

Creating Africa's new image

Our reporter
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Before leaving on his African tour, Clinton announced that he intended to acquaint Americans with a “new Africa,” one characterized not by war, poverty and famine, but rather economic growth and opportunity. Creating this image has proven a complicated and none too delicate operation.

Long before Clinton’s plane touched down in Ghana, advance teams of White House aides and secret service details, together with the regimes in the countries which he visited, got to work setting the stage.

In the Ugandan capital of Kampala, for example, police took to the streets four days before the president’s arrival, staging a dragnet against the city’s homeless population and, in particular, the large numbers of children who live in its streets. Hundreds of youth, together with elderly and disabled people, were loaded onto trucks and taken to prisons outside the capital.

A group of social service organizations protested the government’s action. “Children who have been receiving counseling services to prepare them for leaving the streets now find themselves in custody,” read a statement issued by the groups.

The 20-mile route from the airport to the capital was also given a face-lift for the presidential visit. Shacks lining the side of the road were given a coat of whitewash. Coffin vendors were reportedly told to place their wares under wraps so as not to remind the visiting dignitaries about the country’s high death rate, much of it resulting from the AIDS epidemic. Rehearsing security operations, secret service helicopters succeeded in flattening several shantytown dwellings near the center of the capital.

Clinton was booked into the Sheraton Hotel in Kampala, where the cost of a room is only slightly less than the country’s annual per capita income.



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