

July 9th, 2003

President Bush's visit

For the past few weeks the town of Dakar has been preparing for the visit of President Bush. It all culminated in his five-hour visit yesterday, July 8. Anne couldn't go into work because the town was virtually sealed off. Thought you might be interested in the preparations that took place for W's visit.

Two weeks ago we thought it strange when we discovered that the Club Atlantique (formerly the American Club) cancelled the annual 4th of July party. The excuse was that too many potential attendees would be too busy preparing for the Bush visit to attend. This turned out to be fact. 750 Americans from DC and other parts of the world arrived as much as two weeks prior to assist in preparations. Our President doesn't travel light.

President Bush's five-hour stopover included a one-hour meeting with Senegal's President Wade, a 55 minute meeting with heads of state from several other West African countries, and a visit to Gorée Island.

A necessary stop on every US President's visit to Dakar is [Goree Island](#). Located about a mile from Dakar Port, Goree was an important holding point for slaves who were destined for America and other countries. The Slave House with its famous "Door of No Return" has been preserved. The island is also home to numerous artists and artisans. Goree is really worth a visit. Preparations for Bush's visit included the construction of a world class communications center. It will be dismantled right after the visit.

Also, any disreputable citizens or anyone who appeared disreputable were gathered up and made guests of the city in the Iron Bar Motel for a period of three days. Of course, this included anyone sporting dreadlocks. On Goree more than a few artists sport dreadlocks.

Weekends are when the people of Goree make money. Ferries carry tourists to the island every 1/2 hour. The artists, craftspeople, restaurants and boutiques depend on the weekend trade for their livelihood. Not last weekend. The entire island was closed to visitors in preparation for Bush's one hour visit yesterday.

For all of yesterday morning all traffic was sealed off and businesses closed along any route that President Bush's motorcade would take. Yesterday afternoon we stopped to pick up a rug at the cleaners. The man was irate that he had lost a half day's business because of Bush's visit.

We live 300 yards down the road from the airport. We were told that US citizens with proper ID would be allowed to wave goodbye to George at 12:30PM. We entered the airport at about noon. The air conditioning was a welcome change

from the outdoor heat. We went through a metal detector that was manned, not by Senegalese, but by five US security guys in suits. On the way out I noted that these same gentlemen were packing up the metal detector system. Don't know why they couldn't use a local system. Our President doesn't travel light.

Beyond Security were over 100 Embassy officials and Host Country Nationals (aka Senegalese who worked for the Embassy or USAID), including children. We met a few friends, including Ed and Johnny Mae Jones, our next door neighbors. Ed works for the FAA. On the airstrip were parked Air Force One and Two, another white plane of similar design with no markings, plus two huge grey cargo planes. We also heard that two C-14 aircraft were parked in Cape Verde, as well as two more parked in Banjul, Gambia for emergency support. Our President doesn't travel light.

At 12:20 an Embassy official instructed the assemblage to move to a cordoned-off area on the runway near Air Force One. Anne and I reluctantly left the air conditioned comfort of the waiting room for 95 degree broiling sun and humidity. Fortunately, Anne and I had dressed for the weather. We pitied the Security staff and audience members in their suits and ties. I remembered why I hadn't attended any US presidential appearances since Gerald Ford.

At 12:55 President Bush arrived in an autocade of at least a dozen limos, vans and trucks. I noted that all the vehicles had DC license plates, except for the Ambassador's car. They were all American-made - Cadillacs, Dodges, Fords.

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The President, accompanied by his wife, Laura, Colin Powell, Ambassador William Roth and his wife, Carol, approached the portable podium. George made some extemporaneous (you know how good he is at extemporaneous) remarks about his visit. He spoke of the history of Goree Island, that the slaves that passed through there and landed on our shores made America what it is today. He stated how Goree reminded him about Freedom and how precious it is to us all. It wasn't hard to decipher to which portion of the US voting population he was appealing.

George and Laura then did a quick handshake drill with the front of the crowd. Laura seemed a bit travel-weary. We stood as they entered the plane. We stood and watched as the plane took off for the next leg of his whirlwind tour, Johannesburg, South Africa. Finally we were allowed to leave.

On the way out, I met a US staffer who was packing up the podium. As one of the 750 he was one of three people responsible for the podium sound equipment. Our President doesn't travel light.

A la prochaine - Chuck