

Africa and the Ark of Survival

Pan-African Renewal, Diaspora Service and the Imperative to Turn Ideas into Institutions

By Gabriel J. Christian, Esq.

From Lagos, After MCIU

This meditation on Africa's fate—and humanity's—comes to me as the sun rises over Lagos, Nigeria's commercial metropolis and former capital. I write days after serving as guest speaker at the September 7, 2026 convocation of Michael and Cecilia Ibru University in Delta State, an institution that embodies the central proposition of this essay: development matters most when it is transformed into enduring institutions that educate, employ, inspire and uplift the generations to come.

My presence at MCIU was made possible by Janet Ibru, daughter of the late Chief Michael Christopher Ibru, whom our law firm was privileged to represent. Chief Ibru was a leading African entrepreneur who built a major Nigerian enterprise while remaining

committed to education, community and national development. With his wife, Dr. Cecilia Ibru, he helped establish MCIU to expand educational opportunity and prepare young Nigerians for service. That legacy continues under Vice-Chancellor Professor Ibiyinka Fuwape, Registrar Dr. Kikelomo Opatayo and Pro-Chancellor Professor Anthony Kila, guided by a philosophy of character, competence, innovation, mentorship and service.

My wife, Joan Christian, and I were received with a warmth that reflected a shared purpose between Africans on the continent and in the Diaspora. I urged the graduates to see education not merely as personal advancement but as preparation for nation building and purposeful citizenship.

Lagos makes such reflection fitting. Its towers, ports, industries, universities and markets demonstrate what African enterprise can achieve; its inequality, infrastructure deficits and external dependence remind us that economic and institutional sovereignty remain incomplete. Chief Ibru built enterprises; he and Dr. Ibru helped build a university; their successors now educate young people capable of solving practical problems. That is the philosophy I wish to advance: Africa and its Diaspora must convert vision into capacity—universities into centers of research, agricultural potential into food security, minerals into manufacturing, youth into skilled workforces,

Diaspora commitment into investment, and Pan-African ideals into functioning institutions.

From Lagos, then, I turn to the larger question. Amid war, geopolitical instability, technological disruption and declining confidence in the international order, what must Africa and its Diaspora build so that future generations can help shape humanity's future?

My answer is that we must build an Ark of Survival—not an ark of racial isolation or fear, but an ark of education, productive enterprise, science, technology, democratic institutions, human dignity and peaceful cooperation.

A World Growing Less Stable

We have entered one of those periods when a people must look past the day's headlines and discern the larger movement of the age. Old alliances are under pressure, military conflict is spreading across borders, and artificial intelligence is transforming both warfare and economic life. The 2026 Global Peace Index records the twelfth consecutive annual deterioration in global peacefulness and 61 active state-based conflicts, the highest number since the end of the Second World War.

The continuing conflict involving the United States and Iran illustrates the point. By September 2026,

disruptions in and around the Strait of Hormuz had affected global energy supplies and maritime commerce, and oil prices again moved above \$100 per barrel. Such consequences cannot be contained within the borders of the states at war. They reach the farmer buying fertilizer, the airline purchasing fuel, the family paying for transportation, and developing countries already carrying heavy debt.

For Africa and its Diaspora, the question is fundamental: how shall we preserve our freedom, secure our development and contribute to world peace when the assumptions of the previous international order can no longer be taken for granted?

Lessons from the Good Neighbor

Some lessons are worth retrieving from American history. Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy of 1933 deliberately moved United States relations with Latin America away from habitual armed intervention and toward cooperation, trade and respect for sovereignty. Three decades later, John F. Kennedy's Alliance for Progress sought, however imperfectly, to connect security with economic development, education and institutional reform. It was a Cold War program with strategic objectives of its own, but it reflected an important recognition: poverty and

human insecurity cannot be answered permanently by military power alone.

Great nations are most secure when their strength is joined to diplomacy, productive investment, education and respect for the dignity of other peoples. Force may sometimes be necessary, but it is a poor substitute for the patient construction of peaceful relationships.

The same principle applies within nations. African Americans know from bitter experience that rights secured through sacrifice cannot be assumed to endure without organized vigilance. Contemporary disputes over affirmative action, diversity programs, executive power and the reach of civil-rights law show that the meaning of equal citizenship remains contested. Freedom House still classifies the United States as a free country with strong formal protections, while also reporting institutional erosion and polarization. The wiser lesson is neither complacency nor despair. Constitutional democracy requires citizens who understand their history, maintain their institutions and organize persistently in defense of lawful equality.

Garvey's Unfinished Work

No discussion of African self-reliance can overlook Marcus Mosiah Garvey. In the early twentieth century,

Garvey and the Universal Negro Improvement Association attempted something revolutionary in scale: to awaken people of African descent to a shared consciousness across colonial borders and oceans, and to unite that consciousness with education, business, shipping, publishing and institution-building.

Garvey grasped a truth that remains relevant a century later. Political rhetoric without an economic foundation eventually exhausts itself. A people who do not educate, manufacture, farm, trade, finance, publish and invent for themselves remain vulnerable no matter how stirring their speeches.

His movement was attacked in an age of undisguised racial hostility, and his prosecution and imprisonment weakened the most powerful Black international mass movement of its era. More than a century later, in January 2025, President Joseph Biden granted him a posthumous pardon. Yet Garvey's truest vindication lies in the persistence of his idea. His son, Dr. Julius W. Garvey, carries that work forward through the Marcus Garvey Institute for Human Development, which connects education with industry, technology training and productive employment rather than merely commemorating the past.

That is what Garveyism must mean today. Our Black Star Line must include maritime trade, but also

aviation, advanced agriculture, biotechnology, data centers, artificial intelligence, engineering schools, research universities and manufacturing plants.

Ethiopia, Tuskegee and the Discipline of Service

The same insistence on dignity joined to practical service runs through the Ethiopian tradition. Emperor Haile Selassie I became a symbol of African resistance to colonial domination and a central figure in the movement toward organized African unity. That heritage continues in the cultural and humanitarian mission of his grandson, His Imperial Highness Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie Haile-Selassie, President of the Crown Council of Ethiopia, whose work includes educational scholarships and efforts toward the dignity and unity of Ethiopians at home and abroad. It has been an honor for our family and law office to serve in a volunteer capacity with the Crown Council. Ceremony has its place, because history and culture matter, but the greater obligation is to translate heritage into education, humanitarian work, investment and scientific collaboration.

The same conviction explains our long service with the East Coast Chapter of Tuskegee Airmen, Inc., where I served as president and continue to serve on the board. The chapter provides educational

assistance and youth aviation programs that guide young people toward aviation, aerospace and science careers. The original Tuskegee Airmen faced a system that doubted their capacity because of race; their answer was excellence. Our obligation is to ensure that young people do not merely admire their photographs but inherit their discipline. When a student receives an aviation scholarship or sits in a cockpit for the first time, the Tuskegee legacy has moved from memory into development.

These organizations differ in history and structure, yet they meet on common ground. The Crown Council preserves a tradition of African sovereignty; the Tuskegee tradition binds excellence to youth development; the Garvey Institute turns a philosophy of self-reliance into workforce development. The connecting word is service.

The Caribbean Diaspora Must Also Build

The Caribbean experience teaches the same lesson. The Diaspora cannot be satisfied with dinners, conferences and declarations of affection for the lands we came from. We must organize knowledge and capital into instruments of development.

Dr. Claire A. Nelson founded the Washington-based Institute of Caribbean Studies in 1993 as a forum for research, policy analysis and the inclusion of Caribbean Americans in the policy process. Her work shows that Diaspora engagement becomes effective when it is institutionalized and when scholarship is connected to policy. The late Ambassador Curtis A. Ward pursued the same principle through the Caribbean Research & Policy Center, bringing credible analysis to questions affecting the region and partnering with universities and community organizations. His life reinforced the proposition that professionals have an obligation to place some portion of their knowledge at the disposal of their communities.

That has been our philosophy in Dominica as well. When Raglan Riviere and I founded the Dominica Academy of Arts and Sciences in August 2000, the aim was not another debating society but the mobilization of skilled Dominicans at home and abroad in service of national development. Over time the Academy supported health services, the Botanic Gardens, renewable-energy initiatives, the revival of the Cadet Corps, cocoa development and Diaspora symposia in Roseau, New York and London. The lesson I drew remains central to this essay: we must continuously move from the world of ideas into the discipline of implementation.

From Farm Gate to Shop Gate

Our experience with cocoa offers a small but instructive example. Beginning in 2014, our law office worked with Eric and Crisoire Reid, founders of SPAGnVOLA Chocolatier, whose enterprise rests on vertical integration: cacao cultivated and processed at the farm level and converted into premium chocolate, so that the grower shares in far more of the value chain. That collaboration produced the April 2015 pre-launch of Chocolat de la Dominique at our offices in the Washington area. The objective was larger than a chocolate bar. It was to demonstrate that the farmer can participate from farm gate to shop gate—cultivation, fermentation, processing, branding, manufacturing and sale—rather than remaining at the lowest-value end of a commodity chain.

The issue is not romantic. UN Trade and Development reports that cocoa farmers capture only a small fraction of the value of the chocolate ultimately sold; one analysis placed the farmer's share below 6.6 percent. Africa produces most of the world's cocoa, yet too many cocoa communities remain poor while wealth is created downstream in processing, branding and retail.

The answer is not hostility toward international commerce but better participation in it. What is true of cocoa is true of Africa's wider economy. If we

produce lithium, we must think about batteries. If we produce bauxite, we must think about aluminum. If we produce petroleum, we must think about petrochemicals and diversified industry. If we educate engineers, we must build industries in which they can remain productive at home. And if African citizens generate vast quantities of data, Africa must develop the computing infrastructure and expertise to turn that data into African intellectual property.

An Ark Is Built, Not Proclaimed

This is why I speak of an Ark. An ark is not an opinion; it is a structure. Noah did not convene a seminar about the coming flood and retire satisfied with the quality of the discussion. He built.

We have never lacked eloquent speeches about African unity. Nkrumah, Haile Selassie, Padmore, C.L.R. James and Garvey all made the case. The African Union expresses continental aspirations through Agenda 2063, and the African Continental Free Trade Area offers a mechanism for a larger internal market. Our challenge is implementation.

A continental market becomes meaningful when an entrepreneur in Ghana can sell easily in Kenya, when a Nigerian engineering firm can work in Senegal, and when African airlines, banks, universities and technology companies possess the infrastructure to

operate across borders. Diaspora solidarity becomes meaningful when the physician in Maryland collaborates with a hospital in Accra, when the aviation professional in Washington helps build African maintenance capacity, and when investment capital is organized to build productive enterprises rather than consumed in ceremonies and remittances.

One need not belong to the same institution or share the same biography. Wherever we possess knowledge, influence, capital or professional competence, we should organize some part of it for useful service.

Education: The Safest Ark

Few institutions illustrate this better than The Piney Woods School, founded in Mississippi by Laurence C. Jones in 1909 amid the brutal realities of segregation. It survived because its founders understood that education was itself an instrument of liberation. That mission continues under President Will Crossley and Dean of Faculty Monica Crossley, combining academic preparation with leadership, agriculture, technology and STEM education. Institutions of this kind—like MCIU in Delta State—can become safe spaces of disciplined learning for young people from Africa, the Caribbean and the wider Diaspora.

Our children must know Africa, but they must also know algebra. They must understand Garvey, but also artificial intelligence. They should learn the history of the Tuskegee Airmen while mastering the aerodynamics that will let them design the aircraft of tomorrow. History should tell us why we must build. Education should teach us how.

Pan-Africanism Without Racialism

There is an essential moral boundary to this project. Pan-Africanism must never become the mirror image of the racial ideologies against which Africans have struggled. Africa does not become great by declaring another people inferior. Indeed, modern humanity has its deepest ancestral origins on the African continent; Africa is part of the ancestral homeland of humanity itself, which makes doctrines of racial supremacy particularly absurd.

The Africa worth building must be confident enough to welcome others without becoming subordinate to them: the scientist who shares knowledge, the investor prepared to deal fairly, the visitor who comes with respect. It should maintain peaceful relations with the United States, Europe, China, India, Latin America, the Middle East and all others willing to deal with it in dignity. Our principle should be simple: friendship with all, servitude to none.

That principle is consistent with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s vision, which was never that the oppressed should acquire the power to oppress, but that society might escape the prison of racial hierarchy altogether. Africa needs the same generous confidence—societies in which ethnicity enriches culture without imprisoning citizenship, in which political opposition is not treason, in which courts protect citizens, and in which public office is stewardship rather than property. The answer to foreign domination cannot be domestic dictatorship. The answer to racism cannot be tribalism. The answer to colonial exploitation cannot be exploitation by an African elite.

The Ark Is Human Development

Africa's greatest strategic resource is not oil, cobalt, cocoa, gold or lithium. It is the African child: the young woman who may become an aerospace engineer, the village student who may transform medicine, the farmer's daughter who may build a food-processing enterprise. Africa's true defense architecture therefore consists not only of armed forces but of schools, laboratories, universities, reliable electricity, broadband, farms, factories, competent courts and accountable institutions. Each scholarship, each youth aviation program, each cocoa-processing experiment, each research center and each university convocation is a plank in the Ark.

The storms gathering over the international system should neither frighten us into isolation nor persuade us that catastrophe is inevitable. They should discipline us into preparation. Africa and its Diaspora have endured slavery, colonialism, segregation, apartheid and economic exploitation. Survival is not new to us. What must be new is the determination to advance from survival to organized capacity.

The task of our generation is to join the moral power of Garvey's self-reliance, Haile Selassie's African unity, the Tuskegee Airmen's excellence, Laurence Jones's educational faith and King's democratic humanism to the practical institution-building of people such as Dr. Julius Garvey, Prince Ermias Sahle-Selassie Haile-Selassie, Dr. Claire Nelson, the late Ambassador Curtis Ward, Eric and Crisoire Reid, Will and Monica Crossley, and the Ibru family of Nigeria—all of whom have understood that progress demands work.

The Ark we must build is not a fortress separating Africa from humanity. It is an Africa educated enough to think for itself, productive enough to support itself, democratic enough to respect its people, technologically capable enough to compete, and morally confident enough to cooperate with every people of goodwill. Africa should rise neither beneath the world nor above it, but beside it.

That is the practical Pan-Africanism our age requires. It does not end with an idea, a conference or a stirring speech. It begins there—and then goes to work.

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