

MZUNGU IN KAMPALA with Bryan McInnis

Seeing America from Kampala

Not very long ago, some of my East African friends asked me to weigh in on what is unfolding in the US around immigration. I hesitated. It is divisive, yes, but also because living in Uganda has shown me just how powerful the idea of "America" still is here.

I have ridden dozens of bodas around Kampala. Almost without fail, drivers ask where I am from. When I say the United States, the response is often immediate: "America. The land of opportunity."

It is usually followed by a hopeful question about getting a visa. I have to explain that, despite my official title as "(unofficial) US Ambassador to Ugan-

da," I have exactly zero influence at the embassy.

Curious, I often ask why they want to go. The answer is nearly always the same: "Because it is the best country in the world."

What unsettles me is not gratitude for an American passport. It is the discomfort of knowing I did nothing to earn it. None of us chose where or when we were born.

Pride rooted in geography feels like entitlement when examined closely.

My own ancestors arrived by ship from Europe, ragged and hopeful, stepping into a country that once lifted a torch beside a harbour and called itself a refuge.

Reading those famous words etched beneath the Statue of Liberty still stirs something in me. They represent humanity at its most generous.

"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!"

That is why it has been difficult to watch how confusing this moment is for my Ugandan friends. Many still hold America in high esteem. I sense that admiration quietly shifting, replaced by uncertainty.

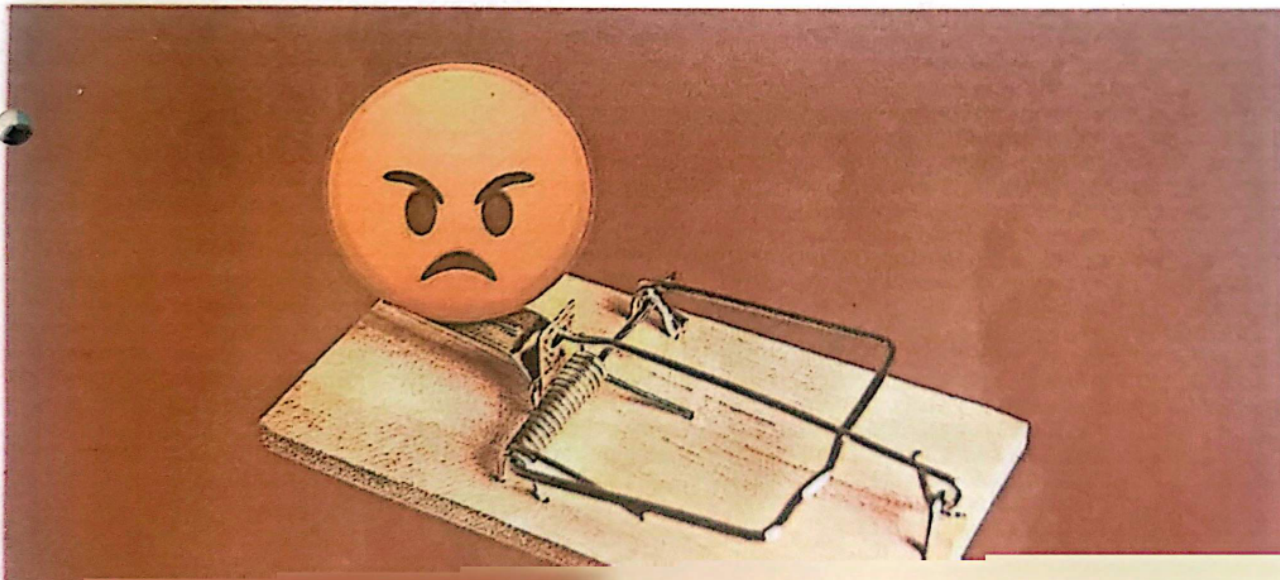
At the same time, I am living in a country that has chosen a different

posture. Uganda is one of Africa's most immigrant-welcoming nations. Every day I pass Sudanese, Congolese, Eritrean, Ethiopian, Rwandan, Kenyan, and Indian families. This is a remarkably young place. The average age here is 17. In many ways, the future belongs to Africa.

I wonder if history has a way of reversing the current. If the past two centuries saw exports flowing outward from the US, perhaps the next will see generosity, resilience, and welcome flowing back in.

Seeing America from Kampala has changed how I understand both.

<https://fromthepearl.substack.com/>



OLIWA?

Joseph Sax @ The Maze Restaurant

Joseph Sax and Friends will be performing at the Maze tonight starting at 8pm until late in a melodic evening. They will be performing mostly cover songs, and entry fee for the evening is free.

Kubeba Mbegu @ National Theatre

Kubeba Mbegu, choreographed by Haula Namboozie, is happening tomorrow at the National Theatre, with the first show starting at 5pm and lasting until 6pm, while the second show will kick off at 8pm and last until 9pm. Entry fee is Shs25,000.

Salvador and Nana Kagga @ Shisa Nyama Village

Comedian Patrick Salvador and actress Nana Kagga