



Trump's travel ban ignores the Nigerian success story

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On a Sunday evening at Eko Kitchen, San Francisco's first and only Nigerian restaurant, the menu for the evening combines sweet, earthy, zesty and piquant: plantain pancakes with Nigerian eggs, Akara — black eyed peas fritter served with Ogi — fermented corn pudding, honey glazed Suya wings, and Puff Puff — Nigerian donut holes.

“When people find out I'm from Nigeria, the first thing they ask is about Boko Haram or the Nigerian Prince scam,” said Simileoluwa Adebajo, the 24-year-old owner of the restaurant. It is such an “annoying narrative and Nigeria is so much more than that.”

So, Adebajo has made it her mission to teach Nigerian culture “through the universal language of food.” Everyone has to eat, she remarked and in May of last year she opened Eko Kitchen in SoMa.

Adebajo left Nigeria to come to America in 2016, when she turned 21, to enroll in the University of San Francisco for a master's in international economics. She went on to work as a financial analyst at Twitch after she graduated.

Then one day last year, she made a bold career move, tweeting her plans on April 5: “So I've quit my job as a financial Analyst to open the first #Nigerian restaurant in the city of San Francisco. Tbh I'm not sure of exactly what I'm doing but I'll do my best with what I have. Wish me luck, guys.” Over 55,000 people responded to her tweet, affirming that San Francisco believed in this bright, articulate, ambitious young woman who was ready to create opportunities for herself.

But Trump's administration has decided they don't want to offer people from Nigeria the chance to succeed in America anymore. In yet another version of the travel ban, first issued on Jan. 27, 2017, Nigerians, Eritreans, Burmese, Kyrgyz, Sudanese and Tanzanians join a list of people from seven other countries with limited entry to America.

The new order, issued on Jan. 31, prevents permanent legal immigration from these countries and Tanzania and Sudan will no longer have access to diversity visas. But rather peculiarly, belying the dubbed title of “travel ban,” people from these countries will still be able to enter America on business, tourist or other non-immigrant visas.

All the new countries on the list have significant Muslim populations and Nigeria, Eritrea, Sudan and Tanzania together constitute roughly a quarter of all Africans.

“It’s infuriating!” Adebajo exclaimed. Either he just doesn’t know or he’s not being advised properly, she added, referring to the President and the travel ban.

According to the White House, the reasons for including Nigeria is that the country “does not adequately share public-safety and terrorism-related information” and “Nigeria also presents a high risk, relative to other countries in the world, of terrorist travel to the United States.”

But as the Cato Institute found, the annual chance of an act of murder on U.S. soil committed by a foreign born terrorist from Nigeria and the other five countries on the new travel ban “is about 1 in 1.9 billion per year.”

Further, if it’s security that the administration is worried about, then why allow Nigerian nationals into the country on tourist and temporary visas?

And when it comes to the sharing of information, as New American Economy (NAE) points out, other nations “do not cooperate with the United States on security or terrorism-related matters, but they have not been singled out.”

Nigerians have a history of success in America, as Adebajo so clearly exemplifies. Nigerian Americans have the highest level of education in the nation, with the Houston Chronicle reporting that 21 percent of Nigerians nationwide hold graduate degrees and 37 percent have bachelor’s degrees.

In contrast, just over 11 percent of all Americans hold graduate degrees and only 21 percent have completed a bachelor’s degree.

All this goes to show that the Nigerian community in America is well-educated, well-earning, and significant contributors to the economy. NAE reports that in 2018, more than 375,000 Nigerians came to America earning “almost \$14.3 billion and paying more than \$2.7 billion in federal income taxes and \$1.4 billion in state and local taxes in 2018 alone.”

Since President Trump took office, America’s record on immigration has been a miasma of misinformation, confusion and incoherence. Let’s recall an incident in 2017, when the New York Times reported that at a meeting with his national security team, President Trump, enraged after reading a report on the number of visas given to immigrants that year, applied his now legendary skill at coming up with insulting names and titles for people and places. It was alleged that he called Afghanistan a terrorist haven; dismissed Haitians by saying “they all have AIDS;” and described Nigerians as never wanting to “go back to their huts in Africa” after seeing America.

What the President failed to understand is that having Nigerians leave America would not benefit America. For instance, the health care industry would take a beating if such a thing were to happen, especially given America’s aging crisis. In 2018, over 60,000 Nigerians worked as registered nurses, nursing assistants, personal care aides, vocational nurses and physicians, according to NAE.

Passionately denouncing the travel ban, Adebajo averred that it is based on discrimination. There’s no other justification, “Nigeria is the most populous black nation, so add that to the equation,” she remarked.

She might be right.

Indeed, we want people like Adebajo to be a part of our multicultural fabric in The City. In a show of support, do make a reservation at her restaurant and try some Nigerian food and contribute to her [Kickstarter campaign](#) to help Adebajo grow her business and increase her capacity to serve delectable Nigerian cuisine and culture.