

New Africa in the World Coming to Harlem: A Retrospective Comparison of Jerry Rawlings and Thomas Sankara

by

Justin C. Williams, Ph.D.

Jwilliams2@ccny.cuny.edu

Assistant Professor, Department of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences
The City College of New York

Abstract

This paper compares speeches made to Harlem audiences by Ghana's Jerry Rawlings ("Harlem Salutes Jerry Rawlings") and Burkina Faso's Thomas Sankara ("Our White House is in Black Harlem") during the 1980s and 90s with the purpose of gaining further insight into the circumstances from which they came to power, although they held different political policies and had outcomes in their governance. Yet, because of their similar backgrounds, friendship and proximity to each other, many scholars during the 1980s were quick to lump Rawlings and Sankara together based on biography and rhetoric rather than policy. In retrospect, this was inadequate and misleading. This paper will explain why this initial assessment was incorrect by noting how critical the 1980s-90s proved to be as structural adjustment policies began to spread across Africa, altering the political and economic landscape of many countries for decades to come. With the benefit of hindsight and focus on these two speeches made to the diaspora, this paper will take a more nuanced and critical look at each leader, the nations they governed and the revolutions they presided over. Overall, this work will shed light on West Africa's political diversity and the variety of ways post-colonial leaders used Pan-African tropes to engage the diaspora for their own immediate political ends, a trend that continues in the present.

Key words: Jerry Rawlings, Thomas Sankara, Harlem, Ghana, Burkina Faso, African Diaspora, Pan-Africanism, Structural Adjustment

“At its most developed, Pan-Africanism can amount to an ideology in its own right- a vision of the past, the present, and the future, and a guide to policy and political action. At another level, Pan-Africanism is an emotional predisposition that identifies with African causes and African cultures.”

-Ali Mazrui¹

“Keep up appearances; there lies the test; The world will give thee credit for the rest.”

-Charles Churchill²

Introduction

When Captain Thomas Sankara's revolutionary coup took hold in the Upper Volta in 1983, observers of African politics were quick to compare him to Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings, who came to power in Ghana roughly two years earlier. In 1985, *Time* wrote that these leaders, “Once backed by extreme leftist elements, both men now appear committed to pursuing a pragmatic, less doctrinaire route out of poverty [...] had given hope to their respective countries.”³ In 1986, Ghanaian political scientist Eboe Hutchful saw both leaders as part of a sweeping trend of pragmatic junior officers leading “popular or progressive” regimes that rejected communist, capitalist and Western democratic ideologies for amorphous notions of bringing more “power to the people” across Africa.⁴ Comparisons like this seemed intuitive, as Rawlings and Sankara were both young, charismatic, firebrand junior officers who led military coups in neighboring countries. Both promised their populations some form of revolution and attempted to engage the African diaspora with their radical rhetoric. The two even became political allies and friends based on their similarities, but do they appear so similar after three decades?

Cognizant of the benefit of hindsight, this paper will compare policies and speeches made by Sankara and Rawlings to Harlem audiences as a way to gauge the critical differences between their regimes and the contexts in which they governed. Historically, Harlem has been an ideal place for African leaders to engage the African diaspora due to its proximity to the United Nations and as Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith explained, “Harlem is an international symbol for Black culture. Two themes dominated most contemporary images of Harlem. The first, a nostalgic image now, is the Harlem of the Harlem Renaissance or of the Black Panthers. The second theme is Harlem the ghetto, one of the largest concentrations of Black working-class and poor inhabitants in the U.S.”⁵

Overall, analyzing the appeals from African leaders to Black audiences gives us insight into how they sought to legitimize their governments and core domestic/international objectives. As a preliminary step, it is imperative to give a basic brief overview of Ghana and Burkina Faso's political histories that produced the leaders and the speeches they gave in what is widely regarded as the most famous Black enclave in the world.

Ghana and Upper Volta: Outlooks at Independence

When Gold Coast Colony became a pioneer of African nationalism by breaking from the United Kingdom and becoming Ghana in 1957, it was commonly cited as the African colony most suited for a smooth transition into independence. Among the wealthiest colonies in Africa, Ghana was well endowed with natural resources such as cocoa, gold and timber. It also had a popular leader in Kwame Nkrumah, whose Pan-African aspirations put the nation front and center on the global stage. Nkrumah attempted to leverage his position as the leader of Africa's first independent state by building alliances with other African leaders who espoused some form of "African socialism" and Pan-African union. The most famous manifestation of this was the short-lived Union of Pan-African States (1958-1963), which included Ghana, Sékou Touré's Guinea and Modibo Keita's Mali.⁶

Undoubtedly due to his experiences in the United States and the United Kingdom as a young man, Nkrumah also used his position as the world's first Black Prime Minister as a platform for engagement with the global Black political movements that largely shaped his worldview. This drove Nkrumah's Ghana to host an array of radical Black figures including Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, W.E.B Dubois, C.L.R James, Maya Angelou and more. Historian Kevin Gaines summarized Ghana's relationship with the African diaspora during this period by writing, "Ghana was unrivaled among African nations in its willingness to provide sanctuary to Black (and non-Black) radicals from the United States, the Caribbean, Africa and Europe unable to function politically in their countries of origin."⁷ It's also worth noting that Nkrumah gave two addresses in Harlem, where he lived as a student, promoting these objectives directly.

Despite Ghana's bright outlook at independence, the structural weakness of the colonial economy began to quickly undermine the initial euphoria. In order to deliver the rapid industrialization and African socialist welfare state promised to Convention People's Party (CPP) supporters, Nkrumah's government spent the nation's savings on an array of development schemes, many of which failed to produce and fell prey to corruption. Furthermore, Ghana's reliance on raw materials subject to global prices became a problem as cocoa prices declined. In order to make up for the funds lost due to increased spending and declining revenues, Ghana began borrowing from global financial institutions. This quickly sent Ghana into the vicious cycles of unequal exchange and the African debt crisis.

As domestic dissatisfaction with the state of the nation's economy mounted, Nkrumah's outspokenness on Civil Rights issues in the United States, agitation against moderate African regimes opposed to his Garveyite/Leninist Pan-African vision and denunciations of Western neo-colonial policies across the continent (especially during and after Congo Crisis of 1960) produced enemies abroad. After a failed assassination attempt in August and September of 1962, and again in January 1964, Nkrumah began to dismantle Ghana's democratic institutions by declaring himself president for life and jailing high-profile political opponents.

By 1966, all these forces converged in a CIA-sponsored coup that inadvertently began a cycle of military interventions into government. Civilian governments came to power, but were unable to stem the powerful tide of the forces that brought down Nkrumah. Each new military government promised different radical solutions to the nation's ongoing economic crisis, but performed just as badly, or sometimes worse than the civilian governments they deposed. This cycle and the nation's economic decline continued until Jerry Rawlings took power for the second time on New Year's Eve of 1981.

When it gained independence from France in 1960, the Upper Volta had a very different economic outlook than Ghana. Dry climate conditions and a small natural resource base made it somewhat of a backwater in the French colonial system. Ever-increasing taxation and forced labor led scores of potential workers to migrate to the Gold Coast or to Cote D'Ivoire.⁸ Despite having an economic situation that was much less optimistic than its southern neighbor's at independence, and a much less muted place on the international stage, the Upper Volta and Ghana have a shared history of political instability accompanying independence.

Not unlike Kwame Nkrumah, the nation's first president, Maurice Yaméogo, quickly attempted to undo the political system inherited from the colonial era by steadily centralizing power. By 1965, the country largely boycotted the vote for a re-election, was scandalized by his extravagant marriage to a "twenty-two-year old former beauty queen" despite not being divorced from his first wife and further angered by the appointment of relatives to government posts. The announcement of austerity measures as a means to deal with the nation's economic crisis led to strikes and protests by trade unions that called for the military to intervene. On January 3, 1966, the military obliged and placed Colonel Sangoulé Lamizana in power after Yaméogo's resignation.⁹

In 1970, Lamizana returned the Upper Volta to constitutional rule, but the nation's persistent economic crisis, made worse by a disastrous drought on the Sahel and leadership's persistent antagonism toward trade unions and other key civil society groups, led to more coups and the entrenchment of the military as a political actor. In the end, Lamizana used many of the same mechanisms as his predecessor to keep power, only to be overthrown by the military in 1980.

A new wrinkle in all this was a generational and ideological divide within the military establishment itself. This divide led Commander Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo to overthrow Colonel Saye Zerbo and set the stage for Thomas Sankara's rise to power.

The Rawlings and Burkinabé Revolutions in Retrospect

The first year of Rawlings' "second coming" could best be characterized as one defined by desperate hopes, confusion and fear. Immediately after the coup, journalist Ebenezer Babatope enthusiastically predicted, "Imperialism will never wish Ghana under Jerry Rawlings well. Imperialism will never want to see Ghana embrace a revolutionary ideological stance that completely neutralises its position in the country."¹⁰

By 1983, it was clear Ghana had to take drastic action or risk becoming a failed state, an inconceivable outcome for Africa's wealthiest colony in 1957. The result was a stunning and complete turn to the West and what Nkrumah blasted as neocolonial financial institutions for economic support. As political scientist Jeffrey Herbst keenly observed in 1993, Ghana's turn to the IMF and the World Bank for assistance was surprising for a few key reasons.

First, Rawlings's revolutionary rhetoric and inner circle were all inspired by dependency theory and the politics of the global left. Second, the conditions of austerity (such as devaluing the currency) imposed by international financial institutions placed Rawlings at risk of another palace coup and by extension, his life in the aftermath of the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) treatment of its rivals. Finally, Herbst observed that like many leaders in Ghana's history, Rawlings could have played it safe by continuing the failed policies of the past, but pleasing key constituencies like the Army.¹¹

But while advocates of dependency theory had plenty of critiques of Africa's place in the world economy, their failure to offer coherent alternatives led Rawlings to consider working within an international financial system that despite its faults, demonstrated a real pool of resources in desperate times. After a month of negotiations in 1983, Ghana once again became an African pioneer during a time of major global change. In the past, Kwame Nkrumah had led Ghana to become a vanguard of what would become a wave of independence in Africa south of the Sahara. In June 1983, Ghana became the first African country (with many others to follow) to undergo comprehensive Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs), beginning its transition from a state-managed economy to a free-market system.

To be clear, this was not a transition toward the type of economic liberalism identified with British economist John Maynard Keynes and the Bretton Woods Conference of 1944; it was the neoliberal model defined by privatization of public enterprise, economic deregulation, liberal trade policies, reduced social spending, tighter control on organized labor and monetary policies aimed at checking inflation at the cost of rising unemployment.¹²

In the same way, the Nkrumah regime embodied the era of decolonization and the pressures of the Cold War; thus, the reforms undertaken by Jerry Rawlings reflected the triumph of Western ideology and the export of “Reagan-Thatcher” conservatism to the “developing world.” As part of its strategy to restore incentives for production of food and raw materials, increase the availability of consumer goods, raise foreign exchange revenues, lower inflation and rehabilitate the nation's infrastructure, and thus, the Economic Recovery Program (ERP) guided by the World Bank and IMF, began a massive downsizing of the state presence in the Ghanaian economy.¹³

Subsidies on fuel, food and social services were eliminated or dramatically cut back. Any remaining import-substitution schemes were also summarily abandoned. In their place, user fees for education, health care, water and electricity were implemented. For a figure that clearly illustrates the government's new priorities, let us consider that the ERP budgets of 1984-86 allocated less than 5% to social services. By 1987, the PNDC government noted, “It is unlikely that without specific programmes, the economic hardship of marginal, poor and vulnerable groups will be alleviated in the short term through the ERP [...] the precarious condition of these groups inherited from the period of decline is unlikely to be altered much in the short run [...] Indeed, certain groups, including at least some of the poor, will have to bear the cost of adjustment in the short term.”¹⁴ Those “specific programmes” which aimed to soften the blow to the poor majority, when attempted, were a failure. Unlike Ghana’s time under Prime Minister Kofi Busia (1969-1972), the absence of democratic governance allowed these unpopular and drastic economic changes to be implemented rather quickly whenever political will was present. As Daniel Green notes, “Authoritarianism allowed the PNDC a relatively free reign in its management of politics and economics.”¹⁵

Authoritarianism was also a persistent feature of Upper Volta’s early years after independence, but it produced very different outcomes under Thomas Sankara. As many observers of West African politics during the 1980s discovered, Upper Volta’s early political history produced divides within the military establishment between senior officers who got their start under the colonial administration and their more populist junior counterparts.

In 1985, Victoria Brittain observed, “Captain Sankara organised the commando unit under him in a new way. The soldiers were encouraged to integrate with civilians—they worked together, formed an orchestra and played together. It was an unheard of change in attitude.”¹⁶ Sankara’s connection with younger service members led him to be named Prime Minister under Jean-Baptiste Ouédraogo’s weak nascent government. The Prime Minister’s newfound popularity with grassroots groups like students, increasingly anti-imperialist tones, visits to Libya and North Korea created a rift between the two and ultimately, Sankara’s arrest. Within a period of ten weeks, Sankara was freed by the more radical elements within the military and thrust into power on August 4, 1983.

Sankara, like Rawlings just before him, was immediately burdened with the monumental task of defining his regimes’ ideological orientation to appease the domestic forces that brought him to power, while carefully navigating the global politics of the Cold War. Guy Martin’s analysis captured the potential confusion of an ideological revolutionary regime leery of labels, but strong on rhetoric by writing:

*One can get a precise picture of Cpt. Sankara’s political thought through his various interviews and office pronouncements expressed in clear, simple and direct language. First of all, the leader of the Burkinabé Revolution acknowledges the unescapable need for some kind of ideology...In spite of an avowed fascination for Marxism, Cpt. Sankara vehemently denies that the Burkinabé Revolution is inspired by or patterned after any past or present foreign ideology, experience or model.*¹⁷

While an exact ideological model for the Burkinabé Revolution might have been vague, its immediate actions were concrete. Celebrating a year in power, the Sankara government changed the country’s name from Upper Volta to Burkina Faso, which roughly translates to the “Land of upright people” in the Mòoré and Dioula languages.

Policy-wise, the first orders of business were the reduction of state salaries for army officers and civil servants by as much as 40 percent. Perks of state power such as luxury vehicles were auctioned off to the public, tax bills for the poor were cancelled while the pricing of schools and food were reduced via state intervention.¹⁸ Sankara’s economic policies remained popular until the end of his regime. For example, the revolutionary government declared a moratorium on rent payments for a year, angering the nation’s landowners.¹⁹ In other words, in Thomas Sankara’s Burkina Faso, austerity was for the elites rather than the masses.

On the broader issue of national development in the land of upright people (Burkina Faso), Victoria Brittan observed:

*An unprecedented explosion of popular confidence and creativity was seen in myriad small development initiatives across the country. From the forming of an anti-apartheid movement in the university and seminars on imperialism by the women's police, to the building of villas, airstrips and dams in the remotest corners of the country there was evidence everywhere of a transformation of people's lives by their own initiative. Particularly remarkable was the extent to which the regime's progressive word on women's position and the need to change it were seized and acted upon.*²⁰

It should be noted that the individual initiative lauded here also led to the use of the People's Revolutionary Tribunals for personal vendettas, which made Sankara's government begin to lose popularity in many circles by 1986. Also of importance was Sankara's emphasis of self-sufficiency and anti-imperialist rhetoric, which led him to use public works projects to spur development rather than international investment. These ideological currents also led him to vigorously criticize the world order on the international stage.

On July 29, 1987 Sankara gave an impassioned speech to the Organization of African Unity (OAU) conference in Addis Ababa in which he attempted to rally other African leaders around the cause of resistance to the wave of structural adjustment programs beginning to sweep across the continent. His rationale was as follows:

*We believe analysis of the debt should begin with its roots. The roots of the debt go back to the beginnings of colonialism. Those who lent us the money were those who colonized us. They were the same people who ran our states and economies. It was the colonizers who put Africa into debt to the financiers—their brothers and cousins. This debt has nothing to do with us. That's why we cannot pay it. The debt is another form of neocolonialism, one in which the colonialist have transformed themselves into technical assistants. Actually, it would be more accurate to say technical assassins.*²¹

In nuanced contrast, at a ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of the OAU in 1988, Jerry Rawlings heralded the creation of regional groupings such as Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) “[...] as landmarks in economic co-operation on the road to the establishment of an African economic community.”²²

Rawlings also lent support for Ghana's past Pan-African initiatives by stating, "In 1963 Dr. Kwame Nkrumah had the foresight to call for an African currency, an African monetary zone, and a common African citizenship. As in 1963 I believe that that call may be still be considered utopian today. However, I venture to proclaim that it is still a valid way forward for Africa."²³ You'll notice that while Rawlings evokes Nkrumah as a nationalist/Pan-African symbol, he is slyly deployed to support market reforms sponsored by international financial institutions rather than attempt to undermine their legitimacy in Sankara's blunt, confrontational style.

In the end, Sankara's confrontations with traditional elites, labor unions, machinations against powerful international forces such as France/its West African allies and inability to delegate the popular energy of his movement led to the coup that took his life on October 15, 1987. Much like Ghana's experience under Rawlings, the "rectification" of the Burkina Faso revolution under coup leader and former chief Sankara ally Blaise Compaoré, also included comprehensive structural adjustment reforms under the auspices of the IMF-World Bank. Yves Bourdet and Inga Persson summarized Blaise Compaoré's economic policies adopted during 1990s as, "The deregulation of markets and the privatisation of the majority of state-owned enterprises and banks have been accompanied by various measures that aim at favouring private domestic and foreign investments."²⁴ Ernest Harsh aptly called this "elite recomposition" for short.²⁵

Just like Kwame Nkrumah and his vision of African socialism and Pan-African Unity, Thomas Sankara's memory remains, but his radical anti-imperial dream of self-reliance is a thing of the past. The mausoleums of both men in Accra and Ouagadougou attract sympathetic visitors, but their nation's current economic and political policies reflect very little of their respective visions. Despite observations from analysts like Michael Wilkins, who predicated Blaise Compaoré's "days seemed numbered" in 1989, he was forced to resign on October, 31 2014 due to a popular uprising and subsequent military coup after attempting to amend the nation's constitution to allow himself a chance at a third term in the 2015 elections.²⁶ Although Compaoré finally overstayed his welcome in Burkina Faso, he is still much like Rawlings who ruled Ghana for 19 years, eight of them as a civilian before stepping down due to term limits in 2001. Both were survivors of Africa's neoliberal transformation.

Sankara and Rawlings in Harlem: Similar Appeals, Different Goals

With a very basic narrative of Ghana and Burkina Faso's histories established, we can now evaluate this paper's core concern. Thus, this section will evaluate speeches made by Thomas Sankara and Jerry Rawlings to Harlem audiences to gauge the degree to which engagement between African leaders and the diaspora can give us critical insight into the workings of their regimes. Due to its geographic location in Manhattan and its history as a center of African-American and African immigrant life in the United States, Harlem is an ideal location for African leaders to make inroads of support in the United States before or after their presentations at the United Nations General Assembly.

When Thomas Sankara addressed a Harlem audience on October 3, 1984, his priority was to further define and consolidate his newly minted, yet ever-evolving revolution. The question was; how would the young leader reconcile his domestic goals with his speech to an audience in the diaspora? To give insight into his strategy, it is worth noting the 500-person rally was organized by the New York-based Patrice Lumumba Coalition, an African-American organization established in 1975 to support Angolan Independence and protest apartheid in South Africa. In essence, this was an audience eager to participate in revolution, and Sankara's speech delivered exactly what they wanted.

The Captain's speech opened with the Burkinabé Revolution's signature anti-imperial, anti-racist and affirming call and responses that concluded with "Homeland or death, we will win!" Immediately giving the audience what they wanted, Sankara remarked that previous speakers or "comrades" already "[...] explained what a revolution should be" and validated the event's artistic offerings by saying "A moment, ago, as I watched the ballet, I really thought we were in Africa."²⁷

After validating the proceedings, Sankara immediately linked his revolution with ideas of global Black solidarity. As an example of this, Sankara cited Burkina Faso's alliance (which included joint military exercises) with its "brother country," Jerry Rawlings' Ghana. In a speech filled with raucous applause breaks, one of the largest came when Sankara proclaimed, "When we hold our next maneuvers, there should be fighters from Harlem who come to participate with us."

Sankara concluded his remarks about Ghana and Rawlings later in the address by promising to send "African wrap-around clothing printed with his picture" and disturbing t-shirts that read "Ghana-Burkina Faso: same fight." Sankara instructed the audience "These clothes should be worn everywhere—to work, in the street, while shopping, everywhere. Be proud of them, show that you are Africans. Never be ashamed of being African."²⁸

Sankara's most direct invitation to the diaspora was to the pan-African film festival held in Ouagadougou. The young captain told the audience that their presence at the cultural event had a political dimension by explaining "All the African countries will be represented. South Africa will be represented by the African liberation movement. Harlem should be represented."²⁹ This part of the speech is especially interesting in how it gave Harlem an honorary form of African nationhood via representation at the film festival. The speech concluded with Sankara informing the crowd of topics he planned on broaching during his address at the United Nations the next day and the signature chants that defined the basic ideals of his revolution.

Reactions to Sankara's speech were an instant testament to its effectiveness. The *New York Times* later referred to Sankara's remarks in Harlem as an example of an "angry man's tall words."³⁰ *The New York Amsterdam News*, a staple of New York City's Black community, reported that attendee Annette Robinson recalled "Brother Sankara has proved that an organized people can be victorious and remain so if they will," and a security guard named Samuel Medford said "I felt a great surge of pride in my heritage as a Black man."³¹ Other observers hoped to vacation and spend monies in Burkina Faso, but in much less specific ways than outlined by Jerry Rawlings' visit to Harlem a decade later. Let us transition to get a sense of the subtle ways the conclusion of the Cold War impacted how African leaders addressed the African diaspora in Harlem.

During a 1995 address at an event also hosted by the Patrice Lumumba Coalition titled "Harlem salutes Jerry Rawlings," President Rawlings segued from praising "Black giants" such as Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. Du Bois and Malcolm X to informing the audience that in order to achieve "psychological, social and economic reunification," African-Americans should "Spend your vacations with us in Ghana and breathe deeply your roots, history and future" and to "Pool your savings together to invest in the economic and social future of Africa."³²

The appeal for investment and vacations was in stark contrast to Nkrumah's call for Harlem residents to use their professional and technical expertise to participate in the project of nation-building in 1958. While Rawlings did note, "This morning we've arrived home in Harlem. It is our home as it is yours, just as Ghana is your home as it is ours" he made a point to clarify his invitation by saying "[...]don't go to that continent without adequate skills; otherwise you will only be adding to the poverty."³³ One thing was clear; the pro-unification, anti-colonial and anti-capitalist ideologies so closely associated with radical African leadership earlier in the century were a relic of the past. This was the structural adjustment era and sentiment had to make way to practical neoliberal concerns.

As for reactions, Rawlings' appeals were certainly part of a larger economic picture. In 1993, Ghana created a Ministry of Tourism, which worked in concert with global bodies such as World Tourism Organization (WTO) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) to produce/implement state policies to aid the industry's cultivation. The next year Ghana sent delegations to the United States to begin courting African American tourists in New York, Washington D.C., Chicago, Detroit and Los Angeles to "rediscover Ghana."³⁴ Initially the state's efforts proved to be successful. In 1988, Ghana attracted 113,784 foreign visitors generating about \$55 million in revenue. Ten years later, the figure stood at 347,952 visitors producing nearly \$285 million in receipts.³⁵

By 2002, tourism ascended to the fourth largest source of foreign currency at well over half a billion dollars, trailing only gold and foreign remittances.³⁶ Needless to say, tourism is big business for Ghana and African American visits to sites associated with trans-Atlantic enslavement like the Cape Coast and Elmina Castles are significant part of that. Indeed, President Barack and Michelle Obama solidified this emerging narrative by making the pilgrimage to Cape Coast castle during their first official visit to Africa with Barack as President of the United States in 2009.³⁷

Conclusions: Similar is Not the Same

While there is a great deal of overlap between Ghana and Burkina Faso's early political histories and the leaders they produced, hindsight gives us insight into key differences between Jerry Rawlings and Thomas Sankara. In Ghana, Jerry Rawlings began as a radical inspired by dependency theory and revolutionary rhetoric. While Rawlings proclaimed in 1979, "I am neither a capitalist nor a communist, but I know how it is to be hungry," the realities of the nation's ongoing economic crisis and emergence of an era of American global supremacy led him to tilt his nation's economic policy firmly towards neoliberal capitalism.³⁸

So in this sense, it should not be surprising that Rawlings' address to Harlem, which took place over a decade after Ghana underwent structural adjustment, engaged the audience on the terms of the free market. In a sense, Rawlings' 19 years in power were products of pragmatism that was able to both co-opt and contradict Ghana's past political ideals to bolster his own legitimacy. For African-American audiences, Rawlings offered a "Free-Market Pan-Africanism," that allowed him to link himself to Kwame Nkrumah and the radical global movement(s) that produced him, while producing an economic record that was much closer to Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher.³⁹

After all, it was Rawlings's ability to reshape and use Ghana's radical past to suit the needs of its pro-Western reform present that compelled President Bill Clinton to say, "...in the last decade, under your leadership, Ghana has made great strides toward fulfilling President Nkrumah's vision of a proud and strong country."⁴⁰ Every American President has visited Ghana since the Clinton administration.

Unlike Rawlings, Thomas Sankara did not have a chance to reinvent himself. Although he made attempts at moderation at times, his allure was his steadfast commitment to his anti-imperialist, nationalist ideals. Instead of attracting the support of IMF-World Bank donor countries like Rawlings, Sankara's murder was mourned by allies in Cuba and denounced by radical Black activists in New York City.⁴¹ Very much like Rawlings, Sankara's Harlem address served as a microcosm for the workings of his political project. While Sankara could certainly be described as populist and anti-imperialist, his revolution avoided doctrinaire definitions of what this meant exactly for Burkina Faso's citizenry.

Sankara's Harlem speech reflects his revolution's major weakness; there are calls for popular participation without strict definitions for what involvement entails for common people. This produced a speech that was long on sentiment, but short on the crude pragmatism (discouraging those without investment capital or skills from coming to Ghana) seen in Rawlings' address. In Burkina Faso, the inability to delegate led to a loss of control of various revolutionary initiatives taken up by common people and ultimately the coup that ended both his revolution and his life. After some reflection, one could argue much of the substance of Blaise Compaoré's 27-year long "rectification" of the Burkinabé Revolution more closely resembles the Rawlings era in Ghana than the period of Sankara's rule. While Rawlings and Sankara were friends and allies, the immediate comparisons of the two young junior officers turned firebrand heads of state were more cosmetic than an accurate reflection of political programs and legacies.

In all, this comparison shows how revealing speeches made by the African leaders to the diaspora can be for historians. In each case, the respective leaders of Ghana and Burkina Faso sought to essentialize, idealize and legitimize their governments to enthusiastic audiences looking for ways to connect with them. An increasing amount of historical scholarship has been done on the ways African-Americans "reversed sail" to interact with the African continent during the colonial, decolonizing and post-colonial eras, but this exercise shows scholarship focusing on the inverse can be just as revealing. It is also especially valuable as rapidly shifting demographics complicate Harlem's nearly century-long reputation as what Thomas Sankara called "our Black White House."

References

Alpers, Edward A. Clark, Nancy L. and Worger, William H. eds. *Africa and the West: A Documentary History: Volume 2 From Colonialism to Independence, 1875 to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010.

Babatope, Ebenezer. *The Ghana Revolution: From Nkrumah to Jerry Rawlings*, Forth Dimension Publishers, 1982.

Bailou, Charles. "Overflow crowd pays tribute to fallen leaders," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1987.

_____ "Thousands brave torrential rain to greet President Rawlings," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 28, 1995.

Bourdet, Yves and Persson, Inga. "Reform Policy, Growth and Poverty in Burkina Faso," *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2001): 169-201.

Brittain, Victoria. "Introduction to Sankara & Burkina Faso," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 32 (1985): 39-47.

Churchill, Charles. *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill*, Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864.

Clark, Hunter and Wilde, James. "West Africa Hope and Ideals: A tale of two leaders," *Time*, May, 27, 1985, 42.

Clinton, William Jefferson. "Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring President Rawlings of Ghana." *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol. 35, Issue 8 (1999).
Englebert, Pierre. *Burkina Faso: Unsteady Statehood in West Africa*, Boulder: Westview Press, 1998.

Gaines, Kevin. *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates in the Civil Rights Era*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006.

"Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union (Union of African States)," *International Organization*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Africa and International Organization (Spring, 1962): 443-444.

Ghana Tourist Board. *Tourism Statistical Fact Sheet on Ghana* Accra: Ghana Tourism Board Research Department, 1999.

Gilbert, James. "Roving Camera," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1984.

Green, Daniel. *Democracy, Adjustment and The "Internationalization of the State in Ghana,"* Accra: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 1997.

Harsch, Ernest. "Burkina Faso in the Winds of Liberalisation," *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 25, No. 78 (Dec. 1998): 625-641.

_____ "The legacies of Thomas Sankara: a revolutionary experience in retrospect," *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 40 No. 137 (2013): 358-374.

Herbst, Jeffery. *The Politics of Reform in Ghana, 1982-1991*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993.

Hutchful, Eboe. "New Elements in Militarism: Ethiopia, Ghana and Burkina Faso," *International Journal* Vol. 41, No.4 (1986): 802-830.

Martin, Guy. "Ideology and Praxis in Thomas Sankara's Populist Revolution of 4 August 1983 in Burkina Faso," Issue: *A Journal of Opinion*, Vol. 15 (1987): 77-90.

Mazrui, Ali A. "Nkrumahism and the Triple Heritage in the Shadow of Globalization," March 11, 2002. Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Memorial lectures, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra.

Ministry of Tourism and Modernisation of the Capital City, *Tourism Data Series Issue V: Tourism Receipts between 1993-2002*, Accra, Ghana, 2005.

Newton, Paula. "Would you feel comfortable being a slave tourist? Ghana hopes 'roots tourism' brings more visitors" *CNN*, March 12, 2014. Accessed on September 17, 2014 <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/12/world/africa/on-the-road-ghana-roots-tourism/>.

Prairie, Michel ed. "Our White House is in Black Harlem" in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987*, New York: Pathfinder Press, 2007.

Rawlings, Flt Lt. Jerry. Towards a Free and United Africa, Statement by Flt Lt. Jerry Rawlings, Chairman of the Peoples National Defence Council of Ghana on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the OAU. May 25, 1988 Addis Ababa.

Rawlings, President Jerry John. *Towards Stability and Development (Selected Speeches from January 1992 to January 1996 Vol. 13*, Accra: Ghana Information Services Department, 1996.

Schaffer, Richard and Smith, Neil. "The Gentrification of Harlem?" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (September, 1986), 347-365.

Steger, Manfred B. *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Wilkins, Michael. "The Death of Thomas Sankara and the Rectification of the People's Revolution in Burkina Faso," *African Affairs* Vol. 88, No. 352 (1989): 375-388.

Notes

¹Ali A. Mazrui, "Nkrumahism and the Triple Heritage in the Shadow of Globalization," March 11, 2002. Aggrey-Fraser-Guggisberg Memorial lectures, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra.

² Charles Churchill, *The Poetical Works of Charles Churchill* 308 (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1864), 309.

³ Hunter Clark and James Wilde, "West Africa Hope and Ideals: A tale of two leaders," *Time*, May 27, 1985, 42.

⁴ Eboe Hutchful, "New Elements in Militarism: Ethiopia, Ghana and Burkina Faso," *International Journal* Vol. 41, No. 4 (1986): 802-830.

⁵ Richard Schaffer and Neil Smith, "The Gentrification of Harlem?" *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 76, No. 3 (September, 1986), 350-351.

⁶ "Ghana-Guinea-Mali Union (Union of African States)," *International Organization*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Africa and International Organization (Spring, 1962): 443-444.

⁷ Kevin Gaines, *American Africans in Ghana: Black Expatriates in the Civil Rights Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 10.

⁸ Pierre Englebert, *Burkina Faso: Unsteady Statehood in West Africa* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1998), 110.

⁹ Ibid, 45-46.

¹⁰ Ebenezer Babatope, *The Ghana Revolution: From Nkrumah to Jerry Rawlings* (Forth Dimension Publishers, 1982), 103.

¹¹ Jeffery Herbst, *The Politics of Reform in Ghana, 1982-1991* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 30-32.

¹² Manfred B. Steger, *Globalization: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 42.

¹³ Edward A. Alpers, Nancy L. Clark and William H. Worger eds. *Africa and the West: A Documentary History: Volume 2 From Colonialism to Independence, 1875 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 225-226.

¹⁴ Ibid, 227.

¹⁵ Daniel Green, *Democracy, Adjustment and The "Internationalization of the State in Ghana,"* (Accra: The Institute of Economic Affairs, 1997), 57.

¹⁶ Victoria Brittain, "Introduction to Sankara & Burkina Faso," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 32 (1985), 42.

¹⁷ Guy Martin, "Ideology and Praxis in Thomas Sankara's Populist Revolution of 4 August 1983 in Burkina Faso," Issue: *A Journal of Opinion*, Vol. 15 (1987): 78.

¹⁸ Ibid, 84.

¹⁹ Hunter Clark and James Wilde, "West Africa Hope and Ideals: A tale of two leaders," *Time*, May, 27, 1985, 42.

²⁰ Victoria Brittain, "Introduction to Sankara & Burkina Faso," *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 32 (1985), 46.

²¹ Michel Prairie, ed. "A United Front Against Debt" in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2007), 375.

²² Flt Lt Jerry Rawlings, Towards a Free and United Africa, Statement by Flt Lt. Jerry Rawlings, Chairman of the Peoples National Defense Council of Ghana on the Occasion of the 25th Anniversary of the founding of the OAU. May 25, 1988 Addis Ababa, 3-4.

²³ Ibid, 4.

²⁴ Yves Bourdet and Inga Persson, "Reform Policy, Growth and Poverty in Burkina Faso," *Africa Spectrum*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (2001), 173.

²⁵ Ernest. Harsch "Burkina Faso in the Winds of Liberalisation," *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 25, No. 78 (Dec. 1998), 634.

²⁶ Wilkins, Michael. "The Death of Thomas Sankara and the Rectification of the People's Revolution in Burkina Faso," *African Affairs* Vol. 88, No. 352 (1989), 386.

²⁷ Michel Prairie, ed. "Our White House is in Black Harlem" in *Thomas Sankara Speaks: The Burkina Faso Revolution 1983-1987* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 2007), 149.

²⁸ Ibid, 150-152.

²⁹ Ibid, 152.

³⁰ "Angry Man's Tall Words," *New York Times*, August 23, 1987

³¹ James Gilbert, "Roving Camera," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1984.

³² President Jerry John Rawlings, *Towards Stability and Development (Selected Speeches from January 1992 to January 1996 Vol. 13* (Accra: Ghana Information Services Department, 1996), 163.

³³ Charles Baillou, "Thousands brave torrential rain to greet President Rawlings," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 28, 1995, 2.

³⁴ "Ghanaian tourism minister, delegation to visit the U.S.," *New York Amsterdam News*, September 11, 1993.

³⁵ Ghana Tourist Board. *Tourism Statistical Fact Sheet on Ghana* Accra: Ghana Tourism Board Research Department, 1999.

³⁶ Ministry of Tourism and Modernisation of the Capital City, *Tourism Data Series Issue V: Tourism Receipts between 1993-2002*, Accra, Ghana, 2005.

³⁷ Paula Newton, "Would you feel comfortable being a slave tourist? Ghana hopes 'roots tourism' brings more visitors" *CNN*, March 12, 2014. Accessed on September 17, 2014 <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/12/world/africa/on-the-road-ghana-roots-tourism/>.

³⁸ Eboe Hutchful, "New Elements in Militarism: Ethiopia, Ghana and Burkina Faso," *International Journal* Vol. 41, No. 4 (1986), 805.

³⁹ For a more detailed explanation of the concept of "free market Pan-Africanism" see Justin Williams, "The "Rawlings Revolution" and rediscovery of the African Diaspora in Ghana (1983-2014)," forthcoming in *African Studies*.

⁴⁰ President William Jefferson Clinton, "Remarks at a State Dinner Honoring President Rawlings of Ghana." *Weekly Compilation of Presidential Documents*, Vol. 35, Issue 8 (1999).

⁴¹ Charles Bailou, "Overflow crowd pays tribute to fallen leaders," *New York Amsterdam News*, October 31, 1987.