hope he will condemn the ruthless exploitation of African resources by dictatorial foreign companies which hold no bars in their theft of precious minerals from African seas. I hope he will be just as perceptive on the root of the problem as he would be on the solutions needed to solve them.

I hope he will not perform the same *stage craft* that has endeared millions of people, foolishly, to his camp. I hope he will not rehash the same narrative scheme - 1). Personal background 2). National accomplishments 3). National failures 4). International disappointments 5). *Hope and Possibilities* - that has rendered predictable his international speeches. I hope he will not wear that hat of condescension and didacticism which his predecessors had no problem putting on - whenever present before dark faces. I hope he will not make a fool of himself by demanding that Ghana, and Africa at-large, join *him* in fighting against Al-Qaeda and other extremist forces - appealing to an unfound, ill-defined, and unstated common interest.

I believe President Obama is no fool. He knows the depth of the African's keen political insight - in many ways sharper than her African-American family's. It would do him well to be thoughtful, thorough and, above all, truthful.

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