

Dedication



Mwalimu Professor Dr. Attorney John Mukum Mbaku

Tribute Essay

John Mukum Mbaku Kibinadamu, Mwalimu, Kiongozi na Mfikiri

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When you visit the Weber State University (WSU) website, the main things you glean about Mwalimu John Mukum Mbaku is that he is a Brady Presidential Distinguished Professor of Economics and a John S. Hinckley Fellow at the institution. You will also learn that he has been a member of the WSU faculty since 1991 and is affiliated with the prestigious Goddard School of Business and Economics. In addition, when you visit The Brookings Institution website, you obtain that beyond his WSU faculty position, he is a licensed Attorney and Counselor at Law admitted to the United States Supreme Court. He is also a nonresident senior fellow at The Brookings Institution focusing on African institutional reforms, public choice, and international law

But, of course, there is so much more about Mwalimu Mbaku that will fill a book. For the sake of brevity, I present in this tribute essay a small sample of the evidence that propelled me to refer to him as Kibinadamu, Mwalimu, Kiongozi na Mfikiri—i.e. KiSwahili for “Humanitarian, Teacher, Leader and Thinker.” I address these four characteristics about him one at a time in the ensuing subsection for perspicuity. It behooves me point out here that these characteristics are reflective of a great person in Kemet (meaning in English “Black Land”)/Ancient Egypt, a civilization that reigned from 3150 BC to 30 BC.

Kibinadamu/ Humanitarian

In Kemet, the humanitarian was deeply tied to the concept of Ma'at (i.e. “balance, order, and justice”), which required leaders to protect the vulnerable, even though this coexisted with a rigid, hierarchical society that practiced retainer sacrifice in the First Dynasty (c. 3100 BC–c. 2900 BC) and employed forced labor. Pharaohs were expected to act as stewards, providing food in times of famine and maintaining societal order, while elite burials moved from early human sacrifice to using symbolic shabti figurines, thereby reflecting a shift away from violent, compulsory servitude over time.

Mwalimu Mbaku’s humanitarian-focused contributions include Conflict Resolution Advocacy, Human Rights and Vulnerable Groups, Resource Equity, and Peacekeeping Critique. On the personal level, his humanitarianism was well captured by Africana Womanist Mwalimu Theodora Ayot, who served as African Studies and Research Forum (ASRF) Treasurer from 2005 to 2020 when she stated the following: “Mwalimu Mbaku as President of the ASRF (from 1996 to 2008) launched several humanitarian development projects in Africa.” She added: “Whenever there was a call for financial contributions to support humanitarian causes, Mwalimu Mbaku was among the first group of ASRF members to make a donation.

For me, I experienced Mwalimu Mbaku’s generosity when I took my American University’s National Conference on Undergraduate Research (NCUR) team of about 50 undergraduate students and two graduate assistants to the University of Utah in 2003. The conference is the largest such gathering in the world and attracts more than 5,000 students and faculty members from universities across the United States and a few European countries. During the celebration of the tenth of our 18 straight national championships for having the most published students in the faculty-refereed journal titled the *NCUR Proceedings*, Mwalimu Mbaku joined us with his wife and daughter at the Brazilian restaurant in Salt Lake City. After the dinner, Samba dancing, and a birthday celebration for one of the students, a waitress brought the bill for over \$1,500.00. Mwalimu Mbaku grabbed the bill and paid it. I later learnt that he had been providing financial support for struggling American and foreign students at his university as well.

Mwalimu/Teacher

The Teacher in Kemet came primarily from the scribes and priests, often working in temple schools (“Houses of Life” or “Instruction”) to train elite students in literacy, mathematics, and morality. The Teachers emphasized discipline, memorization, and repetition by frequently using red ink to correct student errors, a practice dating back 4,000 years.

At Weber State, Mwalimu Mbaku teaches courses in Principles of Economics, Intermediate Microeconomics, International Trade, Business Calculus, and Economic Development. He also works with international students and helps them adjust to college life in the United States. In addition, he challenges his students and others to be the best they can be in their areas of interest.

Kiongozi/Leader

In Kemet, while the Pharaoh was the divine ruler, a structured bureaucracy of civilians managed the daily operations of the state, maintaining order (Ma'at) and overseeing specialized labor.

These leaders, often part of the nobility or highly educated elite, served as intermediaries between the palace and the general population. They included the Vizier (Tjaty), the highest-ranking official under the Pharaoh, acting as a prime minister, chief judge, and overseer of the treasury and all government departments; nomarchs (regional governors), initially appointed by the Pharaoh, to manage the various provinces (nomes) of Kemet; scribes, regarded as the backbone of the administration and essential for tracking resources, trade, military personnel, and tax records; overseers/superintendents, specialized officials who led teams of artisans, laborers, and farmers; and Priests, while being religious figures, operated as key civilian leaders in charge of temple economies, which managed immense resources, land, and labor.

In addition to being one of the founders of the Association of Third World Studies (ATWS) in 1983, Mwalimu Mbaku was also one of the founders of the ASRF (as an associate organization of the ATWS) in 1986 and served as the first President of the ASRF from that year until 2008. In addition, he served as Associate Editor of Africa for the ATWS' *Journal of Third World Studies* (JTWS) from 1987 to 2007. Indeed, Mwalimu Mbaku, being a principled scholar with excellent editing, formatting and technical writing skills, and having respect for the suggestive evaluations of referees and insistence that an author makes the suggested changes and/or provide reasoned rebuttals to some or all of them, brought great respect to the JTWS, especially the African articles, and led to the inclusion of the journal among those in the top tier for tenure and promotion at many universities and colleges and received kudos from the American Political Science Association.

Today, Mwalimu Mbaku is considered across the globe as a major “thought leader” on humanitarian crises in Africa, particularly regarding peacebuilding, human rights, and constitutional reform as solutions to systemic suffering. Key aspects of his include constitutional expertise, academic excellence and service, advisory roles, and legal focus.

Mfikiri/Thinker

A thinker in Kemet is exemplified by Ptahhotep (c. 2400 BCE) who was a renowned Kemetic vizier and sage, best known for authoring *The Maxims of Ptahhotep*, a foundational wisdom text. His teachings emphasized ethics, social conduct, humility, and justice, often regarded as one of the world's earliest examples of moral philosophy.

As a person with highly developed intellectual powers, especially one whose profession involves intellectual activity, Mwalimu Mbaku's extensive body of scholarly work focuses on African political economy, constitutional engineering, corruption, and sustainable development. He has authored, co-authored, and edited-contributed to numerous influential books and scholarly articles. Among his notable books are *Protecting Minority Rights in African Countries: A Constitutional Political Economy Approach* (2022); *Governing the Nile River Basin: The Search for a New Legal Regime* (2015); *Corruption in Africa: Causes, Consequences, and Cleanups* (2007/2010); *Culture and Customs of Cameroon* (2005); *Institutions and Development in Africa* (2004); and *The Transition to Democratic Governance in Africa: The Continuing Struggle* (2003). Some of his well-celebrated and cited scholarly articles appear in the very prestigious *Journal of Social, Political, and Economic Studies*, the *Social Research: An International Quarterly*, and the leading law journals.

Conclusion

That Mwalimu Mbaku has come proverbially a very long way is hardly a matter of dispute. As I have documented elsewhere, he was born in 1950 at Bessi-Awum in the Momo Division of the North West region of Cameroon. He received his high school education at the Cameroon Protestant College in Bali, Mezam Division, North West region where he got his General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary Level and at the Cameroon College of Arts, Science and Technology where he received his GCE Advanced Level. He then came to the United States where he earned his Bachelor of Science in Chemistry degree at Berry College in Mount Berry, Georgia; Bachelor of Arts in the French Language and Literature degree at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah; International Master of Business Administration degree at the University of South Carolina in Columbia, South Carolina; Philosophy Doctorate in Economics degree at the University of Georgia in Athens, Georgia; Juris Doctorate in Law degree at the University of Utah in Salt Lake City, Utah; and a Graduate Certificate in Environmental and Natural Resources Law at the same University. He is also fluent in the Moghamo, English, and French Languages. I am very proud to call him my friend and colleague and an effulgent scholar to boot!

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