

Julian Mayfield, African-American Rights and “Independent Ghana”

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March 6 represents the 60th anniversary of the independence of the former British colony of the Gold Coast. The country was renamed Ghana at independence in order to reclaim the glorious accomplishments of the ancient kingdom in West Africa which lasted from the 6th to the 13th centuries CE.

Dr. Kwame Nkrumah was the co-founder of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) and stated during the independence celebrations that the independence of Ghana was meaningless unless it was linked up with the total liberation of the African continent. Consequently, the foreign policy of Ghana was largely based upon the realization of a United States of Africa.

The struggle in the Gold Coast was won through mass action such as general strikes, demonstrations, boycotts, urban rebellions and the organization of a revolutionary political party, the CPP. The movement inspired other states throughout Africa to accelerate their efforts aimed at achieving the same goals of statehood.

Not only did the liberation movement in the Gold Coast have an impact on other colonies throughout the continent, it influenced the consciousness and determination of the African American people in the United States which during the late 1950s was still enmeshed in legalized segregation in the South where the majority of the descendants of the enslaved Black people resided. Even outside of the South, segregation was enforced either through existing statutes or as a result of customs and practices.

In 1957, several African Americans traveled to Ghana to attend the inauguration ceremonies held in Accra. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Coretta Scott King were in attendance just several months after the conclusion of the Montgomery Bus Boycott, a turning point in what became known as the Civil Rights Movement.

Claude Barnett, the founder of the Associated Negro Press (ANP) in 1919, was also at the 1957 events and held meetings with the-then Prime Minister Nkrumah. The African American newspapers which the ANP supplied with dispatches saw the independence of Ghana as a beacon of hope for all African people throughout the world.

Julian Mayfield: The Emergence of a Radical Artist

During the late 1940s in the aftermath of the conclusion of World War II, the advent of the Cold War began partly in response to the expansion of the influence of the Soviet Union, enhanced by the Socialist revolutions in China, Vietnam and Democratic Korea. Although the U.S. declared its support for self-determination of colonial peoples as the War drew to an end, Washington had no intentions of abandoning the European-controlled territories to the influence of the Socialist camp. Consequently, the Cold War hysteria surrounding the rise of

the Socialist camp was closely linked to the aim on the part of the imperialist states to maintain the dominance of Western Europe and the U.S. internationally.

Julian Hudson Mayfield was born on June 6, 1928 in Greer, South Carolina. At the age of five he moved with his family to Washington, D.C. which despite it being the capital of the U.S. was governed by segregationist laws. As a student at Paul Laurence Dunbar High School in Washington, he decided upon a career as a writer. Later in 1946 after WWII he joined the U.S. Army from which he was honorably discharged after a one-and-a-half year stint.

After studying at Lincoln University for a brief period he moved to New York City in 1948 to begin his participation in the theatre. Mayfield performed in the Kurt Weil musical *Lost in the Stars* in 1949-50 and the following year, 1951, produced his own work entitled *Fire*. He would direct Ossie Davis' *Alice in Wonder* in 1952 and later publish three successful novels *The Hit* (1957), *The Long Night* (1958) and *the Grand Parade* (1961).

It was during the 1950s, that the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) began to keep extensive files on Mayfield. He along with numerous other writers and artists such as Shirley Graham Du Bois, Ruby Dee, Ossie Davis, Alice Childress, Rosa Guy, John O. Killens, Lofton Mitchell and others were monitored by the FBI due to their connections with the Communist Party and other left-wing groups and coalitions.

Of interests to the U.S. government also was Mayfield's connections with the Puerto Rican Independence Movement. The writer had more than a political relationship with the Puerto Rican people due to his 1954 marriage to a physician from the colonized U.S. territory named Dr. Ana Livia Cordero, who was a well-known professional and political figure in her own right. Later during the same year, the couple moved to San Juan to live. It was there that he worked as a contributor to the Puerto Rican World Journal, an English language publication, along with a radio station.

FBI files reveal the agency's attempt to link Mayfield with the Communist Party of Puerto Rico (PCP) and the Movimiento Pro Independencia de Puerto Rico. Mayfield's wife accompanied him to Ghana in November 1961 where they remained until 1966. Dr. Livia Cordero operated a health clinic for women in Ghana and served as the personal physician of Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois up until his death on August 28, 1963.

After Mayfield became heavily involved in the support work surrounding the events in Monroe, North Carolina in the early 1960s, he was forced to go into exile from the U.S. for the following six years. The National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) leader in Monroe, North Carolina, Robert Williams had become an advocate of armed self-defense against racist organizations such as the Ku Klux Klan and the police.

Files kept by the FBI suggested that the work done by Mayfield in relationship to the situation in Monroe was supported by other activists in the New York area. A Bureau source indicated that on July 10, 1961 there had been a meeting held by an organization previously unknown to the agency called the Afro-American Alliance for Action. The declassified government documents speculate that the name of the group was utilized for the specific purpose of concealing its real identity in connection with another organization known as the On Guard Committee for Freedom (OGCFF).

In Mayfield's FBI files under a section entitled "On Guard Committee for Freedom," it noted that the OGCFF was founded on February 15, 1961 in Harlem. Purportedly the purpose of

the organization was to respond to the recent assassination of Patrice Lumumba of the Congo.

A New York Times article from March 1, 1961 commented that Calvin L. Hicks, a journalist, was associated with the OGCF. A publication issued in May 1961 by OGCF entitled "On Guard" said that the objective of the group was: "to act as an educational and action organization. To inspire our people to united mass action on issues affecting their rights and opportunities. To expose those agents and agencies representative of government who violate those principles and documents upon which this country was founded. In order to implement the above-mentioned principles, OGCF shall advocate and make use of the picket line, the boycott, the petition forums and mass circulation of 'On Guard', our monthly newspaper." (p. 2)

While Mayfield and activist Mae Mallory were in Monroe during August 1961, a delegation of Civil Rights workers came into the city to engage in demonstrations against legalized segregation. Mobs of white racists gathered and began to attack the protesters. The African American community was outraged in the face of this brutality along with threats by law-enforcement against the life of Robert F. Williams.

A white couple had driven into the African American community and was surrounded by people threatening to do them bodily harm since they were suspected of being members of a racist organization. Williams took the couple into his home until they could be guaranteed safe passage out of the neighborhood. In response to rumors that Williams would be arrested and possibly killed, Mayfield and Mallory drove Williams out of North Carolina.

Williams and his family fled to Canada and later Cuba, where they were given political asylum after the FBI sought to arrest him on kidnapping charges. Williams continued his activism and advocacy of armed self-defense from Cuba for several years. By 1966, the Williams' had relocated to the People's Republic of China where they remained until late 1969 before returning to the U.S. where they successfully fought extradition to North Carolina from the state of Michigan.

Mayfield Takes Refuge in Ghana

After being sought by the FBI for questioning in the bogus kidnapping investigation surrounding events in Monroe, Mayfield arrived in Ghana during November 1961. He became a well-known writer and supporter of the Nkrumah government during 1962-66.

His articles appeared in the Evening News, founded by Kwame Nkrumah in 1948, as well as the Spark, a CPP journal. Mayfield was employed by the Ministry of Information and worked as a recorder for the Ghana Parliament. He would later establish the African Review, a journal which carried writings by leading intellectuals and artists including Neville Dawes, Preston King and Bessie Head. He was identified also in FBI documents as a part-time employee of the Publicity Secretariat of the Office of President Kwame Nkrumah.

In a telegram from the United States Information Agency (USIA) and the American embassy in Ghana a confidential classification inquiry was sent to the USIA headquarters in Washington seeking background information on Mayfield in response to a series of articles the writer published in the Evening News March 29 and 30 1962. According to the cable: "US Negro writer Julian Mayfield [wrote] on [the] trial [of] Mrs. Mae Mallory, purportedly followed Monroe North Carolina race disturbances last August. In questionable, inflammatory article

Mayfield says, 'Mrs. Mallory fighting for life in Cleveland after Governor Ohio yielded to pressures [by] white supremacists [in] North Carolina and ordered Mallory extradited to that state to stand trial on fallacious charges of kidnapping that grew out of Monroe race riots last August.'

This telegram from the USIA and embassy in Ghana continued saying: "In view of further upcoming articles on this subject and anticipated unfavorable reaction, we require soonest full background information on author Mayfield who purportedly was 'only reporter present at Monroe race riots last August,' and full background information on trial of Mrs. Mae Mallory, including her present status."

In response to the request for information on Mayfield, the New York Special Agent in Charge (SAC) for the FBI sent information to the Director of the agency which included an article by George Breitman, a writer for the Militant newspaper associated with the U.S.-based Socialist Workers Party (SWP). Breitman praised an article published by Mayfield in Commentary magazine in April 1961, entitled "Challenge of Robert Williams."

Breitman stated in the report with the headline, "Nomination for Julian Mayfield", that: "Without any disrespect for The Militant, which printed many fine articles too, Mayfield's was in my opinion unrivaled among those I read last year for excellence of style and serious handling of an important theme. In it, Mayfield, author of three novels, told the story of Robert F. Williams and the movement he led in Monroe, N.C. That alone would make it worth reading, because it is a dramatic story. But Mayfield also related Williams and Monroe to their national background, showing that they represented the emergence of a new young leadership offering a serious challenge to the middle-class legalistic and pacifist spokesmen in the struggle for Negro equality." (The Militant, May 4, 1962, p. 2)

Other information included in the dossier on Mayfield was a report indicating that he was a supporter of the Cuban Revolution. The author in his writing expressed sympathy for Cuba in its battle with the U.S. This information was also shared with the Miami FBI field office as well.

Mayfield's association with support work for the Cuban Revolution was reflected in the FBI files which made reference to the placing of a full-page advertisement in the New York Times on April 6, 1960. Entitled "What Is Really Happening in Cuba", the ad was signed by the Fair Play for Cuba Committee (FPCC).

Later in August 1961, Mayfield was a speaker at the first anniversary banquet of FPCC. Earlier that year the Senate Internal Security Subcommittee held hearings on the FPCC in January.

Cuban Prime Minister Fidel Castro visited New York City in October 1960 to participate in the United Nations General Assembly. He would meet with Malcolm X of the Nation of Islam and other important community leaders.

This visit took during the period leading up to the national presidential elections of November which were won by Democratic Party candidate Senator John F. Kennedy. Soon after taking office Kennedy gave authorization to the already planned invasion at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961. The attempt to overthrow the two-year old socialist-oriented Cuban revolutionary government relied on anti-Castro rebels who were totally unprepared to fight the committed and disciplined military and volunteer forces defending the Revolution.

Leading up to the Bay of Pigs invasion, the FPCC had warned of a possible intervention. At the time of the U.S.-backed military assault on the sovereign Caribbean state, thousands of people demonstrated against the attacks in various cities across the country. The largest actions were mobilized in New York and the Bay Area of California.

With the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) trained rebels being defeated in less than 48 hours of fighting, the internal security apparatus of the U.S. stepped-up its efforts to counter the solidarity work of FPCC. Corporate media outlets were compelled to draw a link between the successes of the Castro government in defeating the invasion with subversive activities among Communists in the U.S.

These events in 1960-61 generated further interests by American intelligence agencies in the role of Julian Mayfield. Robert F. Williams had traveled to Cuba in 1960 on a solidarity tour which included numerous other left-wing and African American leaders. When the false allegations of interstate flight to avoid prosecution for kidnapping were leveled against Williams after the Monroe incident of August 1961, Mayfield and Mallory were also targets for prosecution by the federal government.

A follow up report on Mayfield issued by the New York FBI office dated December 14, 1962, noted that: "Subject resided as of April 1962, at Bungalow #5, Signals Road, Achimota School, Accra, Ghana, and subject was a 'Government Officer' in the National Research Council, Department of National Institute of Health and Medical Research, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, Ghana. In September, 1962, source made available information reflecting that subject was fully in sympathy with the Cuban Revolutionary Government. In April, 1962, a source advised that subject was appointed as a contributor of news articles from Ghana for 'Freedomways' a quarterly review of the Negro freedom movement."

Freedomways was a journal which began publishing in early 1961 and included leading African American editorial staff members from the Communist Party (CP) such as James Jackson and Shirley Graham Du Bois. The magazine was designed to provide a left analysis of the developing Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. and its international implications. The editorial board consisted of both Party members and non-members such as John Hendrik Clarke, a self-taught historian and writer who at the time was closely associated with the CP in New York City.

The FBI reports on a letter from Clarke to Mayfield in 1962 requesting the Ghanaian-based exile assist in recruiting writers for a special issue Freedomways was planning by the close of the year on the African situation. Clarke states in the letter that he wanted Mayfield to act as a representative of the journal in Ghana. Clarke also says that 50 copies of the upcoming issue on Africa would be forward to him in Accra from New York.

Another FBI report on Mayfield's activities included a copy of a reprinted article from The Militant dated September 30, 1963, which had been initially published by the author in the Ghanaian Times. The article took the form of an open letter to Ohio Governor James A. Rhodes, appealing to him not to extradite Mae Mallory back to North Carolina to stand trial in the kidnapping case involving Robert F. Williams in August 1961.

Mayfield sought to dispel the very notion that a kidnapping had even taken place. He admits that he was there when the incident occurred in Monroe and that the white couple in question, the Stegalls, later said that Williams had saved their lives. Mayfield refuted the statement by Governor Rhodes that Mallory could receive a fair trial in the state. The case of

Mae Mallory and the Williams' had been widely publicized in West Africa in an effort to pressurize the Ohio governor from sending the-then Cleveland-based activist back to North Carolina to stand trial.

Continuing its monitoring of Mayfield's work in Ghana, the FBI copied an article from the Muhammad Speaks newspaper dated March 19, 1965. A longer version of the article had originally appeared in the Ghanaian Times from November 25, 1964 entitled "Congo is a Lesson for the Apologists".

The report deals with the duplicitous role of U.S. diplomatic personnel in Africa. Mayfield portrays the American embassy leaders as sophisticated in their language designed to win over African governmental officials to a sympathetic view of the Washington.

Discussing the so-called "Congo Crisis" of late 1964 that garnered the intervention of British and U.S. military forces to "evacuate white hostages" from the former Belgian Congo, Mayfield stresses: "The world has just witnessed a dramatic demonstration of the determination of world imperialism to keep the vast majority of mankind oppressed under its grinding heel. Belgium troops were quartered by Africa's 'friends', Mr. Wilson's Labor Party, on the British-controlled island of Ascension. United States aircraft transported these troops to Stanleyville, ostensibly to liberate white hostages, but clearly, the objective was to crush the nationalist opposition to the U.S. running-dog regime."

In describing those Africans who are unwilling to see the U.S. imperialists for what they are in relationship to the struggle for genuine independence on the continent, the author observes:

"There is a type of African, usually educated in England or North America, who finds it uncomfortable and embarrassing to regard the United States as the capital of world imperialism.... This type of African is more dangerous to the African Revolution than any C.I.A. agent, black or white. The American who rants about the 'free world', 'the rights of man', and 'the liberty of the individual', knows in his teeth that he is lying. But this particular African, who is usually secure because of his education and his job, believes implicitly in that lie. During his brief tour of the U.S. he wined and dined in some fine white homes, and he will fight to the death anyone who purports to tell him that his recent hosts are the world's greatest carriers of the neo-colonialist mentality."

Mayfield then goes on to examine the "rehabilitation" of the secessionist leader of Katanga in the Congo, Moise Tshombe, who was appointed as the prime minister of the country in 1964 in an effort to shore up American influence and dominance. Tshombe was utilized by the Belgians and the U.S. during 1960 to destabilize the newly-independent former colony led by the first Prime Minister Patrice Lumumba of the Congolese National Movement (MNC-Lumumba).

Lumumba was overthrown in a coup led by Joseph Mobutu, later known as Mobutu Sese Seko, which was backed by the Belgians and the administration of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, who authorized a plot to assassinate the Congolese leader. Placed under house arrest by the United Nations forces that were invited by Lumumba to assist in the stabilization of the country after the break down of order due to the mutiny by the paramilitary Force Publique, just days after the declaration of independence from Brussels on June 30, 1960, Lumumba eventually escapes in an effort to join his supporters in the east of

the country where a genuinely independent Congolese state was under construction.

Nonetheless, Lumumba was captured by the imperialist-backed reactionary forces and taken to Elizabethville in Katanga Province where he was tortured and brutally murdered along with two of his closest comrades in January 1961. The assassination was overseen by Mobutu and the Belgian military with the assistance of Washington and London.

This outrageous attack on the independence and sovereignty of the emergent African states prompted widespread demonstrations across the continent and internationally. African Americans disrupted a United Nations hearing on the situation in New York shouting down U.S. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson blaming Eisenhower and the incoming administration of President John F. Kennedy for the murder of Lumumba and the other Congolese ministers accompanying him.

In this report written nearly four years after the coup and assassination of Lumumba, Mayfield then asks: "But what shall they say now, these people who have bought the beautiful American image, lock, stock and barrel? Only yesteryear Moise Tshombe was the symbol of all that is hateful and detestable in human society. Even in America he was regarded as liar, thief, traitor, imperialist lackey and co-murderer of the greatest statesman-patriot the Congo had produced. Who, reading these words, thought he would live long enough to see this same Tshombe crowned Prime Minister of the Congo? Who dreamed that the United States would so nakedly expose itself as to send thousands of military 'advisers', Cuban counter-revolutionary mercenaries, and devastating weapons of modern warfare to his aid, all supposedly in defense of U.S. interests?"

Who imagined that the 'free' press of 'free' England and the U.S. themselves so contemptuous of Uncle Tom Moise, would so suddenly and unashamedly begin to tout the Katangese puppet as the only popular figure in the Congo, 'the only one who can bring peace to that troubled country.'

These arguments were also echoed by Malcolm X (El Hajj Malik Shabazz) during the same time period. The leader of the Organization of Afro-American Unity (OAAU) had just returned from an extended tour of several African, Middle Eastern and Western European states.

Malcolm X had visited Ghana earlier that year for the second time. His first visit was in 1959 as an emissary for the Nation of Islam (NOI) headed by the Hon. Elijah Muhammad, who had taken a tour of several African and Middle Eastern states including Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Sudan and Egypt. When Malcolm arrived in May 1964, Julian Mayfield was considered the de facto leader of the African American community in Ghana.

The African American community in Ghana at the time consisted of luminaries such as Shirley Graham Du Bois, Maya Angelou, Alice Windom, Vicki Garvin, Leslie Alexander Lacy, among others. Malcolm would address audiences at the University of Ghana at Legon, the Ghana Parliament and the Kwame Nkrumah Ideological Institute at Winneba. The OAAU leader met as well with Dr. Nkrumah who provided counsel in regard to the struggle for Pan-Africanism and Socialism.

Nonetheless, the address by Malcolm at Legon was severely criticized by H.M. Basner in a column published by the Ghanaian Times. Basner, a white South African and former member of the Communist Party of South Africa, claimed that Malcolm's viewpoint was devoid of taking class into consideration and that this could not be justified based upon the history of

the anti-slavery and the-then current Civil Rights Movement in the U.S.

Coming to Malcolm's defense was Mayfield who responded in a column in the Ghanaian Times stressing that: "I sat several rows behind Mr. Basner and I heard nothing Mr. X said to contradict this. Mr. Basner's audio reception is as good as mine and he must have heard Malcolm say that he did not believe that the black man would ever experience full freedom under the American system . . . Is not socialism the only alternative to the system? And did not Malcolm go on to outline a campaign by which the black man in the U.S. would do all he could to destroy the present system . . . ?"

Mayfield continued his defense emphasizing: "What we who support Malcolm X have recognized is that there can be no black-white unity until the black man himself is so organized that he cannot become the victim either of his enemies or of those whites who call themselves his friends. By making a passionate appeal to Afro-Americans to unite on the basis of racial self-interest and identify more closely with their African brother, Malcolm X is not being racist, anti-Marxist nor showing disrespect to the memory of John Brown. He is merely using common sense. . . . Black fighters of America have neither the time nor the patience to go around with a magnifying glass searching for genuine white revolutionists . . . the vast majority of the oppressed people of the world are non-white and damn near all of the oppressors are white, and that if the vast majority could be properly channeled, a major and perhaps decisive blow could be struck against the bastion of world imperialism."

Shirley Graham Du Bois, at the time Director of Ghana National Television, entered the debate as well viewing Basner's comments as an indirect attack on the legacy of her husband, the-then late Dr. W.E.B. Du Bois who passed away less than one year prior to the visit of Malcolm X. Dr. Du Bois was selected by Nkrumah to direct the Encyclopedia Africana Project, a monumental work which was designed to reconstruct the history of the continent from the perspective of African people.

Graham Du Bois wrote that: "I must take issue with Columnist Basner in his criticism of Malcolm X. Mr. Basner seems to ignore the fact that Malcolm X's vigorous protests and denunciations are against the White Government and the White Ruling Class 'of the United States. The leader of the Black Moslems was presented at Legon by the Marxist Forum which would indicate that he does not share the prevailing fear and aversion which dominates America for all things Marxist. I have never heard or read of Malcolm X attacking Marx, Engels, Lenin or Mao-tse-Tung. I know that he has always admired, I might even say revered, the works of W. E. B. DuBois . . . The truths which Malcolm X enunciates are bitter. Many people find them hard to swallow."

Basner would have the last word in the debate in an attempt to rehabilitate himself politically by quoting from a speech delivered by Malcolm X in Chicago upon his return to the U.S. which emphasized the economic and class dimensions of the African American struggle. Basner said in the final article: "In the next few years the effects of automation under capitalism will swell the ranks of those millions already unemployed . . . there is the natural army, with the Afro-American in the vanguard, which can carry on the real fight for civil rights I will be told that this army cannot be assembled. I answer it must be because there is no other army." (May 29, 1964)

Mayfield and the Anti-Nkrumah Coup

Julian Mayfield was not in Ghana when the coup against Nkrumah was carried out on

February 24, 1966. He had traveled to Spain in January and as a result of the police and military seizure of power engineered by the U.S. CIA and other western imperialist powers, remained unable to return to the country.

Although it was suspected at the time of the First Republic in Ghana that Washington was pursuing the removal of the CPP government, evidence in this regard has been subsequently revealed through the U.S. State Department declassified documents. Many of the progressive African Americans residing in Ghana during 1966 soon left the country including Shirley Graham Du Bois and Dr. William Alpheus Hunton, who was appointed as Director of the Encyclopedia Africana Project in the aftermath of the passing of Dr. Du Bois.

Mayfield lived in Spain for a year and eventually returned to the U.S. in 1967. The FBI remained interested in his work well into the 1970s. He would later travel to Guyana in 1971 to work for the government of the-then President Forbes Burnham.

Mayfield wrote and acted in the film Uptight which was created in the wake of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968. Three months following the King assassination and the subsequent urban rebellions in approximately 125 cities across the country, Cleveland would erupt on July 23, 1968. The Glenville Rebellion resulted in the ambushing and deaths of police officers. Fred Ahmed Evans, a Black Nationalist leader in Cleveland, was prosecuted and convicted for the murder of four people and given the death penalty. Evans was never placed in the electric chair however he reportedly died of cancer in 1978 while serving a life sentence in Lucasville Correctional Facility in Ohio.

Julian Mayfield after living in Guyana for four years won a Fulbright Fellowship to teach in West Germany and Turkey during 1976. He later worked as a lecturer at the University of Maryland at College Park and finally as a writer-in-residence at Howard University in Washington, D.C.

Mayfield died of a heart attack in Takoma Park, Maryland on October 20, 1984 at the age of 56.

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