

Why Do African Leaders Avoid US Blacks?

Two weeks ago, President Obama met with three African presidents—Koroma (Sierra Leone), Sall (Senegal), Banda (Malawi), and Prime Minister of Cape Verde Jose Maria Pereira Neves. This was the White House's way of rewarding these leaders for their examples of good governance. Receiving an invitation to the White House is one of the most sought after invitations in the world, especially for foreign leaders.

African leaders constantly complain about how they are negatively portrayed in the U.S. media, about how blacks don't invest in Africa, and about how there seems to be a disconnect between Africans and American blacks.

My response has always been quite simple: It's your fault!

Let me break it down based on the itinerary for the delegation that met with Obama two weeks ago. In most cases, the State Department takes the lead in setting up the program for foreign leaders, but they are free to add their own program in addition to State's program if they so desire.

While in Washington, each leader participated in numerous meetings and events to strengthen bilateral cooperation on a range of shared priorities. Joint events included a dinner hosted by the Corporate Council on Africa (CCA) to discuss trade and investment opportunities with representatives from U.S. businesses; a public discussion on democratization in Africa at the United States Institute for Peace (USIP); an economic and development roundtable with U.S. government officials; and a meeting with Secretary of Defense Hagel to discuss cooperation on shared regional security and peacekeeping objectives in Africa.

Notice anything interesting here? Let me help you. Dinner

hosted by CCA—mostly Fortune 500 companies (White-run companies). Many Africans accuse “corporate America” of only using Africa for their natural resources—well duh, you invited them to your country; a discussion on democracy at USIP.

I have tried, to no avail, to get Howard University interested in engaging with African heads of state, but they have shown absolutely no interest. I think I can get a meeting with Obama easier than I can get a meeting with the president of Howard University. Meetings with government officials (i.e. White officials, other than former Ambassador Johnny Carson). Meeting with Secretary of Defense Hagel.

So, I guess these African leaders couldn’t find any Black NGOs to meet with or maybe their White lobbyists would not give them permission to meet with successful minority businessmen like David Steward, CEO of World Wide Technology in St. Louis—a \$ 5 billion privately held firm.

Maybe their white lobbyist wouldn’t give them permission to meet with the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), a federation of 200 Black-owned newspapers in the U.S., or give a speech at a Black university.

So, to my African heads of state, if you are looking for positive media coverage from the U.S., then sit with our black media and tell them your story. If you are looking for investment in your country, then invest some time by meeting with Black businessmen when you come to our country. If you want Americans, especially blacks to tour your countries, then take a tour of our communities when you are in the U.S. Stop complaining and be what you are looking for.

Africa has a lot to offer as far as investment opportunities, tourism and even education; but Africa has not made its case to the American people. Until they do, they will continue to be like the tinkling cymbal or the sounding brass, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.

Raynard Jackson is president & CEO of Raynard Jackson & Associates, LLC., a Washington, public relations/government affairs firm. He can be reached through his website, . You can also follow him on Twitter @raynard1223.