

“African Mobility: A historical perspective of immigration in the U.S.”

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Abstract

Although there is much study devoted to the general understanding of immigration, especially concerning the larger migrating groups of Asian and Latino individuals, little has been done regarding African immigrants. More specifically, American immigration history regarding Africans, reveal that through the 1965 and 1990 policies, doors opened for African immigrants to enter the United States. This would be, in addition to, international education opportunities. Even more, the 2000 and 2010 Census figures, along with recent reports from Migration Policy Institute, give us an eye-opening view of the high numbers and characteristics of these migrants. This paper will, therefore, provide a brief literature review about African immigration in the United States.

Introduction

Although there is much study devoted to the general understanding of immigration, especially concerning the larger migrating groups of Asian and Latino individuals, little has been done regarding African immigrants. More specifically, American immigration history regarding Africans, reveal that through the 1965 and 1990 policies, doors opened for African immigrants to enter the United States. This would be, in addition to, international education opportunities. Even more, the 2000 and 2010 Census figures, along with recent reports from Migration Policy Institute give us an eye-opening view of the high numbers and characteristics of these migrants. This paper will, therefore, provide a brief literature review about African immigration in the United States.

U.S. Immigration History

As the national dialogue regarding immigration policy continues, it is helpful to understand some historical background for immigration in the U.S. To begin, for purposes of this paper, this author will consider immigrants (voluntary) to be defined as those non-native persons who have voluntarily moved into another country with the purpose of permanent resettlement (" Merriam-Webster," 2017). While there are a number of policy categories for which this term could fit, focused attention will be given to those who came through Diversity lottery visa and as international students. Through American immigration policy and international education programs, the number of African immigrants has risen dramatically. We begin first in the industrial age (years 1760 to about 1840). The first immigrants coming to the U.S. were Chinese workers. Chinese laborer contracts were made between the United States and China at the time. As a result, many Chinese were hired specifically to help build the Transcontinental Railway (Mosisa, 2002,p4). However, as Chinese laborers continued to come to America in large numbers, restrictions were put in place to limit such increases through the Chinese Exclusionary Act. This first piece of legislation limited the number of Chinese passengers to fifteen per ship. However, this would not last long as it interfered with international relations between the U.S. and China.

On the other hand, as Chinese laborers decreased, the 1900s became a time when European immigration rose in America. During that era, immigrants primarily came from southern and eastern Europe. These groups were often classified as poorly educated, having cultural and language differences, and sustaining a mass religious belief in Roman Catholicism (Mosisa, 2002, p. 4).

Due to the backgrounds of these immigrants. in 1917, Congress endorsed the Literacy Act in order to restrain European immigration. Following suit, in 1921 the Emergency Quota Act was passed in order to give more discretion regarding background checks according to nationality or country of origin (Mosisa, 2002,p. 4). As immigrants continued flowing, the United States Congress would evolve with continuous restrictions by passing the National Origin Acts of 1924 and then a quota system with the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952. Finally, 1965 brought the Immigration and Nationality Act which took away “national origin, race, or ancestry quotas” for immigration in the United States (Mosisa, 2002,p. 4). This particular legislation was created for and led to the reunification of immigrant families with ties to America.

With this significant change in the 1965 policy, a new door was opened to a wave of immigrants especially between the years 1965-2000. Immigrants from Europe decreased by 74.5 percent to 15.3 percent, whereas, the number from Latin America increased dramatically from 9.3 percent to 51 percent (Mosisa, 2002, p. 4). From the 1965 Act, the formation and birth of the 1990 Diversity Visa (DV Lottery) program changed the face of those who were considered able to immigrate to the United States. In this particular case, the Diversity Visa program allowed for persons, who met high application requirements, and whose country had low numbers in the U.S. The immediate result, of those selected and approved, was the automatic status of permanent legal residency. Moreover, with five to six years of permanent residency in the U.S, those persons now qualified for American citizenship. As a result, Asian and African immigrants benefited tremendously.

According to reports from the American Immigration Council, the number of African immigrants grew remarkably through the DV program. That is, from 1965, the number of African immigrants tripled compared to previous decades. By 1995, about 40,000 Africans were being admitted

U.S. Immigration-Diversity Lottery

Strategic Use of Mexico to Restrict South American Access to Diversity lottery

To help us navigate this Diversity program, Wardle enlightens us with his observation. That is, through the “1990 Act”, diversity lottery aimed at bringing immigrants to the U.S. giving higher priority to countries that had low number of immigrants in the US. A total of 55,000 people from six regions were admitted annually. Countries with the lowest numbers would be granted more visas (Wardle, 2005, p 1963). In viewing the numbers, regions with the most immigrants already, were Asia and North America (which includes Mexico). Therefore, fewer visas have been given to members belonging to North America and Asia, while more have been given to Europe and Africa. Moreover, less visas were given to members coming from South America, even though their numbers are relatively small for non-diversity immigrants compared to Europe (Wardle, 2005, p 1964). For instance, according to Wardle in 2004,

“South America accounted for approximately 8% of all non-diversity immigrant admissions, significantly less than the 12% that came from Europe. In that same year, almost 38% of all Diversity Visa immigrants came from Europe, but only 3% of all diversity immigrants came from the continental South America.”

Furthermore, by defining the South American region to include the Caribbean, Central America and Mexico, Wardle asserts that the writers of Diversity Lottery were able to craft this policy in order to effectively restrict a specific ethnic group’s access to the lottery while allowing for more numbers from European and African Immigrants (Wardle, 2005, p 1964).

To further discuss this, Warble contends that previous immigration policy in the 1960’s focused on family reunification. But with the DV lottery in place, legislatures were influenced by three aspects. That is, international cooperation, “open society”, and rule of law (Wardle, 2005, p 1969). International cooperation is seen as, looking at another country or nations’ interest and comparing it to the U.S. The lens being used, determines the need to either create more equal income and opportunities or assist in alleviating the pressures of such migration. “Open society” is seen as the acceptance of other people from other nations because they could be a positive contribution both culturally and economically (Wardle 2005, p 1970). Rule of law principle maintains that the policymakers

should act on the policies that citizens are willing to pay in the enforcement of. In addition to this, Wardle also contends that the DV program was hopeful in gaining immigrants that were highly skilled and wealthy in order to help address concerns with domestic economic concerns. With this in mind, it was argued on the House floor to restructure the DV proposal so that there would be a counting system by regions. So, if the South American continent only included South America, then Mexico, the Caribbean, and Central America would have comparable numbers to those coming from Europe and Africa. Wardle continues to argue that with congress trying to diversify the population through geographical region choices; it is a politically neutral move for these lawmakers. He also asks the question, if Congress was only interested in the diversity through regions, why group together Latin America?

Wardle concludes that ultimately removing these region-specific definitions and truly randomizing the process would give all an equal chance at DV lottery. In this way, there is a clear distinction that he values the individual contribution of immigrants as he quotes Professor Stephen Legomsky that, “Countries don’t immigrate, people do” (Wardle, 2005, p 1992).

Critical Race Theory in Three Acts: Racial Profiling, Affirmative Action, and the Diversity lottery

Within the confines of legislative law production, Romero also reports that those on the Conservative side prefer Diversity lottery over those who are considered liberal. Like a lottery, many people enter their names in order to be randomly selected by computer to immigrate to the United States, yet, few actually receive these opportunities. For example, in 2000 and 2001, respectively, 13 and 8.7 million prospective immigrants applied for the DV lottery. But with DV lottery restrictions, only close to 50,000 were admitted (Romero, 2003, p 382). With these numbers in mind, Romero poses the question, “What value is preserved through Diversity lottery?” According to his discussion, for the Conservative lawmaker, DV lottery served as a way to “bring balance” to the post 1960’s influx of Asian and Latin-American immigrants (Romero, 2003, p 383). That is to say, it opened the door to previously denied areas for Europe and Asia.

Lived Experiences of Diversity Visa Lottery Immigrants in the U.S.

Hailu et al. studied the experiences of seven DV lottery winners from different parts of Africa. Participants in this study had lived in the United States for at least eighteen months. All participants had obtained at least two years of college education (DV Lottery Instructions-Requirement# 2) Hailu et al, 2012, p 8). Age ranges of participants were from 31 to 60 years old. Data was collected through demographic questionnaire and in-depth, face -to- face, one-on- one interview with phone follow-ups. This study was created in order to gather information about the participants' regard from the time they heard about winning the lottery up to the years of living in the U.S. The main themes generated from the findings were feelings, expectations, and experienced life in the U.S., access to training, and help for those who would apply for DV Lottery (Hailu et al, 2012, p11). Participants reported feeling lucky and very happy about winning the lottery yet also worried about life in a new place away from their family, friends, and other loved ones. For expectations, participants reported that before they won, they had unrealistic expectations of somehow becoming rich quickly because of what they had seen on television, movies or films of having a better life, better employment opportunities along with pathways to learn (Hailu et al, 2012, p12). Upon arrival to the U.S., they soon learned that life was not what they had expected. Words used to describe their experiences were “difficult, challenging, routine, lonely, tiresome, and stressful.” Some even stated that had they known what life would be like, there is a good chance that they would not have immigrated to the US. Regarding access to learning and training, with the exception of experiences where their accents caused people to see them as illiterate, participants recognized there are unrivalled opportunities to improve their chances for obtaining a better job by enrolling for further studies, but, it comes with a high cost. Finally, in thinking about future DV winners, participants specifically shared how important it was for winners to be prepared to endure difficulties for the first few years.

Because of these difficulties, they hoped there would be programs or agencies that would help DV winners with navigation of the U.S. health, education, and housing in the first critical months since they do not get much help from the federal government upon arrival. As a result, some participants of this study plan to return back to their home countries after raising more capital.

Additional Contributions to African Immigration in the United States

According to Gordon (1998), U.S. immigration data shows that 350 Africans immigrated to the United States between 1891 to the early 1900s. During the colonial period between 1900-1950s records continue to reflect numbers of over 31,000. These immigrants were primarily from Egypt and South Africa, since these countries were no longer un the colonial rule like the rest of Africa. (Gordon, 1998, p 84). Shortly after many African countries received their independence from colonial powers, other countries began to add to the numbers of matriculating immigrants. These would include Ethiopia, Kenya, Ghana, Tanzania, Nigeria, Uganda, and Cape Verde.

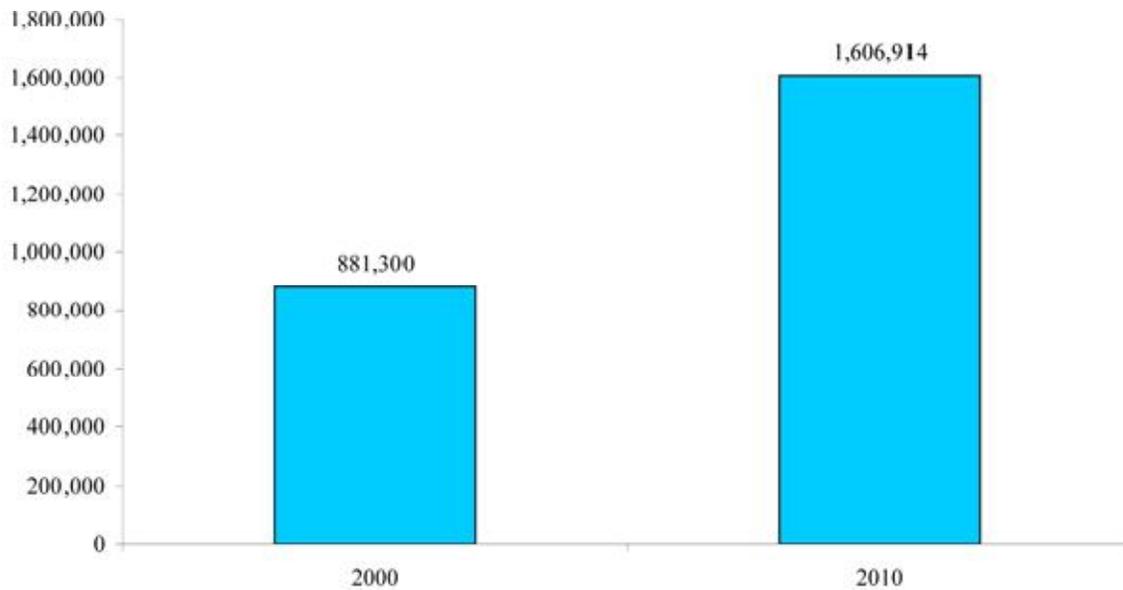
Table 1: Immigration to the U.S. from Africa: 1891 to 1970

Decade	Immigrants
1891-1900	350
1901-1910	7368
1911-1920	8443
1921-1930	6286
1931-1940	1750
1941-1950	7367
1951-1960	14092
1961-1970	28954

Source: U.S. immigration and Naturalization Service, 1989 Statistical Year-book of the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 1990), p. 3.

As immigrants decide to make their transition into the United States, where they choose to live also draws attention by large numbers. Although each state in America has a portion of foreign born in residence, California, New York, Texas, Maryland and Virginia are the most preferred destinations for African immigrants according to the 2010 Census report (Fig 7). Further reporting from the U.S Census Bureau and American Community Survey reveal continuous phenomenal rise in African Immigration to the United States from 2000-2010. See Figures 1, 2 and 3 below. According to American Community Survey, in 2010, there were 1.6 million African immigrants in the U.S.

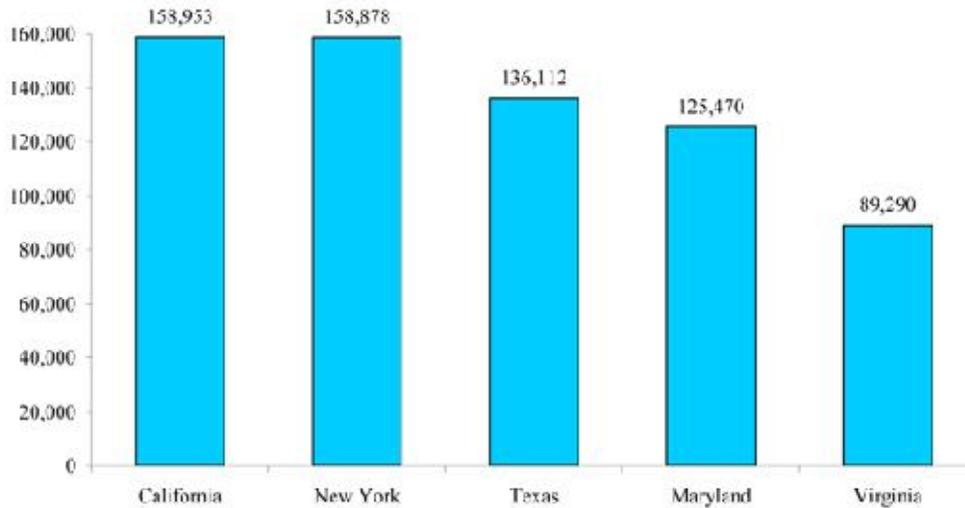
Figure 1: African Foreign-Born Population in the U.S., 2000 & 2010



Source: Census 2000 Special Tabulations (STP-159), Table FBP-1; 2010 American Community Survey, Table S0504.

Figure 1. Source: Census 2000 Special Tabulations (STP-159), Table FBP-1; 2010 American Community Survey, Table S0504

Figure 7: States With Largest African Foreign-Born Populations, 2010



Source: 2010 American Community Survey, Table DP02: "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States."

Figure 2. Source: 2010 American Community Survey, Table DP02: "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States."

Figure 12: Educational Attainment of African Foreign-Born Population & Total U.S. Population, Age 25 & Over, 2010



Source: 2010 American Community Survey, Table S0504: "Selected Characteristics of the Foreign-Born Population by Region of Birth: Africa, Northern America, and Oceania"; Table DP02: "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States."

Figure 3. Source: 2010 American Community Survey, Table S0504: "Selected Characteristics of the Foreign-Born Population by Region of Birth: Africa, Northern America, and Oceania"; Table DP02: "Selected Social Characteristics in the United States."

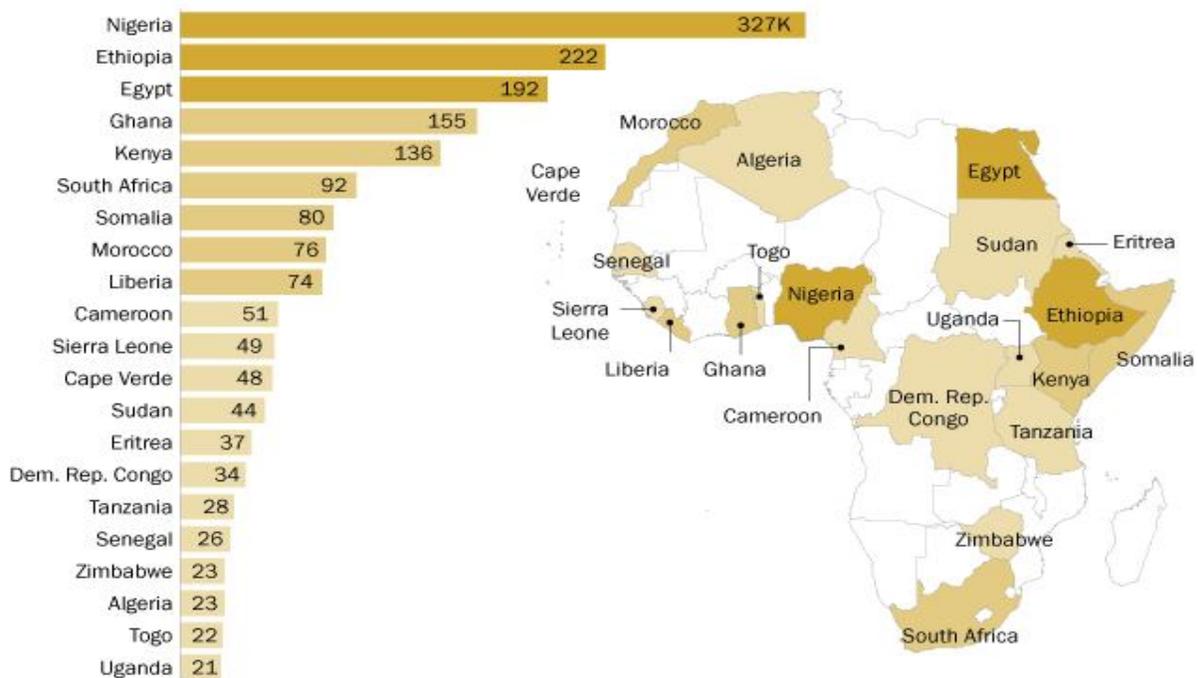
African Foreign Students in the US.

By the 1960s and especially in the 1970's the number of Africans coming would dramatically increase. Data from the Institute of International Education (IIE) reports that many Africans were coming to America for educational purposes and returning to their home countries. On the other hand, quite a few would remain behind in order to begin a new era of permanent residency (Gordon, 1998 p. 84,). Even more unique between the 1960's-1980's many Africans were highly skilled or highly educated (having college degrees).

According to Takougang and Tidjani, these remaining students settled in the specific states or cities in which they studied. Instead of returning home, the term, "economic refugees" has emerged to describe further those who remained and settled in large cities. "They did not come here to be poor. They didn't come here to end up in the gutter. They came here to improve their lot to have more things. Their priorities are making money, sending money back home, stabilizing their situation (Takougang & Tidjani, 2009, p. 34)." Current Pew research shows that the top countries of recent immigrants are below.

Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt are top birthplaces for African immigrants in the U.S.

Leading countries of birth for the foreign-born population from Africa in the U.S. (2015, in thousands)



Note: Africa includes North African and sub-Saharan countries as defined by IPUMS. Does not include unspecified or uncategorized areas.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of 2015 American Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

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In addition to this tremendous growth, a unique factor of this group is their education level. Research reports, including the Census, confirm that African immigrants have the highest education level of all immigrants who come to the U.S. Especially those who come for furthering their pursuit of graduate education (Offoh-Robert, 2003, p. 5).

Stebbleton also asserts, through his study of counseling African immigrant college students, that these immigrant students come with a unique set of challenges. These include; dealing with colonialist past while navigating racism and discrimination, facing outside factors that contribute to living in instability, and the continuing attempt to understand and juggle world views with messages that are either African centered Eurocentric or Western ideologies (Stebbleton, 2007, pg. 292) In Kanya's study on social work practice for African immigrants during a transition, Kanya states there are evident challenges in even researching this specific group. According to Kanya, most Africans have a life motif in which they believe in a supreme being that controls the order of things. Therefore, "...religion is a primary coping resource for immigrants. Any threat, therefore, to a person's cultural or religious beliefs poses a threat to the person's ability to cope (Kanya,1997,p.159). This study also reports that self-esteem and hardiness have a strong relationship with spiritual well-being for African immigrants. As a result, if one is not aware of some of these intricacies about African immigrants, educational institutions will not be able to build a fully developed and supportive academic environment. All of these factors are noteworthy in the study

of this particular group. That is, being knowledgeable about their educational history, understanding cultural nuances for coping with transition and knowing more about the more substantial circumstances for which they emigrated to the U.S. Without investing time and resources to collecting the needed data, higher education institutions will lag in supporting such a crucial group to American society

Conclusion

To conclude, immigration continues to evolve. Specifically, within the U.S., we see various shifts and aspects of inclusion and exclusion. This paper gave attention to historical changes beginning in 1882 to 1965 and 1990. Looking further, it is apparent that Diversity Lottery Visa and international education, contributed immensely to increased numbers of African immigrants. At this point, as the migration process has its multiple challenges, one begins to wonder, how do African immigrants see themselves during their immigration process and current policy shifts? Even more, how can we bring more value to international education during the immigration process for African immigrants resettling in the U.S? With these and more thoughts to ponder, in addition to this literature review, this author aims to make more efforts in contributing towards this line of scholarship. That is, to fill gaps regarding emerging research on African Immigrants, and, to strengthen the discussion of immigrant transitional services in the U.S. specifically for this group.

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