

Black Immigration in the United States

According to data by the Pew Research Center^[1], Black immigrants are a more recent immigration group, with roughly 45% having immigrated after 2000. In 2015 there were 2.1 million African immigrants living in the United States, a significant increase from the 80,000 that were present in 1970^[2]. Immigrants from Ethiopia, Nigeria, and Egypt make up the majority of African immigrants in the United States^[2]. Although African immigrants make up a small population relative to other immigrant groups in the United States^[2], they are the immigrant population with the highest educational attainment. In the article titled, “African Immigrants in the United States are the Nation's Most Highly Educated Group” found in the Journal of Blacks in Higher Education^[3], data collected in 1997 showed that of the African immigrants living in the United States, 48.9% of those had earned a bachelor's degree relative to 44.6% of Asian immigrants during this time.

Throughout the twentieth century, a series of immigration acts contributed to the increase of African immigrants to the United States. The Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 passed by Lyndon B Johnson was an act intended to promote family reunification and to recruit immigrants with specialized skills. This act provided an opportunity for African immigrants to legally enter the United States. (source) Furthermore, The Refugee Act of 1980 allowed for immigrants fleeing conflict to enter the United States easily. Through this act, Somalian and Ethiopian immigrants were able to enter the United States by seeking asylum status. (source) The most impactful piece of legislation was the Immigration Act of 1990, also referred to as the diversity visa program, which encouraged peoples from under-represented countries to immigrate to the United States. Although intended to encourage European immigration, many African immigrants have used this act to legally immigrate into the United States. (source) These acts have proven to be successful at encouraging African immigration to the United States. According to the Pew Research Center, 19% of Sub-Saharan African immigrants entered the United States via the Immigration Act of 1990 while 28% have entered through the Refugee Act of 1990. (source)

Anti-Blackness in Immigration

Immigration status and racial identity are considered as potential barriers for Black immigrants living in the United States. During the post- World War II period, anti-blackness was found to be prevalent in western immigration^[4]. In 1952, the Walter- McCarran Immigration Act established an immigrant preference system that set quotes to limit immigration from the Eastern Hemisphere but not the Western Hemisphere. The quota for European immigrants was set at 149,667, while the quota for all Asian immigrants was set at 2990 and all African immigrants was set at 1400^[4]. After much protest from the NAACP, the Roman Catholic Church, the New York Times, and President Truman, Congress modified the act in 1965^[4]. While the modified act placed an immigration limit on the Western Hemisphere, it also introduced new immigration classes that unfairly targeted black immigrants^[4]. Natives of independent countries of the Western Hemisphere were given quotas that other nations in the hemisphere were exempt from^[4]. These independent countries were primarily

Black and included Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Guyana, and Jamaica^[4]. They were now forced to share quotas with nations who were sending white immigrants.^[4]

Today, the [Immigration and Nationality Act](#), Section 203 (c) includes a program, the Diversity Visa Lottery, that allows for increased immigration to the United States. This program was created to accept up to 55,000 immigrants as permanent residents annually from diverse countries that have historically had a low immigration rate. Natives from 53 African nations, 32 Asian nations, 57 European nations, 25 American nations, and 13 Oceanic Nations are eligible to receive permanent visas^[5]. In 2018, of the 14,692,258 applicants to the Diversity Visa Lottery, 42.6% of visas were granted to immigrants from African nations. Meanwhile, 36% were granted to European immigrants, 13.8% to Asian immigrants, 4.3% to American immigrants, and 3.3% to Oceanic immigrants^[5]. While the program makes it possible for African immigration to the United States to continue, nations with the highest Black populations are excluded from qualifying: Brazil, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Haiti, Jamaica, and Nigeria^[6].

Black Immigration Rights Organizations

Black Alliance for Just Immigration

Founded in 2006, [The Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#) is an organization that advocates for various immigrants of the Black diaspora such as African-Americans, Afro-Latinos, African and Caribbean immigrants. The organization holds chapters in California, Arizona, New York, and Georgia. Their aim is to connect other organizations led by African-Americans and Black immigrants to advocate for just policies that pertain to racism, immigrant rights, and class issues. This organization has a total of 8 [programs](#) that each provide specialized training related to the advocacy work of the Black Alliance for Just Immigration. The first program is known as the BAJI Organizing Committees which is responsible for providing internal political education and campaign work that addresses policies that directly affect Black immigrants and African Americans. The second is known as the Black Immigration Network (refer to the next section.) The third program is known as the Technical Assistant and Training Program (TAT) which provides training to community organizers and leaders in approaching immigrant rights through a racial and economic justice lens and providing this information to immigrant audiences. The Communications and Media Education on Race in America (CAMERA) program uses a variety of media to further advocate and educate people on just immigration policies for Black immigrants and African-Americans alike. Advocacy STAND (Solidarity and Taking Action for New Directions) Program is focused on advocacy and direct action approaches to impact public policy on all political levels. The Faith Advocacy for Immigrants and Refugees (FAIR) project, works with faith-based organizations to advocate for just immigration policies. The African Diaspora Dialogues (ADD) and African American-Immigrant Dialogues (AAID) is a joint program with Priority Africa Network and brings together Black Americans with Black immigrants to discuss common experiences and common public policy agendas. Lastly, The State of Black Immigrants Research Institute, produces research to provide information to various key stakeholders such as elected officials and media outlets and also provides tools for Black organizations and other advocacy groups.

Black Immigration Network

The **Black Immigration Network** is dedicated to bringing people of African descent together to advocate for racial justice and migrant rights with the mission of achieving social, economic and political power. It is a Black-led organization that connects a series of people and organizations that work towards bringing racial justice and migrant rights to the Black community. BIN provides the following 7 guidelines that outlines what the organization's mission consist of:

1 Reflects the communities it serves by having a leadership body made up of people of African descent **2** Plays an active role in fostering dialogue on policy formation and implementation and ensuring perspectives of African-American and Black immigrants are included. **3** Fosters education and alliance building between communities of African descent. **4** Assists communities in examining critical issues surrounding relations between U.S. born Blacks and Black immigrants & refugees. **5** Creates, promotes, and initiates strategies to address immigration and refugee issues facing communities of African descent. **6** Undertakes documentation and issue periodic reports that focus on the unique experiences of migrant communities of African descent and/or receiving African American communities. **7** Fosters alliance building between communities of African descent and progressive organizations committed to racial equity, gender justice, economic justice and immigrant rights.

According to the scholarly article “National ‘Black Love Beyond Borders’ Convening to Unite the African World Community: African Americans and U.S. Black Immigrants”, from April 8th to 9th in Los Angeles California, the **Black Immigration Network (BIN)** brought together many places around the globe such as Canada, Dominican Republic, South Africa, Venezuela, Mexico and the United States. It was stated that “BIN, the nation’s only black-led national organization of more than 40 immigrant rights groups, brought the activists together to help tackle myriad issues facing Black immigrants and African Americans in the fight for justice in the U.S.^[7]”. In addition, “the assembly addressed a wide variety of topics including immigrant rights, refugee rights, physical and mental health, labor and workers’ rights, international human rights/land struggles, LGBTQ issues, mass criminalization—detention, deportation, incarceration and surveillance, Islamophobia and international feminism”^[7].

Priority Africa Network

The **Priority Africa Network (PAN)** works to “inform and mobilize people of African descent and their allies in the US in support of the peoples of Africa and the African Diaspora for sustained peace and democracy as well as economic, political, racial, gender, and social justice”^[8]. Beginning in April 2003, PAN has combated issues such as HIV and Aids, debt cancellation, and globalization^[9]. PAN primarily aims to make change through programs such as Speakers Series, African Community Forum, African Diaspora Dialogues, Africa Moves, and Ubuntu^[10]. The Speakers Series has focused on social justice and inspiring the community to be resilient and have hope^[10]. The African Community Forum works to “share information and resources to address needs”, of which include employment, legal services, housing, health, and immigration^[10]. The African Diaspora Dialogues work to bridge the gap between new African immigrants and Black communities in the US through conversations about common history and the different expressions of Black culture^[11]. Africa Moves

is a globalized platform to help Civil Service Organizations to mobilize and expand alliances between organizations working towards the common goal of securing human rights for refugees and migrants^[12]. Africa Moves also works closely with the Women in Migration Network^[12]. Ubuntu is Priority Africa Network's annual fundraising gala that invites the community to celebrate and learn about the African Diaspora^[10]. According to [Archbishop Desmond Tutu](#), Ubuntu can be translated to "I am because you are"^[10].

UndocuBlack Network

The [UndocuBlack Network \(UBN\)](#) is an immigrants' rights organization and network of currently and formerly undocumented Black people that focuses on fostering community, the provision of resources and advocacy for Black undocumented folks. The Network was formed at the conclusion of The Undocumented and Black Convening in Miami, Florida on January 15-17, 2016. Their current work focuses on establishing chapters in major cities such as Los Angeles, New York, and Washington D.C. Additionally, they are also working on establishing a mental wellness initiative to address the trauma within the undocumented Black community caused by political uncertainty^[13].

According to the Pew Research Center, there were an estimated 619,000 undocumented Black immigrants in the used as of 2015. This makes up for 15% of the total Black immigrant population^[14]. Though making up for the smallest part of the collective undocumented population in the United States, undocumented Black immigrants face a higher likelihood of deportation. Since Black people in general are subject to higher likelihood of being stopped, arrested, and incarcerated by police, undocumented Black immigrants are especially vulnerable to deportation^[15]. The UndocuBlack Network initiatives focus on advocating against the increased criminalization and vulnerability of undocumented Black people as well as addressing the trauma that accompanies said experience.

Notable Black Immigrants

[Opal Tometi](#) is a notable Nigerian-American activist that is attributed to being a co-founder of the [#BlackLivesMatter](#) movement. She is currently the executive director of the [The Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#) which has advocated for just policies supporting Black immigrants in the United States. A more recent notable accomplishment that the Black Alliance for Just Immigration was responsible for under the direct supervision of Opal Tometi is the family reunification visas granted to Haitians after the 2010 earthquake. ([source](#)) Her work with [#BlackLivesMatter](#) and the Black Alliance for Just Immigration has granted her numerous recognitions such as being named "New Civil Rights Leader" by both the Los Angeles Times and ESSENCE magazine. ([source](#))

[Jonathan Jayes-Green](#) is a queer, undocumented Afro-Panamanian and one of the co-founders of the [UndocuBlack Network](#)^[16]. Jonathan Jayes-Green moved to Silver Spring, Maryland at the age of 13 from Panama^[17]. While he and his family originally entered the US on tourist visas, they decided to stay and became undocumented immigrants^[17]. Jonathan graduated high school with a 3.8 GPA and was admitted to several universities in Maryland^[17]. He chose to attend [Montgomery College](#) because of the Montgomery Honors Scholars Program and its accompanying full tuition^[17]. After earning his Associate's degree at Montgomery College, Jonathan pursued a Bachelors degree at [Goucher College](#)^[17]. In March 2013, Jonathan was granted [DACA](#) status and worked in the

Governor of Maryland's office as the Administrator of the Governor's Commission on Hispanic and Caribbean Affairs^[17]. Jonathan Jayes-Green currently lives in Baltimore, Maryland and works as the Director of the Undocublack Network^[16].

Nunu Kidane is the Founder and current Director of the [Priority Africa Network](#)^[18]. Originally from [Eritrea](#), Kidane graduated from [UC Berkeley](#) and has spent the past 20 years working on Africa related programs and policies^[18]. Her work includes writing about [HIV/AIDS](#), debt cancellation, migration, resource extraction, human rights, racial justice, and land rights^[19]. Kidane has spent the past decade working on grassroots mobilization of new African communities in the [Bay Area](#) of California^[19]. Nunu Kidane was honored by the [White House](#) as a [Champion for Change](#) in 2012^[18]. She also works as a member of the steering committee of the [Black Alliance for Just Immigration](#)^[19].

[Dikembe Mutombo](#) is a retired NBA player and a humanitarian. Born in the [Democratic Republic of Congo](#), he moved to America to attend Georgetown University. He competed in 18 seasons on various NBA teams, including the [Denver Nuggets](#), [Atlanta Hawks](#), [Philadelphia 76ers](#), [New Jersey Nets](#), [New York Knicks](#), and [Houston Rockets](#), and later retired. Mutombo then shifted his focus towards humanitarian work starting out with founding the Dikembe Mutombo Foundation, which made efforts to advance the living conditions in DRC^[20]. He has since become a strong supporter of the [Special Olympics](#), had a Global Ambassador title created for him through [UNICEF](#), and opened a \$29 million medical facility called Biamba Marie Mutombo Hospital in his hometown through the Mutombo Foundation^[21].

Born in [Somalia](#), [Ilhan Omar](#) is a politician, public speaker, and advocate based in Minnesota. After being elected as the Minnesota House Representative for District 60B, she has officially become the first and highest elected Somali-American public official^[22]. Omar attended the [University of Minnesota](#), has worked as a campaign manager, was the Child Nutrition Outreach Coordinator for the Minnesota Department of education, and has held other various political leadership roles. This has led Omar to her current position of Assistant Minority Leader of Minnesota. She is also a mother of three and continues to make a difference for underprivileged families^[23].

[Lupita Nyong'o](#) is a Hollywood actress known for her roles in [Black Panther](#), the [Star Wars Trilogy](#), and [12 Years a Slave](#)^[24]. Born in [Mexico City](#) and raised in [Kenya](#), she has won the [Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress](#), becoming the first Mexican and Kenyan actress to win an Academy Award. Nyong'o has also had a strong voice in the #MeToo movement after speaking up about her experience with Harvey Weinstein^[25]. She has since become a strong voice against sexual abuse and animal rights.

[Guetty Felin](#)^[26], a director and producer was originally from Haiti and had come to the United States. When she was younger she had an interest in cinema and felt that she was able to be apart of society and claimed through the Sacredthemovie.org that she “denounce[d] social and political injustice,...[by] explore[ing] haunting themes such as memory, exile, foreignness, and the unending search for home, while interconnecting our common global humanities”.^[27] She was known as the first female director of the film *Ayiti Mon Amour* (Haiti My Love in english) that not only addresses the

post life after an earthquake, however it also creates a new genre for the movie industry. This film was also nominated for the Best Foreign Language Film at the Oscars .^[28]

K'naan originally from [Mogadishu](#), Somalia is known as a poet, rapper, singer, songwriter, and instrumentalist.^[29] He transitioned to New York City where his father was at due to the [civil war in somalia](#) in 1991.^[30] He then begin to use his experiences to create music. He was most successful for creating a powerful music video for the song "Wavin' Flag" based off of the play "Hamilton", that reminds people about how the United States was built on the backs of immigrants.^[31]

[Wyclef Jean](#) originally from Haiti is recognized as a rapper, musician and actor. He came to [Brooklyn, New York](#) at the age of nine with his family to have a better life. His success came from his rap group named the [Fugees](#) short for refugees^[32] and has been successful in receiving 3 Grammy awards.^[33] Jean has used his platform as an artist to advocate for immigrants and refugees.^[34]

Born Zara Mohamed Abdulmajid, [Iman](#) is a Somali supermodel and actress. She is the daughter to a diplomat father. Iman became a refugee after the political unrests in Somalia. She was discovered by renowned photographer [Peter Beard](#) during her time in university and her prolific modeling career included being a muse to top designers and photographers. Iman has also established an eponymous cosmetics company and a clothing line named Global Chic.^[35]

[Bambadjan Bamba](#) is an film and television actor. Born in the [Ivory Coast](#), is family immigrated to the United States when he was 10 years old where he would go on to study at the New York Conservatory of Dramatic Arts in [New York City](#).

He is a [DACA](#) recipient and undocumented immigrants' rights activist.

[Chimamanda Ngozie Adichie](#) originally from Nigeria was recognized as a successful novelist, writer of short stories and nonfiction.^[36] Her father was the Deputy Vice-Chancellor at the University of Nigeria and her mother was the first female registrar.^[37] She attended this school for a year and a half and later received a scholarship to the united states to attend [Drexel University](#) in Philadelphia where she studied communication.^[37] She then received her degree in communication and political science at Easter Connecticut State University. Later she also achieved her masters degree in creative writing in Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore.^[37] One of her successful works was known as the "Americanah" about her African immigrant experience in the United States. She also wrote about social issues and feminism.^[26]

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