

# J. B. Danquah was Never Chief Campaigner or Founder of University of Ghana

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*“In writing this article, we utilized more than one source to establish the history of the founding of the University College of the Gold Coast for all to see. Pioneering advocates for a British West-African University go back to the late 1800s. Then we have, in the Gold Coast, J. E. Casely Hayford, Sir Arku Korsah, Dr. Nanka-Bruce, significant professional groups, and the collective Gold Coast citizenry, some of which worked harder towards the establishment of the University of Ghana, compared to Dr. J. B. Danquah. Therefore, the dastardly plan to assign unjust and unearned historical dividends to a vastly over-rated second-tier supporter of that agenda will never work. That is the objective verdict and responsibility of scholarship, intellectual honesty, and freedom of thought. Dr. J. B. Danquah did not play the role of chief campaigner, primary negotiator, or chief spokesperson, and even less, found the University College of the Gold Coast,” (Lungu, Botwe-Asamoah, & Dompere, 30 June, 2019).*

## **Introduction:**

President Akufo Addo’s assertion during the launching of the “University of Ghana’s Endowment” on 7th May 2018 that “it was the inestimable work of Dr. J. B. Danquah that mobilized the Ghanaian people to insist on the building” of the University of Ghana is grossly misleading if we must be charitable. It is a brazen attempt to re-cast Ghanaian historical facts. By that same token, his contention that “it would be wholly appropriate.....to describe Joseph Boakye Danquah as the founder of the” University of Ghana is totally fallacious. It is a gross misrepresentation of history. Those statements border on attempts at appropriating history and pilfering valor and service to country by other more notable figures, and the collective citizenry. We see this case as yet another attempt at assigning unjust and unearned historical dividends to a vastly over-rated political figure who, more than once, first as faculty member, then as “Mastership”, even

turned down appointments, to join the leadership of the top educational institution in the then-Gold Coast, the Prince of Wales' College (now Achimota College).

When and how did Dr. Danquah's "inestimable work" really lead to the founding of the University of Ghana? When did Dr. Danquah conceptualize the University College of the Gold Coast? What resources, in terms of monies, land acquisition, human capital (such as the faculty) etc., did Dr. Danquah actually mobilize for the University College of the Gold Coast project? If he mobilized funds, did he do it by his solitary self? What role did he play in the structuring and design of the curricular of the University College of the Gold Coast as an affiliate of the University of London? Finally, what convocational and inaugural speeches did Dr. J. B. Danquah deliver at the grand opening of the University College of the Gold Coast on 11th August 1948, or at any other time, if indeed he was the founder?

Fair, objective, and historically-bounded answers to questions above instruct us that Dr. J. B. Danquah, "Kantian Philosopher", he called himself, was never the chief campaigner for the University College of the Gold Coast, now University of Ghana, at Legon, let alone its founder.

The discourse that follows in this 3-part series establishes historical facts about the founding of the University College of the Gold Coast. We utilize more than one "commissioned" source to establish that it was the foresight, sense of purpose, and uncommon toil of Sir Arku Korsah (the sole Gold Coaster on the Elliot Commission), the work of many, many, committees and individuals, letters by diverse groups to colonial British authorities, public rallies organized by people rallying call to action on radio by Dr. Frederick Victor Nanka-Bruce, a leading member of Governor Burn's Committee, that eventually compelled the Secretary of State for the Colonies to agree to the creation of the University College of Gold Coast. Dr. Danquah later joined the crusade and became one of its important forces, but did not play the chiefly role in any of the organizations that campaigned for the University of the Ghana.

## **Pioneering Advocates for British West-African University:**

The "facts" of history instructs us that the first advocate of significance for a West-African higher education system in the British colonies was Dr. James Africanus Beale Horton (1835-1883) of Sierra Leone. In his will, he stated that his house in Freetown should become the nucleus of a university" (Ashby).

The second pioneer was Edward Blyden (1832-1912) an emigrant from the US Virgin, who first settled in Liberia, and finally moved to Sierra Leone. Edward Blyden introduced a new dimension to the idea of an African university. He desired an African university which would eliminate the existing "educational system from the clutch of the "despotic Europeanising influences which had warped and crushed the African mind" (Ashby).

The third notable West-African advocate for an African university was J. E. Casely Hayford (1866-1930) of the Gold Coast. In 1911, J. E. Casely Hayford, like, Edward

Blyden, campaigned for an African-centered university, in the Gold Coast, in which instruction would be done in African languages. His proposals appeared in his celebrated "Ethiopian Unbound", published in 1911, in which he argued that an African university must not be a mere foreign imitation (Ashby, Botwe-Asamoah, Esedebe and Hayford). Hayford's long campaign, which began in 1911, reached its climax in 1920 at the 'First Conference of British West Africa' in Accra. In a paper memorial addressed to the colonial government and King George V, Hayford submitted that the time had come "to found a British West-African University on such lines as would preserve in the students a sense of African Nationalism."

### **Challenges to Universities in British West Africa:**

The historical record shows that later in 1935, James Currie, one of the most experienced and imaginative members of an Advisory Committee set up in 1924 by the colonial administration, produced a report which favoured, as an urgent matter, the founding of universities in tropical Africa. In fact, the Currie Committee proposed that five existing colleges should be developed into universities. Surprisingly, the governors in Nigeria and the Gold Coast showed reluctance to force the pace of higher education. For instance, the existing facilities in the Gold Coast were adequate for higher education, but the governor feared that it would lead to an overproduction of graduates. As the wheels of time turned, a conference on West Africa held in Lagos in 1939 agreed that as a long-term project, there should be a West-African university that would award its own degrees. Then came the Second World War and those educational plans and proposals or West-Africans were put aside.

And so, despite the pioneering pressures for West-African universities by notable Africans, there were still just two publicly-financed institutions by the end of the second world war engaged in higher education in British West Africa, namely, Prince of Wales' College/Achimota and Yaba College (near Lagos). Nonetheless, the Currie Advisory Committee continued its meetings, after the conference in Lagos (Ashby).

### **The Road to the University of College the Gold Coast and Funding Sources:**

Towards the end of the 2nd World War, a fresh and vigorous policy for higher education was on the way. Professor H.J. Channon of the advisory committee prepared a memorandum calling for a resumption of the argument for universities in the colonies. At his prompting, two commissions were set up in July 1943. These were Cyril Asquith Commission whose task was to investigate at large into higher education in the colonies, and Walter Elliot Commission responsible for making recommendations precisely on a Higher Education in British West Africa (namely, Nigeria, Gold Coast and Sierra Leone). There was an overlap of the membership of the two commissions, as their works were a combined (Ashby).

Members of the Elliot Commission were divided as to the methods to be used in realizing their objectives. Accordingly, one report included a proposal signed by the Majority, and another signed by the Minority group. The Majority Report proposed that the existing colleges in Sierra Leone, Gold Coast, and Nigeria should be developed to university colleges, while the Minority Report recommended the concentration of resources on a single university to be located in Nigeria.

For our purpose, it is important to point out that (1) J. B. Danquah was never a member of Elliot Commission either and (2) Sir Arku Korsah, the only Gold Coaster member of the commission signed the Majority Report for a university in the Gold Coast (as did the other African members, E. H. Taylor-Cummings of Sierra Leone, and I. O. Ransome-Kuti of Nigeria); and for this, he (Sir Korsah) was fully supported by public opinion in the Gold Coast (Bourret).

Still in 1945, soon after the publication of the Asquith and Elliot Reports (under the Chairmanship of Rt. Hon. Walter Elliot), the Secretary of State for the Colonies, George Hall, sent a dispatch to the governors of Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone, and Gambia, regarding his approval of the Minority Report of a single West-African University in Nigeria. In the dispatch, he urged the governors to use appropriate means to disseminate his decision in order 'to ascertain the trend of public opinion and reactions' (Nwauwa).

Apparently, the Gold Coast people, especially the educated class, were appalled by the content of George Hall's dispatch from the office of the Secretary of State for the Colonies. Therefore, in October of 1945, the Gold Coast Central Committee on Education formally begun reviewing the Majority and Minority Reports. Its members overwhelmingly supported the Majority recommendation championed by Sir Arku Korsah and West-African delegation. The next month (November, of 1945), they issued a statement protesting that: "Irreparable harm would be done by denying work began at Achimota..... ..which is ready to take off and which is urgently necessary to it and to the Gold Coast," (Nwauwa).

"....(T)he majority felt that the emerging trend of territorialism and nationalism would prove an unsurmountable obstacle to the success of unitary West-African University college sited in any one colony. Undoubtedly, the Majority group was more farsighted than the Minority, as subsequent events would prove", (Nwauwa).

**To be continued....**

**SUBJ:** J. B. Danquah was Never Chief Campaigner or Founder of University of Ghana (Part 1).

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