

CHINUA ACHEBE: THE VISIONARY STORYTELLER



"Chinua Achebe - Buffalo 25Sep2008 crop" by Stuart C. Shapiro is licensed under [CC BY 3.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/).

Joya Uraizee, PhD
Saint Louis University
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THE VISIONARY

Achebe:

- ▶ rewrote African history
- ▶ had a distinctive political vision
- ▶ had a unique world view
- ▶ was a master storyteller



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ACHEBE REWRITES AFRICAN HISTORY

Nigeria:

▶ c9-c16: ancient kingdoms, c10: Arab traders, c16-18: European explorers

▶ 1840s-1850s: British traders (*Things Fall Apart*)

▶ 1861-1914: British missionaries (*Arrow of God*)

▶ 1914-1960: British administrators (*No Longer at Ease*)

▶ 1960s: independence, civil war (*A Man of the People*)

▶ 1970s: military dictatorships (*Anthills of the Savannah*)

▶ 1990s-present: democracy, presidential system



Source: <https://www.enchantedlearning.com/africa/nigeria/>

ACHEBE REWRITES AFRICAN HISTORY contd.

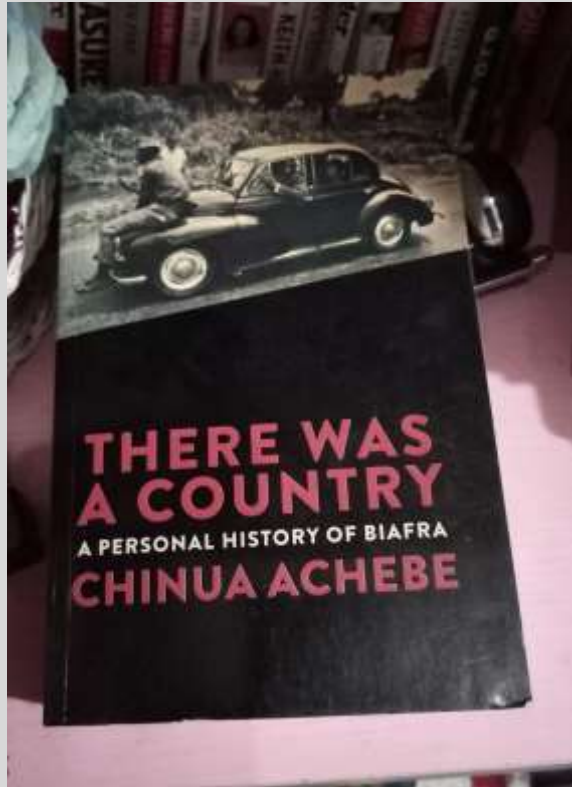
- ▶ *Things Fall Apart*: some British laws.
- ▶ *Arrow of God*: all-powerful British administrators
- ▶ *No Longer at Ease*: pre-independence.
- ▶ *A Man of the People*: pre-civil war
- ▶ *Anthills of the Savannah*: pre-dictatorship
- ▶ “[African] societies . . . had a philosophy of great depth . . . poetry, and . . . dignity. It is this dignity that African people . . . lost during the colonial period” (“The Role of a Writer”).



"Love The Strand. Just bought 'Things Fall Apart' by Chinua Achebe" by Paul Young is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](#).

ACHEBE REWRITES AFRICAN HISTORY

contd.



"A Novel written by Chinua Achebe" by Sarah Ladipo Manyaki. Eugenia Abu.
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Achebe:

▣ describes festivals & events (yam festival, Week of Peace) to vividly re-create Igbo village life

▣ depicts a lifestyle that was flawed, but had a sense of bonding & communal harmony

ACHEBE REWITES AFRICAN HISTORY

contd.

▶ The government spends £35,000 on new houses for each of the new ministers (*No Longer at Ease* 78).

▶ The Minister of Culture has no idea who the best novelists in his country are; he removes water pipes from villages who don't vote for him (*A Man of the People*).

▶ Beatrice organizes a female-centered naming ceremony for her domestic help, Elewa's baby girl; she picks a male name (*Anthills of the Savannah* 206).



"Destroyed water and sewer pipes by elephants in Kariba" by Sustainable sanitation is licensed under [CC BY 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/).

ACHEBE'S POLITICAL VISION

▶ Obi left “the wad of notes . . . where he had placed it for the rest of the day and all night. Obi placed a newspaper over it and secured the door” (*No Longer at Ease* 192).

▶ “I [Ezeulu] want to wrestle with my own people . . . I am going home to challenge all those who have been poking their fingers into my face to come outside their gate and meet me in combat” (*Arrow of God* 179).



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— ACHEBE'S POLITICAL VISION contd.

▶ Nanga and Koko [politicians] are “greedy eaters” who consume the national cake as a reward for political office (*A Man of the People*).

▶ Politicians, like the shopkeeper Josiah, have “taken away enough for the owner to notice . . . Josiah has now removed enough for the owner to see him” (*A Man of the People* 87).



Source: <https://www.theheritagetimes.com/>

ACHEBE'S WORLD VIEW

▶ The writer writes for individuals & societies; too much individualism is bad (Okonkwo); individual flaws destroy communities (Ezeulu)

▶ Truth is dualistic; tragedies have multiple causes. Were the British the catalyst or the cause of Okonkwo's death? Was Umuofia destroyed by Ezeulu's arrogance or by British colonial rule?



"Dualism" by James Ogley is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/).

ACHEBE'S STORYTELLING STYLE



"Folktales shelf sign" by tamara_cox1 is licensed under [CC BY-SA 2.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/).

▶ has oral elements in it (proverbs, folktales), e.g. the story of why Tortoise has an uneven shell (*Things Fall Apart*)

▶ the storyteller is more important than the story, e.g. the village elder in *Anthills of the Savannah* who says that stories are everlasting (141, 114).

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