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Teaching at Howard University:
Part II

(Concluded)

by John Lovell, Jr

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—Fulbright Lecturer, Osaka University of
Foreign Studies, 1960-1961

But it is not my intention to dwell upon such sad prospects. My stay in Japan and that of my wife who accompanied me here have been very delightful indeed. First, our welcome by the officers and members of the Fulbright Commission in Tokyo, by the authorities and teachers of the Osaka University of Foreign Studies, and by the people belonging to the American Embassy and the various branches of the United States Information Service, has been little short of royal. Second, we found a home in Kobe and a most amazing personality for a housekeeper. Before very long, we began to meet, in larger and larger numbers, the Japanese university student, who is full of rare surprises, inspirations, and curious insights. Along with him, we are touching the general Japanese citizenry, of every rank and class, and we find them uniformly fascinating. We have fallen in love with the Japanese countryside, and with both ultramodern buildings on the one hand and shrines, castles, temples, stone lanterns, and ancient gardens on the other, particularly at Nara. We adore the national passions for precision, ingenuity, making the most of every minute, stand-up reading in bookstores and at magazine counters, using every tiny inch of space (especially in traffic), resiliency, courtesy, charm, color, art, and beauty. We admire especially the union of beauty and utility in everyday life. We have written our friends back home that Japan, indoors and outdoors, is the greatest art gallery in the world. And we glory in the fact that as soon as the people we meet discover our interests and our reasons for being here, they begin, as one man, to bend every oar—like the Kyôgen character in the Nô play, Funa Benkei—toward the mutual accomplishment of our interests in them and their interests in us.

Permit me to cite two examples. My wife, a public school counselor in Washington, had to take educational leave to get the chance to come to Japan; this means that she must do, among other studies, a...
project on educational counseling in Japan. The co-operation she has received from educators in Kobe, Osaka, Kyoto, Tokyo, and several smaller communities has been nothing short of phenomenal. Even the busiest people have come to her aid and given her all the time, direction, and authoritative documents they possibly could.

The second example relates to me. A part of my Fulbright project is to study the Japanese drama and its relationship to the life of the people. This is in line with a book I have done on the American drama in relationship to the life of the people, which will be published in New York in May of 1961. One of my aims, therefore, is to see the maximum of Japanese plays, to visit the maximum of dramatic and theatrical monuments, to talk with all available experts in the native drama, and generally to pursue my subject in as many as possible of its infinite ramifications. The response of qualified and important people, on my side, has been just as phenomenal as that accorded my wife. I have seen more than 60 plays—Bunraku, Kabuki, Nôh, Kyôgen, Shingeki—many of them recommended by people who discovered my interest; I have most profitably interviewed outstanding actors, drama critics, directors, playwrights, professors of drama, and other strategic people, and I have seen dramatic monuments by the score. I have been given or been referred to texts, books, and articles written in English and have had some authoritative works that were written in Japanese translated for me. On the basis of my experience so far, I can truthfully say that going to Japan to do dramatic research is a form of going to heaven.

Of course, I have seen practices and elements that are as strange to me as some of the things Miss Kimura saw in America were to her. But they do not frighten or revolt me. The previous writer, for instance, refers to Shakespearean plays done in Negro dialect or in a pronounced Negro accent as though they were a distortion. I do not think of my listening to parts of Julius Caesar, delivered by Japanese students in an English accent and style that I could not always comprehend, as a distortion. I think it is wonderful that Shakespeare so appeals to people in cultures thousands of miles from where he lived that they are willing to undergo the arduors of committing to memory his words in an excruciating foreign language. It is just as exciting to me as my personal curiosity about the innermost details of Bunraku, Kabuki, and Nôh. I want to know what motivates such appreciation. I do know that, if one will take the word of the famous French writer, Theophile Gautier, one of the very greatest performances of Shakespeare on record was delivered by an American Negro, Ira Aldridge, before audiences in major Russian cities in 1863, when Aldridge recited Othello in English and his Iago, Cassio, and Desdemona recited in German. Everywhere they went in Russia—and indeed throughout Europe—audiences were spellbound.

As a representative of Howard
University in Japan, I can only beg that as many Japanese as possible go to Washington and see the University, or at least read its authentic literature. If you visit there, you will be welcomed by the new President, Dr. Nabrit, who during 24 years as a teacher in the Howard Law School, initiated and developed the branch now known as Civil Rights Law, and now taught in other institutions. You will see a plant worth $40 million, and still growing, including individual buildings for engineering, medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, chemistry, biology, and the fine arts. You will mingle with a faculty which now and in years past includes and has included such men as Ralph Bunche, E. Franklin Frazier, past president of the American Sociological Society and recent Doctor of Laws from the University of Edinburgh, George E. C. Hayes, chairman of the Public Utilities Commission of the District of Columbia, the late Ernest Just, pioneer in microbiology, the late Charles Drew, who founded the first blood bank in America, William H. Hastie, a judge on the Court of Appeals, a court second in rank only to the United States Supreme Court, and Howard Thurman, now Dean of the Chapel of Boston University. The present Dean of the College at Howard, Dr. Frank Snowden, was formerly United States cultural attaché in Rome, and presently spends a month each year in Paris, helping to develop the cultural programs of UNESCO. If you meet the alumni, you will meet, besides Dr. Frazier and Attorney Hayes already mentioned, Thurgood Marshall, the distinguished civil rights attorney, Ve Phillips, a city alderman in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, and one of the few women members of the Democratic National Committee, and Kenneth Clark, a New York psychologist, whose discoveries and language were used in the memorable Supreme Court decision of 1954, outlawing educational segregation—men and women who are engaged in the crucially demanding job of making democracy fit for the tremendous threats and energies of the present day. If you had traveled with Mr. Kennedy while he was running for President of the United States, you would have met another Howard alumnus, Frank Reeves, one of Mr. Kennedy’s close advisers. Mr. Reeves has recently taken office in the White House, as a special assistant to President Ken-
nedy. If you meet the trustees, active and honorary, you will meet such distinguished Americans as Eleanor Roosevelt, Lloyd K. Garrison, Pearl Buck, Guy B. Johnson, and Mordecai W. Johnson, who has just retired after 34 fruitful years as President of the University, during which time he was also one of America’s most respected and popular ministers and orators.

Throughout America and many other countries, in countless cities, towns, villages, and countrysides, you would meet—if you visited—thousands of physicians, teachers, lawyers, business men, scientists, community workers, heads of households, and elected and appointed leaders in government and industry—all trained by Howard University. It would be a most inspiring experience. It would be a most invigorating sight.

This University, unique in its educational and democratic role, is fully aware of the terrible problems it faces. It is perpetually analyzing itself and constantly raising its standards. Since it has always stood upon an interracial and an international platform, it invites the full co-operation of the peoples of the world in the hard fulfillment of the most glamorous, the most inspiringly difficult, and the most worthy of all dreams—the dream of a living and working true democracy.

THE STUDY OF CURRENT ENGLISH