

AFRICA IN SEARCH OF DEMOCRACY

K. A. Busia

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K. A. BUSIA

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New Introduction to the Reissue of 2023

*Address at Runnymede on 15 June 1965
Commemoration of Magna Carta. Society for
Individual Freedom*

I deem it a great honour to have been invited to speak here at Runnymede, on this thrilling occasion, commemorating one of the most historic events of British history – the signing of Magna Carta here, 750 years ago.

Even though I am an African, it gives me pleasure to be here to take part in these celebrations, for we commemorate an event which belongs not only to Britain, but also to the Commonwealth, and indeed to all mankind, there are certain ideas and achievements of man which become the heritage not only of the countries where they originate, but of all mankind. Magna Carta is one of them. It not only gave expression to ideas which led to democratic rule in these islands, but it has also become a symbol of human freedom and dignity; and of democratic government under the rule of law; a symbol of that true democracy which recognizes the worth and dignity of every human being as a unique person, whatever his creed or colour or country.

Magna Carta did more than kindle the struggle for basic human rights and the dignity of the individual. In the drama that was enacted here at Runnymede, 750 years ago, was portrayed a persistent and universal problem of man in society: the problem of how those who wield power should be controlled by those over whom they rule. It is a universal human experience that those who rule are prone to act without due consideration of what they are doing to others;

they tend to be corrupted by power. Those who are ruled must have an effective way of checking the excesses of their rulers. For all free men everywhere, power must be subject to law. This is one of the notable lessons of the drama of Runnymede. The barons who gathered here 750 years ago were men who had grievances; have ideas and visions. The barons were men who not only claimed, but also exercised the right of people with grievances to get together at public meetings to discuss and to agitate for what they think is the right course in public affairs. Government by consent means individuals must be able to group together and be able to make their voices heard through their groups. The freedoms of association and of speech are fundamental freedoms for all free men. Would-be authoritarian and despotic rulers have always been tempted to curb them.

More than this, some of the clauses of Magna Carta remind us of the cardinal principle of natural justice; that no one should have a case against him decided without an opportunity of presenting his side of the case at a fair trial. There should always be impartial courts to give protection to personal liberties.

While we meet here at this place, hallowed as the birthplace of high principles of personal liberties, and high ideals of the dignity of the individual, it behoves us to remember that there are many countries in the world today where the foundations of individual freedom are being undermined.

I regret to say my own country of Ghana is among them. There, President Nkrumah's government has become an indefensible tyranny. The President has put himself above the law; checks on the exercise of his powers have been eroded; and the rule of law has been violated. He has reduced elections to a farce, and the people have lost any effective power to elect and remove their legislators and rulers; the courts have been rendered powerless to deny the President the right he has assumed to imprison a citizen arbitrarily, without a fair trial. The argument that seeks to justify all this on the

grounds of economic development is vitiated; facts have belied theory; there is increasing economic hardship for the many and luxurious comfort for the few; public funds have been spent on palaces and prestige projects, on spies, and police and bodyguards; and on intrigues against neighbouring countries. There is no freedom of speech or association. All who attempt to voice grievances, as the barons did here 750 years ago, are in danger of arbitrary arrest and imprisonment; the jails have filled up; and refugees have fled abroad. The danger of arrest and imprisonment and even torture that faces anyone who does or says anything that the government does not like, has threatened all other freedoms. This pattern of development down the path of tyranny is a familiar one.

Many countries have been known to travel along it. Because of this, there are some who have sought persuasively to condone injustice and tyranny; but the arguments they have advanced seem to set up one standard of values for whites and another for dark skinned peoples.

All human beings love freedom and justice and abhor tyranny. The history of every country has a record of men who in their day withstood tyrannical acts, just as the barons did here at Runnymede. In towns and villages in Africa, as elsewhere, can be found, in the immortal words of Thomas Gray, many a grave of

‘Some village - Hampden that with dauntless breast,
The little tyrant of his fields withstood.’

As in the past, there are men and women who are standing against tyranny, risking imprisonment, persecution, even death. In Africa, the battle for national independence has already many victories to its credit; many new independent states have been born; but the long battle to establish basic human rights and personal liberties within each State has only just begun. It has its fighters; the men and women who share the hopes and visions for the achievement of democratic regimes where there will be constitutional checks on those who rule; where people will have the right to choose their

rulers; and where the civil liberties and basic human rights for all will be protected under the rule of law by impartial courts. The institutions in which the different peoples will safeguard these basic liberties and give their expression will indeed vary, according to their historical and social circumstances; but wherever the basic rights themselves are denied, there is always the danger of political instability, and a threat to peace. This is why the denial of basic human rights and civil liberties anywhere must always be the concern of freedom and peace-loving peoples everywhere. Condoning injustice and oppression is a disservice to mankind.

In the memory and in the spirit of Runnymede, may we all derive fresh inspiration and go forward, united by hopes and visions for the freedom of man, and the continuing extension and enlargement of human rights and civil liberties for all peoples everywhere. The future does not lie with the forces of cruel tyranny which some are assiduous to placate, but with the irresistible forces of the spirit struggling for freedom and emancipation. The future lies with the spirit of Runnymede and the principles of Magna Carta which will continue to inspire and strengthen many men and women all over the world, through future years, as they fight against tyranny, and serve the noble cause of personal liberties and the dignity of man.

May I again thank you, the officers and members of the Society for Individual Freedom for inviting me here today to be one of the speakers on this memorable occasion.

Dr K. A. Busia
Leader of the United Party of Ghana in Exile.

A Note on *K.A. Busia on Africa*: An Anniversary Set

The idea for the establishment of the Busia Foundation was conceived of by Mrs. Naa Morkor Abrefa Busia (1924–2010) to honour and perpetuate the memory of her late husband Professor Kofi Abrefa Busia (1913–1978) and remind his communities of his ideas and ideals. Busia had an enthusiastic commitment to democracy as the “moral language” of all humanity and to equality of all persons. It has been observed that Busia’s ideas have survived the radical populism of the 1960s, the militarism of the 1970s and the 1980s and emerged vindicated in the 1990s. It was to honour these ideas and ideals, and the way he tried to put them into practice over his short term of office as Prime Minister of the Second Republic that the Busia Foundation was established. The Busia Foundation was formally launched in July 1998 in commemoration of Busia’s 85th birthday, with Busia Foundation International established three years later. Among the aims and objectives of the Foundations are to preserve and disseminate Busia’s ideas and ideals widely by promoting and fostering his concerns for human rights, and the basic needs of people and civic education through a celebration of their vibrant culture. An anchoring task of this aspiration is to establish and maintain a library and resource center and to publish or assist in the publication of his books, little-known articles and unpublished papers, an aspiration started by the republication of the three books of this set.

Prof. Busia published five books in his lifetime, the first his revised doctoral dissertation *The Position of The Chief in The Modern Political System of Ashanti* (1951) remains today a classic, still in print seventy years after first being published. *Urban Churches in Britain: A Question of Relevance* (1966) is remarkable for being the first sociological study by an African scholar of the British rather than the other way around as it had been for centuries. Commissioned by The World Council of Churches as a part of his World Studies of churches in mission, though it is a model in its approach, and its critique of its subject courageously honest, it remains a study of its time and place. Busia's other three books that comprise this set, though also of their time and place, concern an Africa in the throes of dynamic change and retain a relevance that make them worthy of consideration that republication will bring.

The Challenge of Africa (1962), *A Purposeful Education for Africa* (1964) and *Africa in Search of Democracy* (1967) between them are a comprehensive view into Prof. Busia's concerns published in an incredibly productive five-year period. The three books are together a wonderful reflection of Prof. Busia's work and thinking about the rapidly changing Africa of his day. His was the Africa new to independence, undergoing a thorough going soul searching on how to create the institutions that will craft new complex nations out of old equally complex societies. They have proved prescient in their articulation of the issues we are still facing to establish security and stability for ourselves and control our own natural and human resources. Busia's commitment to understanding how to pass on the heritage of the past, to cope with the present, and prepare for the future remains a constant thread throughout these works, all of which raise questions that remain with us. In dedicating his life to establishing viable liberal democracies on the African continent where each person was "his brother's keeper" Busia showed his firm conviction that liberal democracies are not an invention of ancient

Greece, but a reformulation of traditional ideas of communal caring and governance by consensus, writ large on a more complicated sense of collectivity.

Busia Foundation International is pleased to present this set *K. A. Busia on Africa* bringing these seminal works together in commemoration of the 110th anniversary of his birth and in celebration of the establishment of the Foundation. The studies are published in their entirety, but each of them with new introductions. *Where A Purposeful Education for Africa* is given another introduction by the series editor his daughter H.E. Professor Abena P.A. Busia, we are pleased to present *The Challenge of Africa* and *Africa in Search of Democracy* with new introductions which are the works of Prof. Busia himself. The on-going process of organizing the Busia archives led to the discovery of two scarcely known public presentations by Busia which now serve as wonderful introductions in his own words to the concerns of those two books. Shortly after Busia became the first African Professor at the University of Ghana in 1954, he attended the School of Advanced International Studies of the Johns Hopkins University conference on "Contemporary Africa". The address he gave as the principal speaker at the closing banquet is published here for the first time as the new introduction to *The Challenge of Africa*. This talk, given eight years before the publication of that volume, reveals how early in his career he started grappling with the issues the book covers. A decade after that dinner-time address, Busia's reputation as a fighter for democracy was firmly established. That Prof. Busia, at the time leader of Ghana's opposition in exile, was honoured to be asked, by the society for individual freedom, to speak at Runnymede on 15 June 1965 in commemoration of the seven hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the signing of the Magna Carta, makes this clear. That address now serves as the introduction to *Africa in Search of Democracy*. We hope that the republication of these works, making his own words more readily accessible will encourage the serious study of

his ideas which must be the basis on which his legacy is built.

Abena P.A. Busia
Brasilia, Brazil October 2022
For Busia Foundation International
Akosua G. Busia, President

Africa in Search of Democracy

by K. A. Busia



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*I dedicate this book to
the Youth of Africa
to whom will fall the opportunity
and the honour of building in Africa
democratic societies wherein every man and woman
may live a life of dignity
in Freedom.*



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Preface

As I reflect on the contemporary African political scene, with its bewildering upheavels and revolutions, I am frequently reminded of a passage in Plato's *Protagoras* (321-2):

Prometheus stole the mechanical arts and fire with them, and gave them to man. Thus man had the support of life, but political wisdom he had not . . . Having no art of government, they evil entreated one another and were in process of destruction.

This book is a humble contribution to Africa's search for political wisdom whereby to avoid destruction. If any of my readers should think I have pitched my hopes for democracy in Africa too high, I can only say that I have not written as one who is a stranger to political life in Africa. I took an active part in political life in my own country in Ghana where I was leader of the Parliamentary Opposition and of the United Party which opposed the tyrannical rule of Nkrumah and his Convention People's Party. I have written this book while in voluntary exile, still continuing to oppose and expose the corruption, inefficiency and oppression of the Nkrumah regime; constantly bearing in my heart a harrowing distress at the sufferings of my former colleagues and countrymen im-

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prisoned without trial, denied justice, ignominiously humiliated, some even maltreated to death; and painfully conscious of the reckless waste of our country's rich human and material resources.

Yet beneath all this, I discern the search for a free world in which the relations of men to one another will be brotherly and helpful rather than suspicious and savage; one in which not only the Continent of Africa but the world community will be built, in mutual respect and willing co-operation, on the common moral language which humanity shares.

This book has been made possible by the generous help I received from the African Heritage League of the United States of America and I wish to thank its Board of Directors for a memorable and fruitful association and co-operation.

K. A. B.

*St. Antony's College,
Oxford*