



**CELEBRATING NKURUMAH'S CENTENARY:
REFLECTIONS ON HIS UNFOLDING LEGACY**

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There is no end to the lessons we can learn from careful and continuous study of the lives of the great men and women who distinguish themselves in this sacred narrative we know as African history. Thus, it is with Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah (1909-1972), founding father and first President of Ghana; dedicated and foresighted pan-Africanist, whose life is his legacy and whose work is a testament to both the man and his times. He was both the product and producer of his era, the era of African independence, but also, as Min. Malcolm described it, an era characterized by “a global rebellion of the oppressed against the oppressor, the exploited against the exploiter” of which African Americans were also a vibrant and vital part.

Those of us who in the Sixties saw Nkrumah as an uplifted and uplifting light of Africa and African people cannot help but feel a profound sense of satisfaction in the current credit and recognition being given him and the historical vindication of him and his works which this current outpour of praise and recognition reflects. President John Atta Mills of Ghana, breaking from the pattern of former Ghanaian leaders who would not concede Nkrumah's greatness or continuing relevance, declared his birthday “Founder's Day”. He also spoke of him in this centenary observation as “the man who led our independence struggle and lit the flame that blazed the liberation struggle of the continent”. And he rightfully praised Nkrumah as one “who opened the doors of Ghanaian politics, previously the exclusive domain of the educated elite and wealthy merchant class, to the ordinary people of Ghana, market women, farmers, fisher folk, teachers, civil servants and the youth”.

Moreover, the African Union at its 13th Ordinary Summit in Libya established

Nkrumah's 100th birthday celebration, September 21, as a continental event, voting unanimously to place it on its “calendar of special events”. Indeed, it issued a declaration praising Nkrumah as “an advocate of pan-Africanism who played a vital role in the establishment of our continental organization and the liberation of the continent”.

This is, of course, a long way from the CIA supported coup which overthrew Nkrumah in 1966 and the assembly of corrupt and pliant leaders of Ghana and Africa who collaborated in this and attempts to discredit him and his ideas. Nkrumah had dared to defy the colonial and neo-colonial powers which saw Africa as a continuing source of cheap labor, desperate consumers and vast and valuable natural resources. He worked first to free Ghana and guided it into the world community of nations in 1957 as the first independent African country to break the colonial yoke. But even before the political independence of Ghana, he declared that “the independence of Ghana is meaningless until it is linked to the total liberation of the African continent”.

Nkrumah realized the paradoxical character of Africa as the site of rich resources and some of the poorest people of the world. He said, “Africa is a paradox which illustrates and highlights neo-colonialism. Her earth is rich, yet products that come from above and below her soil continue to enrich not Africans predominantly, but groups and individuals who operate to Africa's impoverishment”. Likewise, he realized that it is Africa's weakness and division into small economically unviable and politically vulnerable units that increases her susceptibility to exploitation and domination thru neo-colonial strategies. Thus, he says, “It is clear that we must find an African solution to our problems, and that this can only be found in African unity. Divided

we are weak; united Africa could become one of the greatest forces for good in the world”, develop itself and defend itself from exploitation and oppression.

It is this conception of a united Africa as an awesome site and source of human and material resources, not only for the good of Africans, but also for the good of the world that defined and determined his pan-African project. Warning against half-measures and weak structures focusing only on economics, he states that “a loose federation designed only for economic cooperation would not provide the necessary unity of purpose. Only a strong political union can bring about full and effective development of our national resources for our people”. It is this central tenet around which the AU has recently begun serious discussion, especially about its relationship to African Renaissance.

Central to Nkrumah’s concept of the rightfully and effective practice of pan-Africanism and governance is a profound respect for the potential and power of the people. Reaffirming this key tenet, Nkrumah says, “I do not know of any greater satisfaction than honest and efficient service rendered to the people in the best interests of all the people”. Thus, he urged us to go to the people, love and learn from them and struggle with them to create a shared common good.

Also, Nkrumah, like liberation leaders around the world, recognized that the central battle we wage in the struggle for freedom, self-determination and development is the battle for the hearts and minds of our people.

It is, as we say in Us, a struggle to break thru the catechism of impossibilities taught by the oppressor and pose new paradigms of human possibility and promise in the Fanonian sense of a new history and new ways of being human in the world. He stated that “It is my deep conviction that all peoples wish to be free, and that the desire for freedom is rooted in the soul of everyone of us. A people long subjected to foreign domination, however, does not always find it easy to translate that wish into action”. This is because of fear, apathy, lack of knowledge, and a dulled sense of possibility. Thus, he says, “Those who lead the struggle must break thru this apathy and fear”. Indeed, “they must strengthen the people’s faith in themselves and encourage them to take part in the freedom struggle” which is their struggle. And “above all,” Nkrumah says, “they must declare their aims openly and unmistakably and organize the people towards the achievement of their goal . . .”

Although Nkrumah focused on continental pan-Africanism, he also advocated, in the tradition of Marcus and Amy Garvey, global pan-Africanism. He stressed cultural grounding and continued cultivation of an African personality, defined by “the deep-rooted wisdom and dignity, the innate respect for human lives and the intense humanity that is our heritage”. In control of our lives and our resources, linked together around the world and, “directed to the good of all (human)kind”, he reasoned, we could indeed begin a real African Renaissance.

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