

Nigeria's 2018 Olojo Festival: Time for African Americans to "Come Home"

by

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His Imperial Majesty Ooni Adeyeye Babatunde Enitan Ogunwusi Ojaja II (<https://www.oonirisa.org/>)

One of the best kept secrets among African Americans is how much our brothers and sisters in Africa enthusiastically would love for us to "Come home." Such was the case most recently in Nigeria as delegations of African Americans traveled to Ile-Ife, Nigeria, the ancestral home of the Yoruba culture and tradition, for the 2018 Olojo Festival, September 28-October 2, 2018.

I was pleased to be joined on this unique and meaningful pilgrimage to Nigeria by Claudette Perry of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA); Jeffrey L. Boney, Texas city councilman and contributing writer for the NNPA; Tish Bazil, author and photographer; and Gary Foster, videographer and social media visionary.

We were invited to attend the Olojo Festival by His Imperial Majesty The Ooni of Ife, who is the global leader of Yoruba and King of the Osun State in Nigeria. Ile-Ife is one of the oldest cities in the world dating back thousands of years.

Yes, Africa is very rich with oil, gold, diamonds, uranium, titanium, platinum and other precious stones and metals. Africa's richest resource, however, is its human resource in the context of thousands of years of culture, language and tradition. Nigeria is Africa's most populous nation with over 190 million people.

But from what we witnessed firsthand during the five days while we were in Ile-Ife, it was the culture that has had and will continue to have the greatest impact on unifying Nigerians and all people of African descent throughout the Diaspora. The Olojo Festival was one of most authentic and impactful cultural festivals that we had ever seen. We saw vibrantly displayed cultural genius in native language, traditional dress, dance, spirituality, pageantry and food.

In fact, we experienced a real-life "Wakanda" celebration of the sanctity, diversity, and cultural wealth of Africa in the ancient sacred city of Ile-Ife, Nigeria. The Yoruba language and cultural manifestations were so evident at the Olojo Festival that we were all moved to tears of insatiable joy and passionate responses.

In preparation for this year's Olojo Festival, H.I.M. the Ooni of Ife, stated, "We are set for a legacy project that will uplift one of the oldest cities in the world and put it on the global tourist map." I certainly plan to let all of our NNPA member publishers and media company owners know about this historic city and all-inspiring annual festival. We should start planning now for next year's festival.

In truth, African Americans have so many issues that are impacting our quality of life, some may ask, "Why should we focus on Nigeria and other nations in Africa?" The answer to that question is quite factual. African Americans have a history that did not begin or end in slavery in the United States. Our ancestry in Africa needs to be better known, appreciated and embraced.

We must travel back to our ancestral homelands. We must reconnect with who we really are without the trappings and ornaments of white supremacy. We are an African people. That is more than a Pan-African slogan from the 1960's. Our children and our grandchildren should be told the truth about our African past, present and future.

It is our responsibility and opportunity to reconnect to Africa beyond sentimentalities. It is time to develop joint economic development ventures. Our Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) should teach African languages and culture as a prerequisite for graduation. We should hold our family reunions in Africa. The NNPA will take trade delegations to Nigeria and to other African nations. The African Press Association will become a member of the NNPA.

We know that there will always be challenges both at home and abroad. The point here is that African leaders such as H.I.M. the Ooni of Ife are calling for all of us to “Come home.”



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