

# POPULATION BULLETIN

Vol. 62, No. 4

December 2007

A PUBLICATION OF THE POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

## Immigration and America's Black Population

by Mary Mederios Kent



- The number of foreign-born blacks more than tripled between 1980 and 2005.
- About two-thirds of foreign-born blacks are from the Caribbean and Latin America.
- Forty percent of African-born blacks arrived between 2000 and 2005.

**PRB**

POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

# Population Reference Bureau

The Population Reference Bureau **informs** people around the world about population, health, and the environment, and **empowers** them to use that information to **advance** the well-being of current and future generations.

## Officers

**Francis L. Price**, Chair of the Board

President and Chief Executive Officer, Q3 Stamped Metal, Inc. and Q3 JMC Inc., Columbus, Ohio

**Terry D. Peigh**, Vice Chair of the Board

Senior Vice President, Managing Director, The Interpublic Group of Companies, New York

**William P. Butz**, President and Chief Executive Officer

Population Reference Bureau, Washington, D.C.

**Faith Mitchell**, Secretary of the Board

Vice President for Program and Strategy, Grantmakers in Health, Washington, D.C.

**Montague Yudelman**, Assistant Secretary of the Board

Senior Fellow, World Wildlife Fund, Washington, D.C.

**Richard F. Hokenson**, Treasurer of the Board

Director, Hokenson and Company, Lawrenceville, New Jersey

## Trustees

**George Alleyne**, Director Emeritus, Pan American Health Organization/World Health Organization, Washington, D.C.

**Wendy Baldwin**, Director, Poverty, Gender, and Youth Program, The Population Council, New York

**Joel E. Cohen**, Abby Rockefeller Mauzé Professor of Populations, Rockefeller University and Head,

Laboratory of Populations, Rockefeller and Columbia Universities, New York

**James H. Johnson Jr.**, William Rand Kenan Jr. Distinguished Professor and Director,

Urban Investment Strategies Center, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill

**Wolfgang Lutz**, Professor and Leader, World Population Project, International Institute for Applied

Systems Analysis and Director, Vienna Institute of Demography of the Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria

**Elizabeth Maguire**, President and Chief Executive Officer, Ipas, Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**Gary B. Schermerhorn**, Managing Director of Technology, Goldman, Sachs & Company, New York

**Leela Visaria**, Independent Researcher, Ahmedabad, India

**Editor:** Mary M. Kent

**Associate Editor:** Sandra Yin

**Design and Production:** Becca Gurney

The *Population Bulletin* is published four times a year and distributed to members of the Population Reference Bureau. *Population Bulletins* are also available for \$7 each (discounts for bulk orders). To become a PRB member or to order PRB materials, contact PRB, 1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 520, Washington, DC 20009-5728; Tel.: 800-877-9881; Fax: 202-328-3937; E-mail: [popref@prb.org](mailto:popref@prb.org); Website: [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org).

The suggested citation, if you quote from this publication, is: Mary Mederios Kent "Immigration and America's Black Population," *Population Bulletin* 62, no. 4 (2007). For permission to reproduce portions from the *Population Bulletin*, write to PRB, Attn: Permissions; or e-mail: [popref@prb.org](mailto:popref@prb.org).

Photos courtesy of Istockphoto (left to right): © 2007 Tim McCaig; © 2007 Judson Lane; © 2007 Digitalskillet.

© 2007 Population Reference Bureau. All rights reserved. ISSN 0032-468X

 Printed on recycled paper



# POPULATION BULLETIN

Vol. 62, No. 4

December 2007

A PUBLICATION OF THE POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

## Immigration and America's Black Population

<b>Introduction</b> .....	3
<b>African-Origin Population Among First Americans</b> .....	3
Figure 1. Increase in Foreign-Born U.S. Blacks, 1960 to 2005.....	4
<b>Black Immigration Since 1965</b> .....	4
<b>Foreign-Born Blacks in 2005</b> .....	4
Box 1. Immigrants and the Foreign-Born .....	5
Figure 2. Timing of Entry for Foreign-Born Blacks by Region of Birth, 2005 .....	5
Box 2. U.S. Policies and Laws Easing Entry for African and Caribbean Immigrants .....	6
Figure 3. Entry Categories for U.S. Immigrants From Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, 2001 to 2006.....	7
Table 1. Refugees Admitted to the United States by Country of Birth, 1983 to 2005.....	7
Table 2. Ten Leading Countries of Birth for African-Born U.S. Blacks, 2005 .....	8
Table 3. Ten Leading Countries of Birth for Caribbean and Latin American-Born U.S. Blacks, 2005.....	8
Table 4. Age and Education of the U.S. Foreign-Born and the Black Population by Region of Birth, 2005 .....	9
Table 5. Sub-Saharan African and Caribbean Students Enrolled in the United States, 2001 to 2005, Leading Countries.....	10
Box 3. Immigration and the U.S. Race and Ethnic Profile.....	10
Table 6. Selected Characteristics of the African American and Total and Black Foreign-Born Americans, by Region of Birth, 2005 .....	11
<b>Metropolitan Living</b> .....	12
Table 7. Top 15 U.S. Metropolitan Areas for Foreign-Born Blacks, 2005.....	12
Box 4. African-Born Black Immigrants in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area .....	13
Figure 4. Top 10 States for Black Foreign-Born Americans, by Region of Birth, 2005 .....	14
<b>Adapting to U.S. Life</b> .....	14
<b>Maintaining Ties to Home</b> .....	15
<b>New Americans</b> .....	15
<b>References</b> .....	15

---

### About the Author

**Mary Mederios Kent** is the editor of the *Population Bulletin* series. She is an editor and demographer and has written and edited numerous publications on population and health-related issues. She holds a master's degree in demography from Georgetown University.

The author acknowledges the contributions of Dia Adams and Mark Mather of the Population Reference Bureau; and of Jill Wilson of the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Project, who wrote the box on African immigrants in the Washington, D.C., area. The author is indebted to reviewers Marlene Lee, Yoku Shaw-Taylor, and Baffour K. Takyi. The Fred H. Bixby Foundation supported the research for this publication. The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and the David & Lucile Packard Foundation provided additional support for this publication.

© 2007 by the Population Reference Bureau

# Immigration and America's Black Population

by Mary Mederios Kent

New flows of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean are a growing component of the U.S. population. They are part of the racial and ethnic transformation of the United States in the 21st century. Although far outnumbered by nonblack Hispanic and Asian immigrants, the number of black immigrants is growing at a remarkable rate. More than one-fourth of the black population in New York, Boston, and Miami is foreign-born. Immigration contributed at least one-fifth of the growth in the U.S. black population between 2001 and 2006.

Economic and political forces brought these immigrants to the United States from Africa, the Caribbean, and some Latin American countries. They come to the United States seeking educational opportunities, jobs, and sometimes individual safety. U.S. immigration laws enacted over the last few decades have opened new avenues for black immigrants, especially from Africa. U.S. laws favoring immigrant family reunification have played a particularly important role in immigration from nearby Caribbean countries. For this group, the journey to the United States has become so common that succeeding generations are likely to join their relatives already here.

The growing number and size of black immigrant communities with their distinctive dress, language, music, and food—are raising their visibility. There is increasing recognition that these groups have produced some of America's most respected leaders, most recently former Secretary of State Colin Powell—son of Jamaican immigrants—and Illinois Senator Barack Obama—whose father was Kenyan. Black immigrants have more education and have higher incomes than foreign-born Americans in general, or than U.S.-born African Americans. They are less likely to be in poverty or unemployed. But many are overqualified and underpaid for the jobs they have.

These new immigrants bring a diversity of skills and experiences, along with rich cultures and traditions. They are immigrants and they are black—two distinctive social groups in the United States—which influences their adaptation into the social and economic fabric of their new country. Many immigrants consciously maintain the dress, language, and other aspects of their homelands to affirm their “otherness.” African and Caribbean



Photos courtesy of Isaacphoto (left to right); © 2007 Tim McCall; © 2007 Judson Lane; © 2007 Digistalkie.

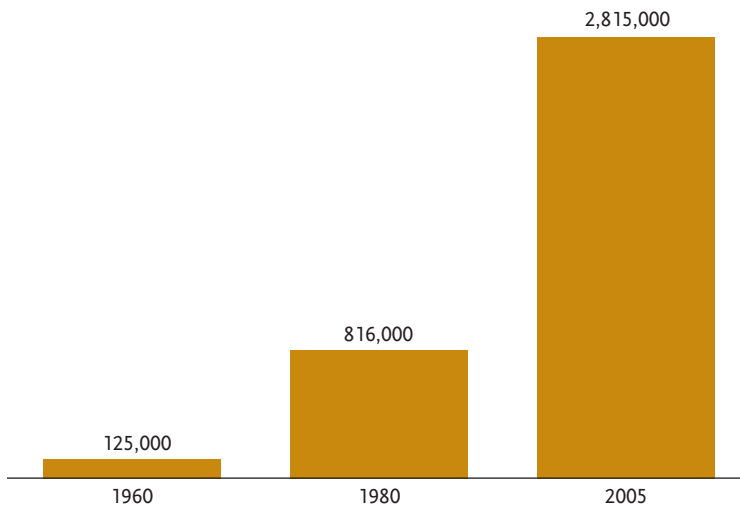
*Immigration from the Caribbean and Africa is adding numbers and diversity to the U.S. black population.*

immigrants often live in neighborhoods separated from each other, from U.S.-born blacks, and from white Americans.<sup>1</sup> But many immigrants, and especially their children and grandchildren, embrace elements of U.S. culture. Through this interaction, both the immigrants and U.S.-born population are affected.<sup>2</sup>

## African-Origin Population Among First Americans

African Americans have been a major part of the U.S. population since the country's founding. They accounted for nearly one-fifth of the 3.9 million Americans counted in the 1790 Census. Nearly all of these early blacks traced their roots to African slaves brought to the country involuntarily during the 1700s. The slave trade was illegal by 1808, ending the flow from Africa. Relatively few immigrants of African origin settled in the United States over the next 150 years, an era when millions of white immigrants were entering from Europe.<sup>3</sup> U.S. immigration laws restricted the entry of nonwhites. The great distance and uncertainties of travel were additional barriers to travel from Africa. The black immigrants who did arrive were mainly from the Caribbean—descendants of Africans brought to that region in the 18th century.

Figure 1  
**Increase in Foreign-Born U.S. Blacks, 1960 to 2005**



Sources: C. Gibson and K. Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000, *Working Paper Series* no. 81 (2006): table 8 ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), accessed Aug. 12, 2007); and Population Reference Bureau analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.

By 1900, the total U.S. population had ballooned to 76 million, driven by immigration from Europe. Black Americans accounted for 12 percent of the total population.

The blacks immigrating to the United States in the early 1900s primarily settled in New York and a few other cities. Jamaicans and other West Indians created active ethnic communities—an estimated one-quarter of the black population of Harlem in the 1920s was West Indian.<sup>4</sup> But immigration waned in the 1920s, stemming the flow of new immigrants into these communities for decades.<sup>5</sup>

### Resurgence of Immigration

Several new developments sparked renewed immigration of blacks from the Caribbean and Africa beginning in the 1970s. New laws opened legal channels for people wanting to immigrate to the United States. Cheaper and more frequent air travel reduced the physical and psychological distances. Better telephone and eventually e-mail communications connected immigrants to their families back home, and sent news of job opportunities to potential immigrants. Poor economic prospects, political instability, and violence in some areas were powerful "push" factors. The strong U.S. economy and the United States' long history as an immigrant country were among the factors attracting additional newcomers from these regions.<sup>6</sup>

The foreign-born black population rose nearly seven fold between 1960 and 1980, and more than tripled between 1980 and 2005 (see Figure 1). The foreign share of all U.S. blacks increased from less than 1 percent to 8 percent during these years. This was a sizeable increase,

even though the percent foreign-born is much higher (12 percent) for the entire U.S. population.<sup>7</sup> The number of Haitians—the second-largest Caribbean group—nearly quadrupled between 1980 and 2005, and the number of Jamaicans—the largest Caribbean group—more than doubled. The increases were even more dramatic among some African groups. The number of Ethiopians in 2005 was 13 times the 1960 number.

At first the new black immigration was little noticed outside a few cities—especially New York and Miami—where communities of West Indians, Haitians, Nigerians, and other black immigrants flourished. But that has changed in recent decades as Somali communities have grown up in Columbus, Ohio; Lewiston, Maine; and Minneapolis; Ethiopian churches may be found in suburban Virginia and Washington, D.C., hosts a Caribbean carnival each year.<sup>8</sup> Immigrant blacks and their children are gaining prominence in many fields, raising their visibility and attracting attention among the general population.

### Black Immigration Since 1965

After 150 years of little immigration of blacks to the United States, the trickle and then stream of immigrants entering in the last quarter of the 20th century fueled new growth among the U.S. black population. In the 1980s, net international migration accounted for just about 13 percent of the increase in all blacks (including Hispanic blacks).<sup>9</sup> The increasing importance of immigration for population growth also reflected a continuing decline in fertility rates among black women. The average number of children born per woman fell from about 2.5 to 2.0 between 1990 and 2004 for black women.<sup>10</sup>

Immigration contributed about 17 percent of the growth of the U.S. black population in the 1990s, and at least 20 percent between 2000 and 2006.<sup>11</sup> The new immigration has an even greater long-term effect on growth when adding births to foreign-born women. About 16 percent of black births, including Hispanics (and 13 percent excluding Hispanic blacks), were to foreign-born mothers in 2004, although less than 8 percent of blacks are foreign-born.<sup>12</sup>

### Foreign-Born Blacks in 2005

In 2005, two-thirds of the 2.8 million foreign-born blacks were born in the Caribbean or another Latin America country and nearly one-third were born in Africa. Another 4 percent (about 113,000) were born in Europe, Canada, or elsewhere. Most of these foreign-born will settle in the United States, raise families, and become part of the U.S. society. Others are here temporarily to work, study, or visit (see Box 1).

The African component of the black foreign-born population is small but growing rapidly. Its newness is striking: 41 percent arrived between 2000 and 2005, compared with 15 percent of Caribbean/Latin American blacks and 22 percent of all foreign-born. More than three-fourths arrived since 1990.

Africans make up an increasing share of the black foreign-born. Just 10 percent of the black foreign-born who entered before 1980, Africans accounted for the majority who entered in the first six years of the 2000 decade (see Figure 2). More Africans entered between 2000 and 2005 than in the previous decade.

### Caribbean Blacks: Coming to Join Family

Caribbean and African blacks have followed very different avenues to the United States. More than 80 percent of recent immigrants from Haiti and the English-speaking Caribbean entered because they had family here: One-half were immediate relatives of a U.S. citizen (see Figure 3, page 7). The close proximity of the islands and the large number of Caribbean immigrants already in selected American cities eased the way for new immigrants. Most faced limited job and economic opportunities in their home countries.<sup>13</sup> Rapid population growth fueled by high birth rates brought successive waves of young people into the labor market, exacerbating the imbalance between potential workers and jobs. Birth rates have declined substantially in much of the region, but thousands still follow the well-traveled route to the United States each year. Although many Caribbean emigrants also settle in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Canada, and a few other countries, the bulk of migration out of the region flows to the United States.<sup>14</sup> With long-standing streams of migrants to the United States from the relatively small island populations, most island residents had friends or relatives who had emigrated.<sup>15</sup>

Just 3 percent of immigrants from these Caribbean countries were admitted as refugees or asylees, and most of these were from Haiti. Cuba, which sends far more refugees, also contributes to the foreign-born black population, but the number of black Cuban refugees is not available from official immigration statistics. Only about 3 percent of Cuban-born U.S. residents identify as black.

Thousands of Caribbean blacks enter the United States with nonimmigrant visas every year. Nearly a quarter-million Jamaicans entered under temporary nonimmigrant status in 2005. The overwhelming majority were tourists or business travelers who quickly returned home. Others were here under a temporary work or study program and may have stayed for months, years, or permanently.<sup>16</sup>

#### Box 1

##### Immigrants and the Foreign-Born

The term foreign-born refers to any U.S. resident who was born outside the United States or its territories, except for people who were born abroad to parents who were U.S. citizens. Some will become legal permanent residents and eventually citizens of the United States. Between 2000 and 2006, more than 317,000 sub-Saharan Africans secured permanent resident status in the United States. Nearly as many people born in Haiti or the English-speaking Caribbean became permanent U.S. residents during those years.

Another large group of foreigners is in the United States under a temporary visa to study, work, or visit. While most return home, some gain permanent resident status when a family member or employer sponsors them. Others may stay on after their visa lapses, joining the ranks of undocumented immigrants.

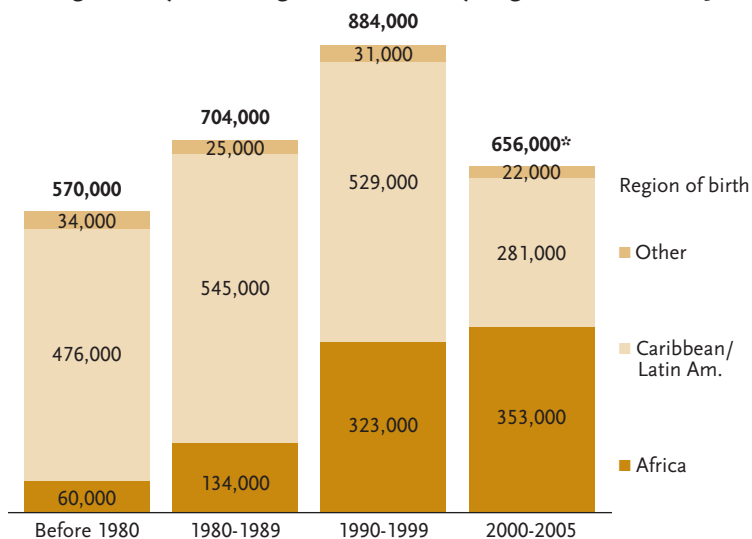
In this *Population Bulletin*, the terms foreign-born and immigrant are used interchangeably to refer to any foreign-born person living in the United States (except those born abroad to U.S. citizens). African American refers to U.S.-born blacks, while African-born refers to any U.S. resident born in any African country who identified as black or as black and another race. Most are from sub-Saharan Africa, but some are from North African countries. Caribbean-born refers to U.S. blacks born in the Caribbean or Latin America.

Other terms referring to African-origin immigrants from the Western Hemisphere sometimes include Afro-Caribbeans and West Indians—people from the English-speaking Caribbean countries, along with their children. These terms may include U.S. residents from French-speaking countries such as Haiti and Martinique. Blacks from Spanish-speaking countries often are not included in the general “Afro-Caribbean” term, but they are included in this *Population Bulletin* based on the assumption that if they identify as black, they are perceived as black by U.S. society.

#### Reference

Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, various years, accessed online at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov), on July 30, 2007.

Figure 2  
Timing of Entry for Foreign-Born Blacks by Region of Birth, 2005



\*6-year period.

Note: The African American/black population includes black Hispanics and people who identified as black alone or in combination with another race. These data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates based on the American Community Survey.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.

## Africans: Diversity Visas and Refugees

The remarkable increase in African-born residents living in the United States reflects several important changes in U.S. immigration law (see Box 2) as well as the general increase in international migration from sub-Saharan Africa after 1960.<sup>17</sup>

The 1960s marked the end of European colonial rule and creation of independent nation-states in much of sub-Saharan Africa. The turmoil surrounding these political changes caused many whites born and raised in Africa to emigrate. Most went to Europe, but some headed to the United States. Many Africans of South Asian origin also emigrated. This first wave of mostly white and Asian African immigrants caused a minor ripple in U.S. immigration statistics, but they were soon followed by a much larger flow of black immigrants.

A confluence of forces and events produced the surge in immigrants from Africa to the United States in the past two decades. Africans have a long history of moving within their own countries, to neighboring countries, and, more recently, abroad. But the migration flows increased

in the 1970s, as economies deteriorated in many African countries. The world prices dropped for Africa's major exports, including coffee, cocoa, and minerals, while the costs of imported manufacturing goods soared. Africans faced extreme poverty, widespread unemployment, political instability, and deteriorating infrastructures. Many national governments were ineffective, and rife with corruption. Some countries were plagued by civil violence and strife. Until recently, African emigrants usually headed to a neighboring country or to European countries, especially to such former colonial powers as Belgium, France, Portugal, and the United Kingdom.<sup>18</sup> But the flow of Africans to the United States accelerated as it became a prime destination for international students, created the diversity visa, and expanded refugee policies. Demographer Arun Peter Lobo noted that the diversity visa program coincided with the close of Africa's "lost decade," the economic downturns, deteriorating living standards, and political instability of the 1980s. He estimated diversity visas accounted for nearly one-half of the increase in immigration from Africa between the 1980s and the 1990s.<sup>19</sup>

### Box 2

#### U.S. Policies and Laws Easing Entry for African and Caribbean Immigrants

An increase in numbers and shift in national origins of U.S. immigrants began in the late 1960s and continues today. The influx of new immigrants included many from African and Caribbean countries with large black populations. Many immigration experts credit the 1965 Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments as initiating the current wave of immigrants, who have fundamentally altered the racial and ethnic make up of the United States.

The 1965 law, also referred to as the Hart Cellar Act, loosened restrictions on immigration based on geography, which had limited immigration of nonwhites. It also instituted policies that emphasized family reunification and professional qualifications. The new law introduced labor certificate and occupational preferences that favored immigrants with desired skills, regardless of origin. Another notable change was allowing U.S.-born children of foreigners to file petitions for legal admission of their parents. Foreigners who had children in the United States while on student or work visas, for example, could apply for legal permanent residence through their young children. (This was amended in 1976 so that undocumented parents of U.S.-born children could not apply for residence until their children reached age 20.) These changes opened the door to newcomers from around the world.

In addition to the 1965 act, several other revisions of immigration laws fostered increased immigration from Africa and the Caribbean, including:

- The Immigration and Nationality Act Amendments of October 20, 1976, made it easier for foreigners to obtain visas to study, reunite with family, or market their skills.
- The Refugee Act of March 17, 1980, fundamentally changed U.S. refugee policy to conform to UN protocol on refugees and provided for 500,000 visas annually. This deflected the emphasis on admitting only refugees from communist countries the United States opposed in the Cold War, and initiated flows from the horn of Africa

(especially Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea), where civil and international conflicts were displacing thousands of people. Cuba and Haiti were the main sources of refugees in the Western Hemisphere, as residents fled repressive communist or dictatorial regimes.

- The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) made it possible for undocumented immigrants living in the United States to apply for legal status. Some 35,000 sub-Saharan Africans and 100,000 residents from the English-speaking Caribbean obtained legal status through IRCA.
- The 1990 Immigration Act increased the number of immigrants admitted on the basis of skills for U.S. jobs. It introduced the diversity visa lottery to admit immigrants from countries not well-represented among the U.S. immigrant population. Although originally envisioned as a way to bring in more Europeans, such as Irish, who did not have close relatives in the United States who could sponsor them, the diversity visa was a boon for Africans who wanted to immigrate. Between 1998 and 2006, sub-Saharan Africans received 27 percent of the diversity visas awarded by the United States.

Some Haitians and Cubans enter with diversity visas, but the diversity lottery did not generally benefit residents of other Caribbean countries. These countries were already overrepresented among immigrants, according to the U.S. State Department criteria.

#### References

Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, various years, accessed online at [www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov), on July 30, 2007.

John A. Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000).

Arun Peter Lobo, "Unintended Consequences: Liberalized U.S. Immigration Law and the African Brain Drain," in *The New African Diaspora in North America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006).

Jill H. Wilson and Shelly Habecker, "The Lure of the Capital City: An Anthropographic Analysis of Recent African Immigration to Washington, D.C.," *Population, Space and Place* (forthcoming).



### Attracting Highly Skilled Africans

The diversity visa program was designed to admit immigrants from countries not well-represented in the United States. It provided a welcome new avenue leading to the United States for Africans but not for Caribbean residents. Because most Caribbean countries regularly send immigrants to the United States, only a few diversity visa slots were awarded to the region, and most were used by Haitians and Cubans. More than one-fifth of recent African legal immigrants entered with diversity visas (see Figure 3). As Lobo demonstrated, the diversity immigrants tended to be well educated and highly skilled. The difficulty, high costs, and lengthy distance Africans faced to enter the United States favored immigrants with exceptional ability and persistence.

Africans' arrival in the United States often represents years of effort that include leaving their home community for a capital city, perhaps in another country, often dealing with corrupt officials and a complex bureaucracy to obtain the necessary papers to emigrate.<sup>20</sup> Their departure also depleted the pools of people with needed skills and knowledge from their home countries.

Nearly 30 percent of sub-Saharan Africans granted legal permanent residence between 2000 and 2006 entered as refugees or asylees. Indeed, sub-Saharan countries figure prominently in all refugees admitted between 1983 and 2005, especially since 2001 (see Table 1).

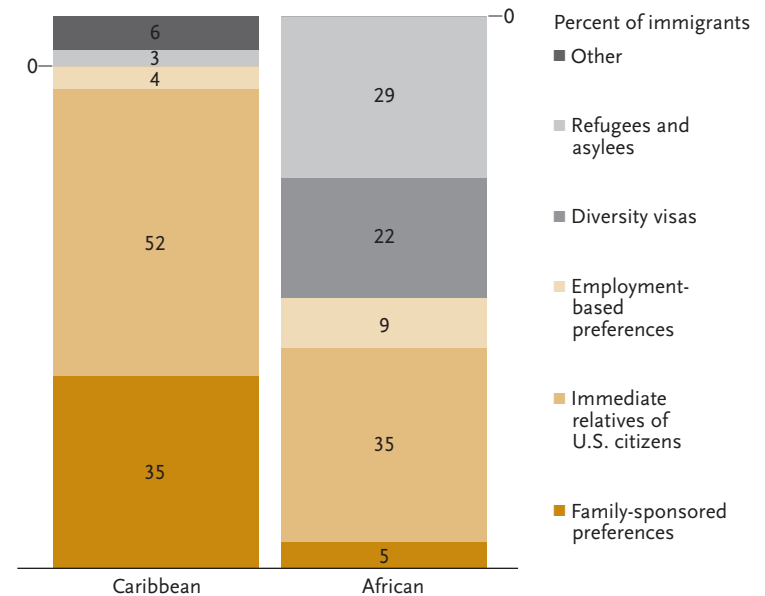
The number of refugees admitted each year is determined by the U.S. president, and the share from a given country depends on international events and U.S. policies. The number of refugees admitted from Africa began to increase after 2000, when the ceiling for refugees from the continent of Africa was raised to 18,000 after years of remaining at 7,000. The new focus on Africa reflected greater awareness of the plight of Africans in conflict-plagued areas brought by the Congressional Black Caucus and international relief organizations, along with shifting political alliances at the end of the Cold War. While less than 6 percent of refugees came from Africa between 1987 and 2000, Africans accounted for more than one-half of refugee admissions in 2004.<sup>21</sup>

### African Countries of Origin

Ten countries account for about 70 percent of black African immigrants (see Table 2, page 8). The two giants are Nigeria and Ethiopia, which together account for a quarter-million foreign-born blacks. The number of foreign-born (of any race) from Ethiopia rose from less than 8,000 in 1980 to nearly 35,000 in 1990, and 105,000 in 2005. The neighboring eastern and northern Africa countries of Somalia and Sudan have also become leading sending countries because of refugees. But West

Figure 3

### Entry Categories for U.S. Immigrants From Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean, 2001 to 2006



Note: Caribbean statistics exclude Cuba and the Dominican Republic, and include Guyana.

Source: Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, various years ([www.dhs.gov](http://www.dhs.gov), accessed Aug. 30, 2007).

Table 1

### Refugees Admitted to the United States by Country of Birth, 1983 to 2005

Country (ranked by 2001-05 admissions)	FY1983-2000	FY2001-05
<b>Total, all countries</b>	<b>1,733,121</b>	<b>320,863</b>
<b>Percent</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Sub-Saharan Africa (%)	5.5	25.4
Somalia	2.0	9.3
Liberia	0.5	5.7
Sudan	0.7	4.6
Ethiopia	1.7	2.6
Sierra Leone	0.1	1.7
Congo	0.1	0.5
Kenya	z	0.3
Burundi	z	0.2
Rwanda	0.1	0.2
Togo	z	0.1
Nigeria	0.1	0.1
<b>Other regions (%)</b>	<b>94.5</b>	<b>74.6</b>
Cuba	10.1	31.4
USSR (or former USSR)	26.2	16.7
Yugoslavia	8.3	7.6
Laos	6.5	4.5
Iran	2.9	4.4
Vietnam	26.3	3.4
Afghanistan	1.4	2.4
Haiti	1.4	1.3
Other/unknown	11.4	2.8

z: Less than .05 percent.

FY: Fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.

Source: U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services, Office of Refugee Resettlement, *2005 Report to Congress* ([www.acf.hhs.gov](http://www.acf.hhs.gov), accessed Aug. 30, 2007).

Table 2  
**Ten Leading Countries of Birth for African-Born U.S. Blacks, 2005**

African country of birth	Thousands	Percent
All Countries	871	100
Nigeria	160	18
Ethiopia	105	12
Ghana	75	9
Liberia	61	7
Somalia	57	7
Kenya	53	6
Sudan	29	3
Sierra Leone	29	3
Cameroon	27	3
Eritrea	18	2
Guinea	10	1
Other countries	245	28

Note: The foreign-born data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates. Includes U.S. residents identifying as black alone or in combination with another race. A more extensive list of countries may be found in the PRB Graphics Bank, [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org).

Sources: J. Wilson, analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.

African countries—in particular Nigeria, Ghana, Liberia, and Sierra Leone—still account for a majority of U.S. African immigrants.

While the African communities in the United States are growing, they are tiny relative to the population in the home countries. In 2005, there were nearly 900 people in Nigeria for every Nigerian-born U.S. resident. Sudan has more than 1,200 residents per U.S. Sudanese immigrant. Only Liberia, which has long had ties to the United States, and once attracted black immigrants from the United States, has a relatively low ratio of national population to the U.S. foreign-born from that country. There were just 56 Liberians for every Liberian-born U.S. resident.

### Caribbean Countries of Origin

The origin countries for black Caribbean immigrants are more limited. Three countries send the most Caribbean black immigrants: Jamaica, Haiti, and Trinidad and Tobago. Guyana, on the coast of South America, also contributes significantly to the U.S. black foreign-born population (see Table 3).

About 8 percent of black immigrants are from Spanish-speaking countries, in particular, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Panama, and Cuba. However—except for Panama—the vast majority of immigrants from these Hispanic countries do not self-identify as black. Blacks made up about one-third of Panamanian and 10 percent of the Dominican immigrants in 2005, but less than 4 percent of immigrants from the other Hispanic countries.

These Caribbean countries have fairly small populations relative to the number of emigrants living in the United States. There are fewer than five people living in Jamaica

Table 3  
**Ten Leading Countries of Origin for Caribbean and Latin American-Born U.S. Blacks, 2005**

Caribbean/Latin American country of birth	Thousands	Percent
All countries	1,876	100
Jamaica	568	30
Haiti	478	25
Trinidad and Tobago	167	9
Guyana	128	7
Dominican Republic	73	4
Barbados	49	3
Panama	45	2
Mexico	40	2
Bahamas	28	2
Belize	27	1
Other countries	274	15

Note: The foreign-born data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates. Includes U.S. residents identifying as black alone or in combination with another race. A more extensive list of countries may be found in the PRB Graphics Bank, [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org).

Sources: Population Reference Bureau tabulations of the 2005 American Community Survey.

for every Jamaican-born person in the United States, for example. The ratio is even lower for Guyana—just three people at home for each Guyanese-born person in the United States. These figures do not take into account the children and grandchildren of Caribbean immigrants, who may be part of the ethnic-group communities in the United States.

The proximity of the islands facilitates travel back and forth, which both reinforces the national culture among immigrants in the United States and spreads American culture to the islands.

### African-Born Younger, More Recent

The African- and Caribbean-born differ from each other and from the larger foreign-born population. More than one-half of African foreign-born are males, while females hold the edge among Caribbean-born and U.S.-born African Americans.

Many African men came to the United States intending to return to their homeland after accumulating some capital; they did not bring their families along on this “temporary” sojourn.<sup>22</sup> Those who stayed brought their families later. More recent African immigrants are more likely to intend to settle and to arrive with more family members.<sup>23</sup>

The foreign-born from all regions are overwhelmingly concentrated in the working ages—18 to 64. The Caribbean-born are older than the African immigrants but younger than the total U.S. foreign-born population. Twelve percent of black Caribbean-born women were age 65 or older in 2005, compared with just 3 percent of the African-born black women and 9 percent of all foreign-born Americans. The total foreign-born population

includes elderly immigrants who entered the United States in the early 20th century, or just after World War II, a period when relatively few arrived from the Caribbean or sub-Saharan Africa.

Again reflecting the recency of the African immigrant stream, the African-born population includes a greater share of children: 17 percent of females and 14 percent of males were under age 18 in 2005, compared with less than 10 percent of either sex among the Caribbean-born or total foreign-born. Not surprisingly, children make up a much larger share of the U.S.-born black population.

## Educational Credentials

The strong educational background of the newcomers from Africa is remarkable. More than one-third (38 percent) have a college degree (see Table 4). They have more impressive education credentials than Caribbean blacks, African Americans, and non-Hispanic whites. Only Asian Americans had a greater percentage of college graduates in 2005.<sup>24</sup>

## Coming to Study

Enrolling in U.S. colleges, universities, and trade schools remains an important avenue for foreigners to enter the country with temporary nonimmigrant student visas. U.S. schools welcome the tuition payments and diversity that international students bring, and often actively recruit them.

Higher education has been a favored route for Africans coming to the United States. Sociologist John Arthur relays stories of African families who pooled resources to send a promising (usually male) relative to study in the United States. The prospective student may have only the minimum funds to qualify for a student visa, intending to find a job as soon as he arrives.<sup>25</sup> Many earn degrees or certificates and eventually find a U.S. employer to sponsor them as permanent residents.

The International Institute for Education (IIE), which has kept statistics on foreigners studying in the United States since 1948, shows a substantial increase in the number of Africans attending U.S. colleges and universities over the past decade. Between 17,000 and 18,000 Africans were enrolled in each year during most of the 1990s. Since 2001, at least 30,000 students from sub-Saharan Africa were enrolled annually in U.S. educational institutions.<sup>26</sup> Most African students came from former British colonies where English is commonly taught in school, which eased their transition into American schools. Nearly half of the sub-Saharan students were from one of three Anglophone countries: Kenya, Nigeria, and Ghana. The IIE statistics do not include the race of the students, and most but not all are black. Census 2000

Table 4

### Age and Education of the U.S. Foreign-Born and the Black Population by Region of Birth, 2005

Age and education	U.S. blacks by region of birth (percent)				Foreign-born (all races)
	U.S.	Outside U.S.	Africa	Carib./Lat. Am.	
Number in millions	33.9	2.8	0.9	1.8	35.6
Percent	100	100	100	100	100
Percent male	46	48	53	46	50
Males					
<18 yrs	38	10	14	7	9
18-64 yrs	56	83	84	84	82
65+ yrs	7	6	2	9	9
Females					
<18 yrs	32	9	17	6	9
18-64 yrs	59	81	80	82	79
65+ yrs	9	9	3	12	13
Education, ages 25 or older					
Less than high school	20	19	12	22	32
High school graduate	33	28	21	32	23
Some college/AA degree	30	27	29	26	18
Bachelor's degree or higher	16	26	38	20	27

Note: The black population includes black Hispanics and people who identified as black alone or in combination with another race. These data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates based on the American Community Survey.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.

statistics suggest many students from Kenya, for example, may be of South Asian origins (see Box 3).

U.S. colleges and universities have hosted nearly 15,000 students from the leading Caribbean immigrant-source countries annually between 2001 and 2006 (see Table 5, page 10). Again, although the majority identify as black in the United States, these countries have large numbers of Asians, whites, and people of mixed heritage. The number of foreign students has grown in recent decades, with some slippage because of tightened visa requirements following the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.<sup>27</sup>

### Attendance at Select Universities

A disproportionate share of the black students at U.S. colleges are foreign-born or the children of foreign-born parents. While 13 percent of blacks are first- or second-generation Americans, this foreign stock accounted for 35 percent of the black students at the most elite U.S. colleges and universities, and 24 percent at the least selective schools included in a recent study of selected U.S. colleges and universities. The foreigners are more likely than U.S.-born black students to have fathers who completed college, a key predictor for college attendance, and they tend to have slightly higher SAT scores, but they do not necessarily earn better grades than U.S.-born blacks during their college years.<sup>28</sup>

Table 5  
**Sub-Saharan African and Caribbean Students in the United States, 2001 to 2005, Leading Countries**

Region/country	Annual average
Sub-Saharan Africa	33,102
Kenya	7,125
Nigeria	5,796
Ghana	3,053
Caribbean*	14,427
Jamaica	4,507
Trinidad/Tobago	3,057
Bahamas	1,857
Haiti	1,040

\*Excludes Cuba and Dominican Republic.

Note: These are foreign students enrolled in U.S. institutions of higher education.

Source: International Institute for Education (IIE), *Open Doors* (<http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>) accessed on July 30, 2007.

### Box 3

#### Immigration and the U.S. Race and Ethnic Profile

The remarkable shift in the racial and ethnic make up of the United States has been tied to immigration trends over the last 35 years. Between 1970 and 2005, the non-Hispanic white majority shrank from more than 80 percent to less than 60 percent. The Hispanic share increased from 6 percent to 13 percent, and the Asian share from 2 percent to 4 percent. The African American share changed little, creeping from 12 percent to about 13 percent. This shift is likely to continue, with non-Hispanic whites losing their majority status by mid-century.<sup>1</sup>

Immigration from Latin America and Asia—along with declining fertility among non-Hispanic whites—helped change the U.S. racial and ethnic profile. However, tracking the effect of immigration on the U.S. racial and ethnic profile is not as straightforward as it might seem. The U.S. government does not record the race or ethnicity of the nearly 1 million people who become legal residents each year, or the millions who live here under temporary student or work visas. Analysts often use an immigrant's country of birth as a proxy for ethnicity and race: Immigrants from China are assumed to be Asian; those from Mexico, Hispanic; and those from Nigeria, black. This is a good estimate of the race of immigrants when they come from countries with racially homogeneous populations.

But many countries have several large minority groups rather than one major group. Guyana, for example, which contributed some 40,000 immigrants between 2000 and 2006, includes large populations of Asian- and African-origin residents, along with smaller populations of white and indigenous people, and various combinations of these groups. Among Guyana-born U.S. residents in 2000, 43 percent identified as black, 22 percent as Asian, 15 percent as some other race, and 16 percent as two or more races. About 2 percent identified as white. Clearly, Guyanese immigrants cannot be summarily assigned to any one racial group.

Even when a country does have one predominant group, its immigrants may come primarily from a minority group within the country. South Africa, for example, is approximately 80 percent black and just 10 percent white; the remaining 10 percent are Asians and mixed-race.<sup>2</sup> Yet South Africa-born residents in the United States are overwhelmingly white, 82 percent according to the 2000 Census.

This increased enrollment of foreign-born blacks has sparked criticism by some prominent African Americans who contend that U.S. colleges are not helping U.S.-born blacks when they admit foreigners to comply with affirmative action goals meant to redress the legacy of slavery and racial discrimination in the United States.<sup>29</sup>

#### Africans' Educational Attainment Diversifying

While African immigrants in 2005 have among the highest percentage of college graduates of any U.S. ethnic group, the educational levels of earlier African immigrants were even higher. More-recent immigrants are more diverse in educational backgrounds as well as in countries of origin because greater numbers have entered as relatives of Africans already here, as refugees, or through the diversity lottery. While the relatives of

Kenya provides a less extreme example of this immigrant selectivity. While at least 90 percent of Kenyans are black, just 64 percent of Kenyan-born U.S. residents identified as black in the 2000 Census. One-quarter were Asian, primarily Asian Indians. In both South Africa and Kenya, the racial minorities were the most likely to leave—perhaps because they had the necessary resources to leave and because their minority status rendered their futures uncertain during the difficult period of nationalization. Asians were forcibly expelled from Uganda during the reign of dictator Idi Amin, for example.<sup>3</sup> Most Ugandan Asians fled to the United Kingdom, but some also settled in the United States. In 2000, some 37 percent of Uganda-born Americans were Asian, although Asians are perhaps 1 percent of the current Ugandan population.

When attempting to estimate the number of black immigrants entering the country, Cuba and the Dominican Republic pose a special challenge because blacks are a minority in these countries, and most Cubans and Dominicans do not identify as black after they move to the United States. Yet, so many immigrants enter from these two countries that they are a major source of black foreign-born Americans. In 2005, some 67,000 foreign-born Dominicans and nearly 40,000 foreign-born Cubans identified as black. Panama and Mexico accounted for another 70,000 to the black foreign-born population in 2000.

In this *Population Bulletin*, immigration from sub-Saharan Africa and selected Caribbean countries is used to illustrate the high volume and increasing flow of immigrants from countries that have contributed significantly to the U.S. black population. However, these numbers cannot be used to estimate the number of black immigrants. In addition, immigration numbers do not capture the number here illegally, which is not known, or the nonimmigrants who may live in the United States for many years under temporary student or work visas.

#### References

1. U.S. Census Bureau interim projections, accessed online at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), on July 30, 2007.
2. Central Intelligence Agency, *The World Fact Book*, accessed online at [www.cia.gov](http://www.cia.gov), on Aug. 30, 2007.
3. Marc Lacey, "Once Outcasts, Asians Again Drive Uganda's Economy," *The New York Times*, Oct. 2, 2007.

highly educated immigrants tend to also have high educational attainment, they may not be as likely to have college or professional degrees as the original immigrant. The requirements for diversity immigrants (high school graduation) are modest relative to the impressive credentials of earlier African immigrants, and there is no educational requirement for the refugees who make up at least one-third of recent immigrants. While some refugees are from educated families who were part of the power elite ousted in a change in government (as were Ethiopians who left when a socialist government took power in the 1970s),<sup>30</sup> others are from uneducated families forced from their homes by widespread violence or persecution because of their ethnic background or political affiliation. They are diverse in their educational levels as well as in their knowledge of English and of the United States.

### Knowledge of English

Caribbean-born blacks are more likely to speak English at home than either African-born blacks or the total foreign-born population. This is not surprising since the major sending countries are former British territories or colonies where the black population descended from slaves brought two centuries ago, with minimal African immigration after the slave trade ended. Some Caribbean immigrants report speaking an English-based dialect or patois, such as Jamaican Creole, at home, in part to reinforce their cultural origins. Another large share of Caribbean blacks are from Haiti, where natives speak French or French Creole. In 2000, more than 330,000 foreign-born said they spoke French Creole at home, a sizeable increase over the 15,000 who spoke this language in 1980. This language barrier hinders their ability to get well-paying jobs and to receive services.

About 15 percent of the Caribbean-born blacks spoke Spanish at home, compared with 47 percent of all the U.S. foreign-born population in 2005 (see Table 6). Most are black Latino immigrants from the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Panama, and Mexico. Although blacks are a small minority of immigrants from these countries, they are important contributors to the foreign-born black population.

African foreign-born are likely to speak an African language at home. In 2005, just 17 percent said they spoke English at home, another 14 percent spoke French. The African languages spoken are diverse: Amharic, Bantu, Kru, and Swahili are among the most common. The 2000 Census recorded more than 300,000 foreign-born speaking an African language at home.<sup>31</sup> However, nearly two-thirds of the African-born say they are also proficient in English.<sup>32</sup> Many studied English in school

Table 6  
Selected Characteristics of the African American and Total and Black Foreign-Born Americans, by Region of Birth, 2005

Socioeconomic characteristics	U.S. blacks by region of birth (percent)				Foreign-born (all races)
	U.S.	Outside U.S.	Africa	Carib./ Lat. Am.	
Number in millions	33.9	2.8	0.9	1.8	35.6
Percent	100	100	100	100	100
Marital status (ages 15+)					
Currently married	37	56	58	55	65
Never married	45	30	30	30	24
Employment (ages 16+)					
Employed	56	68	70	68	62
Unemployed	9	6	7	6	4
Not in labor force	35	25	23	26	33
Percent in poverty	27	17	23	14	17
Language					
English	93	43	17	54	13
Spanish	4	10	1	15	47
other language	3	47	83	31	39

Note: The black population includes black Hispanics and people who identified as black alone or in combination with another race. These data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates based on the American Community Survey.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.

and come from countries where English is the language of government. But even Africans who are fluent in English cite major problems being understood by other Americans because their accents are so unfamiliar.<sup>33</sup> This interferes with school performance, finding employment, and gaining promotions, despite their generally high level of education.

### Marriage and Childbearing

Just over one-half of foreign-born blacks were currently married in 2005, well below the two-thirds of all foreign-born who were married, but well above the percentage for U.S.-born blacks. Corresponding to the marriage data, foreign-born blacks are also more likely than all immigrants, but less likely than U.S.-born blacks, to have children outside marriage. About 42 percent of babies born to foreign-born black women were born to unmarried mothers.<sup>34</sup>

Africans are more likely to be married and their children are more likely to live in a two-parent household than Caribbean immigrants. Census data from 2000 show that 76 percent of African immigrant children (whether born in the United States or abroad) lived in a two-parent family, compared with about 65 percent of Caribbean immigrant children and just 44 percent of African American children.<sup>35</sup> However, Africans are still below the 84 percent of children in all immigrant families who lived in a two-parent family in 2000.

## Immigrant Children

In 2005, more than 1 million U.S.-born black children were immigrants or had at least one foreign-born parent. About two-fifths of these were from African families and three-fifths from Caribbean families. These children, even more than their parents, are caught between the immigrant and American culture. Many immigrant parents want their children to maintain the cultural values and heritage of their home countries. Some parents attempt to teach their children their native language and culture to maintain their heritage, even sending their children to spend time with relatives or attend school in their home countries.<sup>36</sup>

Interviews with second-generation West Indian children in New York revealed that the children's attitudes about whites, their parents' culture, and their future prospects often reflected their parents' socioeconomic situation.<sup>37</sup> Children from poor immigrant families identified most closely with U.S. black culture, felt racial prejudice more acutely, and were less optimistic about their futures than children from middle-class families. They usually lived in low-income neighborhoods and attended lower-performing schools. In contrast, children from middle-class immigrant families were more likely to feel more connected with their parents' heritage and have

higher educational and professional aspirations. They also are more likely to live in neighborhoods with higher-achieving schools.

## Metropolitan Living

Foreign-born blacks are highly concentrated in metropolitan areas, with one-third in the New York metropolitan area alone. Another 14 percent are in the Miami area, and 6 percent in the Washington, D.C., area. But, except for New York, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and a few other eastern metropolitan areas, Caribbean and African blacks have settled in different areas. And, they tend to live in separate neighborhoods within the same metropolitan areas.

African-born blacks are more widely dispersed throughout the United States than Caribbean-born blacks. While the New York area is still a major destination, the diversity visa and refugee admissions have sent Africans to wider-ranging parts of the United States. A large group of East African refugees settled in Minneapolis, for example, creating an ethnic enclave in a major Midwestern city that did not have a large African American population. Like most immigrant groups, foreign-born blacks gravitate toward metropolitan areas where there are job opportunities, and, according to some research, where they find existing communities of U.S.-born blacks.<sup>38</sup>

## New York, Miami, and Washington, D.C., Top Metro Areas

Caribbean-born blacks are highly concentrated on the East Coast. In 2005, 62 percent of Caribbean blacks lived in either the New York or Miami-Fort Lauderdale metropolitan areas (see Table 7). Haitians are the leading Caribbean-born group in the Miami area, while Jamaicans are the leading group in the New York metro areas.<sup>39</sup> Several of the same metro areas were among the top 15 for African blacks (New York, Washington, D.C., Atlanta, and Boston), but they accounted for a much smaller share of the total. Only one-quarter of black Africans lived in one of the top 15 metro areas, and these top 15 are much more far-flung. In addition to Atlanta and the East Coast cities, large African communities have emerged in Minneapolis, Los Angeles, Dallas, and Houston. The arrival of foreign-born blacks during the 1990s shifted the racial balance in areas like Minneapolis, which has a relatively small black population. Foreign-born blacks made up 22 percent of the black population in Minneapolis in 2005. Nearly 17 percent were African-born.

Washington, D.C., has emerged as a favored destination for African immigrants (see Box 4), vying with New York for the largest number of African foreign-born U.S. residents. Between 1990 and 1998, Washington attracted

Table 7  
Top 15 U.S. Metropolitan Areas for Foreign-Born Blacks, 2005

Metro Area	Foreign-born blacks	Carib./ LA-born	African-born
Total U.S. (in millions)	2.7	1.8	0.9
<b>Percent</b>	100	100	100
New York-Northern New Jersey-Long Island, NY-NJ-PA	33	42	14
Miami-Fort Lauderdale-Miami Beach, FL	14	20	1
Washington-Arlington-Alexandria, DC-VA-MD-WV	6	3	13
Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH	4	4	3
Atlanta-Sandy Springs-Marietta, GA	3	3	5
Philadelphia-Camden-Wilmington, PA-NJ-DE-MD	2	2	4
Orlando-Kissimmee, FL	2	3	2
Los Angeles-Long Beach-Santa Ana, CA	2	2	3
Houston-Sugar Land-Baytown, TX	2	1	3
Minneapolis-St. Paul-Bloomington, MN-WI	1	2	5
Chicago-Naperville-Joliet, IL-IN-WI	1	1	2
Dallas-Fort Worth-Arlington, TX	1	2	3
Baltimore-Towson, MD	1	1	2
Seattle-Tacoma-Bellevue, WA	1	2	3
Columbus, OH	1	2	3

z - Less than 1 percent.

Note: The list of top 20, with additional indicators, may be found in the PRB Graphics Bank, [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org). The figures exclude the small number of foreign-born blacks born in another region. The estimates include black Hispanics and people who identified as black alone or in combination with another race. These data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates based on the American Community Survey.

Source: J. Wilson, analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.

## Box 4

**African-Born Black Immigrants in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area**

by Jill H. Wilson

Black African immigrants began arriving in the Washington, D.C., area in the late 1950s and early 1960s as diplomats of newly independent African countries and as students, particularly at historically black Howard University. Beginning in the 1980s, these early immigrants were joined by growing numbers of refugees, diversity visa holders, and other immigrants from sub-Saharan Africa.

The Washington metropolitan area became a top destination for refugees accepted into the United States. Between 1983 and 2004, more than 12,000 sub-Saharan African refugees were settled in the area. Sub-Saharan Africans made up an increasingly large share of all refugees coming to the area: 11 percent in the 1980s, 30 percent in the 1990s, and 67 percent between 2000 and 2004.<sup>1</sup>

Interviews with black African immigrants in Washington revealed that the metropolitan area is attractive to them for four main reasons: its cosmopolitan nature (including its racial diversity); its manageability (especially compared with New York, which was noted as too big and too expensive); its status as a center for international work; and its standing as the capital city (which is viewed as the most important city in many African countries).<sup>2</sup>

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2005 American Community Survey counted 114,000 black African immigrants in the Washington metropolitan area, accounting for about 11 percent of the area's total immigrant population.

The Washington area stands out as a preferred destination for Ethiopians, who account for almost one of every five black African immigrants. The West African countries of Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Ghana, and Cameroon follow, with more than 10,000 people each. These countries, together with Liberia, Somalia, Guinea, Sudan, and Eritrea complete the top 10 sending countries that account for three-quarters of the black African immigrant population in the metro area. These differ slightly from the national totals, in which Nigerians are the largest group and Kenyans are in the top 10.

More than two-thirds of black African immigrants in the Washington metro area arrived in the United States since 1990, more than one-third just between 2000 and 2005. Less than 6 percent arrived before 1980. The recency of their arrival may explain why they are less likely to be U.S. citizens than other immigrants in the metro area, since it usually takes at least five years of residency to qualify for citizenship. Thirty-two percent of African foreign-born were citizens in 2005, compared with 41 percent of the total immigrant population in Washington.

**Higher Education and Incomes**

The population is primarily of working age, with 84 percent ages 18 to 64. Just over one-half (52 percent) is male. Black African immigrants in Washington have more education, higher salaries, and are more likely to hold higher-status jobs than other African-born blacks. In 2005, 42 percent held a bachelor's degree or higher, and just over one-third worked in management, professional, and related occupations (see table). Another quarter worked in service occupations, while 23 percent worked in sales and office occupations. Production, transportation, and material moving occupations—which include taxi drivers—account for another 11 percent. The median household income for black African immigrants in Washington is almost \$53,000, well above the \$36,700

median for the African-born as a whole. This population also has one of the highest levels of English proficiency among U.S. immigrant groups: 62 percent speak English very well.

But many of these immigrants struggle to support their families in lower-paying jobs in the high-cost Washington area. Their unemployment and poverty rates are above the national average, but lower than that for black Africans nationally. About 7 percent were unemployed in 2005 and 11 percent were in poverty. Because Washington has a high cost of living relative to other cities, and poverty thresholds are not adjusted for local living costs, these poverty rates probably underestimate the share of immigrant families that face economic hardship.

**Settlement Patterns**

Within the Washington metropolitan area, Africans are more likely to settle in the inner suburbs and central city than in outlying areas. There are black African immigrants in Prince George's and Montgomery counties in Maryland, where 60 percent of the area's African immigrants lived in 2000. African immigrant communities are also common in Arlington and Alexandria in Virginia, as well as in central and northeastern neighborhoods of the District of Columbia.

*Jill H. Wilson is a research analyst at the Brookings Institution Metropolitan Policy Program, Washington, D.C.*

**References**

1. Author's calculations of data from the Office of Refugee Resettlement. "The 1980s" reflects the period from 1983-1989.
2. Jill H. Wilson and Shelly Habecker, "The Lure of the Capital City: An Anthropological Analysis of Recent African Immigration to Washington, D.C.," *Population, Space and Place* (forthcoming).

	Washington, D.C. Metro Area	United States
<b>African-Born Blacks, 2005</b>		
Total number	114,101	870,744
Country of origin (%)		
Ethiopia	19	12
Nigeria	12	18
Sierra Leone	12	3
Ghana	10	9
Cameroon	9	3
Liberia	4	7
Somalia	3	7
Guinea	3	1
Sudan	2	3
Eritrea	2	2
Educational attainment, ages 25+		
Less than high school (%)	8	12
Bachelor's degree or higher (%)	42	38
Limited English proficient (%)	38	38
Below poverty (%)	11	21
Median household income (2005)	\$52,998	\$36,691
Percent unemployed	7	9
Occupation, ages 16+ (%)		
Management, professional	35	31
Service	25	27
Sales and office	23	22
Construction, extraction, maintenance	5	3
Production, transportation	11	16
Other	1	2

Source: Data come from the ACS 2005 Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS). The Washington metropolitan area includes the District of Columbia, five counties in Maryland, 15 jurisdictions in Virginia, and one county in West Virginia. The population includes all those born in Africa to non-U.S. citizens who identified as black alone or black in combination with another race.

the highest proportion of African immigrants of any major U.S. metropolitan area: Africans accounted for 16 percent of immigrant arrivals to the area, compared with 4 percent nationally.<sup>40</sup> In 2005, African blacks made up 11 percent of the foreign-born population in Washington, compared with just over 2 percent nationally. Among the top 25 metropolitan areas for the black African-born immigrant settlement, only Columbus, Ohio, Greensboro, NC, and Minneapolis-St. Paul, had higher proportions of black Africans, but their numbers were much lower. The New York metropolitan area had more black African immigrants than Washington in 2005, but they made up only 2.4 percent of the area's foreign-born population.<sup>41</sup>

### African-Born More Dispersed Across U.S.

Black immigrants are well represented in most of the major immigrant states: New York, California, Florida, New Jersey, and Texas. The top 10 states are similar for both the African and Caribbean blacks, except that list includes Minnesota and Virginia for Africans and Florida and Connecticut for Caribbean immigrants. The Caribbean/Latin American immigrants are much more concentrated in a few states. New York and Florida (containing the top two Caribbean metro areas), plus New Jersey and Massachusetts, account for three-fourths of

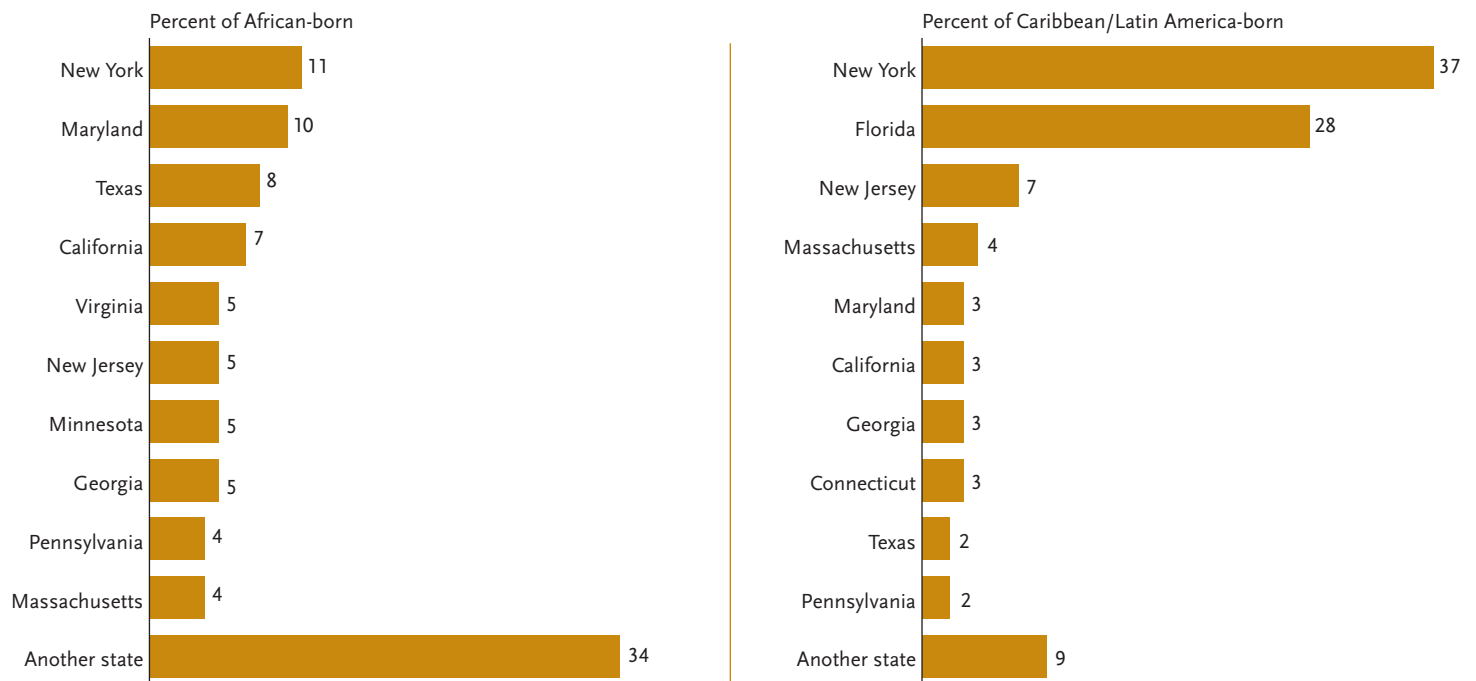
these immigrants. Ninety-one percent live in the top 10 states (see Figure 4).

The African blacks are widely dispersed; just two-thirds live in the top 10 states. Another 15 percent live in the far-flung states of Ohio, Washington, Michigan, North Carolina, and Illinois. Twenty percent of African-born blacks live in Midwestern states, and 15 percent in Western states, while less than 10 percent of Caribbean blacks live outside the Northeast and Florida.

### Adapting to U.S. Life

Many African and Caribbean immigrants report difficulty adapting to U.S. society.<sup>42</sup> Many come from respected families in their home countries, but encounter discrimination here because of their skin color and foreign origin. Both African and Caribbean groups report holding on to their immigrant identity, in part to distinguish themselves from U.S.-born blacks. They may maintain their language and dress and try to instill their traditional values in their children. They may live in enclaves, which reinforces their separateness.<sup>43</sup> Senegalese immigrants in New York City, for example, live in the same high-rise apartment buildings, creating communities that function as “vertical cities” dominated by Senegalese food, music, dress, and language.<sup>44</sup> Immigrant children have more social

Figure 4  
Top 10 States for Black Foreign-Born Americans, by Region of Birth, 2005



Note: The African American/black population includes black Hispanics and people who identified as black or black in combination with another race. These data represent the mid-point of a range of estimates based on the American Community Survey.

Source: Population Reference Bureau analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.



interaction with nonimmigrants through school, and face the competing tug of immigrant and U.S. cultures.

Caribbean immigrants—who have well-established communities in a few U.S. cities—were referred to as a “model minority,” because they appeared to surpass U.S.-born blacks: earning more money, entering more prestigious jobs, and experiencing less crime and unemployment. Some research suggested that nonblack employers prefer to hire West Indians rather than U.S.-born blacks because they are “better workers” and have a better attitude. Subsequent research has negated the model minority label for immigrants: Caribbean blacks do not earn more than African Americans with similar qualifications and their work attitudes are similar.<sup>45</sup>

African-born blacks may not share this immigrant advantage, according to some researchers. Americans often know little about Africa and hold negative, often mistaken, perceptions of life there. These misconceptions affect their views of African immigrants.<sup>46</sup> African immigrants do not earn incomes or hold jobs commensurate with their educational levels.<sup>47</sup> Research comparing white and black immigrants from Africa found that white Africans earned more than black, even after accounting for differences in the educational levels and the university where they earn their degrees.<sup>48</sup> Foreign-born blacks, however, are less likely to be unemployed or poor than U.S.-born blacks, which can translate into higher household incomes.

## Maintaining Ties to Home

Immigrants to the United States often joined together to form mutual-aid associations that helped their compatriots survive in the new land.<sup>49</sup> Similar organizations exist today to serve the new immigrants from the Caribbean and Africa. They provide information about housing and job opportunities, news from home, opportunities to reaffirm traditional ways, and even financial help.

African immigrants send earnings home to family—often helping them to improve their homes. Nigerian immigrants often join associations that are U.S. branches of associations in their home communities. These organizations can be forums for exchanging important information that can help immigrants in the United States, but they mainly function to benefit the community back home.<sup>50</sup> They may remain engaged in the politics of their home countries. Politicians from Ghana and other sub-Saharan countries also turn to Africans in the United States for financial support.

Caribbean immigrants also maintain close contact with family and friends at home, and they send money home to help support their relatives. Because many West Indian emigrants also head to Canada, the United Kingdom, or

other countries, U.S. Caribbean-born also build contacts with family living outside the region. They may join other compatriots with shared interests or occupations, such as Vincentian teachers, or Barbadian nurses, or island-wide church or political associations. However, they are less likely to engage in the African type of “home associations” to benefit a specific community.<sup>51</sup> Many remain engaged in island politics. Caribbean politicians have been known to fly to New York to raise funds and campaign among constituents living there.

## New Americans

Immigrants from predominantly black countries are coming to the United States in record numbers. They are important contributors to the size and diversity of the U.S. population and to the U.S. black population in particular. The African and Caribbean foreign-born differ from each other and from U.S.-born blacks in many ways, yet are viewed as part of the large African American population. They come with more education, follow more traditional marriage patterns, and are less likely to be poor. Yet Africans in particular do not benefit from higher education as much as other Americans.

As they adapt to life in their new country, they also change the U.S. society around them. As their numbers grow and they expand to more corners of the country, more changes are likely. How much each culture adapts will partly depend on future immigration from these regions, how closely immigrants and their children maintain ties to their home countries, and how openly the U.S. population accepts these newcomers.

## References

1. John R. Logan, “Who Are the Other African Americans? Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States,” in *The Other African Americans*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007): 49-67.
2. Regine O. Jackson, “Beyond Social Distancing: Inter-marriage and Ethnic Boundaries Among Black Americans in Boston,” in *The Other African Americans*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007): 221.
3. Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, “Historical Census Statistics on Population Totals By Race, 1790 to 1990, and By Hispanic Origin, 1970 to 1990, For The United States, Regions, Divisions, and States,” *Working Paper Series 56* (2002): table 1, accessed online at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), on Aug. 12, 2007.
4. Thomas Sowell, “Three Black Histories,” in *American Ethnic Groups*, ed. Thomas Sowell (Washington, DC: The Urban Institute, 1978): 47; and Nancy Foner, “Introduction,” in *Islands in the City: West Indian Migration to New York*, ed. Nancy Foner (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001): 1-22.
5. Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley, “Immigration: Shaping and Reshaping America,” *Population Bulletin* 61, no. 4 (2006).
6. Baffour K. Takyi and Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, “Theoretical Perspectives on African Migration,” in *The New African Diaspora in North America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006): 13-16.

7. Campbell Gibson and Kay Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign-Born Population of the United States: 1850 to 2000," *Working Paper Series* no. 81, accessed online at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), on July 30, 2007: table 8; and Population Reference Bureau analysis of the 2005 American Community Survey.
8. Afi-Odelia E. Scruggs, "What Kind of Black Are We?" *Washington Post*, July 29, 2007.
9. Frederick W. Hollman, "U.S. Population Estimates by Age, Sex, Race, and Hispanic Origin: 1980 to 1991," *Current Population Survey P-25-1095* (1993): table 2.
10. Joyce A. Martin et al., "Births: Final Data for 2004," *National Vital Statistics Reports* 55, no. 1 (2006): table 4.
11. U.S. Census Bureau, "Table 5: Cumulative Estimates of the Components of Population Change by Race and Hispanic or Latino Origin for the United States: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2006," accessed online at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov), on Aug. 15, 2007; and Logan, "Who Are the Other African Americans?"
12. Martin et al., "Births: Final Data for 2004": tables 14 and 15.
13. Foner, "Introduction."
14. Robin Cohen, "Cultural Diaspora: The Caribbean Case," in *Caribbean Migration: Globalized Identities*, ed. Mary Chamberlain (London: Routledge, 1998): 21-35.
15. Foner, "Introduction."
16. Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*, various years, accessed online on Aug. 20, 2007.
17. Department of Homeland Security, *Yearbook of Immigration Statistics*.
18. Takyi and Konadu-Agyemang, "Theoretical Perspectives on African Migration": 13-16.
19. Arun Peter Lobo, "Unintended Consequences: Liberalized U.S. Immigration Law and the African Brain Drain," in *The New African Diaspora in North America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006): 189-95.
20. John A. Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2000); and Takyi and Konadu-Agyemang, "Theoretical Perspectives on African Migration."
21. Jill H. Wilson and Shelly Habecker, "The Lure of the Capital City: An Anthro-Geographic Analysis of Recent African Immigration to Washington, D.C.," *Population, Space and Place* (forthcoming).
22. Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners*.
23. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch, *The Other African Americans* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007): Appendix: The New Immigrant Survey.
24. U.S. Census Bureau, *Country Profiles*, accessed online at [www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov).
25. Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners*.
26. International Institute for Education (IIE), *Open Doors* database, accessed online at <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>, on July 24, 2007; and unpublished data obtained via e-mail, July 25, 2007.
27. IIE, *IIE's Response to George J. Borjas' Article in National Review* "Rethinking Foreign Students," accessed online at <http://opendoors.iienetwork.org>, on Oct. 20, 2007.
28. Douglas S. Massey et al., "Black Immigrants and Black Natives Attending Selective Colleges and Universities in the United States," *American Journal of Education* 113, no. 2 (2007).
29. Lewis R. Gordon, "Thinking Through Identities: Black Peoples, Race Labels, and Ethnic Consciousness," in *The Other African Americans*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007): 84-85; and Rachel L. Swarns, "'African American' Becomes a Term for Debate," *New York Times*, Aug. 29, 2004.
30. Lucia Ann McSpadden, "Ethiopian Refugee Resettlement in the Western United States: Social Context and Psychological Well-Being," *International Migration Review* 21, no. 3 (1987): 796-819.
31. Campbell and Jung, "Historical Census Statistics on the Foreign Born."
32. Jill H. Wilson, special tabulations of the 2005 American Community Survey.
33. Judith Shabaya, "English Language Acquisition and Some Pedagogical Issues Affecting the Adaptation of African Immigrant Children," in *The New African Diaspora in North America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006): 257-72.
34. Joyce A. Martin et al., "Births: Final Data for 2003," *National Vital Statistics Reports* 54, no. 2 (2005): table 13.
35. Donald Hernandez, Nancy A. Denton, and Suzanne E. Maccartney, "Family Composition in the Home, Children Ages 0-17 by Immigrant Country or Race/Ethnic Origin," accessed online at [www.albany.edu/mumford](http://www.albany.edu/mumford), on July 30, 2007.
36. Karin Brulliard, "To Africa, For Culture and Credits," *Washington Post*, Sept. 23, 2007.
37. Mary C. Waters, *Black Identities: West Indian Immigrant Dreams and American Realities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001).
38. Baffour K. Takyi and Kwame Safo Boate, "Location and Settlement Patterns of African Immigrants in the U.S.: Demographic and Spatial Context," in *The New African Diaspora in North America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006).
39. Logan, "Who Are the Other African Americans?"
40. Audrey Singer et al., *The World in a Zip Code: Greater Washington, DC as a New Region of Immigration* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2001), accessed online at [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu), on Oct. 20, 2007.
41. Jill H. Wilson, special tabulations of the 2005 American Community Survey.
42. Mohammed Aman, "Blacks, Whites, and a Cultural Divide: Revelations of my American Journey," in *Foreign-Born African Americans: Silenced Voices in the Discourse on Race*, ed. Festus E. Obiakor and Patrick A. Grant (New York: Nova Science Publishers, Inc., 2002): xi-xix; Foner, "Introduction"; and Arthur, *Invisible Sojourners*.
43. Logan, "Who Are the Other African Americans?"
44. Diana Baird N'Diaye and Gorgui N'Diaye, "Creating the Vertical Village: Senegalese Traditions of Immigration and Transnational Cultural Life," in *The New African Diaspora in America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006): 96-106.
45. Yoku Shaw-Taylor, "The Intersection of Assimilation, Race, Presentation of Self, and Transnationalism in America," in *The Other African Americans*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007): 1-7.
46. Mamadi K. Corra and Sitawa R. Kimuna, "The Intersection of Gender and Nativity: Female African and Caribbean Immigrants in the United States," (paper presented at the American Sociological Association Annual Meeting, New York, Aug. 12, 2007); and F. Nii-Amoo Doodoo and Baffour K. Takyi, "Africans in the Diaspora: Black-White Earnings Differences Among America's Africans," in *The New African Diaspora in North America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006).
47. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch, "Earnings, Wealth, and Social Capital: A Review of Debates and Issues," in *The Other African Americans*, ed. Yoku Shaw-Taylor and Steven A. Tuch (New York: Rowman & Littlefield, 2007): 117-19; Corra and Kimuna, "The Intersection of Gender and Nativity"; and Doodoo and Takyi, "Africans in the Diaspora: Black-White Earnings Differences Among America's Africans."
48. Doodoo and Takyi, "Africans in the Diaspora: Black-White Earnings Differences Among America's Africans," and F. Nii-Amoo Doodoo, "Assimilation Differences Among Africans in America," *Social Forces* 76, no. 2 (1997): 527-46.
49. Martin and Midgley, "Immigration: Shaping and Reshaping America."
50. Charles W. Abbott, "Nigerians in North America: New Frontiers, Old Associations," in *The New African Diaspora in North America*, ed. Kwadwo Konadu-Agyemang, Baffour K. Takyi, and John A. Arthur (New York: Lexington Books, 2006): 141-66.
51. Foner, "Introduction": 9-10.

## Visit [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org) to Find:

---

**Articles and Reports.** Each month features new content on topics as diverse as gender, reproductive health, environment, and race/ethnicity.

**Graphics Bank.** PowerPoint slides of population-related information, ready for use in presentations or in the classroom.

**PRB Discuss Online.** Available at <http://discuss.prb.org>. Join online discussions with PRB staff on newsworthy population, health, and environment topics, trends, and issues. Transcripts of each discussion are archived on PRB's website.

**DataFinder.** Search a database of 136 population, health, and environment variables for 237 countries, 28 world regions and subregions, and the world. The U.S. database includes more than 250 social, economic, and demographic variables for each of the 50 states and the District of Columbia.

**For Educators.** Access online lesson plans, maps, and educational resources.

**For Journalists.** Highlights news releases, frequently asked questions, webcasts, and a dictionary of population terms.

**"PRB News" and "Events & Training."** Announces monthly policy seminars, intern and fellowship applications, and workshops, as well as news from PRB's Communications, Domestic, and International programs.

**E-Mail This.** Send e-mails to others with links to PRB content.

**Country Pages.** Scan up-to-date population, health, and environment data for any of 237 countries, and find links to related PRB articles and reports and organizations' websites.

**WebUpdate.** Sign up to receive e-mail announcements about new web content and PRB-sponsored seminars and briefings.

## Become a Member of PRB

---

With new perspectives shaping public policies every day, you need to be well informed. As a member of the Population Reference Bureau, you will receive reliable information on United States and world population trends—properly analyzed and clearly presented in readable language. Each year you will receive four *Population Bulletins*, the annual *World Population Data Sheet*, and complimentary copies of special publications. We welcome you to join PRB today.

Individual .....\$50  
Library ..... \$75  
Corporation..... \$300  
Lifetime Membership .... \$5,000

**Population Reference Bureau  
Circulation Dept. , P.O. Box 96152  
Washington, DC 20077-7553**

For faster service, call **800-877-9881**  
Or visit **[www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)**  
Or e-mail **[popref@prb.org](mailto:popref@prb.org)**  
Or fax **202-328-3937**

## Recent Population Bulletins

---

### Volume 62 (2007)

No. 1 Population: A Lively Introduction, 5th ed.  
*by Joseph A. McFalls Jr.*

No. 2 Challenges and Opportunities—The Population of the Middle East and North Africa  
*by Farzaneh Roudi-Fahimi and Mary Mederios Kent*

No. 3 World Population Highlights: Key Findings From PRB's 2007 World Population Data Sheet  
*by Population Reference Bureau staff*

No. 4 Immigration and America's Black Population  
*by Mary Mederios Kent*

### Volume 61 (2006)

No. 1 The Global Challenge of HIV and AIDS  
*by Peter R. Lamptey, Jami L. Johnson, and Marya Khan*

No. 2 Controlling Infectious Diseases  
*by Mary M. Kent and Sandra Yin*

No. 3 India's Population Reality: Reconciling Change and Tradition  
*by Carl Haub and O.P. Sharma*

No. 4 Immigration: Shaping and Reshaping America  
*by Philip Martin and Elizabeth Midgley*

### Volume 60 (2005)

No. 1 Global Aging: The Challenge of Success  
*by Kevin Kinsella and David R. Phillips*

No. 2 New Marriages, New Families: U.S. Racial and Hispanic Inter-marriage  
*by Sharon M. Lee and Barry Edmonston*

No. 3 The American Community Survey  
*by Mark Mather, Kerri L. Rivers, and Linda A. Jacobsen*

No. 4 Global Demographic Divide  
*by Mary M. Kent and Carl Haub*

## Immigration and America's Black Population

New flows of immigrants from Africa and the Caribbean are a growing component of the U.S. population. They are part of the racial and ethnic transformation of the United States in the 21st century. Although far outnumbered by nonblack Hispanic and Asian immigrants, the number of black immigrants more than tripled between 1980 and 2005. More than one-fourth of the black population in New York, Boston, and Miami is foreign-born. Immigration contributed at least one-fifth of the growth in the U.S. black population between 2001 and 2006.

Immigrants from Africa, the Caribbean, and some Latin American countries come to the United States seeking educational opportunities, jobs, and sometimes individual security. U.S. immigration laws enacted over the last few decades have opened new avenues for immigrants from these regions, in particular, the family reunification preferences, diversity visas, and broader refugee policies.



POPULATION REFERENCE BUREAU

1875 Connecticut Ave., NW, Suite 520 | Washington, DC 20009-5728  
202-483-1100 | 202-328-3937 (fax) | [www.prb.org](http://www.prb.org)