

Analysis of Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of African Immigrants in USA

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Abstract

African immigrants are among the fastest growing groups of U.S. immigrants comprising 4% of the total foreign born population. The paper outlines the reasons for coming to the United States, modes of entry and legal statuses, as well as geographic patterns of settlements in the United States. The bulk of the paper is dedicated to the examination of demographic as well as socioeconomic characteristics of African born immigrants in the United States in comparison with the U.S. native born and other immigrants overall. Specifically, attention is paid to age, gender, English Proficiency, income, labor force participation and poverty rates. An attempt is made to explain the paradox of high education achievement and labor force participation among African immigrants (versus U.S. native born and immigrants overall) yet greater levels of poverty and lower incomes.

Introduction

African immigrants in the United States come from almost all regions in Africa and do not constitute a homogenous group. They include people from different nationalities, linguistic, ethnic, racial, cultural and social backgrounds (Migration Policy Institute, 2006). The influx of African born immigrants to the United States began in the latter part of the 20th century. This trend began after decolonization as many Africans came to the United States seeking an education, and has risen steadily over time. Originally these immigrants came with the sole purpose of advancing themselves before returning to their respective countries. However, in recent years there has been an increase in the number of African born immigrants interested in gaining permanent residence in the United States of America.

African immigrants are among the fastest growing groups of U.S. immigrants increasing by 200% during the 1980s and 1990s and nearly 100% during 2000 and is expected to continue to increase (Capps, McCabe, and Fix 2011; Kent, 2007). Although their immigrant counterparts from Europe, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean have been studied by social science researchers for decades, there is relatively little research which has been conducted on African born immigrants in the United States. As Africa's population continues to increase and chain migration between Africa and the United States expands, the impact of African born immigrants in the U.S. is likely to continue (Capp, McCabe, Fix, 2011).

Objectives of the Study

The present paper seeks to expand our knowledge on African born immigrants in the United States. Attention will be paid to three major items namely:

- I. The size and geographic distribution patterns of African born immigrants in USA.
- II. The modes of entry and legal statuses.
- III. The demographic and social characteristics of African immigrants and how they compare with the U.S. native born and other immigrants overall.

Size and Geographic Distribution Patterns

The number of African born immigrants in the United States has increased more than 40 fold over the past 50 years growing from 35,355 in 1960 to almost 1.6 million in 2010 (**Table 1**)*. This growth has been driven by the desire to pursue post-secondary education, to reunite with family, to take advantage of economic opportunities, and finally to escape from political terror and instability (Arthur, 2000).

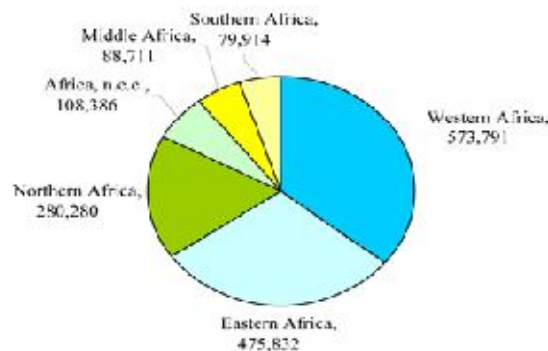
Year	Total Foreign born	African born	
		Number	Share of Total Foreign Born
1960	9,738,091	35,355	0.40%
1970	9,619,302	80,143	0.80%
1980	14,079,906	199,723	1.40%
1990	19,797,316	363,819	1.80%
2000	31,107,889	881,300	2.80%
2009	38,517,104	1,492,785	3.90%
2010	39,966	1,606,914	4%

*Source: <http://www.migrationpolicy.org/article/african-immigrants-united-states/>

African immigrants accounted for 4% of the country’s 38.9 million immigrant population in 2010 (U.S Census, 2010). Although African immigrants account for a relatively small percentage of the total foreign born, the share of African born immigrants has increased consistently over the past 50 years. Though African immigrants represented 0.4% of all foreign born in 1960, this range grew to 1.4% in 1990, 2.8% in 2000 and 4.0% in 2010.

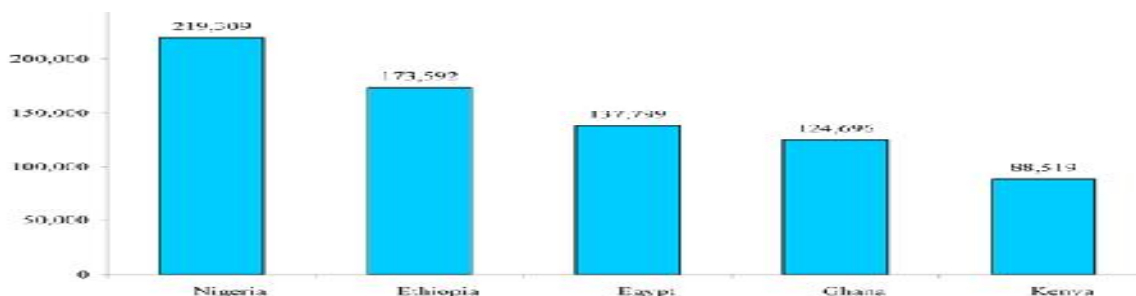
In 2010, nearly two thirds of African immigrants were from Western or Eastern Africa (McCabe, 2011). As **figure 1** shows West Africa was the leading region of birth for African born immigrants with 36.3% of all African immigrants followed by Eastern Africa with 28.4%, Northern Africa (17.7%), Southern Africa (5.7%) and Middle Africa (4.4%). As shown on **figure 2** the countries with the largest number of African born immigrants were Nigeria (219,309), Ethiopia (173,592), Egypt (137,799), Ghana (124,696), and Kenya (88,519). **Figure 3** shows the states with the largest African born populations were California (158,953), New York (158,878), Texas (136,112), Maryland (125,470) and Virginia (89,290). Between 2000 and 2010, the African born population increased in size by 111.1% in Texas, 110.0% in Virginia, 100.1% in Maryland, 40.3% in California and 35.9% in New York(**Figure 4**). Most African born immigrants live in urban areas. The cities that contain significant proportions of Africans are New York, Los Angeles, Minneapolis, Chicago, Philadelphia, Washington D.C. and Seattle.

Figure 1: African Foreign-Born Population by Region of Birth, 2010



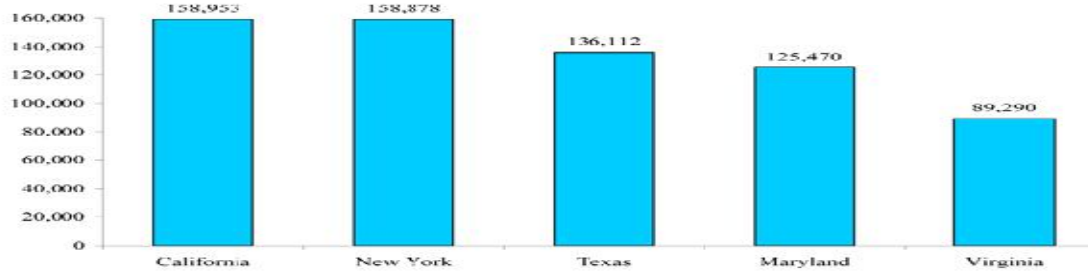
*Source: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/african-immigrants-america-demographic-overview>

Figure 2: Top Countries of Origin for African Foreign-Born Population, 2010



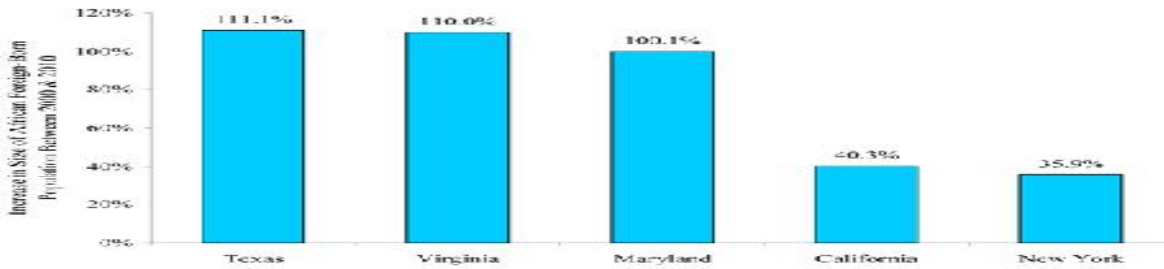
*Source: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/african-immigrants-america-demographic-overview>

Figure 3: States with Largest African Foreign-Born Populations, 2010



*Source: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/african-immigrants-america-demographic-overview>

Figure 4: Increase in African Foreign-Born Populations in Top-Five States, 2000-2010

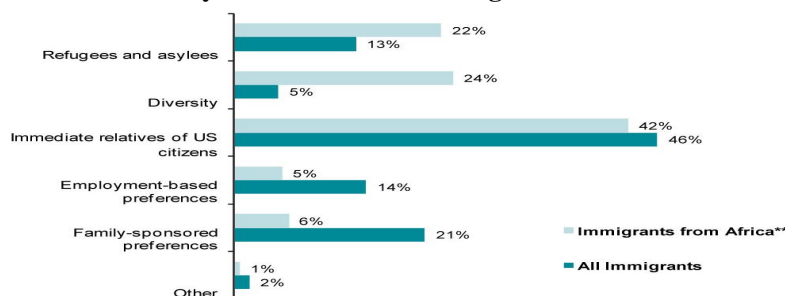


*Source: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/african-immigrants-america-demographic-overview>

Modes of Entry

African immigrants are more likely to have been admitted through the Diversity Program (green card lottery) or refugees than immigrants from most other world regions (Capps, McCabe and Fix, 2011; Thomas, 2011). As shown on **Figure 5** almost half of the African immigrants (46%) were in these two admission classes. It is not surprising that African born immigrants are over represented in the Diversity program given that they are underrepresented in the general immigrant population and the program is designed to promote pluralism in migration flows (Capps, McCabe and Fix, 2011). The overrepresentation of African born immigrants among U.S. refugees is largely attributed to the political landscape of Africa which is dominated by war, civil strife and social fragmentation, persisting political conflicts in Rwanda, the Congo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, Sudan, Burundi, Nigeria illustrate the political fragility of the region. Those who can escape seek political asylum as refugees. But considering the number of trouble spots in Africa and the sheer numbers of people who are displaced, very few are able to come to the United States to be resettled (Arthur, 2000). Small shares of African immigrants have been admitted as temporary immigrants, including students and those with temporary work permits. In 2010, 1% of African born immigrants held these types of temporary visas close to the average of 2% for all immigrants (**Figure 5**). Finally, there are small groups of African born immigrants that are allowed to stay in the United States temporarily due to the political conflicts or natural disasters in their home country (Capps, McCabe and Fix, 2011). The United States Congress has designated two types of temporary legal status namely Temporary Protected Status (TPS) and Deferred Enforced Departure (DED) on a country by country basis for short term periods. TPS and DED allow immigrants to work in the United States and protect them from deportation (Capps, McCabe and Fix, 2011). In 2011, approximately 4000 immigrants from Liberia, Somalia and Sudan had TPS and DED status (Ruth, 2010).

Figure 5: Legal Admissions* by Class for All US Immigrants and African Immigrants, 2010



*Source: "New Streams: Black African Migration to the United States". Migration Policy Institute

The annual flow of legal immigrants to the United States is about one million with approximately 10 percent coming from Africa. Family reunification is the most important mode of legal admission to the United States, including people who enter through marriage or who are sponsored to immigrate by their parents, siblings, or adult children. In 2010, about two-thirds of nearly one million immigrants legally entered to the United States due to this provision (Capps, McCabe, and Fix, 2011).

Demographic and Socio-Economic Characteristics of African Born Immigrants

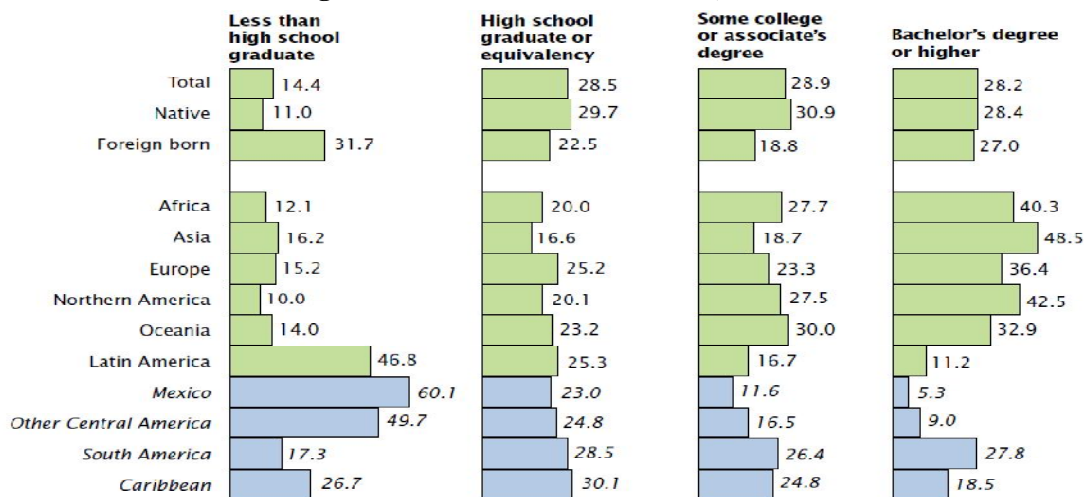
African born immigrants doubled in size from 2000-2010. As of 2009, 47.7% of the 1.5 million African born immigrants entered the country in 2000 or later, and 28.8 % entered from 1990-1999. Thus, more than three-fourths of African immigrants arrived in the United States in the last two decades. In terms of earlier arrivals, 13.7% of African born immigrants came to the United States between 1980-1989; 6.5% between 1970-79, and a minimal 3.2% prior to 1970 (McCabe 2012).

The foreign born immigrants from Africa were less likely to be 65 years or older than the U.S. native born and other foreign born overall (McCabe, 2012). Of the African born immigrants residing in the United States in 2009; 5.5 percent were above the age of 65 in comparison with 12.9 percent of the U.S. native born and 12.4% of all immigrants. The vast majority of African born immigrants were considered to be of working age (generally age 16-64) The African born immigrants were likely to be age 15 and under than foreign born overall. Among world regions of birth, foreign born populations from Europe (51.7%) and N. America (51.3%) had the highest median age while those born in Africa (38%) had the lowest median age (U.S. census, 2010).

Based on past statistics, African born immigrant men have generally outnumbered women. Of all African born immigrants residing in the U.S. in 2009, 53.6 % of them were men and 46.4 % were women (McCabe, 2012). In contrast, U.S. native born (50.8% women), and immigrants overall (50.1%) had more balanced gender distributions.

African immigrants in the United States are among the most educated groups. According to the 2010 Census, 40.1% of African born immigrants reported a minimum of a Bachelor’s degree compared to the entire foreign born immigrants population (27%) and 28.4% of U.S. native born (Figure 6). Of these numbers, 25% of African immigrants have reported a minimum of a bachelor’s degree as their highest credentials compared to 17.9% of U.S. native born and 15.8% of immigrant entirely, and 16.7% of Africans reported having a higher degree than a bachelor’s in comparison to 10.2 % of Americans and 11% of immigrants as a whole (McCabe, 2012). Among those who have reported obtaining at least a High School diploma or an equivalent accreditation, the African born immigrants closely resembled that of U.S. native born in comparison with other foreign born immigrants. In 2009, 32.3% of immigrants overall had not obtained this credential whereas 11.7% of the African born immigrants and 11.4% of the U.S. native born had. The share of African born immigrants who reported their highest educational attainment (high school diploma or some college) was 46.6% which is higher than that of foreign born overall (40.5%) but lower than that of the U.S. native born (60.5%).

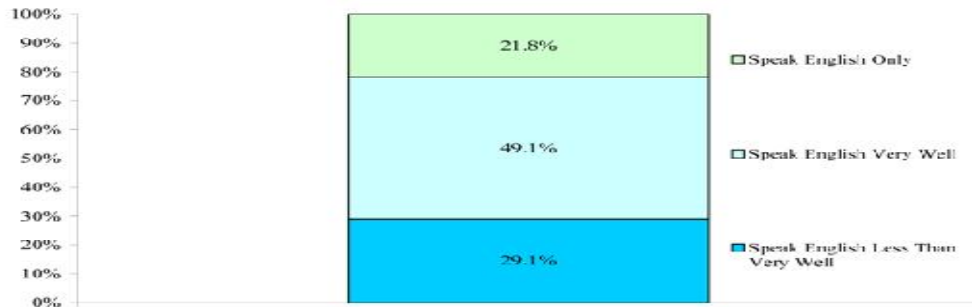
Figure 6: Educational Attainment, 2010



*Source: <https://www.census.gov/prod/2012pubs/acs-19.pdf>

More than seven out of ten African born immigrants reported that they spoke only English or some English very well (Figure 7). In 2009, 22.4% of African born immigrants age 5 and older reported only speaking English and 48.5% reported speaking English “very well”. In contrast, 2% of all African immigrants reported being “not speaking English at all”, while 19.8% reported speaking “well”, and 7.3% claimed they spoke English but “not well”. Overall, 29.1% of African immigrants were Limited English Proficient (LEP) meaning they reported speaking minimal English (McCabe, 2012).

Figure 7: African Foreign-Born Population (Age 5 and Older) by English-Language Proficiency, 2010



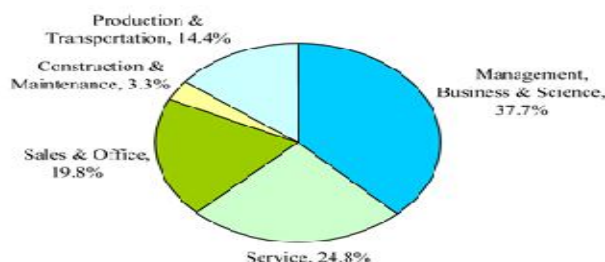
*Source: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/african-immigrants-america-demographic-overview>

The relatively high educational attainment and English proficiency of African born immigrants appears to correlate to high labor force participation. Employments for African immigrants were higher than for immigrants overall or for U.S. born adults (Capps, McCabe, Fix, 2011). In 2007, 75% of African immigrant’s ages 18 to 64 were employed in comparison to 71% of immigrants overall and 72% of U.S. born adults. (Table 2) More than one-third of African immigrants worked in professional jobs, 37.7% were labored in managerial, business, science, and art opportunities. 24.8% worked in service, while 19.8% worked in sales and office occupations (Figure 8).

Table 2: Employment Rates for US Civilian Men and Women Aged 18 to 64,* Black Immigrants, And Black African Immigrants by Origin, 2007

	Population (thousands)			Employment Rate (%)		
	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women
All US adults ages 18 to 64	187,810	93,114	94,496	71	76	67
Native-born adults	157,467	77,617	79,850	72	75	68
Immigrant adults	30,143	15,497	14,645	71	82	60
Black immigrants	2,556	1,247	1,309	75	78	71
Black African immigrants	847	459	388	75	80	68
Sierra Leone	26	12	13	82	83	80
Uganda	10	5	5	81	78	83
Kenya	48	25	23	80	83	76
Ghana	87	49	38	79	84	73
Zimbabwe	9	4	4	78	80	77
Nigeria	161	93	69	78	82	73
Senegal	13	9	4	77	85	60
South Africa	8	4	4	77	82	72
Ethiopia	109	55	54	76	83	70
Liberia	52	26	26	76	78	74
Cape Verde	13	6	6	74	72	77
Cameroon	23	12	11	74	73	76
Eritrea	17	9	8	74	81	67
Other West Africa	42	26	16	74	81	62
Tanzania	7	5	3	71	75	66
Other African countries	110	60	50	71	77	64
Other Eastern Africa	15	7	8	69	67	72
Guinea	8	5	3	69	75	59
Egypt	5	3	2	67	80	47
Morocco	5	3	2	67	79	50
Sudan	28	17	11	67	77	50
Somalia	50	24	26	54	66	44

Figure 8: Occupations of African Foreign-Born Workers Age 16 & Over, 2010



Source: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/african-immigrants-america-demographic-overview>

African born immigrants were likely to live in poverty than the U.S. native born and other foreign born overall. In 2009, the greater share of African immigrants lived in a household with an annual income below the overall poverty line (19%) than the U.S. native born (13%) and the immigrants overall (16%). They are more likely to be renters than homeowners (63%) and have lower median and mean household incomes. This suggest that although African born immigrants are more educated and more likely to be working, they are struggling to achieve parity in revenue and socio-economic status with U.S. born natives and other immigrant groups. African Immigrants' earnings are astonishingly low, given their high levels of formal education and English proficiency. In 2007, the median annual earnings for African immigrants were \$27,000 just above the median for all immigrants (\$26,000) and about 20% below the median for U.S. born workers (\$33,000) (Table 3).

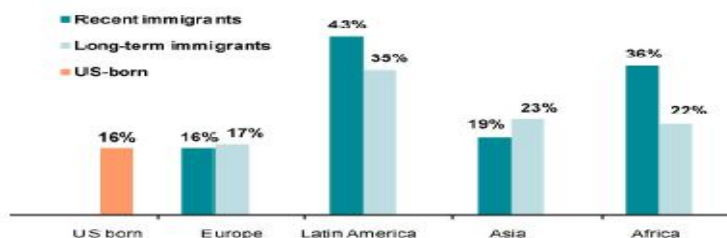
Table 3: Median Annual Earnings for US Civilian Workers Aged 16 and Over,* Black Immigrants and Black African Immigrants by Origin, 2007

	Population (thousands)	Median Annual Earnings (US \$)
<i>Employed civilian workers age 16 and older</i>	141,295	32,000
All native-born adults	119,095	33,000
All immigrants	22,200	26,000
All Black immigrants	1,932	29,000
<i>Black African immigrants</i>	639	27,000
Nigeria	128	36,000
Egypt	4	35,000
Uganda	8	34,000
Sierra Leone	21	31,000
Ghana	70	30,000
Cameroon	17	30,000
Zimbabwe	7	30,000
Tanzania	5	30,000
Kenya	39	28,000
South Africa	6	26,000
Other African countries	78	25,000
Liberia	40	25,000
Eritrea	13	25,000
Cape Verde	10	25,000
Senegal	10	25,000
Ethiopia	84	24,000
Other West Africa	31	24,000
Other East Africa	11	24,000
Sudan	19	21,000
Guinea	6	20,000
Morocco	4	20,000
Somalia	28	18,000

Source: "New Streams: Black African Migration to the United States". Migration Policy Institute

The above statistics reveals an interesting paradox of higher education and great labor force participation among African immigrants (versus native born and overall immigrants) yet greater poverty and lower incomes. How does one justify such findings? Perhaps African immigrants have been disadvantaged by their recent arrival or because their credentials do not “correlate” with American standards (Capps, McCabe, Fix, 2011). Some of these African immigrants have not been naturalized, which in many cases can be quite detrimental when seeking employment in specialized professions. Consequently, many of these “qualified” individuals resort to accepting meager or lessened positions in fields that are not in line with their training. In 2009, over one-third of recent immigrants who have received a bachelor’s degree or higher abroad were working in irrelevant jobs (Figure 9). The employment of high skilled immigrants seems to improve alongside their years of residence in the United States (Batalova, 2008). At the same time, inconsistencies with credentialing and racial discrimination in labor markets, serve as factors which ultimately reduce opportunities for trained employment. Underemployment however, varies considerably across countries of origin. Immigrants who have obtained credentials from Anglophone countries with a relatively long history of sending immigrants are more likely to hold skilled jobs. Countries which fit this criterion include Ghana, Nigeria, Uganda, and S. Africa (Mattoo, 2005). African immigrants who have completed their education in English or spent more time in the U.S. find it easier to transfer their individual credentials than immigrants who have not.

Figure 9: Shares of High-Skilled US Immigrants Working in Unskilled Jobs, 2009 Black African Immigrants by Origin, 2007



*Source: <http://immigrationpolicy.org/just-facts/african-immigrants-america-demographic-overview>

Summary and Conclusions

African immigrants constitute a small (4%) but growing share of the country's nearly 39 million immigrants. African immigrants come from different countries although nearly two thirds are from Western and Eastern Africa. The top sending countries are Nigeria, Ethiopia, Egypt, Ghana, and Kenya. The states with the largest number of immigrants are California, New York, Texas, Maryland and Virginia. African immigrants are less likely to be above 65 years old than the U.S. native born and other foreign born. Overall, immigrant men outnumber women, seven out of ten speak only English or speak it "very well", two fifths have at least a bachelor's degree, more than one third work professional jobs, generally are more likely to live in poverty.

An interesting paradox of higher education and greater labor force participation African immigrants (versus U.S. native born and overall immigrants) yet greater levels of poverty and lower incomes emerge. This suggests that although African immigrants may be more educated and more likely to be working, their earnings are low most likely because of unemployment.

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