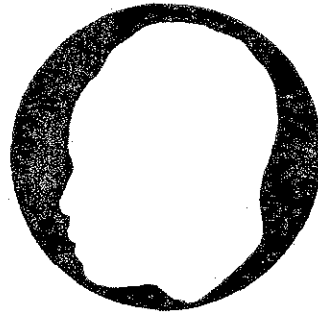


GA 1039

NY

NORTHWESTERN
UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY
DEC 3 1965
AFRICANA



THE AFRICAN GENIUS

SPEECH

delivered by

Osagyefo Dr. Kwame Nkrumah,
President of the Republic of
Ghana, at the opening of
the Institute of African
Studies
on 25th October, 1963

PUBLISHED BY THE MINISTRY OF INFORMATION AND BROADCASTING AND
PRINTED BY THE GOVERNMENT PRINTING DEPARTMENT, ACCRA, GHANA

**SPEECH BY OSAGYEFO THE PRESIDENT AT THE
OPENING OF THE INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES
ON 25th OCTOBER, 1963**

Ladies and Gentlemen:

I am very happy to be with you on this occasion and to welcome you to this official opening of the Institute of African Studies.

I regard this occasion as historically important. When we were planning this University, I knew that a many-sided Institute of African Studies which should fertilise the University, and through the University, the Nation, was a vital part of it.

This Institute has now been in existence for some time, and has already begun to make its contribution to the study of African history, culture and institutions, languages and arts. It has already begun to attract to itself scholars and students from Ghana, from other African countries and from the rest of the world.

The beginning of this present academic year marks, in a certain sense, a new development of this Institute. Already, the Institute has a team of seventeen research fellows and some forty post-graduate students—of whom about one-third come from Ghana and the remainder from countries as diverse as Poland and the United States of America, Nigeria and Japan. We hope soon to have students and fellows from China and the Soviet Union.

This Institute is no longer an infant, but a growing child. It has begun to develop a definite character of its own; it is beginning to make itself known in the world. This, therefore, is a moment for taking stock and to think afresh about the functions of the Institute, and of the University within which it is set.

What sort of Institute of African Studies does Ghana want and need to have?

In what way can Ghana make its own specific contribution to the advancement of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Africa through past history and through contemporary problems?

For what kind of service are we preparing students of this Institute and of our Universities?

Are we sure that we have established here the best possible relationship between teachers and students?

To what extent are our universities identified with the aspirations of Ghana and Africa?

You who are working in this Institute—as research workers and assistants, teachers and students—have a special responsibility for helping to answer these questions. I do, however, wish to take this opportunity to put to you some of the guiding principles which an Institute of African Studies situated here in Ghana at this period of our history must constantly bear in mind.

First and foremost, I would emphasise the need for a re-interpretation and a new assessment of the factors which make up our past. We have to recognise frankly that African Studies, in the form in which they have been developed in the universities and centres of learning in the West, have been largely influenced by the concepts of old style "colonial studies", and still to some extent remain under the shadow of colonial ideologies and mentality.

Until recently the study of African history was regarded as a minor and marginal theme within the framework of imperial history.

The study of African social institutions and cultures was subordinated in varying degrees to the effort to maintain the apparatus of colonial power. In British Institutes of higher learning, for example, there was a tendency to look to social anthropologists to provide the kind of knowledge that would help to support the particular brand of colonial policy known as indirect rule.

The study of African languages was closely related to the practical objectives of the European missionary and the administrator.

African music, dancing and sculpture were labelled "primitive art". They were studied in such a way as to reinforce the picture of African society as something grotesque, as a curious, mysterious human backwater, which helped to retard social progress in Africa and to prolong colonial domination over its peoples.

African economic problems, organisation, labour, immigration, agriculture, communications, industrial development—were generally viewed from the standpoint of the European interest in the exploitation of African resources, just as African politics were studied in the context of the European interest in the management or manipulation of African affairs.

When I speak of a new interpretation and new assessment, I refer particularly to our Professors and Lecturers. The non-Ghanaian non-African Professors and Lecturers are, of course, welcome to work here with us. Intellectually there is no barrier between us and them. We appreciate, however, that their mental make-up has been largely influenced by their system of education and the facts of their society and environment. For this reason, they must endeavour to adjust and reorientate their attitudes and thought to our African conditions and aspirations. They must not try simply to reproduce here their own diverse patterns of education and culture. They must embrace and develop those aspirations and responsibilities which are clearly essential for maintaining a progressive and dynamic African society.

One essential function of this Institute must surely be to study the history, culture and institutions, languages and arts of Ghana and of Africa in new African centred ways—in entire freedom from the propositions and pre-suppositions of the colonial epoch, and from the distortions of those Professors and Lecturers who continue to make European studies of Africa the basis of this new assessment. By the work of this Institute, we must re-assess and assert the glories and achievements of our African past and inspire our generation, and succeeding generations, with a vision of a better future.

But you should not stop here. Your work must also include a study of the origins and culture of peoples of African descent in the Americas and the Caribbean, and you should seek to maintain close relations with their scholars so that there may be cross fertilisation between Africa and those who have their roots in the African past.

The second guiding principles which I would emphasise is the urgent need to search for, edit, publish and make available sources of all kinds.

Handwritten notes: "read + ..."

Handwritten initials: "JK"

Ghanaian scholars who at an early period were actively concerned with the study of Ghana's history and institutions and helped to prepare the way for the creation of this Institute—such as Carl Reindorf, John Mensa Sarbah, Casely-Hayford, Attah-Ahuma, Attobah Cogvano, Anthony William Amu—understood how much the development of African Studies depended on the recovery of vital source material. Indeed, the search, publication and our interpretation of sources are obviously processes that must go hand in hand.

Among non-African students of Ghana's history and institutions, one of the most distinguished was undoubtedly Captain Rattray. By his intellectual honesty and diligence, he was able to appreciate and present to the world the values inherent in a culture which was, after all, foreign to him. It is impossible to respect an intellectual unless he shows this kind of honesty. After all, Academic Freedom must serve all legitimate ends, and not a particular end. And here the term "Academic Freedom" should not be used to cover up academic deficiencies and indiscipline.

I would therefore like to see this Institute, in co-operation with Institutes and Centres of African Studies in other African States, planning to produce what I would describe as an extensive and diversified Library of African Classics. Such a library would include ~~editions~~ with translations and commentaries or works—whether in African, Asian or European languages—which are of special value for the student of African history, philosophy, literature and law. I can think of no more solid or enduring contribution which the Institute could make to the development of African Studies on sound lines during the second half of the Twentieth Century, or to the training of future generations of Africanists.

Here in this Institute of African Studies you have already made a useful beginning with the collection of a substantial body of Arabic and Hausa documents. This collection has revealed a tradition of scholarship in Ghana about which little was previously known, and I hope that it will throw a new light on our history as part of the history of Africa.

I also regard as important the work which you are doing in the collection of stool histories and other forms of oral tradition—of poetry and African literature in all its forms—of which one admirable expression is Professor Nketsia's

recently published book entitled "Folk Songs of Ghana", and Kofi Antubam's latest book on African culture. Other Ghanaians have done equally admirable work in this field. I may mention here Ephraim Amu whose work has created and established a Ghanaian style of music and revived an appreciation for it. Our old friend, J. B. Danquah, has also produced studies of Akan culture and institutions.

Much more should be done in this direction. There exist in our Universities, Faculties and Departments, such as Law, Economics, Politics, History, Geography, Philosophy and Sociology, the teaching in which should be substantially based as soon as possible on African material.

Let us take an example. Our students in the Faculty of Law must be taught to appreciate the very intimate link that exists between law and social values. It is therefore important that the Law Faculty should be staffed by Africans.

There is no dearth of men and women among us qualified to teach in the Law Faculty. This applies equally to other Faculties. Only in this way can the Institute of African Studies fertilise the Universities and the Nation.

The magnitude of the changes taking place in Africa to-day is a positive index of the scale and pace necessary for our social reconstruction. Our Universities should provide us with the force and impetus needed to maintain this reconstruction.

After years of bitter political struggle for our freedom and independence, our Continent is emerging systematically from colonialism and from the yoke of imperialism. The personality of the African which was stunted in this process can only be retrieved from these ruins if we make a conscious effort to restore Africa's ancient glory. It is only in conditions of total freedom and independence from foreign rule and interferences that the aspirations of our people will see real fulfilment and the African genius find its best expression.

When I speak of the African genius, I mean something different from Negritude, something not apologetic, but dynamic. Negritude consists in a mere literary affectation and style which piles up word upon word and image upon image with occasional reference to Africa and things African. I do not mean a vague brotherhood based on a criterion of

colour, or on the idea that Africans have no reasoning but only a sensitivity. By the African genius I mean something positive, our socialist conception of society, the efficiency and validity of our traditional statecraft, our highly developed code of morals, our hospitality and our purposeful energy.

This Institute must help to foster in our University and other educational institutions the kind of education which will produce devoted men and women with imagination and ideas, who, by their life and actions, can inspire our people to look forward to a great future. Our aim must be to create a society that is not static but dynamic, a society in which equal opportunities are assured for all. Let us remember that as the aims and needs of our society change, so our educational institutions must be adjusted and adapted to reflect this change.

We must regard education as the "gateway to the enchanted cities of the mind" and not only as a means to personal economic security and social privilege. Indeed, education consists not only in the sum of what a man knows, or the skill with which he can put this to his own advantage. In my view, a man's education must also be measured in terms of the soundness of his judgment of people and things, and in his power to understand and appreciate the needs of his fellow men, and to be of service to them. The educated man should be so sensitive to the conditions around him that he makes it his chief endeavour to improve those conditions for the good of all.

As you know, we have been doing a great deal to make education available to all. It is equally important that education should seek the welfare of the people and recognise our attempts to solve our economic, cultural, technological and scientific problems. In this connection, it will be desirable for your masters degree courses to be designed with such problems in mind. It is therefore important and necessary that our Universities and the Academy of Sciences should maintain the closest possible liaison in all fields. This will result not only in the efficient planning and execution of research, but also in economy in the use of funds and resources. Let me emphasise here that we look to the Universities to set an example by their efficiency and their sense of responsibility in the use of public funds. They must also set an example in loyalty to the Government and the people, in good citizenship, public morality and behaviour.

In order that the students may obtain the maximum benefit from their education in our Universities, it is imperative that the relationship between them and their teachers should be as free and easy as possible. Without this close interaction between mind and mind and the common fellowship of a University, it will be impossible to produce the type of student who understands the larger issues of the world around him.

Are we really sure that our students are in touch with the life of the nation? That they and their teachers fully appreciate what is going on in our society? The time has come for the gown to come to town.

In this connection, I can see no reason why courses should not continue to be organised at the Law School in Accra for Lay Magistrates, Local Government staff and other officers both in Government and industry, who wish to acquire a knowledge of the law to assist them in their work. The staff of the Law Faculty in this University should be able to organise such courses for the benefit of the people in the categories I have mentioned.

It should also be possible for individual Lecturers and Professors on their own initiative to give lectures on subjects of their own choosing, to which the whole University and others outside it are invited. This would make possible the greatest freedom in discussion and the widest contacts between our Universities and the general public. I would like to see this become an established practice in our Universities.

Furthermore, I would stress the need for the Institute to be outward-looking. There may be some tension between the need to acquire new knowledge and the need to diffuse it—between the demands of research and the demands of teaching. But the two demands are essentially interdependent. And in Ghana the fact that we are committed to the construction of a socialist society makes it especially necessary that this Institute of African Studies should work closely with the people—and should be constantly improving upon its methods for serving the needs of the people—of Ghana, of Africa and of the world. Teachers and students in our Universities should clearly understand this.

What in practice does this mean? In part this objective—of serving the needs of the people—can be achieved by training this new generation of Africanists—equipping them, through

our Master of Arts and Diploma courses, with a sounder basis of knowledge in the various fields of African Studies than former generations have had. It is because of the great importance that I attach to the training of well-qualified Africanists who can feed back this new learning into our educational system that—in spite of the serious shortage of secondary school teachers—I have agreed that teachers who are selected for these post-graduate courses should be released for two years to take them.

An Institute of African Studies that is situated in Africa must pay particular attention to the arts of Africa, for the study of these can enhance our understanding of African institutions and values, and the cultural bonds that unite us. A comparative study of musical systems, for example, or the study of musical instruments, drum language, or the oral traditions that link music with social events, may illuminate historical problems or provide data for the study of our ethical and philosophical ideas.

In studying the arts, however, you must not be content with the accumulation of knowledge about the arts. Your researches must stimulate creative activity; they must contribute to the development of the arts in Ghana and in other parts of Africa, they must stimulate the birth of a specifically African literature, which, exploring African themes and the depth of the African soul, will become an integral portion of a general world literature. It would be wrong to make this a mere appendage of world culture.

I hope that the School of Music and Drama, which works in close association with the Institute of African Studies, will provide this Institute with an outlet for creative work, and for the dissemination of knowledge of the arts through its extension and vacation courses, as well as through regular full-time courses. I hope also that this Institute, in association with the School of Music and Drama, will link the University of Ghana closely with the National Theatre movement in Ghana. In this way the Institute can serve the needs of the people by helping to develop new forms of dance and drama, of music and creative writing, that are at the same time closely related to our Ghanaian traditions and express the ideas and aspirations of our people at this critical stage in our history. This should lead to new strides in our cultural development.

There are other fields in which a great deal remains to be done. In addition to publishing the results of its research in a form in which it will be available to scholars, the Institute

must be concerned with its diffusion in a more popular form among a much wider public. While there are many channels through which this new learning can be spread—including radio and, in the very near future, television—I am particularly anxious that the Institute should assist the Government in the planning and production of new text-books for use in our secondary schools, training colleges, workers' colleges and educational institutions generally.

I have attempted to indicate briefly some of the principles which should guide the institute in its work. It is for you to develop, amplify and apply these in relation to the actual possibilities that present themselves to you. Of one thing I am sure, that Ghana offers a rich and exciting field of work and a friendly and sympathetic environment for scholars and students from any part of the world who wish seriously to devote themselves to a study of Africa and African civilisations.

Hence it will, I hope, be possible to say of this Institute—and, indeed, of our Universities—as the historian Mahmut Kati said of another famous centre of learning—16th Century Timbuktu—I quote. "... In those days Timbuktu did not have its equal ... from the province of Mali to the extreme limits of the region of the Maghrib, for the solidity of its institutions, its political liberties, the purity of its morals, the security of persons, its consideration and compassion towards the poor and towards foreigners, its courtesy towards students and men of learning and the financial assistance which it provided for the latter. The scholars of this period were the most respected among the Believers for their generosity, their force of character, and their discretion. . . ."

Finally, I would hope that this Institute would always conceive its function as being to study *Africa*, in the widest possible sense—Africa in all its complexity and diversity, and its underlying unity.

Let us consider some of the implications of the concept of African unity for the study of African peoples and cultures, and for the work of your Institute.

It should mean, in the first place, that in your research and your teaching you are not limited by conventional territorial or regional boundaries. This is essentially an Institute of *African* Studies, not of *Ghana* Studies, nor of *West African* Studies.

Of course, you are bound to take a special interest in exploring the history, institutions, languages and arts of the people of Ghana, and in establishing these studies on a sound basis—as indeed you are already doing.

But these investigations must inevitably lead *outwards*—to the exploration of the connections between the musical forms, the dances, the literature, the plastic arts, the philosophical and religious beliefs, the systems of government, the patterns of trade and economic organisation that have been developed here in Ghana, and the cultures of other African peoples and other regions of Africa. Ghana, that is to say, can only be understood in the total African context.

Let me illustrate this point.

As you know, Ghana has always been one of the great gold-producing areas of the world. Much of the gold from our mines was exported by our people, who conducted this trade as an exclusive state enterprise, to Jenne on the Niger, whence it was transported by canoe down the Niger to Timbuktu—the great entrepot and meeting-place of river-borne and desert-borne traffic. At Timbuktu the gold was transferred to the camel caravans, which carried it across the Sahara to the commercial centres of the Western Maghrib—whence part would be re-exported to Western Europe.

It was normal for African trading firms to have their agents in Jenne and Timbuktu, in Marrakesh and Fez, with trade connections stretching southwards to modern Ghana and northwards as far as England. Thus, in the early nineteenth century we find in Timbuktu, the home of the University of Sankore, merchants visiting their business colleagues in Liverpool, while merchants from North Africa took part in trade missions to Kumasi.

Another distinct commercial network had grown up around the Kola trade, linking Ghana and its neighbours with the Hausa States and Bornu, and thus—by the central Saharan trade-routes—with Tripoli and Tunis.

These commercial contacts were naturally reflected at the level of culture. The languages, literature, music, architecture and domestic arts of Ghana have made their impact, in a great variety of ways, through these ancient links on the wider African world, and beyond.

Very few of you may know, for example, that Baden Powell based the idea of the Boy Scout Movement, including the left-hand shake, on the concept of Ashanti military strategy and youth organisation.

Consider a Ghanaian writer like Al-Hajj 'Umoru, who lived from about 1850 to 1934, some forty of whose Arabic works, in poetry and prose, have so far been collected by the Institute of African Studies. Al-Hajj 'Umoru belonged to a family of Hausa traders and scholars—his great-grandfather had taken part in 'Uthman dan Fodio's revolution. Born and educated in Kano, he travelled along the kola route to Salaga where he settled as a young man and built up a school of Arabic and Koranic studies; at the time of the Salaga wars, he migrated to Kete-Krachi; well-read in classical Arabic Literature, he collected around him students from various parts of West Africa, and described in some of his poems the disintegration of African society consequent upon the coming of the British.

Similarly, we cannot hope to understand adequately the mediaeval civilisations of West Africa—ancient Ghana, Mali, Songhay, Kanem, Bornu, Oyo—without taking full account of the civilisations which emerged in Eastern, Central and Southern Africa—Meroe, Aksum, Adal, Kilwa, Monomotapa, Mogadishu, Malindi, Mombasa, Zanzibar, Pemba, Chang' Amir—exploring the problems of their inter-connections, their points of resemblance and difference. In North Africa, too, powerful enlightened civilisations had grown up in Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco.

These cities, states and empires developed their own political institutions and organisations, based on their own conceptions of the nature and ideals of society. These institutions and organisations were so efficient, and their underlying ideas so valid, that it is surely our duty to give them their place in our studies here.

Nor must the concept of African unity be thought of in a restrictive sense. Just as, in the study of West African civilisations, we have to examine their relationships, by way of the Sahara, with North Africa and the Mediterranean world, so, in studying the civilisations of Eastern and Southern Africa, we have to recognise the importance of their relationships, by way of the Indian Ocean, with Arabia, India, Indonesia and China.

The 11th Century Arab geographer, Al-Bakri, who gave the first full account of the ancient Empire of Ghana, also gave the first description of the Czech city of Prague.

When we turn to the study of modern Africa we are again confronted with the necessity of thinking in continental terms. The liberation movements which have emerged in Africa have clearly all been aspects of a single African revolution. They have to be understood from the standpoint of their common characteristics and objectives, as well as from the standpoint of the special kinds of colonial situation within which they have had to operate and the special problems which they have had to face.

So, while of course no single institution can possibly attempt to cover the whole range of African Studies in all their multiplicity and complexity, I hope to see growing up here in this Institute a body of scholars with interest as many-sided and diversified as our resources can allow. We should in time be able to provide for our students here opportunities for the study of the history, the major languages and literatures, the music and arts, the economic, social and political institutions, of the entire African continent—so that, though individual students will necessarily have to specialise in particular fields, there will be no major sector of African Studies that will be unrepresented here.

This is not, I think, too ambitious an aim. And I am glad to know that the Institute is already taking steps to develop research and teaching both in North African and in East African History—with their prerequisites, Arabic and Swahili.

At the same time, we must try to ensure that there is the same kind of diversity among the student body. While we are glad to welcome students from Asia, Europe and the Americas, we have naturally a special interest in developing this Institute as a centre where students from all parts of Africa can meet together and acquire this new learning—and thus take their places among the new generation of Africanists which Africa so urgently needs; where the artificial divisions between so-called “English-speaking”, “French-speaking”, “Portuguese-speaking” Africans will have no meaning.

The Encyclopaedia Africana, sponsored by the Ghana Academy of Sciences, should provide a forum for African scholars working together and setting forth the results of their research and scholarship.

Scholars, students and friends: the work on which you are engaged here can be of great value for the future of Ghana, of Africa and of the world. Here let me pay tribute to your Director, Thomas Hodgkin, for the energy and thought with which he has carried out his work. It is to his credit that such a firm foundation has been laid at this Institute.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I now have great pleasure in declaring the Institute of African Studies formally and officially open.