

There Are No Successful Black Nations

And the indignity and helplessness of blacks in America won't end until we have a first-world African nation to lift up our people.

- By [Chigozie Obioma](#) Chigozie Obioma is the author of *The Fishermen*, which won an NAACP Image Award and was a finalist for the 2015 Man Booker Prize. A 2015 FP Global Thinker, he is a professor of literature and creative writing at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. *The Fishermen* is now out in paperback.
- August 9, 2016



In the wake of fresh deaths at the hands of police officers in the world's greatest nation, we, the people of the black race, are once again the object of renewed worldwide attention.

Questions of injustice in the United States have been duly raised and protested. And, once again, the black cultural elites in America have seized various platforms to air their grievances and are mostly — and rightly — talking about [racism](#), discrimination, racial profiling, and hate, among other issues. But one issue that has hardly been talked about is the core reason why black people have remained synonymous with the denigrating experience of racism. It is, I dare say, because of the worldwide indignity of the black race.

Racism is not limited to the United States. There is no nonblack nation, even among the most liberal ones, where the black man is dignified. History dealt us an unforgiving blow in the incursion of foreigners into black lands. The Arabs enslaved tribes and nations and then colonized and evangelized them. Then came the Europeans, who, persuaded the Africans were of an inferior race, divided up the continent over lunch in Berlin in 1884. They carted off a large population of its people — sometimes leaving entire villages almost empty — and brought those who remained on the continent under their rule. So complete was the transformation that no black nation retained its ancestral nationhood, national language, or national identity. And today we often hear of how [China](#) or [India](#) or some other nation is “taking over” Africa economically. There is almost no nation whose majority is of a different race that has not spat on the face of the black person, at one time or the other.

Be assured, the indignity will continue. Black elites and activists across the world have adopted a culture of verbal tyranny in which they shut down any effort to reason or criticize us or black-majority nations by labeling such attempts as “racism” or “hate speech.” Thus, one can be certain that any suggestions that our race may indeed need to do something to remedy our situation will not be aired — not by the terrified people of other races. And anyone within our race who makes such a suggestion will be deemed weak and pandering or a sellout, as [U.S. President Barack Obama has been repeatedly called](#). Thus, no one will talk about the painful fact that most African and Caribbean nations have either failed or are about to collapse.

Early African-American intellectuals and cultural elites saw that the future of their race could not be advanced by endless protests or marches of “equality” or “justice.” It could only be done through the restoration of the trampled dignity of the black man. Great men like Marcus Garvey, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Malcolm X all knew that a people is only respected when it has a nation worthy of respect. A man who lives in a shack cannot expect to be treated with respect at a palace. They knew that for us to reclaim power we must first reclaim dignity and that this comes through the construction of a solid black state with a demonstrable level of development and prosperity — and which can stand as a powerful advocate for the global black.

Today, no such state exists.

Nigeria, the most populous black nation on Earth, is on the brink of collapse. The machineries that make a nation exist, let alone succeed, have all eroded. One might argue that the nation’s creation by self-seeking white imperialists engendered its failure from the beginning, as I did in [my recent novel](#). But this is only a part of the cause. A culture of incompetence, endemic corruption, dignified ineptitude, and, chief among all, destructive selfishness and greed has played a major role in its unravelling. The same, sadly, can be said for most other African nations. States like Zimbabwe, Cameroon, and Equatorial Guinea are farcical democracies ruled by men who exclusively cater to their interests and those of their clipped circles.

Thus, it is no surprise that in the absence of any healthy black nation — in the midst of chaos, senseless wars, corrupted religiosity, violence, and economic collapse — African and Caribbean people leave home en masse. They beg on the streets of Greece, prostitute in the red-light zones of the Netherlands, and make up 40 percent of the migrants flocking to Europe. As they turn up in these countries, helpless, unwanted, starved, or maimed, they are treated like dogs. Last month in Italy, [a newly married Nigerian man was murdered](#) simply for being unwanted. Everywhere from Ukraine to India, nearly every day, black indignity, black helplessness, stares us in the face. And all we do, we who hold the platform can do, is scream “racism!” and court the sympathy of others.

The Yoruba say, “*Eniyan bi aparo ni omo araye n’fe*,” meaning the world loves a person who is like a partridge. The partridge is a poor bird that, enfeebled by its creation, has little ability to hunt, gather, protect, or feed itself. The Yoruba believe that the world loves these birds because they provide the space for people to show both sincere and insincere sympathy while holding firm to their position as the superior and maintaining the place of the partridge as the weak. Which is to say that if the partridge relies on the sympathy of others, it will not elevate its position. If we, black people everywhere, cannot gather the resources within our powers to exert real changes and restore our dignity, we will continue to be seen as weak. Our protestations and grievances will be met with sympathy, which does nothing to inspire respect.

Black elites should allow for self-criticism and soul-searching and for the restoration of the Pan-Africanist movement with an eye toward building sustainable black nations. We must come to realize that to a great extent the fate of the black man in America is inextricably linked to that of his brother in Africa. Although largely unacknowledged in American political discourse, Jim Crow ended in part because of the African Independent movements. Jaja Nwachukwu, a 1960s-era Nigerian foreign minister and avowed Pan-Africanist who was close friends with American Presidents Dwight Eisenhower and Lyndon Johnson, once recalled how American officials were embarrassed when African ministers attended official events in New York’s U.N. headquarters and were treated with honor as representatives of sovereign countries. They were ashamed, for instance, when American blacks

could not use the same bathroom as the Africans, just as black. The American blacks were further empowered when African nations started becoming independent, black-governed nation-states, beginning with Ghana in 1957 and followed shortly afterward by other African nations.

As long as we continue to ignore Africa's continuous wallowing in senseless poverty and destructive failures, as long as the Congolese or the Haitian remains the poster child for poverty and lack, we will remain undignified. As long as we continue to ignore our own self-assessment and soul-searching, we will remain the undignified race. Sadig Rasheed, one of the leading African politicians of the 1980s, once [told](#) Polish journalist Ryszard Kapuscinski: "I worry about whether African societies will be able to assume a self-critical stance, and much depends on this." I add: Our dignity — and even survival — will depend on this.

Photo credit: MAHMUD TURKIA/AFP/Getty Images