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Homelessness in America and U.S. Foreign Policy toward Africa: Westward Migration and Implications for Nigeria

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Abstract

This article examines the problem of homelessness in the United States, as well as American foreign policy and implications for Nigerian migration. While the U. S. projects a model of prosperity, democracy, and opportunity, America's domestic reality is marred by widespread homelessness, structural inequality, and racialised marginalisation. Using qualitative methodology, the study examines how these contradictions undermine U.S. soft power credibility abroad and exposes the fragility of the "American Dream." The discussion situates Nigerian migration within a broader historical continuum linking transatlantic slave trade to contemporary visa regimes, showing how structural dependency and racialised exclusion persist under new forms. The article argues that Nigerian migrants are often lured by aspirational narratives of opportunity but face harsh realities of job precarity, disillusionment, and homelessness in America. These lived experiences resonate with a wider collapse of U.S. moral authority in Africa, as the same state that criminalises African poverty struggles to address its own systemic crises. The article argues for a recalibration of Nigeria's foreign policy, media narratives, and migration diplomacy through an Afrocentric framework that promotes African authority, regional integration, and self-reliance. By deconstructing the mirage of American exceptionalism, the study calls for Nigeria and other African states to pursue development strategies rooted in Afrocentric engagement rather than dependency on flawed Western models.

Keywords: Homelessnesss, migration, soft power, Afrocentrism, postcolonial theory

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Introduction

The United States of America stands as one of the most contradictory states in the contemporary international order. On one hand, it projects itself as the custodian of prosperity, democracy, and human rights, a nation whose "exceptionalism" is often invoked as a model for global emulation (Congressional Research Service, 2025; Mendelson, 2023; Pew Research Centre, 2023; Williams, 2023;). On the other hand, it struggles with a profound internal crisis fuelled by the persistence of homelessness, racial inequality, and deep socio-economic fragmentation. According to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD, 2023), more than 653,000 Americans experience homelessness on any given night, the highest recorded since national tracking began. Behind these figures are sprawling tent cities in Los Angeles, encampments under Washington D.C. bridges, and families living in cars across suburbs once idealised as symbols of the American Dream.

This contradiction is rather fundamental than incidental. As Kumar (2025) and Peggs (2023) argue, homelessness is symptomatic of neoliberal capitalism's inherent contradictions, of scenarios where housing is treated as commodity rather than right, coupled with the disappearance of welfare provisions. In Haaga (2022)'s interpretation of Achebe's observation about African realities – "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" – we might invert the logic to read that the trouble with America is the dissonance between leadership claims abroad and governance failures at home. How then can a nation unable to provide shelter for its own citizens claim the authority to prescribe governance models to Africa?

For Nigeria, Africa's most populous country and a leading migrant-sending nation, the irony of America is not theoretical but lived experience. The American Dream, a cultural script of opportunity, mobility, and success, has long shaped the aspirations of many Nigerians. Scholars note that migration aspirations are not driven solely by material deprivation but by the symbolic power of imagined destinations (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023; Inegbedion, 2022). The U.S., through its media and soft power, has cultivated itself as the most desirable of these destinations. As recent studies observe, this "Japa" wave reflects a psychological and cultural enchantment with Western modernity, where migration becomes a moral metaphor for salvation and global belonging (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023; Liu, 2024). Today, that spell is manifest in the relentless pursuit of U.S. visas by Nigerian youths who equate migration with redemption. Yet the lived reality often contrasts sharply. Nigerian migrants in the U.S. frequently confront precarious work, racialised discrimination, and even homelessness (Jin et al., 2024; Menin, 2024). A growing body of research reveals African migrants in U.S. cities struggling with housing insecurity, exploitation in low-wage sectors, and exclusion from healthcare access (Migrants Rights Network, 2021). Consequently, the gap between aspiration and reality breeds disillusionment, as migrants discover that the "land of opportunity" also harbours exclusion and marginalisation.

At the level of foreign policy, this contradiction is equally pronounced. Joseph Nye's soft power theory – the ability to attract rather than coerce – remains influential, yet its moral premise has been increasingly questioned in recent analyses. As contemporary scholars argue, attraction often conceals domination (Vigers, 2024; Noor, 2024). U.S. soft power in Africa, supposedly through aid, democracy promotion, and cultural diplomacy, functions less as benevolent partnership than as strategic deception, masking interventions that reproduce dependency and underdevelopment (Enwere et al., 2025). In his seminal warning, Kwame Nkrumah famously described how a state may appear outwardly sovereign yet remain economically and politically directed from without, a dynamic that persists in modern forms

of neocolonial influence. The Nigerian migration experience, conditioned by U.S. visa controls and brain drain, illustrates this dependency in real time.

The homelessness crisis magnifies the fragility of America's soft power. Images of tent encampments undercut its moral authority in Africa, where U.S. officials frequently condemn slums in Lagos or Kibera as evidence of African governance failure (Gallup, 2024; HUD, 2023). P.L.O. Lumumba has often critiqued this hypocrisy, observing that Africa's habit of looking to the West for "salvation" is misguided, a view echoed in recent African commentary (Thurston, 2023; Falola, 2024). By sanitising domestic failures while criminalising African poverty, the U.S. sustains a discourse of superiority that is increasingly indefensible. Recent international relations research likewise shows that charges of hypocrisy and "whataboutism" erode a state's credibility in foreign policy when internal crises mirror the problems it condemns abroad (Lawson & Zarakol, 2023; Chow & Levin, 2024).

On the other hand, Nigeria's overreliance on migration as an escape valve reveals the dangers of outsourcing aspirations to America. While remittances exceeded USD $20 billion in 2022 (Aja et al., 2024; Chandra et al., 2024), such inflows mask the structural drain of human capital. Doctors, engineers, and academics leave Nigeria for the U.S., enriching the American economy while weakening domestic capacity (Ajoseh et al., 2024; Umeokwobi et al., 2025). This dynamic reflects Walter Rodney's thesis of the "development of under-development," where African labour and resources sustain Western prosperity at Africa's expense. To persist in aligning national aspirations with U.S. models is to risk tethering Nigeria's future to a crumbling edifice. American global leadership is sustained less by moral legitimacy than by "manufactured consent" and strategic illusions, dynamics exposed when migration becomes the default national strategy rather than structural domestic empowerment (Lawson & Zarakol, 2023). For Nigeria, the U.S. homelessness crisis should be read as a cautionary tale, exposing the dangers of embracing a mythologised model while ignoring its fractures.

This article contends that Nigeria must recalibrate its foreign policy, migration strategy, and developmental aspirations through Afrocentrism. Twenty-first-century scholarship defines Afrocentricity as a framework that centres African agency, rejecting dependency on external models (Oladipupo & Tomoloju, 2024). For Nigeria, this means reframing migration not as escape but as leverage; reorienting foreign policy from mimicry of U.S. ideals to Pan-African solidarity; and investing in homegrown solutions that make migration optional rather than necessary. The homelessness crisis in America symbolises the fragility of U.S. exceptionalism. Nigeria's task, therefore, is to tell its own story – one not scripted by Washington's illusions but anchored in African realities, resilience, and dignity (Orukpe & Aiguobarueghian, 2025).

Conceptual Clarifications

A rigorous interrogation of key concepts is critical for situating this study within broader scholarly debates. Three concepts – homelessness, migration/aspiration, and U.S. foreign policy – are particularly germane in this discourse.

Homelessness

Homelessness is not merely the absence of a physical dwelling; it encompasses broader conditions of exclusion from social protection, precarious livelihoods, and systemic marginalisation. The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) defines homelessness narrowly as lacking "a

fixed, regular, and adequate nighttime residence." Yet, critical scholars argue that such bureaucratic framings depoliticise the issue by ignoring structural inequality, capitalism's housing contradictions, and the racialised nature of exclusion (Hochstenbach et al., 2025; Haycox et al., 2024). For this article, homelessness is understood as both a material condition and a social construct, reflecting contradictions within American society that undermine its projected image of prosperity.

Migration and aspiration

The phenomenon of migration itself and the concept of aspiration (the desire or hope to migrate) are subjects of significant debate, disagreement, and varied interpretation within research, policy, and society (Czaika & Weisner, 2025). Classical push-pull models depict migration as a rational response to economic disparity, while more recent frameworks stress "aspirational migration," in which movement is motivated by imagined opportunities and cultural ideals (Rodríguez-Peña, 2024; Velseboer et al., 2025). The "American Dream" functions as a global narrative that shapes Nigerian migratory aspirations, often concealing the harsher realities of racial marginalisation, labour insecurity, and possible homelessness.

U.S. foreign policy

U.S. foreign policy is a concept that defines America's strategies for managing its relationships with other countries and international organisations, with key objectives including national security and economic prosperity. It is guided by principles including promoting democracy and human rights, and being shaped by factors such as economic interests, international alliances, and the country's role as a global superpower. The implementation of this policy involves a combination of diplomatic, defence, and development efforts (Worthington, 2024; Ateş, 2022). U.S. foreign policy has traditionally been cast in terms of democracy promotion and global leadership, underpinned by notions of American exceptionalism (Williams, 2023; Dierks, 2023).

However, postcolonial critiques highlight its contradictions arguing that while America positions itself as a beacon of human rights abroad, it simultaneously fails to address crucial domestic crises of inequality, racial injustice, and homelessness. Thus, in this study, U.S. foreign policy is treated as a discursive and material apparatus of soft power, whose credibility is weakened by visible domestic failures.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in a multi-layered theoretical architecture. A critical theory-inspired political economy serves as the core lens, complemented by dependency theory, postcolonial theory, and a contemporary iteration of soft power theory. Together, these frameworks enable a rich interrogation of how the domestic crisis of homelessness and inequality in the United States links to its foreign-policy posture toward Africa, and how this connection informs the migratory and diplomatic trajectories of Nigeria.

At the heart of this analysis lies a critical political-economy perspective that treats homelessness, housing precarity, and racialised inequality within the U.S. as not incidental domestic problems but as structural manifestations of a capitalist order that prioritises accumulation and legitimation over welfare and inclusion. Recent evidence demonstrates how systemic housing exclusion, racialised wealth gaps,

and stagnating social mobility in the U.S. undermine the legitimacy of the state's normative claims abroad (McKinsey Institute, 2025). From this vantage, the projection of American moral leadership, through democracy promotion, development assistance, and migration flows, is revealed as an ideological apparatus designed to maintain hegemony. In other words, the domestic internal contradictions of the United States become the hidden foundation of its external moral and normative claims.

Complementing the structural critique, dependency theory offers a robust framework for understanding Nigeria's positionality within the global system. Contemporary scholarship shows how the migration of skilled professionals from Nigeria constitutes an ongoing modality of dependency, where human-capital flight serves the needs of advanced economies even as it drains the periphery (Udeagwu, 2023). Brain-drain dynamics, far from incidental, form part of a system of unequal exchange that replicates colonial patterns of extraction under the guise of free migration and global mobility. Thus Nigerian migration must be seen less as individual agency and more as a structural outcome of integrated dependency.

While dependency theory emphasises the structural-material dimension, postcolonial theory illuminates the cultural and epistemic dimension. Among Nigerian youth and professionals, migration to the U.S. is often internalised as a moral metaphor for redemption – the "American Dream" as a cultural script of salvation and global belonging (Okunade & Awosusi, 2023). This longing is not merely economic but emerges from the internalisation of Western modernity as the standard of progress. In this way, migration becomes an act of epistemic submission, of accepting Western models of success as desirable, and thus reinforcing the dominance of Western modernity over African knowledge.

Finally, the soft power framework is deployed to interpret how the U.S. projects influence through attraction, legitimacy, and normative appeal rather than purely through coercion. Recent studies show that America's soft power in Africa has waned – its global image undermined by growing domestic dysfunction, racialised inequality, and homelessness (Aras et al., 2025; Vigers, 2024). When the agent of normative projection fails to live up to its own values, the credibility of its foreign-policy influence collapses. As such, the United States' domestic crises reduce America's capacity to shape preferences abroad, thereby diminishing its moral authority and creating a credibility gap in Africa.

By weaving these theoretical strands, this framework reconceptualises the triangular relationship among American homelessness, U.S.–Africa foreign policy, and Nigerian migration not as isolated phenomena but as facets of a single structural setting. The U.S. homelessness crisis signals internal delegitimation; Nigerian migration and foreign-policy alignment signal external dependency and aspirational displacement; and soft power functions as the symbolic vehicle of hegemonic reproduction. An Afrocentric reorientation of Nigerian foreign policy is therefore advanced, one that resists dependency on a morally compromised West, reclaims African epistemic authority.

Methodology

This article adopts a qualitative historical critical-analytical research methodology that focuses on thoughtful evaluation of extant literature, academic works, journal articles, government records, and other published works concerning U.S. foreign policy and political economy, and the internal crises of homelessness, racialised inequality within the U.S. as well as Nigerian migration aspirations. The focus is on discursive contradictions – how the United States projects soft power abroad while concealing

systemic crises at home. Nigeria is chosen as the focal African case because of its high migration rates to the U.S., its role as Africa's most populous country, and its geopolitical importance. Taking the nature of the study topic into consideration (which is to evaluate homelessness in America and U.S. Foreign policy toward Africa, westward migration and implications for Nigeria), a qualitative research method is suitable for understanding, analysing, interpreting, and explaining the fundamental undercurrents, features, and outcomes, which quantitative research approach, given its inherent reliance on numerical properties, may not adequately explain.

The research relies wholly on secondary data from journal articles, policy documents, online reports, government documents and reports, scholarly articles, and records of intergovernmental as well as transnational organisations. These collections of data give credible and useful perspective into the fundamental history of U.S. foreign policy projection, the nagging problems of homelessness and racialised inequality in America and Nigerian migration aspiration, while using critical analysis provides for analytical evaluation of the key issues of homelessness in America amid westward African migration. Additionally, the study used relative viewpoint to examine the effect of homelessness and racialised inequality in America on U.S. international image with regards to Nigerian migration aspiration and African westward exodus.

Historical Overview of Homelessness in America and Its Contradictions

Homelessness in the United States has long been a paradoxical phenomenon in the world's richest economy. While America projects itself as a model of prosperity and democracy abroad, its urban landscapes are increasingly marked by tents, shelters, and sprawling encampments. This contradiction has attracted a growing body of scholarship interrogating the structural, social, and ideological underpinnings of homelessness, particularly as it intersects with capitalism, racial inequality, and state governance (Richard, 2025; Castellanos, 2024; Thurston, 2025).

A dominant perspective in the literature links homelessness to the dynamics of capitalism and the commodification of housing. Scholars argue that under neoliberal capitalism, housing is treated less as a social right and more as an investment commodity (Perucca et. al., 2023; Bezgrebelna et al., 2023). This financialisation of real estate has driven up costs, displaced vulnerable populations, and intensified inequality. The U.S. experience reflects what some recent studies term "advanced marginality," where global cities combine immense wealth with widespread poverty and spatial exclusion (Clerici & Ricotta, 2025). Thus, homelessness is not an aberration but a by-product of the structural logic of American capitalism. Another line of analysis emphasises the intersection of mental health, substance abuse, and carceral or incarceration policies. Recent work shows how the deinstitutionalisation of psychiatric care and insufficient community-based supports leave many vulnerable individuals exposed to homelessness and incarceration (Butler et al., 2024; Goldshear et al., 2025). Simultaneously, the "war on drugs", punitive policing and the expanding carceral state pathologise poverty – criminalising those who are unhoused rather than addressing structural causes (Jacobs et al., 2023). This contributes to a revolving door between prisons, shelters, and the streets.

Homelessness in America is deeply racialised. African-Americans constitute about 13% of the population but nearly 40% of the homeless (HUD, 2023). Scholars link this to historical injustices such as slavery, Jim Crow, redlining, and discriminatory housing policies (Gerken et al., 2023; Riley, 2024). These legacies of racial capitalism have produced structural exclusion from property ownership, wealth accumulation, and housing security (Thurston, 2025; Whitlow, 2024). As recent analyses show, eviction

disproportionately affects Black renters and families, perpetuating cycles of displacement and instability (Hepburn et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2024). Thus, homelessness cannot be understood outside the long duration of racialised inequality in the United States.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed the fragility of the American housing system. While wealthier citizens sheltered in place, the unhoused were doubly vulnerable – lacking both protection from the virus and state support. Emergency eviction moratoria temporarily slowed displacement, but as Desmond and Kimbro (2021) note, structural vulnerabilities quickly resurfaced once protections were lifted. The pandemic underscored homelessness not simply as a personal tragedy but as a public health crisis, illustrating the inability of the U.S. welfare model to protect its most marginalised citizens during systemic shocks.

Homelessness in America also challenges the ideology of American exceptionalism – the belief that the United States is uniquely prosperous, democratic, and morally superior. Critical scholars show how exceptionalist narratives obscure systemic inequality and governance failures (Chomsky & Robinson, 2024). Internationally, images of tent cities in Los Angeles or San Francisco disrupt the U.S.'s projection of itself as a model for others. America's inability to resolve its own crises erodes its credibility to lecture others on governance and human rights (Castellanos, 2024).

Finally, the literature highlights the hypocrisy and double standards embedded in U.S. foreign-policy narratives. African poverty, slums, and migration are often criminalised or depicted as evidence of poor governance (Regilme, 2023; Duong, 2025). Yet America's own homelessness crisis is sanitised, and portrayed as unfortunate but temporary, or attributed to individual pathology. This selective framing sustains U.S. hegemony while undermining African states' legitimacy. Taken together, the literature demonstrates that homelessness in the United States is a structural, racialised, and politically managed crisis that destabilises its global image. By reviewing these debates, this section establishes the historical and conceptual foundation for the subsequent analysis of how such contradictions shape Nigerian migration aspirations and complicate U.S.–Africa relations.

Discussion

The contradictions of American domestic reality have profound implications for Nigerian migration aspirations. While the U.S. continues to present itself as the world's premier destination for opportunity, freedom, and prosperity, the material realities confronting many migrants often reveal structural precarity, racialised exclusion, and even homelessness. Nigerian migration thus embodies a duality: the aspirational allure of the "American Dream" on the one hand, and disillusionment upon encountering the lived realities of inequality and marginalisation on the other.

The Aspirational Allure of the United States

For decades, the U.S. has projected itself as the apex of modernity and opportunity. Nigerian migrants – students, professionals, and low-skilled workers alike – are drawn by narratives of upward mobility, advanced education, and global prestige (Pressley, 2022; Tuki, 2024). This aspirational migration is fuelled by U.S. cultural exports, social media portrayals, and diaspora success stories that present America as a space where talent is rewarded and dreams fulfilled. Yet, as Velseboer (2025) cautions, such "migration aspirations" often overestimate opportunities while underestimating structural barriers.

Homelessness, Job Insecurity, and Racialised Marginality

On arrival, many Nigerian migrants encounter a harsher reality. Employment opportunities are frequently low-paying, precarious, or exploitative, especially for undocumented migrants or those on restrictive visas (Ornek, 2022). Racial discrimination further compounds exclusion, as African migrants are often doubly marginalised, seen as both "Black" and "foreign" (KFF / LA Times Survey, 2023). Some face housing insecurity and homelessness, mirroring broader U.S. racial disparities in poverty and shelter (HUD, 2023). This gap between aspiration and reality breeds disillusionment, undermining the very foundations of the American Dream.

The U.S. Visa Regime: Exploitation and Resource Drain

The U.S. visa system functions not only as a gatekeeper but as a mechanism of structural exploitation. Temporary visas often tie migrants to specific employers, enabling exploitative conditions akin to bonded labour (Economic Policy Institute, 2024). Meanwhile, the "brain drain" effect drains Nigeria of skilled professionals, particularly in medicine, technology, and academia, who migrate to the U.S. but seldom return while in their years of bloom (Okafor & Chimereze, 2023).

Added to exploitation and resource drain is disillusionment, which carries significant psychological consequences. Studies on African migrant communities in the U.S. show heightened stress, depression, and alienation when expectations clash with lived realities (Osuji, 2019). The clash between the imagined America of prosperity and the real America of exclusion and precarity creates what Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o describes in another context as "cognitive dissonance" – a profound misalignment between narrative and experience (Zaier & Maina, 2023). For Nigerians, this often manifests in fractured identities and feelings of betrayal, with migrants caught between admiration for American ideals and the trauma of marginalisation.

Beyond personal experiences, Nigerian migrants are also exposed to contradictions in U.S. foreign policy. While Washington promotes democracy and human rights in Africa, many migrants witness first-hand America's struggles with homelessness, racial violence, and inequality. This generates scepticism about U.S. credibility, reinforcing perceptions of double standards (Alao, 2023). For some, this experience reorients political consciousness, spurring solidarity with global movements such as Black Lives Matter while questioning U.S. hegemony in Africa.

Toward Rethinking Migration and National Aspiration

The cumulative effect of these contradictions is a growing awareness that migration to the U.S. cannot be a sustainable strategy for Nigerian development. Scholars such as Orji et al (2025) argue that over-reliance on migration as an "escape valve" undermines domestic innovation and policy reform. Instead, there is a pressing need for Nigeria to redirect national aspirations toward internal development and Afrocentric engagement, rather than constructing its future on the fragile edifice of the American Dream. Soft power, as Joseph S. Nye Jr. famously argued, is the ability of a country to shape the preferences of others through attraction rather than coercion. The United States has long leveraged soft power – through media, culture, education, and democracy promotion – to consolidate its global influence. Yet, critical scholarship challenges this benign view, exposing soft power as a form of strategic deception designed to mask coercive interests (Pérez Ruiz, 2019; Blair et al., 2022).

In Africa, U.S. soft power often appears as a contradiction. On the one hand, Washington funds development aid, promotes democratic reforms, and presents itself as Africa's partner. On the other

hand, the same U.S. foreign-policy establishment has been implicated in regime-change operations, destabilising interventions, and covert support for wars that have left African nations weakened (Chin & Bartos, 2024; Nyiayaana & Nwankpa, 2022). The Cold War saw the U.S. back anti-communist strongmen across the continent, from Mobutu in Zaire to military juntas in Nigeria, often undermining the very democratic values it claimed to champion.

The credibility gap widened in the post-9/11 era, when U.S. foreign policy in Africa was increasingly militarised under the banner of counter-terrorism. Programmes like United States Africa Command (AFRICOM) and security-assistance initiatives positioned the U.S. as Africa's protector, but critics note that these often exacerbated conflicts, securitised governance, and legitimised authoritarian regimes (Nyiayaana & Nwankpa, 2022; Chin & Bartos, 2024). Meanwhile, the domestic spectacle of U.S. homelessness, racial unrest, and political division contradicts the very image America projects abroad. Structural domestic issues erode U.S. legitimacy abroad, revealing soft power as a fragile tool when not matched by domestic credibility (Lewis, 2024). For Nigerian migrants, this duplicity resonates directly. They are confronted with an America that markets itself as a land of dreams yet simultaneously exports instability and perpetuates structural dependency in their home region. The outcome is a double disillusionment: disillusionment with the American Dream on U.S. soil, and disillusionment with American foreign policy abroad.

Nigerian Migration Dreams and the American Landscape

Migration to the United States has historically carried the allure of personal advancement and family upliftment. Remittances from Nigerian migrants are celebrated domestically by the Nigerian government as a key contributor to the economy – over $20 billion annually (World Bank, 2022). This reinforces migration as a national aspiration, even as the realities of exclusion, marginalisation, and disillusionment grow sharper. The "American Dream" continues to serve as a cultural script that shapes Nigerian migration choices. Nollywood films, U.S. hip-hop culture, and diaspora success stories reinforce imaginaries of prosperity abroad (Patrizi, 2022). For many young Nigerians, the U.S. embodies a place where hard work translates into social mobility – a stark contrast to perceived stagnation and corruption at home. Yet migration is often less about actual opportunities and more about the symbolic meanings attached to destinations (Alabi, 2024).

The lived reality, however, is often far removed from the dream. Nigerian migrants, particularly those without elite educational credentials or secure documentation, frequently occupy the lower rungs of the labour market (Jack-Vickers, 2024). They face racialised barriers in housing, employment, and healthcare access, mirroring broader patterns of structural racism in the U.S. (Corra, 2023). Some even confront homelessness, as evidenced by rising reports of African immigrants in New York and Los Angeles struggling with shelter insecurity (Migrants Rights Network, 2021). This disjuncture between aspiration and reality produces a complex set of outcomes: economic remittances may flow home, but the social and psychological toll on migrants themselves is heavy. Families in Nigeria may idealise diaspora life, while migrants abroad wrestle with precarious livelihoods and cultural dislocation.

Thus, migration to the United States represents a dialectic of hope and disillusionment. Hope, because America still functions as a symbol of possibility. Disillusionment arises because the harsh realities of exclusion undermine both personal well-being and the credibility of America's moral authority. These contradictions are not new – they reflect enduring structures of dependency, where

African resources and aspirations are systematically channelled to sustain Western dominance (Mlambo et al., 2024). Moreover, contemporary critique emphasises that developmental aid and foreign interventions often reinforce rather than dismantle neocolonial patterns of control and extraction (Smilak & Putnam, 2022).

Strategic Implications for Migrants

The contradictions between America's projected image and its domestic realities have strategic implications for Nigeria and other African countries. Migration to the United States is not merely an individual decision but a structural phenomenon embedded in historical dependencies, global inequalities, and foreign policy contradictions. This section explores how these dynamics undermine U.S. moral authority, necessitate Nigerian diplomatic recalibration, and highlight the dangers of building national aspirations on a fragile model of development.

The visibility of homelessness, racialised inequality, and political dysfunction in the United States has weakened its soft power credibility in Africa. Scholars argue that foreign policy influence rests not only on coercion but also on moral authority (Gallup, 2024; Aras et al., 2025). Yet, America's domestic crises reveal that it struggles with many of the same issues it criticises in Africa, namely poor governance, inequality, and corruption. For Nigeria, this delegitimises U.S. claims to offer a model of democracy or development, creating space for alternative partnerships with China, Russia, and intra-African initiatives. Nigeria's dependence on migration as a development strategy, reflected in heavy reliance on remittances, creates long-term vulnerabilities. Remittances may relieve poverty temporarily, but they cannot substitute for structural transformation at home (Akanbi & Yusuf, 2024). Nigeria must therefore rethink its diplomatic and migratory strategies, prioritising policies that address unemployment, brain drain, and youth disillusionment domestically. Recalibrating foreign policy away from uncritical alignment with the U.S. toward Afrocentric and South-South cooperation would strengthen Nigeria's autonomy in global affairs (Adebajo, 2023).

Migration to the United States cannot be understood without recognising its historical continuities with slavery, colonialism, and racial capitalism. The African presence in America was first constructed through forced migration, whose legacies continue to shape contemporary racial hierarchies and migration policies. The U.S. economy was built on enslaved African labour, which generated wealth in agriculture, shipping, and finance (Rhode, 2024). This history positions Africans not merely as migrants but as foundational contributors to American wealth. Nigerian migration today must be situated within this continuity: while contemporary migrants arrive voluntarily, they still confront a racialised structure rooted in slavery's afterlives (Aregbeshola et al., 2024).

Africa's underdevelopment was deliberately engineered through colonial extraction, and postcolonial dependency theory reveals that migration flows to the U.S. perpetuate this structural dependency: African talent fuels Western economies while Africa remains underdeveloped (Chikwendu & Agbanyim, 2023). Nigeria's ongoing loss of doctors, academics, and professionals to the U.S. exemplifies this neo-colonial drain of resources (Ajoseh et al., 2024; Ebeye & Lee, 2023). From the Chinese Exclusion Act to the 1965 U.S. Immigration Act, migration policies have always been racialised. African migrants face disproportionate scrutiny, long visa queues, and hostile border regimes. Contemporary restrictions, such as U.S. travel bans on African countries, reproduce the criminalisation

of Black mobility, echoing what recent scholarship describes as the "necropolitics" of global migration management (Augustine-Adams et al., 2025).

Nonetheless, historical continuities link from chains to visa traps. While chains have been replaced by passports and visa regimes, African mobility remains structurally constrained. The U.S. visa system creates dependency, extracting resources through fees, testing, and restrictive conditions, while limiting pathways to permanent security. In this sense, modern migration reproduces the historical logic of exploitation – Africans continue to contribute labour and capital to the West while remaining excluded from full belonging. Nigeria's over-reliance on the U.S. as a model of governance, prosperity, and migration success carries significant dangers. The "American Dream" itself is under siege within the United States, as inequality widens and social mobility stagnates (Equitable Growth, 2025). By framing development through U.S. benchmarks, Nigeria risks importing contradictions, such as homelessness, neoliberal austerity, and racialised exclusion, into its own society. A sustainable national aspiration must instead be built on internal innovation, Pan-African solidarity, and indigenous development strategies.

Conclusion

The analysis has shown that homelessness, inequality, and racial injustice profoundly undermine the U.S.'s claim to moral leadership. The contradiction between its global projection of prosperity and its domestic crisis of shelter erodes its soft power credibility. For Africa – and Nigeria in particular – this raises fundamental questions about the reliability of America as a developmental model. Nigerian migration to the United States reflects both the seductive power of soft power and the crushing weight of disillusionment. While the American Dream continues to animate aspirations, the reality for many migrants is one of exclusion, precarity, and even homelessness. This exposes the Dream as a mirage, one that sustains U.S. hegemony but delivers little for those who sacrifice to chase it.

U.S. foreign policy in Africa has long depended on moral authority, projecting itself as a defender of democracy and human rights. Yet its domestic failures particularly homelessness, inequality, and racial violence, collapse this high ground. Soft power, once a tool of attraction, now reveals itself as strategic deception. This delegitimisation opens new spaces for African countries to chart their own paths. Nigeria stands at a crossroads. To continue anchoring its aspirations on U.S. models risks replicating systemic contradictions and deepening dependency. To move forward, Nigeria must adopt a bold recalibration of foreign policy, grounded in Afrocentrism and self-reliance. This means asserting agency in migration governance, resisting exploitative visa regimes, and privileging African integration over Western dependency.

The way forward lies in a Pan-African, Afrocentric global engagement model. Nigeria must champion African unity, deepen South-South cooperation, and construct developmental strategies that align with African realities rather than Western illusions. Afrocentrism offers both a philosophy and a policy framework: to see Africa as the centre of its own story, to embrace indigenous knowledge and resilience, and to project a vision of global engagement that is rooted in dignity, sovereignty, and shared humanity.

In conclusion, the U.S. homelessness crisis is more than a domestic social problem – it is a symbol of the fragility of America's image and the limits of its soft power. For Nigeria, this crisis offers an urgent lesson: building national aspirations on the mirage of American exceptionalism is a dangerous gamble. Afrocentrism provides the intellectual, cultural, and political compass for Nigeria to move

beyond dependency, dismantle illusions, and build a future that is authentically African and globally credible.

Recommendations

The evidence and analysis presented point to the urgent need for Nigeria to redefine its migration, diplomatic, and development strategies. The following recommendations are therefore proposed:

Embed Afrocentrism in Foreign Policy: Nigeria must move beyond a U.S.-centric lens of aspiration and reposition its foreign policy around Afrocentrism – a worldview that centres Africa's agency, history, and priorities (Omotuyi et al., 2024). This requires privileging African solutions, partnerships within ECOWAS and the African Union, and collective bargaining in global forums. Afrocentrism offers Nigeria an ideological anchor to reject dependency and assert leadership in crafting continental futures. This also flows directly and seamlessly with Afrocentric Diplomacy: by strengthening regional integration (AfCFTA, ECOWAS), Nigeria can redirect aspirations toward Africa rather than the West.

Migration Diplomacy for Dignity: Nigeria must negotiate migration partnerships that protect its citizens abroad while discouraging exploitative visa practices. This requires that Nigeria develops a coherent migration diplomacy agenda that demands fairer treatment of its citizens abroad, challenges exploitative visa practices, and negotiates bilateral labour agreements that protect migrant rights. Such diplomacy must be Afrocentric – defending Africans globally while rejecting the criminalisation of African mobility.

Rethink Development Beyond Remittances and Diaspora Engagement: Instead of uncritical celebration of remittances, Nigeria should develop frameworks to channel diaspora skills and investment into sustainable development. While remittances remain vital, they cannot form the backbone of national development strategy. Therefore, Nigeria must channel diaspora resources into structured investment programmes, entrepreneurship, and technology transfer that serve national and continental priorities, rather than perpetuating brain drain.

Transform National Media Narratives: Nigerian media often reproduces U.S. exceptionalist narratives, reinforcing migration illusions. Nigerian media should present a more balanced portrayal of U.S. realities, countering the mythologised version of America that drives aspirational migration. An Afrocentric media strategy should highlight both the harsh realities of life abroad and the potential of building prosperity within Africa. By reshaping narratives, Nigeria can weaken the psychological hold of the American Dream.

Invest in Youth Empowerment and Homegrown Aspirations: Structural reforms targeting unemployment, education, and housing will reduce the "push factors" of migration. The state must address the root causes of mass migration: unemployment, corruption, insecurity, and underinvestment in education. Afrocentric governance requires harnessing Nigeria's demographic dividend, ensuring that Nigerian youth see Africa, not America, as the future.

The strategic implications are clear. Nigeria must reassess its relationship with the United States, rejecting uncritical migration dependence and rethinking its global engagement. The U.S. homelessness crisis symbolises a deeper fragility in American society, exposing the risks of constructing African futures on American myths. By situating migration within historical continuities of slavery, colonial dependency, and racialised control, this section underscores the urgency of an Afrocentric reorientation that privileges self-reliance, regional solidarity, and postcolonial emancipation.

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