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SENEGAL

Léopold Sedar SENGHOR

President

A distinguished poet, philosopher, politician and statesman, Léopold Senghor has led Senegal as President since independence in 1960. He was elected to his third term in 1968. Senghor also serves as secretary general of the Senegalese Progressive Union (UPS), the only political party granted legal recognition in the country.



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Senghor's critics give him more credit as a politician than as a thinker. A master of the art of "cooptation," he isolates his opponents effectively to integrate them into the regime. His long tenure as President attests to his ability to maneuver and endure on Senegal's murky political scene. He has no challenger of equal stature.

Senghor derives his support from the military, the Muslim brotherhoods, and the peasantry. Senghor, however, is a Roman Catholic in a heavily Muslim country (80-85 percent). In 1968, with the deaths of Lamine Gueye, President of the National Assembly and the most powerful Tidiane political figure in French West Africa, and of Falilou M'Backe, the Mouride Khalif General, Senghor lost much of his influence with the Muslim masses. The Muslim brotherhoods that these two men represented exert an enormous influence over the Senegalese population; Senghor derived his control of the popular vote from the support Gueye and M'Backe gave him. At the present time the Mouride and Tidiane Khalifs General are giving his regime only lukewarm support. If Senghor completely loses the confidence of the brotherhoods, he will be in a very weak position to deal with Senegal's internal problems.



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downgrading and  
declassification

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In the last few years, Senghor has survived internal political bickering, a general economic decline, the complaints of rebellious students and increasingly aggressive labor unions. In order to ease the executive burden and at the same time appease the discontented Young Turks, Senghor revived the office of Prime Minister in February 1970, appointing one of the Young Turks, Minister of Plan Abdou Diouf, to the post. (Senghor had abolished the Prime Ministership in 1962, after then Prime Minister Mamadou Dia staged an abortive coup attempt.) Diouf takes charge of domestic political affairs and has relieved Senghor of the Armed Forces portfolio, which Senghor held from 1968 to 1970. Diouf also implements the policies that Senghor makes.

While Senghor may eventually groom Diouf for the Presidency, a 1970 constitutional amendment allows Senghor to stand for reelection to two additional 5-year terms, beginning with the national elections scheduled for 1973. Senghor, however, says that he may retire from politics in 7 years, at the age of 71. He has endured hard times, and, in the past decade, has escaped three assassination attempts.

#### Political and International Views

Pro-West and anti-Communist, Senghor sees himself as a pragmatic socialist. His encouragement of French investment in Senegal, however, deprives his domestic policies of much of their socialist content. In Africa, Senghor's identification as a moderate causes him much embarrassment among his more radical African colleagues. Senghor has attempted to build his African image with such things as frequent trips abroad, but despite his efforts, he is perhaps the most isolated of the West African leaders.

#### Relations with France

Senghor favors close association with France, Senegal's former ruler. This cooperation has

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come under increasing criticism, particularly among Senegal's Young Turks, but Senghor is convinced of the necessity of retaining French assistance until the country has trained sufficient numbers of skilled technicians and has made adequate economic provisions. Senghor was a great admirer of former President Charles de Gaulle.

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Attitudes Toward the Chinese Communists

Of all the Communists, Senghor considers the Chinese the greatest menace to West Africa and is concerned over their growing influence in his area. He has particularly condemned Chinese offers to help finance the Manatali dam project in Mali--a project involved in the overall plan of the Organization of Senegalese River States (OERS) to develop the Senegal River basin. The three other members of the OERS (Mali, Mauritania and Guinea) all appear favorably disposed toward the Chinese, thus placing Senghor in a difficult position.

Relations with the Soviets

To maintain a semblance of neutrality in his foreign policy, Senghor maintains friendly diplomatic relations with the USSR. He prefers the Soviets to the Chinese and says that the Russians have an advantage over the Chinese in being white and in speaking French. Senghor nevertheless remains suspicious of Soviet actions. In November 1969 Soviet-Senegalese relations deteriorated considerably when a Soviet weekly attacked Senghor's theory of negritude and infuriated him. Relations have since been normalized.

Relations with the North Vietnamese

President Senghor makes a sharp distinction between North Vietnam and other Communist states, describing the North Vietnamese as nationalists rather than Communists and saying that they

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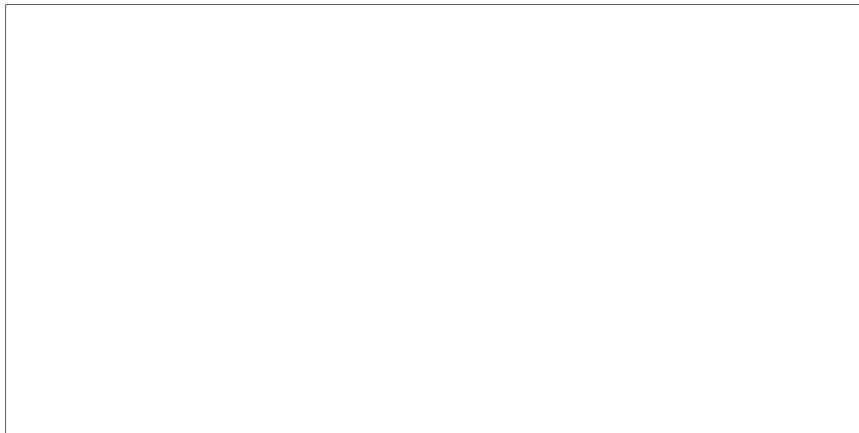
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outclass both the Russians and Chinese in their smooth approach. Senghor also feels that Senegal and Vietnam share a similar culture and heritage because they were both under French colonial rule. Senghor does not agree with the ideological views of the North Vietnamese, but he sees no reason not to have contact with them. In December 1970 he established diplomatic relations with the North Vietnamese and at the same time maintained relations with the South Vietnamese.



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Senghor's Theory on Negritude

Senghor is best known internationally as the poet-apostle of the philosophy known as negritude, which stresses Negro and African dignity. The closest meaning in English is "blackness" or even "soul." According to Senghor, the Negro knows by emotional experience, not by reason, and that emotional receptivity is African while rationality is European. Through this concept, he tries to restore a sense of importance to the black man by building both his pride and his self-confidence.

Early Life and Career

Léopold Sedar Senghor, one of some 20 children, was born on 9 October 1906 in Joal, Senegal. His



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ancestors were Portuguese Guinean, and the name Senghor comes from the Portuguese name Segor. The son of a rich peanut exporter and member of the Sérène tribe, Senghor attended school in Joal and Dakar. He then won a scholarship to the Lycée Louis le Grand in Paris and later enrolled in the Ecole Normale Supérieure of the University of Paris. A classmate of Georges Pompidou at the Ecole Normale, Senghor majored in literature and languages and received the degree of *agrégé de grammaire* in 1935.

Until 1940 Senghor taught in various French lycées. He served as an infantryman in the French Army during World War II and became a prisoner of war at Stalag 230 in Germany when France surrendered. In 1943 Senghor was freed and resumed teaching, later joining the faculty of the National School of Overseas France in 1948.

While pursuing a brilliant career in education, Senghor became active in politics. He joined the French Socialist Party (SFIO), was elected Deputy for Senegal to the French Constituent Assemblies of 1945 and 1946 and served in the French National Assembly from 1946 until 1959. He was Secretary of State in the Faure government from 1955 to 1956. In 1948 Senghor broke with the SFIO and worked to build an inter-territorial political movement that was opposed to Félix Houphouët-Boigny's African Democratic Rally and was intended to foster Senghor's belief in a federation of French West African states.

Dissatisfied with the results of his political strategy, Senghor formed the African Regroupment Party (PRA) and the UPS as the Senegalese section of the PRA in 1958. The UPS campaigned successfully for a *oui* vote in the referendum of September 1958 on the Constitution of the Fifth French Republic, and Senegal remained in the French Community, although Guinea's withdrawal was a setback to Senghor's hopes for federation.

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Senegal was granted autonomy in November 1958 and joined with the Sudanese Republic to form the Mali Federation in January 1959. Senghor was President of the Federal Assembly when Senegal and the Sudanese Republic (as Mali) became completely independent in June 1960, but friction developed between the two countries in August 1960 and Senegal left the Federation.

That September Senghor became President of independent Senegal. He shared power with his preindependence ally, Premier Mamadou Dia. Senghor, however, soon became apprehensive both of Dia's drift to the left and of his ambition. After months of political crisis, tensions between the two men reached a peak in December 1962. A vote of censure against Dia's government by the conservative, Senghor-controlled legislature was followed by an unsuccessful attempt by the Prime Minister to seize power. Senghor's reaction was quick and decisive--Dia was ousted from the government and arrested; Senghor absorbed the Premier's function and took control of the new government.

Travel

President Senghor has traveled extensively. In 1961, 1966 and 1971 he made official visits to the United States. During the 1971 trip he received honorary degrees from Harvard University and UCLA. He also visited Canada and on his return home stopped at the University of Vermont.

Personal Data

Courageous, resourceful and sincere, Senghor is an accomplished extemporaneous orator who speaks elegant French. He reads English easily, although he seldom speaks the language.

President Senghor is slight and frail, and wears well-tailored clothes. He has a shy,



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myopic glance and a precise academic manner. His optimistic attitude sometimes gives him the appearance of being naive, but he is actually very astute. Senghor is also easygoing and free of complexes.

Senghor solemnly observes the French ritual of vacationing every August at his farm in Calvados, Normandy, his wife's homeland. On vacation, he enjoys riding a bicycle and preparing the speeches he will deliver on his return home. Once back in Senegal, Senghor often spends the weekend in a town called Popenguine, which he reaches by helicopter.

Senghor's literary efforts date back to his youth, but he did not publish his first collection of poems, *Chants d'Ombre*, until 1945. The themes of his poetry include love, nature, song, friendship and faith. By 1966 he had published seven books of verse, written numerous prefaces that introduced young black poets to the public, and translated into French selected poetry of T. S. Eliot, Langston Hughes, James Weldon Johnson and others. Senghor personally enjoys reading the works of Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit scientist-philosopher.

Senghor's personal bibliography covers six pages. In addition to poetry, he has worked on philosophical and political publications. One of his major political works is entitled *On African Socialism*. Senghor has also contributed to many French journals, written a number of essays and composed the national anthem of Senegal.

Scholarly and erudite, Senghor has a collection of honorary degrees and awards. In 1962 he was a strong contender for the Nobel Prize for literature. He has honorary doctorates from the University of Bordeaux (1967) and from Fordham University (pre-1967). In 1968 he received the German Librarians' Peace Prize in Frankfurt. In 1969 Senghor became the first African inducted



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as an associate member of France's prestigious *Academie des Sciences Morales et Politiques*; he replaced the late Chancellor Konrad Adenauer.

Family

Senghor has been married twice. He divorced his first wife, the daughter of former Governor of French Equatorial Africa Félix Eboue. They had two children, Francois and Guy. In 1957 Senghor married his secretary, Colette Hubert, a Frenchwoman who claims that her ancestors invaded England with William the Conqueror. [Redacted]

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February 1972

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