Africa to the World!

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Abstract: Kwame Nkrumah was one of the most fascinating, revolutionary Africans in world history. From humble origins, US-educated Nkrumah led the effort to overthrow colonial rule in Ghana and Africa, sought vast sums of economic aid from the West for Ghana’s Volta River Project, and as the leading Pan-Africanist and vocal member of the world’s non-aligned leadership worked to create the United States of Africa. Nkrumah promoted these goals, and more, in a novel form of historical evidence—philately. This article examines Ghanaian stamps and argues that Nkrumah used them overtly and symbolically to advance his national and international agendas. It also compares and contrasts Nkrumah’s use of stamps to promote Pan-Africanism with the approaches of Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and Sékou Touré of Guinea. Additionally, the philatelic reflections of Nkrumah-era Ghana illustrate the brilliant colors, stunning beauty, clever art, enduring optimism, and African themes of the Nkrumah era stamps.

Introduction

Ghanaian philately is a treasure trove of evidence that documents with creativity and beauty the efforts of “Africa’s Man of the Millennium” to fulfill his Ghanaian and Pan-Africanist agendas. Ghanaian stamps reveal many of Nkrumah’s ambitious goals, including his quest for independence, economic development, social justice, Ghanaian culture, and the unification of Africa. The semiotics of Nkrumah-era Ghanaian stamps between 1957 and 1966 display an optimism and purpose that are directed not only to Ghanaians, but also to all humans—to global Africans across time and place.

Stamps have become increasingly accepted as historical evidence to support the more traditional forms of letters, photographs, government documents and newspapers. In Miniature Messages: The Semiotics and Politics of Latin American Postage Stamps, Jack Child argues that stamps have an international impact through their semiotics (“the study of signs and the messages they contain”), which include overt and hidden signs and messages created by governments and handled by the public worldwide. Child also argues that stamps are products of popular culture because a significant number of the world’s population sees and uses them. He credits philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce with establishing the science of semiotics and David Scott for applying semiotics to philately. These views are in harmony with those of Ghanaian philately’s greatest artist, Kofi Antubam, who believed the images on Ghanaian stamps should educate through symbolism.

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Prior to Child’s book, Merrick Posnansky, Agbenyega Adedze, and Donald Reid argued persuasively that stamps could be used as evidence to access African history and culture. They noted the important depictions of indigenous objects, representations of power, conveyance of cultural heritage, and the proclamation of values and policies. Posnansky encouraged historians to view stamps as evidence of anti-colonial imagery.⁶ Adedze explored chiefship in West African philately and Ghana’s history in Ghanaian stamps.⁷ Reid examined the spirit and values of Egyptian history through that country’s stamps.⁸ Scholars now enter the philatelic past to analyze how imperial elites and their revolutionary successors portrayed themselves, their cultures, and their histories.

Origins of Ghanaian Philately

British postal services in the Gold Coast began in 1853, though the first stamps were not issued until 1875.⁹ Like the world’s first adhesive stamp, the “Penny Black” and its British successors, up to 1902 the stamps of the Gold Coast featured Queen Victoria’s westward facing profile.¹⁰ After almost a century of colonial philately, African cultural images on Gold Coast stamps finally appeared in mid-1948, seven months following Kwame Nkrumah’s return to the Gold Coast after thirteen years abroad in the United States and England. Yet the African images (talking drums, sacred Lake Bosomtwe, and surf boats) remained subordinate to themes of colonial authority and resource extraction (Christianborg Castle, Mounted Constabulary, and manganese).¹¹ All were punctuated by the directly facing imperial head of King George VI. None reflected the two months of prison time Nkrumah was given just prior to their issue for leading anti-colonial protests.

With imperial rule in the Gold Coast about to end, Nkrumah and his Ghanaian advisors considered several applications for the contract to produce and market Ghanaian stamps.¹² The Ghana Philatelic Agency (GPA), based in New York, submitted the successful bid.¹³ Its creator, Manfred Raphael Lehmann, had since 1953 established the Ghana American Corporation, met
Ghanaian officials in New York and Ghana, including Komla Agbeli Gbedemah, Krobo Edusei, and Kojo Botsio, supported their struggle for independence, and was present at Nkrumah’s inauguration during Ghana’s independence ceremonies in 1957. Lehmann contracted with Krobo Edusei to plan, design, manufacture, and market Ghana’s stamps for twenty-five years, amended later to five years at Lehmann’s suggestion. Previously, Crown Agents had produced Gold Coast stamps in London and Washington and restricted sales to several wholesalers. Entrepreneurial philatelist Jacques Minkus, who expected to gain the contract through his connections to Nkrumah, lost out. Later, Manfred and wife Anne Lehmann took on Togo and other newly independent countries. For a while, they formed separate country agencies named after each client nation (Ghana Philatelic Agency, Togo Philatelic Agency, and others). The Lehmanns also broke open the restricted philatelic market established by the Crown Agents and the “Syndicate,” which was an oligopoly that marked up face value prices of new issues sold to collectors. They promoted Ghanaian stamps on radio talk shows, in film, through press releases, at stamp clubs, and arranged for their display at the Smithsonian. By 1969, the Lehmanns combined the separate country agencies into what became the Inter-Governmental Philatelic Corporation (IGPC) and sold the business.

There was a clear profit motive to producing stamps beyond the value of a contract with Ghana’s Post Office. As the son of a Lehmann neighbor, who conducted a stamp business out of his home, noted, Ghana’s “1957 independence set... was one of the best all time stamp sellers” for their business. Collectors thought that Ghana’s first stamp issues would increase in value, especially since “Ghana had overprinted the old Gold Coast definitive issue and . . . there would be limited quantities available.” The “Nkrumah set of four” became a great seller, as did three additional stamps printed on demand in 1958. The neighbor then advised Lehmann to take up the Ghana government’s offer of selling stamps to collectors on behalf of the Post Office, “and then Manfred started to import the stamps. This was the beginning of Inter-Governmental Philatelic Corporation, which today is one of the world’s leading philatelic stamp marketing companies.”

Once the IGPC entered into a contract with the Ghanaian government to produce stamps, the two entities developed a stamp production program to meet the needs of both the local and international stamp markets. Thus, given the routine process of creation and production, Nkrumah and his agents provided GPA (IGPC) with the original concepts that GPA forwarded to its stable of graphic artists to implement. Between 1957 and 1966, GPA employed an international group of some twenty-two graphic designers to produce approximately 250 Nkrumah-era stamps. Few of these designers have obvious Ghanaian names. Of the group, only Maxim and Gabriel Shamir appear to be internationally renowned. Latvian Zionists, they designed Israel’s coat of arms, early currency, and stamps. Thus, it is somewhat ironic that two Zionists, whose country Nkrumah condemned as a "base of imperialism" at conferences of the Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization (AAPSO) at Conakry in April 1960 and at Casablanca in early 1962, designed about ten of Ghana’s Nkrumah-era stamps and that the GPA’s founder was himself a life-long Zionist. Hidden beneath that apparent irony, however, were state visits to Ghana by Zionist...
General Moshe Dayan in September 1957 and Israeli Foreign Minister Golda Meir in March 1958, Nkrumah's statements to President Dwight Eisenhower in 1958 that he intended to establish close relations with Israel, and Nkrumah's invitation to Israel to set up the first embassy in newly independent Ghana. Furthermore, Israeli water-planning and construction specialists assisted Ghanaian rural water development projects and Israel loaned Ghana $20 million from 1958-62. The Israelis also participated in the establishment of Ghana Airlines and Black Star Shipping Lines (which were issued as commemoratives) and Ghana National Construction Company, which helped complete the Volta River Project. Lehmann's access to Zionist financial assistance may help explain why Ghana awarded him the contract to produce and market Ghanaian stamps and rejected bids from friends of Ghana far more experienced in the stamp business and apparently closer to Nkrumah. Nevertheless, Nkrumah soon loosened his diplomatic ties with Israel, due largely to the Palestinian issue in 1962 and Israel's opposition to Patrice Lumumba during the Congo Crisis in 1961.

Not surprisingly, given their recent production, catalogue values for Nkrumah-era stamps are modest compared to Gold Coast rarities of Queen Victoria. Yet Nkrumah-era philately is an African cache of striking colors, beautiful designs, and indigenous and international subjects. Clearly, Nkrumah-era stamps are far more interesting than the British Queen's repetitious, ageless Gold Coast profiles. By the time of Harold MacMillan's "Winds of Change" speech in Accra on 10 January 1960, which was a reference to independence movements in Africa and which Nkrumah re-characterized as more like a "raging hurricane," over seventy issues of Ghanaian philately had since 6 March 1957 appeared in the world's mailboxes with imagery of Africa's awakening from colonial rule.

Early Nkrumah-Era Philately

Between 1875 and 1957, Ghanaians, then Gold Coasters, had only seen symbols of imperial and colonial rule on Gold Coast stamps. Kwame Nkrumah, who was imprisoned in 1950 for opposing colonial rule, elected to office while incarcerated, and released in 1951 to serve in Ghana's Legislative Assembly, led the successful effort to end British rule on 6 March 1957. Understanding the iconic value of stamps, Nkrumah replaced the Queen's image with his own on Ghana's first postage stamp (see below), designed by gifted Ghanaian artist Kofi Antubam. Nkrumah exclaimed: "Many of my people cannot read or write. When they buy stamps, they will see my picture--an African like themselves--and they will say, 'Aiee, look, here is my leader on the stamps. We are truly a free people.'" Imperial imagery on remaining Gold Coast stamp stock met the same fate. Nkrumah cancelled British rule by overprinting their imperial themes with "Ghana Independence 6th March 1957."
Beginning in 1960, later issues often combined images of independence and the transition to a republic with Nkrumah’s portrait, as in the proclaimed holiday issues of Founder’s Day and Republic Day. Nkrumah cleverly combined pictures of himself with Ghana’s national flag, national seal, the black star, Kente cloth, Pan-Africanism, annual festivals of independence, world leadership, anti-colonialism, economic development, communal African life, and Abraham Lincoln.

Nkrumah eventually appeared in some form on thirty-four of the approximately 250 Ghanaian Nkrumah-era stamps. If Nkrumah the “Osagyefo” (Redeemer) is guilty of developing a cult around himself, Nkrumah stamps pale in number and longevity to the British Queens’ philatelic presence between 1840 and 2011. Just as the Queens’ images were intended to symbolize the unity of the British Empire and entrench legitimacy of rule, so those of Nkrumah sought to unite previously fractious Ghanaian ethnic groups and the emerging countries of Africa. Arguably, Nkrumah’s philatelic imagery reflected more his vision than his conceit. Shortly after his overthrow, Nkrumah insisted he had no pretensions. He wrote, “I am a human being and I am fighting imperialism and neo-colonialism (the greatest evils of our modern times) as a human being and not as a god.”

Nkrumah-Era African Philately: Issues Common and Unique

The further African nationalists forced the colonial era into the past, the more frequently newly independent African states issued stamps of common themes related to human rights, social justice, medicine, and sport. This increasing trend began shortly after Nkrumah came to power. While in October 1958 only Tunisia joined Ghana from the group of seven independent African countries to issue a commemorative stamp celebrating UN Day, two years later in 1960, thirteen of twenty-five independent African countries recognized the seventeenth Olympics.

Common issues among Ghana and contemporaneous independent African countries included the Olympics (1960 and 1964: 13 of 25 and 24 of 36 African countries respectively); the WHO Malaria Eradication Campaign (1962: 24 of 30 African countries); Freedom from Hunger Campaign (1963: 29 of 33 African countries); Red Cross Centenary (1963: 24 of 33 African countries); UN Campaign to Preserve the Nubian Monuments (1964: 17 of 36 African countries);
International Cooperation Year (1965: 25 of 37 African countries); Centennial of International Telecommunications Union (1965: 25 African countries); Abraham Lincoln (1965: 15 of 37 African countries); and John F. Kennedy (1965: 22 of 37 African countries). Ghana's most beautiful commemorative related to science, concurrently issued with nine African countries, celebrated "The Year of the Quiet Sun." Ghana, with its connection to New York City-based GPA, used the symbol of the 1964 New York World’s Fair, which was the twelve-story, stainless steel, and transparent globe—the Unisphere, as the striking vignette of this striking souvenir sheet.

Common philatelic issues provided a form of Pan-African expression, but individual African countries could also use philately to promote their visions of themselves and of the world. Well aware of their powerful semiotics, Nkrumah often cleverly used stamps to animate Ghanaian national consciousness and demonstrate that "the emancipation of the African continent is the emancipation of man." Nkrumah-era Ghanaian stamps provide significant evidence that Nkrumah the Osagyefo used philately to restore Ghanaian ethnic dignity and establish Ghana as a world presence in the aftermath of the long century of colonial rule in Africa.

While doing so, he also promoted ethnic culture to strengthen Ghanaian national identity. His Asante Minister of Communications, Krobo Edusei, must have encouraged Nkrumah to wear Asante Kente cloth and promote Adinkra symbols related to Asante culture, especially the four issues of Gye Nyame, a troubled Asante symbol transformed by Ghanaian philately to incorporate all Ghanaians. The traditional Adinkra symbols (below left) are fascinating choices from over a hundred possibilities. They are likely variations of fofoo (envy), mmomudwan (unity), and duafe (female beauty). More obviously national in scope are Nkrumah-era stamps that celebrate Ghanaian football, which precede by thirty years Nelson Mandela’s use of sport (rugby) to unify South Africa.

Nkrumah also sought to develop Ghana’s economy quickly by establishing both aviation and shipping industries. The semiotics of Ghana Airways and the Black Star Line support his efforts. Ghana Airways is flying directly into the technologically advanced world, suggesting with its waving flag partly revealed that Ghana has taken flight from colonialism and is now an equal in international diplomacy. The Black Star Line, whose name was taken from Marcus
Garvey’s defunct shipping line, is also a remarkable issue. Ghana, apparently symbolized by the nimble flying fish, is flying above Ghana’s country name and appears to welcome the arrival of Ghana’s shipping industry. The shipping issue may demonstrate that innovative nature and advanced industry can thrive together under the light of the black star.

Unique among African countries was Ghana’s provocative four-stamp series, "World Without the Bomb." Their issue eerily predated by two years the anti-Barry Goldwater "Daisy" attack ad created by Lyndon Johnson’s campaign staff, which depicted a child counting daisy pedals that symbolized the countdown of an atomic explosion, and suggested what would happen if Goldwater won the election. The catalysts for Nkrumah’s anti-nuclear philatelic series were the French Gerboise nuclear tests (1960-1961) in the Sahara Desert. In protest, Nkrumah recalled the Ghanaian ambassador to France and in the spirit of Gandhi’s satyagraha (peaceful resistance) threatened an African march to the Saharan test sites. On 7 April 1960, Nkrumah announced his Positive Action campaign calling upon African nations to
demand the end of atomic tests in Africa.\textsuperscript{47} Ghana issued the anti-nuclear series on 21 June 1962. In contrast to M. Goaman’s hopeful “Five Continents at Peace,” Israeli Maxim Shamir transformed the mushroom cloud of an atomic explosion into a human skull to demonstrate the pervasive fear and devastation of atomic war.\textsuperscript{48} Soon the anti-bomb series took on even more gravity.

Four months later on 22 October 1962, Kennedy announced that the US had discovered Russian missiles in Cuba. As a non-aligned leader, Nkrumah had visited Russia and other socialist countries for two months in 1961 during which he established friendly relations with the Russians and attended the Conference of Non-Aligned States in Belgrade in early September.\textsuperscript{49} Nonetheless, Nkrumah refused to permit the Russians to refuel their planes in Ghana to break the US boycott around Cuba.\textsuperscript{50} Nkrumah’s opposition to Nikita Khrushchev’s request may have contributed to the Russian leader’s decision to remove the missiles.

Another powerful image of Nkrumah-era philately had nothing to do with fear. The friendship handshake between black and white hands, which was the only African issue in 1958 to celebrate UN Day, conveys Nkrumah’s growing international presence and support for diplomacy.\textsuperscript{51} Africa was now emerging as an equal partner to Europe. The semiotics also supports his views on ethnic equality, national sovereignty, and the end of colonialism.

\begin{figure}[h]
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\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{ghana_stamp.png}
\caption{Scott 2002 3, "Ghana": "UN Day," 24 Oct. 1958, p. 209, nos. 36 and 38.}
\end{figure}

Nkrumah said:

“The foulest intellectual rubbish ever invented by man is that of racial superiority and inferiority.... I do not believe in racialism and tribalism. The concept ‘Africa for the Africans’ does not mean that other races are excluded from it.”\textsuperscript{52}

In early 1958 Ghana issued the first African stamp series commemorating Abraham Lincoln. Arguably, Nkrumah’s motivations were idealistic and economic. The Osagyefo sought to associate himself and Ghana with Lincoln’s struggle against slavery, secession, and restoration of national unity. Nkrumah’s alma mater in Pennsylvania, Lincoln University, was surely on his mind when this Lincoln series came out. Calling upon iconic Lincoln also symbolically helped him in his effort to gain economic assistance from the US for the Volta River project. The first of two Lincoln series during the Nkrumah era was also the most
powerful, portraying the Osagyefo in western dress with the Lincoln Memorial in the background. This was Ghana’s first issue featuring a foreigner, even predating the Queen and her husband.

Nkrumah must have had similar aspirations in mind when Ghana issued its prominent Eleanor Roosevelt four-stamp series in 1963, which celebrated the fifteenth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The vast majority of African countries did so with variations of the UN emblem and scales, avoiding direct association with the United States. Just Ethiopia, Sudan, Guinea, and Ghana chose the image of First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, who was a primary contributor to the declaration, as central to their series. Arguably, Nkrumah took the opportunity to use Eleanor Roosevelt’s iconic image to nurture the warm relations he had established earlier with the United States as the Cold War era turned cooler.

The Volta River Project, the Akosombo Dam, and International Capital

In 1957, euphoric Ghana, the first post-Second World War African country to achieve independence from European rule, now had to move beyond short-term festivity to long-term prosperity. Nkrumah’s economic centerpiece was the Volta River Project, which included the construction of modern port facilities at Tema. Upstream, the project included building the Akosombo Dam to generate electricity for consumers, power aluminum production, offer employment, supplement fishing, and create a tourist industry proximate to the dam. To fulfill these goals, Nkrumah required significant international investment capital. Nkrumah knew first-hand the wealth of the US and UK and that their financial support could fund his effort to accelerate the industrialization of Ghana. Not surprisingly, Ghanaian philatelic imagery strongly reflects such connective aspirations.
Just over a year after becoming Ghana’s prime minister, Nkrumah carried out state visits to Canada and the United States. During 23-26 July 1958, Nkrumah visited Washington, D.C., where he met President Dwight Eisenhower (23-24 July), gained his support for the Volta River Project, and addressed the Senate (24 July) and House (25 July). Nkrumah simultaneously recognized this important diplomacy by issuing a commemorative postcard of himself in Kente cloth, overprinting Ghana’s first Nkrumah stamps with "Prime Minister’s Visit U.S.A. and Canada" and creating a special cover that paired Nkrumah with Eisenhower. Krobo Edusei and Manfred Lehmann likely arranged the commemorative postcard of Nkrumah in Kente, a cloth associated with power and the Asante royal family, for Nkrumah’s US trip.

Two years later on 21 September 1960, Nkrumah and Eisenhower met again—this time in New York. According to Nkrumah, Eisenhower expressed exasperation with the slowness of direct US support for the Volta River Project and then demanded from a subordinate, “Why don’t you get on with the damned thing?”

Nkrumah and his advisors also directed philatelic semiotics toward their former colonial power to gain British support for the Volta River Project. Keen to relieve the British taxpayer from colonial expenses, British entrepreneurs and government officials had already carried out several surveys between 1914 and 1950 related to power and aluminum production on the Volta River. During his anti-colonial campaign to achieve independence, Nkrumah never sought expulsion of British capital. Instead, Nkrumah remained dependent on British officials and finances with some £500 million invested in long-term, low-interest British bonds. With a governor general in place as late as 1960, three years after independence, Whitehall listened to the newest member of the Commonwealth. After his state visit in Canada and the United States ended in 1958, Nkrumah flew to England to negotiate financial support for the Volta River project and to arrange for royal visits to Ghana. In 1959, Nkrumah welcomed the royal visit of Prince Phillip, who along with the visit of Harold MacMillan in 1960 set the stage for Queen Elizabeth’s visit in 1961.

For Nkrumah to gain access to British capital, the success of the Queen’s visit was essential. Her royal highness was appropriately cosseted and apparently impressed. Both visits were commemorated in Ghanaian philately. Ghana Post celebrated the Queen’s visit with an attractive souvenir sheet. She was only the second foreigner, after Abraham Lincoln, to receive the honor of a souvenir sheet. Shortly after the Queen’s visit, Tema Harbor, near the mouth of the Volta River, officially opened. Ultimately, the British invested in the Volta River Project. The Americans also noticed. After the success of the Queen’s visit and with additional support from the State Department and CIA, President Kennedy announced on 12 December 1961 that the US would participate in the Volta River Project.

The Akosombo Dam’s opening in January 1966 was the result of years of skilful negotiations between Kwame Nkrumah, Dwight Eisenhower, John F. Kennedy and others, including Kaiser Aluminum, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the US Agency for International Development, the UK Export-Import Bank, and the UK Board of Trade on behalf of the Exports Credits Guarantee Department. Nkrumah argued that he had borrowed funds carefully, under strict conditions, and with Ghana’s self-interests primarily in mind while retaining sufficient power to prevent developed socialist and capitalist supporters from taking advantage of Ghanaians.
Critics and supporters of the Akosombo Dam and the Volta River Project have had much to say over the years. Yet, Nkrumah negotiated with skill and personal charm with world leaders and consummate capitalists. He formed a friendship with Edgar Kaiser who interceded on Nkrumah's behalf on several occasions when the project seemed doomed yet again for fear of serious financial and political Cold War-induced risks. Such were the complexities of the negotiations and goodwill between Nkrumah, Kaiser, Eisenhower, and Kennedy. Nkrumah declared as much in his speech opening the Akosombo Dam. He said:

Edgar Kaiser, President Eisenhower, and President Kennedy were genuinely interested in this project because they saw, behind the cold figures and the rigid calculations, that the Volta River Project was not only an economically viable project, but also an opportunity of the United States of America to make a purposeful capital investment in a developing country. In other words, they saw in the Volta River Project a scheme with new dimensions of growth and development, which they felt could benefit both Ghana and the United States.

It was on this common ground of our mutual respect and common advantage that our two countries—Ghana and the United States of America—made the contact from which grew this project. The result of this contact is living proof that nations and people can cooperate and coexist peacefully with mutual advantage to themselves despite differences of economic and political opinions.

Critics have also condemned the human costs of the resettlement schemes, arguing that the long-term costs of relocating 80,000 Ghanaians outweighed the long-term economic benefits of the Volta River Project. Experts discussed the resettlement experience at length at a conference in Kumasi, Ghana in March 1965 and reassessed it in 1968. Most of those who presented papers were involved in the resettlement program. Robert Chambers, who carried out an objective assessment of the resettlement program, concluded that its shortcomings should be balanced with its successes. He noted that whatever the long-term effects proved to be, Ghanaians "were well-endowed in dedication and energy" and that "the Volta resettlement operation will stand as a brave and imaginative attempt with limited resources to tackle a challenging and urgent crisis."

Such controversies were lost among the perforations bordering the Volta River Project stamp series issued when the dam opened in January 1966. One of the cleverest Nkrumah-era stamps is the reservoir’s water running through the letters of GHANA to commemorate the opening of the dam and the electrification of much of Ghana and her neighbors. Individual workers also appear on two stamps in that series—one faces west, the other east. The semiotics suggests that non-aligned Nkrumah used capitalist and socialist policies to create the Volta River Project.

Nkrumah-era John F. Kennedy memorial stamps are intriguing, given the CIA’s consent to support Ghanaian dissident efforts to overthrow Nkrumah in a conspiracy led by one of Nkrumah’s ministers, Komla Gbedemah in September 1961 and probably later in July-August 1962. Nkrumah’s Pan-Africanist policies seemed to challenge Eisenhower and Kennedy’s policies of orderly change in the status quo. Yet Nkrumah was immensely impressed with Kennedy and his family during his visit to the White House on 8 March 1961 and appreciated both Kennedy’s support for African nationalist movements and reactivation of suspended US financial aid for the Volta River Project. Kennedy’s assassination in November 1963 shocked and grieved Nkrumah. Ghana Post was still selling JFK stamps, issued in mid-December 1965, when dissidents overthrew Nkrumah in February 1966. Nkrumah-era philately, with its beauty, African imagery, noble goals, and humane messages, could not save Nkrumah’s government.

Ghana and Pan-Africanism

From its Diasporic roots to the Nkrumah era, Pan-Africanism became more Africa centered. Nkrumah symbolized this process, as he was personally advised by the great Pan-Africanists George Padmore and W.E.B. Du Bois. The first Pan African Congresses were held outside the continent: London (1900), Paris, London and Brussels (1919-1921), London and Lisbon (1923), New York (1927), and Manchester (1945). At the latter Nkrumah served as co-organizational secretary with Padmore. Afterwards, a working committee comprised of Nkrumah as secretary and Du Bois as chair provided continued leadership.

Immediately after Ghana’s independence in March 1957, Nkrumah established a Pan-Africanist activist foreign policy to liberate Africa from colonial rule. Only united and non-
aligned, he believed, could African states be sufficiently powerful to overcome neo-colonial forces. The Conference of Independent African States in Accra in 1958, at which Nkrumah argued his views on unity and world peace, set much of the foundation for an informal UN secretariat, and strengthened African collaboration on nonaligned issues. From 1959 to 1963, Nkrumah annually commemorated the growing number of newly independent African countries with "Africa Freedom Day" issues. Ghana Post also commemorated the locations of Nkrumah's most powerful Pan-Africanist speeches. The Casablanca Group, which formed under Nkrumah's leadership, attempted to spur unity among African states emerging from colonial rule. From 3-7 January 1961, six African countries met in Casablanca to lay the basis for what eventually became the Organization of African Unity (OAU) and to throw its support behind Patrice Lumumba in the Congo Crisis.

In 1965, two years after the establishment of the OAU with its headquarters in Ethiopia, member nations met in Accra and Nkrumah succeeded Haile Selassie and Gamal Abdel Nasser as the organization’s third chairperson. The OAU was not the strong United States of Africa that Nkrumah had sought to establish, but it was a step forward. Rising nationalist and ethnic identities of emerging African elites experiencing independent power and sovereignty for the first time, as well as opposition by some to any form of Pan-African political union, weakened the OAU.

While Nkrumah knew creating a United States of Africa would be difficult, he probably did not expect the US to be such an obstacle. Adam Hochschild recently reminded US citizens of the collective shame they shared in the collaboration of the US in the gruesome torture, execution, and multi-burials of the democratically elected Congo leader, Patrice Lumumba. Nkrumah and Lumumba were friends, and discussed a union between their countries and opposition to imperialism and colonialism when Lumumba twice visited Ghana—from 5-13 December 1958 for the Pan-African Padmore-organized All-African People's Conference and 7-8 August 1960 for further negotiations. To memorialize his pan-Africanist ally, Nkrumah issued
the Lumumba series on the first anniversary of his death, perhaps wondering whether western collaborators in Lumumba’s death had now targeted him.84

On 24 February 1966, Ghanaian military and police dissidents overthrew Kwame Nkrumah while he was in China on a peace mission to end the American war in VietNam. He ignored both the lack of US endorsement and Ghanaian advice to remain in Ghana, as there was evidence of a forthcoming coup. With the connivance of the CIA Accra station, General Joseph A. Ankrah, Colonel Emmanuel Kwesi Kotoka, and J.W.K. Harley led the successful conspiracy.85 Thus began some twenty years of agreements between Nkrumah’s successors and the IMF, which together undermined local self-sufficiency and development.86 Whether this would have happened anyway, given the cost of the dam and the decline in cocoa production and profits, is uncertain. Nkrumah was overthrown before he was able to act on recommendations from the advisory committee sent out by the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development to analyze and offer improvements to his Seven Year Plan, which in 1965 had four more years until completion. The commission only completed its analysis with some twenty recommendations three weeks after Nkrumah was overthrown. Thus, Nkrumah never had the chance to gain crucial support of the IBRD by adopting its recommendations.87

Although Nkrumah’s non-aligned foreign policy tilted somewhat toward socialist countries in the early 1960s, given his Pan-Africanist policies, anti-colonial speeches, and visits to non-aligned and socialist countries, he always kept one leg more firmly in the capitalist camp. And that leg sensibly carried the bulk of GPA-produced Nkrumah-era philately around the world emanating from its New York City headquarters on Wall Street near the New York Stock Exchange until late 1959, and from early 1960 on West 34th Street near Madison Square Garden. With some irony, given that capitalists worked for his overthrow, Nkrumah’s philately was far more capitalistic than socialist in origin and semiotics.

In contrast to western capitalists, no foreign socialist leaders or symbols received such attention. Imagery related to socialism is subtle, usually commemorating the creation of state-owned industries and agriculture, and presented semiotically as background themes depicting state farms, and communal agriculture.88 Although capitalist critics during the Cold War often accused Nkrumah of being too close to Moscow, there is little semiotic evidence of this in
Nkrumah-era Ghanaian philately. Rather, the relevant stamps are almost all friendly to capitalism.

Pan-Africanists George Padmore and W.E.B. Du Bois, who advised Nkrumah in Ghana until their deaths, were buried in Accra in 1959 and 1963 respectively, and were far more friendly toward socialism than capitalism have never been depicted in Ghanaian philately.89 Obviously, the Ghanaians who overthrew Nkrumah sought to shun the Osagyefo in the popular mind, but now half a century has passed since the great Pan-Africanists began their eternal rest in Ghana. In 1998, Ghana issued a stamp of Henry Louis Gates, Jr., the director of Harvard University’s W.E.B. Du Bois Institute, but Du Bois’s commemoration remains unfulfilled.90 Even the US Postal Service has commemorated Du Bois twice—in 1992 and 1998.91 Ghana Post has some unfinished Pan-African business.

Pan-Africanism Philately Elsewhere in Africa

Nkrumah was not alone among his contemporary Africa leaders in utilizing stamps to promote Pan-Africanism, but not all of them shared his particular vision of a United States of Africa nor did they necessarily utilize philately in the same manner. Julius Nyerere of Tanzania was one of Nkrumah’s most noted contemporaries, but he held different views about how best to achieve the unification of Africa. In contrast to Nkrumah’s federal union approach Nyerere sought to form regional groups first. With prior British combinations of Zanzibar, Uganda, Kenya, and Tanzania in various alliances, for Nyerere an East African Federation seemed a good outcome after independence. Nkrumah rejected Nyerere’s regional unification approach because he believed it was a form of balkanization that would slow and impede the unification of Africa.92 For Nyerere, the answer was not so simple. Philatelically, one must consider three nomenclatures—Tanganyika (Tanzania’s independent predecessor) and two Tanzanias. Tanganyika issued fifteen stamps between 9 December 1961 and 9 December 1962 commemorating independence and the republic.93 Tanganyika was succeeded philatelicly by the merging of Tanganyika and Zanzibar to form Tanzania on 26 April 1964. Shortly thereafter in 1965, “Tanzania” the country and “Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania” the regional federation, began to produce stamps concurrently under the East African Common Services Organization. The tripartite regional entity, however, stopped issuing stamps when the East African Community collapsed in 1977. While the federation existed, stamps issued by Tanzania alone were also valid in Kenya and Uganda.94 Assessing Tanzanian stamps from mid-1962 through mid-1971 reveals the philatelic degree of Nyerere’s Pan-Africanist vision.

Tanzania issued three series totaling thirty-four stamps to 1971. The first series issued under the United Republic of Tanganyika and Zanzibar and valid only in Tanganyika recognized their newly established unification.95 The second stamp series, which hails as Tanzania for the first time, appeared in December 1965 and depicts such Tanzanian topics as animal life, Dar es Salaam, Olduvai Gorge, and the country’s coat of arms.96 The third series is devoted to fish.97 Tanzania’s first overtly Pan-African stamp did not appears until 1980 and commemorated the Pan African Postal Union.98 Tanzanian stamps commemorating economic union in Africa followed in 1983.99 Of the first 289 Tanzanian stamps to 1985 during the Nyerere era, only these two issues promoted Pan-Africanist themes.100 One can find occasional support for regional African causes, but no Tanzanian stamp advocated African political union,
which was both Nkrumah’s immediate concern and Nyerere’s long-range goal.101 This is hardly surprising, given Nyerere’s comments about Pan-Africanism five months after Nkrumah was overthrown:

In order to fulfill its responsibilities to the people it has led to freedom, each nationalist government must develop its own dominant nationalism. This is true however devoted to the cause of African unity the different national leaders may be. For while it is certainly true that in the long run the whole of Africa, and all its peoples, would be best served by unity, it is equally true, as Lord Keynes is reported to have said, that ‘in the long run we are all dead.’102

After Nyerere, Tanzanian postal officials began an aggressive "pop philately" campaign to lure revenue from international stamp collectors. Since 1988, Tanzania has issued at least sixty-five Disney-character stamps.103 Tanzania has commemorated Queen Elizabeth, Elvis Presley, Marilyn Monroe, and Jerry Garcia, but Kwame Nkrumah has yet to appear.104 While it may be true, as James N. Karioki stated in 1974, that Tanzania was "much more committed to the cause of African unity than any other East African country," Tanzania has expressed it poorly in philately.105 Yet what of the regional stamps valid in Tanzania? Perhaps the "Kenya Uganda Tanzania" issues to 1976 convey strong Pan-Africanist themes.

From April 1965 to January 1976, the regional tripartite entity empowered the East African Common Services Organization to produce about 175 stamps valid in Tanzania.106 Three series indirectly promoted Pan-Africanism.107 Another ten, however, celebrated regional unity with topics that largely support the first step of Nyerere’s vision of Pan Africanism—regional cohesion.108 As expected, the semiotics of Nyerere’s regional Pan-African philatelic legacy contrasts with that of Nkrumah’s continental vision in scope and intensity.

In contrast to Tanzania, Guinean stamps reflected a more Ghanaian Pan-Africanist perspective and more consistently resemble Nkrumah-era philately than issues from Tanzania or "Kenya Uganda Tanzania." This is probably due in part to organizational similarities used by Nkrumah and Touré to achieve independence.110 Guinea commemorated themes of social justice, human rights, the UN, and Pan-Africanism before Nkrumah was overthrown and took up exile in Guinea at Touré’s invitation.111 Even Guinea’s first stamps, the proclamation of independence series that depict Touré and the African continent, resemble Ghana’s initial series.112 Both countries also overprinted pre-independence colonial stamps with independence proclamations. Guinea likewise issued a version of Ghana’s profound black and white handshake.113 During Nkrumah’s exile and afterwards, Guinea continued to issue stamps of similar themes. To celebrate the tenth anniversary of the OAU, to associate Pan-Africanism
with the OAU, and subtly to commemorate Nkrumah’s death a year earlier, Guinea’s OAU series is surely a political statement—four portraits of Nkrumah.114

Differing from both Ghanaian and Tanzanian philately, before Nkrumah was overthrown Guinea issued semiotic stamps depicting socialist accomplishments. Touré attempted to balance out the capitalist and communist adversaries of the Cold War by philatelically celebrating both American and Russian accomplishments in space.115 Five years later during the height of the American War in Viet Nam and Nkrumah’s exile in Guinea, Touré went further and commemorated Vladimir Ilyich Lenin in a five-stamp series.116 Shortly after Nkrumah died, Touré also commemorated the Bulgarian communist leader, George Dimitrov.117 These two series had much in common with the scholarly work on socialist political philosophy Nkrumah applied to Africa and published during his exile in Guinea.118

Post-Nkrumah Era Ghanaian Philately

After Ghanaian military leaders overthrew Kwame Nkrumah on 24 February 1966, Ghana Post discontinued Founder’s Day and Republic Day issues. As is the routine, those who assume power after regime changes soon produce philatelic semiotics that attempt to legitimize and promote their governments. The Ghanaians who succeeded Nkrumah were no exception.119 Nonetheless, there was some continuity with Nkrumah-era philately. Through the 1980s, Ghanaian leaders continued to issue stamps dedicated to human rights and social justice.120

By 1989, however, Ghana Post joined many other countries and adopted pop philately to raise revenue. Some of the first issues included a series of Japanese paintings, symbols of the French Revolution, and Shakespeare. The Beatles, Frank Sinatra, Sylvester Stallone, and Mickey Mouse followed shortly thereafter. Ghana Post has continued this trend ever since.121 Semiotics of revolutionary fervor and Afrocentric imagery initiated in the Nkrumah era are now less frequently issued and have been largely replaced by Western images of popular culture. Where is Nkrumah’s philosophy of Consciencism today?

Kwame Nkrumah has nonetheless made three appearances in Ghanaian philately since his death: in 1980 as part of the "National Leader" series, in 1991 as part of the "10th Non-Aligned Ministers Conference, Accra," and in 2001, a year dominated by pop philately, in name only on the "50th Anniversary of Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology."122 That year Ghana Post also issued such disparate topics as James Cagney, The Supremes, Queen Victoria’s
100th Anniversary and Mao Tse-Tung. One wonders what the Osagyefo would have made of it all.


Conclusion

The philatelic history of the Nkrumah-era stands as an artistic tribute to the quest for independence, economic development, social justice, Ghanaian culture, and the unification of Africa. The semiotics of Ghanaian philately between 1957 and 1966 both provokes and inspires. Philatelic reflections of Nkrumah-era Ghana are clever in design, colorful in spirit, and pregnant with meaning. They extol a noble testament to all humans; that is, to global Africans, that there is hope for the future. As Kwame Nkrumah, the Osagyefo, once said, "We face neither East nor West: we face forward." And forward it has been since 1980, philatelically speaking, when Nkrumah's Pan-Africanist dream found expression in the Pan African Postal Union, comprised of forty-four African countries in 2011, among whose goals is to create a single postal territory in Africa.

Notes

1 Biney 2008, p. 130.
5 Adedze 2009, pp. 6-7.
6 Posnansky 2004, pp. 53-54.
8 Reid 1972, p. 209.
11 Scott 2002 3, "Gold Coast:" "Various," 1 July 1948, pp. 254, nos. 130-41. See Adedze 2009, pp. 2-3 where he provides additional information on Ghanaian artists and photographers involved in this series.
12 For details about controversies over the bidders, see Adedze 2009, pp. 8-9.
13 Email interview with J. Yossi Malamud, New York City, 23 Dec. 2010. Unfortunately, pre-1970 contracts and records of IGPC (GPA) have been lost or destroyed.
19 Ibid., p. 4.
20 For more information, see "About IGPC," <http://www.igpc.net/about.html>.
25 The six graphic artists identified in Stanley Gibbons who contributed the most to Nkrumah-era Ghanaian philately are M. Goaman (14 issues sets), R. Hegeman (8 issues/sets), A.M. Medina (7 issues/sets), A.S.B. New (9 issues/sets), M. Shamir (10 issues/sets), and W. Wind (13 issues/sets).
26 Levey 2003, pp. 163-65. For an argument that Nkrumah's Pan-Africanism and Zionism were incompatible, see Adewale 1995, especially pp. 129-44. On Manfred Lehmann, see http://www.manfredlehmann.com/biography.html.
29 Adedze 2009, pp. 8-14.
30 Levey 2003, p. 169. In a further example of apparent irony, the Israeli ambassador to Ghana, Ehud Avriel, may have introduced Kwame Nkrumah to Patrice Lumumba.
32 For Nkrumah's eloquent speech of 10 July 1953 to the Gold Coast Legislative Assembly calling for independence from Great Britain, see Padmore 1971, pp. 375-389. Another copy appears in Nkrumah 1973, Revolutionary Path, pp. 100-115; for Nkrumah's "Midnight Speech" of 5-6 Mar. 1957 on the occasion of independence, see pp. 116-121.


37 For the essay and film critical of Nkrumah, see Mazrui 1966 and Mazrui 1986.


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42 Nkrumah 1970b, pp. 4, 78. See also Nkrumah 1968b, p. 100.


45 "Daisy Ad 1964" and "Daisy: The Complete History of an Infamous and Iconic Ad."


52 Nkrumah 1967a, p. 78.


56 The twenty-four African countries who philatelically recognized the Declaration of Human Rights were Ghana, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia, Guinea, Morocco, Peoples Republic of Congo, Chad, Dahomey, Nigeria, Ivory Coast, Malagasy Republic, Central African Republic, Niger, Mali, Senegal, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, Togo, Gabon, Cameroun, Algeria, Burundi, and Rwanda. Data were extracted from the country entries in Scott 2002, 1-6.


60 Hart 1980, pp. 13-16.


64 Hart 1980, p. 31.

65 Ibid., pp. 175-78.

66 Nkrumah 1968a, p. 84.

67 Nkrumah 1966b, pp. x-xi. For his reassuring statement to the West in 1958 defining his policy of non-alignment, see Nkrumah 1968, pp. 45-53.


74 R. Mahoney 1983, pp. 232-33; analysis is attributed to Henry Kissinger.

76  R. Mahoney 1983, pp. 235, 244-45.
77  Nkrumah 1963, p. 135.
78  Ibid., p. 136; R. Mahoney 1983, p. 163.
81  Nkrumah 1963, pp. 141-49.
82  Hochschild 2011.
85  R. Mahoney 1983, p. 235. For the involvement of the CIA, see Stockwell 1978, pp. 160n and 201n. For comments on Stockwell's book, see Hersh 1978.
86  Hutchful 1987, p. 38.
87  Rowe et al 1966, especially pages 7-11.
89  For a summary of the strong relationship between the three Pan-Africanists, see Afari-Gyan 1991, pp. 1-10.
For W.E.B. Du Bois, see Scott 2003 1, "United States": 31 Jan. 1992, p. 72, no. 2617 and 28 Jan. 1998, no. 3182. The turbulent relationship between Du Bois and the US is well known. Given that the US agency responsible for selecting, designing, and issuing US stamps, the Citizens' Stamp Advisory Committee (CSAC), carries out its discussions in secret and whose minutes are exempt from the Freedom of Information Act, one wonders how discussion went when the CSAC granted approval for two separate issues of Du Bois.


Nyerere 1968, p. 211.


Karioki 1974, p. 58.


110 Ibid.


124 Nkrumah 1967a, p. 66.

125 Pan-African Postal Union 2011.

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http://www.africa.ufl.edu/asq/v13/v13i1-2a1.pdf


<http://www.lbjlib.utexas.edu/johnson/media/daisyspot/>.


Nkrumah-era Philatelic Images of Emerging Ghana and Pan-Africanism


