

Cheikh Anta Diop University

By: Badiyyah Waajid



One of our first outings upon arriving in Dakar was a walking tour of the community which to my delight included the University. In the 1960's before I even dreamed of being able to visit Senegal, I read the works of Cheikh Anta Diop. It is now fitting that this institute of higher learning would be named for this historian, architect, and physicist. I was not aware, however, that until March 1987 this university of 60,000 students was known as the University of Dakar, established in February 1957.

Our walk through the campus occurred on the last day of Ramadan--Eid which was a holiday in Senegal for all. For this reason the campus was closed. The sprawling campus was void of students and buildings were locked. I could determine from signage, however, that there were studies in Humanities, Sciences, Medicine, Business, Law, Languages and others. On this day, I was able to view an unlocked classroom and I already knew that courses were taught in French, except for the foreign language courses. My intention was to return to the campus to visit the bookstore but later learned that all the books there were printed in French.



I never really did return to visit the campus but was delighted that my travels carried me through the campus each day going to and from my temporary home at the Hotel Djolof. No matter the time of day or night, the campus was full of students; smartly dressed in cultural attire. They were either hurrying to class or huddled around door-ways to hear and take notes of lectures because there were not enough seats or space in the classroom. At night students were seated under street lights or using cell-phone lights to read and study. This desire to learn touched me deeply and reminded me of a time in the United States when African American students were as interested in learning because such learning had not previously been available. Oh, how I wish my students could witness this serious pursuit of scholarly activity.

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