

PROFESSOR JOSEPH KI-ZERBO

A CAPSULE BIOGRAPHY

Born: 21 June 1922 at Toma, Upper Volta (present-day Burkina Faso).

Died: 4 December 2006, in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso.

Education:

- 1949 – 1953 Majored in History at the Sorbonne, Paris.
- 1955 Awarded the specialist degree of the Institute of Political Studies, Paris.
- 1956 Obtained the terminal professorial degree in History from the Sorbonne.

Professional Experience:

- 1956 – 1963 Taught in France, Senegal, Guinea-Conakry, and Burkina Faso.
- 1963 – 1967 Director General for Education, Youth and Sports, Upper Volta.
- 1968 – 1973 Professor, University of Ouagadougou.
- 1972 – 1978 Member, Executive Council, UNESCO.

PUBLIC FUNCTIONS

A SELECTIVE LIST

- 1950 – 1956 Co-Founder and First President, Association of Upper Volta Students in France.
- Co-Founder and First President, Association of Catholic Students from Africa, the West Indies, and Madagascar.
- 1958 – 1966 Active in political alliances with Patrice Lumumba and Kwame Nkrumah.
- 1956 – 1963 Professor: Orléans, Paris, Dakar, and Ouagadougou.
- 1963 – 1967 Director General for Education, Youth and Sports, Upper Volta.
- 1972 – 1978 Member, Executive Council, UNESCO.
- 1968 – 1973 Professor, University of Ouagadougou.
- 1967 – 1979 Secretary-General, African and Malagasy Council on Higher Education (CAMES)
- 1980 – 1986 President, African Development Studies Center (CEDA), Ouagadougou.
- 1986 – 1992 President, Endogenous Development Research Center (CRDE), Dakar.
- 1986 – 1992 Research Fellow, French Institute of Black Africa (IFAN), University of Dakar.
- 1975 – 2005 President, Association of African Historians.
- 1992 – 2005 President, African development Studies Center (CEDA), Ouagadougou.
- 1970 – 2006 Elected Member, People's Assembly and the National Assembly.

HONORS AND DISTINCTIONS

A SELECTIVE LIST

- 1964 Honorary Doctorate, University of Ghana.
- 1967 Right Livelihood Award (An Alternative Nobel Prize), Stockholm, Sweden.

- 1999 Avicenna Silver Medal, in recognition of his contribution to the *General History of Africa*.
- 2000 Kadhafi Human and People's Rights Prize
- 2001 Honorary Doctorate, University of Padua, Italy.
- 2004 Radio France International's World Witness Prize, awarded for the book *A quand l'Afrique?(What Time for Africa?)*. Published in 2003.
Honorary Life Member, Board of the Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa (CODESRIA).
- 2006 Commander, International Order of Academic Laurels, African and Malagasy Council on Higher Education (CAMES), a posthumous award.

POSTS IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS, A SELECTIVE LIST

- 1970 – 1978 Member, Governing Board, United Nations Institute for Training and Research (UNITAR).
- 1980 Vice-President, International Council of Philosophy and the Humanities.
Vice-President, International Board in charge of the production of UNESCO's *General History of Africa*
- 1980s Board Member, United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan.

LEADERSHIP ROLES IN POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS, 1958 – 2005

Upper Volta National Liberation Movement
 Upper Volta Progressive Union
 Upper Volta Progressive Front
 National Convention of Progressive Patriots / Social Democratic Party (CNPP / PSD)
 Party for Democracy and Progress / Socialist Party (PDP / PS)

Joseph Ki-Zerbo was a founding member and an active participant in the Collective of Mass Democratic Organizations and Political Parties, a coalition of opposition parties and civil society associations. He was the author of the now famous Dioula/Bambara language slogan : **Nan laara, an saara!**
 Without consciousness, we're dead!

The life and work of Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo present the following highlights:

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, internationally renowned African historian

Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo made a substantial contribution to the retrieval of African history. He published numerous history books, including *Le Monde africain noir : histoire et civilisation (The Black African World: History and Civilization)*, Hatier, Paris, 1972;
Histoire de l'Afrique noire : d'hier à demain (A History of Black Africa: From Yesterday to Tomorrow), Hatier, Paris, 1972.

He also served as a Vice-President of the Executive of the International Drafting Committee for the *General History of Africa*, UNESCO. Specifically, he headed the team of scholars that produced Volume I in the series, entitled *Methodology and African Prehistory*, UNESCO, Paris, 1980.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Educationalist, Architect of CAMES

Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo did not simply teach at various levels of the educational system. He was a top-level thinker and participant in the development of education in Africa. In the teething times following Independence in the French-speaking African countries, he helped advance the Africanization of academic curricula. In his capacity as first Secretary General of CAMES, the African and Malagasy Council on Higher Education, a body he presided over for a dozen years, he endowed the member countries with an outstanding instrument for cooperation in the field of higher education.

He spoke out on issues of educational reform in Africa, and put forward useful orientational guidelines. His books, *Educate or Perish*, UNESCO, Paris, 1990, and the posthumous volume *Education et Développement en Afrique : cinquante ans de réflexion et action (Education and Development in Africa: Fifty Years of Thought and Action)*, Joseph Ki-Zerbo Foundation, Ouagadougou, 2010, provide eloquent testimony to this work.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Promoter of Self-Reliant Development

The issue of identity is at the heart of Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo's intellectual work. Indeed, he took pains to emphasize the necessary link between culture and development. "Development does not just happen; it springs from within." Such is the meaning of the motto of the Center for African development Studies (CEDA). Created by Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo in 1980, the purpose of the Center was "to encourage all activities tending to promote the development and advancement of African societies on the basis of an endogenous, autonomous process incorporating socio-cultural dimensions."

All the Center's activities were conducted within a gender-sensitive perspective. This was particularly noticeable in the Men and Women's partnership Network for African Development (PARTHEFDA), coordinated by Jacqueline Coulibaly Ki-Zerbo, the UNIFEM representative in West and Central Africa.

To quote an African proverb, "Sleeping on someone else's mat is no better than sleeping on the ground." It was this proverb that inspired the title of the book whose drafting he directed: *Sleeping on Borrowed Mats: Toward Self-Reliant Development*, Karthala / Codesria, Paris / Dakar, 1992. The book brought together proceedings from the Bamako Colloquium organized by the Center for Research on Self-Reliant Development, directed from exile by Joseph Ki-Zerbo.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo, Nationalist, Pan-Africanist, Campaigner for African Unity, Advocate for the Protection of Human Rights

“Wanted: Nationalists!” Responsive to this rallying cry, Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo joined a group of African intellectuals and executives who set out to make their contribution to Guinea-Conakry, a country left in the lurch after it voted “No” in the 1958 referendum on independence or continued dependence on France. Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo rubbed shoulders with many an African nationalist: Sékou Touré, Patrice Lumumba, Amilcar Cabral, Kwame Nkrumah.... He took part in the Pan-African Peoples’ Conference in Accra in 1958. His commitment to Pan-Africanism, and his desire for the achievement of the African Union, shines through his output. An example is the series of interviews with René Holenstein, around the question: *What Time for Africa?* Editions de L’Aube, 2005.

Joseph Ki-Zerbo’s life was actively dedicated to the ideal of African citizenship, in the specific context of his homeland, Burkina Faso. For instance, he took part in the historic movement of public mobilization against impunity following the assassination of the journalist Norbert Zongo, in 1998. His explanation for the process is his conviction that “It would be wrong for the human heart to get dragged down by acts that flout legality, ethics, duty, and respect for human duty.” *A quand l’Afrique? (What Time for Africa?)* Editions d’en bas, a cooperative publication, 2013. Page 166).

As participants at meetings and demonstrations used to say, echoing the militant slogan advocating dignity uttered by Joseph Ki-Zerbo and taken up by the coalition of political parties and civil society organizations, “*Nan laara, an saara!*” *Without consciousness, we are dead!*

Joseph Ki-Zerbo bequeathed a set of useful guidelines to Africa, to encourage her self-reliant development, and to empower her sons and daughters, as well as those of other continents.

In sum, Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo, a specialist historian, transcended the boundaries of that discipline in both his life and work, through his principled, committed advocacy of the following ideals:

- Africa’s fecund presence throughout history;
- The centrality of education;
- The necessity of an African identity;
- The feasibility of self-reliant development;
- The possibility of African integration and unity;
- Africa’s place in the process of globalization.

1. Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo initiated a dynamic process by creating the **Center for African Development Studies (CEDA)** in 1980, with the active support of a multi-disciplinary team of research scholars and cultural figures.

2. His posthumous volume entitled *Repères pour l'Afrique (Guidelines for Africa)* carries the following dedication to African youth:

Africa has a history. Africa, the birthplace of humanity, was the originator of history. The continent has faced gigantic obstacles, suffered tremendous tribulations, and made tragic errors. Yet still, Africans have throughout demonstrated our aptitude for change and progress—our historicity. But our presence in history should, by engendering a historical consciousness, serve to articulate the three phases of time: the past, the present, and the drive toward the future. If we spend our time simply invoking the past, we accomplish nothing of value for our present and our future. Worse, such behavior gives adversaries opportunities to use our makeshift present, our disastrous mishandling of current realities, as evidence of our basic incompetence. Thus we risk finding our past challenged, and our future compromised. That is why each African, female or male, is required to add value to our common existence. Each generation has pyramids to build.

What we have here, clearly, is a call to continue the work to which Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo dedicated his life with so much energy. It is a call for Africans to retrieve our dignity by regaining a consciousness of our history and our identity, in a process of human advancement projected on a continental scale. “That is the prerequisite for a process of African development tailored to the needs of the 21st century world, and informed with the reality of our heritage.”

Joseph Ki-Zerbo deserves his place among us. Not only did he facilitate the discovery of African history; he also interpreted world history from an African perspective.

Furthermore, Professor Joseph Ki-Zerbo is recognized throughout the world for his contribution to the recording of African history, his contribution to the positive reassessment of culture, and his promotion of inter-disciplinary research.

In December 2015, the first university in Burkina Faso was given its new name: Université Ouaga I Professeur Joseph Ki-Zerbo.

