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Review of Yewah, Emmanuel and Dimeji
Togunde, eds. *Across the Atlantic: African
Immigrants in the United States Diaspora*

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Although the total number of African immigrants in the United States is not as large as other immigrant groups, they have increased substantially over the years. According to the U.S. Census, of the 37,961,000 foreign-born population in the U.S. in 2008, 20,150,000 were from Latin America; 10,356,000 from Asia; 4,969,000 from Europe; and 1,436,000 from Africa. In 1960, there were only 35,000 African immigrants in the United States. *Across the Atlantic: African Immigrants in the United States Diaspora* edited by Emmanuel Yewah and Dimeji Togunde, has made an important contribution to the understanding of the new African Diaspora in the United States. According Yewah and Togunde, “pre-migration characteristics such as media and literary representation of the United States, socialization experiences including exposure to oral traditions, religious identity and pluralism which become important tools for immigrants to cope and to navigate through the complexities of their new society have received little or no attention in the literature”(3).

Before reading this book, I expected to find answers to the following seven questions: (1) How many African immigrants have emigrated to the U.S. in the post-World War II era and what countries are they from?; (2) What are the factors that caused them to emigrate to the U.S.?; (3) What are the educational, social and economic characteristics of these new African immigrants in the U.S.?; (4) Are there negative implications to Africa for losing this highly selected group of emigrants?; (5) Are there benefits to Africa due to this “brain drain,” or do they maintain connections with their homelands?; (6) How do they adapt and cope in their new communities in the U.S.? Or do they maintain their ethnic/racial, religious/spiritual, and class identities?; What are their settlement patterns?; and (7) What is their impact on the host society?

The nine chapters of this book did an excellent scholarly job answering all of the above questions. For example, chapters one, two, three and five answered questions one and two; chapters four, five, six, and eight answered questions three and six; and chapters seven and nine answered questions four and five.

While answering all of these important questions, many interesting interrelated sub-themes emerged out of the book under the central theme of culture: culture as ethnicity or language; culture as religion; culture as food; culture as home community development (remittances for school fees, food, house building, etc.); culture as internet use; culture as political participation in homeland affairs; or culture as media (newspapers, television, movies) and literature (books and

public intellectual publications).

Pertaining to culture as ethnicity or language, Anthony A. Olorunnisola presents useful information in chapter six on how ethnic/linguistic characteristics tend to remain permanent. He shows that just as ethnicity plays a central role in relations in Africa, it also plays a central role in the lives of African immigrants in their assimilation and pluralism experiences in the U.S.: “we argue that African émigrés enter the United States more specifically as Ogonis or Hausas (of Nigeria); as Hutus or Tutsis (of Rwanda); as Afrikaners or Zulus (of South Africa)” (105). Connecting this to religion, Emmanuel K. Twesigye also notes in chapter 8 how Christian or Muslim African immigrants in the U.S. would establish their own Churches or Mosques, and that “some Africans wanted to establish their own churches and mosques in order to serve as the leaders and determine their liturgy, language and preaching style as well as the topics and cultural or moral content of the sermons” (139-140).

In chapter seven, Ayokunle Olumuyiwa Omobowale, Mofeyisara Oluwatoyin Omobowale and Olawale Olufolahan Ajani present useful information about the rapid increase in the amount of remittances to Africa, which are now more than foreign aid from the West, and they reveal the various economic, educational, and social benefits to family members and communities in African nations. However, in chapter nine Okechukwu Iheduru explains the difficulty that Africans in the Diaspora are experiencing from political leaders in their home countries in attaining dual citizenship and voting rights at home. As a result, African immigrants find themselves not attaining U.S. citizenship because it could cost them their citizenship at home, but they also tend not to run for political office in the U.S. due to the same lack of citizenship. On January 16, 2011, Jeremy Hay wrote an article in the *Press Democrat* about a rare development whereby a Nigerian immigrant banker, Amy Ahanotu, in California won a seat on the Rohnert Park City Council.¹

One visible limitation of the book is the lack of information on non-black African immigrants in the U.S. and how they relate to their black counterparts. Bridget Teboh notes in chapter five that 23 percent of the 881,300 African immigrants in the U.S. in 2000 were categorized as white and that “the end of apartheid in South Africa and Zimbabwe appears to count for the presence of white Africans” (80-81). Another group of Africans also categorized as white in the U.S. is Arabs with hair texture and skin color such as those of the prominent Lebanese American, Ralph Nader. But as Amadu Kaba points out, the late black president of Egypt, Anwar Sadat, is categorized as black in the U.S., just as the

¹ Jeremy Hay, “Rohnert Park Councilman’s Journey from Civil War to Civic Role,” *The Press Democrat*, January 16, 2011, accessed February 19, 2011, <http://www.pressdemocrat.com/article/20110116/ARTICLES/110119598>.

64 | Book Reviews

leader of Egypt and Commander in Chief of the Egyptian military from February 2011 to June 2012, Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, is considered a black man in the U.S., but his immediate predecessor, Hosni Mubarak, is seen as a white man.² Two of the three leaders of Egypt since the 1970s are considered both black men and Arabs, Arab being their culture. Anthony A. Olorunnisola discusses this racial categorization belief system of white Americans in chapter six (108-109).

Across the Atlantic: African Immigrants in the United States Diaspora has made a useful contribution to the body of knowledge on the African Diaspora in the New World, especially the United States. It presents an overview of the numbers and characteristics of African immigrants in the United States. The book illustrates the influence of culture on African immigrants in the United States. The author conceptualizes and utilizes culture to explain how ethnicity, language, food, family, remittances, and politics impact the day-to-day lives of African immigrants in the United States and their home countries in Africa.

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² Amadu Jacky Kaba, "Explaining President Barack Obama's First Visit to Africa (Egypt): Three Phenomena of Africa and Africans as the Core of U.S.-Arab/Muslim Relations," *African Renaissance* 6, no. 2 (2009): 103-106.