This research explores the deep prehistorical roots of the differences in the level of corruption among countries. Utilizing the historical path of the exodus of human species from Africa as an exogenous source of variance in national population diversity, the paper shows that the differences in ethnic diversity between economies partly account for the variation in corruption levels and its persistent nature. In the study we focus on 151 modern economies from the period 1960 to 2017. The findings suggestively reflect the role of distrust, institutional quality, economic development, and the high cost of coordination to perpetuate corruption. In documenting these results, the study presents an overarching and intuitive explanation for the cross-country differences in corruption levels regardless of the wealth level, colonial history, legal origin, or political system of a country.