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AfricaUpdate

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Editorial: The Mazrui - Gates Debate

During the last months of 1999, the Africanist community in the United States was caught up in an intense and controversial debate involving several outstanding scholars in the field of African and African-American history. The debate attracted multi-disciplinary participation which included film studies, theology, African Studies, and African history. There are common threads holding the various commentaries and rejoinders together. The debate has been as much about methodology, Black enslavement, Black reparations, and Egyptology as it was about Malian intellectual heritage, Axumite building technology and Black Orientalism. This issue of *AfricaUpdate* features Ali Mazrui's reaction to Skip Gates television series, *The Wonders of the African World*, and Gates' response to some of Mazrui's initial criticisms.

In the Mazrui selection entitled, *Black Orientalism*, he accuses Gates of paternalistic possessiveness, ulterior selectivity and cultural condescension, the basic symptoms of a rather dreadful disease, Black Oriental-ism.

The Black Orientalist has a love-hate relationship with Africa that borders on derision, self-hate, masochism and disdain, no less than ignorance, curiosity and fascination. Black Orientalists generally play to the European gallery and are unable, perhaps unwilling, to understand Africa in its multifaceted and multidimensional capacity. To add to this, one suspects that the typical Black Orientalist may invest minimal time and intellectual energy on the continent's history, skim the surface and declare himself an expert. He may in reality know very little about Africa. The Black Orientalist may aim at some ill-defined intellectual destination without paying for the ride in genuine intellectual activity; he is often an apologist for European colonisation and domination and very often a prime candidate for intellectual mercenary activities-academic entrepreneurship.

In his defense, Skip Gates invokes Wole Soyinka, Anthony Appiah and Akosua Perbi. He remarks, I suspect that if the average ancient Egyptian had shown up in Mississippi in 1950, they would have been flung to the back of the bus and that's Black enough for me. He then proceeds to defend individual episodes of the series, including his programs on Nubia, the Swahili, Asante, Benin, and Ethiopia, pointing to his consultation of experts in the field and some childhood fascination with the continent.

We at *AfricaUpdate* join in the efforts of other publications such as the electronic journal, *West Africa Review*, to commemorate the historical significance of the Mazrui-Gates debate which marks a major intellectual juncture in African and African-American studies. We also include in this issue some research [notes of Jose Luiz Pereira da Costa of Port Alegre, Brazil](#).

Gloria Emeagwali

Chief Editor

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Black Orientalism? Further Reflections on "Wonders of the African World"

by Henry Louis Gates Jr.

by Ali A. Mazrui, Director, Institute of Global Cultural Studies

and Albert Schweitzer Professor in the Humanities, Binghamton University

I have received an avalanche of responses since my "Preliminary Critique of Gates" went into the Internet. I am grateful for all your comments. Some ninety percent of the comments that I have received are angry, if not outraged, by Gates' television series.

In fairness to Skip Gates, he himself may be receiving many more positive responses from an entirely different constituency. I have no doubt there is a significant market for Wonders of the African World, but probably not at many African Studies Centers in major U.S. universities. Africanist scholars seem to be overwhelmingly critical.

Edward Said, the brilliant Palestinian professor at Columbia University, made his mark when he published his book *Orientalism* referring to the strange combination of cultural condescension, paternalistic possessiveness and ulterior selectivity shown by certain Western scholars towards non-Western societies in Asia, "the Middle East" and Africa. Indeed the concept of the Middle East which is so Eurocentric was itself born out of Orientalism. The question which has been raised by Skip Gates' television series is whether it signifies the birth of Black Orientalism. Are we witnessing the birth of a new Black paradigm which combines cultural condescension with paternalistic possessiveness and ulterior selectivity? The condescension in Gates' television series might have been at its worst in Ethiopia and over the Ark of the Covenant. The paternalistic possessiveness was in Great Zimbabwe and in the wonders of the manuscripts in Timbuktu. The selectivity not only knocked out virtually the whole of North Africa; it also knocked out Nigeria, Africa's most populous country. Nigeria as the center of the three of the largest and most historically dynamic cultures in Africa the Yoruba, the Hausa and Igbo never qualified as one of the "Wonders of the African World," in spite of Skip Gates' close relationship with Wole Soyinka, Black Africa's only Nobel Laureate for Literature. Gates' selectivity also got the white man off the hook for the Atlantic slave trade!

Did Gates boycott Nigeria in his TV series because dictator Sani Abacha was in power? Then why did Gates film in Sudan which had a regime widely regarded as more repressive? At any rate Sudan's policies had killed many more people than Abacha's in Nigeria. Gates' refusal to include Nigeria in his TV series was a colossal lapse in credibility and in judgement!

What has Black Orientalism got to do with circumcision ceremonies and rites of passage?

One or two sisters who wrote to me were worried by my remark that Gates was playing to "the Western feminist gallery" when in a casual sentence he went too far in condemning female genital surgery. Some Western feminists are aware that some of the greatest defenders of female circumcision in Africa are women themselves. We must all convince each other that this particular tradition must end. I personally have publicly spoken against it in Africa itself where it matters. See, for example, my highly publicized lecture on "The Black Woman" given for The Guardian newspaper in Nigeria on July 4, 1991, and published among other places in *Research in African Literatures* (The Ohio State University, Columbus, Vol.24, No.1, Spring 1993).

But cultural reform requires persuasion, education and example. Cheap rhetoric and denunciations are not very helpful.

What has Black Orientalism got to do with linguistic authenticity?

My Egyptian and Lebanese respondents in the United States have drawn my attention to the fact that Skip Gates may have been taken for a ride by his interpreter of Arabic when Gates was interviewing a Nubian woman whom Skip refers to as "Ozayya Suleiman" (judging by Skip's pronunciation). The person who praised the Aswan Dam and the relocation of the Nubians was not Ozayya Suleiman speaking in Arabic, but the interpreter in English putting pro-Government words into Ozayya Suleiman's mouth. It was the interpreter who was trying to please the intelligence officer of the government!! Apparently Gates did a grave injustice to the older Nubian woman by assuming she was the one who was trying to please the Government's representative. This interpretation has been given to me by my Egyptian and Lebanese respondents. I have to double-check it further in person.

Where does religion fit into Black Orientalism? A couple of respondents asked if my TV series *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* (1986) had not had a pro-Islamic agenda. I shall always be grateful to Skip Gates for allowing me in the 1990s to

challenge Wole Soyinka when he made the same charge in Gates' magazine *Transition*.

Please consult the magazine's issues Nos.54 of 1991 and 57 of 1992. Soyinka and I thrashed that question in full.

Although the phrase "triple heritage" is mine, the interpretation of Africa as a confluence of three cultures was partly Kwame Nkrumah's. It was Kwame Nkrumah, founder President of Ghana, who saw Africa as an interplay of indigenous culture, Islam and what Nkrumah called Euro-Christian civilization. Before Nkrumah, Edward Blyden in the nineteenth century had published his book, Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race. My TV series was standing on the shoulders of those Pan-African giants.

Where does **race** fit into **Black Orientalism**? We must not drift into the fallacy of regarding Skip Gates' point of view as the **African-American perspective**.

Skip himself is such an individualist that he would be horrified by such a conclusion. Even more horrified would be African-American Pan-Africanists and Afrocentrists. Almost none of them regard Gates' voice as their voice. On the contrary, Skip has denounced them in the columns of The New York Times deliberately against the pictorial background of the Star of David, (God knows why!). I have talked to some very angry anti-Gates African Americans recently. His attack on African-American nationalists and Pan-Africanists was later widely publicized and circulated by a Jewish organization.

Skip Gates has always been very gracious to me personally. He even consulted me on the chapter about the Waswahili for his book, though he did not consult me in any capacity about the television series. For the single chapter he accepted some of my criticisms and rejected others. Did he accept minor editorial criticisms and reject major ones? The truth lies somewhere in-between. I am a member of the OAU Group of Eminent Persons on Reparations for Black Enslavement. I and eleven others were "sworn-in" before the Presidents of Africa at a summit meeting of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in Dakar, Senegal, in 1992. As an OAU Group of Eminent Persons on such a momentous topic, we are supposed to explore the modalities and strategies of campaigning for reparations from the Western world for the enslavement and destitution of the Black people. Our Chair in the Group was the late Chief Moshood Abiola of Nigeria.

Now Skip Gates' television series virtually tells the world that the West has no case to answer. Africans sold each other. Presumably if there are to be any reparations in the trans-Atlantic slave-trade, it would have to be from Africans to Africans. Skip Gates succeeded in getting an African to say that without the role of Africans in facilitating it, there would have been no trans-Atlantic slave trade at all.

To my astonishment when watching "Wonders of the African World," I heard a Ghanaian tourist guide at a slave fort (Elmina) tell African-American tourists that they were sold into slavery by Africans. Is this the policy of the Ghanaian government to tell tourists that it was not the white man but the Black man who was responsible for the Atlantic slave system? If not, why is not the guide sacked? He was saying to African Americans "We Ghanaians sold you!"

The Ghanaians I have spoken to since Gates' television series are convinced that the Ghanaian guide at the slave fort was given an "inducement" to blame the slave trade on Africans! Who is behind this rewriting of the history of the slave-trade? I am sure Gates was as surprised as I was when he heard such frankness from a Ghanaian tourist-guide.

But even if some Africans were collaborators in the slave trade, why is Gates presenting the story as if the victims were only the Diaspora Africans (exported) while Africans in the ancestral continent were ALL villains? **Is Black Orientalism** racially masochistic?

What about the families of the captured Africans who did not see their loved ones come back home? What about the Africans who were victimised by slave-raiders but were never exported? What about African resistance to slavery? What about the Africans who were not involved in the slave trade at all either as victims or as villains? Why is Skip Gates presenting us with a simplistic picture of continental Africans (villains) selling their brothers and sisters (Diaspora African victims) and provoking what he regards as the curse on Africa for selling its children? In reality only a small minority of the inhabitants of Africa could have sold and exported fellow Africans. So why is Africa as a whole presented in such stark evil ways? Why does Henry Louis Gates Jr. virtually let the white man off the hook on the Atlantic slave trade apart from a throw-away sentence? What is going on? What is the agenda? I hope the idea of Black Orientalism is not to sabotage all claims for reparations for Black enslavement.

What has **Black Orientalism** got to do with the Jewish experience? It partly depends upon the style of the Black Orientalist. In history Jews suffered as slaves, benefitted as slavers, and were also among the abolitionists and liberators.

Some of you have expressed surprise that I included a reference to Jewish capital in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. There were several reasons. Gates has sometimes used Jewish symbols in his attacks on Pan-Africanists and Afrocentrists. Secondly, Gates has used a significant part of this television series to expose Arab participation in the slave trade. Why not complete the Semitic picture and refer to Jewish participation in the trade? Thirdly, I regarded it as odd that in a television odyssey in

Africa Gates should remember to wear what some regarded as a "Jewish shirt" (or at least a shirt with Hebrew written on it) but never once wear an African shirt as his own informal attire! After all, many African Americans wear such shirts right here in the United States routinely. (Gates was ceremonially dressed in Sudan and in Kente regalia for a Ghanaian occasion, but he managed a few snide remarks and jokes in the process.)

Jews were a minority of the Western financiers of the slave-trade. Jews did not invent Western capitalism. They were sucked into it.

But Gates deliberately tries to irritate by juxtaposition. Gates goes out of his way to tell us that in 1970 he came to Africa for the first time through Israel. Was that supposed to be a metaphor? He proceeds to tell us that Tanzania was a culture-shock in discomfort (after Israel?). The juxtaposition of Israel with the discomforts of Tanzania was startling and unnecessary.

Some of my friends think that because I did a television series of my own, I should have remained silent on the series by Skip Gates. But I was an African long before I did a television series for the BBC and the PBS. I am responding to Skip Gates' TV series first and foremost as an African. But secondarily, I am responding to it as a senior and elder Africanist. Skip is a friend. But he knows he and I have huge differences. If he feels he has a right to criticise Africa and abuse the Swahili people and still love Africa, I feel I have a right to criticize Skip Gates and still count him as a friend!!!

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A Preliminary Response to Ali Mazrui's Preliminary Critique of Wonders of the African World

By Prof. Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Only rarely as a scholar does one have the opportunity to discuss one's passion for a subject, the reasons for one's choice of it as one's life's work, and the *raison d'être* for the production of a specific work about it. The extraordinarily energetic reactions to my film series, "Wonders of the African World," provide such an occasion for me to address these issues generally and, more specifically, to respond to questions raised by the distinguished African scholar, Professor Ali Mazrui.

Before I do so, however, let me state frankly that I relish the fact that so very many people, academics and non-academics alike, have felt moved to write to me and to each other about the series. I am first and last a teacher, and anytime so many people are moved to discuss and debate African history must be seen as a good time, indeed, for our field. We are, after all, scholars, not devotees of a religion or an ideology, and the free exchange of ideas without vilification or name-calling is one of the fundamental aspects of the scholar's calling.

Like so many of my contemporaries in African and African American Studies, I came of age in the early sixties, just as many African countries were gaining their independence. I was ten years old in 1960, that great year of African independence, and for reasons even I do not understand, I busied myself memorizing the names of each African country, its capital, and its leader, pronouncing their names as closely as I could to the way our evening news commentator did on the nightly news.

Enamoured of Africa and keenly curious about socialism, I spent the 1970-1971 academic year living in an Ujamaa village in central Tanzania, where I was trained to deliver general anesthesia at an Anglican Mission Hospital. After an extended time there at Kilimatinde, I moved to Dar es Salaam, where I lived for two months, then hitch-hiked across the Equator, managing to travel from Tanzania through Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and the Congo, by land and by river, from the Indian Ocean to the Atlantic Ocean without leaving the ground. By the age of 20, I had traveled through nine African countries, saddened only that illness, a severe case of dysentery, prevented me from fulfilling another dream, which was to cross the Sahara by land.

After graduation from College, where I majored in History, I went to the University of Cambridge where I enrolled in the Faculty of English, under the direction of Wole Soyinka. Much of my passion for African Studies was generated by Soyinka's sublime example, and it is clear to me today that had it not been for our chance encounter, and my deep friendship with a fellow African student, Kwame Anthony Appiah, I would have ended up neither as a professor, nor as a scholar of African or African American Studies.

Soyinka taught me many things, far too many to detail here. But what most struck me about him was his dictum that a fundamental aspect of commitment to a field and indeed, to one's people, however broadly that may be defined, was the willingness both to praise and to criticize, whenever the occasion called for one to do so. "Criticism, like charity," Wole would repeat, again and again like a mantra, "starts at home." And so, in the pages of his journal, *Transition*, on whose editorial board I have sat since 1973, Soyinka attacked the excesses of

brutal dictators such as Idi Amin, Mobutu, or Sani Abacha, as well as the reluctance of other African and African American intellectuals to do so in public for fear, somehow, of giving comfort to colonialists, racists, or neo-colonialists. Since graduate school, I have taken Soyinka's notion of "tough love" as the ultimate sign of passion and true commitment that a scholar can demonstrate in his devotion to her or his field.

Like many of my contemporaries, I have long been appalled by the penchant of white racists to demean, deny, or denigrate the civilizations that black people have produced on the African continent. The sustained, systematic attempt of European scholars to lift Egypt out of Africa, to whiten its people, and to deny its hybrid culture any influence from sub-Saharan African civilization is one of the great scandals of Europe's attempt to dominate the African continent and to justify the enslavement of tens of millions of its people. I vowed to fight that early on in my career, and as a student produced a 500-page Ph.D. thesis about the racist discourse of Enlightenment philosophers such as Hume, Kant, Jefferson, and Hegel, and their denigration of Africans as a people without reason, and Africa as a "continent without History." "Wonders of the African World" is my attempt to bring into the homes of average Africans, African Americans, Europeans, and Americans, some of the monuments of civilization created by people living in twelve countries on the African continent, delivered in an accessible form.

To do so, I wrote to two dozen scholars in Africa, Europe, and America, inviting them to send me suggestions for the "seven wonders" of the African world. I compiled their suggestions into a list of twenty-four, then grouped these by region. For example, five on my original list, the Sahara, the River Niger, the Grand Mosque at Djenne, the Sankore Mosque at Timbuktu, and the Dogon people, all reside in Mali. Hence, Mali became a site for one of my programs.

Let me state the obvious: I am a professor of literature, not an historian, an archeologist, or an anthropologist. Accordingly, the Wall-to-Wall Production Company and I consulted with a wide range of scholars to shape my approach to this vast and complex subject, on both the film series and the book that accompanies it. I have attached, at the end of this piece, a list of some of the scholars whom I consulted.

Each draft of the chapters of my book was critiqued several times by other scholars, none more thoroughly than the chapter on the Swahili coast, which was reviewed by Ali Mazrui himself, whose opinion of it, printed on the dust-jacket, reads as follows:

This is more than a book about Africa. It is a study in black America's profound ambivalence about our shared ancestral continent. Caught between a distaste for Africa within his own family and his abiding love for and fascination with Africa, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., traverses the continent with a keen eye, a brilliant mind, and an ambivalent heart."

Now, having seen the film series, Professor Mazrui has shared his reactions and concerns, to which I should now like to respond. Let me repeat that I cherish the sort of debates and discussions that his critique has generated, especially given the fact that it has occurred on the Internet. Perhaps this debate will be recalled by our descendants as the first such use of the Internet by scholars in African and African American Studies to air their views. If so, this will have been a signal moment for our field.

Since Professor Mazrui's critique has been so widely disseminated, let me refer to the questions he raises by implication, episode by episode. Perhaps because of his haste to share his initial responses, his critique contains a number of factual errors.

1. Episode One: Nubia. I did not attempt to "dis-Africanize ancient Egypt". Rather, I sought to accord ancient Nubia its due recognition. The difference is critical. I hope to deal with the question of the color of ancient Egyptians in a special one-hour documentary that will feature a wide array of experts. I would hope to invite Maulana Karenga, Molefi Asante, Dr. Ben and Martin Bernal among those to appear on camera.

What do I think about this issue? Though not an expert, I suspect that if the average ancient Egyptian had shown up in Mississippi in 1950, they would have been flung into the back of the bus. And that is black enough for me. But the fundamental fact, on which there is no reasonable disagreement, is that Egypt is first and last, an African civilization. (Mazrui mistakenly claims that I am speaking to a European guide at Abu Simbel. I am not. I am speaking to an Egyptian. That's a pretty good example of "dis-Africanizing modern Egypt!")

2. Episode Two: The Swahili. Ali erroneously argues that I failed to consult with Swahili experts, or to put them on camera, or to include Muslims. This is just not true. Ummi Ali Hammid, the descendent of Tippu Tip, is a Swahili and a Muslim, and it was she that said: "It was the trend of the time, that was business, purely. You would either be a slave or a slaver. You choose the lesser of the two evils. And if you are in a position to be a slaver why should you be a slave?" (I assume that Mazrui is not questioning the fact that thousands of slaves were sold in Zanzibar.) As for the experts we consulted, look at the list below.

3. Episode Three: Asante and Benin. The source of the statement about the slave trade, that there would have been no slave trade in these countries without the complicity and collaboration of the kings (and their representatives) in Asante and Dahomey was not me, but Dr. Akosua Perbi, a Ghanaian historian. This is indeed a vexed and painful issue. I know

that it was, and remains, a painful issue for me. How I envy my African friends' easy accessibility to their people's languages and cultures! How much I lament all that our ancestors suffered to survive the Middle Passage, slavery, and Jim Crow racism and segregation. But don't ask me, a descendant of slaves, to avoid addressing this complex issue, which disturbs so many of us so deeply simply because it is so confusing, so troubling, so anguishing. No one I interviewed thought my questions inappropriate or felt that I wanted to make them feel guilty. I don't believe guilt to be heritable. I merely anted to bring a dialogue into the open between Africans and African Americans that has long been simmering beneath the surface. We all feel discomfort in discussing the contributory role of African hierarchies in the slave trade. If "Wonders" succeeds in opening this deeply buried matter to sober reflection, then the series will have made an important contribution. Need it be said that to acknowledge that Africans participated in the slave trade along with Europeans is not to exclude the horrible crimes of the latter?

4. Episode Four: Ethiopia. Mazrui chides me for interviewing the Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church wearing a T-shirt. The shirt bears an image from one of the holiest sites in Ethiopian Christendom. Nevertheless, I myself apologized to the Patriarch on camera for my inability to return to my hotel to change after shooting another scene earlier that morning. He accepted my apology and we moved on.

As for my supposed "sarcasm" "about the authenticity of the Ark," I happen to believe that there is an ancient Ark housed in St. Mary's Church at Axum, and that it most probably is the best candidate for the ark that some claimed housed Moses'

Tablets. (Whether or not you believe that Moses went up to the mountain, and God inscribed on two tablets the Ten Commandments is entirely a matter of personal belief.)

Let me put it this way: along the way to Ethiopia I interviewed the Patriarch, Minister Farrakhan, and the Archbishop of Canterbury. Given the belief system that each represents and claims to believe more or less literally, why is it so hard to believe

that the Ethiopians possess a holy relic of such antiquity? Why make such a bold claim in the first place unless someone has solid reason to believe it to be true? The Ethiopian government, by the way, has hailed the series "for unveiling so many wonders of Africa and Ethiopia" and for "combating flat, superficial images." "Wonders" is, it concluded, "a wonderful piece of work." (Letter from the Embassy of Ethiopia, Washington, D.C., November 1999).

5. Episode Five: Timbuktu. As Mazrui knows, I have never called anyone on the African continent or on any other continent a barbarian: I called the practice of female genital mutilation barbaric, and it is. And until it is eradicated from the African continent, I shall not disguise my opposition to it. No apologies there. Second, I did not describe the relation between the Bella and the Tuareg as slavery; Mr. Baba, my informant, did. What I said was that the relation between the Bella and the Tuareg was "as close to slavery as I ever want to get." And I mean that. I will not do Ali the discourtesy of suggesting that he aimed to defend a relationship of domination based on heredity and skin color.

6. Episode Six: South Africa and Zimbabwe. Ali's only objection to this episode is that it is a "tourist travelogue." "Wonders" is an autobiographical essay, narrated and written by an African American, one who has traveled extensively by land and water from Johannesburg to Cairo, from Zanzibar to Dakar, on over 50 trips to the Continent. The whole series was framed as a travelogue which allowed me to show both the diversity of the vast African continent and the African peoples themselves.

I am proud of "Wonders of the African World," and I stand by the mode of film making that it embodies. As I said at the outset, I relish debate and the free exchange of ideas. Ali Mazrui is an admired friend; but in his haste to share his disagreements with me on the Internet, he has accused me of saying several things that I simply did not say.

Yet I think there is a deep difference in attitude between us that underlies Ali's response to my series. The role of African collaboration in the slave trade (though hardly a major part of my film series) is anguishing to me. He displays no such anguish. While intellectually I know that kingdoms engaged in war and sold their enemy captives to Europeans, and that they did not think of these captives as "fellow Africans," still I wonder why the King of Dahomey forced the slaves to march around the "Tree of Forgetfulness" six times, counter-clockwise, so that they would forget those who had enslaved them into the horrors they would face on the Middle Passage and in the New World, so that their souls would not return to Dahomey to haunt the guilty. (Go to the Route des Esclaves in Benin and see the tree yourself.) Does this sound as though those in Africa were unaware of the depth of suffering that New World slavery held? Does it not suggest they felt guilty about it? You decide. But don't ask me not to wonder what in the world was on these brothers' minds when they sold other black people to these strange Europeans!

Let me end with a piece of good news. So many people have asked me about the fate of the books at Timbuktu. When I returned from filming in Mali, I secured a grant from the Mellon Foundation to catalogue the manuscripts that we filmed, to construct a building to house them, and ultimately to digitize and translate them. The film series would have been justified, in my opinion, if this accomplishment had been the sole benefit that generated. The Malian government and the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute at Harvard are collaborating jointly on this crucially important project.

I invite all who would care to discuss these ideas further to participate in an on-line chat that we shall conduct soon on our website, Africana.com. Please check the site for further details.

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New fossil finds in South Africa

Scientists have discovered the fossil remains of a three million-year-old hominid in South Africa. This is the most significant discovery since the Taung Child was excavated in 1924. They also discovered the body of an ancient well-preserved mummy in the Eastern Cape. The carbon content of the body shows the remains to be about two thousand years old. The body was buried in a fetal position, lying on its left side. A gifbol plant was able to preserve the body because it kept insects, maggots and bacteria away.

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The Mysterious African Prince of Porto Alegre, Brazil Research Notes by José Luiz Pereira da Costa, Porto Alegre, Brazil

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, 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.

Jose Luiz Pereira Da Costa is an Afro-Brazilian Lawyer based in Brazil

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Africa Online

By Haines Brown, CCSU History Department, emeritus

In the June 1999 issue of Communications (Vol. 42, no. 6, pp. 60–66), Mugo Kibati and Donyaprueth Krairit, "The Wireless Local Loop in Developing Regions," summarize the results of research on the comparative cost of the effectiveness of digital wireless vs. analog voice communications in Southeast Asia and Africa.

In poorer regions, wireless networks are attractive because, in comparison to voice over copper (normal telephone connections), they are relatively inexpensive to install and maintain and quicker to deploy. Also, reliance on an analog voice technology will soon begin to isolate the regions from an increasingly digital world. This will make their investment in the infrastructure of voice telecommunications obsolete.

Although a loose formula has emerged for using fixed cellular networks for local telephone loops (wireless local loop) and using satellite transmission for a long distance and international communications that is more cost effective than analog voice over copper, because of existing capital investment in infrastructure, the actual tendency has been to construct analog voice networks.

The article suggests a compromise at this point. It could be to incorporate data capabilities into new voice networks, which would support an eventual shift to digital communications for the next (third) generation of digital networks.

In the case of Africa, that means proprietary code division multiple access (CDMA) based networks for urban centers and fixed CDMA networks for rural areas. However, if a political commitment to social investment outweighed the return on private capital, the social cost of such a compromise would be unnecessary.