

**TRUMPISM: TRENDS AND ISSUES IN AFRO-AMERICAN RELATIONS**

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**Abstract**

*The paper undertook a succinct review of past and prevailing Afro-America relations in the light of the aggressive nationalist posture of the immediate past president of the United States, Donald Trump. If it is true that Afro-America relations, even at its peak, never constituted a formidable consequentiality, it is also equally true that it has never been subjected to the type of intense pressure it witnessed during the administration of Donald Trump. This attack was inclusive of state sanctioned negative labelling of Africans, markedly hostile and an untoward narrative of Africa, exclusionist policies on immigration and travel and significant reductions in development aid. The paper examined the impact of these policies on Afro-American relations through the review of secondary materials. Findings however revealed that Trump's vitriolic attacks on Africa and Africans did not significantly impact negatively on Afro-American relations either at the mass or elite levels. Indeed all sections of African society appear to agree with the pronouncements of Trump on Africa. The paper concluded as a result of this finding that Africa generally has to restructure its society especially the economic system in order to gain greater recognition and respect globally.*

**Keywords:** Afro-America relations, immigration, Africa, America, president Trump

**Introduction**

Geographically, Africa and America are located in the two great systems of human civilization. The one emanates from the old world while the other is located in the new world. However, in the aftermath of Christopher Columbus' epic voyage of 'discovery' so called, to the new world in 1492 (which heralded the infamous slave trade) both spheres have been linked ever since in increasing social, political and economic ties. A major high point of this intercourse was the founding of the republic of Liberia by American ex-slaves under the auspices, of course, of the United States government itself.

However, since 2016 (when Trump was elected) the ties (or such as exists) that bind Africa and the United States have frayed considerably due to the rhetoric of Donald Trump; President Trump had reportedly described African states as 'shitholes'. The Trump administration had practically eviscerated arenas of traditional US support for Africa and has moved with official determination against Africa's interests in major world -organizations. However, strangely enough, despite Trump's acerbity and hostility toward Africa and Africans, till the very end of that administration, he and the United States retained their popularity in Africa, especially among ordinary citizens. To be sure, Africa's diplomatic relations with the US since the era of slavery have been one of polite disinterest and studied adherence to political correctness on the part of the US. This diplomatic status quo was abruptly overturned by the unrelenting political acerbity of Donald Trump. Thus this paper reviews the impact of policies adopted by the Trump administration on Africa. It also examines the impact of Trump's rhetoric on other levels of Afro-American relations.

Research method

This paper in order to arrive at its deductions relied primarily on secondary materials i.e. journals, books, online newspapers and websites to source for materials.

### **Literature review**

#### **Afro-American relations from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the cold war era**

The relationship between the United States of America and Africa has now spanned nearly three centuries. The relations between both polities, which have experienced their ebb and flow, began in some sense with the 'slave trade in the eighteenth century when New England traders sold products like pork, rum, sugar and tobacco and bought slaves' (Jones & Williams, 2012, p.27). Interestingly, American traders also dominated some aspects of the coastal trade, and by 1862 America alone could account for 25 consuls and commercial agents in Africa (Jones & Williams, 2012, p.28). Apart from consulates devoted to the furtherance of commerce, the US established Liberia the first diplomatic relations with a political entity in Africa (Banjo, 2010, p.140). Liberia on the west coast of Africa had been founded in 1821 as a refuge for ex-slaves from the US. However, in Liberia the US' policy of diplomatic disinterest in Africa, which still lingers on till date, was explicitly made manifest. In this regard, the US, 'demonstrated little interest in securing closer ties with Liberia' which 'received little outside aid and virtually no investment from it' (Kasongo, 1999, p.49). In fact Tukumbi Lumumba-Kasongo (1999, p.39) suggests that prior to the two World Wars, Africa in U.S official circles, was viewed as Europe's area of influence through colonial ties quite unlike, 'Western Europe, Japan and the Persian Gulf states'. In fact 'many in Washington preferred that European countries take the lead in their former colonies' (Schmidt, 2013, p.22). This official disinterest was exemplified by the fact that even though a significant number of Africans had trickled into the U.S at the outset of European colonisation of Africa in search of literary enlightenment, their presence was not sufficient enough to warrant an official US support for the nationalist movement in Africa (Kasongo, 1999, p.40; Banjo, 2010, p.141). In this regard Elizabeth Schmidt (2013, p.22) has argued that 'high-level officials in the Eisenhower administration, which took office as African nationalist movements gained momentum, viewed nationalism with suspicion, considering anti-colonial movements to be the product of external communist subversion'.

However, under the Franklin Delano Roosevelt administration (1933-1945), amidst the turmoil of the Second World War, there was sufficient anti-colonial resentment in the White House to necessitate the proclamation of the Atlantic Charter which upheld the principle of self-determination for all peoples. However its widespread application was scuttled ultimately by the European colonial powers whose argument that the principle was intended and applicable only to European or white societies eventually trumped over whatever altruistic ambitions Roosevelt had intended for the colonised peoples. To be sure 'France and Britain envisioned the restoration of those rights in European countries that had been overrun by Axis powers and the return of imperial territories that they had lost' (Schmidt, 2013 p.49). Nonetheless, the Roosevelt administration took interest enough in Africa to establish an 'Africa Desk' within the state department to analyse events in Africa. Furthermore, the huge infrastructural development witnessed in Africa at the end of the Second World War were mainly due to the America inspired Marshall plan which funnelled enormous funds to European countries with African colonies. The US also exhorted European states with colonies in Africa to implement neo-colonialist strategies to safeguard these African societies from communist influences (Jones & Williams, 2012, p.28). In this regard, the Roosevelt administration outlined an enduring philosophy that was to characterize Afro-American relations for decades to come.

However, this diplomatic initiative by the US within the African landscape was particularly urgent. This was because in the aftermath of the conversion of China, with its nearly one billion people, to the communist Ideology in 1949 it had become extremely 'necessary for the US to search for allies' (Kasongo, 1999, p.41). Indeed, the search for allies across the world became in essence a foreign policy fetish and was in fact a cardinal clause in the U.S communist containment policy. Although other factors such as the expansion of world economy and the decolonization process played a prominent part in increasing the US presence on African soil it was the overwhelming desire to curb the expansion of communism which brought the U.S fully into the African continent. In the final analysis, U.S foreign policy in African would come to revolve around three cardinal points:

1. A priority for global political alliances.
2. Opposition to any form of political radicalism especially communism or socialism and;
3. Expansion of capitalist commodities, ideology and markets (Kansogo, 1999, p.43).

Consequently, in order to attain the aforementioned objectives, the 'United States acted directly through economic and military assistance or indirectly through its alliances' (Kansogo, 1999, p.43).

However, the zeal exhibited by the United States toward the containment of communism through strategic political alliances across the world inadvertently led US foreign policy into some moral morass worldwide and Africa in particular. In this regard, the obsession with alliances and strategic partnerships against communism led the US to embroil itself unnecessarily with some of the most repugnant regimes and dictators to have ever held political power on the continent of Africa (Schmidt, 2013, p.24). These include but are by no means restricted to such individuals as Joseph Mobutu of Zaire, South African's apartheid regime, Meles Zenawi of Ethiopia, Hisse Habre of Chad and so on (Jones & Williams, 2012, p.3). In particular the relationship of the U.S with Chad and South Africa during the Cold War era was revealing of U.S foreign policy thrust in Africa during the Cold War years. For example in 1987 Chad's brutal dictator, Hisse Habre, was welcomed by President Ronald Reagan to Washington DC, 'as the leader of a nation that has recently beaten back the violent aggression of an outlaw state' (Mpondo et al, 2017, p.614). It is instructive to note that just a few years after this commendation, 'the same acclaimed leader was convicted for war crimes, crimes against humanity and rape' (Mpondo et al, 2017, p.614). Nowak (2017, p.27), on his part, observed that decades of US entanglement with the apartheid regime in South Africa, 'coincided with more stringent oppression by the nationalist regime'.

Furthermore, in the uncompromising pursuance of its Cold War strategic objectives a disproportionate share of US aid had gone to the so called strategic partners i.e. Zaire, Sudan, Ethiopia, Liberia and Somalia. These aforementioned states, 'actually posted lower economic growth rates than the rest of Africa from the 1960s to 1970s' (Kansogo, 1999, p.42). Moreover a significant proportion of US aid to these African states was blatantly stolen without much protest by the U.S government. Furthermore, trade with African states during the Cold War era were not only minimal (the increase in the 1970 was due to the idiosyncratic rise in oil prices) it also 'revolved around strategic minerals and raw materials' (Kansogo, 1999, p.42, 45). The nature of this economic relationship is strikingly similar to the cohabitation between a client and its patron.

Consequently due to the heavy emphasis placed by the U.S on the defence of strategic interests, 'the national security bureaucracies tended to dominate policymaking' rather than the White House (Jones & Williams, 2012, p.11). This scenario as we shall soon see is also true of the Trump administration. In the final analysis, as James Hentz averred, U.S foreign policy is hinged on real politick (geopolitics), Hamiltonism (or geo-economics) and Meliorism (humanitarianism) (Jones & Williams, 2012 p.14). Thus, to conclude this section, Monde Muyangwa (Africa Program Director, Wilson Centre) is in the main correct when she asserted that, 'for too long, US-Africa relations were defined by Cold War calculations, humanitarian crises and conflict and insecurity, while economic and development matters were largely on the periphery of U.S. engagement with the continent'.

### **A review of US foreign policy initiatives in Africa from Kennedy to Obama**

However, vestiges of humanitarianism and developmentalism began to gradually slip into Afro-American relations in the 1960s with the emergence of John F. Kennedy as president. To be sure, Kennedy showed more respect and regard for African leaders (Amin, 2016, September 19). In fact, prior to Kennedy's emergence as president of the United States, US and African relations had already taken on a different hue or complexion during his tenure as the chairman of the subcommittee on Africa of the senate foreign relations committee. From the Senate floor Kennedy not only 'decried French actions in Algeria and declared his support for Algerian independence' (Schmidt, 2013, p.50);

in this capacity, he (Kennedy) warned his colleagues about the new energy bursting forth in the Dark Continent. "Call it nationalism, call it anti-colonialism call it what you will", he said in 1959. Africa is going through revolution. The word is out and spreading like wildfire in nearly a thousand languages and dialects that it is no longer necessary to remain forever in

bondage'. He advocated sympathy with independence movements, programs of economic and education assistance and as a goal of American policy, a strong Africa (Kasongo, 1999 p.41).

Thus with these objectives at the back of his mind, Kennedy, as soon as he came into the oval office, began with 'a very activist Africa agenda'. This agenda included the appointment of a civil rights leader, Mennen Williams, as Assistant Secretary of State for African affairs (Kasongo, 1999, p.35). Besides the establishment of the United States Peace Corp the Kennedy administration also set up the United States Agency for international development (USAID). The USAID, 'was established in 1961 with the sole purpose of creating a foreign assistance organization that could administer long range economic and social development assistance efforts' (Mpondo et al, 2017, p.611). However, it must be pointed out that despite Kennedy's idealistic foreign policy initiatives with respect to Africa, the US still assiduously kept the faith, albeit surreptitiously, with its containment policy of communism on the continent. This was the case in the Congo and Algeria throughout the 1960s. A scholar noted that, in the final analysis

beneath the heroic rhetoric, the Kennedy administration had been supremely pragmatic and reactive: it had acted on behalf of civil rights only when a national movement forced its hand; it had publicly pursued organised crime while secretly soliciting its assistance in a plot to assassinate Fidel Castro; it had never questioned the cold war assumptions behind a deepening involvement in Vietnam (Heymann, 1998, p.356).

One of the major initiatives of Kennedy's successor, Lyndon B. Johnson administration on Africa was the establishment of the Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC). Somewhat anticipating William Clinton's AGOA initiative three decades later, the OPIC was established to, 'mobilize and facilitate the participation of US private capital and skills in the economic and social progress of less developed friendly countries and areas' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.41). However, in the final years of the Johnson presidency, with the war in Vietnam uppermost in his mind, Africa was always, 'the last issue considered, the first aid budget cut' (Banjo, 2010, p.141).

The Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, James Carter, Ronald Reagan and perhaps even George Hebert Bush administrations merely stressed a rather rhetorical concession toward, 'policies of non-alignment' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.40). All the administrations save for the Carter administration which introduced the notion of human rights in its foreign policy thrust, worked assiduously against the liberation struggle in Africa; in particular 'Henry Kissinger, who served Nixon as both national security advisor and secretary of state, regarded Africa with open disdain' (Schmidt, 2013, p.86). However under all five administrations there was also the 'continued subordination of broader African issues to Cold War concerns' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.43), most especially during the eight years of the Ronald Reagan administration (Hendrickson, 2012, p.48). To be sure when Bush arrived in Washington as the US president in 1988, the Cold War was entering its death throes. Consequent upon this, the duration of the George Bush administration in office actually witnessed, 'reduced resource flows to Africa' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.54). The only significant event of any importance to Africa was the passage by Congress of the African Regional Electoral Assistance Fund in order to support the emerging democratic framework in Africa (Hendrickson, 2012, p.57).

In the light of the aforementioned developments when William Clinton became President of the United States in 1992, 'Africa still ranked lowest in the USA's totem pole of international concerns' (Banjo, 2010, p. 143). However the tenure of President William Clinton is remarkable for Afro-US relations because of his expansive, expressive policies which spanned investment, debt relief and trade (Jones & Williams, 2012, p.2). Clinton, who had been described as having a 'personal interest in Africa' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.58), came to power with a determination to pay greater attention to the continent. To achieve this end Clinton appointed noted Africanists to prominent positions in his administration (Hendrickson, 2012, p.58). Such Africanists include individuals like Warren Christopher, George Moose, Dennis Jett and Jennifer Ward (Banjo, 2010, p.143). In 1997 the US secretary of state Madeleine Albright and the first lady Hillary Clinton undertook an extensive tour of Africa (Mpondo et al, 2017, p.609). In the following year Clinton himself undertook an unprecedented 11-day visit (Ghana, Uganda, Rwanda, South-Africa, Botswana and Senegal) to Africa (Hendrickson, 2012, p.58). In fine, Clintonian policies on Africa rested on six planks: more

multilateralism and less bilateralism, focus on key development issues, support for regionalist framework in Africa, redefinition of the role of the US military in Africa, increased collaboration between the US and US NGOs and political conditionalities for giving aid' (Banjo, 2010, p.143). However the lynchpin of Clinton's entire African policy was based on trade. Consequently he launched the 'trade not aid' campaign (Banjo, 2010, p.143). Indeed, by the end of Clinton's second term development aids to Africa had stopped falling and the unprecedented AGOA act had been passed (Hendrickson, 2012, p.54).

In itself, the African Growth and Opportunities Act (AGOA) legislation was monumental in the annals of Afro-America relations in that AGOA orchestrated a shift 'from aid to trade' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.54). The AGOA had become a reality in May 18, 2000 through Clinton's personal 1997 initiative 'Partnership for Growth and Opportunity in Africa' which was intended to 'promote greater trade and investment' in Africa. In sum, the AGOA

Act offers tangible incentives for African countries to continue their efforts in opening Africa's economy and build free markets. AGOA aims at reforming African countries with the most liberal access to the US market available to any country or region with which the United States does not have a Free Trade agreement. The AGOA supports U.S business by encouraging reform of Africa's economic and commercial regimes which will build stronger markets and more effective partners for U.S firms. AGOA has considerably expanded the list of products which eligible SSA countries may export to the United States subject to zero import duty under the Generalized System of Preferences (GSP)' (Mpondo et al, 2017, p.610)

However, despite the continent-wide accolade that greeted AGOA's promulgation, it has also been sharply critiqued on several important grounds. The most serious of the charges notes that by urging the elimination of barriers to U.S trade and investment, AGOA actually further, 'encourages the American exploitation of Africa through trade' (Nowak, 2017, p.1077). Moreover, the mono-cultural nature of Sub Saharan African economy do not allow for full implementation of AGOA as important SSA exports are excluded and therefore subject to tariff rate quotes (Nowak, 2017 p.1077). Furthermore, 'the US retains all its protective legislation for its industrial, employment and environmental needs, but demands that elected governments forego such priorities in the name of free trade' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.104). Consequently, apart from exacerbating inequality in Africa by providing benefits to only six countries the AGOA, as a formidable tool of American foreign policy, is designed exclusively to facilitate access to African resources and labour while doing practically nothing outside of the extractive industries. Consequently, even with AGOA, 'the US only makes up seven percent of sub-Sahara African exports, a significantly low number despite the idea behind the agreement that better trade access will lead to economic growth' (Jones n.d). By comparison, 'Europe is sub-Saharan Africa's biggest importer of goods and receives ten times more of Africa's imports than does the United States' hence the idea that 'EU trade policy does better than US trade policy'. On this basis Madison Jones has acridly accused the US of, in spite of the AGOA initiative, practising restrictive trade relations with Africa which has inhibited the continent from accessing economic prosperity, democracy, improved labour rights and improved infrastructure. However despite the fallible associated with some of his African policies Clinton was nonetheless unusual in his overall approach to African issues.

Indeed by his pronouncements and posturing George Walker Bush, Clinton's successor, was already earnestly looking to return Afro-American relations to status quo ante before the machinations of Islamist terrorists led to a dramatic reversal of his presidential programme. Thus, arising from the actions of global terrorism, by the time his tenure in office ended, George Walker Bush had had meetings with more African heads state than any other previous president in U.S history (Hendrickson, 2012, p.87). This is ironic; because while on his presidential campaign trail Bush had emphatically pointed out that, 'while African may be important it does not fit into the national strategic interests as far as I can see them' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.89). In another place he noted that, 'there's got to be priorities' of which Africa was not included (Banjo, 2010, p.146). With these declarations of intent it had appeared at first that the U.S was returning to its traditionalist viewpoint that Africa through colonial entanglements was primarily a European affair (Mpondo et al, 2017, p. 608). However, President George W. Bush's altitude toward Africa underwent a radical transformation in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on the U.S in September 11, 2001. Thenceforth, three policy trends, with

respect to Africa, were discernible during the Bush administration: a neo-liberal consolidation, an increase in development aid and an increase in African's strategic importance (Hendrickson, 2012, p.85). The one was encompassed in the creation of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) which focused on the pro-investment policies of previous administration. The other encompassed the President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief (PEPFAR) and the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI). The third encompassed a renewed focus, in the wake of 9/11, on the United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) and the view that Africa served as base for terrorists (Hendrickson, 2012, p.35). AFRICOM was established in 2007 and headquartered in Stuttgart Germany (Hendrickson, 2012, p.90). It was intended by the Pentagon, the U.S military high command, as the coordinating axis of the US 'varied programmes on the continent' (Mpondo et al, 2017, p.609). For example besides deploying a massive 'contingent force dubbed the joint Task force in the Horn of Africa, the US provided 100 million dollars funding for counterterrorism initiatives and military trainings in the Sahel region" (Mpondo et al, 2017, p.608).

The election of Barack Obama, which was akin to the arrival of Bill Clinton 16 years earlier, signalled great tidings to Africa because of his paternal links to the continent (Hendrickson, 2012, p.11). President Obama's African policy is encompassed in his declaration that, 'Africa's future is up to Africans' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.11). However, despite his declaration and the great expectations on the Africa continent, his African strategy was only released during his second term in 2012 (Hendrickson, 2012, p.115), and even at that it largely failed to live up to expectations. His new initiatives for Africa were "Feed the Future" and "Power Africa". The administration also tried to 'maintain the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) and boost Over-Seas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC) and the Export-Import Bank (Ex-Im)' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.115). However president Obama has been accused of having the tendency to, 'lay out grand visions but like other aspects of his domestic and foreign policy, the African agenda has been stymied by lack of resources' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.115).

Apart from policy lethargy on the part of the Obama administration there was also the challenge of aggressive Chinese economic incursion into the African continent within the period of the Obama administration. The idea that Africa was the last frontier for economic growth was brought to full reality by the eclipse of the US by China in 2009. In fact China has completely edged out the US through instruments and institutions such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) and its (in) famous 'complete package'. The FOCAC provides avenues for high level discussions between Chinese and African leaders (Cohen, 2019, p.212) while the nebulous 'complete package' offers 'money, technical expertise and influence in such bodies as the UN security council to protect the host country from international sanctions' (Cohen, 2019, p.220).

### **Checking out of Africa; coming to America**

The liberalist philosophy which engulfed the entire Africa from the late 1980s onwards has produced tangible economic dividends for the continent (Hendrickson, 2012, pp.4&76). Charles Holmes (2019) reports that besides having a predominantly youthful population, six of the world's ten fastest growing economies are currently on the African continent. However in spite of the unprecedented economic boom that saw a significant proportion of Africans move into middle class status the overall economic prognosis of the African continent is on the balance very grim.

To be sure, in Africa presently, the most debilitating poverty and extreme income inequality coexist unabashedly with unprecedented economic growth (Jones & Williams, 2012, p.3). This contradictory situation coupled to increasing political repression has produced sufficient disaffection within Africa to precipitate an equally unprecedented exodus from the continent. Consequent upon the desperation to exit economically sterile and politically vacuous states, devastating consequences has been wrought on the 'migratory highways' out of Africa i.e. the trans-Saharan and the trans-Mediterranean routes to Europe. Indeed, both routes which have come to graphically symbolise the continent's abject economic underperformance are regularly strewn with the carcasses of desperate African migrants. The ultimate destination of African migrants is Europe. However, the United States of America has also received its fair share of economic migrants from Africa. Though, due to the prohibitive distance between the Americas and Africa she has been spared direct inundation by the deluge gushing out from the African interior.

Nevertheless given a long standing placid and sympathetic immigration policy adopted by successive U.S administrations, Africans today account for a sizable proportion of immigrants in that country. However, the Trump administration had been far less sympathetic to African migrants and Africa's economic plight in general. Indeed its conservative policies has fundamentally altered America's historic immigration policy and with it, perhaps, its racial demographic landscape for years to come.

### **Africa and Trump: anatomy of a relationship**

Donald Trump came into the office of the president of the United States of America espousing the ideology of 'America First'. That ideology is at its very core an exclusionist and purist leaning policy which seeks not only to keep out foreigners and reserve America for its citizens but also to project and defend America's interests throughout the world.

This policy objective does not however mean that the US has shut its borders completely to foreign immigrants; the Trump administration only aspires to keep out immigrants from certain regions of the world (Bergman 2018). On his campaign trail, Donald Trump had promised to keep out certain classes of migrants such as his neighbours the Mexicans whom he labelled as being predominantly derelict and vowed to fend them off through a border wall. In office, and adhering to his campaign objective, Trump demanded, during a meeting with US lawmakers, more high impact immigrants from Scandinavia, specifically Norway, than from African countries whom he derisively termed 'shitholes' (Kirby 2018).

Furthermore, in tandem with a character for sweeping deprecations, in the aftermath of the review of the recipients of US visas in 2017, Trump had observed that Haitians, 'all have AIDS' and Nigerians never go back to their huts' once they come to the U.S. Thus, for Trump the US should only accept 'high quality' immigrants who can, 'contribute to our society, grow our economy and assimilate into our great nation' (Kirby 2018). Another reason adduced by the Trump administration for the stringent immigration policies is security. However, this 'security reason' has been rightly trashed and dismissed as unavailing. This is because it has consistently been shown that it is primarily, 'US-based loners who have committed acts of terrorism not immigrants' (Tometi 2020).

In order to achieve its objectives of dissuading immigration into the U.S, the Trump administration has utilized a number of emasculative policy options. These policies include outright travel ban for, 'family members hoping to travel legally from Iran, Libya, Syria, Yemen and Somalia' (Kanno-Youngs 2020). Associate, but subtle, anti-migrant policies include, 'requiring in-person interviews for most immigration visas and a proposed 60 percent increase in citizenship fees for most applicants'. In the United States itself the administration imposed what it termed the 'public charge rule' in 2019. There is also the so-called, 'public charge rule' which discourages legal immigrants from seeking care at public hospitals and clinics lest they be deemed a burden on society and as a result denied legal permanent residence when they apply for green cards' (Trump's immigration policies have already put lives at risk, 2020). Based on this, an editorial in the Washington Post argued bitterly, upon the outbreak of the coronavirus, that the "public charge rule", 'drove immigrants afflicted with Covid-19 underground thus further fuelling the pandemic'.

The Centre for Immigration Studies (CMS) on its part has acridly deployed three executive orders signed by president Trump as being offensive and threatening to the, 'rights of immigrants and refugees both in the United States and globally' (Centre for Immigration Studies (CMS), 2020). The centre further argued that,

the three executive orders indicate that the United States is turning its back on its heritage as an immigrant nation and a safe haven for the world's persecuted. This stance will harm its moral standing in the world, and limit its ability to influence other nations to collaborate with it on humanitarian and other initiatives. It will also harm US relations with long-term allies.

Congress should resist these orders and deny funding to implement them.

However, in a series of communiqués issued from the White House, Trump had defended the stringent policies by pointing out that reforms in the immigration law, 'will help protect the wages of American workers and ensure that foreign labour entering our country is high skilled and does not undercut the United States labour market' (Fact Sheet, 2020, June 22; Fact Sheet, 2020, April 22). In any case the stringent immigration policies being institutionalised by the Trump administration have already begun to pay off as,

‘legal immigration has fallen more than 11 percent and a steeper drop is looming’ (Kanno-Youngs, 2020). This is significant; because even though the Trump administration has been widely perceived as being haphazard on most policy issues, internationally and domestically, ‘on immigration they have been extremely consistent and barreling forward’ (Kanno-Youngs 2020). Consequent upon Trump’s emasculative migration policies it is expected that its effects will reverberate in America’s demographic landscape for many years to come.

### **An analytical deconstruction of the three levels of Afro-American relations**

It had been pointed out that Trump’s policies were likely to exert severe pressure on Africa and Africans given the continent’s sordid economic outlook (Tometi 2020). This pressure is likely to occur at three levels; the multilateral, the bilateral and the mass levels. For example, at the mass level, the African Diaspora in the U.S repatriates billions of dollars annually in remittances to relatives in Africa. This remittance is not only a viable source of foreign change, it also enables associates in Africa, either family members or friends to enjoy a reasonable standard of living; paying for better nutrition, education and health care or such as are available. Presently the Nigerian Central Bank has announced significant shortfall in foreign exchange receipt from overseas and has thus instituted reforms to stem the drop. Significantly also the African Diaspora in America serves as a powerful lobby on critical African issues. In a similar vein, the civil rights leader the reverend Leon Sullivan initiated in 1991 the African/African-American Summits. It was staged in Africa and aimed at social and economic investments in Africa (Hendrickson, 2012, p.61).

At the bilateral level, relations between the United States and African states had not fared much better under the Trump administration. Asides from the fact that in 2018, as has been recounted, Trump described African countries as ‘shitholes’ for which the African union demanded an apology ‘for his clearly racist remarks’; in 2019 he publicly disparaged the Nobel committee’s selection of Ethiopian prime minister, Abiy Ahmed, insisting that he not Ahmed deserved to win the 2019 Nobel peace prize. This bellicosity toward the state in Africa is hardly surprising given that ‘Trump had made no bones about his lack of interest in Africa’ (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020). For instance he had proposed budget cuts to areas such as global health, development and diplomacy, where the U.S traditionally had comparative advantage in Africa (Holmes, 2019). Furthermore the visit by Mike Pompeo, US secretary of state, to Senegal, Angola and Ethiopia was the highest official visit paid to the continent by any member of the Trump administration throughout its first term in office. In fact within the period under review only two African leaders, Muhammadu Buhari of Nigeria and Uhuru Kenyatta of Kenya, visited the Trump White House (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020). Furthermore, even more revealing, it took Trump, ‘a year and a half to appoint an assistant secretary of state for African affairs and even longer to find an ambassador for South Africa one of the top diplomatic posts, south of the Sahara’ (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020). It was in the observation of these events that Johnnie Carson, Obama’s first assistant secretary for Africa could lament that within the administrative apparatus of the United States, ‘the Africa Bureau has been eviscerated, morale is low, senior officers have walked away’ (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020). For Carson, Africa now only matters to the U.S as a, ‘place where China and Russia must be confronted’ (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020).

However, even though the Trump administration has no systematic, cohesive African policy in place there appears to be, however, in the interim, a noticeable transactional approach to relations with Africa. What this means is that ‘all U.S aid on the continent will advance U.S interests’ (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020). In the main the return to Cold War era diplomacy by the Trump administration vis-à-vis Africa, is leading the U.S away from its, ‘traditional defence of democracy and human rights’. The blowback effect from this abrupt paradigmatic shift in U.S foreign policy in Africa is already being felt both in Africa and in the U.S itself. For example, ‘the U.S has embraced Felix Tshisekedi as the president of the Democratic Republic of Congo despite the blatantly rigged election that brought him to power’ (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020). It is clear that America’s earnest desire to dissuade any alliance between the Congo and China, ‘trumped any worries about democracy’. In the United States itself, just as had been earlier pointed out, Jeffery Smith has suggested that, ‘Mr Trump’s lack of interest in Africa

may unwittingly have given professional Africanists more scope' (How America deals with Africa despite Trump, 2020).

In the main the only developmental effort geared toward Africa, as far as one can see, under the Trump administration had been the BUILD. It is however pertinent to point out that the BUILD is a 'bipartisan effort which was signed by Trump' (Holmes, 2019). In brief, the BUILD with a finance capital worth 60 billion dollars, 'is designed to encourage further U.S private-sector involvement in human capital development'. In Africa BUILD is expected to 'give African governments better access to reciprocal partnerships that drive growth and development and do not threaten their sovereignty, as some Chinese loans have done'. One must understand that the U.S under Trump had consistently alleged that Chinese development initiatives in Africa are riddled with 'predatory lending and corruption'.

At the multilateral level, certain international financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and World Trade Organisation (WTO), 'backed up by U.S power played a very significant role in structuring economic relations with Africa and options of African countries' (Hendrickson, 2012, p.14). However under the Trump presidency the US appeared to be negating the earlier achievements of these institutions in Africa. In recent times the US had solidly arraigned itself against African interests in some major multilateral organisations. The three most glaring examples of US hostility against Africa's interests were in the African Development Bank (AFDB), the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the World Health Organisation (WHO). In the case of the WHO, an affiliate of the United Nations, the US which contributes 15% of WHO's total budget denounced the organisation as being a Chinese lackey. The US president had observed that the Chinese control of the organisation had enabled China to pressurise the WHO to 'mislead the world' about the corona virus pandemic (Corona virus: Trump faces backlash after US quits WHO, 2020). This allegation is hinged on the praise the WHO had showered on China for its 'commitment to transparency' and initial response to the corona virus pandemic (Corona virus: what are president Trump's charges against the WHO? 2020). However Trump's criticism of the WHO is considerably undercut by the fact that Trump himself had been equally effusive in his praise of China's initial handling of the pandemic outbreak. Hear Donald Trump:

China has been working very hard to contain the corona virus. The United States greatly appreciates their efforts and transparency. It will all work out well. In particular, on behalf of the American people I want to thank president Xi! (Corona virus: what are president Trump's charges against the WHO? 2020)

In the second case one is baffled with the US' obstinate rejection of a preliminary investigation into unethical behaviour by the president of the AFDB, Akinwumi Adesina (Akinwumi Adesina: why the US is targeting a flamboyant Nigerian banker, 2020). Despite being, 'totally exonerated of all allegations' made against him, the US Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin had personally signed a letter to the board rejecting that initial investigation. It is instructive that no African country backed a second inquiry. Besides, 'the core 54 African countries, the US is one of the 27 non-regional members of the AFDB and its second largest shareholder'. It is also instructive that a second external probe totally cleared Akinwumi Adesina of any wrongdoing.

In the third case, the US robustly acted against the appointment of what would have been the first African and female to head the WTO, Ngozi Okonjo Iweala from Nigeria. The American hostility to the appointment of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala was enacted against the backdrop of a global consensus for Okonjo-Iweala's appointment (who has since been appointed in the aftermath of Trump's electoral defeat in 2020). According to the spokesman for WTO delegates who met to discuss the appointment, 'all of the delegations that expressed their views today expressed very strong support for the process... for the outcome except for one'. (US tries to block Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as first African WTO head, 2020). The main grouse of the US is that the WTO has become a foil for unsavoury Chinese economic ambitions.

These aggressive actions and declamations against Africa and African interests by the Trump administration had contrived to portray the continent and its people in a negative light worldwide and in the US in particular.

### **Africa in contemporary American mind**

To be fair, the average American mind harbours an imagery of Africa which predates the Trump administration. The enduring image of Africa in the American mind is as a ‘burden or as an area of hopelessness and despair’ (Amin, 2016). This imagery was made more acute in contemporary times by the Trump’s administration repetitive characterisations of Africa’s ‘hopelessness and despair’ which has succeeded in intensifying, popularising and projecting this imagery of Africa and blacks in general in the American mind. In America itself Trump’s thinly veiled white supremacist rhetoric had led to a perceptible rise in deadly racism inspired assaults on African-Americans. Recall that Trump had demanded that four U.S congresswomen some of whom are of African descent and had been born in the U.S return to the ‘crime infested places from which they came’.

The Nigerian Nobel Laureate, Wole Soyinka (2016), had once acridly observed that it was rabid nationalism liberally strewn with racist rhetoric principally ‘targeted against Africans, specifically speaking Nigerians’ which had helped bring Donald Trump into office. In office, however, Trump had neither been moderated by the exigencies of the oval office (US presidential office), nor diplomacy nor the need to adhere to political correctness. In the same vein, for Madison Jones, it was Donald Trump’s ‘extreme rhetoric and “America First” statements which ignited a populist revolution in which millions of Americans voted in order to focus on building up the US before building up other nations’. That rhetoric simply reinforced the traditional American view of Africa as ‘poor, unstable, undemocratic, corrupt’. Although Jones also blames the negative labelling of Africa on the Western mass media whose, ‘images strongly anchor in our heads and create stereotypes, false images of the world around us preventing the West from truly understanding the nuances of development and life in Africa’. For Jones the struggle for ‘the hearts and minds’ of Americans in order to reshape that view of an Africa dependent on ‘massive aid in order to survive’ must be done through a ‘public diplomacy strategy’. Public diplomacy strategy entails the use of the social media, public relations and international broadcasting clean up Africa’s image.

### **Results and discussion**

From the foregoing, it is now apparent that Africa has for a long time largely been on the fringe with respect to US foreign policy projections. It was thus because of the tangential nature and impact of Afro-American diplomatic relations on US foreign policy projections and calculations that Donald Trump could afford to be abrasive in his characterisation of the continent. It is our contention here that this characterisation has in the main further fuelled the de-marketing of the continent internationally.

It is pertinent to also point out further that Trump’s impolitic characterisation of Africa and her people has not, as far as can be seen, negatively impacted Afro-American relations in any empirically quantifiable way. In fact, despite the uncomplimentary remarks about Africa in general and Nigeria in particular the Nigerian president still sought out the technical assistance of the Trump administration in its war against Islamist insurgency. Meanwhile across the rest of Africa it is instructive that amid the diplomatic blitzkrieg launched by the Trump administration against the continent no government of any country in Africa deemed it necessary to embark on a corresponding diplomatic response on the part of the continent either to challenge the Trump administration’s untoward narrative on Africa or to discomfiture the Trump administration through some other means. Recall that during the Angolan civil war Nigeria had stood up to the US by supporting an opposing faction. There was also no coordinated response from the continent to the indignities meted out to it by the Trump administration. Thus the collective torpor is indicative, by implication, of the continent’s graphic abject political, economic and diplomatic helplessness vis-à-vis the US. Consequent upon this, the continent has inspired at best polite disinterest and lately disdain from successive US presidents.

It is therefore for this reason that Jones’ advocacy of public diplomacy strategies as a panacea for the generalised negative perception of Africa worldwide cannot avail more so when successive US presidents have in fact either directly or indirectly helped in propagating this negative imagery. History has often shown that the President of the United States possesses enormous clout with which to influence the global perception of states. It is for this reason that visits to, and friendship with, the United States are highly valued by political leaders worldwide. But as our review has shown very few US presidents have situated Africa at the fulcrum of American foreign policy. Indeed most US administrations have engaged in ‘transactional’

relations with the continent. As has been noted in the review this transactionary motive which was an integral aspect of Afro-American relations during the Cold War assumed renewed salience during the Trump administration. Thus, given this almost institutionalised approach to Africa in US foreign policy it has been difficult for the continent to generate the favourability rating linked to a positive view from successive US presidents which is necessary if Africa is to remake its considerable negative imagery in American and indeed world opinion.

However this is only one aspect of the dilemma confronting the continent. If Africa is actually going to leverage on the huge goodwill of the president of the United States it must also be willing to re-model itself. In other words, it must reform the extensive governance lapses in its administrative structure. Ironically, the need for such an aggressive reform has long been widely recognised in Africa itself. It was therefore unsurprising that despite Trump's vituperative outbursts against the continent, the 'favourability of the United States in Africa is not a problem, according to a Pew research, as African countries overwhelmingly view the United States positively' (Jones, n.d). This perception of the US was, and remains, true both at the mass and elite levels. For example Uganda's president Yoweri Museveni was reported to have said in a speech that: 'I love Trump, he tells Africans frankly, Africans need to solve their problems' (South Africa's Motsepe sorry for 'Africa loves Trump' remark, 2020). In addition the institution of several reward systems targeted at African leadership – for example the Ibrahim Mo prize for leadership – is a tacit acknowledgement of the unmitigated failure of leadership in the post-colonial state in Africa.

### **Conclusion**

In recent years, given the immediate past US president's emphasis on 'America First' policies, the transactionary motive had inched back into US relations with Africa. These policies had also been characterised by a rabid denigration of Africa and its people. However in spite of this the US president and the US itself had maintained favourable ratings in Africa. Of course this development highlights the fact that Africans, both the elite and the mass, recognise the import of Trump's comments more so in the light of the continent's endemic migrant crisis. Paradoxically, it may be inferred that, by implication, Trump's brazen impolitic attacks on Africa has yielded some positive results. For example, to be sure, it has led to a lot of soul-searching on the continent particularly among the political elite. At least for the first time Africa's relative backwards in all aspects of human development was nakedly and crudely highlighted by the world's most powerful political leader in blatant disregard of political correctness. This development further underscored the continent's almost total diplomatic inconsequentiality in global politics. Thus the current de-emphasis (as we have seen, the relative disinterest in Africa runs the gamut of the two major political parties in the US) placed on Afro-United States relations by the US government requires African leadership to urgently reappraise Africa's post independence economic trajectory and thereafter make meaningful adjustments in order to strengthen the continent's bargaining power relative to other global powers not just the US. This is therefore not the appropriate time for African leaders to engage in retaliatory diplomatic exchanges with the US – an exchange which it is bound to lose in any case – but to seek to dispassionately interrogate the repeated institutional failures which has abjectly sidetracked it in global affairs.

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