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“It’s All about Perspective: Black America’s Nation Formation”

Certainly, you’ve heard references to the “importance of perspective.” When one is enthralled deeply in the context of a situation, it is difficult to achieve perspective. But when you can step back from, or out of, the situation, then obtaining perspective is possible.

For most Black Americans, it is impossible to fashion a perspective of living while Black in America. We wake up each day and face media, political, historical, and economic systems that are all orthogonal to our wellbeing. Because we are “in the moment” and actively pursuing life itself under these circumstances, real perspective cannot be had often.

That is why I was very fortunate. I departed the US for the first time for a trip abroad in 1982 at the age of 26 and visited South Asia for just a couple of weeks. I was too young, and too uninformed to try to use the visit as an opportunity to get perspective on what it meant to be Black in America and, better yet, to evolve some strategic notions about how to right the situation for me—and, potentially, for other Black Americans.

My opportunities to get “out of the box” continued in the late 1990, when I spent the final two years of the millennium in South Asia. This elongated absence from the US enabled me to see not only South Asia, but other parts of the world (parts of East Asia, Europe, and Australia). However, at that time, I was thoroughly engrossed in my climb upwards in the American economic and material hierarchy and only took note of how the US was such a much more favorable environment materially in which to live as opposed to many other parts of the world. So, when I returned to the US just before the millennium change, I was convinced that Black Americans should travel abroad in order to be able to see how fortunate we were to be living in the good old US of A.

During the first five years of the new millennium, I mainly had an opportunity to travel to Europe. In the second five years of the millennium, I was back out and about in South and Southeast Asia. Fortunately, for me, this was a period when I began to look critically at the condition of Blacks in America and to question why we are at the bottom of most hierarchies in the nation. As I traveled to South and Southeast Asia, and even on a couple of occasions to Central and South America, I began to look for locations that offered an upgraded environment for life for Black Americans. Not materially, but mainly psychologically. Where was the racism less pronounced? I concluded, as have many, that, if one has significant material resources, then many of these places offered a more placid environment for Black American life.

Starting in 2014, I gained an opportunity to begin to travel to and to live and work in East Africa (Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, and Uganda). I was amazed to see people that looked like replicas of persons from my childhood—cousins, teachers, and friends. Could this be the best place for Black Americans? I even heard that the baseball great Jackie Robinson’s son had a large commercial farm in Tanzania and thought, “maybe this is it.” Then reality struck. I needed to make certain purchases. I would go to commercial enterprises. I would be greeted at the door of the shops by an African. But when price began to be negotiated, the African would say: “Please excuse me for a moment.” Then the African would go to the back of the shop and into a room, and then return with the owner of the shop—usually a person of South Asian descent. Not only that, but I began to read about China’s BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) and its development across the African continent. Not only that, but as I traveled throughout East Africa, I realized that the British were still very much there in street names, lake names, mountain names, and other places names, which the Africans were not thoughtful enough to want to return to their original African names (this is something that the South Asians have gone to great lengths to do).

I realized again, that if one has significant material resources, then one could get along quite well—without too much racism—in East Africa. But one would not be living in space completely owned and controlled by Black Africans. One would be living in space that has been forever modified by the British, and that is now owned, to a significant extent, by western enterprises and companies from South and East Asia.

I would argue that East Africa is a better place to live than West Africa (a place that I only visited once in the late 1990s) because the anger against outsiders is less severe. The Africans in East Africa experienced colonialism under the firm but somewhat balanced hand of the British. Then they got a mouthful of Russia and China during a Socialist phase after Independence. It is only in the last 40-to-50 years that East Africa has tried to chart its own course. West Africa, on the other hand, experienced the harsh colonialism of the French, the Germans, and Belgium. It was West Africa that saw the most egregious forms of human slavery during the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, from which they still suffer. The monuments are still there to remind them daily. Moreover, they are more prolific in population, so that the poverty appears to be more severe. All in all, East Africa appears to present a more pleasant environment to live in than West Africa for Black America.

The point being that I have traveled to, visited, and lived in several parts of the world. From those experiences, I was able to obtain some perspective—being “outside of the box.” I would argue that there is nothing wrong with Black Americans moving to Africa (I didn’t say “back to Africa”). But when one does, one must keep in mind that Africa is not a glorious place. It has many problems that will be enormously difficult to resolve. In my humble opinion, Africa, on a material basis, will never converge with the Western World. But on a psychological basis, there may be some comfort in living in a “Black environment”—even if that environment is heavily shaped by the Western world. Encapsulated, one might say, especially from a psychological health perspective, it is better to live in a Black world than in a mainly White world.

But up to this point, I had found no ideal solution for Black America. I had been “outside the box,” but I was unable to identify a perfect place of residence for Black Americans.

Over the past ten years, I have thought persistently about nation formation. And I am continuously drawn back to that idea. Not nation formation in some far-flung land. But nation formation right here in the wilderness of North America. Our 2019 Essay, [“More than a Conqueror”](#) and our 2010 book [Chosen: Black America’s Calling](#) provide insights on how this might be achieved—at least some rudimentary strategies. I have used all of my travels, readings, thinking, and God-given insights on this topic to rationalize why the best strategy going forward for Black America is to carve out space for ourselves on the North American continent. During this period, I continued to be fairly certain about this. But then I got real perspective.

Last Sunday, I went for a walk in the diplomatic enclave neighborhood that is mine while living these days in South Asia. I may have walked a total of less than one and one-half miles. I left the compound, turned right, took the first left and found myself in front of the Kenya High Commission. At the next corner, I took a right, and then a left. Before long I would reach a key cross street. Just before reaching the cross street, I saw the Embassy of Gabon, and signs leading to the Embassies of Peru, Kyrgyz, and Burkina Faso. On the cross street, I saw the Embassies of Guyana, Morocco, and a side road that led to the Embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina. There are other embassies and high commissions all around. Some for relatively large countries in population, and some for very small countries. I turned right from the cross street and saw the Embassies of Ecuador and Bolivia. Then I found my way back to my compound.

The perspective which I sought slapped me in the face after I saw the second or third diplomatic installation during the walk. Except for Kenya, all of the countries that I saw have a population that is less than Black America’s 45 million-plus population. None of the countries represented have a gross domestic product, or its counterpart gross domestic income, that reaches nearly the sum that passes through Black Americans’ hands on an annual basis—well over one trillion in US dollars. And then the bell rang loudly. How can the people represented by these diplomatic installations have their own nation while a larger and higher-income Black American population not have our own nation?

As I often say, there is something wrong with this picture. Are we too unintelligent or too lazy to see the efficacy of nationhood? Are we too afraid to fight for nationhood? What drawbacks would there be of having our own nation? Don’t you think that we deserve our own nation? What can we do as a nation to improve our future—a future that we will never experience as part of the larger USA? And what can we contribute to the world as a nation that would make the future of the world more beneficial? After you answer these questions, then you might have better perspective, and you may agree that Black America should go for self through nation formation right here in North America.

The his|story of the world is about:
The formation and dissolution of empires; and
the rise and fall of nations.
Why can’t Black Americans join that story?

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