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When the People Decide: A Study of the Independence Movement in Ghana

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WHEN THE PEOPLE DECIDE:

A Study of the Independence Movement in Ghana

By

Angela Howard

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SUMMARY

In this paper, I examine the struggle for independence in Ghana. I explore what factors inspire the quest for freedom that emerged in Ghana as well as all over the world during the 1940's and 1950's. I explore the life of Kwame Nkrumah, the movement's leader, and how his political consciousness developed. I examine the major events that took place in Ghana during the late 1940's and early 1950's that set the stage for independence. Finally, I examine some possible reasons why Ghana was able to become the first African country south of the Sahara to achieve independence.

INTRODUCTION

On March 6, 1957, after over 100 years of foreign rule, the people of the British colony known as the “Gold Coast” achieved the right to govern themselves once again. On this date in 1957, the “Gold Coast” became the Republic of Ghana, the first independent African country south of the Sahara. This was a history moment for the people of Ghana as well as for oppressed people of all over the world.

When Kwame Nkrumah, leader of the independence movement in the “Gold Coast” who would become Ghana’s first president, made his historic Motion of Destiny asking for independence, the British officials asked him how they could know it was time to let the “Gold Coast” become an independent country. Nkrumah told them that they should let the people themselves determine their readiness. And indeed, the people of the “Gold Coast” expressed in their actions on the streets and in the voting booths that they were ready to govern themselves. But, how did the people come to decide it was time? In this paper I will explore the factors that set the stage for independence. I will explore what conditions in the “Gold Coast” during the 1940’s inspired the movement for independence. I will examine what events taking place around the world contributed to the movement in Ghana as well as what Ghana’s liberation meant to other freedom movements. And I will examine some possible reasons why Ghana was able to gain her independence before other countries in Africa.

METHODOLOGY

I could very easily have written a paper on this subject in an African Studies course at my college in the United States. I could have found the appropriate dates and events from library books and created a paper that was historically accurate. However, because I am writing this paper in Ghana, I have had the opportunity to learn from professors and other experts who are native to this country and culture and who can add a richness to the dates and events that I could not have found in a United States text book. In doing research for this paper, I have tried as much as possible to take advantage of first-hand knowledge. I hope to have created a paper that would have been impossible to write in a library at home.

For the purposes of my research, I rely on interviews and visits to several important sites. I also make use of a written account of aspects of the movement by Kwame Nkrumah. However, the most important sources of knowledge I have drawn upon have been my interviews with people who actually participated in the movement for independence in Ghana. I was able to find three people who played a part in the struggle. Cameron Abongo Duncan is an X-serviceman who participated in the historic 1948 soldiers demonstration and which later became Kwame Nkrumah's body guard. Joseph Samuel Appiah was a railways worker who played a leadership role in the Positive Action of 1950. Thomas Charley Brown worked for the Convention People's Party and says he will be a CPP member until the day he dies. Each of these men shared with me what they remembered about both the struggle itself and the conditions that made the people of the "Gold Coast" ready to fight for independence.

Kwame Nkrumah played a crucial role in the struggle for independence, and I therefore felt it was important to find out more about his personal background. I traveled to Nkrofo, the village where Nkrumah was born and interviewed Nkrumah's first cousin, Joseph Aduku. I also interviewed Dr. Robert Lee, an African-American dentist who went to school with Nkrumah and who moved to Ghana during the struggle for independence. Dr. Lee still has a dental practice in Accra.

I also interviewed people who did not necessarily live through the struggle, but who have expertise in the subject. I visited both the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Mausoleum and the W.E. B. DuBois Center for Pan African Culture and interviewed people who work in these centers. These visits helped me to piece together the factors and the chain of events that led to Independence. I also interviewed several professors who are in some way personally linked to the struggle. Esi Sutherland-Addy is a Research Fellow at the University of Legon. Her father was an African-American who came to live in Ghana during the struggle for independence. Her father organized many conferences for the movement and eventually became the private

secretary to the Minister of Finance. Kojo Maison is a history professor at the University of Cape Coast. His hometown of Sekondi was the birth place of the Positive Action of 1950, and his uncle was an important leader in the struggle for independence. And Sammy Tenkorang is the senior lecturer in History at the University of Cape Coast. He adds a unique perspective to his scholarly knowledge because he actually lived through the independence struggle.

I planned to interview elderly people in the community of Cape Coast to hear their perspective on the independence movement. However, I discovered that it was difficult to find people who could provide me with the information I was looking for. Many of the people I considered interviewing were either too young to remember much or so old that it is difficult to get information from them. However, I did interview one elderly man who gave me some valuable information.

There are many advantages to learning about past events through a first hand perspective. We often take it for granted that what is printed in books is automatically accurate information. We so often forgot that books are written by people and, like their authors, are subject to error. For example, Kojo Maison insists that much of what Kwame Nkrumah wrote about the part he played in the struggle was a lie. By talking directly with people who lived through the events, who played a role in organizing them, or who had close family members who were involved, one can have a better understanding of what really happened. Learning about dates and events through the eyes of those who actually experienced them adds an aspect of humanity to the coldness of historical facts.

There are many advantages to relying on firsthand memory and family stories for historical information. However, there are also limitations. The human memory is faulty, and names and dates can get easily twisted. When three different informants recall three different dates for the same event, it is difficult to know who to believe. Also, people's loyalties often get in the way of fact. For example, those who are still die hard Nkrumahists are probably not going to volunteer information that would cast a shadow on their leader.

I hope that I manage to draw upon the strengths of field work and minimize the errors that can occur. When I interviewed Dr. Lee, he told me that many people come to speak to him and that many have quoted him as saying something he never said. He told me as I was leaving, "I hope that your paper is written in the same spirit in which I have talked to you." More than being concerned about the accuracy of my data, I hope that I have written a paper that I would be proud to show Dr. Lee and the others who so graciously shared their experiences with me.

COLONIALISM IN THE “GOLD COAST”

The relationship between Europeans and the people of Ghana has been a long and painful one. The Portuguese first landed on the coast of Ghana in the fifteenth century to trade for gold and ivory. They called the Coast “Mina” or “Gold Coast”. The Dutch, Spanish, and English soon came, and forts were built all along the coast.

In the seventeenth century, trading between Africa and the West shifted from gold and ivory to slaves. Europe needed a supply of cheap labour that could produce raw materials in the New World, and the indigenous peoples of the Americas had already been killed off. Over half of the Africans taken from the “Gold Coast” by force were taken by the British (Nkrumah).

The British stopped trading slaves in 1808. However, their exploitation of the land and the people of the “Gold Coast” through colonization was only just beginning. On March 6, 1844, the chiefs in the southern region of the “Gold Coast” signed a bond linking themselves and their people to the British crown. They agreed to follow British law in return for British protection from the Ashanti. This bond was the first document that gave the British political influence in the “Gold Coast” (Nkrumah).

As Europe industrialized under its capitalist system, it became imperative for nations to establish colonies. Industrialized nations needed colonies as sources of raw materials, as markets for importing industrialized goods, and as points for military defense (Nkrumah). In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, European countries struggled to claim as much territory along the coast as they could. This struggle is known as the Scramble for Africa. Like other European countries, the British were desperate to claim as much territory in Africa as possible. After a battle with the Ashanti, the British finally laid claim to the southern region of the Gold Coast”. On July 24, 1874, the British signed a peace bond with the Ashanti, giving them the right to rule the southern region. The British and the Ashanti continued to quarrel over the upper region, but, by 1922, the British colony known as the “Gold Coast” was clearly defined.

RESISTANCE IN THE “GOLD COAST”

From the time that the peace bond was signed in 1874, resistance to colonization in the “Gold Coast” has been present. However, the different people I interviewed had different opinions as to the nature of resistance before the 1940’s. Joseph Samuel Appiah, a retired railways worker who was a leader in the independence movement of the 1940’s and ‘50’s, insists that people had been asking for independence all along. He told me of the Aborigines Rights Protection Society, which formed immediately after the bond was signed, as well as two delegations that were sent in the 1930’s to ask the British government for independence. When I tried to clarify exactly what these groups were asking for, he insisted that it was nothing short of independence (Appiah, November 1999).

According to Dr. Esi Sutherland-Addy, Researcher Fellow at the University of Legon, resistance in the “Gold Coast” had its roots in the elite class. Around the turn of the century, an elite class emerged in the “Gold Coast”. There were no higher institutions of learning in the colony at the time, so members of the elite and merchant classes had to send their children overseas for higher education. Studying overseas allowed these students to be exposed to what was going on all over the world. They learned about important movements and events such as the French Revolution, the Bolshevik Revolution, and the two World Wars. They were exposed to many ideas of freedom. Many of these students returned to Ghana to become lawyers and journalists and many of them spoke out in resistance to colonialism. For example, Joseph Casely-Hayford was a journalist from Cape Coast who talked of “emancipation through education” (Sutherland-Addy, November 1999). It was this class of elite lawyers and journalists who would later form the first political party in the “Gold Coast” and begin the final struggle for independence.

Unrest Growing In The Colony

Though there was evidence of resistance by certain groups in the “Gold Coast” throughout the colony’s history, the struggle for independence did not become a mass movement until the late 1940’s. As Sammy Tenkorang, senior lecturer in History at the University of Cape Coast, notes, “There was no sign that independence was coming before World War II, but after the war, anybody could have predicted it” (Tenkorang, November 1999). During the late 1940’s, the struggle for independence in the “Gold Coast” found backing in the masses, and one could not have overlooked the fervor with which colonialism was being resisted. There are many factors and events that shaped the attitudes of the people,

that helped them decide that they were ready to fight for the right to govern themselves. Life under colonial rule was very difficult for the people of the “Gold Coast”. Empires maintain colonies for their own benefit. Colonization works to the advantage of the mother country and not to the benefit of those living in a colonized territory. Colonies are needed under capitalism as sources for raw materials and as markets for industrialized goods exports from the mother country. Therefore, colonies are often manipulated by the mother country. The British had the power to manipulate prices of raw materials being produced in the “Gold Coast”, and having no industries of their own, the people of the Gold Coast” were dependent on goods imported from the mother country. Also, the British did not invest in providing education for the people of the ‘Gold Coast”. The only needed a few educated people to fill lower-level civil-service jobs, and they educated a few people only for the purposes of filling these roles. Before the struggle for independence in the 1940’s and ‘50’s, there were no higher institutions of learning in the “Gold Coast”. When Ghana gained her independence in 1957, 80% of her citizens were illiterate (Nkrumah). Even most of those who did receive an education were stuck in low-level, low-paying jobs. As an elderly man in Cape Coast remembers, “The Europeans trained us at the schools in order that we could be useful to them. We were only given the book knowledge, no engineers, no doctors, and many things that would have been suitable for us we never had’ (anonymous, November 1999).

Though the people of the ‘Gold Coast’ had been enduring these conditions for some time, their unhappiness with the situation became more evident after World War II. Many groups of people within the society began to express their discontent with colonial rule. One major group that expressed unhappiness was the soldiers returning from World War II. Ghana sent 65,000 soldiers to fight in the war in Burma and India, and these men were promised to be given a pension, a gratuity, and jobs when they returned. (Tenkorang, November 1999). But, in 1946 when the troops were demobilized, they returned home to find that they were going to be given almost nothing. Many of them could not find work, and according to Cameron Abongo Duncan, X-serviceman who later became Kwame Nkrumah’s body guard, they were only allotted one shilling and six pence a day. This is equivalent to about two hundred cedis, and as Duncan notes, “It is not sufficient to look after yourself or your wife” (Duncan, November 1999). Many of the soldiers returning from World War II had fathers who fought in the first World War and had returned to live in poverty. They did not want this fate to be theirs (Tenkorang, November 1999). The financial hardships that these men endured was the cause of discontent in a large portion of the population because these men had many family members who were dependent on them.

Fighting in the war itself also had an impact on the attitudes of the Soldiers. These men were fed the philosophy of freedom and democracy that the West was pushing and it made them question their own circumstances of living under foreign rule at home (Duncan, November 1999). During the war, black and white soldiers fought along-side one another. Interacting with whites in such an intimate way helped the African soldiers to gain confidence in their own abilities. Ghanaian Seth Anthony rose to the position of major in Burma, and he later became an ambassador to the US. The soldiers saw first-hand that they were equal to whites in every respect, and they began to challenge their own internalized feelings of inferiority. These soldiers grew angry when they returned home to find that, while the British X-servicemen were treated well, the Ghanaian soldiers were all but forgotten by the British government (Duncan, November 1999).

The plight of the soldiers returning from the war was not the only cause of unrest in the “Gold Coast” Farmers were also suffering under colonial rule and were ready to take action. Farmers were unhappy because the prices of their crops on the world market were extraordinarily low. Also, the colonial government, in trying to rule over a land that was foreign to them, made some mistakes that angered farmers. For example, the cocoa crop was being negatively effected by the Swollen shoot Disease that is caused by an insect. The farmers asked for some spray to kill off the insect, but the colonial government insisted that the way to stop the spreading of the disease was to cut down the infected trees. But, this method was useless because the insects would simply jump from the dead tree to a living one. Despite complaints from farmers who were actually working the land, the British government sent in agricultural labourers to chop down the infected trees (Tenkorang, November 1999).

Virtually everyone in the colony was deeply effected by the economic recession. Great Britain was in debt after the war, and they hoped to use profits from their colonies to rehabilitate the nation (Tenkorang, November 1999). Not only were cocoa and other crops selling for nothing, but the prices of goods imported from Britain were extraordinarily high and continued to rise. Sammy Tenkorang remembers how difficult it was to buy anything during this time. “Even to buy some salt was a major ordeal (Tekonrang, November 1999). When I asked an elderly man living in Cape Coast if he remembered prices being high immediately after the war, he let out a laugh and said, “Oh yeah, and they were rising all the time” (anonymous, November 1999).

In the wake of growing unrest in the colony, a group of lawyers and journalists decided to form a political party to push for independence. These elites had traveled overseas to receive higher education, and they had returned to the “Gold Coast” to find themselves silenced by the colonial government. The British government preferred to work with chiefs because they were

illiterate and easy to manipulate, and the government allowed the chiefs access to a certain amount of power within the colony. The elites of the “Gold Coast” could see that the British Empire was crumbling, and they wanted to insure that they would be given power once the colony was made independent (Tenkorang, November 1999).

In 1947, they formed the United Gold Coast Convention whose stated goal was to bring about “independence in the shortest possible time.” These men has asked Arko Adjei to be their secretary and to organize the party, but Adjei told them he knew of someone who could do a better job. He told them about Kwame Nkrumah, a man with whom he had attended college in the United States. He told the others that, “When this man is brought into the United Gold Coast Convention, self government will be achieved” (Duncan, November 1999).

Kwame Nkrumah

Kwame Nkrumah was the most dynamic leader of the independence movement in the “Gold Coast.” In fact, some say that independence would not have come to the colony for many years later if Nkrumah had not emerged as the leader. Because Nkrumah and his political consciousness became such an important part of the movement, it is valuable to examine the life of Nkrumah and how his political consciousness was shaped.

Kwame Nkrumah was born on September 21, 1909 in Nkrofo, a village with population of about two thousand located in the Western Region of Ghana (Aduku, November 1999). He was an only child, the son of a goldsmith. According to Joseph Aduku, first cousin to Kwame Nkrumah, on the day Nkrumah was born, he did not make a sound for three hours. His parents were worried, and they consulted a fetish priest. The priest told them that their son was going to be a great man. He told them that the baby would begin to cry only after he heard a gun shot. So, Nkrumah’s father fired a shotgun, and Nkrumah did finally begin to cry (Aduku, November 1999).

Nkrumah’s father worked as a goldsmith in the nearby town of Halfacini, and when Nkrumah was fours years old, his mother and he joined his father. Nkrumah attended a Roman Catholic school near where his father worked. There was no school in Nkrofo at the time, so if Nkrumah had stayed in Nkrofo, he would not have had the chance to receive an education (Aduku, November 1999). According to Aduku, Nkrumah was always the brightest student in his classes. The Fathers at the Catholic school gave the young Nkrumah much praise and attention, and these men had a big impact on his life. Nkrumah’s cousin remembers him as a smart and noticeably well-behaved child (Aduku, November1999).

Nkrumah spent ten years in Halfacini where he completed his elementary education. He was awarded a government scholarship to attend Achimota Secondary School in Accra.

This was one of the top schools in the colony, and his scholarship recognized him as one of the brightest pupils in the Western Region (Aduku, November 1999). Nkrumah was thrilled at the chance to attend this school.

The government scholarship Nkrumah received required him to teach for seven years after secondary school. He taught school for seven years in the town of Axim and then decided to further his education. Because there were no higher institutions for learning in the “Gold Coast” at the time, Nkrumah had to travel overseas to further his education. However, his cousin says that he always planned to return to Ghana some day (Aduku, November 1999).

In 1935, Nkrumah left for the United States. He attended Lincoln University in Pennsylvania where he earned a combined Bachelors Degree in Sociology and Economics and later another degree in Theology. It was during his time at Lincoln that his political consciousness began to form. Nkrumah’s cousin says that Nkrumah did not leave Ghana with any strong anti-colonist views (Aduku, November 1999). Leslie Dodoo, museum curator at the Kwame Nkrumah Memorial Mausoleum, explains that most people did not see the evils of colonialism until they left the colony to attend school elsewhere (Dodoo, November 1999). While at Lincoln, Nkrumah was exposed to the philosophy of Marcus Garvey and was greatly influenced by his writings. Nkrumah helped to organize the union of African students at Lincoln, and Robert Lee, an African-American who attended school with Nkrumah, says that he cannot remember Nkrumah ever talking about anything but the evils of colonialism (Lee, November 1999). Nkrumah wrote his first book while attending Lincoln entitled “Towards Colonial Freedom.” However, it was not published until 1962 (Dodoo, November 1999).

Nkrumah earned his Masters Degree in Education from the University of Pennsylvania, and in 1935, he traveled to the United Kingdom to begin his Doctorate. While he was in the United States, Nkrumah concentrated mostly on his studies. It was when he moved to the U.K. that he became heavily involved in political activities. He organized the Fifty Pan-African Congress along with George Padmore of the Caribbean. They brought together over two hundred delegates from all over Africa and the Diaspora. During his conference, these delegates articulated their quest for the liberation of the continent and the means by which it could be achieved.

After the Fifth Pan-African Congress, W.E.B. Dubois formed a working committee whose goal was to see that the ideas formulated at the conference were put into practice. Nkrumah as an instrumental part of this committee. He organized two West African conferences and published a newsletter called “The New African” (Nkrumah). He and a few other students who were deeply committed to the liberation of Africa formed a highly secretive

group known as “The Circle,” and they mapped out plans for revolution in the colonies (Nkrumah).

In 1947, Nkrumah received word that a political party was forming in the “Gold Coast,” and that they wanted him to come and be their Secretary General. Nkrumah was in the middle of defending his thesis. He also carried many leadership responsibilities in his work with Dubois. However, he decided that this was a golden opportunity for him to make real changes in the colonized world. He left both his unfinished thesis and his work with Dubois to assume the role of Secretary General of the United Gold Coast Convention (Nkrumah). Though he never completed his thesis, he was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from Lincoln University (Dodoo, November 1999).

THE MOVEMENT TAKES SHAPE

Kwame Nkrumah returned to the “Gold Coast” at a time when the people’s unhappiness was heightening. During the Fifth Pan-African Congress, delegates had articulated the importance of building a mass following in the struggle for liberation, and when Nkrumah returned to the “Gold Coast”, he put this commitment into action. As a representative of the UGCC, he traveled all over the colony, organizing rallies and explaining to people about the nature of colonialism. According to Leslie Dadoo, “He articulated what the people themselves wanted to say” (November 1999). Nkrumah was well-liked by the people. The other leaders in the UGCC were seen as untouchable elites, but Nkrumah was approachable. He had charisma, and he was also a new face in the scene, which sparked people’s interests (Appiah, November 1999). Though he was organizing the masses on behalf of the UGCC, Nkrumah inevitably build a large following for himself.

The members of the UGCC began to campaign hard to build support for independence, but they needed a platform (Tenkorang, November 1999). Two major events that took place in the colony in 1948 helped to increase the pressure for independence. The first was a nation-wide boycott of imported goods. This boycott was organized by a popular chief of Osu, Nii Bonne, and was provoked by the rising prices of imported goods (Tenkorang, November 1999). The boycott rapidly became a nation-wide practice, and even Bonne was surprised at its success. An elderly man living in Cape Coast remembers that everyone he knew participated in the boycott (Anonymous, November 1999). According to Tenkorang, the UGCC attempted to take over the organization of the boycott to further their own political cause. He claims that Danquah, one of the leaders in the UGCC came to Bonne and asked him to turn over the boycott to their party. Danquah promised to make Bonne a minister in the government if independence was achieved. However, Bonne was not happy with this offer and brought the story to the press. (Tenkorang, November 1999).

Another major event that brought the movement into full swing took place on February 28, 1948. This was the famous soldiers’ demonstration in which three soldiers were killed. Many X-soldiers has attended a rally organized by Kwame Nkrumah, and he had inspired them to organize to present a petition to the colonial government, asking for independence as well as better living conditions. Cameron Abongo Duncan was the regional chairman of the X-serviceman’s union for the Western Region at the time, and he helped to organise the soldiers for the event. He recalls their decision to organize themselves. “People thought that Kwame Nkrumah came, and he gave us advice. This was a mistake. Kwame Nkrumah organized a meeting of all youth, X-servicemen, and unemployed in Accra. So, when we went there,

Kwame Nkrumah's opening speech on the platform gave us the inspiration to organize ourselves, particularly the X-servicemen, to go forward to tell the colonial government that we want independence, a good living, and good pay" (Duncan, November 1999). The leaders of the X-servicemen's union agreed to round up the X-soldiers in each of their regions and bring them to Accra on the 28 of February. They planned to meet at Polo Ground, which is now Independence Square, and then walk to Christen Borg Castle to present a petition to the governor. According to Duncan, the soldiers' petition asked for "Independence as we fought for you" as well as good-paying jobs and shelter (Duncan, November 1999).

Duncan and the other leaders of the union brought soldiers by the thousands so participate in the peaceful demonstration, and Duncan recalls that even civilians joined in the march. But, when they reached the crossroads on the way to the castle, they were stopped by British police. Sergeant Emory, who was in command of the British officers, told the demonstrators to "halt". He told them that they could send their representatives to present the petition, but that they all could not march to the castle. The demonstrators, however, insisted that they would all march to the castle to present the petition. As they attempted to move forward, Emory commanded the police to fire upon them. The three leaders of the demonstration; Sergeant Adjetey, Corporal Atippoe, and Private Lamptey, were fired upon and killed (Tenkorang, November 1999). This road is now called February 28 Road, and these soldiers are remembered every year on November 11 (Tenkorang, November 1999).

When the soldiers were shot, the unarmed demonstrators rushed the police officers and beat them. Duncan remembers that the police officers had to flee from the enraged crowd (Duncan, November 1999). The crowd then made its way into the city. Starting at the Kings Way Supermarket, they began burning and looting. Duncan explains that the soldiers began breaking windows and burning, and it was the civilians who began looting. The riot was so out-of-hand that the British police could not control it. The rioting lasted into the following day and even spread to other regions of the country (Tenkorang, November 1999). Duncan remembers, "We burned indiscriminately. We were on the rampage. We didn't care whether you belonged to us or not" (Duncan, November 1999).

According to Tenkorang, members of the UGCC "hijacked" the February 28 incident to promote their own cause (Tenkorang, November 1999). Nkrumah and Danquah sent telegrams to the British government, claiming that the colonial government in the "Gold Coast" had broken down. They demanded that the colonial government give itself over to the UGCC. When the British government inquired into the situation and found out that the "Gold Coast" government had not, in fact, broken down, they ordered the Big Six to be arrested. The leaders of the UGCC spend six weeks in jail (Tenkorang, November 1999).

Some of the leaders of the UGCC felt that Nkrumah was pushing too hard for independence. They wanted independence, but they wanted to work more cooperatively with the colonial government to bring about independence in a reasonable amount of time. Nkrumah, however, insisted that they should push for “Self Government Now”. Due to this difference in philosophy, Nkrumah broke away from the UGCC. In 1949, he formed his own political party, the Convention People’s Party (CPP), which advocated for “Self Government Now” (Nkrumah). The masses of people that Nkrumah has persuaded while working for the UGCC transferred their loyalties to the CPP. While the UGCC was made up of lawyers and other elites, the CPP as comprised of students, farmers, labourers, and teachers. Nkrumah’s message spoke to ordinary people, and they gave him their loyalty.

POSITIVE ACTION

In 1950, Nkrumah's party began what they termed, "Positive Action" This was a combination of strikes, demonstrations, and rallies held all over the country that were designed to put pressure on the colonial government (Appiah, November 1999). This strategy of nonviolent non-cooperation was based on the philosophy and practices that Ghandi had used to fight for independence in India. Nkrumah and the other delegates of the Fifth Pan-African Congress had committed themselves to using these strategies in their struggles for the liberation of their countries.

The strikes began in the town of Sekondi where both the harbour and the railways headquarters were located. The railways workers of Sekondi were in a unique position to see quite clearly what colonialism was doing to the people of the "Gold Coast". Dr. Kojo Maison's uncle, Nana Kobina Nketsia, was the paramount chief of Sekondi at the time, and he played a major role in organizing the Positive Action. Nketsia has worked in the customs office of the railways, and he has seen tons of gold leaving the country with no benefit to the people (Maison, November 1999). The railways workers also saw first-hand that they were paid less and treated with less respect than the British employees. Also, they experienced a kind of apartheid in their town. There were certain places in the town of Sekondi where only whites could go, and black people were not even allowed to swim in the ocean when white people were in the water. Maison's family home is now located in an area that was once forbidden to Africans (Maison, November 1999).

The railways union was the most organized union of labourers in the country, having committed members and dynamic leaders such as Pobee Biney and Anthony Wood. As Appiah remembers, the railways labourers had already been struggling for better working conditions in the colony. They had gone on strike in 1941, 1944 and 1947, asking for better wages and working conditions (Appiah, November 1999). Also, the railways were an important lifeline for the colony, and that gave these labourers an important weapon to use against the colonial government. For these reasons, the railways workers played a vital role in the Positive Action.

Nkrumah declared Positive Action on January 8, 1950. however, he was in the process of negotiating with British officials at the time and was hesitant to embark on the action. It was the labourers in Sekondi who pressured Nkrumah into declaring Positive Action. On the night of January 6, the leaders of the railways union, which at that time also included labourers at the ports, decided to go on strike. According to Maison, they all knew that it was more than a strike. They all knew that they were beginning the Positive Action. Some of the leaders of

the union were hesitant to agree to the strikes, but late into the night, they were all finally persuaded (Maison, November 1999).

A rally was held in Sekondi on January 7 to announce the beginning of the strikes. Later that day, Nana Nketsia sent Anthony Wood, one of the leaders of the railways union, to travel to the town of Tarkwa to convince the gold mine labourers to join them in the strike. Nketsia also sent Pobee Biney to Accra with a message for Nkrumah written in Fanti which said, "If you won't do it, then we have started" (Maison, November 1999). Pobee Biney was a powerful leader, and Nketsia knew that his presence would send the message to Nkrumah that the railways men were serious.

On January 8, a rally was held at Polo Ground in Accra. Nkrumah stood on the platform with Pobee Biney and talked, but he hesitated to declare Positive Action. As Nkrumah talked, Pobee Biney kept hitting him from behind and telling him in Fanti that, "If he did not declare Positive Action, then Biney himself would do it. Nkrumah finally declared that the country was going to embark on Positive Action (Maison, November 1999).

The British government declared a state of emergency and imposed a 6:00 to 6:00 curfew on the people. On the night of January 13, Nana Nketsia was called to Accra to meet with Nkrumah. He left his house to look for a car, and after he left, British police stormed his palace. They were looking for both Nketsia and Nkrumah, who they thought was hiding in the house. They demolished the palace, causing the roof to collapse. They even dismembered some toy dolls that were in the house because they thought Nkrumah has the power to turn himself into such objects. One baby living in the house was taken outside seconds before the roof over where she had been sleeping collapsed. Nketsia's mother, Mary Budu-Arthur, sounded the gong-gong for the people of the town to come to the palace, and the British police left for a time. Nketsia returned to his now demolished home, and the British police also returned to the palace. The towns people were enlarged, and the chief did not want violence to ensue. He asked the crowd gathered in front of his house to sit down. Then he stood to face the British officers. They told him, "On behalf of His Majesty the King, I give you five minutes to dismantled this crowd."

Nketsia replied, "I give you five seconds to leave my territory" (Maison, November 1999). Nketsia's words were an open defiance of defiance to colonial rule. The British police began beating him with batons, and an X-serviceman by the name of Yenkey covered the chief with his own body. Nevertheless, the chief was beaten into a coma. After the beating, the townspeople counted eighty-four broken pieces of baton on the ground. Nketsia was arrested and was thrown in prison along with Nkrumah (Maison, November 1999).

The strikes and demonstrations of 1950 succeeded in shutting down the country. As Appiah remembers, “No one went to work. No one went to school. You didn’t even talk to your watershed of the independence struggle in Africa” (Maison, November 1999).

INDEPENDENCE IS ACHIEVED

After the riots of 1948, the British government established a commission of inquiry, known as the Watson Commission, to evaluate why there was so much unrest in the colony and what could be done to ease the tension. The commission issued a report suggesting that the people of the colony needed a voice in government. As a result of the Watson Report, the colonial government called for the first elections of the “Gold Coast” (Nkrumah). Nkrumah ran for the Accra Central seat in Parliament while he was in prison. Even though he had no opportunity to campaign, he was elected by a landslide. Nkrumah had to be released from prison after serving only thirteen months of a three-year sentence so that he could fulfill his role in Parliament. His party was the majority in Parliament, and Nkrumah became Leader of Government Business.

Nkrumah and the other members of his party were reelected in 54, again by a landslide. The colonial government gave Nkrumah the title of Prime Minister. Though his power in this position was limited, Nkrumah used what power he had to move the colony towards autonomy. In 1956, he made the famous Motion of Destiny before Parliament, asking the British government to release the colony. British leaders asked how they could know that the colony was ready for independence, and Nkrumah told them to go to the people and let them decide. So the colonial government called for more elections, and when the CPP won by a landslide yet again, they agreed that the time had come to release the colony (Dodoo, November 1999).

On March 6, 1957, the “Gold Coast” became the Republic of Ghana, and Kwame Nkrumah became its first President. Nkrumah chose March 6 as the date for independence because it was a ceremonial release from the March 6, 1844 bond that first gave the British influence over the country. Ghana was the first country south of the Sahara to gain independence.

A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

In order for the independence movement in Ghana to be properly assessed, it must be placed in the context of what was going on all over the world at the time. The nationalist movement in the “Gold Coast” that came into maturity in the 1940’s was only one of many movements that organized all over the world. Many countries in Africa such as Nigeria and Guinea organized for independence during this time, and by 1961, eighteen African countries had followed Ghana’s lead and achieved the right to govern themselves. Even Africans in the Diaspora were mobilizing for equality. In the United States, black leaders such as Martin Luther King Jr. were leading the Civil Rights Movement to end segregation.

What caused this fever for freedom that arose all over Africa and the Diaspora during this time? Soldiers returning home from fighting in World War II played a major role in inspiring these government. Black soldiers were recruited from all over the world to fight, and they came home with new ideas and experiences that caused them to rebel against the status quo. The major powers of the Western World asserted their need to fight for the right of people to determine their own destinies. Soldiers fighting in World War II were fed the philosophy of the right to self determination, which are articulated in the Atlantic Charter of 1941, and many took it to heart. When they returned from the war to find themselves being once again subjected to exploitation, they began to question those very leaders of the Western world who fed them the ideas of freedom and democracy. As Kwame Nkrumah noted, “The ideas of freedom and democracy, which the Western world was busily propagating to engage support for their cause were being easily absorbed by those to whom freedom had been most strenuously denied” (Nkrumah).

African soldiers returning from the war came home with a new level of confidence. While fighting in the war, they worked intimately with white soldiers. According to Maison, many of them had come to believe the myth of the white man, but working with white people in such a close way exploded this myth. “Some Africans thought that white people didn’t even die. Then these soldiers saw white men crying and scared, and they even saw that they were often better fighters than these white men” (Maison, November 1999). Coming home with a new confidence in their own capabilities, these men were no longer willing to be subjected to inequality.

As has already been discussed, servicemen returning home to the “Gold Coast” from their stations in Burma and India played an important role in setting the stage for independence in the “Gold Coast”. Soldiers returning from the war played roles in independence struggles in other African countries as well. For example, X-servicemen in Nigeria also organized

themselves to agitate for independence, though ethnic conflicts kept their efforts from being as successful (Maison, November 1999). Black soldiers from the United States who traveled to Europe to fight in the war experienced for the first time what it was like to be treated with dignity. They too returned home with a new found confidence, and they played a major role in inspiring the artistic rebellion of the 1940's known as the Harlem Renaissance as well as the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's.

Another important event that helped to spawn nationalist movements all over the world was the Fifth Pan-African Congress that took place in Manchester in October of 1945. Led by W. E. B. Dubois and organized by Kwame Nkrumah and George Padmore, this conference brought together students, labourers, and farmers from all parts of Africa and the Diaspora. During this conference, delegates and leaders clarified both their determination for freedom and their commitment to the Pan-African ideology. As Kwame Nkrumah wrote, "The fundamental purpose was identical, national independence leading to African Unity." The delegates of the conference passed a resolution calling for freedom from colonial rule.

Not only did the representatives at the Fifth Pan-African Congress articulate their philosophy and determination to be free from colonial rule, but they developed a plan of action based on the philosophy and practices of Ghandi. They developed strategies of nonviolent non-cooperation such as boycotts and strikes and stressed the importance of mobilizing the masses. After the Fifth Congress, A working committee was organized to assist in putting the program they articulated into action. Like Nkrumah, many of those present at the Fifth Pan-African Congress went on to lead movements for independence in various parts of Africa. According to Appiah, "The adapted Ghandi's practices to suit their various environments and the social backgrounds of the people" (Appiah, November 1999).

Though the fever for freedom played a major role in liberating Africa, other political factors made their struggles somewhat easier. After World War II, the US and the USSR emerged as Super Powers. As the war drew to an end, leaders of these countries began to put pressure on European nations to release their colonies. The US and the USSR were not allowed to trade directly with the colonies, but instead were forced to trade through the mother countries. The two powers wanted to be able to trade directly with these colonies, and they began to put pressure on European nations to free their colonies (Tenkorang, November 1999).

After the war, it was obvious that the European empires were going to crumble. India won its independence from the British in 1947, using Ghandi's strategies of nonviolent non-cooperation. Pakistan also achieved independence during this time. Also, in 1949, foreign countries let go of their hold on China, and China became independent. African leaders were inspired by the freedom gained in Asia and even developed their strategies based on those used

by Ghandi in India. And in turn, Africa's quest for independence was a source of inspiration for those participating in the Civil Rights Movement in the United States (Doodoo, November 1999).

The movement for independence in the "Gold Coast" was inextricably linked to both the liberation movements in Africa and to the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. Ghana's victory in 1957 served as a source of inspiration for liberation movements all over the world. As Appiah explains, "When you see another country that is no longer ruled by the whites, you also want to rule yourself" (Appiah, November 1999). Robert Lee, an African-American who moved source of inspiration for the Civil Rights Movement in the US. Ghana's success gave the liberation struggle in the US a practical example of how nonviolent resistance can work. "It believes that Martin Luther King Jr. derived his famous words, "Free at last, Free at last, Thank God All Mighty, we're free at last," from Nkrumah's victory speech in which he said, "Our beloved country, Ghana, free at last, free forever" (Lee, November 1999).

Nkrumah remained committed to his Pan-African ideals, and he supported other liberation movements both morally and financially. He hosted many conference on African liberation, and he offered scholarships for people to study in Ghana. When the French attempted to bully Gynni by stripping them of everything they had built in the colony, Nkrumah loaned the struggling new government ten million pounds sterling (Agbeyebiawo, November 1999). Nkrumah also invited African-Americans from the United States to come to Ghana to bring their practical skills to the new country as well as to serve as a source of inspiration (Lee, November 1999). As a result of Nkrumah's commitment to Pan Africanism, many people involved in liberation movements traveled to Ghana during the 1940's and 1950's. In fact, Appiah recalls that most leaders of the liberation movements in Africa came to Ghana during this time (Appiah, November 1999). Many important leaders such as W. E. B Dubois and Martin Luther King Jr. traveled to Ghana from the United States as well.

WHY WAS GHANA FIRST?

Though other countries in Africa were struggling for independence during the 1950's, Ghana was the first to successfully break free from colonial rule. There are several factors that pushed Ghana to the forefront of the movement. Without a doubt, one of the main reasons that Ghana was able to achieve independence first was the determination and leadership of Kwame Nkrumah and his political party. Everyone I interviewed agreed that, though independence may have come eventually, it would not have come as quickly without the militant determination of Nkrumah and the CPP. Nkrumah himself asserts that having a well – organised political party is essential to movements for independence (Nkrumah).

The character of the people of Ghana also played an important role in helping the colony achieve independence so soon. Ghanaians have a reputation for being peaceful, good-mannered people. Great Britain called the “Gold Coast” its Model Colony because the Ghanaian people were so agreeable (Dodoo, November 1999). For this reason, the British government was completely unprepared for either the rioting of 1948 or the massive demonstrations that took place in the colony in 1950. According to Leslie Dodoo, it was easier for the movement for independence to be successful because it came as such a shock to the British government (Dodoo, November 1999).

Unlike other countries struggling for independence in Africa, the ethnic groups in the “Gold Coast” coexisted peacefully together. This proved to be a strength that helped Ghana gain independence before other countries. As Nkrumah insisted, there is strength in unity. Ethnic conflicts within colonies gave the colonial governments opportunities to slow the process of giving the countries autonomy. Colonial governments could point to the conflicts as reasons why the colony was not ready for independence, and they could use divide and conquer tactics to slow political movements within the colony. The ethnic conflicts that were going on in Nigeria and Sierra Leone slowed their progress towards independence. But, as Tenkorang explains, “If you told someone from the ‘Gold Coast’ that they should turn against another, they would probably laugh in your face” (Tenkorang, November 1999). The cooperative attitudes of the Ghana people proved to be an invaluable asset in their struggle for independence.

Another strength that helped Ghana in the struggle for liberation was the fact that, compared to other colonies, Ghana had a rather large middle class. Nkrumah believed that education was an important key to liberation, and while the “Gold Coast” did not have a good education system, it educated more of its citizens than most colonies did (Maison, November 1999). The few secondary schools that were operating before Ghana achieved independence

brought together students of varying ethnic backgrounds. They developed friendships and loyalties to one another that crossed ethnic Barriers. The wealthy class in Ghana was able to send their children abroad to receive higher education, and this gave them the opportunity to develop a political consciousness. These elites returned to Ghana to take the lead in the independence struggle. Because their schooling had brought them together in their early years, the elites in Ghana managed to maintain a fairly cohesive front. This was an asset in the struggle (Maison, November 1999).

GHANA AFTER INDEPENDENCE

Ghana's struggle for independence shaped both the nation and the world. Though there had been stirring from certain groups in the colony since colonialism began, the movement came into full maturity during the late 1940's. As Nkrumah insisted, the success of social movements is determined largely by the commitment of the masses to the cause. The people of Ghana, strapped by economic hardship, began to feel the need to make change. The leadership of Kwame Nkrumah helped to direct their discontent and turn it into positive action.

Nkrumah served eleven years as the leader of the Republic of Ghana. While in office, he continued to work to improve the quality of life for the people of Ghana, working to establish schools and industries. He also maintained his commitment to Pan-African values and assisted many other countries who were striving for independence.

Towards the end of his time in office, Nkrumah's popularity among the people began to decline. Just as economic hardships gave Nkrumah the avenue to build a following among the masses, economic hardships played a major role in his downfall. Many people felt that Nkrumah's plan for economic development was failing, and many were angry that he was spending Ghana's money to assist other African countries in their struggles for independence (Sutherland-Addy, November 1999). Nkrumah experienced several attempts on his life. Out of fear for his safety, he began to isolate himself from the public, and he had certain people thrown into jail. Many felt that he was no longer a people's President.

In 1966, Kwame Nkrumah was overthrown. He was out of the country at the time of the coup, and he never returned to Ghana again. The president of Guinea invited him to assume the position of Co-President with him, and Nkrumah remained there until he died (Agbeyebiawo, November 1999). According to Agbeyebiawo, if Nkrumah had not been overthrown and W. E. D. Dubois had not died, other African countries like South Africa, Angola, and Zimbabwe would have achieved independence much sooner.

In recent years, Nkrumah's popularity among Ghanaians has risen. People are now coming to once again believe that his ideas for economic development could work. According to Dr. Esi Sutherland-Addy, Africans from the Diaspora have helped Ghana to reassess Nkrumah and to appreciate the positive things he accomplished for the country (Sutherland-Addy, November 1999). Certain political parties in Ghana today claim Nkrumahism because they know it will help them in the polls. However, upon review of their voting records once they are in office, it becomes apparent that these claims are generally untrue.

Today, Ghana enjoys the right to self government. However, the country has not completely absolved itself of colonial rule. Ghana is still heavily dependent on foreign

imports, and this gives the Western world a power over the country. I asked each of the people I interviewed what they thought of Ghana today and whether they thought the dream of independence had been fulfilled. They had different opinions on the subject. When I asked Joseph Appiah if he thought that Ghana got what it was struggling for, he replied, “Why not? We have self government, so we are free...If there are errors here and there, that is immaterial as far as I am concerned. We wanted to govern our own selves, and now we’ve got it. And if we manage it well, then we manage it. And if we are not able to do that, it’s immaterial, because at least we now govern ourselves” (Appiah, November 1999). Others like Thomas Brown insist that Ghana is still not truly independence because it is not self-reliant.

CONCLUSIONS

I am a Sociology major, and this is the first project I have completed in the area of history. I am sure that I could have obtained more information from my informants if I had a background in history. Nonetheless, I learned a great deal from doing this research and got the chance to speak with people I will never forget. As should be the case with a research project such as this, I am left with many more questions than I found answers. Perhaps future studies in this area could examine why those who worked for independence now have differing views on where Ghana is today. Also, during my research, I only heard stories about men. Perhaps future studies should examine what role the women of the “Gold Coast” played in the struggle for independence.

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