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February 20, 2005

Mr. Jerry Prado Shaw  
Director International Group  
YMCA of the USA  
101 North Wacker Drive  
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My Dear Jerry,

It was centuries ago, when we met the first time in Saint Louis, Missouri. Marco Antônio and me, we were doing some job in favor of our local YMCA. I'm still (and this is a job forever!) working as a volunteer for our YMCA, in fact, for the last 10 years, as the Chairperson at our main cash support that is the Cemetery João 23. I remember you, we met again by the Centenary of Porto Alegre YMCA.

I don't think that is nice to bother somebody, only because one has crossed his way some long time ago. Nevertheless, being part of this marvelous movement, that is the YMCA, I encourage myself thinking that the basis for the growth and power of it, is the human relations that makes the YMCA what the movement is.

So, I have a project, that may be just a faraway dream, yet I would like that you read it, and tell me if there is any way that a YMCA brother, dealing or knowing people that dealt with books, can help on it.

I'm a former lawyer that before of being that, I was a journalist. I was along all my life writing and reading things. When I retired from my main activity, which was to be Attorney at Law at the Legislative House of my State, I started writing fictional material – basically short stories. Then, I experienced two novels. The first one is "*As Nações*" (The Nations). The second, "*Benin*".

My project is to try a book editor that may be interested at the project, by reading the synopsis, which is enclosed here, and it is in English. If the editor find interest in the material, then comes the second and maybe more difficult part: he has to identify a reader able read and evaluate literary material in Portuguese. If all goes true (what a dream!), then a translator will be hired. The novels, as can be seen by the synopsis, have a potential interest of reading in the USA, Canada, United Kingdom (specially Benin's novel), Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, South Africa, and other English speaking Countries.

Since we do love YMCA, the image of our institution it is in the grandeur of its mission, in both novels.

On the other hand, aside, being Chicago a strong Afro-American metropolis (the headoffice of Johnson Publishing, for instance), maybe – just maybe – a light can bright at the end of the tunnel, and hopefully maybe it wouldn't be a train coming against.

Finally, if the "Massena" is identified, I will post the copies of the novels.

I thank you in advance for any think that you may do.

Regards from all your YMCA friends especially from Maurício.

José Luiz Pereira da Costa

# The Nations

## Plot synopsis

Nine short stories are interconnected, as follows:

1 – ***The chimera*** – The story teller returns to his youth, and start the remembrance of his Negro community, living among poor and low medium class white people. The story teller, which bears the African nickname Calunga, is now a self-made Architect. He recalls life's facts of several neighbors, composing life's broad panel from a group of Brazilian Afro-Descendants, and some foreigners that pass across that majority Negro environment.

2 – ***The Professor*** – A young boy, Tadeu, is engaged to serve into the Merchant Navy, and travels allover the world, learning to enjoy world's museums, and the reading of newspapers and magazines in various languages. Tadeu met his origins in a trip to Lagos City, and Northern Islamic Nigeria. After a term at the Navy, he returns home, sic of tuberculosis. He finds time to remind his trips, in special one to New Orleans, Baton Rouge, and Port Allen, Louisiana, when he met, and became friend of another sailor, Joshua an American sailor. The experience in visiting Port Allen, near Baton Rouge, at an Afro-American settlement, is part of the experience Tadeu will carry back to Brazil. In fact, the "*Professor*", only the way the children use to call him, is a nickname, since he was never a Professor, but a sailor. Yet, his intellectual resemblance gave him the casual title.

3 – ***The Master*** – One of the book's main characters depicts a man who works as clerk at the School of Mechanical Engineering and, as his hobby, he produces handcrafts in wood and metal. He has frantic dreams in his nights, which he can't understand. One day, one of the school professors visit his house, and discover Juvenal's works in wood. Admired to what he sees, the Professor call Juvenal as *The Master* – the informal title Juvenal will carry for all his life. He was never a School Master, but if a real Professor says so! Then Juvenal, *The Master*, is commissioned to receive and store at the School warehouse several machines from Germany, which transforms his quiet and humble life in a nightmare. In fact the machines will allow him to produce fine works of art, using the ancient method called "lost wax", something that his ancient people at Benin and Ife produced centuries ago.

4 – ***The Saints*** – The community live in two spots of this fictional world. A spot comprises a suburban area called *The African Colony*, a space where solid majority is made up of Negro people. In it, there are few withes, and among these few withes live some poor Jews, and Italian immigrants. The other spot comprises "*The Bush*", a small sample of African Forest, where the Black community finds herbs, fruits, hunting animals, and where they meet for popular ball, under the trees, and where they worship ancestral deities. Inside of that environment, thrive a large number of sorcerers, voodoo priests, honest and crooked "*Fathers of Saints*", as they are called.

5 – ***The Sailor*** – Joshua, the Sailor which meet Tadeu in New Orleans, come down to Brazil to visit his mate, when he discovers some very interesting things, at the yet rural Porto Alegre, hometown of Tadeu, in early years of 20<sup>th</sup> Century. The two Sailors, the Brazilian Tadeu, and the American Joshua, find several uses and costumes among both Brazilian and American Negro communities. And, both sailors can't understand questions concerning the thin color line in Brazil, and the lack of education for the Negroes; and segregation in the USA, but with schools, even segregated ones.

6 – ***The Grandpapa*** – An old Grandpapa tell nice stories for the boys living at the neighborhood; stories from distant Africa, something that he dreams of, even never having being there. Only subconscious inputs push him to tell such stories as to build a positive image of The Virtue against The Evil in the consciousness of vicinity's youth.

7 – **The Journey** – The old Grandpapa dies, and he starts a fantastic journey. Mysticism and reality compose the story inside this dense part of the novel.

8 – **Les étrangères** – A couple of Haitian, wife and husband, coming from nowhere, just appear at “*The Chalés Street*”, that is the place where the story has its main scenery. She is an extremely beautiful Negress, and reveals herself as a powerful sorcerer. Her husband, Mr. Dessalines, is a very wealthy man, roaming from place to place, as a Haitian expatriated. The Haitians stay for one year in the city, time enough for a remarkable stay, involving themselves with the main Catholic priest in the neighborhood, a lawyer that is not really a lawyer, which originate a dubious relation with the beautiful woman, all bringing mysticism, and making arise prejudice and jealousy.

9 – **The waters** – It is basically the epilog for the story, when heavy rains wash away the past of that community.

Why the title, **The Nations**?

The novel epigraph, taken from an African writer (Kwame Anthony Appiah), in few lines states the wide differences between African nations, differences which somehow have been transferred to the various types of Afro-Descendants within a simple town community. And, the author, himself, tells us, at the book's Introduction, about the experience of a serious misunderstanding he has experienced in one of the borders between Togo and Ghana countries.

# B E N I N

*An African gentleman who called himself a Prince, lived in my hometown, Porto Alegre, South Brazil, from the early days of the twentieth century until the year of 1935, when he died. Some old people know a bit about him including the following:*

*1 - He used to say that he was part of the Royal Family of Benin, who were overthrown by the British in 1897.*

*2 - In Brazil, he adopted the name of Custódio Joaquim de Almeida.*

*3. He used English as his language of communication*

*He was considered a wealthy man, at a time when Afro-Brazilians were very poor, living massively in slums. Indeed he acted as a rich person. Apparently he could afford the ownership of race horses at the local Jockey Club a place where then Afro- Brazilians were not admitted. People used to say, as well, that each month, until he died, he collected at the local branch of a London bank, a pension in sterling pounds.*

*If as historians claim, Oba Ovonramwen of the Benin Empire was exiled to Calabar (Nigeria), and died there in 1914; and, since the gentleman that lived here in Porto Alegre died in 1935, for sure, Mr. Custódio Joaquim de Almeida was not the overthrown Oba. But then, who was he? Was he a brother or a son of Ovonramwen, who left Calabar and moved to Brazil, and was rewarded with a pension for life? Note that during the nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries there were regular ships between Bahia, Brazil and the West Coast of Africa.*

## **Plot synopsis**

With ten chapters, and 364 pages, the novel explores, in its initial chapters, the early days of a boy named Idugboa, son of Adolo, Benin's reigning Oba. It shows as well Idugboa's youth, his training; introduces the court people, and the intrigues they live in. Various characters living around the court, each one portrays how the life was in Benin at that time. So, also will it play an important rule in the story Obaro, the younger brother of Idugboa; Kotou, the first friend of Idugboa, which will be

in the ripe days of his youth, the master of Metals, *iguneronmwan*. The religious behaviour of the society will play an important role of the priestess Emotan, *ogwega*, and later as a powerful witch, Azonye. To act as a ruler for the political scenario, the main character is Obayemi, the chief *uzuma*, head of the council of the Oba's Makers. He acts along the whole plot, with the power the prime-ministers use to have. And to counter-act to him, was the mayor of Ughoton, Abiola, the *enogie*. There was corruption and sectarianism, across the voices of the characters in Benin at the end of Nineteenth Century.

Since the actual history of Benin leads to her conquest by the British, some important British characters are acting along the novel, as Cranfield, the British Preacher, kind of intelligence agent to the British Empire. As well, plays important rule the Official of H. M. Navy, Captain of Frigate Henry Levingson Sauer.

In the plot there are the initiation rituals for the youth future Oba, the dead of his father (Adolo), and his ascension with new name, Ovonramwen, or Overami.

The plot displays moments of War and Peace:

**War** led by Oba's younger brother, Obaro; and finally by the depressing deposition of Ovonramwen. **Peace**, by a romance between Ovonramwen and Edim, the astonishing twin daughter of a rich man of the caravans. In Edim, Ovonramwen's seed is sown, connecting her with the future events in Calabar, place of Ovonramwen's exile, and in Brazil where a Beni Prince will live and die.

The plot marches on to Calabar where new characters came into the scenery. And it all leads to an end, both in Porto Alegre, the Brazilian city, and in Harlem, New York.

All the characters, but Ovonramwen, his father, and few historic characters, are fictional names.

### Support books, for Benin

*Topics in West African History*, By Adu Bohaen – (Longmans, Green and Co Ltd)  
*Benin and the Europeans, 1485-1897*, By Alan Ryder – (Humanities Press Inc, New York, NY)  
*Benin Kingdom, of West Africa* – By John Pepper-Engels (The Rosen Publishing Group)  
*Edo, The Beni People of the Benin Kingdom*, By Chucwuma Azounye – (The Heritage Library of African Peoples)  
*Art, Innovation, and Politics in Eighteenth-Century Benin*, By Paula Girshick Ben-Amos. (Indiana University Press)  
*Dahomey and the Slave Trade*, By Karl Polanyi – (AMS Press Inc.)  
*The Dahomean*, By Frank Yerby – (Dell Publishing Co., Inc.)  
*A Enxada e a Lança* – By Alberto da Costa e Silva (Editora Nova Fronteira – Brazil)  
*The Building of Modern Africa* - By D.D. Rooney e E. Halladay – (George G. Harrap & Co. Ltd)  
*The African Experience* - By Roland Olivier – (HarperCollins)  
*The African Origin of Civilization* - By Cheikh Anta Diop – (Lawrence Hill Books)  
*Religion in Africa (Experience & Expression)* – By Walter E. A. Van Beek & Dennis L. Thomson  
*The Kings & Chiefs of Old Calabar (1785-1925)* – By Ekei Essien Oku – (Glad Tidings Press Ltd.)  
*Fluxo e Refluxo* – By Pierre Verger – (Curripio, Brazil)  
*História Geral da África - África sob o domínio colonial - 1880-1935*, organizado por Adu Bohaen (Ática – Unesco, Brazil)  
*Black Voices* – By Abraham Chapman (Penguin Books Ltd.)  
*Da Escravidão à Liberdade* - By John Hope Franklin e Alfred A. Moss, Jr. (Alfred A. Knop Jr.)  
*American Negro Spirituals* - By James Weldon Johnson & J. Rosamond Johnson (Viking Press Inc.)  
*Free Within Ourselves - African American Experience* - By Geoffrey Jacques (Grolier Publishing)  
*Harlem Renaissance - Art of Black America* - By Mary Schmidt Campbell, David Driskell, David Levering Lewis e Deborah Willis Ryan  
*Du Bois - Writings - The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade, The Souls of Black Folk, Dusk of Dawn and Essays.* – Excerpts from W. E. B. Du Bois – (Library of America)  
*Douglass - Autobiographies - Narrative of the Life; My Bondage and My Freedom; Life and Times* – By Frederick Douglass (Library of America)  
*Dom Obá II, D'África, o Príncipe do Povo* – By Eduardo Silva (Companhia das Letras – Brazil)

**Vínculos de Fogo** – By, Alberto Diniz (Companhia das Letras – Brazil)

**The Collected Works of Phillis Wheatley**, edited by John Shields (The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers)