

# My Quest for an Internet

In the 11th installment of our weekly series at [emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com), we walk down memory lane to March 26, 1974. The scenario: Philip Chukwurah Emeagwali “discovers” that black Americans no longer speak their native African languages.

## The First Africans in America

Transcribed and edited from a lecture delivered by [Philip Chukwurah Emeagwali](http://emeagwali.com). The unedited [video](#) is posted at [emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com).

I did not know that the first Africans arrived in Jamestown, Virginia, in 1614. I thought Nnamdi Azikiwe, my hometown hero, was one of the first (*Zik nwa jelu obodo oyibo*). He was in Storer College, Virginia, in the 1920s, 50 years before my arrival in the United States.

Three hundred and sixty years (360) earlier, Africans arrived in the United States, via Portugal. Africans arrived in Portugal, as slaves, 170 years before their arrival in the United States.

Lagos is a Portuguese word. Madam Tinubu (of Tinubu Square, Lagos) was a wealthy 19th century slave-trader. Pidgin-English was invented to trade with Portuguese.

My first awareness of black America came in 1968 from reading the classic “*Up From Slavery*” by Booker T. Washington. I read it as a 13-year-old refugee living in a refugee camp located at Saint Joseph’s Primary School, Awka-Etiti, Biafra. So for a period, I carried the image of Africans in the United States, who could still speak some African languages, two centuries after they were liberated from slavery.

As I remember, the first time I saw black Americans in everyday context was in 1972 in *Jet* magazine in Ibuzor. The second was in 1973 in *Ebony* magazine in the public library in Onitsha. The third was in February 1974 in the movie *Shaft* in a cinema in Lagos. I was impressed by the level of their affluence. I realized that black Americans were living in a very, very different world from Africans.

The first time I saw a black American in person was on March 20, 1974. He was a young marine standing guard at the gate of the Embassy of the United States on Victoria Island, Lagos, Nigeria. I was there for an appointment for my visa interview. I gawked at him because he had the exotic look of man from another planet.

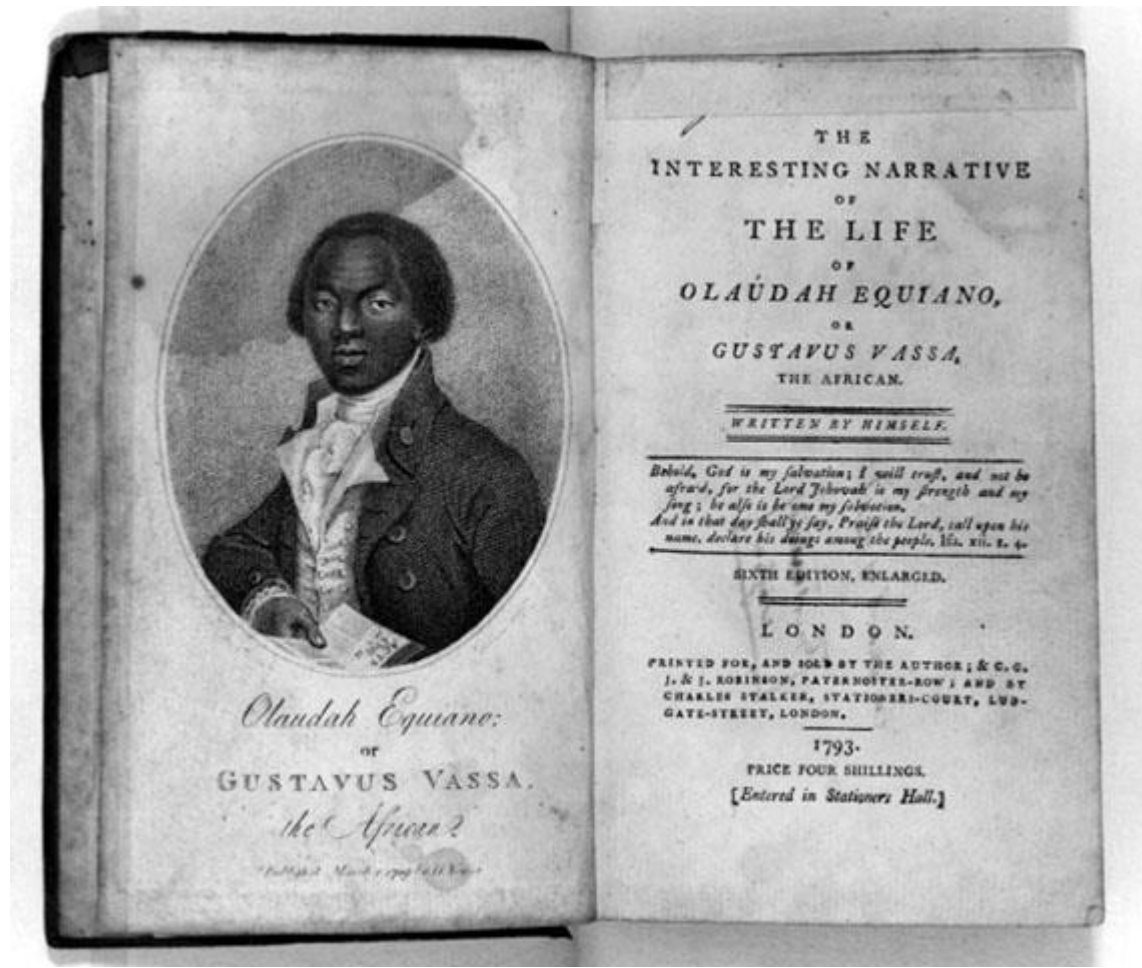
Five days later, I was in New York's John F. Kennedy airport and I stopped counting the number of black Americans I had seen. I assumed I will see more in Oregon, which was my final destination. So at 7 am, the day after my arrival in Monmouth, Oregon, Jim, the resident assistant who had volunteered as my guide for the day, knocked on my door at Room 36, Butler Hall. He invited me for breakfast.

In the cafeteria, I was taken aback by the sea of a thousand young white faces. Growing up in colonial Africa, we had about one white resident in most towns. Often, he was a Catholic priest or a colonial administrator. So I had never seen a white teenager. But here I was in America, and there was not a single black face in the crowd of young people.



I definitely stood out in Oregon. Here is a photo of me taken for my passport for my travel from Nigeria to the United States. [Philip Emeagwali, in Onitsha, Nigeria, 1973]

## Igbo Pioneers in the Americas



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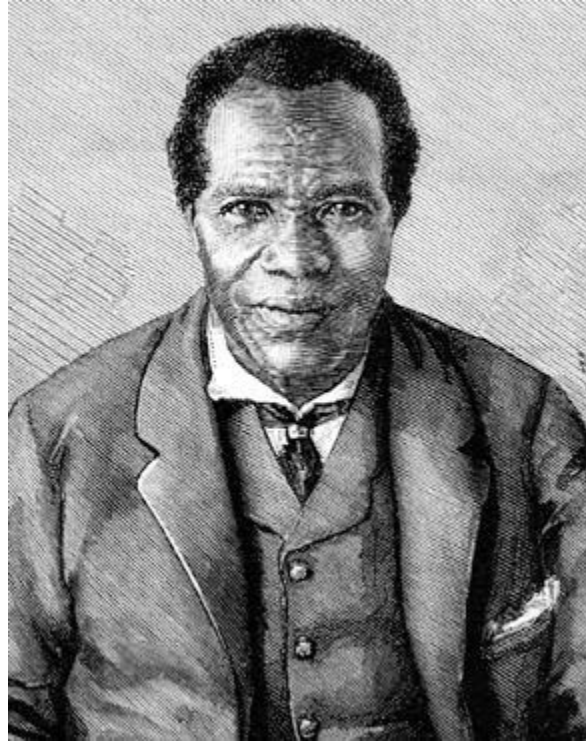
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3. Kennerly, K. *The Slave Who Bought His Freedom; Equiano's Story*. NY: Dutton, 1971.

## Edward Wilmot Blyden



Edward Wilmot Blyden, a renown Pan-Africanist, declared himself: "a true son of the Eboe tribe." Blyden's writings inspired Marcus Garvey, W.E.B. DuBois, Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Kwame Nkrumah.

## Ja Ja of Opobo



**Birth:** c. 1820

**Death:** 1891

**Nationality:** Nigerian

**Occupation:** revolutionary, ruler

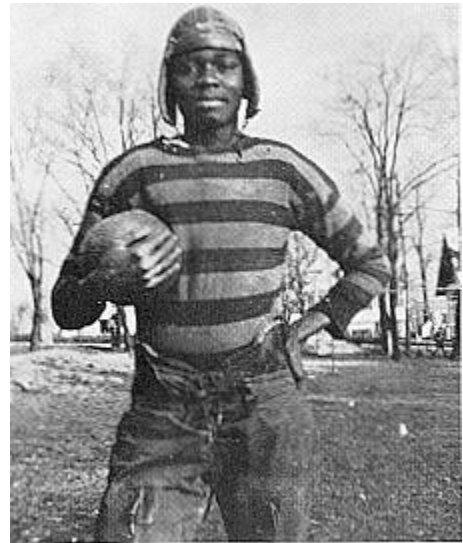
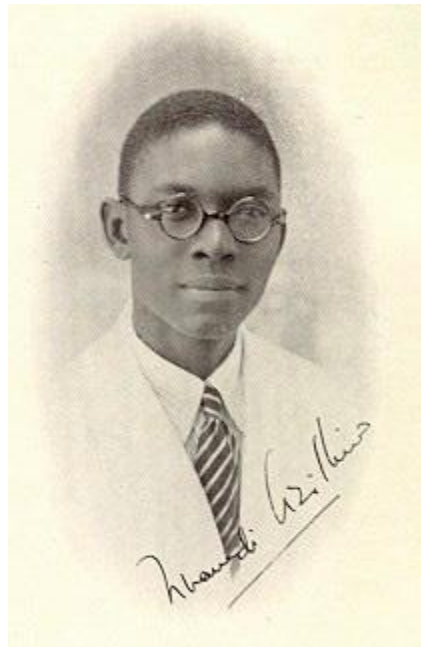
**Source:** *Historic World Leaders*. Gale Research, 1994.

"Several of the Igbos who were brought to the [Niger] Delta as slaves showed an outstanding ability to triumph over circumstances. Of these, the most celebrated and the most outstanding was Ja Ja of Opobo. . . ." Elizabeth Ischei



## Nnamdi Azikiwe

Nnamdi Azikiwe was one of the first Igbo-speaker – excluding the slaves - to visit the United States. His early experiences in the United States inspired me to emigrate to Oregon.



Playing American football, Storers College, 1926.

## William Balfour Baikie





The Igbo expressions *Ala Bekee*, *Ndi Bekee* translates to "land of Baikie (William Balfour Baikie), white people." In 1857, the Obi of Onitsha ("king") negotiated with William Balfour Baikie for the establishment of a British trading post at the banks of the River Niger. Dr. William Balfour Baikie was buried at the old cemetery in Sierra Leone.



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## The Last Speaker of Igbo Has Died!

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It wasn't until my third day in Monmouth, Oregon that I finally saw a black person. He was about 19 and the first black American I tried to have a conversation with. However, due to his black American accent, I wasn't sure what language he was speaking.

I asked him, “Which tribe do you belong to?” He hesitated, and so I asked, “Which African language do you speak?” “*kedu asusu Africa na asu,*” I thought quietly in my ancestral Igbo language.

He could not answer. It was as shocking to me as it would have been if all white South Africans were fluent in Zulu and not one of them could understand a word of English. *Etu oga adi na obulu na ndi beke-e nile bi-na obodo South Africa na asu asusu zulu.*

It then dawned on me that black Americans of Igbo descent no longer spoke the Igbo language. That day, March 26, 1974, will forever remain fresh in my memory because it was the day I tried to have my very first one-on-one conversation with a black American.

Before I came to America, every white person I met spoke one European language and every black person I met spoke one African language and belonged to a tribe. I extrapolated from Africa to America and assumed the young black man I met in Monmouth, Oregon also could speak an African language.



This photo was taken approximately two days after I spoke to my first black American. Here I was standing outside the student union building. I was showing off the new trousers and shoes I had just purchased in Monmouth to replace the cotton trousers and sandals I had bought in the Onitsha market. A week later, I was advised to purchase a winter coat to replace the cotton sweaters I had on in this photo. (Philip Emeagwali, in Monmouth, Oregon, March 28, 1974).

I was born in Africa and my first words were in the Igbo language. I then became fluent in Pidgin-English and Standard English. In Pidgin, I would say: *Abi na wetin!* (What is it?) or *Bodi no bi firewood* (The body has its limitations).

In Africa, I attended an all-boys Catholic boarding school that made Latin compulsory, and no African language was taught. The official language of the Catholic Church is Latin. So I studied Latin for 15 months and learned to say *veni vidi vici* (I came, I saw, I conquered). All the songs I learned as a choir boy in the Catholic church were in Latin.

On Sundays, in 1966-67, I travelled from Obinomba to Obiaruku or Umutu or Abavo or Abraka. I was the altar boy for Father Thomas B. Kennedy who was born in Cork, Ireland. In those days, the entire Roman Catholic mass was in Latin. At the end of the mass, the priest will close with: "*Dominus Vobiscum,*" (The Lord be with you.) "*Et cum spiritu tuo,*" (And with thy spirit.) we reply.

In the Middle Age, Latin was the official language of scholars and scientists. I ended my mathematical proofs with *Quod Erat Demonstrandum* (Q.E.D.). In fact, the primary source for my work- the Second Law of Motion- was written in Latin

I was being trained to be more literate in Latin—a dead language—than in my ancestral Igbo that is a living language. In contrast, in Rome, Italy, the ancestral home of Latin, nobody could speak it.

By the dawn of the fourth millennium, humanity's 6,000 languages will have almost disappeared. The wisdom and knowledge embedded in each language also will have disappeared. The extinction of a language is equivalent to the extinction of a biological specie. Each language has unique features that are specific to it, and when it dies, knowledge passes from the earth that will never exist at any other time or place.

In a thousand years, when all 21st century languages will be as dead as Latin, I foresee our descendants relearning my Igbo language so they can extract the wisdom and knowledge embedded in the language of my ancestors.

At the dawn of the fourth millennium or Year 3000, the internet will be unrecognizable and indistinguishable from the computer. I believe that since the computer has been around for 3,000 years (as abacus) and that it will be around for another 3,000 years. However, technological progress could yield a planet-sized superbrain (supercomputer and internet of Year 3000) that will outsmart the human mind. French could be extinct, no longer France's native language. Perhaps future generations will preserve endangered languages for posterity by programming super-intelligent, immortal, half-human cyborgs to speak them.

He is my snapshot of life in the third millennium when the entire contents of humanity's brain could be downloaded into a planet-sized SuperBrain, the name for the third millennium's supercomputer. A thousand years from now, a linguist might write:

A thousand years ago, a thousand languages were spoken in Africa. Today, those languages are extinct and only spoken by half-human cyborgs—or 31st century robots—who are connected to each other and think collectively. The disappearance of Africa's languages has touched the human community, which is now outnumbered by cyborgs that act and react to help each other through life.

As for me in the early 21st century, I am a language bigamist and a stranger to both Africa and America, a man who struggles to answer the simple question: "What language do you dream in?" My answer is this: I am a proud Igbo language polygamist who is "more" native in the English that he has adopted as his favorite "wife."

The new generation of Diasporan Igbos, born and raised in Europe or North America, cannot speak fluent Igbo. Their Igbo parents have lost their Nigerian citizenship and become "foreigners" in their children's country.

I was born in Akure, the Western Region of colonial Nigeria of British West Africa, in 1954. The first words I heard were in the Igbo language. Fifty years later, my father's last words with me were spoken across the ocean from Africa to America in the English language. I regret that I did not speak Igbo to my son, Ijeoma, or to my American wife of three decades, who is of African descent but cannot speak any African language.

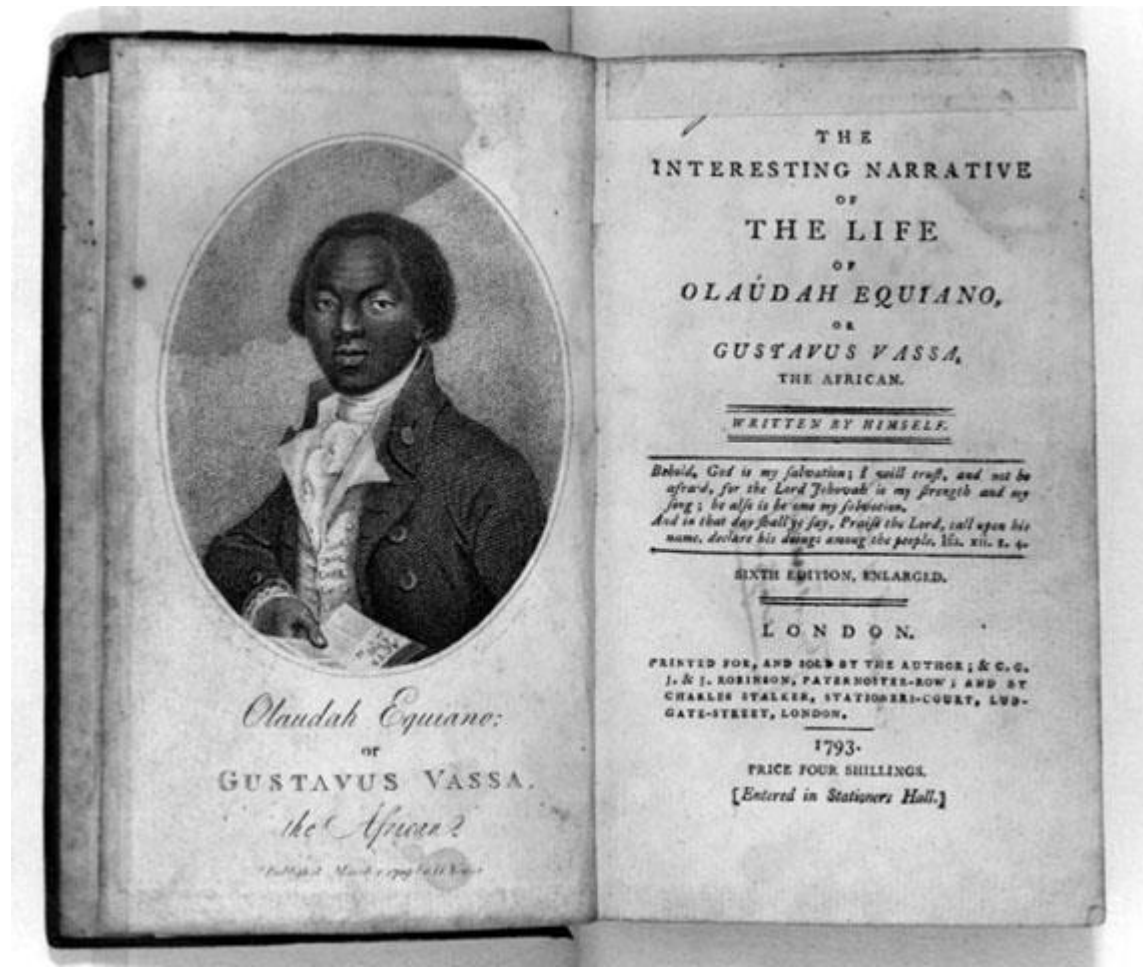
Imagine it's the year 3010, the dawn of the fourth millennium and the start of the 31st century. People are bigger, smarter, and older than we are in the 21st century. Computers are a thing of the past and have disappeared into planet-sized SuperBrain, the internet of the 31st century.

That Internet has killed the diversity of the world's languages. Every person speaks the same language with some English words passed down from the 21st century. I foresee a news headline transmitted by telepathic email called t-mail announcing,

"The Last Speaker of Igbo Has Died!" Onye ikpeazu na asu asusu Igbo nwugo.

The news story continues: "Ngozi Okafor, the woman who was the last known native speaker of the Igbo language of Africa has died in her home in Onitsha, Nigeria at the age of 167."

## An Igbo Pioneer in the Americas



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## Lecture in Igbo Language by Philip Chukwurah EMEAGWALI

### Ichoputağhari Ihe Banyere Umu Igbo Furu Efu

*Ozi Nkwado Ndi Igbo nke Mazi Chukwurah Emeagwali degara Igbo Cultural Association of Calgary, Canada n'oge emume afo ncheta Igbo*

*August 23, 2003 na Calgary di na obodo Canada*

Ndi banyi ndeewo nu O!

Obi bu m so anwuli oge Mazi Kene Ufonda kpokurum ka m bia buru onye obia puru icha na emume ncheta Ndi Igbo 2003 na Calgary. Ya mere nji were si ka m'gwa unu okwu nkwa.

Iji kwado emume unu, ana m akpoku nwa Igbo obula ka ochee echichi na lotakwa ihe iriba ana puru icha Umu Igbo gara mba imilikiti afo gara aga megasiri ikwado oganiru madu.

Ewerem ubochi Icheta Igbo were leta Mazi Jubo Jubogha nke ana etu "Ja Ja," onye nke atoro na oru n'afu iri na abua ma gbagide mbo we buru Eze Igbo n'Opobo. Ndi ulo ikpe Britain kpuru Mazi Jubogha ga n'ulo ikpe ha ebe ha noro maa ya ikpe na odara iwu site na imebi "nkwa udo okwere" na kwa "igbochi mmukwu uzo azum ahia". Na itaya ahuhu, achupuru Mazi Jubogha nobodo ya, buru ya ga n'obodo anakpo Barbados na kwa mba nke St. Vincent, di na West Indies.

Iji kwanyere ya ugwu ruru ya, ndi mba Barbados etinyena akuko maka ndu ya na akuko iro ha, makwa na ukwe.

Ozo, ewerem ubochi Icheta Igbo were kene Mazi Olaudah Equiano, nwata ozo dikwa afo iri na abua erepulu n'oru onye nke jiri aka ya dere si: "Abu m Igbo". Ewerem ukpa ekene bunye Mazi Equiano onye nke mere ka anyi nwee akuko edere ede banyere odinani na omenani na kwa emume Ndi Igbo oge gboo. Ekenekwasim Mazi Equiano ka osi were mee ka uwa ghotu ijo ihe din a igbo oru, soro nua ogu iji kwusi ya, ma dekwa akwukwo banyere ajo agwa di na igba oru.



Abu na esota bu abu nke ejiri were kwaa obere nwa anyi Olaudah furu efu:

"Obu Onye ka anyi na acho? Obu Onye ka anyi na acho?  
Ikwanoo ka anyi na acho.  
Obu iyi ka ochuku? 'Biko nya nata.  
Obu ugbo ka ojelu? 'Biko nya nata.  
Ikwanoo ka anyi na acho."

Mazi Ikwanoo bu ichie, burukwa nna-mmuo. Ndi ogu akwukwo dum, iji bobo ya ndu anwu anwu, nyere ya aha otutu: "Nna akuko banyere ndi ojii."

Ewerem ubochi Ncheta Igbo were kponite mmuo Umu Igbo nwoke, nwananyi na umuaka ndi Georgia's Sea Islands ndi nke miri rigbadoo oge ha siri na ugbo oru manye na miri iji gbanari agbam oru. Akuko ndi anakpo n'oyibo ndi Sea Islands nerota etu "Oru ekwe ekwe Umu Igbo", ndi anya miri juru anya siri buru iga akponyere ha na olu makwa na ukwu, kwa akwa alili, were otu olu were tie nkpụ akpata oyi na asi:

"Oshimiri butel'anyi, Oshimiri g'ebu anyi laa"

Omume dike nke Umu Igbo, makwa inupu isi ha nupuru banyere agbam oru madu ewerele onodu anwu-anwu na akuko makwa abu ndi bi na ikpere miri Georgia, ndi anakpo ndi Gullah.

Ka mmuo Umu Igbo furu Efu soro unu n'akuku n'ije unu, gbanyere unu izu okwu, makwa dube unu na ochucho amam ihe na ako n'uche unu.

Mazi Ikwanoo kowara onwe ya sin a ya bu "obia na obodo oghotaghi" 'Dika ndi obia na obodo Canada, ajalun unu ike na nnukwu oghere nke a unu weputara maka unu Igbo iji makorita onwe ha.

Ndi ba anyi si na njiko ka, mmadu ka e ji aba.

Igbo Kwenu!

[Chukwurah nwa Emeagwali bu onye onicha. Mazi Emmanuel Chinyeaka Okoli de re nka na asusu Igbo. Udo di ri gi, nwannem.]

## An Igbo Pioneer in Monmouth, Oregon

About twenty *Ndi Igbo* lived in Monmouth, Oregon during the 1970s, including these:

Boniface N. Madubom (late 1960s)  
Philip Emeagwali (March 24, 1974)  
Abai Ibe (March 1974)  
Hyacinth Anagbogu (August 1974)  
Onesimus O. Okechukwu (August 1974)  
Raphael O. Ezeokonkwo (September 1974)  
Sebastian Nwunemelu (September 1974)  
Evelyn Okeke (Sept. 1974) and her husband  
Edmond Okeke (1975, Evelyn's brother)  
Peter Nwokolo (or Nwaokocha?) (January 1975)  
Sunny Ambrose Okorie (July 1975)  
Peter Ozoh (January 1976)  
Ferdinand Ejinaka and his older brother (1976)  
Okey Ozoh (1978)

A few Igbos commuted from Corvallis. I had non-Igbo friends such as Emilia Edet (sports coach of Nigerian national female team), Julius Ogunlade, Amos (Yoruba).

### My Addresses in Monmouth, Oregon

Butler Hall, Room 36  
Oregon College of Education  
Monmouth, Oregon 97361  
March to June 1974

Miller House  
195A South Knox Street  
Monmouth, Oregon 97361  
June to September 1974  
I lived upstairs in the first of two rooms on the right. Rent was \$40 dollars per month.

159 South Monmouth Avenue  
Monmouth, Oregon 97361

September-November 1974

Rent was \$75 per month for two tiny bedroom.

Friends

1630 Monmouth Avenue, Apt. 8

Independence, Oregon 97351

Three bedroom luxury townhouse. Rent \$12 per month



On an outing to Corvallis, Oregon with my Igbo-speaking friends Mrs. Kalu and Abai Ibe. You can tell we were new in United States because our bodies are still shaped like a coca-cola bottle. This photo was taken by Kalu's husband [Kalu Kalu] A few days later, Abai and I became roommates. (L-R: Philip Emeagwali, Mrs. Kalu Kalu, Abia Ibe. April 1974, near Corvallis, Oregon)

# **THE GREATER IGBO NATION—IDENTIFYING IGBO VARIANTS DURING THE ERA OF THE SLAVE TRADE**

**By Cultural Education Institute of New Jersey**

**Ishaq D. Al-Sulaimani**

**Vernon (Alufiel) Grier, Ed.D**

## **THE GREATER IGBO NATION-- IDENTIFYING IGBO VARIANTS DURING THE ERA OF THE SLAVE TRADE**

### **I**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

It is universally recognized that Igbo is the correct spelling of the tribe that currently comprises the majority of the inhabitants of southeastern Nigeria and of whom are readily associated with the Biafran revolution, however during the time of the Trans Atlantic Slave Trade the “Igbo Nation” was divided into a number of sub-tribe variant identities which were most commonly expressed in the Egbo, Egba Ebo and Ibo forms.

The contents of this Chapter establishes the identity of the captives taken from Africa to the Americas and enslaved were of Igbo origins. It further clarifies the role of the sub-tribe variants during the slave trade and their recognized status as being part of a once greater and more inclusive Igbo identity.

The majority of Igbo intellectuals continue to teach that the Igbo variants such as the Ibo, Ebo and Egbo are European corruptions of the exclusively indigenous and proper Igbo. In defense of their claim they often cite the words of James Africanus Beale Horton who states that the Igbo spelling is the original of the nation, while avoiding his more detailed description concerning the indigenous usages of Ibo, Ebo and

Egbo as it relates to the inhabitants of various towns and regions.

“Egbo, Igbo, Ebo and Ibo are the various spellings met within books describing the race that inhabits part of the coast. Amongst the soft Isuama and Elugu the soft Ibo or Ebo is used but amongst the inhabitants of the coast such as Bonny and Okrika the harsher name Egbo is prevalent. In the interior north of the territory the nations are called Igbo which appears more the original name of the inhabitants.” (Horton 1969:154)

The altering of the name Igbo was initially implemented with the intent of establishing independence from the “Greater Igbo entity”, while at the same time maintaining the natural ancestral link with the main and originating body. The often hostile reaction and rejection on the part of the Igbo towards the seceding Egbo, Ebo and Ibo gradually weakened the bonds of brotherhood ultimately resulting in the emergence of such “non-Igbo” tribes as the Efik, Ibibio and Oron of Calabar, the Egba and Igbo-Mina of Yorubaland and the Ewe and Ga of Ghana and the Fongbe of Dahomey.

## II

The altering of the letters in a name to create an independent identity such as that of Egbo, Ebo and Ibo which at some “ancient” point derived out of the original Igbo continued after the Biafran War in regards to the Iwerre people as pointed out by Professor Ben O. Nwabueze.

“It is well to note that of the Igbo border communities in Benue State as well as those in and around Port Hacourt now



strenuously disclaims their Igbo Identity. This disclaimer is manifest in practical terms by the latter changing their names of their villages by prefixing them with a “R” so that Umuokoro becomes Rumuokoro, Umuigbo becomes Rumuigbo, Umumasi becomes Rumumasi, Umukorusha becomes Rumukorusha and so on. The intention is to make them not look or sound like Igbo names.”

Throughout this presentation I will be using Igbo as an umbrella term describing the tribe in a general sense and as a specific reference for the majority of the tribe presently inhabiting Southeastern Nigeria and of whom are readily associated with the Biafran revolution. Egbo will primarily refer to the Efik and Ibibio also known as the Cross River or Ekpe Tribes. The term Ebo will refer to the Igbo descended Mina Tribes of Ghana and Benin(Dahomey) which include the Ewe, Fon(Fongbe) and the Ga-Adangbe. The Ebo classification will also include the Igbo descended captives of Angola, while Ibo will be applied historically to the “Western Igbo” and those of Mozambique.

Egba will be used to describe the largest Igbo descended tribe living in Yorubaland (Southwest Nigeria) inhabiting the Osugun State, while Igbo-Mina will address another Igbo descended tribe living in the Kwara State of Yorubaland.

## THE EGBO ARE IGBO

The majority of the captives taken to the Americas were from the coastal Egbo tribes and were referred to as Calabaris. Presently in Igboland they are known as the Efik, Ibibio, Oron and Ekoi, etc., and are well associated with a secret society known as the Egbo Society. Although the present day Efik and Ibibio living in Nigeria generally deny ancestral relations with

the Igbo; this was not always the case as described by A.E. Afigbo, Professor of History at the University of Nsukka.

“Until three or four decades ago there were many Efik and Ibibio communities which proudly laid claims to Igbo origins but today would treat such suggestions as an affront. Here we find the classic example of the trick which time and political consciousness play on historical writings.”

The explorer William Balfour Baikie writes in 1854 that the Efik mark was formerly the same as that used by some Igbos but more recently they have adopted another.

Egbo captives meaning those such as the Igbo descended Efik and Ibibio were targeted throughout the entire period of the slave trade beginning with the Spanish and Portuguese traders of the 16<sup>th</sup> century and continuing to arrive in the Americas throughout the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries.

The Aro slave trading network of Arochukwu first established itself in 1620 with the intent of enslaving the Egbo tribes. In regards to this task they settled in the most southeastern corner of .Igboland, lands belonging to the semi-autonomous Egbo nation called Egbo-Shari. Once settled, the Aro began to emulate and infiltrate the Egbo leaders in an attempt to deceitfully manipulate and redirect their governing institutions into a slave trading operative.

The coastal Egbo who were generally known to the slave traders as Calabaris provided the majority of “Igbo descended” captives and were often referred to as KWA IBO. The general tendency to associate the Calabaris with “Igbo” is a result of the

understanding that the Egbo tribes were related to the “Greater Igbo Nation” and therefore Herskovits refers to Calabari as a generic name for “Ibos” in the United States.

In Cuba it is understood that those known as Calabaris descended from the Egbo tribes such as the Efik and Ibibio. During the time of the slave trade the most powerful and numerous of the Egbo tribes were those known as THE KWA. In generalizing the Egbo Nation with the dominant Kwa tribe, all of the Egbo tribes were collectively known as Kwa Ibo. Through the dominance of the Kwa tribe, the Egbo Society was also known as the AbaKwa Society meaning of the Kwa people. To this day the Egbo Society continues to actively function in Cuba.

The Egbo Society communicates by using a secret Igbo writing system known as that of Nsibidi. Nsibidi symbols were recently discovered to be engraved on a number of African-American tombstones in Virginia. This most accurately attests to the Egbo ancestry of the deceased as these writings were sacredly maintained by the Egbo Society and were associated as Igbo through the understanding that the Egbo tribes were of Igbo origins. The word Mbakara which African captives used to describe the “white man” in the United States is of Egbo origins as it can be traced directly back to the Efik and Ibibio.

Egbo captives were so numerous and dominant in Virginia that some historians of the Colonial Era actually referred to Virginia as “Igboland”. By the 1700’s Virginia plantation owners gathered to discuss the “Igbo problem” as the hardworking but resistant Egbo are acknowledged to have dominated the Virginia trade. This further lends credence to the

alleged Willie Lynch speech of 1712 which advocated the implementation of harsh measures of containment designed to eradicate Egbo culture and in turn slave resistance on all levels. The speech of proposals was delivered by Willie Lynch on the Bank of the James River in Virginia in 1712. 120 years later Nat Turner led a revolt in Virginia that killed approximately 60 whites. In accordance with his Igbo(Egbo) origins, Turner bestowed upon himself the honors of Odogo, a ceremonial ritual in which an Igbo warrior places feathers in his cap to signify the killing of a person of rank in war. After killing Hark Travis, the head of the Travis farm, Turner placed feathers in his cap and a red sash around his waist.

Douglas Chambers recently published a book which discusses the alleged role of the Igbo in the murder of President James Madison's grandfather who was killed in Virginia. Igbo(Egbo) revolts were so frequent and intense throughout Virginia that it was understood that this revolutionary mentality on the part of the Egbo captives was an obvious reflection of Igbo culture as the Igbo proverb states;

“What saves also kills and what kills also saves.”

It is of interest to note that James Africanus Beale Horton who clearly understood the proper application and usage of the term Igbo and its sub-tribe variants such as the Egbo, Ibo and Ebo chose to dominantly use the Egbo variant when speaking of the tribe in general, while remaining in clear avoidance of using the Igbo spelling. This is obviously a reflection of his descendancy from coastal Egbo captives who were resettled in Sierra Leone.

“The Egboes are considered the most imitative and emulative people in the whole of Western Africa; place them where you will or introduce them to any manners of customs and you will find they easily adapt to them.”

“The population of Egbo is unknown.”

(Horton 1969:157)

## THE EBO ARE IGBO

In accordance with his origins in the Essaka village of Benin, Olaudah Equiano referred to his people as being that of Ebo and never Igbo.

“The West Indies planters prefer the slaves of Benin or Eboe.”

“Deformity is indeed unknown amongst us. I mean that of shape. Numbers of natives of Eboe in London might be brought in support of this assertion for in regard to complexion ideas of beauty are wholly relative.”

(Gates Jr. 1987:17)

The Ebo connection to Benin is further supported by Onyebuechi Amene who states the following;

“Ebo is a Benin name. It was the Binis that went to and from the Igala Royal families that took the name to Igala.”

“The Ebo family of Isiskre still retains their ancestral Bini names.”

Those captives who came to the Americas from Ghana and Benin(Dahomey) were those known as Ebo or the Mina tribes. In fact a Mina tribe remains in the Kwara State of Yorubaland and refer to themselves as Igbo-Mina using the original Igbo spelling of the name. It was the Portuguese Jewish slave traders who began selling Ebo captives from Benin to Ghana where they were used to work the Gold Mines. These traders coined the Ebo as “Mina tribes” meaning those destined for El-Mina, a Portuguese word meaning “The Mines”. El-Mina became central to the slave trade in Ghana. The Most powerful amongst the Ebo(Mina) to arrive in Ghana were those called Ewe.

The word Ewe derives from the Igbo name Eke. Eke in the Igbo culture refers to the feminine, motherly or birth giving attributes of the Supreme Deity Chineke. Through the interchangeable nature of the letters v and w Ewe is also pronounced with the v sound of Eve(Yevéh). It is from the life giving Eke, Ewe or Eve that a female lamb is called a Ewe and the mother of all humanity Eve.

Some reports estimate that over 3 million Ewe were brought to the American South alone. Amongst the followers of African religions in Cuba, Ewe refers to the life giving herbs, while in Haiti, the Ewe deity Nanan Boclou is remembered as the god of life giving herbs and medicine. The Ewe are closely related to the Mina tribe known as the Fon(Fongbe). In fact the word voodoo often associated with Haitian religious practice is a Fongbe word. The last Fon ruler of Dahomey was named Agbo. Agbo was exiled to Guinea where he remained until his death.

In 1967, Haiti became the only country outside of Africa to recognize the independent Igbo Republic of Biafra in secession



from Nigeria. The vote of confidence in favor of Biafra on the part of this fine Caribbean nation was due to the Haitian's memory of their own "Igbo" revolutionary past. The numerous and successful slave revolts in Haiti are clearly documented as "Igbo" uprisings but yet we find the strongest presence of the ancestral deity Legba(Eshu) amongst the Haitians. In Haiti Legba is described as the most powerful of all the Loa. He is the guardian of the sun and his color is black. The guardian of the sun is most likely a code for the "Land of the Rising Sun" which is an ancient Igbo reference for the Land of Biafra. The Igbo revolutionaries and devotees of Legba(Eshu) in Haiti were in actuality the Igbo descended Mina tribes such as the Ewe and Fon(Fongbe) who are well associated with the worship and reverence for Legba.

The other major non-Akan Igbo descended tribe to be sold from Ghana are those known as the Ga. The Ga like the Ewe are known to have earlier "Nigerian" origins which more specifically equate with that of the Igbo. A section of Belize City is known as Ebo Town. Most of the African captives arriving in Belize were imported from Jamaica and in turn it is acknowledged that the African captives of Jamaica primarily came from Ghana. The Jamaican Festival Jonkonnu evolved out of the Ga Festival of Homowo and thus the African descended population of Jamaica can trace their Igbo origins through the Ga and the Ebo-Mina tribes as they became known.

Captives arriving in the Americas from Angola were also known as Ebo. The city Ebo still exists in Angola. The Gullah whose name derives from Angola are an African-American community who live on the Sea Isles off of the coast of Georgia

and South Carolina areas which record a majority of Angolan captives. The Gullah are currently engaged in a strenuous battle to secure a memorial at a site called Ebo Landing. Ebo Landing was named in memory of the countless Ebo who drowned themselves in protest of their enslavement. Mr. Utsey is a Gullah meaning a descendant of Angolan-Ebo captives. He recently wrote to the Igbo Studies Association in quest of information concerning his lost Ebo identity. He stated that he was raised in an area which was approximately 45 minutes from Ebo Landing. D.N.A. testing has confirmed his Igbo (Ebo) origins.

The presence of Angolan captives in Virginia is reflected in such names as Angola Creek and the Angolan Quarter. What is of interest is the fact that there were many Angolans acknowledged to have been living in Virginia alongside of the Igbo(Egbo), however there is no evidence or documentation that indicates that the Angolans were any different in regards to submitting to enslavement in contrast to the Igbo(Egbo). In accordance with their Ebo culture the Angolan captives were known as runaways. In 1744, a runaway by the name of Angola Tom was captured in Orange County. This being similar to Jamaica where an advertisement for wanted slaves lists the two largest groups of runaways as being those of Igbo and Angola. Igbos and Angolans are acknowledged to have dominantly co-existed in Delaware without any distinguishing differences in temperament and behaviors particularly in response to enslavement.

With the abolition of the slave trade Igboland experienced the largest population increase in all of Africa. Since Igboland

was the area most affected by the slave trade once left unmolested the population that supplied the most captives would naturally respond with the largest population increase. Angola on the other hand is noted as the area which experienced the largest population decrease after the slave trade ended. Being that Angola provided many captives for enslavement to the New World, a population increase similar to that which was experienced in Igboland would be expected unless of course the captives taken from Angola were not from the native population but were imported Ebo as advocated in this writing. It is also interesting that in the case of the Angolan and Mozambique captives they are generally identified in the classification of country as opposed to any specific tribe. Angola's role as a Portuguese slave colony was confronted by Queen Nzinga who in 1624 declared all territory in Angola as free country, meaning that all captives reaching Angola would be declared free upon arrival. Queen Nzinga's efforts only temporarily hindered the mission of the slave traders who continued to import and export Ebo throughout the course of the slave trade.

## **THE IBO ARE IGBO**

Although Mozambique did become a Portuguese colony similar to that of Angola, the Ibo inhabitants had already been living there centuries before the arrival of the Europeans and were residing under the Ibo tribal heading. The Ibo of Mozambique are presently known as Chi-Mwani and speak a dialect called Ibo. In Mozambique there are two coastal cities named Ibo conveniently located for the importing and exporting of slaves. In their early attempts to colonize Mozambique the

Portuguese established their first trading post on what is known as the Ibo Islands and by 1754 Ibo was chosen by the Portuguese as their main clearing house for slaves.

It is estimated that by 1807, 80% of the captives destined for the Americas were being imported from Angola, Mozambique and the Igbos of Biafra.

Beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Spanish and Portuguese were in charge of the slave trade, they transported 15,000 slaves from Angola to America every year. The Ebos of Angola and the Ibos of Mozambique were classified amongst those of Congo. The Congo slaves began arriving in such places as Cuba in the 1500's. The Portuguese began dispersing Igbo captives across Africa at the beginning of the slave trade in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. Those sent to such places as San Thome and Gabon were of Ibo origins as acknowledged with the first recorded Ibo slave Caterina Ybou who like her fellow Ibo captives arrived at San Thome and Gabon to work on the newly established slave plantations. In Gabon Ibo runaways were so numerous that one of the largest mountains in Gabon became a place of hidden refuge known as Ibounji. It is acknowledged that most of the captives that came to San Thome and Gabon were from the Congo and in turn it is acknowledged that these captives were Ibo. Present day Congo cities such as Ibondo, Iboko and Ibola are reminiscent of the once numerous Ibo captive population.

## **THE EGBA ARE IGBO**

Southwest Nigeria is commonly referred to as “Yorubaland” which is home to a mosaic of distinct tribes and tribal states who collectively form the present day Yoruba tribal identity, however the original Yoruba designation exclusively referred to the Oyo, a tribe who at one time lived amongst the Hausas in what is presently Northern Nigeria. In fact the word Yoruba is of Hausa origins.

Misrepresentations of Nigeria the Facts and the Figures by Yusef Bala Usman, PhD – Center for Democratic Development, Research and Training.

“The fact is that the earliest record we have of the use of the very name Yoruba was in the Hausa Language and it seems to have applied to the people of the Alfinate Oyo. Don Masani wrote a book on the Muslim scholars of the Yarriba.”

Over the centuries the Oyo were gradually driven southward where they in turn became the conquerors of the indigenous people of “Southwest Nigeria” who like their Southeastern counterparts were referred to as the Igbo. The Southwestern Igbo were protected by an army of masked warriors known as the Egbo or Egba. Olumida Lucas states that the name Egba is synonymous with Igbo. The Indigenous Igbo(Egba) lived in the forest area surrounding Ife. The name Ife derives from an Igbo system of “divination” called Ifa. It was at Ife that the Igbo(Egba) were first confronted by Odudwa who along with his youngest son Oranyan are remembered as the founders of the Oyo(Yoruba) Kingdom at Ife. At the time of Odudwa’s invasion the indigenous Igbo(Egba) resided under the leadership of Obatala whose name means the Oba or Obi Ala. Obi or Oba was initially an Igbo title of authority and Ala is the

land deity of the Igbo. Amongst the Egbo tribes of Calabar the Oba appears in the form of the deity Obassi who is also called Abassi.

Like the indigenous forest dwelling Igbos, the present day Egbas are historically associated with the Obas. In fact the name of the Egba ruling council known as the Ogboni relates to the Igbo word Ogbonna which indirectly refers to an elder.

### The Wikipedia Encyclopedia – “Yoruba”

“The numerous Egba communities found in the forests below Oyo’s Savannah region were a notable example of elected Obas though the Ogboni, a legislative judicial council of notable elders wielded the actual political power.”

(The Ogboni “Cult” played a central role in the Brazil slave rebellion of 1809.)

In their initial encounters the Oyo(Yoruba) were unable to penetrate the frightening Egba(Igbo) as these intimidating masked forest dwellers mastered the art of instilling fear into their opponents. In defense of their homeland the Egba(Igbo) went further in raiding and burning down the intruding Oyo(Yoruba) settlements in the town at Ife.

The Egba were first defeated through the scheming of a woman named Moremi who allowed herself to be captured as she used her beauty to seduce the Igbo(Egba) King into revealing the secrets of the masked Egba warriors. She later returned to the Oyo providing her countrymen with the



necessary information needed to finally conquer the Igbo(Egba) Kingdom. This defeat of the Igbo(Egba) is celebrated every year at the annual Eid Festival of Ife.

In 1835, the Egba declared themselves to be independent of the Oyo(Yoruba) and in response the Oyo along with the Ijebu drove them out of Ibadan, Ife and other towns north of their present day capital of Abeokuta. As a result of contact between the Ijebu and the Indigenous Igbo the city Ijebu-Igbo was established. The founding of the Egba Kingdom of Abeokuta in 1837 is considered to be the last kingdom to be recognized within the “Yoruba federation of tribes”. By this time the term Yoruba had expanded beyond its original usage in referring to the Oyo and now generally applied to all of the inhabitants of Southwestern Nigeria.

The tradition of the masked Egba(Igbo) warriors is likewise documented in Southeast Nigeria amongst the followers of the Egbo Society of Calabar.

**EGBO** – A secret society at one time existing as a political bond between various towns especially Eastern Nigeria. – World Book Dictionary A-K 1974.

In 1876, the Scottish Presbyterian missionary Mary Slessor came to Calabar. According to the accountings of Ms. Slessor in the “Igbo” dominated areas a secret society known as Egbo went around in masks and beat people. She claimed to have chased a group of Egbo and tore off a mask. The image of Mary Slessor would later appear on the 10 pound British Monetary



note. (The Egbo/Egba warriors seem to have a problem or weakness in defending themselves against foreign women. First Moremi in the west informs her people to burn the masks of the Egba(Igbo) warriors and later in the east Mary Slessor claims to have ripped a mask off of an Egbo man.)

The Egba of Abeokuta worship a deity called the Oro. Oro is a god who resides in a bush. In honor of Oro a sacred ceremony is performed at a secluded spot inside the bush. This ceremony is called Igbo Oro and is very similar to bush ceremonies observed by the Egbo Society of Calabar. There are many similar practices and rituals performed by both the Egba of “Yorubaland” and the Egbo Society of the east. In this regard it is of interest to note the name of the Biafran Officer from Ejagham(Calabar), the formidable Captain Ndom Egba.

Although the concept of Legba varies it began as an ancestral memorial designed to maintain the Egba identity during times of persecution and hardship. Legba is also known as Eshu and relates to the deity Isua which is honored in the Egbo Society as the Master of Ceremonies. Legba was also activated in the New World as a means to counter modern slavery and its attempts to wipe out the Egba identity of the captives. The deity is described in Yoruba mythology as the “Divine trickster” because of his ability to outwit his fellow gods. Evidences of Legba have been documented throughout the Americas in such places as Brazil, Guyana, Trinidad, Haiti and New Orleans under various names such as Lebba, Legba, Elegbara and Liba. It is the Igbo descended Mina tribes such as the Ewe and Fon who are most readily associated with the Legba variant.

The term Elegbara is of great significance because not only does the name appear in the Americas amongst Igbo descended captives meaning the Egba and the Mina tribes, but is also the name of a tribe that lives on the Southern Sudanese, Northern Ugandan border and of whom are likewise related to the Igbos of Nigeria as they are known by the variant of Elegbara being called the Lugbara. When traveling in Uganda I personally met a Lugbara Doctor of Medicine who previously studied alongside of Igbo students from Nigeria. The Lugbara man stated that he could understand much of the Igbo Language which held a great deal in common with his own Lugbara Tongue. Through numerous and prominent cultural and linguistic affinities the Lugbara man was definitely convinced that the Lugbara and the Igbo are akin.

Similar to the Igbo of the east, the western Igbo descended Egba were always known to be revolutionaries in continual revolt against the Colonial British authorities, European missionaries and their traditional Yoruba enemies being primarily that of the Oyo and Ijebu. In 1929 the Igbo market women of the east led a tax revolt against the Colonial British Government which became known as the Abia Women's Tax Revolt. The Egba women carried out a similar tax revolt in 1947 known as the Abeokuta Women's Tax Revolt of Egba Market Women. The Egba market women were led by Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, a teacher and wife of a prominent Egba educationalist. The protest of over 10,000 Egba women caused the governing authorities to abolish taxes on women for several years and the Alake who conspired with the Colonial authorities spent three years in exile in Oshogbo.

Many of the positive social and ethical traits which are often associated with the Igbo are historically documented as being characteristic of the Egba as well. Robert Campbell who along with Martin Robison Delaney signed a pact with Egba leaders for the right of resettlement of African-Americans to “Egbaland” states that the Egba are the most industrious people on the face of the earth. (Burton 1863:101)

James Africanus Beale Horton concerning the Egba(Akus) “It must be admitted without question that there are no people on the coast who are so hard working and so long suffering in proportion to what they expect in return.” He also went on to say that the Egba as a race are amongst the most industrious, persevering and hard working people on the coast of Africa. (Horton 1969:149)

In terms of education the Egba like the Igbo are deserving of great acclaim. The first Black-African to receive a Nobel Prize in Literature was an Egba man named Wole Soyinka who like the Igbo actively opposed the Nigerian Government during the Biafran War. Soyinka was detained by agents of the state between 1967 and 1969. In this regard Booker T. Washington whose middle name, Tanifeani, attests to Egba origins should be noted as the founder of the famous Tuskegee Institute.

In Brazil an organized Ibo revolt led to the establishment of the Independent “Ibo Republic” of Palmares which lasted 45 years. Being consistent with “Igbo resistance” Palmares ended in a massive suicide of Ibo warriors who preferred death to capture. The city Ibotirama testifies to a strong Ibo presence in the region, however as in the case of Haiti, Afro-Brazilian

culture and religious practices are more readily associated with that of the “Yoruba”(Egba) including the worship of Legba.

Olukwumu is spoken in Brazil and interestingly enough in a few Western Ibo communities such as Anioma, Idumu-ogu, Ubulubu, Ugbodu, Ugboba and Okwumuzu. In fact communities bearing the name Olukwumu(Olukumi) still exist amongst the Western Ibo. Although this dialect cannot be found in the Yoruba heartland it remains in reference as a “lost dialect of the Yoruba Language”. All of the above clearly indicates that many of the captives in Brazil including those who successfully revolted in the establishment of Palmares were of western Ibo origins and like the Egba are being mistakenly classified as Yoruba. In Brazil the Western Ibo were accompanied by a massive importing of Ebos from Angola and Ibos from Mozambique, the latter further accounting for the dominant and preferable Ibo usage amongst the Brazilian captives.

In Cuba the Olukwumu were referred to as the Olukumi, Lukumi or Akumi. The Egba have traditionally resisted identification with the term Yoruba preferring to be called Egbas or Akus. Slaves in Cuba known as the Lukumi or Akumi meaning of the Egba people were well known for suicide resistance which often found them hanging from the branches of the Guasima trees. This being very similar to the “Igbo” resisters of Haiti who were likewise remembered for suicide resistance as understood in the Haitian saying, Ebos pend cor a yo, meaning the Ebos hang themselves. The relationship between the names Olukwumu and Olukumi with that of Akumi(Aku or Egba) further solidifies the common origins which link the Western Ibo and the Egba peoples.

The Egba who like the Igbo were originally known as forest dwellers are acknowledged to have been at one time living east of their present day location. The process which led to the vanquished links of brotherhood between the Igbo and the Egba can be characterized by the often strained relations that currently exist between some of the eastern and western Igbo communities of today.

Biafran Nigerian World Message Board-JAN. 6<sup>th</sup> 2004  
Efulufu of Western Kind.

“... lately some misguided Igbo people of Anioma/Ibusa (in short Western Igbo stock), have been making anti-Igbo noises. I read that a group of 419 purporting to represent Anioma and all Western Igbo issued a statement disavowing their Igboness... If you are from Western Igboland and you no longer wish to consider yourself Igbo you have only one option. Pack your damned bags and leave otherwise we are coming!!!”

History not only records the common origins of the Egba and the Igbo but their common destiny as they are identified as two groups most devastated by the slave trade which is expressed in the following;

“The Egba have suffered more than any other nation in West Africa from the depredation of the slave trade.” (Horton 1969:146)

“It is stated that a dispersion of the Egba in the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of the 17<sup>th</sup> century scattered the exiled Egba to Sierra Leone, United States, Gambia Fernando Po, Hausa, Borneo,

Central Africa, The Fezzan, Egypt and even Istanbul.” (Horton 1969:146)

“Igboland was one of the areas most affected by the slave trade. Igbos were exported as slaves throughout the whole period of the trade.” (Isichei 1973:45)

The Four African Societies of Modern Cuba represent the various elements which comprise the Igbo ancestry of African-Americans.

1. **LUKUMI(EGBA)** – The Lukumi Society whose name derives from Akumi meaning those of the Akus who are the Igbo descended Egba and their brethren the Ketu. They are often mistakenly referred to as Yoruba, an estimated 275,000 were brought to Cuba.
2. **ARARA(EBO)** – The Arara Society pertains to the Igbo descended Mina tribes who were designated to work the Gold Mines of Ghana and of whom were sold to the Americas from Sao George which became known as El-Mina (THE MINES). El-Mina was the center of the gold trade and the focus of the greater slave trade. The main Mina tribes of Ghana were the Igbo descended Ewe and Ga, while in Dahomey they were called (Fon (Fongbe) or Abo as in Abomey. The origins of the Mina tribes is maintained in the name of the Igbo-Mina tribe of The Kwara State in Yorubaland. Most Mina tribes were known as Ebo and approximately 200,000 arrived in Cuba.



3. **The Egbo Society(EGBO)** – The Egbo Society consists of the descendants of the coastal “Igbo Nation” of Egbo-Shari. The present day Efik and Ibibio are amongst the most prominent tribes to be historically associated with the Egbo Society, however during the time of the slave trade the largest and most powerful tribe within the Egbo nation were those known as the Kwa and thus the Egbo Society was also known as AbaKwa(Abacua). The majority of the Kwa were sold to the Americas during the Slave Trade. Slave traders often referred to the Egbo as Calabaris or Kwa Ibo. A division of the Egbo Society is called Ekpri Akata. Many present day Yorubas and Africans in general now derogatorily refer to African-Americans as Akata(Akuta). Since there was such a large number of Akata(Egbo) sold during the slave trade the term Akata became synonymously associated with those being enslaved. Approximately 240,000 Egbo were brought to Cuba.
  
4. **BAKONGO(IBO/EBO)** – The Congo Society is made up of the descendants of Ibo captives who arrived in the Americas from Angola(Ebo), Mozambique and the Congo and Gabon. Ibo captives were shipped to the Americas throughout the 16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Their practices are often reflective of that of the slave-trading tribes of whom they encountered such as the Imbangala, MaKua and Lemba.



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