

# Technology is the Root of All Evil

## by Philip Emeagwali

**LETTERS:** The transcript of this speech was reprinted in hundreds of general circulation press. Below are random commentaries.

To: emeagwali.com  
Subject: "Technology is the root of all evil"  
From: justiceudemba@aol.com

Dear Phil:

I recently came across excerpts from your article titled, "Technology Is The Root Of All Evil".

I beg to disagree. One of my major reasons for disagreement is also imbedded in your article. You mentioned that the compass was invented by the Chinese more than 2000 years ago. I can also inform you that, from historical records that the gun powder was invented by the Chinese. The Chinese attained ship building capability early on. If your premise is correct, it seems to me that the Chinese had a lethal combination of technologies to conquer the entire world. Everybody should have been speaking Chinese by now. And yet that did not happen. When Christopher Columbus arrived the so called New World, he found some Chinese natives who were already there. These Chinese did not fall from the sky. Somebody had to bring them there. They

respected the way of life of their hosts, the native Americans and quietly settled in their enclaves. The Europeans came, ravaged and took over the land, in keeping with the philosophy of Julius Caesar, "we came , we saw and we conquered". Evil men employ any means to commit evil acts like the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. (Please see [www.aafnet.org](http://www.aafnet.org)). Africa was not "devastated because it lacked a simple compass" or because it existed at all as a people.

Evil men with evil intent will always find their prey.

It has been a pleasure.

Oliver Udemba  
President  
Africa-America Foundation  
508 733 2963, [afamfoundation@aol.com](mailto:afamfoundation@aol.com)

Hi, Philip,  
Jeff of the Progress Report here, with a question.

You write,

"It was the compass that created the Atlantic slave trade, enabling the early colonial navigators -- and their blood merchants -- to chart an accurate course from Goree Island, off the coast of Senegal, to Brazil; paving the way for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which began on August 8, 1444."

So, they sailed to Brazil in 1444, before Columbus?

SMITH, Jeffery J.

President, Forum on Geonomics

[www.geonomics.org](http://www.geonomics.org)

Share Earth's worth to prosper and conserve.

Philip EMEAGWALI replies:

Yes, they sailed to **Portugal** in 1444, before Columbus. For reference, check out the 900-page book entitled: “**The SLAVE TRADE: THE STORY OF THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE: 1440 – 1870.**” It’s first sentence is:

VERY EARLY in the morning, because of the heat, a few Portuguese seamen on the decks of half a dozen hundred-ton caravels, the new sailing ships, were preparing, on August 8, 1444, to land their African cargo near Lagos, on the southwest point of the Algarve, in Portugal.

Happy Christmas

From: VICTOR OBUNADIKE (okwyvic2000@yahoo.co.uk)

Hello Sir,

Good day to u. Permit to use this day to wish u a happy Xmas in advance. Sir I'm also sending this short note to inform u that u ve just won my global personality of the year award, thanks to ur achievement in the microsoft world. Sir though i might not be a known personality to u ,**but within my humble self i have decided to give u the award in recognition for being my hero.** Just last week I was reading a column that u wrote in one of the national dailies in Nigeria about the internet. I love what u wrote about the opportunities in it and i also want to thank u personal for being an icon of the internet evolution. its

great to know that one of our own, an Igbo man, a black man and a Nigerian must be mentioned whenever the internet is mentioned. Sir, I salute your courage, despite your background, you've proved the western people wrong, by showing that something good will come out of Nigeria. Can you imagine that a poor boy like me will have a friend, whose famous in the USA? It's great to have someone like you as my fellow countryman. And I'm going to live my life believing that being from a poor background is never an obstacle in achieving great things just like you've shown. I'm going to stop here, but I will like a situation when you will one day come back to Nigeria and help in human development. I don't know if we are ever going to meet, but this award is an award that my heart has chosen to give you, for impacting positively to the lives of youths out here in Africa and all over the world. Once again, congratulations for the award you've just won. Have a nice day, while I will be hoping to hear from an inventor like you. It's going to be a dream come true.

Victor Obunadike  
Lagos-Nigeria.

From: sunday daramola <daredaveson@yahoo.com>

Subject: thank you sir

yesterday as I was changing the TV station I came across your profile on one of the stations, I paused for a while and took my time to read it, I said to myself I think I've heard this name before PHILIP EMEAGWALI I thought he was not a Nigerian maybe from another country in Africa. But to my surprise you are a Nigerian, I was so happy, I tripped for the contribution you made to the world.

I never knew until now that there had been another Nobel laureate winner from Nigeria apart from Wole Soyinka.

Ever Since i Know of such Award (Nobel Laurette), I have a dream of winning it one day. I want to make an impact in the world as u did.

Ur story thrilled me sir.

When people are chosing a role model i never choose without first knowing about them, so this kept me searching for one until last year that i adopt the late chief Obafemi Awolowo as my Role model. And now i will be adding u too Sir, bcos both of u have one thing in common that i love so much.

I'm a lover of Sience that's what makes me to go for sience when i was in secondary school and i've always believe that i make an impact on the world and the people living in it. I believe that i can be like if not better than Isaac Newton, Albert Einstein, Lord Rutherford, Thomas Edison etc.

You are a Hero.

I WILL FOREVER BE PROUD OF BEING A NIGERIAN.

Date: 11/16/2007, 10:13 am, EST

Name: Mezie Okolo

Location: London, UK

An illustrious son we admire. We are proud of you my brother. We look forward to an Emeagwali Technological Institute that would give our people an opportunity to catch up with high tech.

Thousands of our jobless graduates could benefit and their talents harnessed.

In regards to your articles on [www.Kebbistate.com](http://www.Kebbistate.com)  
Dear Dr. Emeagwali,

I offend go to [www.kebbistate.com](http://www.kebbistate.com). Today, I came across two of your articles on [Kebbistate.com](http://www.Kebbistate.com), I must say that i was moved and enlightened by those two articles and have forward those article to everyone in my address book. I just wanted to say “Thank You for your hard work.”

Sincerely,  
Brenda  
[www.brendaromeus.com](http://www.brendaromeus.com)

Date: 11/26/2007, 6:13 am, EST

Name: elabor isaac

Location: lagos, nigeria

Your achievements inspire me and your talks give me a clear insight of the challenges faced by Africans in a world where total attention is diverted towards the west, leaving Africa with total neglect as well as ways to tackle these problems. You are a true hero.

Date: 12/7/2007, 2:48 pm, EST

Name: Joseph Ojo

Location: Toronto, Canada

Hi Prof.

People have said it all. You are our joy, may almighty God be with you and your family.

Thank you.

Date: 12/9/2007, 12:44 am, EST

Name: Olufemi Olatunji

Location: USA

I was greatly inspired by the lofty accomplishment of Prof. Emeagwali....he is an epitome of ingenuity for all Africans who have always been intellectually-undermined by the likes of former Australian PM and his ilks. Ride on Prof. You are highly adored and I am saving this page to motivate my kids.

From: Lateef Balogun <lateefbal@yahoo.com>

Subject: advice request

hello siir'

i read your write up on technology being the root of evil and the internet the next control o/ empowerment.

i just want to make a request to be my mentor

and give me advise on how to make use of the enormous power and possibilities of the internet,IT,computers .  
thank yu sir.

Date: 12/12/2007, 4:02 pm, EST  
Name: Anagu, Charles Ikechukwu  
Location: Lagos-Nigeria

Dear Prof.

You are the pride of Africa, a gift to our generation. In fact the story of your life and achievements makes me understand that we can make it to the top in life irrespective our race or background.

To the rest of the African I want to say: "Rejoice Africa because we are black and blessed."

Dear Sir

As usual your words are an inspiration for the numerous silent ones who are doing their bit to change their lives and in the process bring some change to the challenging environment we call home in Africa.

However I felt compelled to make a few comments regarding the impact of technology on African society, both in the past and now, in the present age:



Technology is amoral: God in his infinite wisdom created electricity. We can observe the presence of electricity in nature through the beautiful and frightening discharge of lightening, and children puzzle over the effect of static electricity on toys and other play items. Man has subsequently studied nature, distilled the essence of electricity and invented technology to harness it for benevolent use – heating, lighting, cooking and powering appliances and other numerous benefits around us. Man has also used electricity for destructive purposes – stun guns, electromagnetic pulse weapons, electric chairs. From this perspective the compass was simply a technology developed from the study of natural magnetic principles. It was the application of the compass that enabled Columbus to ‘discover’ the New Worlds. Surely this was not a bad thing? What of the technology that enabled the Europeans and Chinese to build boats 75 feet long and 25 feet wide, that enabled the exploration (and exploitation) of other civilizations? Our African fore-fathers never tasked themselves to develop this technology even though we lived by the same sea-side and wondered every day (like the Chinese and Europeans) what lay across the waters. What the invention of the sailing boat a bad technology?

The Internet and Africa: The effect of the Internet is apparent all around the world. In Africa we can see positive impacts in improved communications and data exchange. The real revolution is the mobile internet which is already available to anyone with access to GPRS/3G (over 20 countries in Africa have these services on their GSM network). As vendors like FutureShock deploy new services to target various sectors we will develop solutions that will in turn migrate to other parts of the world. The beauty of the internet is that from the darkest part of Africa I can develop the next ‘big thing’ and deploy it all over the world using the power of social networking and viral networking. I think the opportunities for positive change in Africa is enormous.

Technology will rescue Africa: Right now Africa has come full circle. The Diaspora (both ancient from 1444 to modern times; I was out of Nigeria for total of 15 years) are coming back with ideas. One very clear idea which FutureShock is engaged upon is the deployment of technology to improve the daily operational processes of Local Government, State Government and Federal Government agencies. Our research over the past 5 years with a Federal agency shows that the laws specifying how Government officials should behave and manage our collective resources are in place. The challenge we have faced all along is the lack of systems to enforce compliance with the laws. To solve this our solutions are providing the following tools

Improved budget preparation process to ensure budgets are needs based and not overloaded with fake and inflated projects  
The process of approval for fund requests needs to ensure that the best prices and quality are being received for goods and services procured

The verification of goods and services received has to be tightened (we call it tamper-proof quantification of deliverables). We identify ways of quantifying various deliverables from buildings, roads, bridges, drains, etc and use technology to capture the measurements in a way that improves confidence about the data being evaluated. This closes the gap between over inflated project awards and actual payments made. It also improves quality of deliverables

Faster reports, easier compliance checks and audits as some of the benefits of using technology in Government

There are other challenges like poor staff morale and skills and these are actually the biggest challenges. But our experience so far is that if you change the working tools and streamline the daily operations people are more easily reconditioned into the new way of working, and this affects their thinking in a positive way

This is a challenging undertaking and we have faced numerous delays (a 15 month project has dragged for 40 months) but we have persevered through the challenges and hope to roll out similar solutions to other Government agencies. UNDP will be carrying out a study in this project to see the impact on improvements in Governance and deliverables to the people.

Thank you for taking time to read my comments.

Regards  
Stephen Onerhime  
Managing Director  
FutureShock Consultants Limited  
[www.futureshockltd.com](http://www.futureshockltd.com)

Dear Bamidele,

I hope this mail meets you well. After several unsuccessful attempts over a couple of months to get the attached article published in the Guardian I have been compelled to seek your assistance in doing so, as recommended by Kunle Daramola of Dnetsystems (ISP) who was very professional and kind enough to have responded to queries to the ISP as to how the Guardian can be contacted. You were also copied in his

reply to me, but nothing was heard from you. While I'm still struggling almost 3 months after Dr. Emeagwali's article to get the rejoinder published, I strongly believe the issues raised in both pieces remain relevant given Nigeria's present circumstance.

I am a Nigerian currently residing in Melbourne, Australia. I regularly follow the events in Nigeria through the on-line newspapers, of which the Guardian is my first and favourite. I enjoy the various intellectual and balanced discourses by respected Nigerian leaders of thought in the Guardian and I also want to lend my voice to the call for the rectification of social ills plaguing Nigeria and Africa. I have decided to also copy this mail to Sonala Olumhense, whose article, like Ruben Abati's, I love to read with religious fervor, hoping he might be able to advise on how he gets his articles published in the Guardian, should this attempt fail.

It is however very discouraging and frustrating that after 3 months I'm yet to get an article published in the Guardian, while I can get my article published in the Age or Herald in Australia in 2 to 3 days. Maybe it is because I have not sent my mail to the correct address, since the Guardian's contact details "Contact Us" is not working and cannot be accessed on-line. I am not sure if the address below is valid, but my mail was not returned, so I continue to wonder why my rejoinder was not published. Or is publishing an article in the Guardian an exclusive reserve of some famous writers and individuals? I have read many articles written and published in the Guardian addressing burning current issues, so I do not think it is a problem of backlog of articles, maybe that of a predetermined exclusive selection process.

In view of the above, I will greatly appreciate your help in passing my article as attached to the appropriate section for it to be published. I

will also be grateful if you can send me the correct contact details of the Guardian for my contributions to debate on relevant national issues in the future.

While I look forward to your invaluable help and reply, please accept my best regards.

'Lanre Bolarinwa

Dear Editor,

I would like to request you to kindly allow me space in your reputed newspaper to post the attached rejoinder to Dr. Philip Emeagwali article titled, "Technology is the root of all evil", published in the on-line Guardian of Friday 28 December 2007.

Thank you for anticipated cooperation and assistance.

Please accept my best wishes for the New Year.

Lanre Bolarinwa  
Melbourne, Australia

Re: Technology is the root of all evil

After reading the article of Philip Emeagwali titled "Technology is the root of all evil" in the on-line Guardian of Friday 28 December 2007, I cannot but sympathise with the world's foremost mathematician and scientist. The readiness and offer to make meaningful contributions to

national development by notable Nigerians like Emeagwali, who have reached the pinnacle of achievements and carved a niche for themselves locally and internationally in their chosen careers and fields, have been continually shunned and rebuffed by the bunch of scoundrels and mediocres at the helm of affairs who are threatened by the prospects of positive change for national development.

It is understandable that the renowned inventor of the internet being of African stock and a Nigerian, is desirous of Nigeria, specifically and Africa generally, taking advantage of his invention for technological development. It is an incontestable fact that the internet has become a defining and fundamental factor underlying technological advancement and can be said to be responsible for the phenomenal human progress of 20th century onwards. The extent of the writer's frustration is discernible from the tone of his treatise which can be seen as a plea to his own people to embrace technology as a panacea for development.

Lately, in a personal effort to identify icons of African descent, who have made immense contributions to humanity and universal progress in various fields of endeavour, I have become familiar with Philip Emeagwali's prodigious achievements. He features prominently on my compendium of illustrious Africans from Africa's recent-past and contemporary History.

It is however most unfortunate that in spite of individual efforts and immense contributions of Africans in and out of Diaspora to human progress, the situation back home in Africa is most appalling and deplorable. Even if developmental issues confronting various African nations today had their roots in the obnoxious Triangular Trade and Colonialism, what stops present day African leaders from taking courageous policy decisions and resolute actions at breaking away

from an ugly past and positively transforming their respective nations for the collective good of their citizens?

Emeagwali is intelligent enough to have realized that no matter his intellectual stature and international acclaim he cannot deny being an Igboman, a Nigerian and of African origin, facts that do not in any way diminish or demean his achievements. But if he liked, he may have chosen to disclaim his Nigerian nationality, dissociate himself from and pretend not to be aware of his peoples' sufferings and hopelessness, as well as the state of lack of development of his homeland. Instead, he has expressed concern over the pervasive lack of development in Africa. Hence, he has made a clarion call for Africa to wake up from her profound slumber and join the race for technological development. While drawing inference from historical antecedents, he was able to establish that the present state of lethargy and lack of development in Africa is a matter of choice.

It is painful that Emeagwali, a source of pride to the Black race and Africans, is not even accorded due recognition by the Nigerian political authorities, who are busy squandering, plundering and pillaging the nation's resources. Instead of exploring covert and overt stratagem to bring his genius to bear positively on the nation, the discredited and dishonorable looters continue with impunity in their vain arrogance to bestow on themselves undeserved accolades, spurious and worthless national awards.

As a result of irrevocably bad governance by the profligate Nigerian political ruling class and their cronies who live in extraordinary opulence, the generality of the people live below poverty level. Ironically and quite disquieting, Nigeria, the most populous Black nation in the world and arguably the richest country in Africa in terms of

human and natural resources, is ranked amongst the poorest of nations in the world.

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Nigeria can be easily classified as a failed state because of despicable living conditions, worse than those in some war ravaged countries. The inefficient and corruption-ridden governments that are installed and perpetuated through fraudulent processes lack the moral courage to uphold the Rule of Law, social justice and equitable distribution of national wealth. There is no guarantee of security of life and property for Nigerians due to the total breakdown of law and order; anarchy is the order of the day, characterized by assassinations, armed robbery, political thuggery, violence and arson, militancy and kidnapping, religious and civil unrests etc. In Nigeria, Social Security is a non-existent concept, while toiling workers do not earn enough and cannot afford three square meals, the unemployed and poverty stricken Nigerians, in their millions have lost hope for the future. Social services and infrastructure including health, education, housing, transport etc. are either dilapidated or defunct.

Because of the prevailing life-threatening situation and untold economic hardships unleashed on Nigerians, the “Brain Drain Syndrome” continues to deplete the nation’s workforce as vibrant youths and adults of all callings flee the country at the slightest opportunity in their thousands to join the workforce in other oil producing countries and elsewhere in the world.

While Emeagwali is busy contemplating how technology can be employed as a tool to fast-track development and launch Africa into the future, the reckless and irresponsible political leaders in virtually all African countries are preoccupied with their nefarious activities and abuse of political powers and machinery of state to subjugate their



peoples in order to perpetuate themselves in government and continue the wilful sabotage and subversion of the socio-economic progress of their respective nations.

In conclusion, until African peoples rise up to the challenge of ridding their nations of this present crop of opportunistic leaders, driven by inordinate ambition to maintain the status quo for the spoils of office and who want to continue wielding political power as a means of amassing wealth at the expense of their respective peoples, technological advancement will continue to elude us and Africa will forever remain a backward continent.

Written by  
Lanre Bolarinwa

## Debates on Slave Trade Overlook the Role of Technology

by Philip Emeagwali

[emeagwali.com](http://emeagwali.com)

According to history books, gun-wielding European slave traders kidnapped one in five Africans and transported them across the oceans to the Americas. A less visible, but no means less drastic technological tool of suppression, is the compass, a device used worldwide for

navigation. In the same way that Britain used its maritime knowledge and the US harnessed its intellectual capital to rule the world, the early slave traders used the simple compass to wreak havoc on civilization.

It is a sad fact that the innocuous navigation tool originated during and was fuelled by the Atlantic slave trade. The technological development of the innocent compass, invented in China for religious divination 2,000 years ago, allowed Africa to be ravaged in unspeakable ways.

It was the compass that created the Atlantic slave trade, enabling the early colonial navigators — and their blood merchants — to chart an accurate course from Gorée Island, off the coast of Senegal, to Brazil; paving the way for the trans-Atlantic slave trade, which began on August 8, 1444. This trade in human merchandise covered four continents and lasted four centuries, and serves as a shameful beacon for the depravity of human greed and conquest.

The compass became the *de facto* weapon of mass destruction, which led to the de-capitalization and decapitation of Africa. It created the African Diaspora with one in five people taken out of the motherland. It was the largest and most brutal displacement of human beings in human history.



Today, it is hard to imagine that such destruction and the wholesale abduction of a race could result from a tool as common as the compass. Yet, as a people who survived the slave trade, we must draw our strength from lessons learned from the past and draw our energy from the power of the future. And the power of the future lies in “controlling” technology and harnessing it for the benefit of mankind, not for his destruction.

The people of Africa must take note that the Internet is our modern-day compass, and within it resides our own clay of wisdom. As we prepare for our great journey into the cyberspace of the future, with its technological promise — its clay of wisdom — we must understand the strategic value and potential of this all-important tool. Our image of the future inspires the present and the present serves to create the future.

Africa's lack of substantial technological knowledge of the Internet and its potential may lead it to be assaulted or manipulated in unexpected ways, just as it was devastated generations ago for the lack of a simple compass. We didn't recognize the power of the compass then; the danger is that we don't recognize the power of technology today. While Africa merely *contemplates* the future, the West, the quickest off the mark to wield technology's weapons, actually *makes* the future.

This fact, and how the power of technology can be wielded against the poor, was brought home to me clearly when I received the following email recently:

"About a year ago, I hired a developer in Africa to do my job. I am paying him \$12,000 a year to do my job, for which I am paid \$67,000 a year," the sender wrote. "He's happy to have the work and I'm happy that I have to work only 90 minutes a day. Now I'm considering getting a second job and doing the same thing."

Technology in the hands of others has been used to exploit Africa for centuries. But now it's time for Africa to grasp technology and finally embrace the modern age's clay of wisdom and advancement. Africa has the chance to show the world how technology can be used for good, not evil. And the people of Africa can use today's technology, not to mimic their own exploitation, but to right the wrongs of the past and empower themselves with the same tool that has been used to oppress them in the past. Africa can provide a shining example for the world in using technology for its own upliftment and the benefit of mankind.

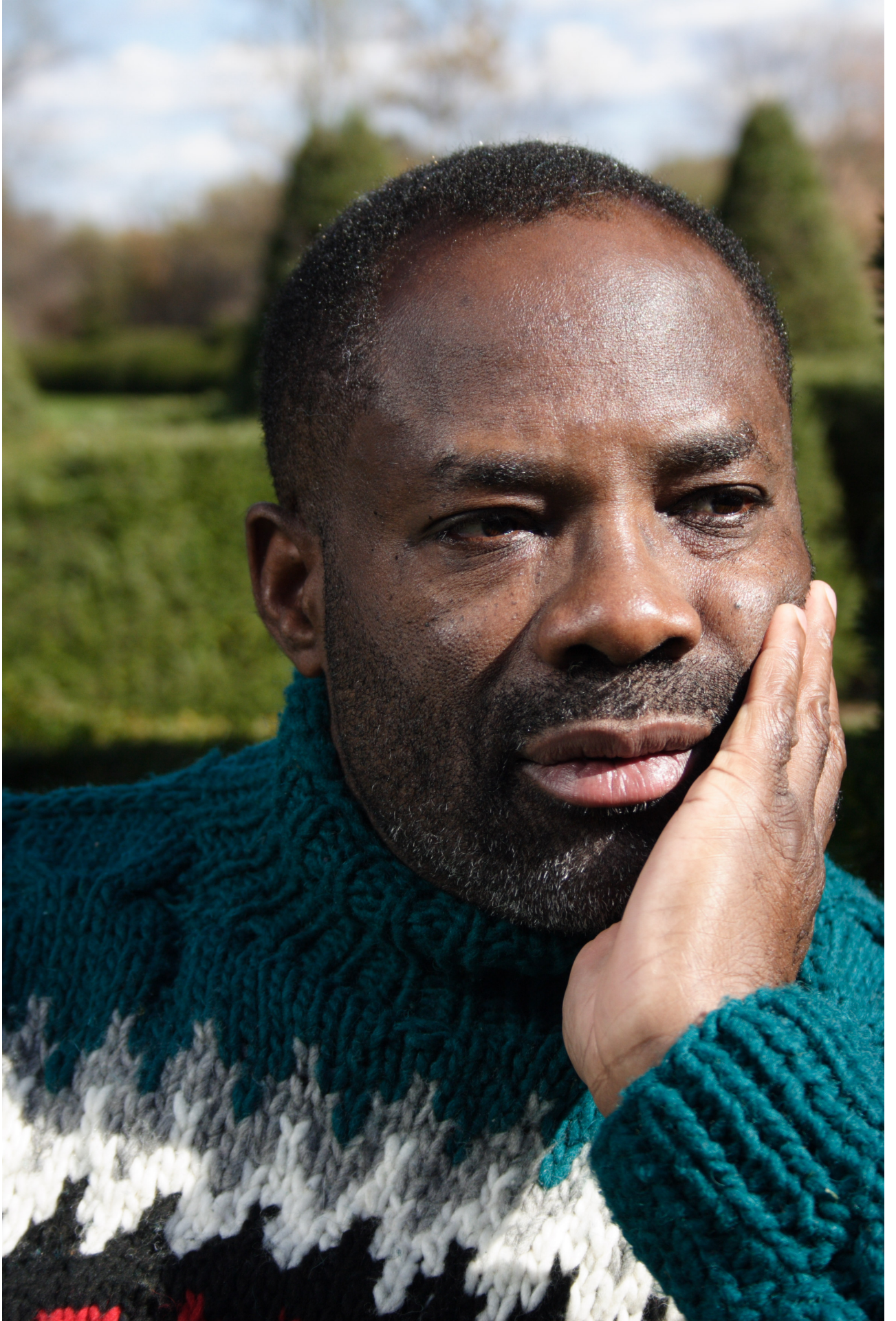
This time, it is our choice.

Nigerian-born [Philip Emeagwali](#) won the 1989 Gordon Bell Prize, the Nobel Prize of supercomputing. He has been called “a father of the Internet” by [CNN](#) and [TIME](#); extolled as “one of the great minds of the Information Age” by former US president [Bill Clinton](#); and voted history’s greatest scientist of African descent by [New African](#).

Excerpted from a keynote speech delivered by Philip Emeagwali at the African Diaspora Conference in Tucson, Arizona on September 29, 2007. The entire transcript is posted at [emeagwali.com](#).

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Diaspora Showcase Africa

Tucson, Arizona

September 29, 2007

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This time, it is our choice.

Philip Sennefer.