

On My Life in the Sudan

Sudanese Train Ride Offers Minimum Of Comforts But Maximum Experiences

By Bayyinah Sharrieff

Interstate travel in the Republic of the Sudan by train is one of the most eventful of my experiences in the Sudan. One can learn so much of the people in a country by mixing with them on trains.

I WAS VERY surprised to find that the women were seated in separate compartments from the men. The first and second class compartments placed six to eight women and children in the same compartment. The train had no closing doors on its sides. The windows were wooden shutters, which could be pulled up or let down. There was no shelter to protect its riders from the intense heat which reaches the hundreds on the desert in the mid and northern regions of the Sudan. After a 24 to 48 hour ride on these trains one would be covered with a film of white dust blowing in on them from the desert.

I noticed that the dates of construction of these trains were 1940-42-43. They were crude trains, but they filled their purposes: to transport. But in spite of the crudeness of the trains, and the hardships and inconveniences with which one is confronted by travel on these trains, I enjoyed traveling by train in the Sudan.

The Sudan's University of Khartoum provided second-class tickets for all of its students to travel to their home towns and back twice a year.

I WAS granted permission and tickets to travel wherever I wanted, and I took advantage of their generosity and traveled whenever I could.

Traveling to Port Sudan, on the Red Sea, from the capital city of Khartoum (which takes approximately 48-60 hours, depending on the speed of the train), I was placed in a compartment with three women, one girl age 15, and two children. One of the women was a Coptic (Christian). The others were Muslims. One was a school teacher from the western Sudan. Her niece was accompanying her to the west to expose her to the life of the Sudanese in that area. This is a common custom among the Sudanese, to expose their children to life in the different regions of the Sudan. The other woman was a mother and housewife traveling to visit relatives in Atbara, a city north of Khartoum.

at the junction of the Nile and the Atbara river. Her husband was in a compartment with only men, and occasionally he would come and knock on our door to check on her, and the children.

None of these women spoke English, and we therefore had to communicate in Arabic.

They assumed that I was a Sudanese. I told them that I was a student at the University, and they were very happy that they were riding with a female university student. We discussed the growing number of women receiving higher education in the Sudan.

WHEN THE train stopped about 40 miles outside of the capital city, the women took out their packaged lunches of bread, cheese and squabs. Although they did not know each other prior to their riding this train, they shared their lunches with one another, and even offered me of their lunches. We purchased fruit, boiled eggs, and tea from the train side open markets. At this time, I met a male student from the university who treated me to a cold drink, and after asking of my compartment companions, escorted me back to my compartment. He told the women that I was an American, a guest in their country. He then left, but checked with me periodically.

The women were amazed at this. They told me that I looked like a Sudanese and that I was teasing them about my place of birth. They then concluded that my parents must have been Sudanese, and that I was born and grew up in America. They could not really believe that I was from America. At that time, I was not in the knowledge of myself, my God (Allah) nor of my True religion (Islam).

I TOLD them that there were millions of us in America who looked like them. They found

this hard to believe. They told me that they thought all Americans were white. They laughed at their lack of knowledge. I thought it strange that they did not know that there were Blacks like them in America. I told them of how we were taken to America by force, and they sympathized with our position in America.

The Honorable Elijah Muhammad teaches us that "they did not know that we were here" until approximately 60 years before the coming of our Savior, Master Fard Muhammad, to Whom praises are due forever, came to America.

AFTER hearing the teachings of the Honorable Elijah Muhammad, the Messenger of Allah, I understand why other black people did not know that we Blacks were here in America. How could they know we were here when we were called by names of white people? The only Americans who visited their country were white.

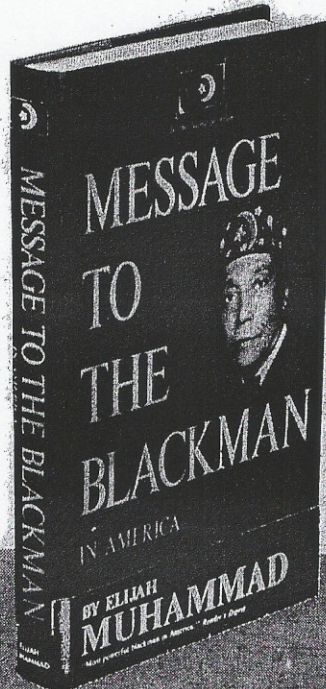
(To Be Continued)



WITH ONE of his five children, internationally famous actor Sidney Poitier is vacationing with his family in Rome. Poitier states he plans to increase his support behind struggle for freedom, justice and equality for Black people upon return to America.

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