

# AFRICA AND THE WEST

## A Documentary History

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From Colonialism to Independence, 1875 to the Present

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## 34 • Freedom! Freedom! Freedom! (1957)

On March 6, 1957, Ghana became the first colony in Africa to win its independence. The leader of the successful movement to end colonial rule was Kwame Nkrumah, a very different type of person from the sort of collaborator that the British had hoped would lead an independent Ghana. Nkrumah, like Azikiwe, had studied in the United States and graduated from Lincoln University. He was a strong proponent of the pan-African ideas of W. E. B. Du Bois and of Marcus Garvey (who had led a back-to-Africa movement in the United States during the 1920s). Despite subjecting him to lengthy periods of detention, the British were not able to undermine Nkrumah's leadership of the Ghanaian independence movement.

The most symbolic moment for the end of colonial rule always came at midnight on the eve of independence, as the flag of the old imperial power was lowered and that of the new state raised. This extract is from the speech that Nkrumah gave on March 6, 1957, to the people gathered at the flag ceremony, among them thousands of Ghanaians, representatives of many foreign nations, and numerous dignitaries from Britain, including Queen Elizabeth. For Nkrumah, this occasion symbolized the end of empire.<sup>6</sup>

At long last the battle has ended! And thus Ghana, your beloved country, is free for ever. And here again, I want to take the opportunity to thank the chiefs and people of this country, the youth, the farmers, the women, who have so nobly fought and won this battle. Also I want to thank the valiant ex-servicemen who have so co-operated with me in this mighty task of freeing our country from foreign rule and imperialism! And as I pointed out at our Party conference at Saltpond, I made it quite clear that from now on, today, we must change our attitudes, our minds. We must realise that from now on we are no more a colonial but a free and independent people! But also, as I pointed out, that entails hard work. I am depending upon the millions of the country, the chiefs and people to help me to reshape the destiny of this country. We are prepared to make it a nation that will be respected by any nation in the world. We know we are going to have a difficult beginning but again I am relying upon your support, I am relying upon your hard work, seeing you here in your thousands, however far my eye goes. My last warning to you is that you ought to stand firm behind us so that we can prove to the world that when the African is given a chance he can show the world that he is somebody. We are not waiting; we shall no more go back to sleep. Today, from now on, there is a new African in the world and that new African is ready to fight his own battle and show that after all the black man is capable of managing his own affairs. We are going to demonstrate to the world, to the other nations, young as we are, that we are prepared to lay our own foundation.

As I said in the Assembly just a few minutes ago, I made a point that we are going to see that we create our own African personality and identity; it is the only way in which we can show the world that we are masters of our own destiny. But today may I call upon you all; at this great day let us all remember that nothing in the world can be done unless it has the support of God. We have done with the battle and we again re-dedicate ourselves in the struggle to emancipate other countries in Africa, for our independence is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total liberation of the African continent.

6. Kwame Nkrumah, *I Speak of Freedom: A Statement of African Ideology* (New York: Praeger, 1961), 106-8.

Let us now, fellow Ghanaians, let us now ask for God's blessing, and in your tens of thousands, I want to ask you to pause for one minute, and give thanks to Almighty God for having led us through obstacles, difficulties, imprisonments, hardships and sufferings to have brought us to the end of our trouble today. One minute silence—Ghana is free forever! And here I will ask the band to play the Ghana national anthem.

*Here the Ghana national anthem was played.*

I want simply to thank those who have come from abroad to witness this occasion. Here I wish I could quote Marcus Garvey. Once upon a time, he said, he looked through the whole world to see if he could find a government of a black people. He looked around, he did not find one, and he said he was going to create one. Marcus Garvey did not succeed. But here today the work of Rousseau, the work of Marcus Garvey, the work of Aggrey, the work of Casely Hayford, the work of these illustrious men who have gone before us has come to reality at this present moment. And so we thank all of you and I am going to ask the band to play again, because it must sink in and make us realise that from today, we are no more a colonial people. This time, the national anthem is going to be played in honour of the foreign states who are here with us today to witness this occasion and I want you all, those who have hats on, to take off your hats and let the band play our national anthem. And from now on that national anthem is the national anthem of Ghana to be played on all occasions.

The national anthem was played, and played again amid cries of *Freedom! Freedom! Freedom!*

### 35 • Verwoerd reaffirms South Africa's commitment to white supremacy (1958)

*While Nkrumah celebrated African independence in Ghana, Hendrik Verwoerd reflected on history as he spoke at Blood River on December 16, 1958, about the need for white South Africans to defend their ideals in a world increasingly hostile to the continuance of legalized racial discrimination. Verwoerd chose as the occasion for his reflections the 120th anniversary of the battle of Blood River, when on December 16, 1838, an armed force of Voortrekkers had avenged the death of their leader, Piet Retief, by massacring thousands of Dingane's Zulu subjects. For Verwoerd and for many other whites in South Africa, Blood River symbolized the triumph of civilization over savagery and the power of Europeans fighting with the Christian God on their side. Indeed, commemoration of the battle had become for whites an increasingly popular event in the twentieth century by providing an opportunity for stirring speeches about the need to stand together to face the forces of darkness. For Verwoerd and his followers, the move to independence in the rest of Africa made the struggle to maintain white rule in South Africa more difficult and more important than ever.<sup>7</sup>*

Dear friends, I want to speak of then and now.

If we review the spirit of the world at the time of the Voortrekkers, we find that it was a period of commotion in the minds of men. A spiritual current was then flowing over the world which created a new atmosphere spreading its influence even as far as here in the southern

7. A. N. Pelzer, ed., *Verwoerd Speaks: Speeches 1948–1966* (Johannesburg: APB Publishers, 1966), 206–11.

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