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The Greatest Africans Of All Time



by Peter Hammond

The New African magazine (August – September 2004) recently published the results of their poll. The choices of the readers who participated in this New African survey are quite incredible. **Robert Mugabe**, the brutal dictator of Zimbabwe was voted the third greatest African of all time!

Winnie Mandela, despite her convictions for kidnapping, child abuse and theft from the poor, was voted the " *most popular woman in Africa!*"

The editors of the New African observed that although they requested nominations for "the greatest Africans of all time", over 95% of the nominations were from the post-independent era. They asked the question: "Have people forgotten Africa's history?"

The vast majority of people chosen were political leaders. The editors declared: "The results are disappointing. It shows that African governments and educationists have to review the kind of

history and education we are teaching and providing in our schools. Without knowing our past and where we came from, we can hardly know our present and why we are where we are, and plan for our future.

”

Amongst some of the surprising nominations for “*The Greatest Africans of All Time*” were numerous Americans: Malcolm X, Mohammed Ali, Bob Marley, Michael Jackson, Bill Cosby, and Louis Farrakhan. Even Brazilian footballer Pele featured as one of “*the greatest Africans of all time*”!

”!



Samora Machel

As the editors of the *New African* said, the results of the survey were most disturbing. Dictators who oppressed their people and ruined their countries seem to pre-dominate in this *New African* list of “*Greatest Africans of All Time*”: **Kwame Nkrumah** – the first president of Ghana who became a dictator, impoverished the Gold Coast and was overthrown in the first of six violent revolutions which have racked his troubled country since independence;

Julius Nyerere

whose socialist experimentations with Tanzania so spectacularly failed;

Patrice Lumumba

– the brutal revolutionary of the Congo in whose name the Simba terrorists sacrificed many thousands of human beings (the Soviet Union named their premier terrorist training institution – The Patrice Lumumba University);

Kenneth Kaunda

whose 26 year dictatorship impoverished one of the richest countries in Africa and who in the first free elections was overwhelmingly rejected in a landslide vote by the long-suffering people

of Zambia; and

Samora Machel

who declared war on the Church, closed down, confiscated or destroyed 8000 churches, had 300 000 people incarcerated in concentration camps, 75 000 people executed, and under whose scorched earth campaign millions died of starvation – these tyrants were all voted some of the “

Greatest Africans of All Time

”!

Amazingly **Kofi Annan**, the secretary general of the United Nations who has been credited with the responsibility for the UN's failure to protect the people of Rwanda (whom they had helped disarm) in the 1994 genocide, was elected the tenth “

All Time

Greatest African of
”!



Shaka Zulu

The predominance of socialist failures, Marxist murderers, political dictators and sportsmen amongst this list of “*100 Greatest Africans of All Time*” reflects an abysmal ignorance of history and current affairs. One of the few truly worthy recipients of this honour is

Shaka Zulu

, the military genius, described as Africa's Napoleon, who built the Zulu nation into the most formidable military power in Southern Africa. However, he is only placed number 13 on this list.

I wondered why **Mzilikazi**, the founding king of the Matabele and **Moshoeshoe** king of the

Basuto were not included in the New African list.



Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther

I also wondered why **Bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther** of Nigeria was not included? Samuel Crowther was the first African Bishop of the Church of England. At age 13 Samuel was captured by Muslim slave traders but rescued by a British naval squadron. In 1843 he was ordained as a minister of the Church of England. His Yoruba language became the first African language to be used for Church of England liturgy and worship. In 1864, Crowther was ordained as the first African bishop of the Church of England in an overflowing Canterbury cathedral. Samuel Crowther was one of the first four students to graduate from Fourah Bay College, Sub Saharan Africa's first university (built on the site of an old Arab slave market). Crowther's dynamic ministry was effective in opposing slavery, witchcraft and Islam and he succeeded in indigenising an Evangelical Anglicanism which was truly African. (Today there are 18 times more Anglicans worshipping in church every Sunday in Nigeria than there are in Great Britain)! Samuel Crowther would be high on my list of the “*Greatest Africans of All Time*”.

In fact, if I am not mistaken, not only are there no Christian martyrs or missionaries on the New African list of “*100 Greatest Africans of All Time*”, but there are precious few Christians at all.

Why are some of the greatest names of Church history, not included in this list? **Tertullian**, **Origen**, **Cleme**

nt and

Augustine

were some of the greatest minds and influential leaders of the early Church and they were all Africans. Why are the Biblical characters of

Simon of Cyrene

who helped carry the cross of Christ and the Treasurer of Queen Candice (

the Ethiopian

official of Acts 8 who brought the Gospel to Sudan) not mentioned either?



Mary Slessor

If a Jamaican drug addict like Bob Marley, an American racist criminal like Malcolm X, and an accused child abuser and drug addict like Michael Jackson (none of whom are Africans) can be included in the New African list, then why are those missionaries who adopted Africa, and in many cases are buried in Africa, not included? Where is **Robert Moffat**, the first to translate the entire Bible into an African language? What about

David Livingstone

, the pioneer missionary who died in his adopted continent dealing a death blow to the Islamic slave trade. What about

Mary Slessor

, considered Eko Kpukpro Owa the Mother of All The People of Calabar (the missionary who ended the killing of twins, pioneered schools for girls, saving countless lives). Why is Mary Slessor not included in this list?

I certainly would also include **Dr Kenneth Fraser**, the pioneer missionary who established the first school, the first church and the first hospital in Moruland in Sudan. And his disciple Canon Ezra Lawiri, the Moru Bible translator who was killed in an ambush after completing the

translation of the Bible into the Moru language.

Andrew Murray must be the African author with more books translated into more languages, worldwide than anyone else. For over a century, his books have never been out of print and they are immensely popular. Yet, for some reason, Andrew Murray is not mentioned in the New African list either.

Personally, I would also have included **Dr. Jonas Savimbi**, the UNITA freedom fighter who so courageously opposed Soviet and Cuban colonialism in Angola; and

Ian Smith

, the Prime Minister of Rhodesia, who (whether you agreed with his politics or not) is an African of immense courage and integrity, a man of his word who remains in Zimbabwe to this day seeking justice for the pensioners and the widows.

The New African magazine places president **F. W. De Klerk** as 50 and **Bishop Desmond Tutu** as 99. But it was president

P. W. Botha

who really abolished apartheid. There was very little left of apartheid for F. W. De Klerk to abolish after the sweeping reforms initiated by P. W. Botha.

Dr. Buthelezi

is not mentioned on the New African list but his achievements most certainly deserve him a place on such a list as well.

And as far as contemporary religious leaders go, **Rev. Erlo Stegen**, whom King Goodwill Zweletini described as God's Apostle to the Zulus, would be high on my list as one of the greatest Africans of all time.

The Egyptian Christians would include **St Mark** the evangelist who founded the Church in Egypt, and our friends in Sudan would nominate

General Charles Gordon

, the courageous Evangelical Christian who crippled the slave trade and gave his life for the people of Sudan.

But what do you think?

Who would you vote for as the greatest Africans of all time? Christian Action is launching its own survey of its readers to compile a Christian Action list of The 100 Greatest Africans of All Time. Each subscriber is entitled to nominate 10 individuals, in descending order of your estimation of their overall importance. Twenty of those responding will be rewarded books as prizes for historical knowledge and for originality and eloquence in motivating your choices. The final results of the Christian Action survey of The 100 Greatest Africans of All Time will be published in the first edition of Christian Action for 2005.

Send your nominations to info@christianaction.org.za
or Post to Christian Action,
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