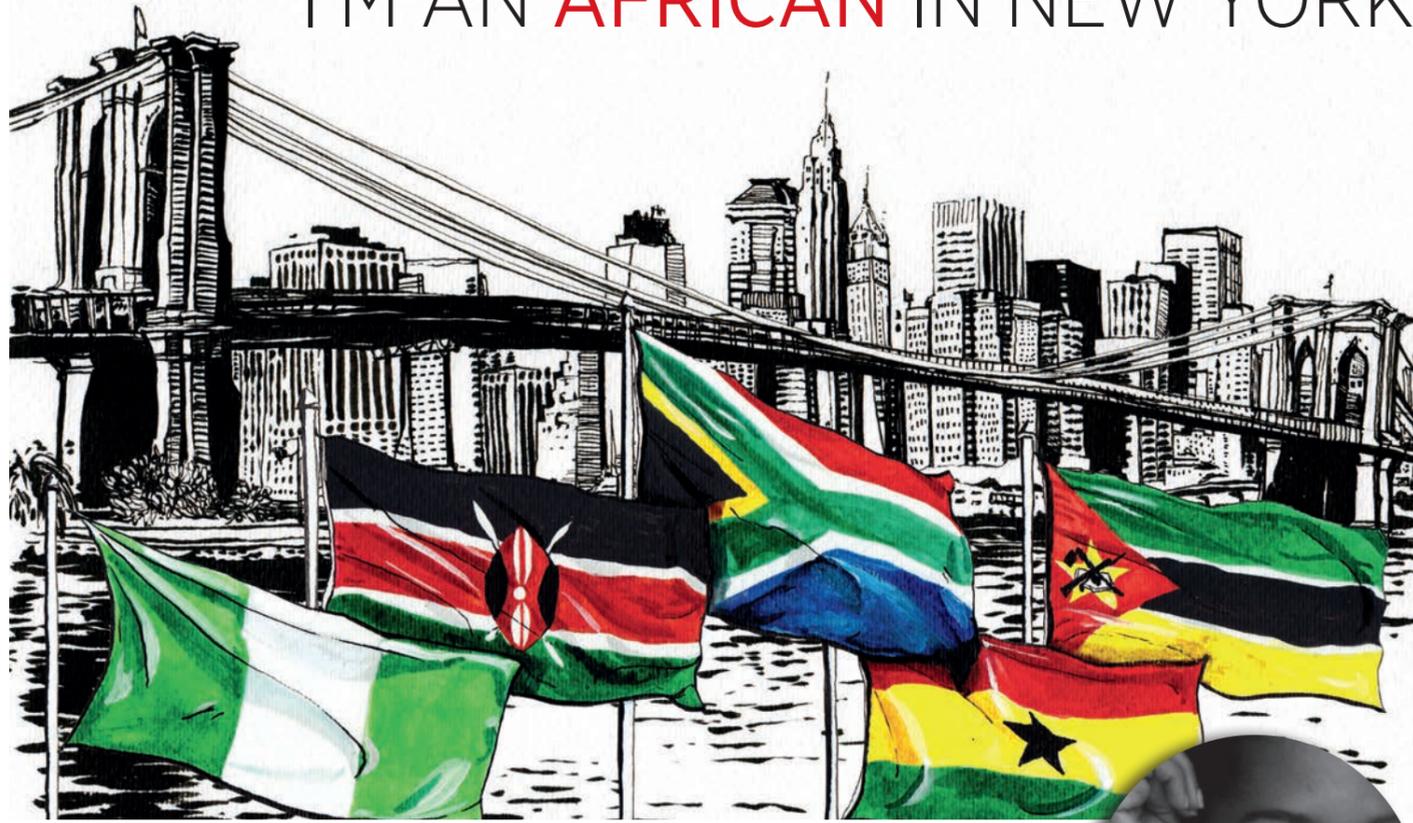


I'M AN AFRICAN IN NEW YORK



By **Lola Adesioye**

It's no secret that the Empire State's inimitable energy, relentless pace and pulsating drive have led to the creation of some of America's (and indeed the world's) most famous and enduring commercial and cultural institutions.

This dynamism coupled with an effervescent melting pot of people of diverse nationalities and ethnicities has also given rise to a newer trend—an African one. In the past few years, the New York eye on Africa has gone from strength to strength, resulting in what we have today: a veritable community of business leaders—some African, some not—who are using New York as a base for building, showcasing and investing in African ventures and opportunities.

Not long ago, doing business in Africa was the preserve of die-hard Afrophiles in New

York. Most New Yorkers had little interest in or connection to Africa; on the contrary they stayed away, discouraged by media depictions of Africa's various crises. In 2013, this has changed dramatically as the metropolis has become the de-facto hub for much Africa-related activity on this side of the United States (US).

A slew of successful investment firms, PR agencies, fashion companies, media houses and various other businesses now operate out of the city, having laid firm foundations in recent years, all culminating in what appears to be a New York-based Africa boom.

A growing number of people, both African and non-African, are opening and investing in businesses and business-related activities focused on the continent. These people wish to deepen and strengthen the relationship between Africa and the US from their New

York City bases.

They are positive that they can take Africa by storm. And, they are doing it. In fact, a New York location allows them to take advantage of the constant comings and goings of international colleagues and clients, who may be easier to access in the US than when further afield, while technology allows them to stay in constant communication with Africa.

You can see the shift by looking at the media's portrayal of Africa. Major news outlets such as *The New York Times* and *The Daily Beast* are now willing to extol Africa's virtues, while towards the end of last year, *The Daily Beast's* editor-in-chief, Tina Brown, hosted an invitation-only breakfast panel to discuss

'Africa's burgeoning media sector'.

You also know that change is underway when Google's chairman Eric Schmidt returns from a trip to Africa and pens a thoughtful blog post, in which he describes Rwanda as a 'jewel' and admits his surprise that Nigerians are entrepreneurial, stylish and educated in addition to laying out some of the major opportunities that he has seen for Google's growth on the continent.

International PR agent Claudine Moore, a British expat who is based in New York and spends a good proportion of her time working on African projects, counts the Nigerian airline Arik Air as one of her clients. She uses her British, American and African connections to advance business on both sides of the world. She is currently gearing up to present the first Social Media Week in Lagos (the first to be held on the continent) in February.

They say that art imitates life, and the city's art world has not been shy in its current embrace of Africa. Currently showing at the Walther Collection is 'Distance and Desire' an exhibition of contemporary African art and photography. The Walther Collection is extraordinary in that it is owned by Artur Walther, a German man who has one of the largest collections of contemporary African art in the world.

Africa Fashion Week, which has become a regular feature of the global fashion week circuit, will return to New York once again this summer.

ARISE media group has also just announced the launch of a new Africa-focused 24-hour global news channel. Guess where its first US-based hub is? New York City of course.

New York finance firms have also been encouraged by President Barack Obama's open desire to encourage US businesses to invest more heavily in Africa and are looking forward to attending the Africa investor summit later in the year which will once again bring together over 250 investors from around the world at the New York Stock Exchange. **FL**

ILLUSTRATION BY AUDREY ANDERSON



THE CITY OF DREAMS

By **Farai Gundan**

From Wall Street, Tribeca, SoHo, Harlem, Brooklyn, Queens and the rest of the boroughs that make up the 8.2 million-resident metropolitan city, Africans are quietly but steadfastly building their empires and pursuing their diasporan dreams.

Charles Dickens famously wrote, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," and indeed it is the best of times for Africans in the United States. Particularly in New York, a global city, where the residents are constantly in an empire state of mind. This is not surprising given that New York yields tremendous influence in fashion, finance, technology, art, film and media, and music and entertainment. International organization, the United Nations, is headquartered in the Turtle Bay neighborhood of Manhattan overlooking the East River making the mega-city an epicenter for international diplomacy.

Navigating around New York City on the subways, buses or yellow cabs; Africans in New York typically use HopStop, an app that provides optimal directions and was founded and developed by Nigerian-born tech entrepreneur, Chinedu Echeruo.

Africans can also experience home cooking right in New York. From the renowned Africa Kine, a restaurant that serves West African cuisine in Le Petit Senegal, a neighborhood of Harlem, to the popular Madiba, a South African eatery in Fort Greene, Brooklyn, or Buka's, an authentic Nigerian restaurant and bar in Clinton Hill, Brooklyn.

From the electrifying musical performances of D'Banj, Lira and Oliver Mtukudzi during the summer months and the fireside readings of authors Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and NoViolet Bulawayo to Nollywood movie premieres, colorful traditional weddings, baby showers, graduations and family celebrations, Africans always find a reason to gather in New York. We celebrate our entertainers at the Nigerian Entertainment Awards, our African models walk the runways

and fashion designers show off their talent during Mercedes Benz Fashion Week. You find Africans working diligently in corporate America on Wall Street, choreographing hit musicals on Broadway or being cast in the popular play, *Lion King*.

Like the rest of my fellow Africans who left their beloved countries for greener pastures, I came to the United States fresh out of high school to pursue my tertiary education. I had two options: the United States of America or Japan. The United States offered a generous scholarship to a private liberal arts college in the mid-western state of Wisconsin. I was so determined and focused that I graduated in three years instead of the usual four. I also worked full time to financially support my mother and younger sister who were still in Zimbabwe at the time. Never easy but an "African girl's gotta do what an African girl's gotta do". Fast forward to my graduation, my family stood proudly on the well-manicured lawn at college congratulating me on obtaining a Bachelor's Degree: a first in my family.

Of course, I had my eyes on even higher goals—a joint law degree and M.B.A. But law school is expensive, so I opted for the M.B.A with the goal of one day returning to get my law degree. That day is still to come. I attended Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University, a historically black university, where I learnt about the works of W.E.B DuBois, Langston Hughes, and other great black men and women. Graduate school was a turning point for me. I embraced my culture and realized who I am as an African woman. I even went natural with my hair, sporting a short Afro. It was the beginnings of a coming of age of an African girl.

I received great training in corporate America, however, after a defining moment with Oprah Winfrey, I left to pursue a career in media. From covering red carpets to the fashion runways and everything in between, I have been able to travel across the United States. Yet New York remains the place that can turn an African girl with dreams of being a media mogul into reality. **FL**