

THE AFRICAN IMMIGRANT IN THE AMERICAN WORKPLACE:  
UNDERSTANDING THE IMPLICATIONS OF IMMIGRATION & EDUCATION

by

Tegan J. Mosugu

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Approved by:

Kimberly Torres, PhD, Department of Organizational Dynamics,  
University of Pennsylvania

Alan Barstow, PhD, Director and Senior Scholar, Organizational Dynamics,  
University of Pennsylvania

## ABSTRACT

There are more than 3.8 million black immigrants in the USA that represent 8.7% of the USA's black population (Anderson & Lopez, 2018). Among these immigrants are African immigrants. The purpose of this research is to conduct a preliminary exploratory study on what the African immigrants experience (specifically, Anglophone African immigrants) is at the workplace - a demographic that has been historically understudied in the social science literature. In order to understand how African immigrant professionals adjust to their newfound reality, a historical overview of African immigration to the United States shall be provided. Subsequently, a secondary analysis of various sources provides insights on the potential barriers that exist as well as the opportunities that enable African immigrant professionals to thrive.

An understanding of interpersonal workings that African immigrant professionals have within the organizations yields an in-depth understanding of how African immigrants fit the new organizational culture that they find themselves in. Furthermore, it also enables scholars and practitioners to apprehend how and why the outcomes for African immigrants are not the same, as compared with other demographics. Last but not least, this paper explores the African immigrant professional's contribution to society. Knowledge of this is juxtaposed with the current immigration laws and policies that can potentially inhibit the cross-sector benefits that African immigrants bring to the USA. In this capstone research paper, first-generation and second-generation of immigrants are studied. The first-generation of immigrants refers to the first group of immigrants that

come to the United States or individuals that come to the United States in their early teens. On the other hand, the second-generation of immigrants refers to the children or grandchildren of such immigrants. (Thomas, 2014).

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## CHAPTER 1

### BACKGROUND

In the 1960s and 1970s, African immigrants that acquired an American education were anxious to return to their respective nations. The promise of nation building was a push factor for these young men and women that had received a Westernized education. In the late 1990s to date, African immigration to the United States has significantly increased (Takougang, 2005). Primarily, this can be attributed to the fact that many immigrants are interested in building a better life for themselves and their families. Overall, African migration to the United States has been beneficial on a multidimensional level. In 2015, African immigrants earned \$55.1 billion in the United States, and paid \$10.1 billion in federal taxes (New American Economy, 2018). Yet, African immigrants in the United States often face underemployment. As a result, they have been susceptible to lower earnings in the workplace but eventually close the gap over time compared to their African-American counterparts (Takougang, 2005) due to the percentage decrease in unskilled labor.

In a 2012 “Black African Immigrant Population by State” retrospective study of the share of African immigrants in the USA, Capps, McCabe, and Fix (2012) suggest that it takes about ten years for there to be a significant drop in the number of highly skilled African immigrants working unskilled jobs - from 36% to 22%. Two-fifths of these



African immigrants that come from West and East Africa have bachelor's degrees and have different outcomes just by the very nature of them being Anglo-speaking (American Immigration Council, n.d). In fact, African immigrants are an integral part of the workforce since three out of four African immigrants are well within their working years (New American Economy, 2018). As a result, they are well positioned to fill the employment gap as the baby boomers age out of the workforce.

In *Power of the Purse: How Sub-Saharan Africans Contribute to the U.S. Economy*, a research study was conducted to look into the African immigrant's contributions to the US economy, by presenting a detailed analysis of the most recent available demographic and socioeconomic data, including several national surveys and censuses such as the 2015 American Community Survey. Why the African immigrant is so beneficial to the workplace is because of their high levels of educational attainment (New American Economy, 2018). Ogbu and Simmons describe the African immigrant as a model minority facing external pressures to live up to expectations within their community even when the odds are against them (Ogbu and Simmons, 1998). This claim is corroborated by Thomas Sowell who historically points out that black immigrants have the “taste for entrepreneurship, a focus on education, a commitment to family, a reputation for honest dealing and hard work” (Pearlstein, 2015, para 6). In this study, I examine the diverse outcomes of Anglophone-speaking Africans (particularly Nigerians, Ghanaians, Cameroonians) as compared against refugee immigrants whose outcomes trail behind theirs due to their inability to speak English which makes them less desirable especially when coupled with lower educational attainment levels.

Collectively, African immigrant educational attainment is high, 65% of African immigrants in the USA have completed more than a year of college education, which is higher than any other group except Asian-Americans (New American Economy, 2018). Capps, McCabe, and Fix (2012) point out that “favorable rising levels of educational attainment may also contribute to the number of African students at US universities and skilled professionals admitted through employment-based channels” (p. 1). Massey, Mooney, Charles and Torres (2007) note that Africans “are the most educated immigrant group with many originally coming to the United States to pursue a college or professional degree” with the highest group of emigres coming from Nigeria and Ghana (p. 246).

The Pew Research Center shows that between 2015-2017, Nigeria, Ethiopia, and Egypt were the top birthplaces for African immigrants in the USA (Anderson, 2017). However, this is all subject to change in light of the current visa ban passed in February 2020. Thus, it is important that stakeholders holistically weigh the impact and contributions that African immigrants have made to the workforce before sustaining such drastic measures.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

The research method for this capstone paper is content analysis. Content analysis is a systematic and effective way for understanding a research question that employs multiple analytical techniques and puts data into context (White and Marsh, 2006). The primary reason for choosing this research methodology is because it enables data to be analyzed from multiple sources - texts, reports, newspapers, videos/interviews. Furthermore, content analysis serves as a useful research methodology for exploring the black immigrant's professional experience in depth. As an understudied topic, the literature that exists on the African immigrant focuses on macro outcomes, with only a handful of them focusing on the feelings and experiences of these immigrants. The use of content analysis enables scholars and practitioners to look at particular cases that provide a glimpse into the daily work experiences of the African immigrant professional. In addition, content analysis enables stakeholders to juxtapose the scholarly and economic-related evidence on the interplay between race and immigrant status. This form of content analysis does not utilize relational analysis - a technique used to explore relationships between concepts. The use of content analysis in understanding the African immigrant's workplace experience results in a thorough understanding of their historical evolution.

## CHAPTER 3

### LIMITATIONS

This capstone study does not collect primary data or interview study participants. This is because of the limited time frame in which this study occurred. Due to the secondary analysis of the data, inclusion and exclusion criteria were not defined for a subset of African immigrant professionals. This could have been beneficial in looking at subpopulations of African immigrant professionals - unskilled workers, Anglophone speaking Ivy League graduates, health professionals of African descent, etc. Another limitation of this study is that it is unable to reveal newer insights on the experiences that African immigrants have in large corporations such as Google, Johnson & Johnson, etc. In addition, the time limit of this study restricted its ability to gauge how other black groups at elite universities feel about the African immigrant student (first- generation or second-generation). Lastly, cultural bias might also be present in the analysis of the study due to the professional and personal experiences associated with not only being Nigerian-American, but also an native English speaker.

## CHAPTER 4

### AN OVERVIEW OF THE BLACK IMMIGRANT IN THE WORKPLACE

The African immigrant population in the USA has increased steadily from 130,000 to 2.1 million between 1980 and 2017 (Zog and Batalo, 2014). Most of these immigrants arrive to pursue the American dream. America to them is the land of opportunity whereby any dream is possible as long as one is willing to work towards achieving it. In the United States, four counties in New York, hold about 12% of the total African immigrant population (Dapaah, 2017, p. 2). In these states, African immigrants usually settle where their compatriots are already established. Compared to the American populace, African immigrants tend to have greater educational attainment--compared to native-born multigenerational Black Americans. In 2013, 38% of immigrants aged 25 and above had a bachelor's degree or higher, compared to 30% of other American groups (Zog and Blato, 2014). In addition to contributing to the United States economy, Africans in the diaspora sent a total of \$31 billion back to their respective nations. Arguably, one can even suggest that the mere notion of having African immigrants participate in the United States workforce has positive knock off effects.

Capps, McCabe, and Fix (2012) point out that black immigration to the United States dates back to the earliest days of European colonization which was recorded in 1519 (p. 2). This was recorded in 1519. The slave trade saw 10 million African slaves being brought involuntarily from Africa to the Western Hemisphere. The first voluntary migrants to Africa arrived from Cape Verde in the early 1800s; that forced migration

preceded the formation of the United States. The end of U.S. slavery resulted in severe limitations on immigration into the United States. This can be attributed to the concept of “historical materialism” (Duggan, 2013), whereby the United States was more focused on decreasing the number of immigrants from Africa, Southern Europe, and Asia, and increasing the influx of skilled immigrants from other parts of the world. During the 1860s through to the 1950s, fewer than 500 Africans arrived each on average (Rahiminezhad & Arabian, 2018). As the United States entered the industrialization era, there was a need for more non-Southern European immigrants who were not only independent of political / social affiliations but were also highly efficient in the manufacturing processes, thereby creating a surplus value of goods/products. As a result, the US favored countries with skilled professionals - whereby the capital used in hiring immigrants went beyond buying and selling of commodities, but rather involved less production time.

In 1965, immigration reforms were created to make the United States more welcoming to other countries. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (also known as the “Hart-Celler Act”) removed national origin quotas that were very low for countries outside of Northern Europe. Instead, it created a system for family members to reunite with one another by giving preference to the families of US citizens and permanent residents. Likewise, it also encouraged the migration of skilled professionals to enter the United States of America. Despite the skepticism surrounding this law, it was not until the late 20<sup>th</sup> century that the United States recorded an increase in immigration numbers from other countries. In *The Making of Africa America*, Ira Berlin (2010) details why the

1965 Immigration and Nationality Act was so significant for black America, and the nation as a whole. In fact, he goes on to suggest that this growth has accounted for a quarter of the growth in the black population.

The black population increased when the United States government amended the aforementioned Immigration and Nationality Act by establishing the Refugee Act of 1980. Signed by President Jimmy Carter, this act led to a wave of African immigrants being admitted to the United States and resettling in different cities. Igielnik and Krogstad (2017) mention the fact that the modern waves of refugees arriving in the U.S. reached their peak in 1980 following the establishment of the U.S. Refugee Act. An act that “established the Office of Refugee Resettlement, raised overall refugee quotas and provided a provision to deal with special humanitarian concerns” (para. 6). This act set the foundation for America’s ability to absorb large waves of refugees amid the humanitarian crisis. For example, in 1982 and 1983, a total of six thousand African refugees immigrated to America (Brill, 1983, p. 10). These numbers compared to present-day figures have greatly increased. In 2016 alone, three countries (Democratic Republic of Congo, Somalia, and Eritrea) had a total of 27,339 refugees entering the USA – representing 32% of all incoming refugees to the United States (Igielnik and Krogstad, 2017).

The increase in the African immigrant population has also led to them being referred to as the “model minority.” The notion of a model minority is one that was used to characterize Afro-Caribbeans. Coined by William Petersen, the term “model minority” refers to a minority group who achieves higher education and socioeconomic outcomes

than the average population (Guo, 2017). Petersen used the term to describe how Japanese Americans would “climb over the highest barriers” of racism and overcome societal barriers in early America (Petersen, 1966). Similarly, ethnic and racial studies scholars have also explored the black immigrant in America by paying close attention to Afro-Caribbeans and their ability to climb up the social ladder. Thomas Sowell explored the notion of the successful “Afro-Caribbean” and the level of social mobility that they had in the United States.

According to Sowell, Afro-Caribbeans as a whole had far better outcomes than their African-American counterparts despite the cultural differences that they are accustomed and to the significant levels of discrimination that continue to plague American society (James, 2002; Sowell 1988). Like so many scholars, Sowell also subscribes to the color line that excludes Afro-Caribbeans from immigration history (James, 2002, p. 224). Thus, he compares them to black immigrants rather than other immigrants. This presents a biased perspective because it does not acknowledge the collective assets possessed by the group when it comes to higher levels of literacy, education, and skills which were higher than any other European immigrant group at the time. In addition, looking at within group differences also camouflages the phenomenon that even though the first generation of Afro-Caribbean immigrants had achieved more than white immigrants, the second-generation immigrants — the children of at least one immigrant parent born in the United States or who arrived to the USA by the age of 12 (Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, and Holdaway, 2008) have not. Although, the second-generation of immigrants were even more educated than their parents, they paled in



comparison to their white counterparts (James, 2002).

*Despite the higher achievements of first-generation Caribbean immigrants compared to white immigrants, the second-generation is greatly outdistanced by second-generation white immigrants. These facts lend weight to the very thesis that Sowell has worked tirelessly to disprove. If the children of Caribbean immigrants have not fared as well as the children of white immigrants and natives with inferior qualifications, then how much more must racism have blighted the prospects of native Afro-Americans whose parents lacked the immigrants' advantages? (James, 2002, p. 224).*

The model minority stereotype directly pins black immigrant professionals against their African-American counterparts. As a social construct, the model minority stereotype presents black immigrants as being preferable to employers over black Americans. Employers are likely to consider them as being more qualified based on their educational attainment or the belief that they are a hardworking group, in contrast to Black Americans who might be depicted as lazy or lacking respect of authority. As a stereotype threat, the model minority ideology leads to African-Americans in the United States reporting to be more impacted by the arrival of African immigrants than white Americans (Torrez, 2013). Therefore, it is very possible for there to be overt and/or covert tensions between African-American and black immigrant professionals due to the educational and earning differences.

Second-generation African immigrants reap the benefits of their parent's educational and financial success in the United States. They are overrepresented in the black student populace at selective postsecondary institutions due to their educational achievement and excellence. That said, black immigrant professionals can also find themselves victims of the model minority stereotype. In *The Model Minority Stereotype as a Prescribed Guideline of Empire: Situating the Model Minority Research in the Postcolonial Context*, Kim and Taylor (2017) implied that even in other Western countries, there is a preference for Central Africans compared to North Africans when it comes to working hard, being more obedient, and amenable (Kim and Taylor, 2017). Therefore, there is a strong divide in terms of which members of black immigrant professionals are highly sought after over their counterparts.

The black immigrant is not only highly sought after but has also been an essential building block of the community and the nation. James (2002) highlights the fact that Carribeans played a significant portion in the development of New England in the eighteenth and nineteenth century. According to him, "a significant number of the nineteenth century migrants were skilled craftsmen, students, teachers, preachers, journalists, lawyers, and doctors" (p. 221). In the Afro-Caribbean community, it was assumed in society that "every man was a paragon of intelligence and a man of birth and breeding" (p. 223).

The social and economic outcomes of black immigrants can be used to disentangle the roles of culture and structural barriers that exist in society (Hamilton, 2019, p. 1139). The results of a 2009 retrospective longitudinal study that examined the

share of African immigrants in the workplace show that there are a high number of highly skilled immigrants in the American workplace who possess unskilled jobs. These immigrants had lived in the United States for fewer than ten years and had at least a college degree or higher. Most experienced professionals who immigrate to the United States often begin their careers as unskilled workers, it takes them about ten years before they become skilled workers in the United States. Furthermore, it was also proven to be the case that the employment of highly-skilled African immigrants was positively correlated to their years of residence in the United States. When African immigrants enter the USA, they are “penalized rather than rewarded for educational attainment” (Tsfai, Thomas, 2019, p. 1). This can be attributed to the fact that most of their educational credentials do not cross over when they migrate. Hence, there is a need to start afresh when it comes to the types of jobs that they can get.

Andemariun (2007) emphasizes the challenges faced by skilled African immigrants during the job search. He notes that the lack of recognition of their credentials and experiences in the workplace results in them seeking nontraditional kinds of work such as opening their own small businesses either in the United States or abroad. Furthermore, he notes that companies might be hesitant to hire workers due to the fear of these employees might not be “unfamiliar with American business norms” (p. 114). This is also worsened by the language barrier that Francophone-African immigrants have with potential employers in the labor market. Thus, one could argue that on a micro level, African immigrants have a higher barrier of entering the job market. This high barrier

associated with entering the labor market often spews into prejudice and can lead to biases and unfavorable mindsets between them and those that they work with (p. 115).

The outcomes that African immigrants not only differ with other groups but are also stratified across gender. Sheriff and Knight (2013) suggest that female African immigrants in the workplace encounter serious discrimination and even denial of due process. Despite these micro challenges, Sherriff and Knight (2013) note that Anglophone-speaking African immigrant women as a whole have higher levels of education, higher English level proficiency, and lower unemployment rates compared to other groups. Other recent immigration studies on how black women fare in the workplace show that black immigrant women have better outcomes than their male counterparts. Nawyn and Park (n.d) pinpoint to the phenomenon that black African immigrant women have greater representation in the highly skilled jobs in healthcare, whereas black African men are still the “driver” as their top occupational status, even though they have high levels of education (para. 1). In a recent study by Michigan State University (2017), researchers highlight the fact that although race plays a significant role in the earnings of immigrant men, it has less of an effect on black immigrant women (Michigan State University, 2017). Hamilton (2009) also supports this claim that black immigrants experience different levels/degrees of racial discrimination (p. 1239). This can be explained by black immigrant men's susceptibility to stereotyping and criminalization. Hence, there is a negative externality that black immigrant men face in the workplace that directly affects their earning potential.

## CHAPTER 5

### A HISTORY OF AFRICAN IMMIGRATION & PUBLIC POLICY

Elo et al. (2015) provide a historical overview of the African immigrant in the American labor force. They start out by asserting that immigration from Africa to the United States has grown exponentially since the 1930s. Initially, the rate at which African immigrants relocated to the United States during the Great Depression decreased. However, the end of World War II marked a gradual increase in the number of African immigrants coming into the country (Elo et al. 2015). In addition, since the 1950s, the number of foreign-born who have become legal permanent residents has quadrupled, but the number from Africa has increased nearly 60-fold—a rate of growth more than twice that for migrants from Asia, the next-fastest growing source of new Americans” (p. 1).

In the 1950s, the vast majority of African immigrants originated from Morocco, South Africa, and Egypt (Elo et al. 2015). However, the vast majority of immigrants from these parts were white (Kollehlon and Eule 2003). Today, African immigrants who identify as white constitute about 20% of the African immigrant population in the U.S. compared to 75% who identify as black. Black immigrants largely represent English-speaking countries particularly Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Kenya; and the remainder of Africans come from Asia [5%] (Capps et al., 2012).

Elo et al. (2015) credit improved immigration laws in the late 20th century as being the stimulus for the boost in African immigration. Specifically, they point out the 1980 Refugee Act, 1990 Immigration Act, and the Diversity Visa Lottery. The 1980

Refugee Act added a caveat to America's immigration rule during humanitarian crisis and raised the quota level for these vulnerable and displaced populations. The Immigration Act of 1990 was responsible for strengthening family-based immigration and expanding the visa categories based on occupation; whereas the Diversity Visa Lottery led to admittance of African immigrants from low-admittance countries.

Within and between group disparities have always existed for the African immigrant. Doodoo and Takyi (2002) analyzed the 1990 Census data, and revealed that white migrants earned 32% more than their black counterparts (between the ages of 25-64). However, they noticed a drop by 19% when they controlled for human capital and years in the United States. Among African migrants, those who identified as white Africans earned higher wages than their black counterparts. The white wage premium was higher for men [34%] and for women [13%] (Borjas, 1999).

Despite the gains in education made by migrants born in Africa, they still lag behind other foreign-born immigrants. Migrants from certain parts of Africa (South Africa, Zimbabwe, Cape Verde) usually enter the United States on work visas, significantly boosting their earnings immediately upon arrival. However, longer duration of residence does not lead to greater success in the labor market. As a matter of fact, the highest work premiums were recorded by immigrants who came to the USA after the age of 18 (Elo et al. 2015). Controlling for education, the differences African immigrants have within their group no longer exists. As a matter of fact, the advantages of pursuing post college education pays high dividends. For example, African-immigrant men that pursue education beyond college conferred a pay earning of more than 62%,

compared to their fellow African counterparts that decided not to do so. As a whole, black male immigrants lag behind their white/asian male counterparts. When human capital functions are controlled as a variable, white men earn 29% more than black men, and Asian men earn more than 25% of their earnings. Higher earning potentials have been shown to be positively correlated to one's English-speaking ability as well as citizenship status. For African-immigrant black men, the ability to speak English offers greater rewards in the labor marketplace than any other group (Elo et al. 2015, p. 20). In that same vein, there is also a 6-7% increase in wages for African-immigrant men after they have become naturalized citizens - a marker of assimilation in the American workplace (Elo et al. 2015).

## CHAPTER 6

### ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

An understanding of the economic characteristics of African immigrants in the United States provides key insights to why some struggle and why others thrive. Furthermore, it also enables for a better understanding of economic mobility that the workplace provides. In *Human Capital and Performance of African Immigrants in the U.S. Labor Market*, Kposowa, A.J. (2002) argues that gaps in knowledge exist between the human characteristics of this group and the extent to which their earning characteristics differ from whites and African Americans.

In *Ain't Making It in America: The Economic Characteristics of African Immigrants in North Carolina*, Dapaah (2017) studied 350 African immigrants in North Carolina to understand more about their economic conditions. The study primarily looked at the labor force participation of these Africans from 2004 – 2014. According to Dapaah, “structural changes in North Carolina’s economy, as well as prejudicial experiences, undermined the economic ambitions of the Africans” (p. 1). In North Carolina, the first wave of African immigrants settled in the 1990s. They were primarily from Liberia, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Senegal, Sudan, Somalia, etc. Dapaah presents the argument that African immigrants face two sets of challenges when they arrive in the United States. The first challenge is related to human capital and the other one deals with the structural and cultural challenges that are unique to the United States. According to Dapaah, the human capital factors are English proficiency and



educational attainments. Poor English skills make the individual less valuable to an employer; this significantly reduces the individual's ability to participate as well as his/her long-term earnings. On the other hand, structural and cultural challenges can be defined as conditions that are pervasive not just to a single individual but the whole group. These includes the economy, education, discrimination, and prejudice. According to Dapaah, structural and cultural challenges also play a huge role in the status of African immigrants since it affects their legal status upon arrival, the kinds of jobs that they are eligible for, and the degree of discrimination.

Despite the societal misperceptions and ills - discrimination and prejudice - African immigrants with marketable skills in professions such as nursing, teaching, and accounting are taking advantage of the countless opportunities that are made available to them. Conversely, those with weak English or without marketable skills, as well as those with unrecognizable qualifications find it difficult to enter the American workplace. The degree of discrimination is also affected by the length of stay in the United States. The longer the stay, the higher the level of increased discrimination (Finch, Frank, and Hummer, 2000; Goto, Gee, and Takeuchi 2002).

In a sample of 365 African immigrants living in North Carolina from 2004-2009, Dapaah concludes that despite 93% of those in the sample had full-time jobs, the vast majority of the respondents (62%) had relatively low-income jobs. Specifically, they earned between \$30,000 - \$49,000, while another 27% of respondents earned between \$15,000 to \$29,000. In addition, 245 out of 365 surveyed in the sample revealed that they had failed to achieve their economic goals/objectives. They responded to three

categories based on their income, education and lifestyle. The remainder of the respondents who could be classified as being rising stars and professional elites revealed that they had achieved most or if not all their economic ambitions.

Dapaah categorizes the African immigrants in the workplace based on the interaction between human capital and economic/structural factors.

- The dependents: Achievers of no economic ambitions
  - Individuals that fall within this category tend to be significantly low earners (< \$15,000 per year). They are unable to keep their jobs for long. Without any jobs, individuals in this group are unable to make any financial headway. They are also more susceptible to absolute poverty, since they tend to fall below their minimum sustenance level and are unable to function as members of society (Thompson & Hickey, 2011).
- Struggling workers: Achievers of minimum economic ambitions
  - This category of workers made up two-thirds of workers. They usually experience relative poverty since there are little resources available. Roles such as security guards, cab drivers, airport field workers, etc. Despite the challenges that they face in America, they are able to support their families back home.
- Rising stars: Achievers of some economic ambitions
  - As its name implies, rising stars can be viewed as those African immigrants that are in the middle class of society. They often include health professionals (licensed professionals and nurses) as well as

teachers, those with white-collar jobs, and those that own local shops. One of the major characteristics of this group is that they either arrive into the USA with foreign credentials or work their way through college to obtain degrees from community and state colleges/ universities.

- The professional elites: Achievers of most economic ambitions
  - These African immigrants have reached the pinnacle of success. In Dapaah's sample, they made up only 3.5% of the respondents. This group was comprised of all men; and, they had either upgraded their academic credentials in their home countries or come to the United States to further their studies. Another practice that is typical of this group is that they are philanthropic - in the sense that they give back to their home communities in Ghana, Ivory Coast, Kenya, and Liberia.
  - All respondents, however, were victims of job prejudice and discrimination. As a result, some were even compelled to go into private practices for their professions. The group of workers that were likely to delve into private practice for their professions include physicians, pharmacists, and lawyers. Some of the respondents referred to the prejudicial experiences that they had faced in the workplace. This was a clear inhibitor for them being able to achieve their economic goals and were rampant regardless of the industry that they found themselves in. Moreover, prejudice and discrimination came from both coworkers and supervisors due to the misconception that skills and education acquired in

Africa were nontransferable. Dapaah's research also unearths the inequality that exists between the salaries of native-born and foreign-born professionals. Salary gaps were recorded between \$5,000 - \$10,000 and some of the respondents made the following claims: Respondent X stated that "my supervisor openly stated that the aliens at the plant should be paid less" for no particular reason." In addition, Respondent Y noted that despite having the necessary qualifications, his supervisor was fond of asking him multiple times about where he had received his education in the United States. Thus, possibly alluding to identity threat due to the assumption that someone who happens to have immigrated to the states could not be US-educated (p. 423).

The constant stereotyping faced by African immigrants in the workplace stems from misunderstanding or a lack of empathy from the employer (Stimson, 2008). This stereotyping is often seen as incompetence or the inability for these group of workers to get the job done. Race impacts the experiences of African immigrants in the workplace since many underrepresented minorities do not feel comfortable or equipped to build the necessary relationships/skills to flourish in their organizations (Harvard Business Review, podcast, 2018). According to Stimson (2018), African immigrants get off to a rocky start due to the innate cultural misunderstandings that their employers may have. For example, an employer who is supervising an African immigrant in the workplace might not understand the importance of family when an employee's family member is sick. In contrast, the employee might fail to effectively communicate that he or she might need to

take some time off to care for the sick family member. Communication gaps like these often stem from misunderstandings of behaviors or expectations between the African immigrant professional and his/her supervisor. Stimson also notes that the African workplace is quite different from the American workplace; in Africa it is common practice to hold hands or gently touch another employee in an endearing manner. In the United States, this does not translate well and can often be the breeding ground for sexual harassment violations. Other practices such as not questioning one's boss is a sign of respect, and the mere act of doing so can come across as being malicious. These ways of life are quite ingrained in the African immigrant workplace's behavior. Therefore, there is a need to make duties, roles, and expectations quite clear to employees since it would undoubtedly lead to more positive outcomes.

## CHAPTER 7

### ACCULTURATION

Acculturation is a process that leads to optimal outcomes for immigrants since society becomes more receptive to them. It is characterized by changes in one's culture, which occurs when people (mainly immigrants and native-born minorities) adjust to the mainstream culture of a plural society (Sam, 2000). In *Immigrating to North America: The Kenyan Immigrant's Experience*, Kabuiku notes that African immigrants experience acculturative stress when it comes to being able to integrate successfully into a host's community (Kabuiku, 2017). African immigrant professionals face high-level expectations in both their professional and personal lives. This stems from the workplace demands (some of which, they might not be accustomed to) as well as external pressures such as familial commitments, material possessions, and social status (Kabuiku, 2017). The ability to effectively integrate into a new work community is predetermined on the activities that are pursued to make the African immigrant feel at home (Kabuiku, 2017). Kabuiku places special emphasis on the need for workplaces to be intentional when it comes to their onboarding practices. He posits the collectivist cultural identity that Africans have. This calls for the need for organizations to create inclusive places whereby community and a feeling of belonging can be fostered.

In *Workplace Challenges Persist for African Immigrants*, Stimson (2008) advocates for the need for employers to be flexible when it comes to knowing that some African immigrants will struggle with new languages, new customs, and new ways of

earning a living. He also suggests that the learning curve for African immigrants is not steep, and employers should be slow to fire their employees due to the cultural adjustments that some of them might be struggling with. African immigrants are affected by the interpersonal workings that they have with their employers. In scenarios, whereby it is not strengthened, the repercussions for certain workplace behavior can negatively lead to forgone wages for a certain period of time or even lead to a job loss. Thus, the African immigrant in the workplace who is new to America is in need of information concerning what the job entails as well as trust from the employer. These two factors when fostered concurrently enable the African immigrant to perform to the best of his/her abilities as long as he/she is willing to adjust to newer cultural and behavioral practices in the organization.

## CHAPTER 8

### AFRICAN WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN THE WORKPLACE

Assimilating into the workforce is typically a matter of choice rather than need for African immigrant women. In a research study of fifteen African immigrant women, Abbah (2014) explores their work experiences by looking at the influence human resource policies have in the workplace. Based on his interviews, Abbah observed that African immigrant women from Arabic countries tend not to participate in the workforce compared to their other counterparts. For those that decide to enter the workforce, there are steep organizational gaps that they grapple with, within the organization. These gaps can be classified into four groups: i. lack of human resource policies that represent the needs of married women with children; ii. misunderstanding of cultural issues when dealing with ethnically diverse workforces; iii. and, the interplay between dominant vs. dominant culture. The lack of context-specific human resource policies in some organizations, result in some African immigrant women feeling that it is impossible to balance both work and the homefront. This stems from a lack of understanding of how human resource policies work. In addition, there is a sense of feeling alienated in the workplace since their needs are not represented (Abbah, 2014, p. 67). As a result, they have to give up one in order to focus on the other. Their workplace pursuits are what suffer at the end since the well-being of the home is of topmost priority since it is part of their cultural makeup.



It is paramount that employers increase their cultural competency when it comes to how they interact with African immigrant women. Abbah (2014) notes that “the greatest challenge for Africans is that employers largely misunderstand cultural differences that are characteristic of African immigrants. Many problems are created out of a misunderstanding or a lack of sympathy from the employer (p. 15). He also suggests that there is indeed a discrepancy between the notion of respect for cultures in theory vs. practice. For example, a woman with an accent is more likely to get an unfavorable response from her nonimmigrant colleague and may also be treated differently based on how she speaks (p. 7). In addition, an African woman’s attire may be deemed inappropriate for the work environment even though she might be fully covered up. The interplay between a dominant vs. nondominant culture is a dichotomy that African immigrant women in the workplace face. The American culture is strongly promoted and favored. Employers conscientiously (and unconscientiously) promote its adoption in order for employees to fit in. This inadvertently suppresses the African culture that is indicative of the African female in the workforce. Controlled structures such as potlucks, and cultural nights are not sufficient for addressing African female immigrants' desire of feeling welcomed and accepted into an organization.

## CHAPTER 9

## STRUCTURAL FRAMEWORKS &amp; ON AFRICAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

In a research study of local professionals in Northern California, Whaley and Ford (2007) explore how fifty-two individuals perceive eight workplace opportunity structures: employment opportunity (EEO), diversity, affirmative action programs, mentorship, inclusion, merit, preferential treatment, discrimination. The white professionals functioned as the pioneer group to which black professionals were compared to. The results of this exploratory study reveal a statistical significant difference whereby African immigrant professionals expressed the highest disconnect from inclusion programs in the workplace. Furthermore, they also note that they were disenfranchised from performance merit systems and that they were often not subject to preferential treatment. Moreover, African immigrant professionals were not able to perceive the extent to which discrimination at the workplace affected them - as compared to white and African-American professionals.

Whaley and Ford (2007) suggest that “African immigrants perceived inclusion less favorably to having the most effective profile (mep), while African-American immigrants view inclusion as close to their mep” (p. 23). In the findings, the authors underscore the notion that African immigrants in the workplace viewed legally mandated structures such as affirmative action programs and the equal employment opportunity as being more favorable to them compared to African-Americans. Adler (2002) suggests that there is a

tendency for immigrants who are experiencing a “culture shock” which makes them react positively to structures already in place. Therefore, they are less likely to report higher levels of discrimination in the workplace since they are focused on making the most use of opportunity structures. As a result, the cultural adjustments and opportunity windows that they experience might camouflage their ability to effectively perceive discrimination - which is predetermined by one’s length of stay.

The length of stay that one has in the United States also shapes the manner in which diversity and inclusion are viewed. Based on the results of the sample, Whaley and Ford (2007) underlie the notions of diversity and inclusion as being mutually exclusive. This is akin to having a seat at the table but having little to no personal prominence or power. For the African immigrants studied, workforce diversity did not translate to inclusion. Astonishingly, they were the least likely to get any form of special treatment/consideration in their organizations, as compared to African American individuals. As a subgroup, the respondents’ responses suggest that they are rarely part of active teamwork whereby they are working towards common goals and experience organizational unity. In addition, African immigrants were less likely to reject established procedures and more likely to conform in order to fit in / be included. Whaley and Ford (2007) reveal that one of the major root causes as to why African immigrant professionals have the urge to fit in stems from the lack of mentorship that they experience in the workplace. This is worsened by their propensity to give up their personal desires while on the job for the goals of the organization.

The ability for African immigrants to pursue organizational goals and succeed involves having an astute level of assimilation and separation in American society. Separation can be defined as “the preference for the retention of one’s cultural heritage at the expense of adapting to a new culture” (p 2). African immigrants experience a phenomenon known as acculturation.- whereby an individual changes his culture so as to adjust to the mainstream culture of a plural society (Ndika, 2013, p. 1). In an analysis of self-efficacy and the role that it plays in workplace performance, Ndika (2013) examines Nigerian immigrants’ competence and effectiveness in the workplace through self-efficacy. Ndika highlights the mechanisms by which acculturation occurs for African immigrants. These different possibilities include: integration, assimilation, separation, assimilation and separation, as well as integration and assimilation. It is also common for Nigerian immigrants as well as other African immigrant professionals to social distance from Black Americans.

## CHAPTER 10

### INTERGROUP RELATIONS - AFRICAN IMMIGRANT & AFRICAN-AMERICAN PROFESSIONALS

African immigrant professionals separate themselves from black Americans through different cultural adjustment processes. In a study of 104 first-generation Nigerian immigrants, the highest self-efficacy ratings were reported by individuals who concurrently assimilated and separated in society. Those who solely “separated” by forsaking their mother cultures had less optimal outcomes in regards to their work performance. The group that had the second optimal outcomes were those that integrated and assimilated. These individuals entered the mainstream workplace culture but still held on to their own mother cultures. Participants who assimilated, recorded the third highest self-efficacy ratings. Thus, the decision to separate from one’s cultural ways does more harm than good, if the African immigrant professional is not able to integrate into the workspace. By integrating, he or she develops a clear understanding of what the expectations are and how it fits the overall makeup of the organization. Integration is only a means of continuing the cyclical cycle of reiterative assimilation and separation - accepting and embracing the new culture, and conscientiously shying away from the former. As a result, the African immigrant professional is always in a state of adjustment when it comes to the intra and interorganizational workings of the organization.

Ndika also uncovered that immigration support in regards to integration is a major predictor of how African immigrants adjust to the workplace. Those that have a

more streamlined process with less stressors during the immigration process have better coping workplace mechanisms and are also able to navigate plural cultures in the workplace. According to Ndika, the findings suggest that “immigration support and self-efficacy ratings are important markers for classifying Nigerian immigrants based on acculturation strategies they utilize as they adapt to the mainstream American culture” (p. 4). These markers reveal that two distinct cultures can exist for African immigrants in the workplace. The psychology behind the decision to acculturate is worth investigating. Nonetheless, African immigrant professionals might be predisposed to integrating rather than assimilating. Ndika posits the assertion that “when an individual navigates multicultural contexts from at least two cultural perspectives, he or she is said to use the integration acculturation strategy” (p. 5). Thus, the very nature of being integrated into the workforce means that the African immigrant might feel out of place even if he or she possesses the right skills and is qualified for the job. This changes when there is a familiarity with the system and people can either integrate and assimilate (preferably) or assimilate and separate. Based on the findings, it becomes vivid that the mother cultures of African immigrant professionals (who have been in the United States for a significant length of time) become culturally extinct in relation to long term competence and effectiveness.

## CHAPTER 11

### A DEEPER LOOK: SECOND-GENERATION AFRICAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

Second-generation African immigrant professionals experience a continuum of assimilation and separation in order to thrive in the American workforce. Despite them being born in the United States, their experiences of how they perceive discrimination in the workplace are categorically different from the first-generation. Second-generation immigrants not only experienced racism outside their racial group but also between native African-Americans. With this in mind, the two strategies that have been useful for negotiating racism and economic mobility are: minimizing one's ethnic identity and stepping up one's game. The notion of minimizing one's identity involves intentionally reducing anything that stands out and creates a seeable difference. This could be taking the form of deciding not to wear natural hair in the workplace or finding ways to relate to one's manager through a sport (for example, hockey). The need to minimize one's ethnic identity can either be through code switching or avoiding racially charged conversations or confrontations with other ethnic groups. Similarly, second-generation immigrant professionals might even switch out their traditional names in the workplace or Westernize them in order to reduce their "Africanness." The continuum of needing to assimilate and separate is also indicative of the higher expectations and standards set for the second-generation of African immigrants, who are also natural born American

citizens. One could even argue that there is a racial sense of “othering” even if these professionals are well-acquainted with the workplace systems and structures.

The knowledge that this group of highly-educated and skilled professionals have does not prevent their colleagues from questioning whether they belonged at their jobs. There is this urge to step up one’s game - a societal pressure that is similar to other black groups regardless of ethnic or minority status (p. 508). As such, it is common to see second-generation immigrants being the first to come into work and the last to leave the office. There is the constant need to overperform so that they can justify why they belong in the organization (Lorick-Wilmot, 2015). The sense of needing to belong also stems from grappling “with developing notions of place, identity, and citizenship” (Lorick-Wilmot, 2015). This creates constant pressure which does not always come from external sources but is also internal. One of the major differences between the second-generation and their first-generation counterparts is the constant “emotional tax” that they face (Travis, D. J., & Thorpe-Moscon, J. 2018; Travis, 2016). The workplace dilemma is simply not about having a seat at the table but has evolved to getting what is yours and ensuring that it is not stripped away by external and/or internal racial competition.

The second-generation of immigrants also tends to struggle “identifying as inner-city black Americans, identifying as ethnic Americans with some distance from black Americans, or identifying as immigrants in a way that does not reckon with American racial and ethnic categories” (see Kebede 2018; Waters 1990). In *Characteristics and Challenges of High-Achieving Second-Generation Nigerian Youths in the United States*, Anekwe (2008) suggests the following:



“..Although youths faced the challenges of peer teasing, underpreparation for college, and parental pressure, they devised coping strategies through code-switching, reevaluating their definition of academic success, and increasing determination and effort. They also were involved in several extracurricular activities that helped them to create social networks with peers and adults and to break social barriers” (p. 2).

Compared to the first-generation of African immigrant professionals who struggled to acquire the appropriate jobs and necessary skills for the workplace, the second-generation of immigrant professionals experience their parents pushing them into careers such as engineering, medicine, or law for the purposes for status and job security (Anekwe, 2008). In this new age, the second-generation of African immigrant professionals are faced with an “emotional tax” (Travis 2016) whereby they not only feel that they are treated differently at work, but are also affected by the burden of bias and discrimination, all of which affect their health, well-being, and ability to thrive at work (Travis and Thorpe-Moscon, 2018).

In a Business Insider education news article entitled, *An Elite Group of Students Accepted to All 8 Ivy League Schools Have One Specific Thing in Common*, Peter Jacobs looked at second-generation students who were all accepted into Ivy league institutions (Jacobs, 2015). He noticed that this group of exceptionally gifted students, credit their experiences to their parents growing up outside the United States (e.g. Massey et al. 2007; Charles, Torres, & Brunn. 2008). This serves as an intrinsic motivator for pushing them to achieve greatness in their academic pursuits. In *We Are America: A Thematic*

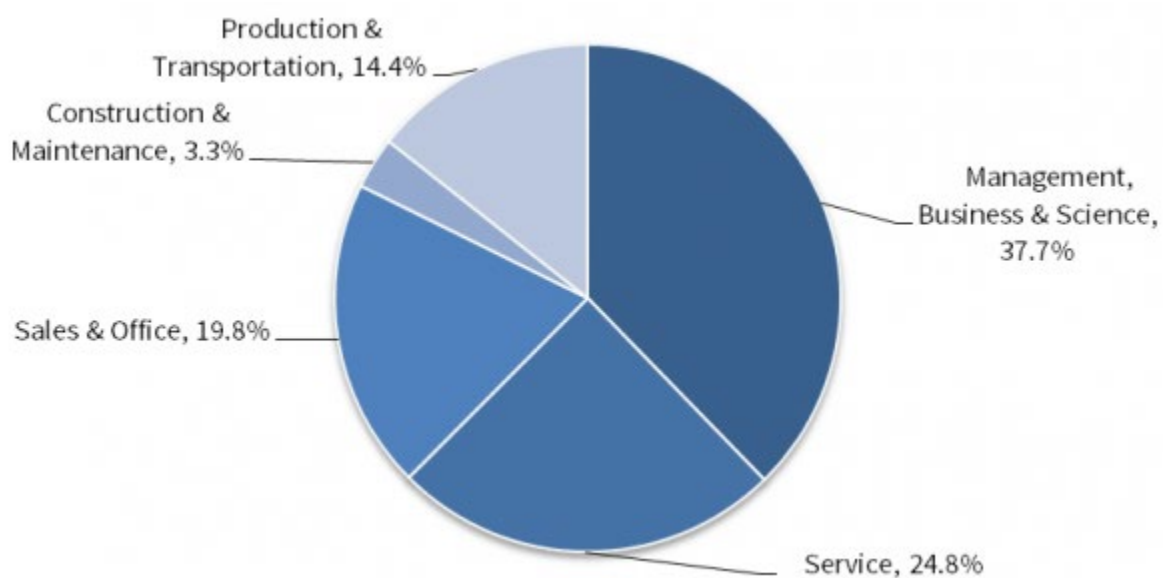
*Reader and Guide To Writing*, Joy (2008) notes that the tendency for African immigrant professionals to reach the pinnacle of academia is one that is generationally ingrained and results in the development of a sense of self-efficacy. Nurture plays a huge role in educational attainment since for many African immigrant professionals and their children, there are societal pressures (within group expectations of income, material possessions and social status) expectations in regard to having the best outcomes within their group. As a result, there is racial and ethnic socialization of African immigrant professionals which promotes high self-esteem, instills ethnic pride and an awareness of bias. Moreover, African immigrant professionals also have strong networks that they form in the diaspora. This not only emphasizes the independent self in relation to others (Yoon, Hacker, Hewitt, Abrams, & Cleary, 2012) but forges social connections which allow for a stronger collectivist culture since the success of the group is equally as important as any individual gain (Yoon et al. 2012).

## CHAPTER 12

## IMMIGRATION DATA AND REPORTS

## Sub-Saharan African Immigrants in the United States

Figure 1.0 - Employed Workers in the US Labor Force (ages 16 and older) by Occupation and Origin, 2010

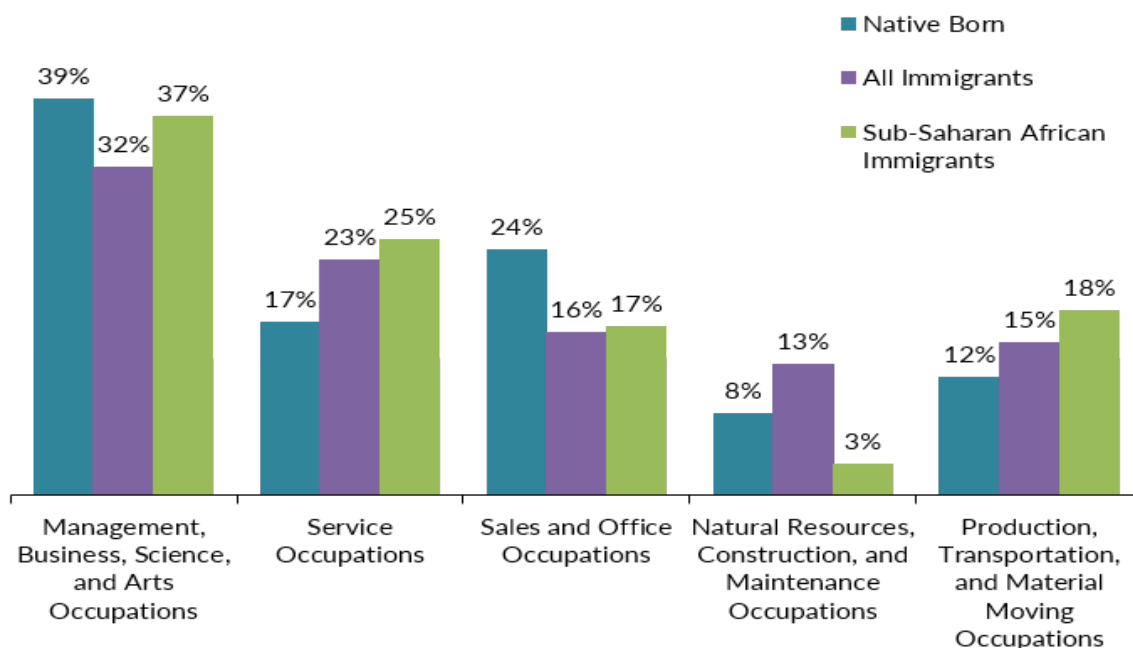


Source: American Immigration Council, 2012

- 37.7% of employed African immigrants aged 16 and over worked in management, business, science, and arts occupations in 2010 (American Immigration Council, 2012)

- One-quarter (24.8%) of employed African immigrants aged 16 and over worked in service occupations in 2010, while one-fifth (19.8%) worked in sales and office occupations (American Immigration Council, 2012).

Figure 2.0 - Employed Workers in the US Labor Force (ages 16 and older) by Occupation and Origin, 2017



Source: The Migration Policy Institute, 2017

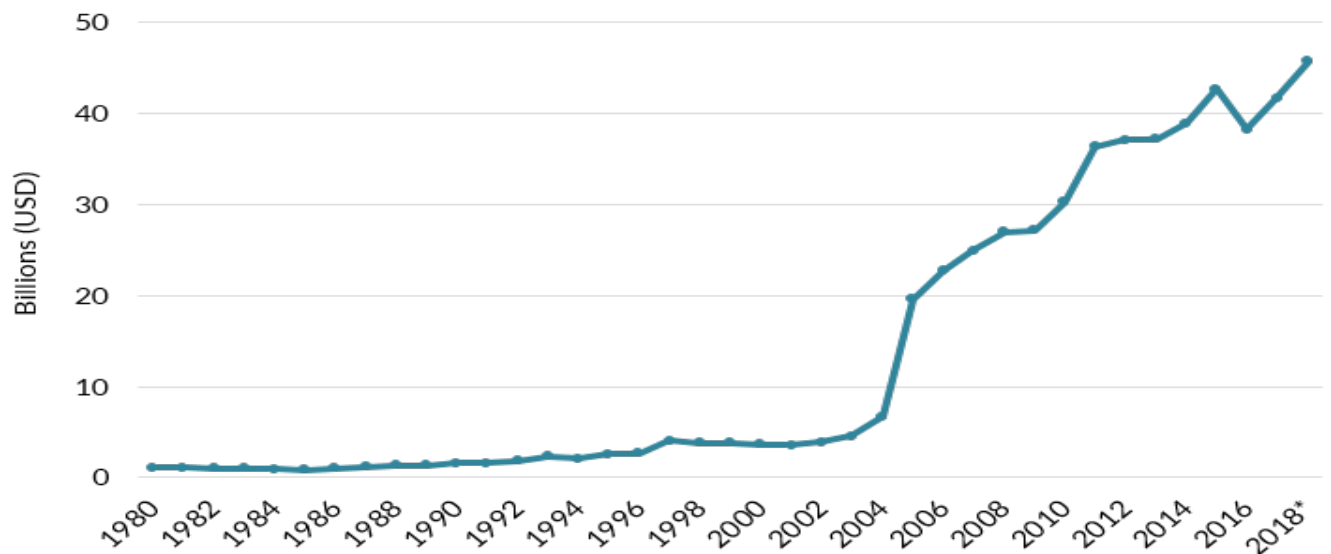
In the United States, African immigrant professionals are most likely to be in management, business, science, and arts occupations (37%) than other industries. This is followed by service occupations (food, retail, social services, etc.) which comprise 25% of the roles that African immigrant professionals have in the United States. Only 3% of African immigrants work in natural resources, construction and maintenance roles. Therefore, one can conclude that there is a propensity for African immigrants to be

employed in more blue-collar jobs than white-collar ones. The 2017 data also reveal that 61% of South Africans hold management positions in the USA compared to 54% of Nigerians and 50% of Kenyans that hold similar executive level positions. In the production, transportation, and material moving occupations, Somalians are the most represented African immigrant group. Similarly, Liberians are overrepresented in most service occupation jobs than any other African immigrant group. These findings coincide with the respective advantages/disadvantages they experience in their home countries-- some come as refugees, others who have large amounts of human capital. Between 2010 and 2017, the percentage breakdown of occupations by African immigrants stayed the same for the most part. The only changes that were recorded was a decrease in sales and office roles by a margin of 3-4%. As a result, the percentage of African immigrants involved in the production, transportation, and material moving functions increased from 14.4% in 2010 to 17% in 2017.

Social identity threat is still prevalent for African immigrants in management positions. Research into racial and ethnic disparities suggest that “blacks who hold comparable management positions as whites consistently report feeling less accepted by their organizations, perceive themselves as having less discretion in their jobs, and express less career satisfaction” (Browne, 1999; Feagin & McKinney, 2005; Feagin & Sikes, 1994; Greenhaus, Parasuraman, & Wormley, 1990). Hence, simply having a high percentage of African immigrants working in managerial positions does not translate to them having the same outcomes as their white counterparts. As a result, many of these

senior-level African immigrant professionals report having less ideal workplace experiences and outcomes than their counterparts.

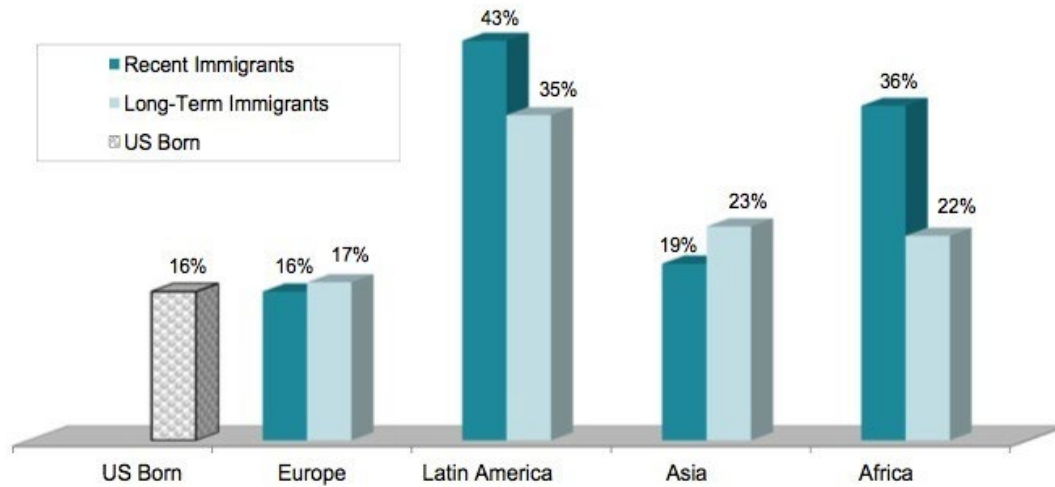
Figure 3.0 - Annual Remittance Flows to Sub-Saharan African Countries, 1980-2018



Source: World Bank Prospects Group, “Annual Remittances Data,” April 2019

Global remittances have increased by 13-fold since 2000 (The Migration Policy Institute, 2017). According to the World Bank data, these global remittances reached \$45.7 billion in 2018. In Nigeria, global remittances in 2018 were at an all-time high of \$24 billion in 2018 - accounting for more than 6% of the nation’s gross domestic product (GDP). In Cape Verde and Liberia, remittances accounted for 12% of the 2018 GDP. Similarly, they contributed to 15% of the GDP in Lesotho and Gambia in the same year.

Figure 4.0 - Shares of High-Skilled US Immigrants Working in Unskilled Jobs, 2009



Source: MPI Analysis of 2009 ACS

A higher percent of recent immigrants (33%) work unskilled jobs compared to long-term immigrants (22%). On average, it takes about ten years for African immigrant professionals to reap the benefits of skilled work that matches their skill set and education level. Across all indicators - wealth, neighborhood, and school quality, African immigrants from Anglophone countries have higher skilled jobs than those from Francophone countries. This is because employers tend to have a reference for individuals that can speak English in the workplace. The highly unskilled jobs non-English African immigrants tend to include construction laborers, drivers, and maids, whereas skilled jobs are those requiring at least a college degree.

A VOA News documentary (2018) looks at two Africans in their mid-30s who work as truckers – Mamoudou Diawara and Elias Balima. These two African immigrants -

originally from the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso - pride themselves for earning \$200,000 a year. These truckers do not experience a day without being offered work. Despite the long day drives, they enjoy the sense of financial freedom and autonomy that comes with being able to own their trucks and set their schedules for themselves. Elias, specifically, is grateful for the opportunity that America affords him since his inability to finish secondary school back home in Burkina Faso did not hinder his earning potential in America.



## CHAPTER 13

### SELECT PROFILES: UNSKILLED AFRICAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS

In order to humanize the African immigrant professional as well as his/her experiences at the workplace, five different articles were critically appraised out of a pool of ten articles published within the past six years. African immigrants without a bachelor's degree were selected to understand their background and daily plights as they navigate the United States.

#### **Findings:**

1. Many of the immigrants that were unskilled workers were asylum seekers / refugees are from East Africa - Somalia, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Eritrea (many are Somalis). This is aligned with the findings from both the immigration report and literature

- VIDEO: "My name is Abdi Khalif. I was born in Somalia. I fled Somalia January 12, 1991 because of civil war." - (Khalif, 2014).
- VIDEO: "My name is Amina Shire. I was born in Somalia. I came from Somalia 2005 and I came to Kenya refugee. I stay in refugee 10 years. Then I fly to America." - Amina Shire (Shire, 2014).
- VIDEO: "My family and I immigrated from a region in Ethiopia called Oromia to Kenya in 2000, then from Kenya to America in 2004." - Nazera Mohamed (Mohammed, 2019).

2. Most of the working immigrant professionals admit that settling in was harder than they expected.

- VIDEO: "We discovered that America wasn't perfect. In Nigeria, we'd heard stories about how America was an amazing place and how the people who came to America instantly became rich." - Tunrayo Olanrewaju (Olanrewaju, 2017).
- VIDEO: "My parents had to work jobs that they never would have taken in Nigeria. My parents had to work in nursing homes and they had to work weekends and holidays" - Tunrayo Olanrewaju (Olanrewaju, 2017).
- "Eritrea uses the metric system. Weldegabr, 26, had never needed to understand English measurement units before winning his asylum case a few months ago." - Kibreab Weldegabr (Morrissey, 2018, para. 4).
- "It made me realize what we see back in Africa is also here." - Jumi Onimole (Morrissey, 2018, para. 16).

3. Some African immigrants experience cultural, weather and/or language differences on getting to the US.

- "But after legally crossing the border and asking for asylum, Merlin was detained by federal officials for 11 months. He lived at the South Texas Detention Complex along with people who didn't look like him or speak his native language, French" (Greene, 2018, para. 3).
- "Eritrea uses the metric system. Weldegabr, 26, had never needed to understand English measurement units before winning his asylum case a few months ago." - Kibreab Weldegabr (Morrissey, 2018, para. 4).

- VIDEO: "People from other cultures were always interested about African food and I see that opportunity that was missing" - Abdirahman Kahin (video) (Kahin, 2015).
- "The U.S. was colonized by the British. We were colonized by the British," she said. "So, why are we speaking different English?" - Jumi Onimole (Morrissey, 2018, para. 21).
- "Onimole explained that in Nigeria, party hosts are expected to provide all of the food for their guests. She was surprised but delighted to learn about the concept of pot lucks" (Morrissey, 2018, para. 24).
- "African immigrants arriving in Texas are finding a litany of unique racial, cultural and practical challenges to becoming legal residents in America" (Greene, 2018, para. 1).

4. African immigrant professionals regardless of skill level have previous work experience and/or come from families that had jobs/businesses back in their home countries.

- "The 38-year-old who worked in hotel management said he fled violent political unrest in Cameroon to seek a new life in America, a country he viewed as a bastion of safety and freedom." - Merlin's article (Greene, 2018, para. 2).
- VIDEO: "My aunt lived in Kismayo. She had a business there. She taught me how to do business. One year later, I made my own business. Then, seven years later, I went to South Africa. My business in South Africa was clothing, shoes, cosmetics" - Abdi Khalif (video) (Khalif, 2014).

- VIDEO: "My dad was a lawyer or professor while my mom was a secretary at an electronic firm" - Tunrayo Olanrewaju (she migrated with her family at a young age) (Olanrewaju, 2017).

These select profiles of unskilled African professionals reveal a loss of privilege that they all experience when they leave their home countries for the USA. This loss of privilege is disrupted by external factors -such as civil wars- that are beyond their control. For some of these professionals, they have to start all over again to make ends meet. Furthermore, there is also a common thread that applies to each of these professionals. They perceive the United States as a place where they can pursue their highest goals as long as they are willing to tirelessly work hard to achieve the American Dream.

## CHAPTER 14

AFRICAN IMMIGRANT PROFESSIONALS AND THEIR IMPACT ON BLACK  
WAGES

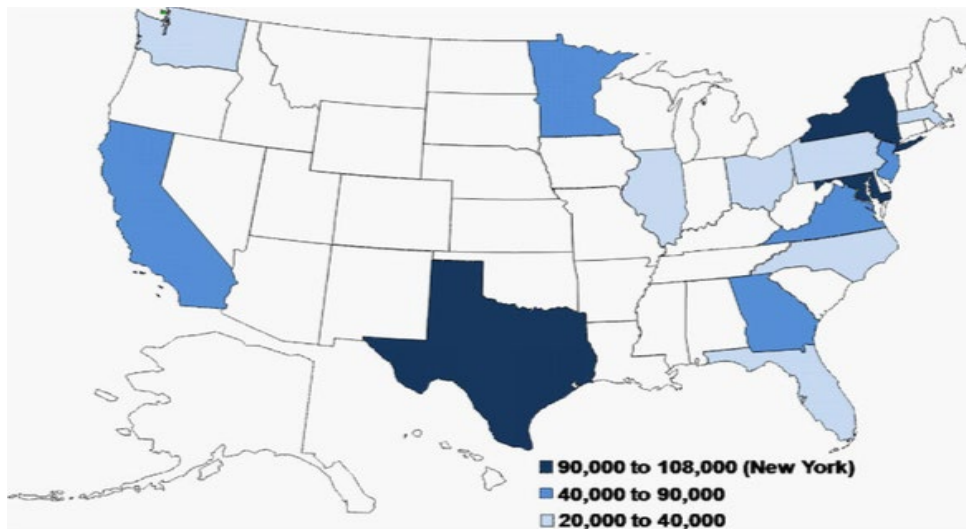
The American Dream is the notion that anybody can achieve success as long as they are willing to work hard and make the most use of opportunity. There is common belief that high levels of immigration affect the wages or employment of native workers. In *Immigration and African American Wages and Employment: Critically Appraising the Empirical Evidence*, Mason (2013) argues that an increase in the supply of capital in the country is what leads to an increase in the wages of both unskilled and skilled workers. Mason (2013) also suggests that some scholars present the argument that employers view immigrants and native-born, multigenerational African Americans as perfectly substitutable groups of workers in the production process, when they have identical skills. In addition, employers are more likely to hire African immigrants since they are cheaper to employ than black natives. However, this decision is predicated on the belief that there would not be a loss of productivity. It is important to note that “recent immigrants are not substitutes for native workers or for long term immigrants who are fully integrated in the US labor market” (p. 23). Hence, workplaces have a preference for African immigrant professionals that are quite familiar with systems and practices. With that in mind, “new immigrants are strong substitutes for other recent immigrants of their own group” (p.23). Competition between recent immigrants for jobs is steep; the supply

of black human capital being greater than the demand (opportunities) is predicted to result in a decline of black wages and employment (p. 23).

## CHAPTER 15

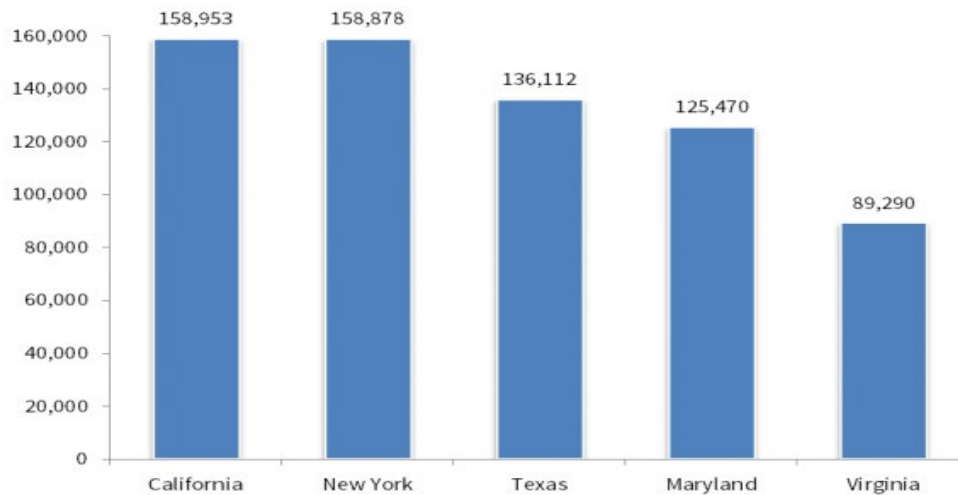
## MACRODATA: POPULATION &amp; DEMOGRAPHIC THEMES

Figure 5.0a - Black African Immigrant Population, 2006-2008



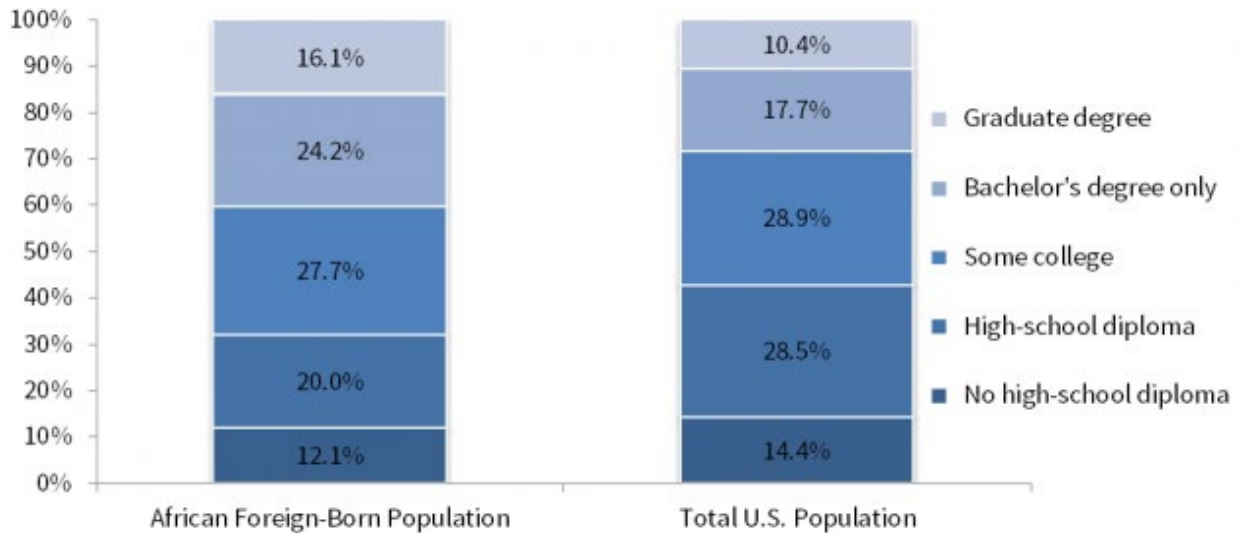
Source: MPI Analysis of 2006 - 2008 ACS Data

Figure 5.0b - Black African Immigrant Population, 2010



Source: Census 2000 Summary File 3, Table DP-2; 2010 American Community Survey, Table DP02.

Figure 5.0c - 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.

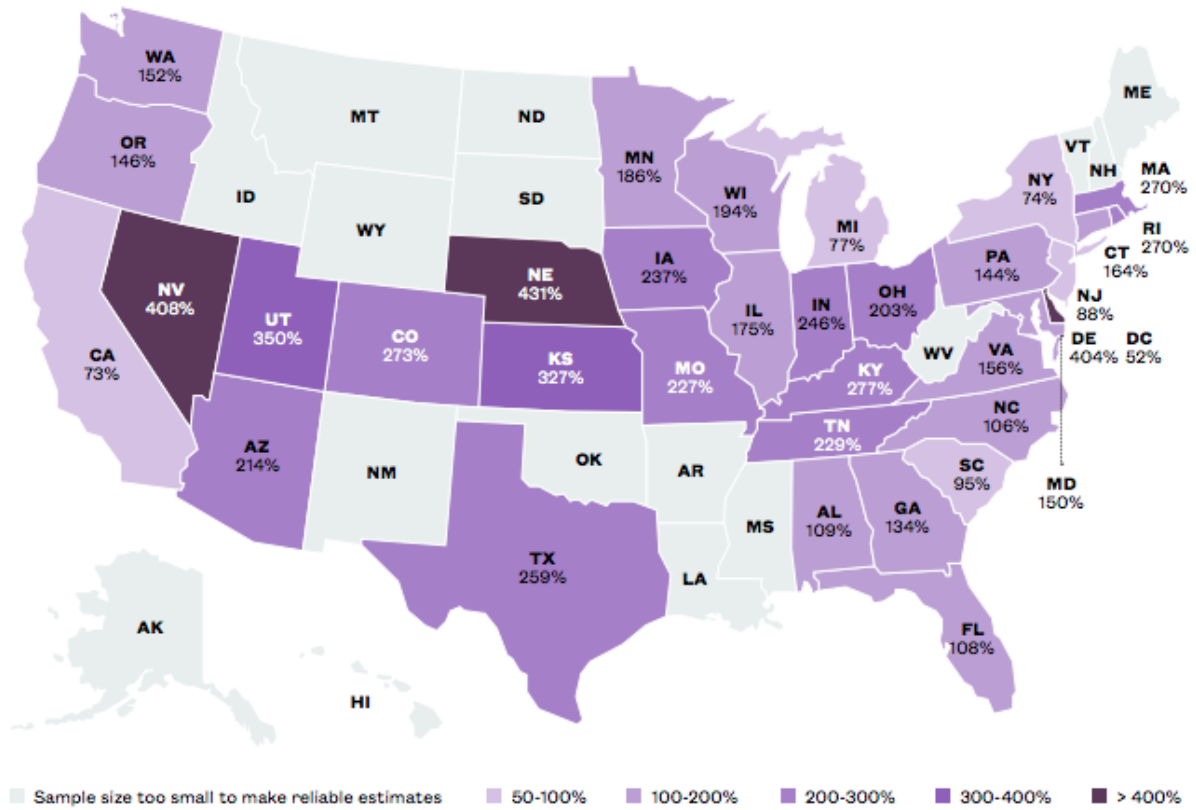


In 2006-2008, the highest number of African immigrants resided in New York, Texas as well as the District of Columbia-Maryland-Virginia. Georgia, New Jersey and California followed suit in terms of the number of African immigrants that they recorded. Overall, there were more than 660,000 African-immigrants living in five states. On average, African-foreign born nationals are more likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher than other groups in the United States. Conversely, the African-foreign born population lags behind the total US population in regards to the percentage of those that have a high school diploma and those that have an associates degree.

African immigrants boast higher levels of education than the US population overall. With more than 40% of Africans having a bachelor's degree, a third of the degrees held by this group are STEM-related degrees (New American Economy, 2018). This gives African immigrants a competitive advantage than other groups since 3 out of every 4 African immigrants that are in the workforce are between the ages of 25 and 64.

Data from the Pew Research Center (2017) shows that the median age of African immigrants is 37 years old. This is lower than the overall median black immigrant age which is 42 years. Although, African immigrant professionals tend to be concentrated in key areas of the country (Maryland, Georgia, New York, etc.), they are also geographically spread out - 40% in the South, 25% in the Northeast, 19% in the Midwest and 16% in the West. Considering the fact that 48% of these African immigrant professionals are married, more metropolitan hubs for African professionals are likely to emerge in the future.

Figure 6.0 - Growth in the number of Sub-Saharan African immigrants, 2000-2015



Source: American Community Survey (ACS), 2000-2015

FIGURE 12: METROPOLITAN AREAS WITH THE LARGEST POPULATIONS OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANT RESIDENTS, 2015

2015 Metropolitan Area	Sub-Saharan African Population	Share of Population	2015 Metropolitan Area	Sub-Saharan African Population	Share of Population
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	191,149	<b>3.2%</b>	Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	78,106	<b>2.2%</b>
New York-Newark-Jersey City, NY-NJ-PA	183,070	<b>0.9%</b>	Boston-Cambridge-Newton, MA-NH	69,615	<b>1.4%</b>
Houston-The Woodlands-Sugar Land, TX	91,228	<b>1.4%</b>	Chicago-Naperville-Elgin, IL-IN-WI	56,085	<b>0.6%</b>
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Roswell, GA	89,328	<b>1.6%</b>	Los Angeles-Long Beach-Anaheim, CA	52,630	<b>0.4%</b>
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	85,956	<b>1.2%</b>	Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	48,918	<b>0.8%</b>

Source: New American Economy, 2012

In 2010, California had the highest black immigrant population followed by New York, Texas, Maryland, and Virginia. In recent times, the DC-VA-MD-WV area has the

largest share of population. African immigrants make up 3.2% of the population. There are also high concentrations of immigrants in New York, Georgia and the metropolitan areas of Houston and Dallas. Several states have also recorded significant increases in their African immigrant population. African immigrants have increased in Nebraska and Nevada by 408% and 431% respectively since 2000

In states like Maryland, the immigrant population is integral to the state's economic growth. One in seven residents identify as an immigrant in Maryland, and nearly four in five immigrants speak English very well. Immigrant migrant workers comprised 19.6 percent of the labor force in 2015. African immigrant households recorded a total income of \$5.6 billion in 2015, with \$530 million paid in state and local taxes (American Community Survey, 2015). Therefore, African immigrants are essential building blocks of state and national economies in the USA.

## CHAPTER 16

### CAPITALISM AND REVENUE-GENERATION

Experts at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business and Howard University argue that immigration bans on African nations create business uncertainty for companies that rely on these groups as a primary source of business revenue / income. Companies are able to drive up their business revenue through a diverse workforce. Diversity and inclusion efforts could also be affected at so many companies. For example, Goldman Sachs is committed to “hiring targets aimed at increasing the diversity profile of its people” since it recognizes “the many benefits of a more inclusive workplace.” Similarly, Starbucks CEO, Howard Schulz had made the commitment to hire 10,000 refugees over the next five years (Useem, Meyer & Hira, 2017).

Organizational research from The Brennan Center for Justice also shows that more than 40% of Fortune 500 companies are founded by the children of immigrants (Panduranga, Patel & Price, 2017). Great companies like “AT&T, Apple, Google, Intel, General Electric, Oracle, McDonald’s, and eBay” have been founded by immigrants or their children, including (New American Economy, 2011). African immigrant professionals are also heavily employed in the healthcare industry. In the United States alone, there were 46,000 high-skilled African immigrant registered nurses with at least a bachelor's degree or higher. There are also more than 13,000 African immigrant post-

secondary teachers and more than 15,000 general physicians and surgeons (New American Economy, 2018, p. 18).

In places like Maryland and all throughout the country, African immigrant professionals are not only traditionally employed in STEM industries but are also entrepreneurial in their pursuits. More often than not, African-immigrant professionals create their own small and medium-sized enterprises which not only provide goods and services to essential members of the community. In that same vein, African immigrant professionals also end up employing others which also creates a pathway to financial security.

Current laws that seek to put a ban on immigration from certain African countries are not only against the values that America stands for but also impede economic growth. This is because African immigrant professionals are involved in many industries that provide essential goods and services to communities across the nation. Likewise, African immigrant professionals and their households put money back in their communities and states through gainful employment but also value-added entrepreneurship.

## CHAPTER 17

### CRITIQUE

Kasinitz, Mollenkopf, Waters, & Holdaway (2008) define the 1.5 generation as those born abroad but who arrived by age 12 and then grew up in the United States (p. 2). The literature on the African immigrant professional has some gaps in its analysis. Firstly, the 1.5 generation of African immigrant professionals are often left out of the discourse. The outcomes for this group of individuals is quite unknown and as a result, this group is even more understudied. It is important to know how the outcome for this group fares and understanding of the dichotomy that exists between the first- and second-generations of African immigrant professionals.

Several studies focus on the likelihood for African immigrant professionals to have a STEM education and/or pursue graduate school. There are more and more young African men and women who are employed at large corporations across different industries. One thing that the research has yet to examine is the long-term economic outcomes for African immigrant professionals who decide to go beyond the traditional four year post-secondary education model. Future social science research can look into their salary earnings over a ten-year period and compare them to other groups particularly Asians and Whites. In order to assess how groups fare, it is important to understand the role of affinity groups in the African immigrant professionals' community. These affinity groups not only provide networking opportunities for African professionals but they also provide them with a sense of community and belonging. Furthermore, various works that were analyzed in this capstone did not deeply hone in on the power of affinity groups,

and the means by which they can lead to better workplace performance as well as alleviating the emotional tax that exists (Diversity Best Practices, 2009).

In order to define emotional tax in the African-immigrant context, it is necessary that the triggers of such an emotional tax are defined. Several articles focused on the outcomes that African immigrant professionals have but hardly any focused on the journey the individual had when it comes to meeting workplace demands. After conducting this content analysis, it is still quite unclear what percent of African immigrant professionals are affected by their ways of speaking or whether the exorbitant cost of living makes them feel inadequate in their jobs. Although the findings in the literature are applicable to multiple individuals, it would be beneficial to examine those who are outliers within certain groups. For example, an individual - similar to the truck drivers in the Vox article - that does not speak English whose economic outcomes are favorable. A case study of these individuals will shed some light on how their organizations are either creating or hindering environments for African immigrant professionals to succeed.

Identity threats at work hinder people's chance of success since employees of color often feel threatened and underrepresented when it comes to overcoming workplace injustices. The body of work on African immigrant professionals does not thoroughly examine identity threat as it relates to stereotypes that are associated with Africans. Although some of the individuals profiled attest to being stereotyped, there is little follow up to how these job labels have affected their ability to relate to others. Emerson and Murphy (2014) suggest that diversity policies in organizations can create a new "all-

inclusive multicultural” approach that speaks to the identity of majority and minority individuals. Future case studies should explore the extent to which such policies have enabled Africans to thrive and climb the company ladder.

The ability to advance in the organization is heavily dependent on key traits or skills that are desirable to the organization. In *The Relational Generation of Workplace Inequalities*, Tomaskovic-Devey (2014) argues that categorical distinctions such as gender or education are either mapped, exaggerated or naturalized with organizational divisions of labor (p. 1). The extant sociology literature on the African immigrant does not expatiate on these individual characteristics and whether they are more definitive to an African immigrant professional who might be new to the organization. In addition, the sociology literature does not look at individuals who might be triple minorities - e.g. someone is African, female, and Muslim - and whether she might have favorable workplace outcomes and strong interpersonal relationships at the workplace.

Tomaskvoic-Devey also notes that “one of the most powerful ideas that have developed in the organizational inequality literature is that each organization represents an inequality regime — a regime comprised of the job, class, and status-based social relations within the organization; practices both formal and informal; and cultural models of people, work, and inequality imported from the society at large” (Acker, 2006; Stainback and Tomaskovic-Devey, 2012). One of the most salient things worth examining is whether the existence of several African immigrant professionals in an organization - spread across the organizational hierarchy - leads to better outcomes. Organizations have consciously pursued several efforts aimed at increasing their diversity



profiles. However, an increase in the number of minorities does not always lead to optimal outcomes. Therefore, it is worth exploring whether status-based social relations exist for Africans in their organizations due to the collectivist culture that is ingrained in them.

Tomaskvoic-Devey rejects the notion as being “empty positions, rational bureaucracies, or efficiency-obsessed capitalist firms” (Roscigno, 2011; Tomaskovic-Devey, 2014, p. 54)” From his assertion, individuals in organizations seek to maximize their outcomes and self-interests. As a result, they are also more likely to further their own objectives even if it is at the expense of others. The extant literature examined in this capstone research does not provide insight into the perspectives of individuals who view the African immigrant professional as a threat to either the organizational balance of power or their individual career advancements. Knowledge of this would be useful for understanding the psychology behind their own decision making.

## CHAPTER 18

### CONCLUSION

The African immigrant professional is an essential building block of the American workplace and economy. In 2015 alone, African immigrants earned \$55.1 billion and paid \$10.1 and \$4.1 billion in federal and state taxes (New American Economy, 2018). At the workplace, new African immigrants are not only adjusting to a different culture but are also fixated on optimizing their outcomes either through taking advantage of structural opportunities or through socialization within their ethnic group. African immigration to the United States has been strengthened through adversarial legalism mechanisms which have created a pipeline for immigrants from underrepresented parts of Africa to immigrate to the United States. These pipelines have benefitted local and state communities since African immigrant professionals are not only gainfully employed but are also entrepreneurs. As a result of their participation in various GDP-generating activities, - either through goods/services or their spending power of \$40.3 billion - African immigrant professionals are economic drivers in America. Stakeholders in government and across sectors must realize that there is an innate value that an African immigrant professional brings to an organization. With that in mind, efforts ought to be made to strengthen diversity and inclusion on both the micro and macro level when. This would undoubtedly create an enabling environment for African immigrants to thrive in their respective organizations. Therefore, it is crucial that

research and policy head in the direction of alleviating the structural and institutional barriers that African immigrant professionals face.

This capstone examined the heterogeneity of the African immigrant professional as well as the multidimensionality of their needs in the workplace. Race and their immigrant status play an integral role in their ability to assimilate and integrate into society. The African immigrant professional's experience is also not monolith. Despite earning a college education in their home country, some African immigrants might take up to ten years before achieving their "big break" which is the transition from unskilled to skilled work. On the other hand, other African immigrant professionals particularly those from prestigious universities or those with STEM education tend to have higher earning outcomes. Last but not least, there is an underlying theme of "invisibility" that is pervasive across the African immigrant experience. This is characterized by the emotional tax that is associated with not only wanting to belong but feeling the need to justify one's place in an organization by exceeding expectations.

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