

Queen Mother Moore (1898-1997): A Legacy of Revolutionary Resistance

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One leading figure in the 20th century movement for African liberation in the United States and around the world is Audley Eloise Moore, widely known as Queen Mother Moore. Her efforts spanned the era of Jim Crow in the South where she was born in New Iberia, Louisiana on July 27, 1898, to the Garvey Movement of the 1920s and the Communist Left of the 1930s and 1940s.

Queen Mother Moore remained a symbol of resistance through the turbulent years of the 1950s through the 1970s, where she was a stalwart at numerous mass meetings, conferences and demonstrations across the U.S. and the world. Even into her later years of the 1990s she attended significant conferences related to the demand for reparations reminding a younger generation of activists and organizers that the struggle for national liberation extends back for decades.

Fighting Jim Crow in the Struggle for Self-Determination

Queen Mother Moore early on in life faced the challenges of Jim Crow segregation, national oppression and lynching. Her parents died while she was very young propelling her into starting her own cosmetology business at the age of 15. One of her grandfathers was lynched by white men for violating the codes of Jim Crow segregation.

She would later hear the propaganda of the Jamaican-born African nationalist leader Marcus Garvey, who founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) in 1914. Garvey would travel to the U.S. in 1916 seeking to learn from the establishment of Tuskegee Institute in Alabama by Dr. Booker T. Washington.

However, Washington had died in 1915. Garvey stayed in the U.S. setting up his headquarters in Harlem in New York City. By 1920, he had acquired millions of followers and supporters throughout the country and extending his movement for self-reliance and African emancipation to Europe and territories on the continent.

Queen Mother Moore became a member of the UNIA in New Orleans and was inspired to move to New York in the 1920s. In later years she recounted a rally addressed by Garvey in 1922 when he had been arrested the night before. Armed members of the UNIA came to the rally and ensured that Garvey was able to speak. (<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/29/>)

After the imprisonment and deportation of Garvey on bogus trumped-up charges of mail fraud from 1925-1927, his movement began to decline. Moore continued in her activism by joining the Communist Party in 1933.

The Communist Party was undergoing its most successful period in the years of the Great Depression of the 1930s. The Communists would recruit thousands of African Americans in both the northern cities such as New York and Chicago along with establishing a radical Sharecroppers Union (ASU) in Alabama.

Through the Unemployed Councils (UC) and other mass organizations, Communists led struggles against evictions, for tenant rights, and solidarity campaigns with Ethiopia when the Italian fascist government of Mussolini had invaded the Horn of Africa state in 1935. When asked why she became a Communist in the 1930s, she said in an interview that “the Communists were the only ones interested in my revolutionary rights.” She ran for a seat in the New York State Assembly as a Communist in 1938 and City Alderman in 1940.

According to the African American Registry, Moore had: “organized domestic workers in the Bronx labor market and helped Black tenants in their struggles against white landlords. She was arrested repeatedly for her activities, but she would not stop in her activism. In 1931, she participated in the Communist Party’s march in Harlem to free the Scottsboro boys. Inspired by the party’s stance on anti-racism, Queen Mother joined the International Labor Defense and the Communist Party. During the 1930s, she organized around housing issues, the Italian-Ethiopian war, racial prejudice in film, and a host of other issues confronting poor and oppressed Black communities.”

She would leave the party in 1950. Later she was a co-founder of the Universal Association of Ethiopian Women which engaged in anti-lynching work, welfare rights and charitable efforts.

In addition, she worked with the National Association of Colored Women (NACW) and the National Council of Negro Women (NCNW). In 1963, she established the Reparations Committee of Descendants of U.S. Slaves calling for reparations for African people from the American government. She built-up support for this demand across the country acquiring over a million signatures for a petition to the government and presented them to the-then President John F. Kennedy in December of that year, which was the 100th anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation.

An Advocate for National Liberation and Pan-Africanism

It was in the 1950s that the African independence movement began to win victories across the continent. In Egypt, Ghana, Guinea, Algeria, Congo, Kenya, South Africa and other states, the masses erupted through labor strikes, boycotts, demonstrations and armed struggle. In 1957, the former British colony of the Gold Coast won its independence under the leadership of the Convention People’s Party (CPP) founded by Dr. Kwame Nkrumah.

Nkrumah declared on March 6, 1957 at the Ghana Independence Day celebration that “the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked up with the total independence of the African continent.” Nkrumah would maintain an open door policy to Africans from across the continent and the Diaspora. Thousands of Africans would visit and resettle in the country during the years of 1957 to 1966 when Nkrumah was overthrown in a right-wing military and police coup that was engineered by the U.S. State Department and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

Nkrumah went into exile in Guinea-Conakry, a former French colony and was given the position of Co-President with Ahmed Sekou Toure, the founder of the Democratic Party of

Guinea (PDG). Nkrumah died in Bucharest, Romania in April 1972 after a battle with cancer. Moore attended his memorial services in Guinea and Ghana, where she was given the name Queen Mother by the Ashanti people.

Later in 1990 when African National Congress (ANC) leader and eventual President Nelson Mandela was released after over 27 years of imprisonment, she would attend his speaking engagements in New York when he traveled to the U.S. in that year to build support for the liberation of South Africa.

Black Power and the Demand for Reparations

Moore was present at the Black Power Conference held in Newark, New Jersey in July 1967 in the immediate aftermath of the rebellion in that city. The following year she was one of the first signatories to the Declaration of Independence from the U.S. by the Republic of New Africa, founded in Detroit in late March 1968.

On November 5, 1979, a march of 5,000 people from Harlem to the United Nations organized by the National Black Human Rights Coalition (NBHRC) presented a petition to the-then General Assembly President Salim Ahmed Salim of the Republic of Tanzania documenting violations against the African American people. Moore spoke to a rally outside the UN which was chaired by Elombe Brath. She told the crowd that the U.S. government owed African people reparations for the exploitation and rape people were subjected to for centuries.

At a standing room only symposium organized by the Chama Cha Kiswahili (CCK) held in "Tribute to the Revolutionary Legacy of African Women" at Wayne State University in Detroit during February 1980, she told the audience that "it was not abject poverty that drove her to the struggle, but a burning desire for freedom." She would visit WSU again the following February where she addressed a large audience. In 1983, after suffering a stroke, she attended "Black Nation Day" at WSU commemorating the 15th anniversary of the founding of the RNA.

In 1994, Moore attended another Detroit conference at Cobo Hall organized by the National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America (NCOBRA). She participated as an observer in a panel discussion where this writer presented a paper on the international implications of the demand for reparations.

Queen Mother Moore passed away to the realm of her ancestors on May 2, 1997 at the age of 98. She left a legacy of struggle for the contemporary generation of African American and African activists to learn from and emulate.

Note: This writer was a graduate student and leader in the Chama Cha Kiswahili in 1980 and 1981 when Queen Mother Moore was hosted at WSU. She later said that her appearance at these events was a highpoint for her in a long history of political work. The author was also a participant in the November 5, 1979 demonstration to the UN in New York City.

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