

### **Eyewitness Eritrea: Reflections from a Ghanaian Perspective**

2019 marks the 400 year that the first slaves from Africa were forcefully displaced to Jamestown, Virginia. To commemorate this chilling moment, President Nana Akufo-Addo of the Republic of Ghana, my home country, formally declared in 2018 that 2019 would be marked the “Year of Return.” Since the launch of the Year of Return, several members of the Diaspora and people all around the world have descended on the shores of Ghana to partake in the countless historical and cultural events and activities intended to educate the masses of Ghana’s rich history. Just this year, Ghana has been recognized as [the fastest growing economies in the world](#), it has been “[heralded as the next big tourist destination](#),” and a prime destination for business and investments. Born and raised in the heart of Accra, Ghana, all of this made me proud. I came to the United States ashamed of my heritage and often hid it from others, but as an adult, I have never been so eager to share this part of my identify with others. Despite all of these notable milestones, some opinions believe that the [Ghana’s leaders have failed its people](#); and I agree.

My recent trip to Eritrea was filled with so many emotions. From my experience, Africans learn more about European and American history and culture than we do about our neighboring countries. As a Ghanaian, I did not have the luxury of learning a lot about other African countries and so I brace myself every time I step foot on new African soil. But what I experienced in Eritrea challenged and stretched me in ways I could have not imagined. I often wondered if I was really in Africa because of the cleanliness of the tiled sidewalks and paved streets, the genuine kindness and generosity of the people and get this, no traffic! I was taken back by the lack of visible signs of socio-economic disparity and shocked when I met with the nation’s leaders and business owners who wore the same sandals ordinary Eritreans wore, and did not roam with security details or personal cars. The Eritrean system was a shock to my part West African system. It contradicted so many of what I have experienced as a Ghanaian all my life. For the first time in my life, it felt as if I was getting an intensive history lesson on who we are as Africans. It was refreshing to witness first hand just how people-centered Eritreans are and the commitment of the government and its people in ensuring that everyone benefits from the economic development agenda. In Eritrea, citizens are obligated to actively participate in the development of the nation and its people. Schools are supported not only by the government, but by the communities where they are based. Education and healthcare are free, children are taught in their own languages, farming communities mobilize, with little assistance from the government, to build irrigation systems to support with water conservation efforts, and perhaps the most intriguing observation, corruption is non-existence.

As I reflect on the transformational experience I had in Eritrea and compare it to the realities of my own country, I am reminded of Mark 8:36 which says, “For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?” From being the first in Africa to earn its independence from colonial masters, to now being recognized as a premier tourist destination, it is easy to assume that Ghana (and Ghanaians) are done very well. Despite all its efforts, socio-economic disparity is high, many of the country’s infrastructure remain undeveloped, ordinary citizens are constantly left in the dark with unscheduled electricity outages, and the education and healthcare systems are disastrous. Ghana may have gained a lot of fame and fortune, but corruption is rampant and many of its citizens remain hopeless. Like Ghana, Eritrea’s cultural heritage is heavily steeped in community. My hope is that in all of the excitement, Ghana will pause and carefully look to Eritrea as an example for how it ought to approach its stickiest problems.