

Portrait Of A New African University

by J. E. Adetoro

J. E. ("Tayo") Adetoro, a 29-year-old Nigerian, is at the U of A this year studying for his Ph.D. in education.

He spent three years at the University of Ibadan, in Nigeria, studying English, history and geography. He then went to England and received his Master's degree in education from Birmingham University, and spent a year at Oxford, where he got a diploma in education.

"The system here is completely different," he says. "In Africa and England they don't have credit hours and courses which you have to pile up. But my study is comparative education. I'm exhilarated to be here—I came here because this is something quite different."

The second article by Tayo will deal with life at Oxford, and his third article will stack our university with others he has attended and visited.

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During the Middle Ages West Africa could boast of but a few centres of higher education like the Sangore University in Timbutu; the idea of the modern university is something which has begun to gain ground only during the last two decades. For example, the University of Ibadan—which is the subject of this feature—is only sixteen years old. But in sixteen years it has chalked up spectacular achievements and gained a reputation which is the envy of many older institutions.

The University of Ibadan began its career as Nigeria's first university in 1948. It was one of the colonial universities set up by the British Government to meet the needs of post-war reconstructions and to train leaders for eventual self government.

The University College, Ibadan, as it was known until last year, began its career in rather unfavorable circumstances. These were no plans and no relevant experience to draw from. Finances were woefully inadequate and the new institution was held in suspicion and heavily criticized by the local press, politicians and intelligentsia. Gradually all opposition was overcome. Assurance was given that the new college would maintain high standards in university education.

The University Today

The University of Ibadan is a fully residential university with about 2,500 students. All students, professors, lecturers, senior administrative staff and even junior maintenance workers live on one vast campus.

The students live in halls which are patterned after Oxford and Cambridge. The designs are varied and each is encouraged to develop a life and tradition of its own. An unusual feature of the halls are the private balconies and the decked corridors on each floor. These provide natural meeting places for 'gisting' i.e. discussion of the latest news, for heated arguments and for those so inclined, the examination of the eternal verities.

Degrees, Examinations and Study Methods

From its beginning, students at the university had been prepared for the degree examinations of the University of London. This was done under a special relationship scheme. Now that the university has received a charter to grant its own degrees, all the new students will work for Ibadan degrees which will retain the exacting standards of London University.

The Ibadan student works very hard at his studies for failure to make the grade is usually a great personal tragedy. For many students, the three or four years at the university is made possible only by the combined effort of the family, the village or mutual aid groups. Few students can afford to take their studies lightly.

Lectures are regarded as important but it is left to the student to decide which to attend. Although terminal and sessional examinations are set these do not count, in most cases, for the awarding of the degree.

Social Life

The student at Ibadan is socially very free. His room is a private castle and there he can entertain anyone irrespective of sex. The university is a popular place to visit. The university zoo, the botanical gardens, the playing fields and its many unusual buildings attract hundreds of people, especially at weekends and on public holidays. A visitor is expected to leave a student's room by 7 p.m. A few guest rooms are usually available for visitors who can persuade the hall wardens that it is necessary to stay the night.

The facilities for recreation are many. Association football, athletics, cricket, lawn tennis, field hockey, table tennis, badminton, netball, boxing and body building are the main recreational activities. The Sigma Club and the Social Circle are two large organizations which arrange parties, dancing and outings for the students.

Because the number of female students is so small (ratio about 1:20), they are in extremely high demand. To make up for the acute shortage, girls from other institutions are always invited to social functions on the campus. Only about three a term, these are far more elaborate affairs than the usual Saturday and midweek hops on British campuses or the dances here at the U of A. Usually the dancing continues till 4 a.m. or till dawn.

Dress

Traditionally, the Ibadan undergrad is the best dressed person in town. Nigerian costumes or western style dress are equally in vogue for all occasions. Academic gowns are worn only on such special occasions as Foundation Day, at meetings of the Students Representative Council and when being interviewed by the principal or registrar.

Crazes, fashions and fads come and go among the younger stu-

dents. One session it may be the beatnik look, in another sporting the Don Juan moustachio may be the thing.

The beard is an all-time favorite in certain departments. Drain pipe trousers, basket top boots, Awo and Seko Toure caps for boys and the 'bonfo' for the girls have all had their days. The professor has a badge of distinction—he is nearly always badly dressed.

Campus Publications

The university has many campus publications. At the bottom of the class is the mimeographed variety—intended for internal circulation only. The most notorious of these is "The Bug"—a scandal sheet which operates just within the fringe of legality. It has survived many attempts at suppression. "The Sword"—organ of the Sworn Enemies of Convention—is a very diverting paper. Top of the form are such respectable publications as Ibadan, The University Voice, West African Journal of Education and The Horn.

Religious Life

The Chapel of the Resurrection is a non-denominational place of Christian worship at the university. Architecturally, the Chapel is considered the most original building on the campus. At its entrance, there stands a sculptured figure of The Risen Christ. The work was executed by Ben Enwonwu—Nigeria's foremost sculptor.

Religious life among Protestant students is organized through the Students Christian Movement. The Catholics have their own chapel close to the Protestant Chapel. A site has now been chosen for the building of a Mosque for Moslems.

University and Politics

While the university does not engage in political activities, its individual members can and usually do take an active part. Some of the faculty members are in the legislatures and others occupy high posts in the government sponsored agencies.

The students are very vociferous in their expression of

political opinions. Every major national and international issue is debated. Protests and petitions are frequently sent and sometimes demonstrations are held.

Ibadan and the New Universities

No portrait of the University of Ibadan should fail to mention its great contributions to the four new universities. When Ibadan began, it was without benefit of experience. All the new universities look naturally up to it for guidance. Ibadan has supplied men and women to fill the key positions in all of them.

The strain on Ibadan is great but all those who have worked so hard to build up the university can take comfort in the fact that their efforts as pioneers and pace setters have not gone unnoticed. They can justly be proud of the following comment of the Ashby Commission:

"University College, Ibadan, has set standards in Nigeria at a level which would be a credit to any country in the world."

