

Rich's Journal Wed., Dec. 28

Dakar

Capital city. Our stay at the hotel and what we woke up to. Initial impressions. Students in a foreign land. Learning what it means to be a minority. Transition from Connecticut to Dakar. Things we have and they don't. Things they have and we don't

Vocab

Morocco
Casablanca
West Africa
Islamic
European
Dakar

Jet fuel choked the air as I strolled off the plane. Casablanca was exciting, but it was cooler than I thought it would be. The heat in the air, noticeably greater than in Morocco, said, "welcome to West Africa." Sweat, smoke, and smells I could not place. The scene



at the baggage pickup was something out of a movie. Only two conveyers working, people on each other's backs. Cigarette smoke...sounds and languages completely new. This wasn't like visiting a European place. The people are tall, and well dressed. Western garb, traditional dress, Islamic...it all looks beautiful. Very diverse.

After the chaos of the baggage check, my group gathers to meet our transportation...none other than Massamba Diop. After all of our party are accounted for, we make our way past locals standing behind the bars of airport fencing, holding it with both hands. As we step out into the night and the heat, there is Massamba, beckoning us towards him. Only a few steps away is a cameraman who will be filming the trip. It was the one time since my high school play that I felt like a star.

Dakar, judging by the airport, is electric. We arrived at 11 p.m., and people everywhere. As we jammed into a minibus that would make any Westerner think twice, I knew that the real trip was just beginning. Casablanca, in my opinion, had been a very lame warm up.



Massamba operates with a sort of small gang of fellows, all treating us with warmth and going miles to help, but some of them wanted money for moving our bags. Massamba seems to be only concerned with our well being. He has made arrangements for us to stay in an apartment building on the beach in Dakar. It's a glorious building and has the feel of an extravagant youth hostel. The place is empty; we're the only ones here. Big rooms, but only double beds in each room. I am bunking with Lenny. Traveling with him has been easy. He is fun to be around and is looking out for me. However, he is tremendously worried about malaria. He has checked the screen in our window many times. He started his malaria medication late. I hope he doesn't get sick.



The group is nice. I don't seem to have a feel for most of them yet, but they strike me as professional types with curiosity and lots of compassion. They are mostly older than myself. Derrick Jordan is nice. Elisabeth made delicious cookies. I have had a couple nice conversations with them at JFK and in Morocco.

The best part about my day is that after lugging all of my bags to the 4th floor of the apartment, I discovered the card my wife hid in my bag before I left the States. I suddenly felt home again in a very special way despite my location...