

Francis Kwame Nkrumah (21 September 1909 – 27 April 1972) was a Ghanaian Marxist politician, political theorist, and revolutionary. He served as Prime Minister of the Gold Coast from 1952 until 1957, when it gained independence from Britain.[1] He was then the first Prime Minister and then the President of Ghana, from 1957 until 1966. An influential advocate of Pan-Africanism, Nkrumah was a founding member of the Organization of African Unity and winner of the Lenin Peace Prize from the Soviet Union in 1962.[2]

After twelve years abroad pursuing higher education, developing his political philosophy, and organizing with other diasporic pan-Africanists, Nkrumah returned to the Gold Coast to begin his political career as an advocate of national independence.[3] He formed the Convention People's Party, which achieved rapid success through its unprecedented appeal to the common voter.[4] He became Prime Minister in 1952 and retained the position when Ghana declared independence from Britain in 1957. In 1960, Ghanaians approved a new constitution and elected Nkrumah President.[5]

His administration was primarily socialist as well as nationalist. It funded national industrial and energy projects, developed a strong national education system and promoted a pan-Africanist culture.[6] Under Nkrumah, Ghana played a leading role in African international relations during the decolonization period.[7]

Nkrumah's government became authoritarian in the 1960s, as he repressed political opposition and conducted elections that were not free and fair.[8][9][10][11][12] In 1964, a constitutional amendment made Ghana a one-party state, with Nkrumah as president for life of both the nation and its party.[13] He fostered a personality cult, forming ideological institutes and adopting the title of 'Osagyefo Dr.', while adorning currency with his images.[14] Nkrumah was deposed in 1966 by the National Liberation Council in a coup d'état, under whose supervision the country's economy was liberalized.[15] Nkrumah lived the rest of his life in Guinea, where he was named honorary co-president.[16][7][17]

Early life and education Gold Coast Kwame Nkrumah was born on Tuesday, 21 September 1909[18][19] in Nkroful, Gold Coast (now Ghana)[20]).[21] Nkroful was a small village in the Nzema area,[22] in the southwest of the Gold Coast, close to the frontier with the French colony of the Ivory Coast. His father did not live with the family, but worked in Half Assini where he pursued his goldsmith business until his death.[23] Kwame Nkrumah was raised by his mother and his extended family, who lived together traditionally and had more distant relatives often visiting.[24] He lived a carefree childhood, spent in the village, in the bush, and on the nearby sea.[25] During his years as a student in the United States, he was known as Francis Nwia Kofi Nkrumah, Kofi being the name given to males born on Fridays.[26] He later changed his name to Kwame Nkrumah in 1945 in the UK, preferring the name "Kwame".[27][28] According to Ebenezer Obiri Addo in his study of the future president, the name "Nkrumah", a name traditionally given to a ninth child, indicates that Kwame probably held that

place in the house of his father, who had several wives.[29]

His father, Opanyin Kofi Nwiana Ngolomah, came from Nkroful situated in Nzema East currently called Ellembele, belonging to the Akan tribe of the Asona clan.[30] Sources indicated that Ngolomah stayed at Tarkwa-Nsuaem and dealt in the goldsmith business.[31] In addition, Ngolomah was respected for his wise counsel by those who sought his advice on traditional issues and domestic affairs. He died in 1927.[32][21]

Kwame was the only child of his mother.[a][33] Nkrumah's mother sent him to the elementary school run by a Catholic mission at Half Assini, where he proved an adept student.[34] A German Catholic priest by the name of George Fischer was said to have profoundly influenced his elementary school education.

Although his mother, whose name was Elizabeth Nyanibah (1876/77–1979),[28][35] later stated his year of birth as 1912, Nkrumah wrote that he was born on 21 September 1909. His mother hailed from Nsuaem and belonged to the Agona family. She was a fishmonger and petty trader when she married his father.[36] Eight days after his birth, his father named him as Francis Nwia-Kofi after a relative[21] but later his parents named him as Francis Kwame Ngolomah.[31]

He progressed through the ten-year elementary programme in eight years. In 1925, he was a student-teacher in the school and was baptized into the Catholic faith.[37] While at the school, he was noticed by the Reverend Alec Garden Fraser, principal of the Government Training College (soon to become Achimota School) in the Gold Coast's capital, Accra. Fraser arranged for Nkrumah to train as a teacher at his school.[34][38] Here, Columbia-educated deputy headmaster Kwegyir Aggrey exposed him to the ideas of Marcus Garvey and W. E. B. Du Bois. Aggrey, Fraser, and others at Achimota thought that there should be close co-operation between the races in governing the Gold Coast, but Nkrumah, echoing Garvey, soon came to believe that only when the black race governed itself could there be harmony between the races.[39][40]

After obtaining his teacher's certificate from the Prince of Wales' College at Achimota in 1930,[28] Nkrumah was given a teaching post at the Roman Catholic primary school in Elmina in 1931.[28] After a year there, he was made headmaster of the school at Axim. In Axim, he started to get involved in politics and founded the Nzema Literary Society. In 1933, he was appointed a teacher at the Catholic seminary at Amissano.[41][42] Although the life there was strict, he liked it, and considered becoming a Jesuit. Nkrumah had heard journalist and future Nigerian president Nnamdi Azikiwe speak while a student at Achimota; the two men met and Azikiwe's influence increased Nkrumah's interest in black nationalism.[43] The young teacher decided to further his education.[42] Azikiwe had attended Lincoln University, a historically black college in Chester County, Pennsylvania, west of Philadelphia, and he advised Nkrumah to enroll there.[44] Nkrumah, who had failed the entrance examination for London University, gained funds for the trip and his education from relatives. He trav-

elled by way of Britain, where he learned, to his outrage, of Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, one of the few independent African nations. He arrived in the United States, in October 1935.[42][17][45]

United States According to historian John Henrik Clarke in his article on Nkrumah's American sojourn, "the influence of the ten years that he spent in the United States had a lingering effect on the rest of his life." [46] Nkrumah had sought entry to Lincoln University some time before he began his studies there. On Friday, 1 March 1935, he sent the school a letter noting that his application had been pending for more than a year. When he arrived in New York in October 1935, he traveled to Pennsylvania, where he enrolled despite lacking the funds for the full semester.[47] He soon won a scholarship that provided for his tuition at Lincoln University. He remained short of funds through his time in the US.[48] To make ends meet, he did menial jobs on roles such as a wholesaler of fish and poultries, cleaner, dishwasher and others.[49] On Sundays, he visited black Presbyterian churches in Philadelphia and in New York.[50]

Nkrumah completed a Bachelor of Arts degree in economics and sociology in 1939. Lincoln then appointed him an assistant lecturer in philosophy. He began to receive invitations to be a guest preacher in Presbyterian churches in Philadelphia and New York.[51][52] In 1939, Nkrumah enrolled at Lincoln's seminary and at the Ivy League University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia and in 1942, he was initiated into the Mu chapter of Phi Beta Sigma fraternity at Lincoln University.[53] Nkrumah gained a Bachelor of Theology degree from Lincoln in 1942, the top student in the course. He earned from Penn the following year a Master of Arts degree in philosophy and a Master of Science in education.[54] While at Penn, Nkrumah worked with the linguist William Everett Welmers, providing the spoken material that formed the basis of the first descriptive grammar of his native Fante dialect of the Akan language.[55]

Nkrumah spent his summers in Harlem, a center of black life, thought and culture. He found housing and employment in New York City with difficulty and involved himself in the community.[56] He spent many evenings listening to and arguing with street orators, and according to Clarke, Kwame Nkrumah in his years in America stated:[57]

These evenings were a vital part of Kwame Nkrumah's American education. He was going to a university – the university of the Harlem Streets. This was no ordinary time and these street speakers were no ordinary men ...The streets of Harlem were open forums, presided over [by] master speakers like Arthur Reed and his protege Ira Kemp. The young Carlos Cook [sic], founder of the Garvey oriented African Pioneer Movement was on the scene, also bringing a nightly message to his street followers. Occasionally Suji Abdul Hamid [sic], a champion of Harlem labour, held a night rally and demanded more jobs for blacks in their own community ...This is part of the drama on the Harlem streets as the student Kwame Nkrumah walked and watched.[58]