

Who 'decolonised' in Ghana?

Enquiry: Who 'decolonised' in the twentieth century?

Ms Apps



‘Decolonising’ the British Empire

In the years from 1914 - 1947 the British government faced a series of protests and rebellions throughout the British Empire. These were largely inspired by growing **nationalist** movements.

The Gold Coast had been a British colony since 1821. The Gold Coast had sent soldiers to fight for the British in both WWI and WWII. During WWII soldiers from the Gold Coast had shown great bravery in battle in Asia and the Pacific.



Rising Nationalism

By the time of WWII many of Britain's colonies with majority white populations (Canada, New Zealand, Australia) had been given **dominion** status. Dominion status gave these colonies self-government. The same process had not occurred in colonies in Asia and Africa.

In the Gold Coast a group of highly educated men such as Kwame Nkrumah began to vocally campaign for independence. They were inspired partially by events in India and Ireland. Nkrumah was also inspired by the idea of **Marxism**.



The career of Kwame Nkrumah

Kwame Nkrumah was central to the movement that led to Ghanaian independence. Nkrumah studied in the USA and UK. He became interested in the work of African American **activists** such as Marcus Garvey. Garvey argued for the development of black businesses, rejecting white help and arguing that African Americans should return 'back-to-Africa'.

During his time in England, Nkrumah became heavily involved in campaigns for African independence. He helped to organise the Pan-African Congress in Manchester. On his return to the Gold Coast he became the secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention. This was a group who shared the intention of achieving independence from Britain.



Tensions in the Gold Coast

When Kwame Nkrumah returned to the Gold Coast the colony was facing increasing economic difficulty. Jobs were scarce for the soldiers of the Gold Coast returning from WWII. The cost of food and goods were high, particularly as many goods in the Gold Coast were expensively **imported** from Britain and Europe. To protest against British Rule some nationalists organised a **boycott** of these goods from January, 1948. Tensions against British rule again rose in February of the same year when a peaceful protest march led by WWII veterans was fired upon by the British Police in the Gold Coast. Three people died and sixty were injured. Large-scale riots followed these shootings.



Tensions in the Gold Coast

The British blamed known nationalists for the disorder. Six key leaders, including Kwame Nkrumah, were imprisoned in the aftermath of the **boycotts** and riots. The British authorities feared an 'African revolution'.

Nkrumah and his fellow **nationalists** were freed in April. Nkrumah established a new political party; the Convention People's Party.

Nkrumah would face further spells in prison before the British accepted the need to give people living in the Gold Coast more political power. In 1952, Nkrumah became the Prime Minister of the Gold Coast with his party, the CPP, winning the highest proportion of votes.



Shift to Independence

Nkrumah was able to become Prime Minister for two main reasons. Firstly, the British introduced the right to vote for all adults living in the Gold Coast. Secondly, there was increasing support for nationalist politicians. By the 1950s it was accepted that Britain should give its colonies more power.

During Nkrumah's period as Prime Minister votes were held as to whether the Gold Coast should become independent. The vote in July 1956 showed unanimously that the Gold Coast wished to be independent. In 1957 the Gold Coast became the independent state of Ghana (named after an ancient civilisation in the region).



Nkrumah became the leader of Ghana, holding power from 1957 until 1966.

Nkrumah believed in pan-Africanism (that all Africans should work together for the greater good of the continent) and **marxism**. As a result, Nkrumah developed a welfare system to look after the poorest people in Ghana.

However, Nkrumah ruled as a **dictator** and only his party the CPP were allowed power.

He was overthrown by the military in 1966. He died in exile in 1972. His body now lays in Accra.



Glossary

Activist - A person who campaigns to bring about political change.

Boycott - To refuse to buy goods or use a service.

Dictator - A leader who completely controls a country.

Dominion - A former colony of the British Empire given control over its own government.

Import - Goods bought into a country.

Nationalism - A person who believes in the rights to control your own country.

Marxism - Marxists believe in the theories of Karl Marx. Marx believed the state should own all businesses and share the wealth.

Pan-African - A belief that all of the peoples of Africa should work together.



Comprehension Questions

1. What was the Gold Coast?

Sentence starter: The Gold Coast was...

2. Who was Kwame Nkrumah inspired by as a student?
3. Why did the British fear a 'revolution' in the Gold Coast in 1948?
4. What position did Kwame Nkrumah receive in the 1950s?
5. Challenge: Why do some see Kwame Nkrumah a controversial figure in Ghanaian history?

