

## **ENGAGING WITH OUR PAST TO WIN THE FUTURE**

REMARKS ON THE OCCASION OF THE COMMISSIONING OF LASRAB HOUSE ON  
TUESDAY, FEBRAURY 28, 2012

**BY PROFESSOR AYODEJI OLUKOJU, FNAL**

CONVENER, NETWORK OF NIGERIAN HISTORIANS &

VICE-CHANCELLOR, CALEB UNIVERSITY, IMOTA, LAGOS STATE

Your Excellency, My Lords Spiritual and Temporal, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen

First, I apologise for my inability to be here in person to make these remarks. Well before this event was arranged, I had been approached to host a Black History Month event of the Public Affairs Section of the United States Embassy at Caleb University, Imota, Lagos State. Consequently, much against my personal desire, I have had to remain at Imota while this momentous event is going on at Magodo.

That said, I salute the government and people of Lagos State, ably led by Governor Babatunde Raji Fashola (SAN), for envisioning and executing the laudable project of collecting and preserving rare archival material which encapsulate the Lagos past. It is a telling statement of how highly this government rates the contribution of our collective heritage to the charting of our future. I shall return to this subject presently.

As we recall and commemorate the historical moments in the evolution of Lagos State, let me acknowledge the great contributions of the likes of Professor A.B. Aderibigbe, doyen of Lagos history, Professor Anthony Hopkins, whose thesis covered the critical two decades before and after 1900, and who inspired my own work on the economic history of Lagos, Professors Robin Law, Sandra Barnes, Babatunde Agiri, Ade Adefuye and Hakeem Danmole, who came before me and much later scholars, Professors Kunle Lawal and Hakeem Tijani. For the record, I have been engaged with Lagos history since 1983, culminating in two authored books, a 1991 PhD thesis, chapters in books and journal articles all on the colonial and post-independence history of Lagos from 1987 to 2012. The most recent is on urban fires in Lagos between 1980 and 2008, the only contribution on Africa in a global collection. I am also glad to report that two of my PhD students completed their theses on Lagos: one on the social history of violent crimes; the other on colonial land policies and urbanization.

Returning to the subject of this day, I rejoice with the government and people of Lagos for successfully salvaging and preserving archival material on Lagos history. Lagos is richly documented in the holdings of public and private archives in Nigeria and foreign countries. Its rich history is stored in newspapers, private papers (diaries, letters, photographs, title deeds), court records, monuments and non-written historical data presented in songs, traditions and

festivals. Much of this has yet to be collected and some might have been lost for good to fire disasters, the elements and human activity. The need to collect and preserve such material as much as possible is urgent and we all must support LASRAB to fulfil its mandate. I urge Lagosians to turn in their private papers and other relevant historical material. LASRAB should continue to acquire and digitize documents in local and foreign holdings. This calls for sustained funding and support by government and other stakeholders.

The Network of Nigerian Historians, which I represent, is committed to “Doing History Differently,” with a positive engagement with our rich but often neglected past, and to the appropriate application of our rich heritage to (re)defining our identity and making informed choices in a highly competitive world. No people can develop beyond their level of self-definition and self-assertion, for which history provides the intellectual and emotional moorings. In the context of today’s event, we have partnered with the French Institute for Research in Africa and LASRAB to organize a Roundtable on “Engaging with the Archives,” an event that we had to shift from October 15, 2011 to March 16 2012 because of the protracted ASUU strike. As part of our mandate, we are committed to engaing with all stakeholders to return History to our primary and junior secondary schools, a project to which the Lagos State government is reported to be equally committed. We are excited about that vision and are willing to partner with Lagos and other State governments to undertake this patrotic task.

Once again, I congratulate the Lagos State government and LASRAB on this great occasion and wish them greater success in preserving the glorious past of this pace-setting State.

Thank you for listeing. God bless.