



The Bright Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa

By Dayo Olopade

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"A hopeful narrative about a continent on the rise." —*New York Times Book Review*

"For anyone who wants to understand how the African economy really works, *The Bright Continent* is a good place to start." —*Reuters*

Dayo Olopade knew from personal experience that Western news reports on conflict, disease, and poverty obscure the true story of modern Africa. And so she crossed sub-Saharan Africa to document how ordinary people deal with their daily challenges. She found what cable news ignores: a continent of ambitious reformers and young social entrepreneurs, driven by *kanju*—creativity born of African difficulty. It's a trait found in pioneers like Kenneth Nnebue, who turned cheap VHS tapes into the multimillion-dollar film industry Nollywood. Or Ushahidi, a technology collective that crowdsources citizen activism and disaster relief. A shining counterpoint to the conventional wisdom, *The Bright Continent* rewrites Africa's challenges as opportunities to innovate, and celebrates a history of doing more with less as a powerful model for the rest of the world.

"[An] upbeat study of development in Africa...The book is written more in wonder at African ingenuity than in anger at foreign incomprehension."
—*The New Yorker*

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Editorial Review

Review

“A corrective to Africa’s image as a dark, hopeless place...A hopeful narrative about a continent on the rise.” —*New York Times Book Review*

“[An] upbeat study of development in Africa...Despite evident exasperation at Western interventions that fail to adapt to local systems, the book is written more in wonder at African ingenuity than in anger at foreign incomprehension.” —*The New Yorker*

“[A] sweeping new work...A very ambitious book.” —Michel Martin, *Tell Me More*

“An excellent introduction to contemporary sub-Saharan African society and the region’s economy. Olopade’s optimism is refreshing.” —*Foreign Affairs*

“[Olopade] invites her readers to peer past the biases that inform western stereotypes of Africa and Africans...It’s time for the West to...start looking for smart investments in the continent’s abundant pool of intelligence and energy.” —*Boston Globe*

“[Olopade] seamlessly traverses the continent, threading a narrative that shows how African innovation is playing a vital role in its own development.” —*Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*

“[Olopade gives] a face to African entrepreneurship, and her suggestion...that Africa can be the guidepost for how the world should tighten its fiscal belt and ‘aim for the notch marked “Africa”’ is exciting.” —*The Root*

“Olopade has a slew of insights that will feel spot-on to anyone familiar with Africa—or, for that matter, with almost any developing economy...[*The Bright Continent*] is an optimistic vision, and one that’s steadily gaining traction in policy debates.” —*Bookforum*

“An ode to the virtues of the small in economics...[Olopade] gives a multitude of examples and a huge mass of fascinating detail. Her case is persuasive...For anyone who wants to understand how the African economy really works, *The Bright Continent* is a good place to start.” —*Reuters*

“*Bright Continent* will change your view of Africa. It’s that simple. Dayo Olopade looks with the eyes of a first-generation Nigerian-American and sees a landscape of ingenuity, technological innovation, and grit. A lively and enjoyable read.” —Anne-Marie Slaughter, President and CEO of the New America Foundation and Professor Emerita of Politics and International Affairs at Princeton University

“Dayo Olopade has written a book that bracingly lives up to its title. In it, an Africa we are all too unaccustomed to seeing comes vividly to life thanks to her restless eye and keen curiosity. It is one of local solutions born of necessity and local heroes who arise from even the most fragile soil.” —Howard French, Associate Professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism and author of *A Continent for the Taking*

“This book captures the complex thoughts of a whole generation of young Africans. Olopade shows Africa as it is, a complicated space occupied by real people with the desire and the power to shape our futures.”
—Uzodinma Iweala, author of *Beasts of No Nation*

“*The Bright Continent* is a long overdue and much needed corrective to the dominant perception of Africa. It is a book loaded with revelations of heroic, and often ingenious lives, all of which are eloquently and poignantly brought to life through Dayo’s brilliant observations.” —Dinaw Mengestu, author of *All Our Names*

“The Bright Continent is an absolute brightness. Sidestepping dead-end debates, the indefatigable Olopade maps out a contemporary Africa which is vital and self-reliant. Her definition of the Yoruba term kanju as ‘specific creativity born from African difficulty’ will enter the English language. Through strong reporting and clear thinking, Olopade demonstrates how to improve the lives of African youth stuck in a purgatory of ‘waithood.’ This is essential reading.” —J.M. Ledgard, longtime Africa correspondent, *The Economist*

“A new mental and strategic landscape, one based on possibilities, not merely perils...We should be grateful to Olopade.” —*The Plain Dealer*

“A painstakingly researched and lively tour of the people, institutions, and ideas currently at work on the continent.” —*The Africa Report*

“An exhilarating book. [Olopade’s] style is refreshingly breezy, and displays an inherent confidence that belies her youth...As this book successfully illustrates, the continent is following a trajectory that, despite all the ongoing challenges, is steadily in ascendance.” —*African Business Magazine*

“A refreshingly hopeful argument, well-grounded in data and observation.” —*Kirkus*

From the Inside Flap

The path to progress in Africa lies in the surprising and innovative solutions Africans are finding for themselves

Africa is a continent on the move. It’s often hard to notice, though the Western focus on governance and foreign aid obscures the individual dynamism and informal social adaptation driving the last decade of African development. Dayo Olopade set out across sub-Saharan Africa to find out how ordinary people are dealing with the challenges they face every day. She discovered an unexpected Africa: resilient, joyful, and innovative, a continent of DIY changemakers and impassioned community leaders.

Everywhere Olopade went, she witnessed the specific creativity born from African difficulty a trait she began calling kanju. It’s embodied by bootstrapping innovators like Kenneth Nnebue, who turned his low-budget, straight-to-VHS movies into a multi-million-dollar film industry known as Nollywood. Or Soyapi Mumba, who helped transform cast-off American computers into touchscreen databases that allow hospitals across Malawi to process patients in seconds. Or Ushahidi, the Kenyan technology collective that crowdsources citizen activism and disaster relief.

“The Bright Continent” calls for a necessary shift in our thinking about Africa. Olopade shows us that the increasingly globalized challenges Africa faces can and must be addressed with the tools Africans are already using to solve these problems themselves. Africa’s ability to do more with less to transform bad aid and bad government into an opportunity to innovate is a clear ray of hope amid the dire headlines, and a powerful model for the rest of the world.

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From the Back Cover

For anyone who wants to understand how the African economy really works, *The Bright Continent* is a good place to start. *Reuters*

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[An] upbeat study of development in Africa . . . The book is written more in wonder at African ingenuity than in anger at foreign incomprehension. *The New Yorker*

Dayo Olopade is a Nigerian-American journalist covering global politics, development policy, and technology. Dayo has been a correspondent in Washington and in Nairobi, reporting for publications including *The Atlantic*, the *Daily Beast*, *Foreign Policy*, the *New Republic*, the *New York Times*, and the *Washington Post*. She holds BA, JD, and MBA degrees from Yale University, and currently lives in New York."

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Charlotte Womble:

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Continent: Breaking Rules and Making Change in Modern Africa.

Gary Roth:

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