



SPEAKING FREEDOM, CELEBRATING THE PEOPLE:

GHANA @ 50, NKUMAH @ FIRST

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Ghana had put out the call to “come home” to us and to “come to do business, tour, invest and celebrate” to us and everyone for its 50th anniversary of independence. And many of us packed up, pointed east and took off carrying the heavy weight of history and the light load of wonder and aspirations to enjoy ourselves, arriving as what the Yoruba next door in Nigeria called Malcolm, *Omowale*—sons and daughters returned home.

And at this time of returning home, there is for me and our Organization Us nothing and no thought more momentous and meaningful than of Kwame Osagyefo Nkrumah (1909-1972) and the struggle he and the people of Ghana waged to open and expand the historical horizon of freedom in Ghana and Africa as a whole. It is he who rose up in the midst of the masses to speak freedom, to urge struggle and to make what he called “A Motion of Destiny” to secure self-determination and initiate a wave of independence in Africa. First among equals in the struggle for Ghana’s freedom, his legacy not only reinforces the will and commitment to struggle of all Africans and other freedom-loving people, but also has enriched our understanding and practice of life and struggle in very profound, particular and lasting ways.

At LACC and later UCLA, it was my reading and absorbing the works of Nkrumah, along with Malcolm, Fanon, Toure, Nyerere and others, that helped shape and develop my philosophy of Kawaida. There is in Kawaida clear evidence of Nkrumah’s stress on “nationalism, pan-Africanism and socialism” as essential and interrelated pillars and projects for liberation; belief and rootedness in the masses of people; groundedness in the

“elevated values” of traditional African culture; the power and possibilities of relentless organizing and organization; the collective responsibility of each one to teach one; and the commitment and call of “forward ever, backward never.” It is also in Nkrumah’s writing that I first discovered Marcus Garvey. And after reading Garvey, I realized the reason for Nkrumah’s deep respect for him and his incorporation of Garvey’s ideas and his belief in the promise of Africa and Africans in human history. An ardent advocate of development and peace in Africa and the world, Nkrumah maintained that a developed and “unified Africa would become one of the greatest forces for the good of the world...” and “another bulwark for world peace.”

Nkrumah was Ghana’s founding father, first prime minister and first president and from the beginning, the core of his mission was African freedom and the radical restructuring of society. His aim was “to remold African society in the socialist tradition,” and thus, reaffirm the ancient African ethical concept of shared wealth and work, which is *Ujamaa* in Kawaida and in the philosophy of Mwalimu Nyerere. Secondly, Nkrumah wanted Africa to improve its present and forge its future based in the rich and ancient resource of its own culture, i.e., “to reconsider African society in such a manner that the humanism of traditional African life reasserts itself in a modern technical community.” Like Malcolm, DuBois, Cabral, Toure, Nyerere and others, Nkrumah argued that “the presuppositions and purposes of capitalism are contrary to African society,” given its history of plunder, oppression, devastation and war in the world.

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At the center of Nkrumah's philosophy and practice is a profound commitment to the masses, especially to making them self-conscious agents of their own life and liberation. He urged us to "go to the people, start with what they know and build on what they have." We must, he says, believe in the revolutionary capacity of the masses of the people, "stir and nourish (their) political consciousness," organize them around their needs and aspirations; learn about them and from them by living, working and struggling with them and leading and supporting them in actions in securing and defending their rights.

Nkrumah's pan-Africanism, like that of Marcus Garvey his mentor, had both a continental and global dimension. He saw the African continent in Garveyian terms as the cultural, political and economic base of African people everywhere. It is a classic and much-quoted assertion by him that "All people of African descent whether they live in North or South America, the Caribbean or in any other part of the world are Africans and belong to the African Nation." Moreover, he maintained that our struggles are ultimately one against a common set of national and world oppressive forces, and for a redeemed and restored Africa, able to defend and develop itself at the highest level and for the liberation and flourishing of Africans everywhere.

Nkrumah also embraced an international view and commitment. Indeed, he argued "it is impossible to separate the affairs of Africa from the affairs of the world as a whole." Much of his work in the last years of his office as President of Ghana was spent building relations with countries in the Non-Aligned Movement, as well as other friendly countries of the world. For he

saw it as a necessary work for us to create world conditions favorable to Africa's independence, development, security and the progress of humankind.

In his sober assessment of the savage suppression and degradation which occurred in conquest, colonization, enslavement and imperialist exploitation of Africa, Nkrumah finds not only a reason for righteous anger, but also for resistance and reconstruction. He says, "They took our lands, our lives, our resources and our dignity. Without exception, they left us nothing but our resentment and...our determination to be free and rise once more to the level of men and women who walk with their heads held high."

To wage this liberating and reconstructive struggle, he says, first "it is vital that we should nurture our own culture and history if we are to develop that African personality which provides the educational and intellectual foundation for our pan-African future." Like Frantz Fanon, he wanted us to reach inside ourselves and this rich and most ancient history and heritage of humankind and bring forth something new, necessary and elevating, and representing the best of what it means to be African and human.

And finally, he tells us, rely heavily and hopefully on the masses. And remember, "if for a while the imperialists appear to be gaining ground, we must not be discouraged. For time is on our side." It is, he says, the enduring resistance of the masses that "is the deciding factor and no power on earth can prevent its ultimate decisive effect in the revolutionary struggle" to reconceive and reconstruct ourselves and the world.