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978-0-521-09135-0 - Zik: A Selection from the Speeches of Nnamdi Azikiwe

Nnamdi Azikiwe

Excerpt

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## CHAPTER 1

## ZIK IN AMERICA

*From a speech delivered when proposing the toast 'To the High School Department of Storer College' at the Young Men's Annual Party which was held in the Anthony Memorial Hall, at Storer College, Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, in May 1927.*

I am proud to have graduated from the High School Department of Storer in May last year. Since my experience of life is limited, all I can advise the upper class men and women is to remind them that this college stands for high ideals. It stands for purity of youth; it stands for the advancement of coloured youth; it stands for all that is good, noble and lofty in life.

Those of you who are on the threshold of graduating from this intellectual shrine should henceforth fashion your lives to the highest principles and ideals, so that when you depart from here to take your places in life, as men and women of our race, you will be worthy of emulation by posterity.

From what we have been told by our fathers and teachers, the ocean of life is tempestuous and it is filled with hidden rocks and shoals. However, we are encouraged to know that only lion-hearted men and women can endure and survive life's problems successfully. That being the case, it is my hope that high school graduates will gird their loins for the struggle and remember that in the final analysis, they are the captains of their fate and the masters of their destiny.

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*From Zik's eulogy on the late Hogan Edem Ani-Okokon delivered in the Rankin Memorial Chapel, at Howard University, Washington, D.C., on May 10, 1928.*

Okokon was patriotic, but he was not parochially so. Although he loved Africa, he realized that America had a lot to offer Africans by showing them the way to real freedom and true democracy. He admired and respected the ideals and traditions which animated the founding of this great republic. He had visions of Nigeria becoming a great country, emerging from the continent of Africa, offering freedom to those in bondage, and securing the democratic way of life to those who have been lulled into a false sense of security under colonial rule.

It is my fervent prayer that God may sanctify the life of this young African so that we, his survivors, will not forget the sacrifice made by this pioneer of freedom in Africa. If God spares me to return home alive, I pledge that I will join crusaders for human freedom anywhere in the world and we shall intensify the struggle for democracy in Africa.

I will never forget to remind my fellow crusaders in Africa that, in the spring of 1928, we buried him in Washington, and that the spirit of Okokon stands guard over his grave which is now a landmark in our journey from the world of darkness to the world of light. May the body and soul of Hogan Edem Ani-Okokon rest in peace, and may his memory be an inspiration to Nigerian posterity.

*From an address delivered in the Abyssinian Baptist Church, New York, on November 10, 1931, during the annual meeting of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History.*

The eyes of the world are on Liberia. Men without appreciation for the contribution of the Negro to modern statesmanship are content to criticize this African Republic without deep thought on the onerous duty of statecraft. Greedy nations are lurking and watching Liberia like hawks. In this her hour of despair and universal condemnation, Liberia needs to take seriously the political philosophy of that great Cuban Negro, Senor Rafael Serra,

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who warned that it is necessary for the government to exercise more urbane and equal treatment and less oppression, so as to safeguard the security and liberty of the individual and the nation itself.

Ladies and gentlemen, I submit that eighty-four years of political autonomy are not sufficient to pass a final judgment on the political incapacity of the Liberian Negro. Dr Woodson states that Liberia's first century compares favourably with that of the colony of Virginia. While Liberia encouraged education and social uplift, Governor William Berkeley was narrow enough to 'thank God that there were no free schools or printing presses in the province.'

Let it be remembered also that it took Great Britain fourteen hundred years after the conquest of Boadicea to draft the Magna Carta. It took her several centuries more to pave the way for the English Revolution which established a constitutional democracy. It took France eighteen hundred years after Caesar's conquests in Gaul to dream up and effect the French Revolution, thereby founding a government of the people, for the people, by their accredited representatives. Even the United States of America spent one hundred and fifty-six years, after the landing of the Pilgrim Fathers, in political tutelage as a vassal of an alien colonial power. As Judge T. M. Stewart pointed out, the United States was heir to generations of civilization and experience in government. Her builders were fresh from the schools and universities of Europe. British brains and capital laid the foundation of the American commonwealth of nations.

In spite of this unequal handicap, Liberia is still keeping pace. Commander A. H. Foote states the case for Liberia more tersely: 'Let then the black men be judged fairly, and not presumed to have become all at once and by miracle, of a higher order than old historic nations through many generations of whom the political organization of the world has been slowly developing itself.' Even acknowledged authorities in the field of politics and government recognize the evolutionary nature of modern democracies. Liberia should not, therefore, be hastily condemned.

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*From an address in response to the message of greetings by the Deputy Mayor of New York on the occasion of Zik's visit to the City Hall, at New York, on June 11, 1947.*

I come from a part of the world called Nigeria, in West Africa. When the foundations of democracy were rocked, during the World War II, my country played an honourable part in order to preserve this political philosophy from extinction. We sent our sons and daughters to the various theatres of war and we shed our blood in order to make the world safe for the democratic way of life. Side by side we fought and died with the American soldier, sailor and aviator; hoping, trusting and believing that, jointly, we should defeat the common enemy and that, side by side, we should win the peace. I and my inarticulate people hope that these gallant heroes and heroines have not died in vain.

I bring to you goodwill from across the Atlantic. We are thirty million. We have our own traditions and heritage which go back to ancient Egypt. Some of us are literate, articulate and able to adapt ourselves to the contradictory conditions of contemporary world society; but not all of us are literate and sufficiently advanced to appreciate the import and significance of the material and social techniques of modern industrial civilization. Nevertheless, we have the breeding and native intelligence to appreciate good neighbourliness in a world that is gradually becoming one through the magic wands of twentieth-century science and invention.

Twenty years ago, whenever I visited New York City on a short trip from my university, and found it uneconomic to seek for a house to pass the night, I learned from experience how to pass a comfortable night in the subways, so generously placed at the disposal of guests and residents of the city, for the nominal charge of a nickel! In those days, I was also acquainted with the methods of some employment agencies at Sixth Avenue where, on the payment of five dollars, one can be hired today and fired tomorrow; and on payment of another five dollars to the same agency, one can be re-hired by the same employer the following day. Naturally, such recollections are inspiring, for apart from helping me to

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cultivate a sense of humour, they strengthen my faith in American democracy, because, in spite of handicaps of yesteryears, I have forged ahead, I have realized my dreams, and I have learned to love America as 'God's Country' !

*From a response to a toast made in his honour at the dinner arranged jointly by the Lincoln University Alumni Association and the African Academy in the Hotel Pennsylvania, New York, on June 27, 1947.*

I wish to speak to you tonight on the subject of co-operation between the United States and dependent territories in West Africa. . . . As I see the issue, it is one of human contacts. The minds of men and women must be liberated from those social forces which foster intolerance and ignorance. The more we know each other, the more we will appreciate the oneness of humanity, and the more we will cultivate the urge to create goodwill, fellowship and mutual understanding. Let us recognize and emphasize at once that such a task cannot be restricted to one continent alone. It must be a two-way traffic. This implies bridgeheads in Africa and America, in order to make co-operation worthwhile. . . .

At present, the United States have many universities at their disposal and West Africans have none. But the idea of exchange implies equality of a basic nature. Here is where I think American educators and those interested in building up goodwill between the two countries can be of immense aid. The granting of scholarships to African students to study has its advantage. So too goodwill tours to West Africa by Americans. But to broaden the base of operations and make this two-way traffic much more efficacious we have to make university education accessible to the Africans as well. By the establishment of a university in West Africa, organized and administered by the American and African peoples concerned and their friends, we should succeed in creating goodwill centres where teachers and students from America can spend sabbatical leaves. Surely, if we can have 'Yale University in China', 'American University in Turkey' and 'American University in Beirut' I can see no reason why we should not have 'Lincoln

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University' or 'Howard University' in Nigeria. I trust that all who are interested in this project of adjusting human relations will bear in mind this idea of establishing a university in West Africa in order to make the bridge-head in Africa more secure and more valuable to the cause of understanding, goodwill and fellowship with the United States.

*From an address delivered at the Banneker High School Auditorium, Washington, D.C., on December 27, 1949, at the 35th Anniversary of the Phi Beta Sigma Fraternity.*

I have travelled 8,500 miles in order to be present on this momentous occasion. It took me less than 40 hours to make the trip by aeroplane, in two stages, thanks to modern scientific knowledge. I bring you greetings from Sigma men who are scattered over the continent of Africa. In concert with their comrades-in-arms they are playing their part in the great awakening which has gripped that continent of everlasting spring, having been imbued with the idea of 'Culture for service and service for humanity'.

What is the nature of the struggle for national freedom in contemporary Africa? What are the forces at work to intensify that struggle? What is the reaction of the African people towards national realization? What is the role of the United States in this attempt of the African towards national self-determination? These are some of the issues I shall attempt to clarify within the limited time at my disposal. Throughout Black Africa, a struggle for national freedom is in the offing, because factors of imperialism have stultified the normal growth of Africans in the community of nations. Consequently, our indigenous people present a sorry spectacle of degraded humanity. Politically, they are dominated by alien races and are denied the basic human rights. Socially, the African has been made to witness discrimination of different kinds against him in his own native land. Economically, the African has been subjected to exploitation of a most heinous type, whilst he vegetates below the minimum subsistence level of existence. . . . Yet, in spite of his plight he has become self-assertive and he is demanding a place in the sun.

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What forces have been at work to intensify this struggle of the African for self-determination? Let me take the liberty of referring to comments made by Mrs Eleanor Roosevelt during the World War II, when it appeared that certain sections of American society were diffident in participating wholeheartedly in the war. She said: 'We are fighting a war today so that individuals all over the world may have freedom. This means an equal chance for every man to have food and shelter and a minimum of such things as spell happiness to that particular human personality. If we believe firmly that peace cannot come to the world unless this is true for men all over the world, then we must know in our nation that every man, regardless of race and religion, has this chance. Otherwise we fight for nothing of real value. . . . If the future holds only a repetition of the past, if in each nation there are to be real slaves, even though they do not exist in name, then the boys who say they do not know why they fight have a right to say so. There would be no world worth fighting for and the only men who would have any reason for fighting would be the professional soldiers who fight for the love of fighting.'

That was precisely what happened to the African. He was persuaded to fight in order to free European nations. His reward was denial of freedom and the tightening of the chains of servitude. Due to the forces of intolerance, prejudice, ignorance, pride, and superstition, those whose homes were bombed by the V1 and V2 bombs, those who had suffered the humiliation of the concentration camp—refugees, displaced persons, kings without kingdoms, 'Governments' without countries—these ungrateful Europeans continued the enslavement of their former comrades-in-arms, after winning the war. Thus they have failed to win the peace. Today, man is still a wolf to man, and the teeming millions of Africans have been denied the heritage of democracy, despite their sacrifices in two world wars for its attainment.

. . . I think that the Government and the people of the United States can play a creditable role in the attempt of the African to achieve freedom in his life-time. Emerging from World War II not only as an arsenal but a bastion of democracy, the United States has been presented by history with an opportunity for con-

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structive statesmanship on the continent of Africa. Having been educated in the United States, I could be expected to be steeped in the traditions of Jeffersonian democracy. But that cannot make me blind to any situation which might stunt the natural development of my people towards an independent national existence. At times, I am perplexed at the role of the United States on the African continent. Is this great nation buttressing the forces of European reaction so as to manacle the people of Africa and thwart their legitimate aspirations towards nationhood?

It is obvious that the United States Government is assuming some responsibility for the development of the under-developed areas of the world. We who live in some of these under-developed areas are profoundly gratified that such a great nation should realize the urgent need for this economic step. The proposal of the Point Four Programme by President Harry S. Truman is indicative that this part of the world feels that its economic life is affected by the conditions which have caused stagnation in under-developed areas, comprising more than half the people of the world. Perhaps it is fitting at this moment to interject an old adage familiar to all of you, that no economic chain can be stronger than its weakest link. From the fact that more than half the chain is weak, it follows that the economic mooring of the world is not too secure.

It is commendable that at this moment in the course of world history, when cold war propaganda has such an unnerving effect on the more highly developed nations, President Truman should propose something that should lighten the tension of this ideological warfare. Such a project is ripe with possibilities that may save the world from a war more devastating than the two struggles that most of us have witnessed in our life-time. The crux of this programme seems to me in a large measure to be the solution of the problem with which we are confronted in West Africa. Moreover, it is a denunciation of the old imperialistic policies based on exploitation of less fortunate people, that has heretofore set the world asunder. It means that the people of the western world may look forward to a more bountiful life; that they may feel that they can enter more freely in the competitive struggle to



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satisfy their human wants. The effect on the people of Africa can be better imagined.

But is there a deeper economic significance to the Point Four Programme? Is it possible that the under-developed areas contain raw materials which the United States must have because the stock-pile reserves are getting dangerously low? To an African who has been conditioned to expect many strange behaviour patterns in international relations, in so far as these patterns have affected Africa, the questions seem to cast the twin shadows of doubt and fear. I am optimistic enough to believe that President Truman must have fully realized that in spite of the urgent need for replenishing the stock-pile of priority materials, such as cocoa, tin, columbite, bauxite, palm products, uranium and so on, which abound in my country, all under-developed areas must be invited to participate in a programme that has the potential ingredient for establishing more firmly the four freedoms so essential to a free world.

One feels that the President had rightly put the aims and objectives of his country first. It follows that all advantages for that country must be considered. That, again, is as it should be for the best interest of this country. But we who live on the other side of the world could derive many benefits from these co-operative efforts. Naturally, our aim would be to work vigorously for the success of such a programme. In it we can visualize a turn of events which can lead ultimately to our independence.

However, the general nature of the President's Point Four Programme has elicited different interpretations from various interests. Big business in America, for instance, sees it as a new avenue for private ventures and from all appearances suggests that the Government guarantees security of operation against risk. While, on the other hand, the British authorities have interpreted the Point Four Programme as a new device for bridging Britain's dollar gap. In the light of this latter interpretation, which is very vital to the struggle we are making for freedom, it is heartening to know that the United States is not necessarily in accord with Britain on this score. This may suggest the reason for the Kennan Report's recommendation of an on-the-spot study of the African

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situation. It may hasten the day when the United States and Britain must re-orientate their policies in respect of future relations with Africa as an under-developed area.

*From an address delivered in the Abyssinian Baptist Church, Harlem, New York, on January 15, 1950, with Congressman Adam Clayton Powell as Chairman.*

The importance of Africa in contemporary world politics is becoming clearer, thanks to the emergence of certain forces which have affected the existence of Europe and America. Whether we like it or not, Africa is destined to become the continent of the present century. What happens there today must be material to the future course of world history. Without exposing myself to the righteous indignation of well-meaning critics, may I be permitted to say that Nigeria is a key to the solution of the African problem. Every sixth African is a Nigerian. With its raw materials, Nigeria enjoys prestige in the forefront of African nations. In spite of the impact of Western culture, its institutions are basically African. The future of Nigeria is thus intertwined with the future of Africa, nay, the Negro race.

Two main problems have projected Nigerian affairs on the screen of world opinion: the demand for independence and the shooting of Nigerian coal miners. To have an intelligent grasp of these problems, you are entitled to be well-informed about their setting. This should enable you to pass a fair judgment on the crusades we have embarked upon for the emancipation of Nigeria in the life-time of those crusaders who have made this a life mission.

Nigeria is partly a Crown Colony, partly a Protectorate, and partly a Trust Territory. With a population of thirty million and an area of 372,000 square miles, it is easily the most important dependency in the British colonial system. By virtue of a Treaty of Cession negotiated in 1861, the sovereignty of Lagos and certain areas was ceded to Britain for ever. By virtue of over 400 treaties, the main areas of Nigeria were placed under British protection. Cameroons became a trust territory following the