

When I was growing up in the hilly suburb of Kishiy-Kimbo, in north western Cameroon, the names of West Africa's patriots taught in our general knowledge and civic education classes were not only revered; they were celebrated. To a large extent, Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Sékou Touré of Guinea, Houphouët Boigny of Côte d'Ivoire, Ahmadou Ahidjo of Cameroon, Leopold Sédar Senghor of Senegal and recently Thomas Sankara and Jerry Rawlings are immortalized for their patriotic sacrifices that restored the dignity of their people. These were not necessarily great democrats, but they left their mark as great symbols of national grandeur. Sékou Touré called on his fellow countrymen and women to choose poverty in freedom over affluence in chains. His unrelenting position humiliated the West, especially France that craved for the wealth of Guinea. Nkrumah appealed to Africans to unite and expand their vision for self-rule. He snubbed the myopic identity of fragmented states for a united Africa. Today, Nkrumah stands vindicated. Senghor represented the intellectual capability of the African mind and demonstrated the richness of African poetic life in his leadership. He implored his people to explore the wonders of their minds and intellects. Houphouët declared that a free people are those who feed themselves. The land of Côte d'Ivoire was cultivated to the maximum, making his nation the richest in West Africa. Ahidjo played his game and refused to be maneuvered by France as he turned his back on appeals to recognize the break-away state of Biafra by steering clear of the Nigerian civil war. Though this was a political snare, Ahidjo refused to allow Cameroon to be used as a launching ground for a neighbour's destabilization, sealed its borders to the secessionists and allowed refugees the free corridor.

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