

MOVIES IN THE BACK OF BEYOND

(CONTRIBUTED)

"Massa dis na de good ting you bring for we country. Since white man dey come for dis country we never see dis kind ting before. I wonder me too mus."

THESE were the words of Mr. Ehihia, the garden boy attached to the District Office here, on the first night when the Cinema Unit of the Information Office screened their pictures in Afikpo.

Afikpo had never seen movies before. You can imagine what excitement these pictures created here. The third night of the show brought in "fans" from every village. It occurred to me that missionaries should consider the tremendous possibilities of the cinema when dealing with Africans like these, who for so many years have made themselves impervious to outside influence.

One night I decided to be late for the picture. I thought I would try to decipher how the mentality of the natives reacted under the influence of this picture propaganda. I descended from the hill on which my house was built and stood at the foot of it, just where two roads adopted a single course to our stadium. I saw old men, old women, girls and boys hurrying to take some vantage posts in the stadium. I was amused, for the conversation of these people centred round two things, the praise of Churchill and the rascality of Charlie. Then I observed that even the girls left their houses. This will not seem anything strange to many readers. But I must say with experience that it takes time to manufacture an interest capable of arousing an Afikpo girl or woman to leave her house in the day or in the night. I'd been a picture fan for many years. Most times, I visited the picture houses in other countries not for the fun of the pictures but to read the behaviour of picture lovers. The people here are simply marvellous. They are hero worshippers. They express very great interest in the war work of the Empire. They have shown an interest

that is not merely primitive, but loving. There was an old woman who, in spite of her age, dragged herself on her crutches to the field. I heard her say, "If I can see this picture before I die, I shall thank my God."

The war effort of the Empire was much applauded. Pictures depicting various African industries were hot favourites. The women expressed the hope that some day pictures of their pottery and ground-nuts industry will be made. It is not possible, however, to take pictures of every place, but Afikpo deserves a place in the picture propaganda.

The picture showing West African soldiers in action in East Africa excited feelings of bravery. Some mothers actually believed that they had seen their sons in action in the pictures. "That's Obio," one shouted. "Oh, that's Agbi," another put in. And so for some minutes every one shouted the name of his friend or relative, or son. The smart forms of the soldiers in uniform, the speed and strength of tanks, the air battles, the rescuing of prisoners, the bravery of commandos—all these are pictures that will remain long in many hearts. The King was applauded every time he was seen, and more so when he returned salutations.

After four nights of screening in Afikpo, a dash was made for Nguzu Edda, a town on a hill, and situated 21 miles from Afikpo. Here the natives showed very great interest in this "magic of the white man", as they call the cinema here. After two nights at Nguzu, more days were spent in Afikpo. It was not possible to screen pictures at Owutu, as the projector was damaged.

The Unit left Afikpo on the 25th October, after twenty days' stay.

The following is a further extract from the Gold Coast Memorandum on the work of the Cinema Branch of the Information Office.

PROGRAMMES

THE programme consists of five or six films of a varied nature, interspersed with music and talks; a typical programme is as follows:—

1. Loud martial music or recordings of vernacular songs popular locally, directed to the village to bring the audience to the van. (15–30 minutes.)
2. Opening talk, dealing with the reason for the van's presence, the care of Britain for colonial peoples, the African family life and strong feeling for the land, and the attempts of the Nazis to destroy in occupied Europe the similar ways of life and to filch the ownership of land and the fruits of the soil.
3. Film: *Empire's New Armies*—Army training from various parts of the Empire, the aim being to stress the power of the Empire.
4. Recorded music.
5. News of the week. External and internal. The trends of the war.
6. Film: *Searchlight and Anti-aircraft Gun*, or other film explanatory of modern war weapons. This series has been running for some time as a preliminary training of the audiences in preparation for newsreels.
7. Recorded music.

8. Topical talk—Grow more food, Save more money, Crack more palm kernels, Tap more rubber—according to the local need of the moment.
9. Film: *An African in London*. A short tour of some of London's landmarks with a well known West African from Nigeria in the principal role, developing the idea that all are members of the Empire, that all may look to the imperial centre, that all are welcome there, and that there is opportunity for all irrespective of race or creed.
10. Message from Governor, Resident Minister, Provincial Commissioner, or District Commissioner on the need of the moment.
11. Film: *Self Help in Food*—or other film illustrating the war effort of the common man of the type of an educated British craftsman, with his wife and child doing a little extra for the war.
12. Closing talk: Remember what you have seen: the Empire is strong; all are members and are safe and free within it. Every one must do his bit towards winning the war. You have been told what you can do to help. The truth has been shown; avoid rumour.
13. Entertainment film.
14. The King.