

## The Centenary Anniversary of Africa's Man of the Millennium

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Had he lived, he would have hit a ripe old age of 100 on September 21. On September 21 1909, in the small village of Nkroful in the Western region of Ghana, a child was born. The event passed, as in the case of many children, as an ordinary event. And, as in many African families, the parents of this child did not even take note of the date on which he was born.



In his autobiography, he was to state that it was with some difficulty that he could pinpoint his birth day. Kwame Nkrumah, the visionary Pan-Africanist, who dreamt of a united, prosperous Africa, was a man of foresight. He had a noble vision for Africa and the Black race. He saw the metropolises of Africa becoming the headquarters of science, technology, and medicine. He saw in Africa a giant hypnotized, made dormant by years of foreign tutelage and exploitation, and he sought to awaken this giant. But time and his contemporaries were not on his side. He seems to have been born ahead of his time and his contemporaries. As the celebrated British historian, Basil Davidson put it: Nkrumah lived far ahead of his time. It would be in the year 2060, that people would read about his works and wonder to themselves why

such a man should have lived at such a time. But, Nkrumah was not a paragon of political virtues. He committed mistakes, including his allowing bootlickers and sycophants in his Convention People's Party to make a tin god out of him and to tear him away from the ordinary people.

Born into a humble smith's family in Nkroful in the western region of the then-British colony of the Gold Coast (now Ghana) a century ago on September 21, 1909, Nkrumah (photo) was to become one of the most illustrious makers of modern Africa and perhaps the most ardent and consistent advocate of the unity of the Black race after Marcus Garvey. His single-minded desire to make Africa the proud home of all peoples of African descent dispersed around the world brought him to work with many leaders and architects of the Pan-Africanist movement, including W.E.B Du Bois of the United States, George Padmore of Trinidad, and Nnamdi Azikwe of Nigeria. He was one of the organizers of the historic 5th Pan-Africanist Congress in Manchester, England, more than half a century ago, a congress which proved decisive in the struggle against foreign rule in Africa and against racial oppression in the West and which demonstrated a remarkable unity between continental Africans and Africans in the Diaspora.

Not only did he bring Pan-Africanism to its natural home when he returned to the Gold Coast after his sojourn in America and England to lead the independence movement, he also established and sustained until the end of his regime a link between the continent and the Diaspora. He borrowed many brilliant ideas from his inspirer and admirer, Marcus Garvey, including the Black Star as a national symbol (displayed in the center of Ghana's flag as well as taken as the names of the country's shipping line and soccer team). He made Padmore his adviser and invited the grand old man of Pan-Africanism, Du Bois to live out his last days in Ghana.

In Africa, Nkrumah attempted to form the kernel of his pet dream—the United States of Africa with-Sekou Toure of Guinea, Modibo Kieta of Mali, and Patrice Lumumba of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Without doubt, Nkrumah ranks among the greatest political figures of the 20th century. An indefatigable champion of world peace, advocate and spokesman of the Non-Aligned Movement, it was ironic that his government was overthrown in a violent CIA-masterminded coup while he was on his way to Hanoi to negotiate a peaceful settlement to the US-Vietnam war.

His courageous and tactical leadership (Gandhian passive non-resistance or what he termed “positive action” leadership led to the wresting of the political independence of his country from Britain, the first such achievement in sub-Saharan Africa. Ghana’s independence not only became the power-keg that ignited a continental revolution against European imperialism, Nkrumah also consciously made his newly liberated country the powerhouse of the African revolution.

Nkrumah’s revolutionary and pan-Africanist ideas swept across the entire continent—from Casablanca to Cape Town. Consistent with his independence-day declaration that the independence of Ghana was



meaningless unless it was linked with the total liberation of the entire African continent, Nkrumah trained African liberation fighters, financed their movements, and encouraged them to dislodge colonial rule from their territories.

It was no wonder that in less than a decade after Ghana’s independence in 1957, over 90 per cent of African countries had attained their own independence.

All of Nkrumah’s adult life was devoted to one and only one passion—the liberation and unity of the African “race.” He lived, dreamed, and died for this ideal. His passion and quest for a continental union government prompted his enemies to

brand him dreamer, a megalomaniac, an African Don Quixote. But judging from the parlous state of the continent's desperate, dispirited, non-viable 53 countries today, Nkrumah's call for the formation of a United States of Africa government was a wise one, if brazen at the time. The largely ineffective Organization of African Unity, now African Union is a testimony to Nkrumah's warning that only a continental government of political and economic unity could save the continent from the encircling gloom spawned by enraging internecine wars, famine and disease.

Nkrumah argued forcefully that only a federal state of Africa based on a common market, a common currency, a unified army (a African High Command), and a common foreign policy could provide the launching pad for not only a massive reconstruction and modernization of the continent, but also could optimize Africa's efforts to find its rightful place in the international arena and so effectively checkmate internal conflicts, fend off superpower interference, and predatory and imperialistic wars.

But Nkrumah's tragedy was probably that he came to power at the wrong time, in the "heat" of the Cold War, a period when the bi-polar East-West ideological confrontation made leaders like Nkrumah sacrificial lambs on the alter of superpower chauvinism. Cold War politics brooked no homegrown nationalists and patriots; it did not forgive leaders who refused to worship the gods of Soviet communism or American capitalism. Would Nkrumah's ideas have been more welcome in this post-cold war, uni-polar, "de-ideologized," globalized world? It is difficult to say. So far, Hugos Chavez of Venezuela and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe have managed to hold on, in spite of frenetic attempts to overthrow their regimes by the same Western forces who overthrew Nkrumah's government in 1966.

To many, the idea of a union government of Africa remains a utopia. True, the enormity of the tasks of ironing out political and ideological differences and of overcoming the vestiges of colonial divisions and

neo-colonial machinations are enormous. But the inherent impossibility to archive an actual utopia should not push Africans into resignation or inaction. After all, history has amply demonstrated that all great ventures of human civilisation were conceived, as it were, in the womb of utopianism. What is more, Africans should remind themselves that any programme, no matter how poorly conceived, if imaginatively executed, is better than complete inaction.

A continental union government might not have been a magic bullet or a panacea for all of the continent's seemingly intractable problems, but one can say without fear of contradiction that the continent would be better today if Nkrumah's dream had been achieved, for such a union would have made it possible for the marshalling and pooling of the continent's rich resources for the collective benefit of the citizens of Africa. Advantages of economies of scale, the avoidance of duplicity, the presentation of the a united voice in world affairs, and a collective bargaining position in international trade (instead of Africans competing among themselves for the lowest commodity prices at the international bargaining table) are but a few of the fruits that might have been by a continental union government, and that may still yet be reaped.

Examples on both sides of the Atlantic, where the European Union and the North American Free Trade Agreement have united countries of disparate cultures, languages, and political and even ideological orientations, coupled with the surging globalization of the world economy, point to the breadth of Nkrumah's vision.

The ongoing civil wars in various parts of Africa today stem partly from the inability of regimes in Africa to meet the basic needs of the people as leaders compete in cynical popularity contests parading as "saviors", "redeemers," and "liberators" of their countries. Some of those "countries" have national airlines with a single aircraft, and have their only source of foreign currency earning a perishable and dispensable crop. In fact, the only trappings of "nations" these political units can boast of a rickety national armies national flags and national anthems.

How can such “flag and anthem” countries become viable in a lop-sided global economy that is so much skewed against small and weak nations?

Africans have themselves to blame if they continue to plough their narrow furrows instead pooling their efforts, human and material resources in order to create a cross-continental garden equipped to compete in the globalized 21st century. If Africans fail to take up the challenge of continental unity now, the continent will inevitably be gobbled up by the colossus of capitalist globalism this century, just as it was enslaved, balkanized, and exploited of its human and natural resources through the trilogy of slavery, colonialism, and neo-colonialism in the last century.

SOURCE: <http://www.thepatrioticvanguard.com/the-centenary-anniversary-of-africa-s-man-of-the-millennium>

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Our thanks to Dr. Charles Quist-Adade.  
[www.GhanaHero.com/Visions.html](http://www.GhanaHero.com/Visions.html)

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