Associated Press

SEPARATISTS IN MISSISSIPPI: Scene at ceremony two weeks ago consecrating farm near Bolton as capital of Republic of New Africa. About 200 armed blacks attended.

Black 'Nation' Vexes Mississippi

By JON NORDHEIMER

Special to The New York Times

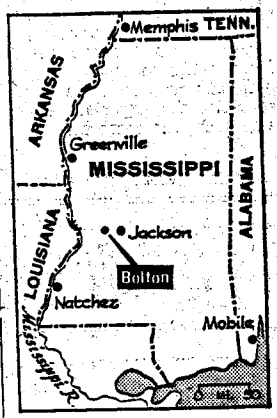
BOLTON, Miss., April 9 — A bizarre claim of territorial and political independence by a band of black separatists in Mississippi has led state officials to ask Washington to quell the "insurrection."

The Department of Justice has been asked by Attorney General A. F. Summer of Mississippi to clarify the Federal Government's position in case open hostility should break out between the state and the separatists.

The cause of Mr. Summer's concern is a 20-acre farm near the town of Bolton (population 787) that a group called the Republic of New Africa dedicated as its capital on March 31.

Leaders of the Republic declared that the dedication was the first step in the eventual takeover of Mississippi, Louisiana, Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina as reparations for the crimes committed against the black people.

At the moment, however, the Republic of New Africa is an invisible empire. All the activity of the separatists has been chiefly symbolic, with little work done on changing the 20 acres of flat Mississippi countryside into a community. No one lives on the property—no structure has yet been put up—and, aside from a few armed sentries, the place is deserted.



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Bolton is the capital of Republic of New Africa.

Jackson State Recalled

Concern has arisen that, with important state elections this year, the rhetorical contest between white politicians and the black separatists could lead to bloodshed. Mindful of the killings last spring at Jackson State University, some blacks are convinced the state will set up a confrontation that will give the police an excuse to drive the separatists off the land.

In an interview in his office at the state capital in Jackson, about 30 miles east of here, Attorney General Summer said

that the state would take unilateral action against the separatists if the Federal Government "failed to exercise its constitutional duties." He remarked that the state's first impulse would be to prosecute the separatists in the Mississippi courts, but he did not rule out more direct steps "if conditions warranted it."

In Washington, a Justice Department spokesman said that the situation was under study.

Mr. Summer, known to his friends as "the Judge," said that Mississippi had been "cruelly abused" in the last decade by private interest groups that made incursions into the state to obtain national publicity.

'A Happy Hunting Ground'

"Mississippi is a happy hunting ground for any irresponsible group that wants to raise money," he remarked with a pained expression. "I know the whole damn thing is ridiculous, but when 200 people come marching in here heavily armed it stops being a laughing matter."

It was estimated that from 150 to 200 blacks armed with rifles and shotguns attended the March 31 dedication. Local law enforcement agents who patrolled the area later complained that some of the black sentries had aimed their weapons at them and newsmen.

Imari Obadele, the reputed president of the Republic, has dropped from sight since the dedication, and a few of his followers who remain in Mississippi said that his absence had been prompted by police harassment and fears that he was a marked man.

That apprehension was based on the first contact the group had with the police two weeks ago as the separatists, most of whom come from outside the South, converged on Bolton to declare their independence.

Raid on Apartment

The local sheriff, Fred Thomas, and his entire force of 10 deputies raided a Bolton apartment with a warrant for the arrest of a man charged with auto theft. The suspect was not there, nor was the stolen car, but the police arrested 12 men and women inside the apartment on charges ranging from illegal possession of weapons to obstructing justice.

A few hours later the police in Jackson arrested two other members of the Republic on traffic and marijuana charges.

The separatists have contended that the arrests are evidence that a conspiracy exists among the police to smash their movement before it gets started.

Apart from two black sentries who patrolled the 20-acre "nation" during daylight hours, the separatists have stayed in the background since the dedication ceremony.

The sight of the armed blacks on television enraged many whites in Mississippi in whom for years white demagogues have instilled the fear of an armed black uprising. But there is little evidence that any significant fraction of the state's large black population has accepted the premise that the Republic of New Africa has any legal or moral standing.

Peaceful Relations Sought

"We'd love to go down there and run them off," said an agent of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, attached to the Jackson office, "but so far they haven't broken any Federal laws. All they've done so far is run off at the mouth."

Mr. Obadele, in a letter sent this week to Attorney General Summer, said that his Republic's policy was to maintain peaceful relations with the state of Mississippi that would benefit the citizens of both governments.

He said that the Republic's declaration of independence had sealed the black man's traditional claim to lands that he worked and developed over the centuries, and constituted a nonnegotiable reparations settlement that must be accepted by Mississippi and the other states. He said that a plebescite would be held to give the Republic the official sanction of the people.

"I'm not authorized to negotiate foreign policy," Mr. Summer said. "All I know is someone better cut out this damn foolishness before someone gets hurt."