We are one people

Contributed by EDITORIAL BOARD
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The Igbos in the Nigerian community in South Florida recently hosted a celebration of life for Gen. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu who led the secession movement in Nigeria in the late 1960s that led to the creation of the short-lived nation of Biafra. He died last November in London. Despite his central role in the civil war that led to the deaths of more than two million Nigerians, he won a pardon from the central government and went on to play an important role in the affairs of Africa's most populous nation. The celebration, held in Opa-locka in north Miami-Dade County, paid tribute to Gen. Odumegwu-Ojukwu for his "patriotism and nationalism," as one local Igbo leader said.

It is highly unlikely that many African Americans, let alone Americans, generally, know anything of the 13-year Nigerian conflict. Yes, that was 45 years ago but Nigeria is once again wracked by unrest that could deteriorate into another civil war. Other African nations are also coping with unrest, including Somalia and Sudan, in these unsettled times which are certain to remain with us for many years.

Should we have an interest in what happens in those countries? Should we have had an interest in what unfolded in Libya, a North African nation? Yes, we should. We must underscore our heritage by being actively engaged with Africa and other countries of the Diaspora so we can stand ready to be of service to the people as they strive to emerge from the myriad challenges they face and be their partners for peace and prosperity. And we must insist on having an influence on American foreign policy towards such nations. We must not continue to let those whose only interest in Africa and the Diaspora nations is their natural resources shape their destiny.

Such a role will be greatly enhanced if we of the Disapora embrace our cultural heritage and our point of origin and understand the common thread that runs through us. We have allowed insular considerations to dominate our attitudes towards one another, rather than uniting under the common reality that, language and parochial customs aside, we are all black.

There is too little mixing, sharing, uniting and exchanging of knowledge, yet there is much we can learn from one another. Our brothers and sisters newly arrived from the Motherland have much they can teach us about the culture of our forefathers and infuse our daily lives with a stronger connection to our heritage. In turn, they can learn much from our experience in what originally was a land of slavery and now is a land of opportunity. There is much we can accomplish economically, as well.

After all, we are one people.