

Albany State University and Our Global Village
Exploiting the Possibilities from Within

Emmanuel Konde

Department of History, Political Science & Public Administration

(Presented on the occasion of U.S. International Education Week at ASU, November 15, 2004)

Good morning! This event marks the beginning of activities commemorating the 2004 U.S. International Education Week at Albany State University. I want to thank Dr. Claude Perkins and the ASU International Education Week Committee for giving me the privilege of kicking-off this event. My presentation is entitled "*Albany State University and Our Global Village: Exploiting the Possibilities from Within.*" What I propose to accomplish is to lay the broad outlines for documenting international education programs and activities at ASU. But first, some prefatory remarks about my personal experience as a product of international education would set the stage for my attempt at linking ASU to the tradition of international education among historically black institutions in the United States.

A Personal Testimony

I was born among a people, a Cameroonian ethnic group, known as the Bassa in Cameroon. My birth and early childhood intersected with the ending of European colonialism in Cameroon and the emergence of Cameroon as a quasi-independent African state. I use the word *quasi-independent* because my native country is not truly independent. I came to life during a tumultuous period in Cameroon's political history, a period when my people, armed with rudimentary weapons such as bows and arrows, sought to dislodge European colonialism from our country. Because of their inferior weapons technology, my people paid dearly for that valiant effort with their lives. Many of their villages were razed to ashes; many of their young and able-bodied men slaughtered. Those who were left alive were mostly the very young and the very old, the sick and infirm. Bassaland, the land of my ancestors, was effectively rendered a wasteland by the French; and, among the extinguished lives was my own direct forebear.

The result of nearly a quarter century of European colonialism in Cameroon—as in many former European African colonial territories—was the decolonization of my native land. Cameroon did not win her own independence; independence was granted her. But freedom granted by the oppressor is never the same as freedom won by the oppressed. Decolonization, therefore, was by no means independence for Cameroonians, since we never won our own independence. Our country was simply decolonized by our European overlords. This is how the neo-colonial situation came to be in Cameroon and in much of Africa.

As you must have noticed and as many have commented, I am a lone child around whom everything revolves. I was born during a period of suffering of my people. As a child, I spent much of my childhood years among adults, who tended to show great respect for travelers because the latter were always full of strange, exciting, and exalting tidings of faraway places that often jolted my imagination. Thus, very early in my life I internalized dreams of seeing the world, so that someday, in the distant future, I too, like the travelers of my childhood days who had come to visit, would return home to tell of the great wonders of distant places I would have seen. Indeed, there is virtue in learning about the cultures of other peoples from books and lectures; but it is virtuous visiting and consorting with people of other cultures within the context of their own countries. No other form of education even comes close to approximating this type of experiential learning.

Little did I know during my childhood that I would end up in the New World, school there, marry there, bear children there, and raise a new breed of humankind that would speak not like me or my forebears, but like what my people call the “white man.” It was a spectacle to behold last December (2003), when I took my six-year-old son on a visit to Cameroon. I observed my family members across the Atlantic examine my son with curiosity, referring to him as “talking like a white man.” In as much as my American child was an object of curiosity to my family members in Cameroon, in like manner, they too, were a curious bunch to him. Yet curiosity, which is usually evoked when people encounter the unfamiliar, spurs a desire to learn about things unfamiliar. And so the meeting of members of my two families on the two sides of the Atlantic constituted a veritable learning experience—a sort of lesson in international education on a small scale—for my son on the one hand, and for my extended family in Cameroon on the other.

International education provides us a broad perspective from which to understand the world and its peoples. It equips us with the ability to interact with people from far and wide, an ultimately leads to expansion of our intellectual horizons and worldviews. With the shrinking of our world into a global village, the value of international education is becoming all the more important, all the more inestimable.

Yes, I am a product of international education. My first real encounter with Americans occurred immediately upon my arrival at a Midwestern college, where I spent my first four years in the United States. The scene of that initial encounter was the college dining hall, during a meal of chicken and mashed potatoes. That too, was my first real American meal. In the tradition of my people, I undertook to eating the chicken with my fingers, and, in the process, chewed the bones in my avid search for the marrow hidden inside the bones. There is something about bone marrow that I am still at a loss to understand why my people like to eat it. My first discovery was that American chicken bones were different from those of chicken found in Cameroon. American chicken bones are much softer, and so my strong teeth tore them open with ease and facility, and the crackling sound of chicken bones could be heard throughout the dining hall. All eyes were turned to my direction in utter amazement. My new college mates scurried to my table to observe firsthand a man of exotic taste chewing chicken bones. What followed was an avalanche of strange questions, again, borne of curiosity, about my country of origin. Flung at me from one corner of the table to another, their questions included: “Where are you from?” “Do you live on trees and in caves in your country?” “Do you ride goats?” “Do you have cars?” “How did you get here?” Obviously, I had created a sensation just by eating the way people of my culture did, and from that point on I became very popular on campus.

As if the first encounter was not enough, the spring semester of 1979 opened with another big surprise. This time it came from two African American female school mates. My undergraduate institution was predominantly white. Blacks numbered only 12, of whom two came from Africa—Eric Anang (from Ghana) and me. On that sunny spring afternoon, Rhonda Moss and Karyn Officer accosted me immediately after lunch and thrust the big question at me: “Emmanuel,” they queried, “why did your people sell us into slavery?” I was completely flabbergasted and taken aback. My subdued answer was “I do not know.” Since that time their question has haunted me like a nightmare. I finally laid it to rest a few weeks back when I completed a book-length monograph on the “Origins of the European Slave Trade in West Africa.” That enterprise took me more than 20 years to execute. The question of Rhonda and Karyn prompted me to study African history in graduate school.

During my four years of college I spent nearly every weekend and vacation with my host family—the Richard Kneed Family. For four years my host family made the Hillsdale Country Club my place of recreation. Born into the Presbyterian Church by parental association, my religious affiliation endeared me to an American family that was ostensibly surprised by my knowledge of the scriptures. Through their intervention, I became an associate member of the First Presbyterian Church in Hillsdale, Michigan. After church service every Sunday, we would

proceed to the country club for brunch. I learned how to ice skate in the winters, and in the summers learned how to water ski. In the spring I accompanied my host family on long trips, which included family reunions. At first I was shy, almost timid, and careful not to do or say the wrong things. As I learned the social mores and etiquette of my American hosts, I gradually warmed-up, gained self-confidence, and became more relaxed. But never was I able to bring myself to call them by their first names, even when they insisted. My reluctance, I think, is a cultural baggage brought from Cameroon I have never been able to lay down. I was effectively acculturated and transformed into a bourgeoisie, but one without any capital of his own.

Of course, my kind hosts were very curious about me. And so in the beginning I was occasionally tested with some infantile exercises, which I found rather amusing than insulting. I was made to understand that Americans did not like aggressive people, but also that they did not care much for wimps. I was taught to be insistent and assertive, but in a non-aggressive way; to know when to, and when not to, be assertive.

I have spoken rather glowingly about the bright side of my experience in America. But America has a dark side, too. The dark side that W.E.B. DuBois had called the problem of the twentieth century—*the color line*--more than one hundred years ago. I had befriended one David Odenbach upon arriving in the United States. David was a junior during my freshman year. We met in Dr. Payne's American Government class and studied together. A few months before his graduation, he and his fiancé, one Marsha Kaplinski were scheduled to marry. David came from California and Marsha from Chicago, Illinois. David kindly invited me to the wedding, but upon learning that a black person was going to be present, Marsha's parents, first generation immigrants from Poland, decided not to have me grace their daughter's wedding with my presence. It is thus that I was effectively *dis-invited* to my first American friend's wedding because I happened to be black. At the time I did not understand how a bride's family could *dis-invite* the groom's guest because in my native Cameroon it was the groom's family that paid for the wedding and usually decided on who could attend a wedding from their own side. But I later learned that in America it was the bride's family that foots the bill and therefore could determine the list of invitees.

Frankly, I was very disappointed and took ill for a day or two. I had been sheltered by host family and, through their intervention, accepted everywhere. The Kaplinskis rebuff was my first encounter with reality, which I eventually accepted. In as much as I could not understand what had happened, I accepted the fact that I was in a new culture and a new way of doing things had to obtain. Well, of such is a partial narrative of my cultural education in America.

On Humans and Institutions

My presentation is designed to provoke thought... thought about where ASU now stands with respect to international education, thought about how far ASU has come, thought about where ASU is going. My approach is historical because history is a contract between the past, the present, and the future; between the dead, the living, and the yet-to-be-born. But it is those of us in the present, the living, who constitute the primary actors in history. It is our responsibility to shape the future, through combining lessons from the past and present in our deliberate efforts to give direction to the future.

Consequently, institutions, like humans beings, must pause periodically to take stock of their accomplishments and to examine the trajectory of their lives. What have we accomplished? What were our successes and failures? Why did we fail? What were our mistakes? And how can we amend them? Because the lives of institutions are intricately intertwined with those of the people who serve them, especially the leaders, it is difficult to discuss institutions without making mention of the men and women who fashion and administer institutional policies.

Today, I want to pause for a moment to examine the trajectory of international education at Albany State University. While the picture appears to be somewhat blurry; and the record

perhaps too recent and sketchy to reconstruct with any degree of certitude, it is necessary to begin the process of reconstruction now. This is imperative upon us, particularly at this juncture when ASU is rapidly changing. Change introduces uncertainty, and uncertainty causes apprehension among some of us. But change is an integral part of growth and, even among humans, we find that no person stays stagnant in childhood when adolescence beckons them; and none in adolescence, when adulthood comes calling. Ultimately we all grow old, wither and die out!

The theme of this year's International Education Week at ASU is "*Academic Excellence: An Appreciation for Education on an International Level.*" Consequently, some aspects of my presentation will attempt to address this theme. Because too often we expend a lot of effort and energy extolling the virtues of others, sometimes forgetting that we, too, are also involved in similar pursuits and that our work is as important as the work of others. My synoptic appraisal of international education at ASU is twofold: (1) an expression appreciation of what has been accomplished, and; (2) a tentative attempt at linking the history of ASU with the long tradition of African American institutions of higher learning catering to the educational needs of international students.

This dual approach would permit me to connect the current effort at internationalizing ASU with the work of other HBCUs dating back to the dawn of the twentieth century. I have adopted in my narrative a juxtaposing of the past and present, with a view to presenting an ASU future in international education whose outlines are already in the making. To that end, my presentation is divided into three sections. The first section examines the foundation laid by the founder of this institution and the work of his successors to 1996; the second documents some of the accomplishments of the last four years, 2000-2004; and the third attempts to project some future trends. My desire is to initiate the practice of documenting the accomplishments of ASU in international education, while hoping that others will fill in the gaps, and improve on the shortcomings, of this tentative appraisal.

From Institute to University, 1903-1996

In July 1996, Dr. Portia Holmes Shields became the seventh and first woman president of Albany State College. Officially invested in April 1997, President Shields inherited a rich tradition of academic excellence from her six male predecessors and accordingly harnessed her bequest, a tradition of excellence, to international proportions.

This institution was founded in 1903 by Dr. Joseph Winthrop Holley as Albany Bible and Manual Training Institute. The Institute's original mission was limited to providing religious and manual training for African American youths of Southwest Georgia. With its financial support coming mainly from private and religious organizations, Albany Bible and Manual Institute undertook the training of teachers with the aim of preparing them to teach basic academic skills and to instruct students in the trades and industries. Special emphasis was placed on domestic science. When in 1917 Albany Bible and Manual Institute became a state supported two-year college with a Board of Trustees, its name changed to Georgia Normal and Agricultural College. Although the College's educational program focused primarily on agriculture, it also strove to train elementary school teachers. In 1932, following the establishment of the Board of Regents, Georgia Normal and Agricultural College was incorporated into the newly established University System of Georgia.

From 1903 to 1943, Dr. Holley presided over the early development of this institution and carefully laid the edifice upon which it would eventually grow from an institute to a university. Always poised to meet the changes that were taking place in the larger society, the institution smoothly adjusted its programs to accommodate global change. In 1943, Georgia Normal and Agricultural College expanded to be in step with global transformations. That same year the College had its second president in the person of Dr. Aaron Brown, and it was granted a

four-year-status with authority to confer bachelor's degrees in elementary education and home economics, and it simultaneously assumed the name Albany State College.

In 1949, the educational program of the College was further expanded to include offerings in the arts and sciences, with major fields in the humanities and social sciences. These developments finally resulted in the establishment of new programs, beginning in 1954, when teacher preparation in science, health and physical education, business, music, mathematics, and natural sciences were added. Meanwhile, a shift of leadership occurred in 1954, when Dr. William H. Dennis assumed the office of president. Seven years later in 1961, under the presidency of Dr. Dennis, Albany State College was authorized to offer a four-year degree program in nursing.

The fourth president, Dr. Thomas Miller Jenkins, took over leadership of the College in 1965 and continued the tradition of excellence and growth established by his predecessors. In response to the educational needs of its constituencies as dictated by the changing times, the College's graduate program was developed in cooperation with Georgia State University and was added to the curriculum in the fall of 1972. The new graduate program offered master's degrees in business education, mathematics education, elementary education, English education, health and physical education, and science education in three disciplines: biology, chemistry, and physics. Three years later in the spring of 1975, a master's degree in business administration, in conjunction with Valdosta State College, was added to the College's graduate program.

The 1970s opened with new leadership at Albany State College. Dr. Charles L. Hayes, who took over from Dr. Jenkins in 1969, supervised important transformational developments at the College. It was during this decade that the number of faculty with doctorate degrees more than doubled, a development that enabled the College to offer, by 1981, a graduate program designed and administered solely by its faculty and staff. In 1980 Dr. Billy C. Black was installed as the sixth president of the institution. Dr. Black managed the establishment of new graduate offerings that conferred master's degrees in business administration and education. Criminal justice and public administration were later added to the graduate program during his tenure.

International Education at ASU, 1996-2004

When in July 1996, Dr. Portia Holmes Shields rose to the presidency of Albany State College, a new era opened for the institution. For it was in that same year that Albany State College was granted university status by the University System Board of Regents and took the name Albany State University. Although international students had long benefited from the educational programs offered by ASU since the early days of its existence, international education did not feature as an academic focus of this institution. The centrality of this orientation can be dated to the tenure of President Shields and her appointment in 2000 of Dr. Claude Perkins to the position of Associate Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Graduate School with special responsibility for administering international education programs.

My first visit to Albany State College was in 1996, when a graduating nursing student from Cameroon invited me to attend her graduation. I returned to ASU in 2003 to interview for a teaching position in the Department of History, Political Science, and Public Administration. Between 1996 and 2003, Albany State had undergone a staggering transformation. Something new, something positive and uplifting, had happened at ASU. It would hardly be an exaggeration to attribute that "staggering transformation" to the leadership of Dr. Shields, president of the institution.

As a student of history, it is a requirement of my craft to attempt a reconstruction of what happened at ASU by connecting the spectacular transformation of this institution to the leader who presided over it. Dr. Portia Holmes Shields came from Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States. While there, Dr. Shields had been actively involved in multicultural projects with

various institutions of higher learning during her tenure as Dean of Howard University's School of Education. Dr. Shields also cultivated a cosmopolitan outlook in education. She brought her cosmopolitanism to rural Georgia and decided to transform Albany State College from a rural, local college into a world-class university.

In her search for an able leader to spearhead the project of internationalizing Albany State University, President Shields sought out Dr. Claude Perkins, an educator and administrator with extensive experience, and charged him with the responsibility of developing international programs for ASU. In other words, Dr. Shields commissioned the construction of international programs at ASU; and Dr. Perkins was the architect who mapped out the project and oversaw its construction. Dr. Perkins' appointment coincided with the changes that were already underway. These changes were being fashioned by the Board of Regents of the University System of Georgia, and were focused particularly on exposing Georgia students to international affairs through study abroad programs, efforts at internationalizing the curriculum, the development of institutional affiliations with foreign universities, etc.

Over the past four years, Dr. Perkins has built on the long experience of African American institutions of higher learning, which undertook to sponsor and train Africans beginning at the turn of the twentieth century. Historically Black Colleges and Universities like Tuskegee University and Lincoln University stand out among many. In professional fields such as medicine, Howard University Medical School (1868) and Meharry Medical School of Nashville (1876) played pivotal roles in training African physicians. For example, the man who led the first African nation to independence in 1957, Dr. Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, was a product of Lincoln University.

Some of the founders of South Africa's African National Congress (ANC), the political party that led the struggle against white minority rule in South Africa, were educated in African American institutions. These include P.K. Isaka Seme, Professor John L. Dube, Solomon T. Plaatje, and Professor D.D.T. Jabavu. In fact, the liberation of Africa from European colonialism was made possible by African Americans, who tirelessly fought for their kin despite the conditions that they themselves suffered in America. And, without African American intercession on behalf of their oppressed brethren in South Africa, black humankind there might still be languishing under Apartheid, that last bastion of white minority rule. It is indeed a strange twist of history: that the descendants of Africans enslaved in white-owned plantations in America were the same people who would rise centuries later to liberate the land of their ancestors!

While the work of African American colleges and universities for Africa and Africans is yet to be completed, these institutions are today opening their doors to ever-increasing numbers of students from across the globe. To this great task of our times, ASU has consciously placed itself as a major player. Barely four years into this enterprise (2000-2004), Albany State University has registered some rather astounding achievements. A partial record of these accomplishments includes but is not limited to the following:

- In 2001 President Shields led ASU students on a visit to China;
- A Study Abroad Program has been established with South Africa and is directed by Dr. Patricia Ryan-Ikegwuonu;
- The T.A.G.S. (Textbooks for a Global Society) Namibia initiative is led by Dr. Carolyn Rollins. She recently received a Namibian delegation and has visited the country;
- ASU Camp Adventure Youth Series administered by Dr. Wilburn Campbell;

- ASU has signed Memoranda of Understanding with universities in Belize, Jamaica, Kenya, Malawi, South Africa, and Swaziland;
- The Ronald H. Brown International Trade Center hosted an agro-business and rural development workshop for representatives from seven African countries this past summer;
- Dr. Kwame Dankwa's National Model United Nations has been in full force since 2002, representing ASU at three successive meetings;
- *The African Symposium: An Online Journal of the African Education Research Network*, involving collaboration among African and North American universities, is managed and edited by ASU;
- ASU students represented the institution at the 8th Southeast Model African Union Conference early this month.

By any measure of objective or subjective evaluation, these achievements, less than five years in the making, are truly worthy of note.

Some Future Trends, 2004 and Beyond

There are more international students, faculty, and staff today at ASU than at any other period in the history of the institution. Given this current trend, we cannot but expect these numbers to increase in the coming years. But the presence of so many international faculty, staff, and students on this campus, in and of itself, means very little. Of significance is the need to maintain and even augment programs designed to educating ASU students for world citizenship.

In her Proclamation of the U.S. International Education Week at Albany State University, President Shields accurately noted in one of statements that "The heritage of the United States and its educational institutions is an amalgam of international expression and exchange." This statement symbolizes and bears testimony to Dr. Shields' commitment to internationalize ASU. Currently, ASU boasts of 54 international faculty and staff, and 43 international students. The international presence at ASU comes from 26 countries and four continents: Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas.

At this juncture ASU needs to vigorously emphasize the other dimension of international education: the need for American, especially African American students, to develop an active interest in acquiring international experience. The rest of the world is not made up of less civilized people. Even in Africa, a continent berated century after century as "dark" and full of barbarians, an American can live a quality of life that can otherwise be lived only in his or her dreams. Indeed, as President Shields again noted in her proclamation, "International education provides a viable opportunity to strengthen understanding and celebrate cultural diversity." Studies have shown that African American students are underrepresented in study abroad programs. This gap has to be bridged, if not filled, as the world outside of the United States invites African American college students to explore and exploit the available opportunities and possibilities. What many of our students may not know is that those Americans who work abroad make more money than their counterparts at home in the United States. They also save more money because the standards of living in most countries outside of Europe and Japan are lower than in the United States.

I foresee a community of scholars and students at ASU continually expanding with the changing world. And with the development of programs commensurate with educating a student

body poised to compete effectively for jobs and other opportunities globally, the future of ASU graduates will be guaranteed. In preparing our students for global citizenship, we must never forget to instruct them of the virtues of the place that made it all possible. Albany State University is the center of our universe and the nodal point from which its products will be dispersed around the world.

An important ingredient to the success of ASU in the coming years will depend largely on two important factors: (1) collaboration of the faculty in sharing knowledge about changing trends in international education as well as collaboration in developing essential courses, and; (2) the augmentation and efficient delivery of services to students. As international education takes deep root at ASU, new sources of funding should be sought to enable students study and intern abroad in American businesses and government agencies. Such funding should be sought through creating working relationships with American corporations that have international branches, and preparing our students to intern in those locations during the summers or whenever the companies demand their presence.

These connections will give ASU students a competitive edge come graduation time. As a matter of fact, with the current trend of outsourcing American jobs abroad, a program of international internships would provide ASU students who participate in the program with the requisite language skills, familiarity with local cultures, and on-the-job work experience to ease into administrative positions in countries where American businesses are operating.

The administration of efficient student services is important for both retention of continuing, and attraction of new, students. While ASU must aspire to provide all students with first class services, two categories should be sought out for special treatment: freshmen and seniors. Freshmen because they are the most likely to bolt out if services are less than desirable, and seniors because of the need to build a pool of alumni whose departure from ASU must be crowned with fond memories. Disgruntled graduating seniors constitute a big loss for any college or university. After investing four years training graduates, ASU should expect something in return from them and institution's alumni should oblige. This is an obligation incumbent upon ASU and its graduates. But it must be cultivated with care and love. One of the better ways to secure alumni loyalty is to ensure that graduates depart this campus as satisfied customers.

Now that the enterprise of international education has become part and parcel of ASU, we must set our sights on success and nothing short of success. Thank you, and may international education flourish at ASU.