

CONVOCAATION LECTURE, 2020 NIGERIA: WHAT TIME IS IT?

10th Convocation Ceremony of the Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University

Pressure from the VC made me hurriedly come up with a title as strange as this! However, it is a title that gives rise to many thoughts, particularly so as we look at our world, and more specifically, our nation, today.

The notion of time is philosophy or sociology. Time naturally means different things to different people. It generates different levels of adrenalin in each of us depending on the occasion. A long time with a loved one can seem so short. A short time with an enemy could seem like eternity. A winning team would wish to bring the time to an end, a losing team on the other hand would wish to borrow more time. Time generates different levels of anxiety for the hanged man or the man waiting to hear the cry of his first baby. Perhaps in the end, the greatest definition of time is what the Holy Bible said, that for everything, *there is a time, a time to live and a time to die* (ECCL. 3:1ff).

Julius Sevilla, a writer says that: *Time waits for no one. Excuses will not slow down time. Indecision will not slow down time. Complaints will not stall time. Regret will not turn back time. Don't waste your time in anger, regrets, worries or hate. Time will not turn around and cry along with you. It's time to let go of the past and stop worrying about the future. Your only time is now. So, make sure you spend your time with the right purpose, right deeds, right emotions, right thoughts and the right people. Time flies: You can. You will not pass this way again. Do what time does, keep moving.*

I believe that a reflection on the concept of Time is pertinent for a gathering such as this. For the Graduands, your performance may have much to do with how well you used your time. For those who used it well, stay on that path because the future is waiting for you. For those who may not have done so well, remember that you still have time to re-set your clock if you want a happy life. For those just getting started, you have a change to reflect on the road that lies ahead of you. How you use and manage your time will largely determine whether the investment being made by your parents pays off or not.

I use the concept of time largely as a metaphor for defining both identity and vision. Players and their team members must have a common sense and understanding of time. Equally so with actors in a film or play. Similarly, students and the University staff know that all things being equal, if you register for this or that course, both

sides know when you should graduate. Imagine what chaos there would be if each student, Department or Faculty considered time differently from the University authorities. Imagine what would happen if passengers had a different understanding of time to the managers of the flight or train.

In the drama of life, each and every one of us is allotted time, and our ability to make or not make any contribution in life depends on how we manage this gift, this investment. Every individual, every generation, every society must appreciate what time it is, the challenges of the time, and figure out how to use it well. Today we reflect on what we did with the time of yesterday. Tomorrow will depend on what we make of today's time. Time is another world for the gift of life, an investment. The bank of time neither grants loans nor cancels debts. So, management of time is so central and critical that literally everything, success or failure in life, depends on its use.

In the next few minutes, I will not dwell on the philosophy of time, but reflect on how our country has used its own time. This of course sounds very ambitious. I wish to briefly look at what has happened to our own time, how is it that our dreams will argue that our inability to manage time efficiently is another word for what Onyeka Onwenu referred to as *squandering of riches*, akin to what the American intellectual, Lilian Hellman referred to as *Scoundrel time* and Scripture refers to as the *years consumed by the locusts* (Joel, 2:25). Whether we can salvage something out of all this, pull out a few chestnuts from today's inferno, remains the challenge for our future.

1. Time, Moments for Nations: How telling Time became difficult in Nigeria

I believe that the first signs of our confusion with time arose from the challenges over the synchronization of our African time with a new clock imposed by colonialism. To be sure, before colonialism, we can argue that we all had **different clocks** and used them differently as communities. We had no sense of urgency because everyone, individual or community, had their time and managed it as they wished. Traditional societies relied on a crystallization and interpretation of the intersection between terrestrial elements such as state and position of the sun, moon, stars, shadows, weather or such neighbours as the clock.

In traditional societies, there were no bells announcing that it was time for the farmer to head to his farm, nor was there a time for any farmer to return home. Communities however had an agreement on the times for the community festivals, market days or meetings at the village square for example. Community cohesion depended on a common understanding of duties and responsibilities of members of the community on the major issues that they had agreed upon.

However, the emergence of the modern state compelled us all to submit to a new sense of time with the emergence of the clock and calendar. The new clock now became the centre and means of regulating all activities for the individual and his/her community. Metaphorically, and for nation building and progress, to attain a common sense of cohesion and act as a community, our nation's Constitution, our national Anthem and our common currency could now be referred to as some form of a clock, marking our sense of common purpose.

In other words, the idea of time would be reduced to how a society saw adherence to a set of values or rules that held it together. As we will see, confusion later set in because just after the British left, we all seem to have reacted differently to the concept of time, values and rules. Goals, vision and a sense of national unity and common purpose began to change as different persons, groups and institutions began to react differently to the dictates of a **common clock**. Even the titles of our novels would gradually suggest this: *Things Fall Apart, My Mercedes is Bigger than Yours, Born without a Silver Spoon, Stillborn, or the Famished Road*. In my view, the confusion we find ourselves in now is the visible manifestation of the fact that perhaps we may not all have had, or indeed still have, a common understanding of the clock and time, a set of values to serve as a normal anchor or to serve as a compass to lead our nation.

We have come to refer to the first generation of the political class as *founding fathers*. I think this reads too much into our history and the notion of founding fathers. In truth, can you found what was already there? You can only found something whose vision only you possess. The British had *founded* and named what would later become Nigeria, they designed a political, social and economic map for it. What those we call the founding fathers sought to do, and did commendably, was to put pressure on the British to step aside and the British did that on their own terms. They were not conquered in a liberation war. Indeed, as well all know, there was even no agreement among the three 'founding fathers' as to **when** the British should depart. I will return to this towards the end, but for the purpose of this lecture, let me turn to the experience of the United States from where I wish to draw inspiration.

I am turning to the United States largely to explain what we think founding fathers should look like and how their imprint vision and dreams have continued to drive the politics of that country. What today we call, the American **Founding Fathers** were preceded by the **Pilgrim Fathers** who set out from Europe in search of a new land away from the oppression and persecution that they had experienced in Europe. In other words, they were looking for a place to feel at home, create their values and

live their lives as they believed. The settlers would later decide to bring an end to British colonial rule by way of war.

The same people would still fight another civil war to decide what manner of country would bring about, to decide whether all should be free or if some would be in servitude. This is why the country would later be known as the *Land of the brave and the free!* These founding fathers were culturally of the same world view. They were White, Anglo Saxon and Protestant. These identities would later coalesce to become the categories of power in America captured in the acronym, White, Anglo Saxon Protestant, WASP. The local Indian populations paid with their lives and would become the victims of the brutality of their conquerors.

If you compare this with our situation, the confusion begins to show very clearly why it is more important for us to be modest in our application of the term founding fathers for our situation in Nigeria. Yes, like the American founding fathers, we were colonized, but unlike them, we did not go out to colonize anyone. Our colonisers had come to find and extract minerals and make profit. Colonialism was an economic adventure that became necessary when slavery ended and Europe had to industrialize. In the American case, the founding fathers raised a superior force, built an army, economy and ideology that would surpass that of their British colonisers. They conquered their oppressors and laid the foundation for a new and free nation based on its own new principles and ideology of freedom.

In our own case, events leading to our own independence would be fraught with the seeds of conflict in perception and expectations, suggesting clearly that even the founding fathers were looking at different clocks. For example, compare some servile aspects of our negotiation for freedom in the famous with the British with the America situation and we can appreciate the decisive difference.

In parts of what came to be known as the Self Government Motion by Mr. Tony Enahoro in 1953 for self-government to be granted in 1956, we see highlights of our predicament. Among other things, Mr. Enahoro said: *The question in the public mind since the end of the war has been self-government, when? What time, what date?... We do not want to part with the British people with rancor. For many years, they have ruled us. We are not an unreasonable people, and like a good house servant, it is only fair that we give our masters notice of our intention to quit, so that they can effect arrangements either to employ new servants or to serve themselves. We do not wish to take them by surprise.* Clearly, we were asking for some form of dependent independence!

The British who had sowed the seeds of our division in the political arrangements would mischievously frame the issues differently. Independence would clearly be a

set-up, burying in its womb, the seeds of conflicts the inevitability of instability. Sir Bryan Sherwood Smith, the Colonial Governor of Northern Nigeria summed it all up when he said: The British were not the enemy. The enemy lay beyond the Niger in the persons of the political leaders and their followers who desired independence for Nigeria before the North was ready, in order, the north was convinced, to dominate the whole. Tragically, till date, attempted handshakes across the Niger, have exacerbated these fears.

These men had no common vision of a country because their views were the views designed and manipulated by the colonial government. Both Nnamdi Azikiwe and Awolowo had been exposed to the secular Democracy of the West whereas Ahmadu Bello had just come out of the womb of feudalism and an Islam inspired by the Arab world. Ahmadu Bello, on the other hand, was a proud Prince of the over one-hundred-year-old caliphate whose overthrow laid the foundation for British rule. He was proud of his ancestry and unwilling to trade its values for the new values espoused by the British. Azikiwe and Awolowo on the other hand looked into a future framed through the lenses of a western liberal worldview of modernity, individualism, progress and freedom. Whereas Ahmadu Bello was no stranger to privilege, having come from an environment of slave holders, his counterparts came from a background that celebrated egalitarianism, individualism, success and struggle.

On a broader note, Chief Awolowo's exposure to Fabianism and Azikiwe's exposure to the liberal culture of American Democracy ensured a coincidence in their world view, but the same could not be said of the Sardauna. Hence, according to the famous anecdote, when Azikiwe suggested that they should *forget* their differences and unite to move the new nation forward towards a liberal western worldview, the Sardauna suggested rather that they should *understand* these differences. Janus faced, our founding fathers looked in opposite directions for inspiration. The inability of these fathers to synchronize their clocks and agree on what time it was has haunted us and accounts for our seeming immobility.

It has led us to an internecine war and back. It has led us to several constitutional conferences with no final Constitution. Despite all these initiatives we remain inundated with the threatening clouds of fear, anxiety, suspicion, self-doubt, self-abnegation, lassitude, ennui, exhaustion and despair. With these twisted hands of the clock, we have been unable to tell what time it is. Today, by whatever name our confusion is called, whether we call it the quest for true federalism, resource control, Sharia, or restructuring, the essence is the same: we have one clock but no common agreement as to what time it is.

2. Lessons from the American Experience.

Let me now turn our attention and briefly look at the American experience, with all its imperfections, and see what lessons we can draw from their history today. The American story of Democracy is not perfect, but I believe no other country in the world has made such great sacrifices to institutions this system of governance than that country. They have since outclassed and outlived those from whom they borrowed the system, from Greeks to the French. They received the statue of Liberty as a present from the French on October 28, 1886. The timeless and most inspiring words of the poet, **Emma Lazarus**, summoning all to freedom have the power of a sacred text. They still resonate till date. The Poem reads: *Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free. The wretched refuse of your teeming shore, send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me. I lift my lamp beside the golden door.* I know the flood of exhilarating emotions I felt when I climbed the edifice in 1986.

The very successful story of the United States of America illustrates what human beings, collaborating with the grace of God, can achieve when they work together under a common vision, or clock. Do not get me wrong. I am not naïve to think that the United States does not have its own problems. We can remember the history of the struggles for equality of the black race and others for justice and integration till date. We can recall the struggle of women to have their equality as citizens recognized. **Time Magazine** (March 16-23rd, 2020) has dedicated a two-week edition to the Women struggle in the United States and around the world. We can also afford to quarrel with the new restrictions imposed by the Trump administration today, whether on border walls, immigrants, visas, or how much you need to have to get their visa. But in whichever way we look at things, every struggle there still finds its legitimacy in the vision of the founding fathers of that country against the backdrop of commitment to freedom and human dignity.

In 1776 after they won their war against Britain, the founding fathers set about laying down the moral basis for what they had done. After the Holy Bible, the **Declaration of Independence** can be considered the most powerful source from where the United States has continued to draw its moral authority. The writers (Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, Robert Livingston and Robert Sherman) stated very clearly the reason why they had fought a war and what kind of society they wanted to live in. The Declaration of Independence opened with the following words: *when in the course of human events, it becomes necessary for one people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation. We hold these*

truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness. That to secure these rights, Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to affect their Safety and Happiness, Prudence, indeed, will dictate that Governments long established should not be changed for light and transient causes.

Who would imagine that these words, written over two hundred years ago are still so inspiring? They could pass for a text of agitation from any of the angry, frustrated and militant separatist groups spread around every nook and cranny of Nigeria today. So, that we have not been able to resolve problems whose solutions were offered over two hundred years ago by men and women of vision? How could we have offered to sit for their examination and sixty years later are still unable to graduate?

The founding fathers of America drew their strength from the Christian faith, calling their nation a *City on a hill, a Nation under God and God's country*. The inscription on their currency reads, in God we trust. Today, these appellations have paid off because faith, including today greater respect for all faiths, has remained the rallying cry for the people. Thus, we can all agree that, America may sway, but it remains a worthy reference point for how Democracy should be. This is the price we have had to pay for trying to merely understand our differences rather than hammering them out on an imaginative anvil that would enable us weld these differences together and subordinate them under a Constitution would serve as our secular sacred text?

Apart from the Declaration of Independence, two other speeches are important for understanding why American Democracy has stood the test of time and why honoring the time-tested principles laid down by the founding fathers has conferred a form of secular sacredness to these texts. The first is a speech that has come to be known as the **House Divided Speech**, delivered on June 16th, 1858, was an acceptance speech which Abraham Lincoln delivered after he accepted the nomination to run for the Senate for the State of Illinois. Although Mr. Lincoln lost that election, the contents of the speech show an ideological consistency that shows the depth of his moral convictions about human dignity. His entire political life would hang around the themes of the speech. Among other things, he said: "*A house divided against itself cannot stand*". *I believe this government cannot endure, permanently half slave and half free. I do not expect the Union to be dissolved- I do not expect the house to fall- but I do expect it will cease to be divided. It will become*

all one thing, or all the other. Either the opponents of slavery will arrest the further spread of it, and place it where the public mind shall rest in the belief that it is in course of ultimate extinction; or its advocates will push it forward till it shall become alike lawful in all the States, old as well as new North as well as South.

The second is the very **Gettysburg Speech** which Abraham Lincoln delivered at the dedication of the cemetery at Gettysburg in Pennsylvania on November 19th, 1863 after the war. It is one of the shortest but most memorable speeches that has become the poster child of Democracy around the world. The entire speech is less than 300 hundred words. In it, Lincoln said: *But, in a larger sense, we cannot dedicate- we cannot consecrate- we cannot hallow-this ground. The brave men, living and dead, who struggled here, have consecrated it, far above our poor power to add or detract. The world will little note, or long remember, what we say here, but it can never forget what they did here. It is for use the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for use to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us that from these honored dead take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion- that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain- that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom- and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the earth.*

These two speeches reflect the consistency in the mind of Abraham Lincoln and his alignment to the mind of the founding fathers contained in the Declaration of Independence. American politics has continued to revolve around the Constitution etched on this moral foundation already laid. The Constitution has been placed at the centre of America life as the totem, a kind of a sacred political text. For example, it has become the secular Bible of *Democracy* and while other crimes can be tolerated in the politics of the United States, any sign of a breach of the Constitution, real or imagined can attract a political death sentence for the offender.

It is a measure of how absolute compliance with the Constitution has been strictly adhered to that in the over 200-year history of American Democracy, only three Presidents (Andrew Johnson, 1868, Bill Clinton, 1998, and Donald Trump, 2019, have so far been impeached) by Congress. It is significant to note that all three Presidents were subsequently acquitted in the course of trials in the Senate. Richard Nixon had the wisdom to resign (August 9th, 1974) before his Senate trials could commence.

After writing their Constitution in 1787, it became clear to the founding fathers that individual freedom was very important. As such, the first **Ten Amendments**,

Known now as the **Bill of Rights**, (all ratified on December 15th, 1791) focused largely on promoting individuals freedom against the excesses of the state. It is significant to note that the **First Amendment** focused on freedom of *Religion, speech, press*. It addressed the issues of the rights of citizens to *free assembly* and also the right to *petition government*. This is significant because, coming out of the tyrannical rule of colonialism, the founding fathers sought first to establish the fact that government has to earn the trust of citizens as opposed to those rights being taken for granted. Building on this, the **Second Amendment** gave citizens the right to bear arms. Citizens had experienced abuse of power and knew the potential consequences of the unchecked power of the state on citizen rights.

Here, the issues of legitimacy of government are based on a convergence between the ideals of the Constitution and the state's capacity to enforce them with the protection of the citizen being right at the Centre of every effort. The **14th and 15th Amendments** addressed the very controversial issues of abolition of slavery. Since the fate of black people and women had not been anticipated in the Constitution, it became clear that securing these rights was fundamental to legitimizing and ensuring the sacredness of the Constitution.

The **13th Amendment** abolished slavery and any form of servitude (December 6, 1865). The **14th Amendment** (July 14th, 1868) defined Citizenship and inserted a protection clause and privileges for all citizens while the **15th Amendment** (February 3, 1870) granted all male citizens the right to Vote irrespective of status or race. It would take till the passage of the **19th Amendment** (August 18, 1920) for all white women to get the right to vote and the **Voting Right Act** in 1965 before all women could vote!

We see here a consistency in goals and objectives of the founding fathers, the framers of the Constitution and the goals of liberty and the pursuit of happiness in the declaration of independence. In keeping with the goals and ideals captured in the Declaration of Independence, the House Divided and the Gettysburg speeches and the Constitution, we see that the totality of the American dream is nailed firmly on the mast of Democracy, the pursuit of happiness, human freedom and the quest for an egalitarian and prosperous society. It is to be assumed that based on their experience with their past, American's commitment to Democracy would remain resolute but only to the extent that it is the guarantee for the realization of the goals of the founding fathers. And, as I have said, future politics and politicians will be measured by how far or close they are to the principles of the founding fathers of the nation.

Against this backdrop, the question to ask is, what time is it in Nigeria? What is the state of own struggle for the creation of an egalitarian, just and free society? To get a sense of where we are or where we have come from, we will have to attempt to trace the tortuous story of our wandering and meanderings on the terrains of Democracy. We will have to address the issues around the undulating contours that is Nigeria's severely fractured landscape.

Today, growing education, increasing political consciousness, upward economic and social mobility, have all combined to make Nigeria a cauldron of competing, conflicting and bubbling nationalisms. Frustrations with unmet dreams have combined to create a culture of the inevitability of instability. We are all wrapped in one torn blanket of frustration and near despair. Everyone or community is in revolt mode and most Nigerians believe they would rather anywhere but in the country itself. Nigerians have continued to demand, with increasing aggressiveness, a more rugged political space to contain their energies. Sadly, we are all coming to terms with the fact that our efforts at Constitution making have largely been desultory.

This is neither the place nor time to review Nigeria's Constitutional history for I will be venturing into an area that I am least qualified. However, to understand our country's convoluted Constitutional history is to appreciate the nature of our colonial history. Unlike the United States of America, we did not defeat the British and therefore did not possess the requisite moral authority to draw a distinct line between the ugly past and the future. What we had was an inchoate amalgam of concessionary initiatives that upended the interest of the British and made Nigeria's interests subordinate while the political class and bureaucracy acted as junior partners. Unlike the Americans, it was the colonial state which made our various laws ranging from those laws which legitimized trade and coincided with the period of their occupation, through amalgamation to independence. Military rule, coming on the heels of the colonial state, further deepened the culture of servitude and subordination of human rights under the jack boot of militarism.

Constitution making in Nigeria has continued to be a cat and mouse game, pitching the conservative statist interests of those in power with the wishes of the ordinary citizens. This legal puppetry would gradually suffer diminished legitimacy as the process deteriorated to the abyss and became a tool in the hands of despots seeking illegal processes of breaking the rules of the game. Thus, between 1914, 1922, 1946, 1951, 1954, 1960, 1963, 1979 and 1999, we have been trying to agree on a Constitution that will meet our vision and dreams.

Almost every attempt at reviewing the Constitution has been an ambush against the wishes of the people by a rampaging political elite who often turned the platform

into a theatre for unsavory political gymnastics. From 1977 when these debates started under the auspices of the military, for these reviews and debates of the draft Constitution have often been crowded by shabby conspirators and carpet baggers who, on behalf of the dark interests of the day, have often turned the exercise into a bazaar for selfish political horse trading. So called Constitution Review Assemblies or Conferences become victims and an instrument of state capture as Members focus on merely building political alliances. Does it not sound strange that from 1914 till date, we still have not been able to agree on a Constitution? Right now, the 8th Assembly is in the process of embarking on another of these wild goose chases, not to talk of the Political Reform Conferences of 2005 and 2014 which were of limited mandates but seen as attempts to manipulate the Constitution! Like their predecessors, these drafts remain in various dustbins.

In these platforms, politicians often deploy pseudo mini nationalistic platitudes, dubious bravado for appealing to the sentiments of their bedraggled and traumatized constituents. They cast the others as **enemies** of their religions, regions or ethnic groups and they present themselves as champions and defenders of their faiths or peoples. As usual, by the time these theatres are over, the centrifugal elements have weakened our common sense of nationhood and politics becomes a war of *Us* against *Them*. The exploitation of these sentiments by a crooked political class is largely responsible for the mess we find ourselves in now. From Boko Haram to banditry and kidnapping, the logic is the same: how can politicians who themselves kidnap the political process and the machinery of power find the moral authority to ask for anything different? Those in the bush are largely adopting less civilized methods than their uncles and brothers in the political field, but the essence is the same. All that this tells us is that there are no wells of inspiration from which we can draw. Can anyone remember any single memorable speech ever delivered by a Nigerian President?

3 What Time is it, Nigeria?

To answer this question and by way of concluding this lecture, I can only say that sadly, there is still no agreement over an answer to that question. I have tried to argue that the United States of America, with all its imperfections, has demonstrated to us that the resilience of any nation, its capacity to meet the needs of its people, cannot be undertaken outside a set of ideals, principles and vision of a future anchored on Constitutionalism and shared values. I make no claims that American Democracy is perfect. Rather, I draw attention to their consistency in holding strongly to *certain self-evident truths*.

Thus, close to two hundred and fifty years after the Declaration of Independence, the United States has had a total of 45 Presidents from President George Washington,

(inaugurated April 30th, 1789) to Donald Trump (inaugurated January 20th, 2017). There has been no history of a coup plot. Over the years, with discipline, hard work, patience and endurance, the principles and tenets of Democracy are now irreversible.

Compare with Nigeria. After just 60 years of independence, we have produced a total of a hotchpotch of 15 individuals whose identities defy both history, nomenclature and political science logic. Their designations or titles are a nightmare for political Scientists and historians. Take a look: **Olusegun General Obasanjo** was a Military **Head of State** who benefited from a coup and many years later, morphed back as a **President** in a second life as a Democracy. **General Babangida** was a Military **Head of State** who came to power through a coup but called himself a **President**. Major **General Muhammadu Buhari** was a **Head of State** who came to power through coup. Today, he is back as a **President** under a Democracy, Chief **Ernest Shonekan** became the **Head of Interim Government, HIG**, while in other places he was called, **Head of Government, HOG** in a diarchy of sorts. How to count or allocate the years, how to agree on the nomenclature remains of all these people defies logic. We need not look anywhere else for an explanation to our state or rudderlessness.

Or, take **Anambra** your state, created only in 1991. In just 20 years, between Military regimes and Democracy, it has produced **20 Governors!** Nigeria has not had an aggregate of shared values hewn and crafted into a Constitution to inspire the reverence and awe of its citizens, and has no process in leadership recruitment. This is the vacuum that the political elite has exploited by turning the country into a jungle where the arbitrary *rule of men* has replaced the *rule of law* and mere human instincts have become substitutes for Constitutionalism.

It is time to take stock. Chinua Achebe had warned that it was still *morning yet on creation day*. Perhaps, we should have listened to Wole Soyinka and *set forth at dawn*. Had we done so, as Ben Okri said, perhaps, just perhaps, we would not have been on this *famished road* festooned with the debris of our broken dreams and nightmares. Nigeria and Nigerians know what time it is? For Boko Haram, they are reaping the harvest of a war they started. For the Bandits, Ali Baba and his forty thieves, it is harvest time. Who is in charge of Nigeria and where are we going? Do we have a destination? Are there navigational aids? Are there roadmaps? If so, where are they? This is the turbulent world into which you are graduating. Yet, do not relent, do not give up.

For these young men and women who are graduating today, for the University community, what time is it? It is time to rescue our nation from the hands of predators. How do we explain the fact that today, our battle as a country is against

those who have rejected Education? I agree with the Vice President, Professor Yemi Osibanjo, who warned in his lecture at the Federal University in Dutse last month that your generation should not dwell on those who tell you that the days of yesterday were better. The best days are ahead of us because the days of the godfatherism are over. The days of the stranglehold of feudalism are coming to a close.

We the educated class must renew our commitment to the value of education and rise up quickly before we are devoured by the darkness that hovers over us in the name of toxic politics by too many charlatans. We must restore honour and dignity to elitism in its proper sense and see the intellectual elite as dreamers and visioners, bearers of a promise and a dream to rescue us from this nightmare and darkness. The University must claim back its preeminence. Elitism has a superior moral force than the shallow waters of ethnicity and religion. Only the elites can dream of a country, create the structures and institutions that can espouse the values of our common humanity.

The birth of a new Nigeria depends the choices we make today. Charles Dickson warned us that: *it was the best of times, it was the worst of times. It was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness. It was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity. It was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair.* Now is the time to make the right choices and the mantle falls on us.

As Abraham Lincoln said, *we cannot remain half slave, half free.* We must make a choice. Democracy cannot co-exist with feudalism even in its most reformed state. James Madison said: *Without Education, popular government is but a prologue to farce or a tragedy or perhaps both.* This is the fate that has befallen Nigeria. Northern Nigeria, the epicenter of this illiteracy is today a cauldron that has spilled over the acid of violence across the nation. If the educated elites do not win this war, then the ideology of Boko Hara, even if it's veiled, pretentious form masquerading as reform will bury our future.

There are no two ways about it. Anyone who wishes to govern us must be fully stripped of any gowns of hypocrisy, tartuffery, simulation or patriotism, that famous refuge of the scoundrel long with all claims of puritanical cleansing this country. The credentials of any claimants to leadership must forensically analyzed. We can no longer continue to make educational qualifications issues of court processes. Anyone wishing to govern us must establish his or her credentials as one committed to the fine principles of Democracy such as freedom, secularity of the state, transparency and a demonstrable understanding and hopes of the people that make up this great country. We should no longer accept any leader arriving in a parachute

wrapped in Teflon but hiding supremacist claims based on religious, regional irredentism. Every aspirant to a high office must be measured not by the size of his or her material resources, but the content of their intellect. They must show us what they have accomplished and be compulsorily subjected to rigorous public debates as one of the pre-conditions.

Anyone seeking to govern us must demonstrate a strength of both character and deep intellectual capacity to wrestle with the problems of Nigeria and the world. The Nigerian elite must set that pace and tone. We owe our children and the future nothing less. This country can no longer remain a laboratory for experiments or merely trial and error.

It is sad that for the better part of 30 years now, years of strikes and threats of strikes have eroded the dignity of the academic vocation in our Universities. Despite all the challenges and the legitimacy of their claims, the Academic Staff Union of Universities, (ASUU), must seek ways to rescue the dignity of academic vocation so that intellectualism can be injected into governance. It is only means of neutralizing the cutting edge of other corrosive identities such as ethnicity, regionalism and religious bigotry. It is the only culture that can rescue our people and our politics from the bandits who now threaten the very foundation of our existence. The time to act is now and the place to start is here.

Thank you very much and God bless you.