Why is Diaspora spelled with a capital “D”?

In America, we are taught at a young age that we are a proud country of immigrants. People flocked to the nation because it was a land of hope, freedom and opportunity.

Star spangled banners, Yankee Doodle dandy and African slave labor.

The latter is not typically a symbol of our prestige but a dark mark on our nation’s history. It is wrong that has yet to be righted since its abolition in 1863 and almost a 150 years later Africa and her people have yet to heal.

The majority of the black populations living in America now are not descendants of immigrants who voluntarily crossed the Atlantic Ocean to escape religious oppression or famine. They are descendants of slaves who were forced to come over and withstand inhumane treatment for the benefit of those with simply a much lighter skin tone. African nations were robbed of their strong men and women and left vulnerable to even further foreign invasion which came with a period called the “Scramble for Africa”; this period in history connotes the world’s power colonizing the continent for their own economic benefit.

Unfortunately the bullying of Africa has stunted its growth ever since and the efforts of recently converted, human rights concerned nations have been less than effective in picking up the pieces of continent and putting it back together again. That’s not to say they can never redeem themselves for their past transgressions but that it’s about time they look solve the problem in other ways.

I’ve always looked at it like this, just because Kobe Bryant bought his wife Vanessa a $4 million ring to apologize for cheating on her with a barely legal, hotel
employee and it worked, doesn't mean that throwing money at a problem will always right all wrongs. He's now obligated to constantly buy her expensive, meaningless material things whenever she’s feeling down and out. Let’s be honest though- that will never repair the inferiority she is bound to be feeling after being embarrassed on a national stage. In other words, I do not condone massive aid to Africa as the single solution. It helps here and there but after years of that method and no real progression to speak of, there has to be another way.

This is where the fresh, innovative, inspiring thinking of man named Nosakhere Griffin-EL comes in. I saw debt relief as a more effective way to cure a majority of Africa’s ills. In my eyes, it puts her on a more level playing field to rebuild from the ground up. But he taught me that Africa is not an NBA wife or a woman scorned, she is underdeveloped and childlike because of a lack of genuine nurturing.

We sat down to speak in the middle of the Africana studies department, here at the University of Pittsburgh, and my first question was not on the list I had prepared. I wondered aloud why Microsoft Word kept auto-correcting my spelling of “diaspora” to “Diaspora” and addressed him for an explanation, if had one.

“It comes from way, way back when the Romans ran the Israelites out of Israel. In the Africana context, [it] connotes, some sort of a different entity. The way I look at it, some people might disagree, but I feel like black folk outside of Africa are kind of like place in their own but not a location, just a different consciousness.”

I understood that to mean that it was gesture to show respect to those taken out of Africa, unwillingly. As the interview progressed though, I understood why
even more so. To me, Diaspora is spelled with a capital “D” because in some form, those who once exploited Africa, her land and her people, understand that humanity and respect are not earned through overcoming struggles imposed upon the undeserving, but a birthright that should be returned to all of humanity.

Nos is a captivating speaker, he speaks with conviction and unmistakable candor. Fortunately for me, he does not need much prompting or prodding to express his point of view on topics concerning education, black America, Africa or Pan-Africanism. I officially began our interview by attempting to explore how that came to be, what was the force behind his passion and he opened up readily.

“When I was a kid my mother would take us to Kwanzaa events. So every year we would hear the man who created Kwanzaa, Maulana Karenga, talk about how African heritage and how black folks way back in ancient times developed these grand societies and had intense culture, which should have been transferable into modern times. So as a young black male from Philadelphia, always hearing about all the negative things that had been done to African Americans specifically, slavery, Jim Crowe, even the Civil Rights movement, um, it seemed to articulate black folk having no agencies, even thought the civil rights movement was a movement connoting agency, it just said love thy enemy, one should be submissive and one should seek integration and it just wasn’t something I could support.”

Understandably for me, someone who’s never been the type to just “sit down and take it”, I nodded in agreement. It is obvious that he is an ambitious individual and mistreatment to African Americans in this country is not the extent of his
concern. Metaphorically, the root of the problems that plague them is that their motherland is still in as much distress as the children she lost long ago.

She does not want to be paid off or reimbursed for the damages, nor does she simply want debt forgiveness for the budget imbalance she did not even create. Instead Nos, paints me a picture that in a material world, we could really use love. This notion is typically dismissed as hippyish or juvenile in a world so concerned with money, power and respect but its something that we can all give to help at no expense. It could potentially break the vicious cycle of black cynicism and inferior mindsets of the African Diaspora, all over the globe.

Currently, a phenomenon known as the “brain drain” is again emptying the African continent of its potential to progress and transform. Simply said, Africans with financial means are getting their education in universities, domestically or abroad, and a huge majority is not returning to their nations. “There are more Ethiopian doctors in Chicago than in Ethiopia, more Nigerian doctors in the D.C. area than back home in Nigeria. Isn’t that crazy, Jess?”

It was a startling statistic he brought to my attention. He continued by addressing a question I had made earlier about his involvement Pan-Africanism.

“Am I an American patriot, you said, [but it’s] more than loving a nation you are in or born in, you have to love humanity. I’m not talking about something that is romantic or temporary, I’m talking about a love that is so profound that you see with your eyes, feel it in your heart and in your mind tell your stomach that ‘Yo you have to be patient in dealing with this to transform it.’”
In other words, instead of imposing the global value that money is power and success is defined by the ability to compete on a world stage, in order to pick Africa out of its rut, society needs to instill a more humane thought that does not leave the weak behind. "If the societal vision, is economic competition, which means that the social, political, economic elite are saying economics is the focus then education is going to say what? You just need to focus on economics and then personally you're going to focus on getting job like ‘what I care about is financial security, my own comfortability.’ So we have to make a more humane education, a more humane society, people have to want to be more humane, hence they have to love. Love conquers all...isn’t that Marvin Gaye said?"

Continuing our conversation, Nos made me realize that the reason I came to speak to him was because my mission in my blog had become so ambiguous that I needed him to reassure me why my issue of Africa and my mission to cure her debt should be an issue of widespread public concern, but also an issue that even those in Pittsburgh could relate to. Revolutions always start small and gain appeal because everyone to some degree wants to be apart of something special. As movements gain awareness and begin to spread, then no one wants to be left out. If college students could see the importance in redirecting Africa’s future toward success by transforming their own notions of it and inspiring others to do the same, then society will eventually follow suit.

As Nosakhere puts it, learning more black history, in addition to American history, as elementary students alone will not inspire this societal transformation nor through the current ideal of global competition. “Instead, the future generation
of the world needs to encourage curiosity in youth that stretches beyond asking how can I get money, economical advancement? We need to encourage, instead, global cooperation.” As citizens of a country with more advantages than most others in the world saying, “why should I care about Africa? “ or dismissing it as a hopeless cause should not be acceptable. We can start change from the ground up by lending our minds to notions of transformation, not just in the African context, but a global context that could potentially start by bringing Africa into this century, with the ability to stand on a global stage, held up by more than just the economic strength of others nations but the humanity of the global society.