

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

To the Editor of the African Studies Bulletin:

I was very much interested in the recommendations of Professor Wickert in his report on "American Universities and Africa" in this journal (Vol. III, No. IV, Dec., 1960). One suggestion under his recommendations for "African studies and research programs" particularly caught my eye, where he states:

"Teaching personnel going to Africa ways of improving the possibility of really making desirable technical changes (even though many anthropologically-oriented African studies program personnel may have an emotional stake in trying to slow down such changes) Sic ".

It is the latter part of the statement in parenthesis that I would like to comment on. I agree that many Europeans and Africans in Africa, and some academicians in the U.S. have the idea that anthropologists would like to keep change in Africa to a minimum. However, the fact that some people have this concept about anthropologists does not make it correct, and to include a stereotype in such a report indicates either extreme naivete or ignorance about current anthropology.

As a student in one of "anthropologically-oriented African studies programs" over a decade ago the only time I was ever taught that change in Africa should be slowed down was by Europeans with backgrounds as colonial officials. On the contrary, the change going on in Africa is fascinating to study. Isn't it about time our colleagues in the behavioral sciences recognize that anthropologists are not campaigning to establish "game preserves" of uncontaminated tribes for the purpose of study?

I would also like to comment on the first part of the recommendation quoted above; that people going to Africa for the purpose of research be taught ways of inducing technical change. If a scholar or technician is going to participate in some program directed at the introduction of new methods, well and good. However, for someone going for the express purpose of doing research to engage or involve himself in such a program is fraught with danger. For one thing, he usually has a commitment to a foundation to engage in research, not to carry out his own foreign aid program. Secondly, there is the obvious danger that if a scholar goes into a particular area under the understanding he is doing research, and then becomes involved in some other project, that he may not be welcome, to say the least. It is still the best procedure to confine your activities to your stated purpose.

Obviously, one cannot make a hard and fast rule. If the opportunity to extend aid is presented, and wanted or requested, then one should respond. For example, it goes without saying you encourage the use of malarial suppressants, but though it would be easy to do, a research scholar should not become a medical missionary. In my own case, while doing ethnographic research, I made information on land tenure and patterns of inheritance available to an administrator and agricultural officer, after it was requested. However, I would never approach them with suggestions about how to do their job.

I full realize that my qualified objection to research personnel engaging in programs involving technical change may be taken as a case in point in support of the myth about the conservation of Africanists with an anthropological orientation. However, it is not because I want my "game preserve", and I am as concerned as the next person about the welfare of the African. I believe it may bring about difficulty in some situations to digress from the program undertaken, but more important, I happen to believe that the research scholar should engage in research, not social planning, whether he is in Accra or Akron.

James B. Christensen
Wayne State University

(This letter inaugurates a new feature for this Bulletin. The editor welcomes comments and criticisms concerning the activities of the African Studies Association, or other items of interest to its membership.)

POSITIONS AVAILABLE

The African Studies Association has been notified of the following available positions. Members who are interested should write directly to the persons specified.

The American University, Washington, D. C. The Foreign Areas Study Division of the Special Operations Research Office, American University, is seeking sociologists or social anthropologists to work as senior researchers in teams, preparing studies on West African or Latin American countries. They will be expected to do research for, and write, chapters on ethnic composition, family, social structure, languages, religion and patterns of living. Positions require persons who can meet relatively short deadlines and who are able to work in close cooperation with other team researchers specializing in political science, economics, and sociology. Reading ability in French or Spanish is highly desirable. The starting salary range is \$6,000-\$10,000 for a full year. Inquiries and applications to Herbert H. Vreeland 3rd, Deputy Chief (Research), Foreign Areas Studies Division, The American University, 4501 Massachusetts Avenue, N.W., Washington 16, D. C.

Pius XII College, Maseru, Basutoland. Pius XII College has announced a vacancy for a teacher of political science. Inquiries may be addressed to the Registrar, to reach him before July 15.