

VIII

Liberia

Soon after the United States entered World War II, Liberia became strategically important to our war effort. By that time Germany controlled much of Europe and northern Africa. The Japanese had aggressively driven south to gain control of the sources of rubber in the Asian and Pacific region. Hence Firestone's productive Liberian rubber plantation became a significant resource for a valuable war commodity. President Franklin D. Roosevelt visited Monrovia on his return from an important wartime conference at Casablanca in 1943, highlighting Liberia's importance. An airfield started by the Firestone Company to serve its rubber plantation, was soon turned into Roberts Field by the U. S. Army Air Force. It became one of the largest and most important airports in a string of trans-Atlantic international bases on the vital transit route from America via Brazil and Monrovia to the middle and far East. Pan-American Airways established a base there during the war and Orchid Jordan worked for Pan-Am during the Jordans' final years in Liberia.

Several important agreements were reached between the Liberian and American governments during the war period, including a Mutual Defense Agreement, signed June 8, 1943. U. S. troops entered Liberia soon after Pearl Harbor. Liberia declared war against the Axis powers January 28, 1944. America agreed to develop the port of Monrovia, and in 1944 a Lend-Lease agreement was signed providing for a Foreign Economic Assistance Administration to be sent to Liberia. Col. John West, who married Muriel Stewart and hired Leon Jordan to head Liberia's police force, was part of that administration.

The war years made a huge difference in Liberia's economy. Before the war Liberia suffered under the burden of large obligations to the Financial Corporation of America, which was controlled by the Firestone Company. With the extraordinary demand for Firestone's rubber the financial position of Liberia improved markedly. From 1940-1945 exports increased from 2 million dollars to over 6 million dollars. Liberia's bonded indebtedness decreased notably.

On January 3, 1944, President William V. S. Tubman began a presidential rule that would last for more than twenty-seven years. He was the choice of President Edwin J. Barclay who had held office for the previous thirteen years. Attorney General, C. Abayomi Cassell, who signed Leon Jordan's contract, was one of Tubman's closest advisors from the beginning. There was a rich interplay of American and Liberian governmental institutions already set up when Leon and Orchid Jordan arrived in Liberia December 11, 1947.⁵¹

While Jordan was still negotiating his new position, Liberia celebrated one hundred years of its existence as a nation during Centennial Week, beginning July 21, 1947. When Jordan first requested leave from the Kansas City Police Department, he expressed some urgency, indicating that the Liberian government wanted him to fly to Monrovia to be present for the Centennial Week. It didn't happen because Jordan feared flying.

The Jordans made their way to New York late in 1947, stayed in the Theresa Hotel, and sailed for Monrovia November 26 on board the *African Grove*. Before sailing, however, Jordan gave an interview to *The Voice of the People* in which he describes his early adult life and police service. The theory behind his police work "is that prevention of crime is better than punishing the criminal; that a bad environment produces the criminal, and that 'third degree' methods should have no place in police activity." He was proud of having founded American Youth

⁵¹ J. H. Mowrer, "The Republic of Liberia," pp. 299-301; Tuan Wreh, *The Love of Liberty*, p. 11.

Clubs in Kansas City as early as 1939 that sponsored sports, dancing, and other recreational events for young people.

By letter Jordan told his former partner, Cliff Warren, that he and his wife arrived in Monrovia, December 11. After visiting Dakar and Freetown, Jordan described Liberia as more “Americanized” than the other African nations he had visited. He found a former Wilberforce classmate now a wealthy rubber plantation owner in Cape Palmas. He was learning the Bassa and



Kru languages so as not to be misunderstood, and the men of these tribes should make good policemen because of their fearlessness. When he ventured into the hinterlands, he wanted “someone with me who can whip a leopard with a switch.”

Noting the elaborate rules of protocol, he said he had been officially presented to His Excellency, William V. S. Tubman, President of Liberia, and The Honorable C. V. O. King, acting secretary of state. He was impressed with the political knowledge of the cabinet members and the business-like manner in which the government is run. He was also very pleasantly surprised that white Americans “are quite congenial and display no resentment to the dark-skinned rulers. . . .you would never believe Bilbo lived in America.”

In March former American Secretary of State, Edward R. Stettinius, arrived in Monrovia with a grandly ambitious economic development plan. Stettinius had accompanied Roosevelt to Yalta and was impressed with Tubman when he met him on the presidential stop in Monrovia.

He became the Administrator of the various Lend-Lease programs and directly involved in the construction of the harbor of Monrovia. On this visit to Monrovia he came with an ambitious Statement of Understanding embodying an idea for developing Liberian resources that would benefit the Liberian people and still be attractive to American investors. The Liberian Company was set up with representatives from the Liberian government and business and social leaders from the U. S. It was modeled on the success of the Firestone Plantation, but designed with more safeguards for the Liberians and more input from social leaders who were not just interested in economic profits. Regrettably a little more than a year and a half later, Oct. 31, 1949, Stettinius suffered a heart attack and died suddenly at his sister's home in Connecticut. He was only 49 years old. Without his leadership his plan slowly disintegrated. Jordan worked very hard on the March state dinner and was rewarded by an invitation to dine privately with President Tubman at the Executive Mansion.

That same month back in Kansas City, Jordan was among 23 Negro residents honored by the Urban League for "outstanding contributions to racial advancement in 1947." Jordan contacted the KCPD about supplies he had ordered and the next night spoke with his brother-in-law, Harvey Ramsey. His uncle, John Wright remembered Jordan's birthday with a radiogram May 5: "Anniversary congratulations family well." St. Augustine church recorded that Jordan's aunt, Kate Jordan Bufkin, died August 4th. Apparently she had married into the Bufkin family even as her older sister had done.⁵²

On September 19, President Tubman married Antoinette Padmore, granddaughter of the late President Arthur Barclay. It was to be a vividly celebrated event and guests were invited from around the world. A plane carrying the French High Commissioner of West Africa and

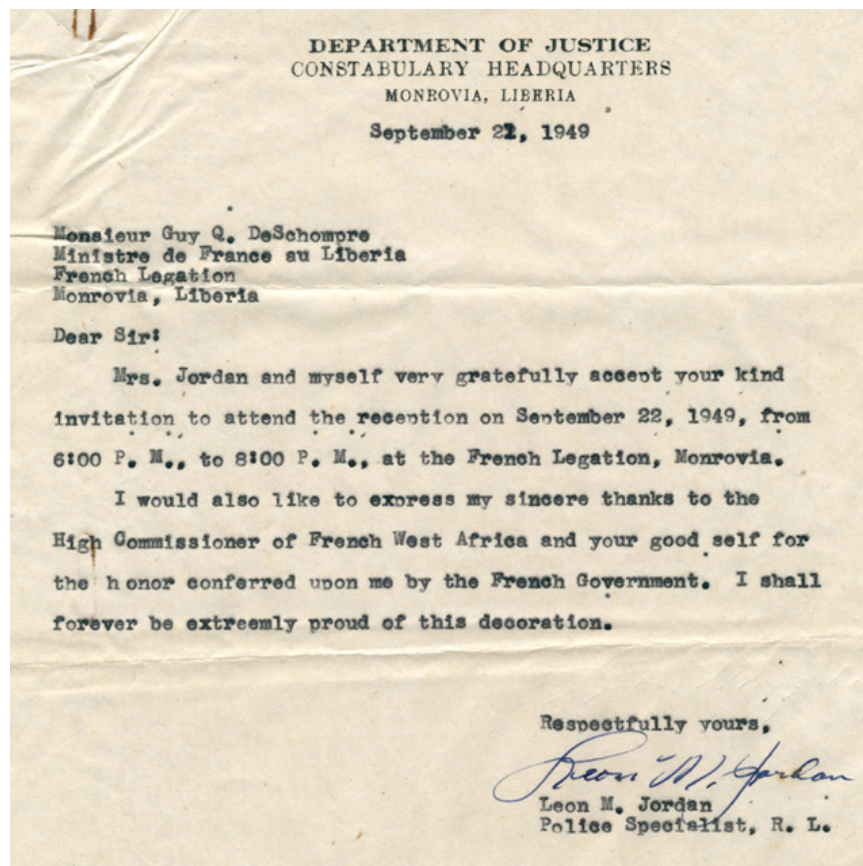
⁵² May 7, 1947 request for leave of absence, KCPD file, LJC; Dec. 6, 1947 *The Voice of the People*; Jan. 30, 1948, *Kansas City Call*; R. Earle Anderson, *Liberia, America's African Friend*, pp. 255-259; President's invitation, March 30, 1948, LJC; March 20, 1948, *Kansas City Times*; March 12, 1948, *Kansas City Call*.

sixteen other French officials made a forced landing in the vicinity of Little Bassa on their way to Roberts Field. A distress call went out, and a combined rescue attempt was organized by French officials, Firestone specialists, and Jordan's police. After a day of frustrating difficulties all of the plane's passengers were eventually rescued.

Jordan singled out three of his men and one woman for special praise, but recommended letters of commendation for each member of the rescue mission. On December 8, 1948, President Tubman conferred on Jordan the distinction of the Chevalier

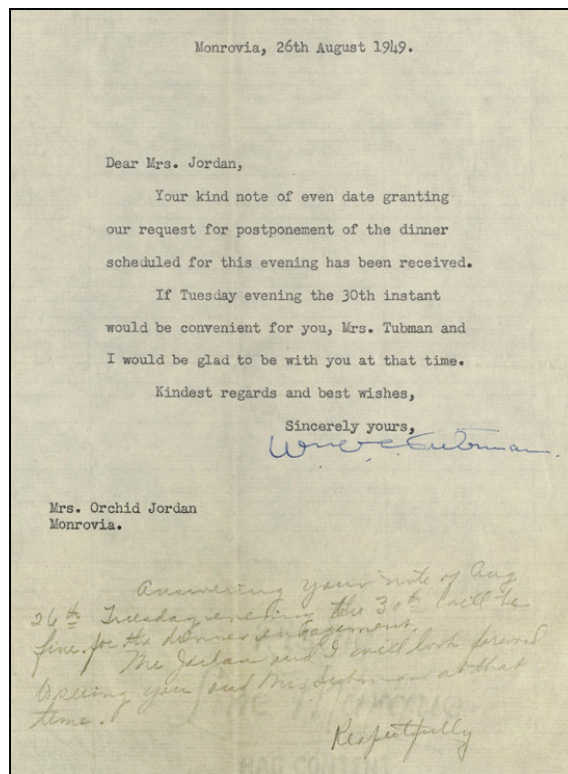


of the Star of Africa in the Parlors of the Executive Mansion. France showed its gratitude to Jordan a year later when she awarded him *la croix d'OFFICIER de l'ordre de l'Etoile Noire du Benin*, in the presence of President William V. S. Tubman at a reception at the French Legation, September 22, 1949. Attorney General Cassell then gave a garden party in Jordan's honor, November 25, 1949, at the Government Square. Jordan was presented with photos of the occasion by T. W. Dupigny-Leigh, Sr., Social Secretary to President Tubman.



A card saved by the Jordans indicates that President Tubman and his new wife sent the Jordans two pieces of their wedding cake. Almost a year after their marriage the Tubmans agreed to dine at the Jordans' home with Attorney General Cassell's wife. The dinner was originally set for August 26, 1949, but the Tubmans then requested it be postponed until August 30. Orchid agreed.

Not all Jordan's new job concerns were so high profile. Among the Jordan papers are numerous plaintive requests for jobs and money



from local citizens in need. But on Jordan's forty-second birthday, Sgt. J. W. Yates, brought him a few eggs "for you are sick, and know that you need them." Another of his men prefaced his request with a colorful personal story: "Sir, I am very sorry to say that my wife takes all my clothes, pots, and ran away with it. A cousin of mine told me that she is to Saniquellia with one man. So I wish to say please give me a pass for two or three weeks to go there and come back. I hope there will be no objection. As my happiness depends upon your favorable reply. Thanks yours obedient servant, Africa Bull."⁵³

A month after the rescue of the downed French officials, Jordan gave a talk before the Montserrado Sunday School Union at Saint Thomas Church. He noted that the police reorganization he was presently engaged in was a program "conceived and sponsored by the Department of Justice under the Honorable C. Abayomi Cassell." A Departmental Order issued February 4, 1948, gave Jordan sweeping powers as Police Specialist to reorganize the police, reporting directly to Attorney General Cassell and subject only to his authority. He was attempting to bring the Bureau up to accepted modern standards. The examples he chose to illustrate his goals reveal the influence of his experience during the reorganization of the Kansas City Police Department following the fall of Pendergast. "The science of fingerprinting, firearms identification, photography and other advanced scientific methods of enforcement agencies are goals toward which we are daily working."

He listed four goals for his Bureau: (1) Protection of life and property, (2) Preservation of the Peace, (3) Apprehension of offenders, and (4) Prevention of crime. The last he described as "one of the newer responsibilities of the police. It is more and more clearly recognized that a

⁵³ Jordan's report to Cassell, September 18, 1948, letter to Jordan from French Minister Guy De Schompre, French, December 8, 1948, letter to Jordan from J. Emory Knight, Secretary to President Tubman, September 16, 1949, letter from F. W. Dupigny-Leigh, Sr., note from Dupigny-Leigh regarding Tubmans' accepting dinner invitation, August 15, 1949, Sgt. Yates' letter, May 15, 1948, Africa Bull letter, October 6, 1948, LJC.

constructive approach to the crime problem must go to its very roots. That is, factors in the community life which create the criminal and lead him to indulge in anti-social behavior.” The mix of international diplomats and business people then working in Monrovia seems to have been a



particularly congenial lot. On August 31, 1948, Helen Mayer invited Orchid Jordan to a lunch for Muriel West. Col. West’s wife, with her strong ties through her mother to the Jordan family, was already an established part of this society and almost certainly helped provide entrée for the Jordans. They were quickly invited to cocktails, bridge, farewell and welcoming parties. Orchid seemed to blossom in this trans-racial society. But she also did yeoman’s service as her husband’s right hand in organizing the police force. She was soon to head the photography department of the Bureau, and Attorney General Cassell presented her with an award of \$500 for organizing the police-work in fingerprinting. While she now had a significant role of her own to play, both socially and economically, she and her husband seemed a functioning team, their marriage once again a source of mutual satisfaction.

On Nov. 15, 1948, Jordan requested an additional fourteen months leave, twelve months to



complete his contract with Liberia and two months leave to return home. “I have been fortunate in receiving an invitation from French Minister Guy de Schompre, Monrovia, to visit the French Police in Conakry, Dakar, and Paris. I also have hope of visiting one or two other English Colonial Police and London before my return home.”⁵⁴

The Jordans’s second year in Liberia apparently was a continuing building process for his police force capped by the recognition I have already mentioned by the French Minister and the Jordans’ growing friendship with President Tubman and his wife. But another notable American arrived in Monrovia late in November, and a scrapbook of extraordinary photographs that the Jordans kept of their years in Liberia reveals a significant record of her later visit.

Pearl Primus was already attracting considerable praise as a dancer when she appeared as a guest soloist on the “African Dance Festival” program held at Carnegie Hall, December 13, 1943. It was the first dance project of the African Academy of Arts and Research. Eleanor Roosevelt and Mary McLeod Bethune spoke during the intermission in support of the project. After a summer of travel and research in the American South--Primus was a student of anthropology as well as dance--she made her Broadway debut on October 4, 1944, featuring by then her well known solos, *The Negro Speaks of Rivers*, *Strange Fruit*, *Hard Time Blues*, and *African Ceremonial*. Almost four years later while dancing at Fisk University, Dr. Edwin Embree, President of the Rosenwald Foundation gave Primus the very last grant of the foundation to study in Africa for nine months. Embree had also been a board member of the Liberia Company that was to grow out of the Stettinius plan.

⁵⁴ Motterrado School Union talk, Oct. 22, 1948, Departmental Order, February 4, 1948, Woody L. Taylor’s column, *The Afro-American*; Letter from Jordan to Chief Johnson, November 15, 1948, KCPD file; all in LJC.

On her first trip to Africa, Primus traveled to Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Angola, Cameroons, Liberia, Senegal, and the Belgian Congo. Among the Primus papers archived at the American Dance Festival at Duke University is a typescript of what was her diary. It describes her leaving the S.S. Delmundo, which had carried her from Lagos, on September 5, 1949, in the company of Ida George bound for Ida's home in Monrovia, a home that seemed very comfortable "to one whose eyes have grown used to mud huts and thatched roofs." That day "white as pale milk," the rain "poured, tumbled and galloped from the sky." It grew feet and ran in sharp diagonals.

After meeting John George, Ida's husband and Carl Mebane, she was to be taken to the home of Loyce Woodford, where she was questioned about her trip. "In the muddle which their faces represented I remember Loyce, Ambassador and Mrs. D[udley], Orchid [Jordan], John and Ida George. John and Ida George were good friends of the Jordans. There are photos of them in the Jordan scrapbook.

The Jordan scrapbook also contains a number of remarkable photos of Primus dancing for and with native Liberians while she records their music and movements with camera and recording equipment. While the Jordans left no written record of their association with Primus, the remarkable photographic record suggests that Leon Jordan was assigned to guide Primus into the interior to meet local leaders and that he recorded her activities with his own camera.



In 1948 Primus published an account in *Vogue* of her beginning travels and research in western Africa. Of Liberia she describes the women of Zor, “their heads covered with tremendous headdresses of sheepskin, their ankles rounded with tiny bells, turning and stamping the earth to greet me.” They sing and dance her into the village, where the talking drums herald her arrival. Then a new sight: “Giants in skirts of raffia, faces masked, legs as long as the trunks of palms, come whirling down the path. These are the fearsome Devils. These are the country Devils, the greatest dance figures in Liberia. I am honoured above all men, for they have come to greet me. They will dance me before the chief.”

“Chief Mongru sits quietly smiling. His teeth are red from chewing the Kola nut. He parts his lips. . . ‘Anything you ask is yours, since you are my daughter.’ And so, again I have become part of a village. . . a village with round houses lying like mushrooms in the clearing. Tonight there will be no sleep. The Devils will sing, the drums will play, and I shall join the circle of the dance. . .swaying and chanting till morning comes.” Chief Mongru is probably the conspicuous chieftain in the inauguration photos in the scrapbook. He was a leading political figure in Liberia as well as a sponsor of Primus. The Jordans’ scrapbook also contains many photos of devil dancers.

After her visits to the tribal areas, Primus gave a command performance for President Tubman at the Executive Pavilion, November 25, just before she left Liberia. President Tubman congratulated Primus on “the grandeur, magnificence, sublimity, beauty and perfection with which you performed and executed your program last night.” He thought it noteworthy that in such short space of time she was able “to make yourself the possessor of those of our Liberian culture with which you have come in contact and reproduce them on the stage in such artistic style.” On December 2nd, he decorated her with The Star of Africa.⁵⁵

Shortly after Primus gave her command performance, the Jordans took a leave from their duties in Liberia and returned to Kansas City to work with the police department to enhance their skills for police work in Liberia. While they were still in Kansas City Pearl Primus and her

⁵⁵ Richard C. Greene, “(Up)Staging the Primitive, Pearl Primus and ‘the Negro Problem’ in American Dance,” included in Thomas F. De Frantz, *Dancing Many Drums*, pp. 113, 115-117, 120; John O. Perpener III, *African-American Concert Dance*, pp. 113-114; John Martin, “The Dance in Liberia,” *New York Times*, July 31, 1960, sec. 2, p.6; Typescript from Box 2, Writings—Africa, and copy of letter from Tubman to Primus, Box 3, Printed Materials, 1850, Primus Papers, American Dance Festival, Duke University; “In Africa,” *Vogue*, Oct. 15, 1948, p. 99. See prints numbered, 1801, 1901-1912, 2001-2012, & 2201-2212, Jordan Scrapbook, LJC. The first hint that the dancer in the Jordan scrapbook was Pearl Primus came to me from Dorothy Madelin Davis. Leon and Orchid became godparents to Davis in Monrovia in 1953. Her parents, Griff and Muriel Davis, were close friends to the Jordans. Griff Davis was an internationally known photographer hired by the American Embassy in Monrovia. Among the collection of her father’s photos that Dorothy still holds is a photograph of Orchid giving Pearl Primus a congratulatory kiss.

troupe of dancers gave a performance titled, “Dark Rhythms” at the University of Kansas City Playhouse. One of the dances she performed was titled, “Fanga,” an authentic dance from the interior of Liberia, originally done to honor a chief. “Fanga” became an iconic dance for Primus and a much repeated and reinterpreted dance by others in subsequent years. It seems highly likely that the Jordans were involved in arranging that appearance. But surprisingly there is no notice in the *Kansas City Call* of the performance. There are, however, notices of the coming performance in the *Kansas City Star* and the university student newspaper, and the *Star* also noted that the performance was attended by a near capacity crowd. Miss Primus also “explained the significance of the movements and related some of her own experiences while in Africa.”

The Jordans became avid collectors of African art early in their Liberian residence. There are many photos of them with their collection in their scrapbook. After they returned to Kansas City in 1956 they showed their collection at special events and at their church. They loaned a pair of carved elephant tusks to an African art exhibit at the Kansas City Public Library, and eventually Orchid opened a shop selling African art next to the Green Duck Tavern on Prospect. There is no hard evidence that Pearl Primus, with her enormous enthusiasm for the African roots of human culture, influenced the Jordans’ interest in collecting, but it seems likely. The Jordans’ interest in African culture, however, is relatively modest compared to the intense historical and spiritual enthusiasm Pearl Primus felt for Africa as the root culture of all humanity.⁵⁶

⁵⁶ University of Kansas City Playhouse program, Box 3, Printed Materials, Primus Papers; April 23, 1950, *Kansas City Star*; *The Dance Claimed Me*, pp. 88-93.



The Jordans left Liberia by ship, arriving in Kansas City late in December, 1949.

Meanwhile Jacob Browne wrote: “No longer can the label that the Monrovia police force is incompetent and inefficient apply. Today, the Monrovia Police constabulary conforms to all modern police forces, and there is a marked and rapid change of improvements seen daily.”

Jordan is credited with effecting the change. “When Jordan took over, persons looked down on the police force, and policemen were scoffed at and termed in local parlance ‘ballah.’ Today, we see college graduates, high school graduates, women, as well as school boys as part of an efficient police force. The Monrovia force comprises 180 men and 12 women.” A police academy has been established where fingerprint identification and classification, lifting and preservation of fingerprints, first aid, criminal law with evidence, ballistics and fire arm instructions, and traffic control are taught.

Browne refers to the police role in the rescue of the passengers of the downed French plane and gives Orchid credit for her role in teaching finger printing. He also notes the award Orchid received from Attorney General Cassell on behalf of President Tubman.⁵⁷

The Jordans remained in Kansas City from late December, 1949, until May 20, 1950. Leon officially returned to duty in Kansas City February 15, and his salary was raised to \$260

⁵⁷ A copy of Brown’s article is in LJC.

per month. But it was clear both in Kansas City and Monrovia that he would be returning to Liberia. In March Ambassador Edward R. Dudley had requested the Kansas City Police Board give Jordan another year's leave: "In addition to the splendid quality of Mr. Jordan's work, we at the Embassy feel that such an assignment will add immeasurably to the prestige of our Government here, and also strengthen the friendship between the two countries." On March 27 the Board informed Attorney General Cassell that Jordan had been granted two years of leave and if his work there was then not completed, another two years would probably be considered. This in spite of the fact that legally Jordan could only be granted one year's leave at a time.

In Kansas City Leon overcame his fear of flying and began taking lessons. Orchid trained in the police school of photography. Under the instruction of Al Wilson at Municipal Airport, Leon soloed May 10th. After he returned to Liberia a plane was purchased for his use and he became an adventurous and efficient pilot, quickly beginning to instruct his police officers there in all



the skills they needed to allow the department to extend its authority into areas of Liberia where land roads were scarce and undependable.

In 1975 Ambassador Dudley wrote to Orchid remembering Leon's flying career: "We became such good friends, (not good enough for me to get in his airplane) that he used to call me

‘Junior.’ He was truly my senior, being older, taller, and louder. Almost daily he would fly his plane over what then had become the American Embassy compound and invariably we would be in conference or meeting with scores of persons who visited the Embassy for business reasons or visitors out of sheer curiosity as to what an Embassy looked like. . . .Upon these occasions, when we were being buzzed at an altitude, I am sure of not over 150 feet, we would hear the engine of the plane go dead, then a booming voice from up above would call out, ‘Junior,’ what’s happening, then the motor would again be turned on and the plane would soar away to whatever mission awaited it.”

Flying above the American embassy, talking down to the American ambassador, no matter the obvious good humor of the occasion, must have been an exhilarating experience for Jordan. He had come far from the segregated police work he had endured in Kansas City. He not only had conquered his personal fear of flying, but now had real power and considerable personal freedom. He was feeling confident and strong. He was in deed flying high.

While the Jordans were still in Kansas City, Leon was commended for a talk he had given in March to the Association of Community Councils by Mrs. J. J. Butler, a Commissioner of the Association: “Mr. Jordan is a fine representative of the Police Force, and I think everyone there was proud that he had this



opportunity in Liberia, and proud that he could so well represent his people.” There is also a program in the Jordan collection listing Jordan along with Dr. J. E. Perry as speakers at a Missionary Mass Meeting of the Pleasant Green Baptist Church on March 12. Both he and Orchid probably gave other talks in the community during their return to Kansas City as well.⁵⁸

The Jordans returned to Liberia by way of Washington, D.C. and New York. Woody L. Taylor interviewed Jordan for *The Afro-American*: “The advances made by the natives in police work in the short space of three years have been nothing short of phenomenal.” Taylor listed the names of five top officials Jordan had brought to New York for six months training in the latest police trends: Edward Cooper, newly appointed commissioner of police; J. G. H. Davis, captain of police and an administrative assistant; George Perry, chief of detectives; Wilmut Mason, inspector of police of Grand Bassa County; and Allen Yancey, inspector of police, Maryland County, City of Harper, Cape Palmas. Taylor gave much credit to Orchid. He added that while the Jordans have been in Liberia they have seen women get the vote and become employed in office work whereby previously they remained at home and tended the babies. He also noted that Jordan had organized a fire department in Monrovia in 1949. That department had a complement of sixteen men and plans to branch out to the rest of the country.

When Taylor’s column appeared, the Jordans were already in New York purchasing supplies and uniforms for the police force in Monrovia. They sailed from New York for Monrovia on July 28.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Letter from Dudley to J. D. Milligan, March 7, 1950, letter from Board of Commissioners to Cassell, March 27, 1950, letter from Butler to Chief Johnson, March 8, 1950, KCPD file, LJC; undated newspaper clipping, but shortly after May 10, 1950, LJC; letter from Dudley to Orchid Jordan, May 2, 1975, Bruce Watkins Museum, copy, LJC; Pleasant Green Baptist Church program, March 12, 1950, LJC.

⁵⁹ Woody L. Taylor column, *The Afro American*, July 29, 1950; In April 2007 I made a presentation of some of the photos from the Jordan Scrapbook to the Liberian Studies Conference in Toledo, Ohio. Coincidentally I shared the platform with Dorothy Davis, who is the God child of Orchid and Leon Jordan, and whose father, Griff Davis, was a professional photographer and close friend of the Jordans. In the question and answer period that followed our presentation, Dr. Svend E. Holsoe, Professor Emeritus of Anthropology at the University of Delaware, who was

Leon's aunt, Sallie Love, died September 18, just a few weeks after the Jordans returned to Liberia. The Jordans sent a \$500 check to Lucile Bluford to purchase a life membership in the NAACP. Theirs was the third life membership taken out in Kansas City. Leon said of the purchase: "this culminates a life-long ambition which will give to me a bit more self-respect in my yearning for first-class American citizenship." Although the membership put "a strain on the family budget," he was happy to be able to afford it. Since it followed so closely his aunt's death it was also a likely tribute to his aunt and uncle's long service to the Kansas City NAACP.

In the spring of 1951 two of Jordan's flying students, Wilmot McCritty and Philip Jargbah, soloed after four months training. They were approved for continued training in advanced aerodynamics, and two new students were chosen to begin training in a month or so. Jordan was using a Piper Vanguard Trainer, 65 H. P., but President Tubman approved the purchase of a larger plane, and the students' training might well continue for six months in the United States. *The Liberian Age* commented on Jordan's teaching skills: "The public considers Leon Jordan as a marvelous man of pluck and wits. His approach in the training of cross section mentalities is admired by all. He said that not the literary [*sic*] training alone, but a certain degree of intelligence and a scientific approach by the teacher are all required for the training work."⁶⁰

That year President Tubman was also reelected for a second term, and immediately began planning for a second inauguration. The Jordans were deeply involved in the preparations for the inauguration and in the two weeks of spectacular events that celebrated it. Orchid was now in charge of the police photography department. The photographic laboratory the Jordans established probably became the genesis of the remarkable scrapbook of over 900 photos taken

twelve years old when his parents were in diplomatic service in Monrovia, was pleased to learn why the police in Monrovia he remembered wore New York City uniforms.

⁶⁰ *The Liberian Age*, May 7 & 14, 1951, LJC.

during the Jordans' years in Liberia. Slowly some of those featured in the photos have been recognized. Dorothy Davis, God-child of the Jordans and daughter of Griff Davis, photographer and friend of the Jordans said there is a photo of Orchid and Pearl Primus



together in her father's collection. That led to the identification of Pearl Primus dancing and researching among the natives. The puzzle of identifying all those featured in the photos is, however, far from complete. What is clear is that the Jordans were talented photographers and Monrovia, particularly during President Tubman's second inauguration in 1952, provided an extraordinary setting to photograph a rich panoply of both local and international citizens.

Oden and Olivia Meeker described this inaugural celebration several months later in *The New Yorker*:

They went on for ten days and included a state dinner almost every night, a formidable series of receptions and garden parties, and daily public celebrations of one sort or another, with oratory. The new research institute of the American Foundation for Tropical Medicine, a two-hundred-and-fifty-thousand-dollar laboratory donated by Harvey S. Firestone, Jr., as a memorial to his father, was dedicated during this period, and there were numerous parades, including one by six hundred Marines from the attack transport U.S.S. Monrovia, which paid a formal call on the city it was named for. The Liberian Army was issued new weapons, new uniforms, and white-enameled American

helmets for the occasion. A chef was imported from France to take care of the state dinners, and a decorator to arrange the bunting on the public buildings and along the route of the parades. From Italy came a bandmaster, who conducted a Liberian band, and an *artiglierista*, who brought his own cannon, to fire joyful salutes.... The United States delegation to the inauguration consisted of Edward R. Dudley, the Ambassador to Liberia; Mrs. Mary McLeod Bethune, the famous Negro educator; Major James S. Stowell, of the United States Air Force; and Carl Murphy, head of the Afro-American Company, which publishes newspapers in Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and the District of Columbia.

Another important guest whom the Meekers do not mention is Brigadier General Benjamin Davis, America's first black army general. In October, 1951, Liberian Secretary of State Dennis invited Davis and his wife, Sadie, to be President Tubman's guests during the inauguration ceremony. The Davises came for a month. They arrived in Monrovia on board the *African Pilot* December 31, 1951. In his



journal Gen. Davis recorded that the *African Pilot* loaded two railroad cars bound for Monrovia at a stop in Charleston. The Jordans took fourteen photos of the *African Pilot* arriving in Monrovia and unloading the two railway cars. At the time Liberia had a single railroad line connecting Monrovia and the iron ore mining camp in the Bomi Hills. On the seventh day of the

inauguration ceremonies, President Tubman took his international guests there by rail to view the progress of the mining industry. There are three clear photos of Gen. Davis in the Jordan scrapbook: (1) with his wife Sadie, seated at the Antoinette Tubman Stadium on the opening day of the inauguration, (2) with Sadie talking to other guests between the formal dinner and the ball in honor of the special missions on the second evening of the inauguration, and (3, not shown) in a tired crowd at the end of a 200 mile excursion into the interior on the third day of the inauguration. Davis reports in his journal that he did not get back to his hotel until 2:30 a.m. on the next day of this excursion.



On Sunday, January 11, Davis notes that he and his wife attended a dinner hosted by Dr. J. Max Bond, President of the University of Liberia at the Executive Pavilion. Dr. Bond is brother to Horace Mann Bond, then President of Lincoln University in Pennsylvania, and uncle to Julian Bond of Civil Rights fame. Davis lists Mary McLeod Bethune, Mrs. Jordan (presumably Orchid Jordan), Mrs. Chandler and Mrs. King, the wife of the American ambassador, as other guests at the dinner. The Jordan scrapbook also includes many photos of Mary McLeod Bethune at various events of the inauguration, including a brunch given January 14th by the Liberian Social and Political Movement in her honor at the Pepper Bird.

There was another notable guest with Kansas City connections that the Weeks did not mention in their article. Etta Moten attended Western University in Quindaro, Kansas, next door to Kansas City, Missouri, before finishing her degree at the University of Kansas. She got her first break on Broadway in the show *Zombie*. Gershwin wrote *Porgy and Bess* with her in mind, but had some difficulty persuading her to take the part because she



was a contralto and the part called for a soprano. But once she accepted, she quickly became a striking success. Shortly after becoming the first African American to be invited to sing in the White House in 1934, she married Claude Barnett, head of the Associated Negro Press, who became an interested observer of the Liberian scene and another important guest at the Tubman inauguration. On Sunday evening, January 13th, 1952, Moten gave one of her last public performances to climax Tubman's inauguration ceremony. She continued a long life of active philanthropy and political engagement. Her 100th birthday was celebrated by more than 400 notable guests, including Studs Terkel and Harry Belafonte. The Jordan scrapbook contains four photos of her performance, one with Mary McLeod Bethune appearing on stage with her. She gave an autographed photo of herself to the Jordans reading, "Love and best wishes to Leon and Orchid, Liberia, 1952."

The preparations of the capital for the inauguration, the Italian *artiglierista* firing his canon, the military parades, the parade of floats, the games and dances, Pearl Primus dancing with and photographing native dancers, devil dancers performing, the parade of foreign

dignitaries greeting President Tubman, the mix of diplomatic guests and top level Liberian political leaders at President Tubman's garden party, the dedication of the American Foundation for Tropical Medicine on the Firestone Plantation with Harvey Firestone present, the arrival of the USS Monrovia and the marines instructing their Liberian counterparts in the use of weapons being



transferred, the two hundred mile trip into the interior and the meeting with the tribal chiefs, the excursion to the Bomi Hills to see the iron mines and their transporting of ore by rail to the harbor of Monrovia, all are captured by hundreds of photographs in the Jordan scrapbook, including many endearing portraits of ordinary citizens. The scrapbook is truly an extraordinary chronicle of this political event and many of its attendant activities.⁶¹

⁶¹ Oden and Olivia Meeker, "Letter from Liberia," *New Yorker*, Nov. 29, 1952, pp. 120-121; *America's First Black General*, pp. 162-163; Numbers 2910, 4501, 5412 and 6901, Jordan Scrapbook, LJC; Copy of Gen. Davis's Journal during his stay in Liberia, LJC; *Etta Moten Barnett*, *TexasEscapes.com*; Occasionally a bit of revealing humor intrudes in the Scrapbook's photos. There is a photo of a woman releasing the flag bunting that hides the bronze plate recording the name of the Antoinette Tubman Bridge on the railway trip to the Bomi Hills. I assumed the smiling woman was Antoinette Tubman and the photo was of a formal dedication of the bridge. There are other nearby photos of well dressed men apparently carrying on a dedication ceremony. But on closer examination I realized that the woman was Mrs. Hendrik Jordense and the photo was probably a good natured spoof. There are other photos not included in the scrapbook of the Jordans and their friends enjoying various party and informal activities. Some of these have identifying names written on the back side. Mrs. Jordense is often pictured and identified. Clearly she and Orchid were close friends. She came to visit the Jordans after they resumed living in Kansas City.





On March 5, 1952, Jordan wrote to Kansas City Police Chief Johnson: “We have just completed a successful Presidential Inauguration that carried an unusual amount of color and splendor. The experience was one of a life time. Even though I tried to take some of the festivities in stride I must admit that several events ‘popped’ my eye. The police received commendations from his Excellency the President, so, all in all feel rather proud of the boys.” He then requested leave for four and a half months from April 15 to September 1. His request was approved on March 22.

The tone of Jordan’s letter to Chief Johnson is significant. While it is respectful, it is also easy and confident. Jordan’s work in Liberia had gone extremely well. The Kansas City Police Department had been very supportive and apparently appreciative of his achievement. On June 2, President William V. S. Tubman capped the Jordans’ experience by making Jordan Knight Commander of the Liberian Humane Order of African Redemption.

On June 11 the Jordans flew to Dakar on the way to Lisbon. It was the beginning of a grand European vacation. They stayed two nights in Lisbon, then flew to Barcelona for ten days. From Barcelona they flew to Paris for another ten days. There is a photograph of Orchid with a caption reading, “snapped by Ollie Stewart, in his apartment, Paris, 1952,” in the Jordan Collection. Stewart was a long and noted member of the African-American community from 1949-1970 in Paris. He published



frequently in the *Baltimore Afro-American*. From Paris the Jordans flew to London for two weeks, and finally from London to Rome for a week before returning to Kansas City. There are numerous postcards recording their grand European tour, and coming on top of the dazzling events of Tubman's second inauguration, it has the feel of a planned climax to their Liberian adventure, as if they were seriously considering coming home to Kansas City for good proud of a mission accomplished.⁶²

⁶² Letter from Jordan to Johnson, March 5, 1952, and reply from Johnson, March 22, 1952, KCPD file, LJC; Leon and Orchid Jordan's passports, LJC.