

EXTENDED LIVES

The African Immigrant Experience in Philadelphia

By Leigh Swigart

FROM AFRICA TO PHILADELPHIA

“Immigration has been an opportunity to live the best of two worlds. I am able to earn a decent living and go home every year.”

– Nigerian immigrant on the benefits of her new life.

Philadelphia has long been home to people of African origin. As W.E.B. Dubois chronicled in his landmark 1899 sociological study *The Philadelphia Negro*, Philadelphia has been home to successive Black immigrants and migrants – from African slaves in the 17th and 18th centuries, to freedmen in the 19th century, to waves of the “Great Migration” from the South in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In recent years,

Philadelphia has come full circle and is once again playing host to a new population arriving directly from the continent of Africa.

Philadelphia is not the only American city welcoming this new influx of Africans. During the last decades of the 20th century, the United States as a nation has experienced a wave of immigration

from sub-Saharan Africa. While Africans started coming voluntarily to the United States in the 1960s, mostly for higher education, the largest influx has occurred since 1990. A combination of economic and political factors leads Africans to turn increasingly to the United States as a destination. England and France, the global powers of a previous era, have enacted stiff policies that discourage immigration from their former colonies in Africa. And the idea that America is a land of unlimited opportunity and freedom, reinforced by films and other popular media, has made it the first choice of most of Africa’s youth.

These new African immigrants represent a wide variety of nations, cultures, languages, and religions. Their immigration experiences are also



*Fatou Ndiaye, Senegalese Restaurateur
Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward*

very diverse. Some are sojourners seeking their fortune in the U.S. Many come as students and stay on to work as professionals. Others are fleeing political turmoil in their countries of origin and come as refugees or as asylum seekers. Africans also arrive in the United States following a variety of immigration scenarios. The most common are coming to attend university, obtaining a work visa to practice a specialized profession, marrying an American citizen, being resettled as refugee, obtaining political asylum, winning the U.S. Diversity Lottery, or overstaying a temporary visa to become an "undocumented immigrant." Whatever these immigrants' reasons for coming, and however they manage to stay, their businesses, social networks, and lifestyles are changing the character of the cities and neighborhoods where they are concentrated.

refugees have also been resettled in the Philadelphia area by agencies, usually following the principle of "family reunification." Moving to a city with a large and active population of compatriots is an important factor in choosing a destination for many African immigrants arriving in the United States.

Africans who have left their home countries and immigrated to the United States have different ideas of what the future holds. Some arrive with the idea of resettling forever. Many others view their time here as temporary. One Ivorian immigrant's comments are typical: *"We have no problems with American society. We do what we have to do. If we are students we go to school, we have American friends. In the workplace we get along fine with people. But we ultimately think of going back home someday. I would like to stay here a long time and then retire home."*

Africans embody a new phenomenon of transnationalism, characterized by the maintenance of identities that extend across national borders and by the ongoing, active participation of immigrants in both their home countries and new societies of settlement.

A growing number of African immigrants have settled in various Philadelphia neighborhoods, including the West, Southwest, and Northeast parts of the city. They come from over 30 different countries and speak dozens of different languages. They practice Christian, Muslim, and sometimes traditional religious beliefs. Their presence can be seen in the new businesses and religious institutions that cater to Africans, the sale of African merchandise and services to Philadelphia natives, and simply the colorful dress of passers-by.

Philadelphia is often the second American destination for these new immigrants. Its convenient location between the hubs of New York City and Washington D.C., along with its cheaper real estate and slower pace of life, have attracted many Africans who initially settled in these other cities. One Liberian immigrant described how she ended up in Philadelphia, which hosts one of the largest Liberian populations in the United States: *"I had no money, nothing. So I decided to be with other Liberians that had experienced war like myself, maybe they would be more patient and sympathetic. And then people said Philadelphia is an easy place to get by for immigrants."* Many

These immigrants dream of returning home when they have accomplished their goals or conditions improve in their country of origin.

Longing for home, many immigrants find adaptation to American life a difficult process. In particular, Africans must learn to lead more solitary lives in Philadelphia than they would in Africa, where the daily routine is oriented around family, and one's place in the community is understood and recognized by all. Many Africans also express a dislike of the Philadelphia climate, being unused to the cold winter months. A Sierra Leonean summed up the shock of her first week in Philadelphia: *"It was the crowd, the cold, and no one talks to you on the street. No one is recognizable."*

But as initial distress gives way to acceptance of local ways, most African immigrants readily admit the many benefits of life in the United States. *"I can't deny it, the comfort level is better here. Things function and I do what I want to do. I am able to get a job here, while unemployment is so high at home,"* commented one Kenyan immigrant, who lives and works in a small city outside of Philadelphia.

Extended Lives

Despite their diversity of background, African immigrants in Philadelphia (and in the U.S. more generally) have many common experiences. African immigrants experience immigration in ways that are both similar and different from the immigrants who arrived in the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries and from contemporary immigrants from either Europe or Asia. Most find that their *lives become extended* in various ways.

African immigrants extend their lives across national borders. All immigrants since 1965 have come at a time when global travel and communication are relatively easy and inexpensive. As a result, connections are rarely severed with home as they might have been in an earlier era. Africans embody a new phenomenon of *transnationalism*, characterized by the maintenance of identities that extend across national borders and by the ongoing, active participation of immigrants in both their home countries and new societies of settlement. In particular, refugees – such as those from Somalia, Ethiopia, and Eritrea, and, more recently, Sudan, Liberia and Sierra Leone – remain emotionally, politically, spiritually, and financially invested in their home countries' struggles. Even Africans who have immigrated voluntarily are expected to make substantial economic contributions to the extended family left behind, and most dream of returning home at a later time. The possibility of being connected to both one's host society and home country does not exist everywhere in the world. One Sudanese immigrant expressed his appreciation of American society, which allows for the coexistence of cultures: *"If someone in Sudan asked me whether they should immigrate to the U.S., I would tell them not to hesitate. But at the same time you have to keep your ties with people back home. This is one of the strengths of culture in this country."* Immigrant lives in the United States may be extended to encompass two continents but they are not necessarily stretched thin. Transnational lives may be fulfilling and enriching in ways not possible in the home country.

African immigrants extend their identities

In many parts of Africa, one's ethnic or national identity may be at the center of one's sense of self. Adaptation to American society, however,

FAST FACTS ABOUT PHILADELPHIA'S AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS

- There are an estimated 40,000-55,000 African immigrants living in the Greater Philadelphia area. (These figures are based on community leader estimates.)
- There are immigrants from almost every African country in Philadelphia. The largest communities are from Nigeria, Liberia, Ethiopia, and Ghana.
- African immigrants in Philadelphia speak many different languages. Some, like Amharic in Ethiopia and Wolof in Senegal, are spoken by a majority of the community as a first or second language. Other languages are spoken by just a small ethnic group. In communities with great linguistic diversity, English or French, the official language of the home country, may be the preferred language of communication.
- Immigrants from Africa have the highest educational levels among all immigrants to the United States. They have on average over 3 years of college, and over half are college graduates.
- Philadelphia is the resettlement site for many African refugees. The largest number are from Ethiopia, Sudan, Liberia, and Sierra Leone.
- The majority of African immigrants in the Philadelphia area come from large cities in Africa. Some of these cities have much larger populations than Philadelphia.
- There are over 40 African community associations in the Philadelphia area representing 15 countries of origin.
- There are eleven African churches and three African mosques in the Philadelphia area.

leads many African immigrants to think about themselves differently; they are required to extend their identities. For example, a member of the Mende ethnic group of Sierra Leone may identify himself simply as “African” when interacting with Americans unfamiliar with the diversity of the African continent. He may identify as “Black,” following the expectations of American society. Or he may identify himself as a “refugee” when contacting social service agencies. None of these identities would necessarily be important to him had he stayed in his home country.

The presence of people of African descent in America also shapes the immigration experience of African immigrants in unique ways. For one Sierra Leonean pastor, here for several decades, this African American presence was definitive. He remarked, *"When I first came from the airport, I saw all these Black people. We had learned about the slave trade and slavery. When I got the opportunity to come to America, I felt that I was coming to that America. This was unlike England, where I was in college before."* African immigrants are often invisible in the U.S. since they are perceived as African American by the larger society. This perception helps them blend in and survive when they settle in predominantly black neighborhoods such as those in West, Southwest, and North Philadelphia.

But blending in with native-born blacks may also have undesirable consequences for African immigrants – it may subject them to racial discrimination, erase their cultural and historical uniqueness, and lead to the assumption that their behavior will conform to American standards that they find unfamiliar. At the same time, relations between African immigrants and native-born Blacks are not necessarily easy by virtue of a shared heritage. Cultural differences often create obstacles to mutual understanding.

Intermarriage between African immigrants and Americans may also lead

to the creation of new identities. The African spouse may be required to "Americanize" more than he or she would have done if married to a fellow African. The American spouse might also adopt a number of African customs to accommodate the husband or wife who grew up on the continent. If there are children from the union, they may grow up with a sense of being

bi-cultural and, if the American parent is black, of having a "diasporic" identity. *Kinship*, the recent memoir of Philippe Wamba, the son of a Congolese father and African American mother, describes just such an identity. American spouses may or may not feel "at home" in their husband or wife's country; some may have never visited there. A West African married to an American described his dilemma:

I would like my wife to go to my country, but I don't want her to be shocked by the difference in standards. She is used to American standards. Maybe I have forgotten African standards too. Some things at home are extremely shocking to me now. Maybe there is something inside me that would like to forget them. Maybe there is something inside me that says that the standards I have seen in America, my people deserve them too.

Living in the United States may thus change the perspectives and expectations of African immigrants themselves, leading to a sense of unfamiliarity with life in the home country.

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EXTENDED FAMILIES: HERE AND THERE

"I miss the family, the extended family, because our culture is very much interwoven with the extended family."

– Nigerian immigrant

Family is very important throughout Africa. Families, not individuals, are the building blocks of African society. Most people live in households that include not only the nuclear family (mother, father, children) but also members of their extended family (grandparents,

Immigration to the United States changes the African family

aunts, uncles, cousins, and others). Family members act as both an economic and emotional network and provide individuals with a sense of who they are and where they belong. Many African immigrants, such as this Guinean immigrant living in Philadelphia since the 1960s, express a sense of loss at no longer being surrounded by their family: *"What I miss most*

about Guinea is the extended family structure. When I am at home, I feel safe. My children are safe, my wife is safe. Whether I am there or not, they will be taken care of. In America, I don't have that."

Immigration to the United States changes the African family. African families in the United States are very restricted compared to the extended model they would follow at home. If African immigrants come with family members, it is usually with a spouse or children. They thus adopt the nuclear family arrangement common in the United States. Extended family members may, however, stay in their relatives' household temporarily when they arrive in Philadelphia. For example, one Kenyan immigrant explained that both her husband's sister and her brother's wife were staying in her Norristown home while deciding what course their new lives would take. And a Tanzanian family willingly played host to a distant relative who won the green card lottery while he became familiar with Philadelphia and integrated into the local economy. But usually, as newcomers themselves settle into their new lives and find jobs and housing, they move on to form their own households.

In rare cases, grandparents may rejoin the nuclear family group. But most older Africans who come to the U.S. to visit their children and grandchildren have a hard time adapting to the social isolation and choose to return to Africa rather than resettle. A Nigerian woman described her mother's reaction to the United States like this: *"My mother came to visit and stayed a year and that was it, because she did not like it. It was isolating for her. Back home, people are in and out of your house, in and out, friends and families are walking down the street. They stop and say hello."* In Africa old age is looked forward to since elders are generally highly respected and younger people defer to their wisdom and authority. Giving up this status to live in an unfamiliar and youth-oriented society is not a popular option.

Some of the older Africans who live in Philadelphia were resettled here as refugees and thus did not immigrate voluntarily. The Liberian community of Philadelphia has tried to help older refugees adapt and form new social groups through the creation of the Agape Senior Center. At Agape's bi-weekly meetings, older Liberians practice their English, learn basic literacy if they have never been to school, and get oriented more

generally to life in Philadelphia. Agape Director Pastor John Jallah observed that these meetings act as a social lifeline for those who attend; without this contact, elder Liberians would have little opportunity to leave the house and socialize.

Attitudes toward aging shape younger immigrants long-term plans. A Kenyan immigrant described her view on growing old in America this way: *"I don't think I can be an old person in this country. I like the reverence that the youth have for the elderly back at home and the way the community just kind of embraces you. You continue with life in a more gentle fashion as opposed to worrying about Medicaid, if you have heat, and the cost of living. I couldn't grow old here."* Despite making new lives in the United States, younger immigrants dream of returning home after retirement. That way, in their old age they would once again be surrounded by their extended family.

Immigration changes not only family structure but also the relationships between household members. Married couples often share both paid work and housework in a more equal way than they would in their country of origin. Consequently, women become active decision-makers in the household. An Ethiopian man described the shift in household work patterns this way: *"In Ethiopia the wife has to take care of the whole house. Here, I cook for my kids, I wash their clothes, I get them dressed. I am the one who takes them to school and then my wife picks them up. In Africa a man wouldn't generally do that."* Women immigrants from Africa often welcome this shift, and men seem to adapt well to their wives' new roles.

Parents also tend to have less authority over their children than they would in their home countries, where discipline is usually strict and respect for elders obligatory. Loss of authority may be countered by steering one's children toward those of other immigrant families from the same country. Many community events are multigenerational so that children are exposed to the African model of child rearing. Churches and mosques are another place that children meet other young people from their community.

Fictive Kin

Many African immigrants replace their absent extended family with "fictive kin" – members of the same ethnic or national community who play

the role that family would at home. Community members may counsel young people, mediate during domestic conflict, provide moral and financial support at times of crisis or death, and help celebrate joyous events such as weddings and births. For example, the president of the Guinean Association of the Delaware Valley resolved cultural problems between a young Guinean woman and the family she worked for as a babysitter. In many cases the entire community functions as a kind of extended family. A Sudanese family organizing a traditional wedding extended an open invitation to all members of the Sudanese community of Philadelphia, many of who were personally unknown. And the death of a Senegalese taxi driver in July 2001 inspired an outpouring from the larger Senegalese community of both sympathy and funds to repatriate the body.

Many African immigrants are single men or men who have left their families at home. Often they have come to the U.S. in order to support economically the very people who are the most important part of their lives. These men may feel very isolated in the United States without their wives, children, and extended family network. Single men may get together to drink tea, listen to music, celebrate national or religious holidays, or simply chat in their native languages. Spending time with co-ethnics or co-nationals helps them to recreate the home context and to recover some of their identity.

Another kind of fictive kin is found among the southern Sudanese "lost boys" who were resettled in the Philadelphia area in 2000. After fleeing the civil war in their homeland, these boys lived in the Kakuma refugee camp in northern Kenya for years. There, they created fictive "families" with other older and younger refugees, groups that were kept intact when the boys were resettled in the U.S. Many of these young Sudanese are now living with American foster families, a new kind of fictive kin. Describing her adopted sons, one foster parent commented, *"They call me 'mother.' But any woman who is nice to them they call 'mother.'"*

Keeping in touch

African immigrants extend their lives back across the Atlantic, remaining in constant contact with their families on the continent. Most are very honest about longing for home and those they left behind. A young Eritrean woman put it

this way: *"I miss the weather in Eritrea, the family closeness we had. I am close with my brothers and sisters here, but it is very hard to keep up, with all the work and our busy schedules. I miss my family. Of course, the main thing is I miss my mother."* The success of immigrants' lives cannot make up entirely for what they have lost.

Africans keep in touch with their home countries in many ways. Innumerable letters and e-mails are sent back and forth everyday between Philadelphia and the African continent. But nothing can replace the human voice in its ability to conjure up images and emotions connected with home. For many immigrants, the telephone is the preferred channel of communication with home. Most immigrants call home frequently, and may even reach their relatives who are in refugee camps, awaiting resettlement. Phone cards that offer low-cost calls to African countries are available around Philadelphia, often on sale in groceries and other businesses in neighborhoods with large African populations.

Immigrants also stay in contact with their families at home by sending "remittances," or sums of money that they wire abroad using a number of different services. One Sierra Leonean described sending money home as "the African immigrant's burden." Some services are international, like Western Union. Others are small businesses that are run with one partner in Philadelphia and the other in the home country.

Virtually all African immigrants send money home. Family members at home may depend on these sums for survival. A Mauritanian immigrant described his financial responsibility like this: *"You do not exist as a separate unit. You are part of a family so you support them whenever you can. I make sure that my younger sister at home has at least enough to keep food on the table and to buy clothes."* A Nigerian doctor, in Philadelphia since the 1960s when he came to study at Temple University, similarly associates his continued monetary contributions to family back home with the cultural perspectives he learned there as a child: *"One thing that is unique about Africans is that the extended family system is very, very important. If you make one thousand dollars this month, you try to send five hundred dollars back home."* Remittances help immigrants remain an integral part of their relatives' daily lives though separated by thousands of miles.

The younger generation

African immigrant children – those who were either born in Philadelphia or arrived here at a young age – face many challenges while growing up. They notice the differences between their own immigrant households and that of their American peers – their family eats differently, speaks differently, and socializes differently – and may feel self-conscious about this. Adapting more quickly to the new society, children may be called upon to help their parents understand American life or language. This leads to a reversal in traditional patterns of authority that makes everyone feel uncomfortable. Since their parents may be unfamiliar with the role families are expected to play in their children's education by schools and teachers, younger Africans may receive less educational support than their American peers. And parents may also have little understanding of the psychological distress their children experience in adolescence when “growing pains” are intensified by concerns about cultural identity and belonging. Many African parents expect to raise their children as they themselves were raised, often disregarding the different social and cultural context in which

they now find themselves. This gives rise to frustration or rebellion on the part of the younger generation. Some refugee children may even make a concerted choice to leave their “African-ness” behind as part of an attempt to forget the often traumatic events they have experienced in Africa before arriving in the United States.

Despite the separation they feel from Africa and its traditions, younger generation Africans *do* feel that they are different from their American peers. They enjoy their knowledge of two cultures, and feel that they have greater options about where and how they will live their adult lives. They interact well in mixed generational groups, which is the norm for their community gatherings. And they tend to have a respect for their elders which is uncommon in our American, youth-oriented society. A young Eritrean woman put it this way: “*So we young people try to keep the culture, but we also know that there is a lot of culture and traditions that we don't agree with. So you would like to keep some things, like family values and the respect we have for each other, and the closeness we have. Things like that we try to teach.*”



Yoruba children at Christ Apostolic Church. Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward

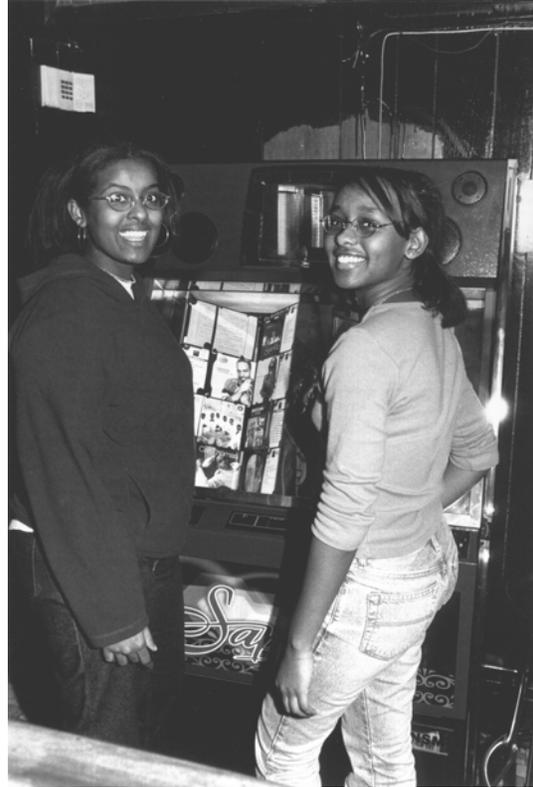
For their part, African parents have a lot to say about the frustrations of raising children in the U.S. Most groups would like to transmit their language and the cultural values they consider the most important, such as self-discipline and respect for authority and elders. A Tanzanian mother describes the efforts she and her husband make to bring up their children in what they view as the proper way:

First, they are Muslim kids so they also have to learn the Koran. We do not have much time, so it does not get done very much. But whenever we get a chance, when they go to Tanzania for two or three months, they will have a teacher who comes and really teaches them. My son has been very good at taking time to continue reading the Koran. And also, we have dress codes in the family, like not wearing shorts and very short miniskirts.

Many immigrants do not wish their children to adapt the behavior of the average American child. Immigrant families do several things in order to slow down this Americanization. African children tend to spend more time at home with their families and are generally allowed much less freedom of movement than their American peers. Many African children do not socialize very much with their schoolmates. An Ethiopian father describes the routine his children follow and how it limits their activities:

I believe that they might get into trouble. I am trying to work on that and I am not sure what will happen in the future. What they do is that they go to school and after that they go straight home. If they want to go somewhere I take them and bring them home. That is why we designed the Oromo Community Association, so they will be busy and not spend time on the streets.

When they see other children outside of the classroom, it is at an event organized by their community. A father who helped found the Guinean Association in Philadelphia saw the role that such an organization could play in socializing his children, who have an American mother: "Now we are beginning to create links between the second and first generations. One of my own motivations for creating the association was that I wanted my own kids to be introduced into the Guinean community." Some African communities dream of having a daycare center



*Eritrean youth socialize at Asmara ConXion
Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward*

for their members, which would solve problems of expensive childcare and at the same time provide a safe and culturally correct atmosphere for their young children.

The African community associations that have summer schools encourage families to send their children for language and cultural training. In this way, the second generation will learn in a special context what they are missing in day-to-day life. Families that have the means and come from countries at peace, may try to have their children spend summer vacations in the home country. This is the best way to have a "crash course" in the home culture.

Most African families try to strike a balance in raising their children in the U.S. They wish their children to succeed according to the American model but hope to instill in them an appreciation of the home culture. A Nigerian mother described her family's approach to parenting like this: "We have tried to make them realize, to understand where they are coming from. Their backgrounds, their beginnings, some of the values of their culture. They consider themselves Nigerian Americans. They have the sense of who

they are and they can choose wherever they want to live." This sense of "who they are" is something that many younger Africans in Philadelphia seem to have. It will be interesting to see where they ultimately choose to live.

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EXTENDING COMMUNITY: INSIDE AND OUT

African immigrants arriving in Philadelphia tend to settle in the same neighborhoods as friends and family members who came before them. This "chain migration" creates pockets of different populations around the area – many Sierra Leoneans, Liberians, and Ethiopians live in Southwest Philly, for example. Sudanese tend to settle in either West or Northeast Philly. There is a small Kenyan population in Norristown. And a number of Eritreans live in Lansdale.

Community meeting places – churches, groceries, restaurants, and community centers – are usually established in these same neighborhoods. This concentration of people and services facilitates the frequent interaction of community members. In many ways, Africans prefer to remain *inside their communities*, where they feel most at home.

But African immigrants also interact with the larger Philadelphia society, that is, *outside their communities*. This contact takes place in the workplace as well as through the mutual cultural and religious activities that are becoming more common in Philadelphia.

Extending a Sense of "Home": Inside the Community

Businesses

African businesses are not only commercial enterprises. They also help immigrants to recover a sense of "home." Restaurants offer busy immigrants a "taste" of their country of origin when they do not have time to cook for themselves. Music stores sell the "home sound," either traditional music or the latest hits of popular music from the continent. Such businesses may also act as a meeting point for community members. An Ivorian immigrant summed up the relation of his compatriots to an Ivorian-owned restaurant with this statement: *"If you miss the*

community, you just stop by the Benkady Restaurant. There are always people."

Grocery stores are similarly multi-purpose. Since most immigrants continue to eat African dishes, they usually buy ingredients at African markets, although other "ethnic" groceries, such as those run by East or South Asians, may also carry the desired products. African stores also become gathering places for conversation about politics and people at home. For example, many Sierra Leoneans meet at the Freetown Market in Southwest Philly to discuss recent political events at home. Ivorians stop by the Baltimore African Market to watch recordings of television programs originally broadcast in Ivory Coast. Meanwhile, taxi drivers congregate in front of the store in the late afternoon to take a break and exchange news and stories about the day's fares. African grocery stores may also offer money-wiring services, which attract an additional clientele. The Nigerian-owned Amigo Market posts advertisements for sending money through both Western Union and a Nigerian money-wiring service based in Atlanta.

Other kinds of businesses appeal to the African community by offering services they especially need or by hiring personnel who speak African



*Socializing outside Baltimore African Market
Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward*

languages. Liberian-owned Mt. Nimba Computer Center offers technology training for those who purchase equipment. Owner Moses Voker also helps newly arrived Liberians with Immigration and Naturalization Service formalities on a consulting basis. Sudanese-owned Nilien Insurance often employs clerks who speak French and Amharic, which attracts a clientele from the West and Horn of Africa. Owner Siddiq Hadi had a strategy when he chose a location for his business: *"I had that background of an immigrant coming to the United States. I was quite convinced that the ethnic market was my potential market. So I started a business in West Philadelphia."* African entrepreneurs have similarly found that locating their shops or offices in neighborhoods with concentrated populations of immigrants has proved a boon to their businesses.

Associations

Many African national and ethnic populations have created associations that cater to their respective groups. In the Philadelphia area, there are now more than forty such associations. Community associations recreate a familiar atmosphere for socializing and mutual aid. They may also assist newcomers in locating housing, employment, and social services, and a few have schools and summer courses that teach the community's language and culture to the second generation.

The first association to seek and obtain non-profit (501(c)3) status in Philadelphia was the Ethiopian Community Association of Greater Philadelphia. Incorporated since 1984, the ECAGP has been very successful in providing services to its membership and in collaborating with other ethnic communities in Philadelphia on a number of programs. The Ethiopian Association also has a community center, as do the Sudanese Society of Greater Philadelphia and the Eritrean Community of Philadelphia, where members may meet and organize activities.

Although a source of help and comfort to African immigrants, community associations, especially those based upon ethnic criteria, may serve to recreate divisions present in home countries. A Sierra Leonean immigrant notes that this has been a problem in his own community in Philadelphia: *"One of the problems in Africa is tribalism. We have left home to come here, and we begin to divide ourselves into Mendes,*



*Ethiopian coffee at an ECAGP picnic
Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward*

Mandingos, Fulas... I find it very divisive." Recognizing this danger, some community associations, including a new Sierra Leonean one, are seeking to forge a sense of unity among immigrants from the same country. The United Liberian Association, United Sierra Leoneans for Peace and Development, and the Sudanese Union of Philadelphia have adopted this perspective, for example; Liberia, Sierra Leone and Sudan are all currently experiencing ethnic strife and civil war. A recent refugee from southern Sudan noted that while he would not have socialized with northern Sudanese back home, things are different here: *"We have conflicts back home between the Dinkas and the northern Sudanese, but when we come here we brush them aside and become one."* Leaders wish to avoid the replication of divisive relationships in their Philadelphia communities.

While many Africans are involved primarily in their national or ethnic associations, some leaders have begun to extend interaction across these lines through the creation of the Coalition of African Communities - Philadelphia (AFRICOM). Member association presidents

and religious leaders recognize that they will exert more power on the local scene by using a single "African" voice. The Coalition aims to increase its members' access to social and health services, educate the media about Africa, and collaborate with African American organizations. To date the Coalition represents immigrants hailing from fourteen countries.

News programs like Radio Tam-Tam, broadcast on WNWR (1540 AM), also unite African immigrants across national borders by providing a clearinghouse for African news and community information. Radio Tam-Tam, created by Senegalese businessman Mody "Modibo" Diagne, is broadcast twice a day, once in French and once in English. Eric Edi, an Ivorian graduate student at Temple University, assists him. The program is supported primarily through advertising by both African-owned businesses and those that target an African clientele, such as travel agencies and immigration law services.

Social Life

Community is also built in less formal ways, through socializing and visiting. This socializing includes informal tea and coffee drinking, cooking and eating together, and attending each other's weddings, baptisms, and funerals. When

communities congregate, they also like to listen to music from home. This music, whether old favorites or new popular recordings, may be bought on trips back to Africa, or at special shops in Philadelphia, New York, or Washington D.C. Dances are also very popular, and they are always a joyful event, recreating through familiar music and movement the home atmosphere. For example, a Senegalese or Ivorian dance party will typically start after midnight, just as it would in Dakar or Abidjan. And a Liberian immigrant noted that hospitality continues as a strong tradition in his community in Philadelphia: *"I think that there is unity here among Liberians. Most of the parties you will go to, you don't even need an invitation. You just go there and the door is open."*

Sometimes, communities will hire live musicians, who often come from New York or Washington D.C. At a recent Eritrean event, a live band played at the Eritrean community center into the small hours of the night. People of all ages joined in the exuberant dancing while small children slept on chairs around the periphery of the dance floor, finally tired out from their earlier active participation. People often comment nostalgically after such events that they "felt just like being back home."



Ivorian women at soireé dansante. Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward

Gatherings are also an opportunity for African immigrants to wear traditional clothes, usually not worn on a daily basis in Philadelphia. West Africans don sumptuous robes, often adorned with complex embroidery, or brightly colored two-piece ensembles. Ethiopian and Eritrean women may wear dresses of white gauzy fabric, trimmed with colorful strips of traditional cloth at the neck and hemline. Sudanese women wrap their torsos and heads in lengths of shiny and textured fabrics, while their male escorts wear white tunics and turbans. African children, on the other hand, are usually not dressed much differently than their American counterparts – Mary Janes and frilly dresses or jeans, tee shirts, and sneakers predominate.

Finally, community gatherings are a time to use one's native language and to expose one's children to it. Africa is a continent with well over 2,000 languages. Several dozen are widely used in the immigrant communities of Philadelphia. In settings where people of different language groups come together, the official language of the home country -- usually English or French -- is the neutral choice. Local varieties of these languages -- Ivorian French, Liberian English, and, in the case of Sierra Leone, the English creole called "Krio" -- may also be used to communicate across ethnic and linguistic lines.

members. Its aims are not unlike those of many American investment clubs, although KWIC is also reminiscent of the traditional "revolving credit associations" that are very popular among women all over Africa.

Interacting Outside of the Community

Responding to Images of Africa

"Many prominent people in Christianity were African, such as Clement of Alexander. There was Christianity in Ethiopia, Morocco, Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, but people forget that. When they see that your name is African, they question what you know about Christianity."

– African chaplain in a Pennsylvania state prison.

Africa is not a place that most Americans know much about. Not only are African history and geography rarely taught in depth in American schools, but the American media also contribute to the average American's perception that Africa is nothing but a "continent in crisis." Some African immigrants in Philadelphia express frustration about the imperfect knowledge that

“Americans should know that we go to school, that we have highly educated people. That we have very modern cities, computers, TVs.”

-- Ivorian immigrant correcting American views of Africa.

Some African communities have taken to very American kinds of socializing. Some families begin to observe American holidays, such as Thanksgiving, Halloween, and the 4th of July. They may organize picnics in public parks, and swimming and skiing outings with their children. For example, at the Ethiopian community picnic in Summer 2000, the men played cards at picnic tables, the women made coffee in the traditional manner for the entire group and prepared the barbecued meal, while children played in the nearby swimming pool. The Eritrean youth group comes from high schools all over the Delaware Valley to hold parties and fundraising events such as car washes. The Kenyan Women's Investment Club (KWIC) meets regularly to make group investments in the stock market and to provide a social outlet for its

most Americans have about their home, such as this Ghanaian: *“There are nice places in urban Africa but unfortunately they are not newsworthy. I guess it is better to take a picture of someone who is naked in a village than to show some of those things. My mother was visiting and she went to the library and borrowed a video on Ghana. She watched it but did not recognize anything. It was like Ghana from a nature program!”* An Ivorian sets the record straight in this way: *“Americans should know that we go to school, that we have highly educated people. That we have very modern cities, computers, TVs.”*

Other immigrants find that some Americans hold romantic notions about Africa that have little in common with contemporary economic and political realities on the continent. All

immigrants become used to explaining where they are from, starting with the continent at large, and gradually focusing in on their country. One Eritrean explained, *"The first thing I say is 'Have you heard of Ethiopia?' When they say yes, I say 'Eritrea is in the northern part of Ethiopia.'" They cannot assume any familiarity with the more than 50 countries that make up the continent of Africa.*

African Immigrants and "Race"

Many Africans are unused to living in a society where race is a defining factor. In fact, many immigrants may never have thought of themselves as "Black" before arriving in the United States. As one Eritrean commented, *"In Eritrea we don't identify people by color. I would think of a white person as the same as me. That's how our culture is in Eritrea."* This difference in racial identity sometimes leads to conflict with African Americans who expect Africans to identify automatically with their group and participate in its struggle against discrimination.

At the same time, many Africans appreciate the fact that they can blend in racially in many Philadelphia neighborhoods. They would not have this experience in Europe, where one can be stopped on the street by authorities and asked for identification simply for looking like a foreigner.

Yet they are disturbed by the racial polarization found in the United States. One Nigerian immigrant expressed concern about American attitudes toward difference:

I wish race relations were farther along in the U.S. than they are. People perceive you as an African American person and treat you accordingly. Maybe if I had tried in the last 25 years I could have lost my Nigerian accent, but I don't want to because that's me. But then Americans treat you differently because either you look different or speak different. We are a little bit worried about my son. He is now driving and you hear about African American males and profiling."

A Kenyan pointed out, *"Something I don't like about the U.S. is that racism is so pervasive, but people pretend that it is not there."* Race is for

many a new experience; at home, conflict and discrimination may be based on other factors, such as ethnicity or religion.

The perceptions of African immigrants toward racism often depend upon their prior experiences, either at home or while living in other foreign countries. One southern Sudanese refugee found the United States to be less racially polarized than other countries: *"America is far better than any other place that I have lived. My color is not important, compared to what I felt in Sudan or Egypt."*

For many African immigrants, the puzzle of where they fit into the racial landscape of the United States may not be solved until the second generation grows up and finds its place. If the African experience is anything like that of earlier Black Caribbean immigrants, immigrants from the continent will find their children identifying with African Americans, either by choice or, indeed, by lack of choice.

Extended Identities – Being "African" in America

Although a shared heritage and experience of discrimination do not create an automatic empathy between African Americans and African immigrants, the two groups are gradually beginning to explore their common interests. Many African retailers market import merchandise to African Americans eager to connect with Africa. In the last decade successful collaborations also have emerged between

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-- Nigerian on race relations in the U.S.

members of these two groups in Philadelphia. At Odunde, an annual Yoruba celebration recreated by African Americans, many African vendors offer cultural goods for sale. Philly Dance Africa, organized by the Philadelphia Folklore Project, features collaborative performances by African immigrant and African American

dancers. And Victoria Onwuchekwa, an immigrant from Nigeria and proprietor of an African boutique in Philadelphia, actively shares her African heritage with African American youth. She has published her family tales, entitled *Ibo Folktales My Mother Told Me*, and performs as a storyteller in the Philadelphia schools during Black History Month.

African immigrants have contributed to local Philadelphia life not only as "Africans," that is people with a certain cultural perspective to offer, but in other ways as well. Their identities are becoming local in character. Dr. Cyprian Anyanwu is a good example. He came from Nigeria in the 1960s to study at Temple University, and since then Anyanwu has served the Philadelphia community in a variety of capacities. He currently directs a residential drug addiction center in North Philadelphia, serving mostly inner city Americans. Anyanwu also has been active in local politics, running for City Council.

Dikembe Mutombo, a new member of Philadelphia 76ers, is also making an impact on the local community. Philadelphia's most famous African immigrant, he is an enormously popular athlete among young Philadelphians, who love to wear Mutombo jerseys. Mutombo is also known for his humanitarian work in his home country of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where he is contributing to efforts to improve health care. His local success in the United States makes his work back at home possible.

Many immigrants from Africa feel that Philadelphia offers them opportunities they would not have had

elsewhere. They recognize the challenges of adapting to a complex, multi-racial and multicultural society, and are usually willing to take on these challenges. In particular, Africans know that many immigrants have come before them to the United States, and that their families have become established members of American society. A Sudanese immigrant expressed confidence in the possibilities of life in America, especially in comparison to other places he might have settled: *"As an immigrant in Oman where I was before, you are always just an immigrant.*

You will never be part of the society, no matter how long you stay there, one year, fifteen years, or thirty years. You do not feel that here in the United States. This country belongs to hard-working immigrants."

* * *

EXTENDING OCCUPATIONS, EXPANDING EDUCATION

"The thing I like about this country is that there is room for everybody. You really can find your own space. I like the fact that if you work hard, you can succeed. Because it has been proven to me."

– Sierra Leonean social worker

"The U.S. is the ultimate for what I needed to complete my education. There was no better place than the United States."

– Ivorian paralegal

While some Africans immigrate to the U.S. specifically to practice a particular profession, most need to "start over" once they arrive. A Sudanese social worker had this reaction to the difficult situation that many African immigrants find themselves in: *"It is at times degrading when you come here and find that all the education you have from home does not mean anything here. It is a shock. We had to start over*

"It is at times degrading when you come here and find that all the education you have from home does not mean anything here. It is a shock. We had to start over from nothing." – Sudanese social worker

from nothing." Statistically, African immigrants have the highest level of education among all immigrant populations to the U.S. They have on average completed more than three years of college and more than half are college graduates. Yet many Africans experience a decrease in job status and earnings because their professional credentials from home, or diplomas from unfamiliar universities, are not valued.

Many immigrants are not able to take the time to re-train or even to perfect their English. They

need to find a job rapidly so that they and their families back home might make ends meet. There are some Africans who arrive with little educational or professional experience at all, and they consequently have difficulty selling themselves on the American job market. But even very educated Africans may have little experience with technology, which limits their employment options.

Frequent difficulties in finding satisfying work have led many African immigrants to particular employment niches, work where the demand is high and the required skills limited. These niches include work in nursing homes and as residential aides for the elderly and disabled. Many African men drive taxis and work in parking garages, while many African women work in braiding salons. An Ethiopian parking garage attendant commented in a resigned tone about his position: *“Most people don’t need this job and so it is easy to get. It is left over.”* Some of the people



working in these fields have university or even advanced degrees but have not been able to apply their skills to the American labor market.

Africans who received their training or university degrees in the U.S., on the other hand, tend to integrate easily into the American workforce. They are represented in medicine, research, education, administration, social work, and numerous other fields. Many would have preferred to practice their profession in Africa, but they could not be absorbed into their countries’ economies. They thus became part of Africa’s “brain drain” to the developed world. But even such professionals may encounter skepticism about their credentials on the part of Americans. A Ghanaian physician at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital made this observation about her patients: *“They know that I have a good training and good experience in order to be at the University of Pennsylvania Hospital. But still I can say that about five percent of the patients I get, I sense their discomfort with the fact that I am foreign. And they ask for my credentials, ‘Where did you train?’ or something like that.”*

Immigrants under the age of sixteen are required to enter school upon their arrival in the United States. African students with little educational experience may be placed in the Newcomer’s Program at South Philadelphia High School, where they receive intensive English and literacy training. Other schools, like Bartram High in Southwest Philadelphia, have many Africans in their ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) program. After one or two years, the students transition into the mainstream high school curriculum. Young Africans who arrived as refugees find themselves with particular challenges in school; many have had their education disrupted by civil war in their home country and time spent in refugee camps. Students at Bartram High have recently formed an African Students’ Association, which aims to aid newcomers in their adaptation to the American school environment, and to enhance understanding between Africans from different countries and between African students and their American peers.

Adult immigrants may also choose to take classes in order to enhance their success in the American job market. Classes may include English as a Second Language, high

school diploma equivalency preparation, basic literacy, and computer training. Those with enough resources may decide to go directly into community or four-year college.

Some African immigrants who are able to accumulate enough capital prefer to open small businesses rather than face the American job market. These businesses include restaurants, photocopy centers, grocery and music stores, clothing and art boutiques, and braiding salons. While some of these businesses have a largely American clientele, others cater specifically to other Africans who want to purchase familiar foodstuffs and popular music. Still other businesses target Philadelphia's African American population, in particular African clothing stores and braiding salons.

The two major sources of African refugees for the Philadelphia area are the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia and Eritrea in the 1980s, Somalia and Sudan currently) and Liberia and Sierra Leone in West Africa.

Most African immigrants agree that the pace of work life in the U.S. is fast and relentless. Since many people work more than one job or jobs that take up a lot of time (like hair braiding or taxi driving), they have little leisure. This lack of time stands in great contrast to their home countries where the importance of family time and socializing is widely recognized. A Liberian immigrant expressed her dismay at the daily routine of most Africans in Philadelphia: *"I see people working two jobs, which is good sometimes. But it is like 'go, go, go!' You never pause for a minute to take a break, to look back and see what is behind you, who is there."* A produce vendor from Ghana made the observation that he could not work at that pace forever: *"America is a place for hard workers, but not for old men!"*

Despite all the frustrations associated with work life in the United States, most immigrants agree that there is much greater opportunity to work and be educated here than there ever would be back home. They recognize this opportunity and appreciate it. They feel that if you study and work hard here, you can eventually make something of yourself and thus help both yourself and your extended family.

LIVES EXTENDED BEYOND FEAR: REFUGEES

Refugees are very different from "voluntary" immigrants because they do not choose to leave their country. They are forced to leave because of persecution due to race, religion, political opinion, nationality, or social group. Since 1980, the United States has accepted refugees from the continent of Africa. Although the quota was initially set at 2,000, the U.S. now accepts 18,000 from Africa annually.

The two major sources of African refugees for the Philadelphia area are the Horn of Africa (Ethiopia and Eritrea in the 1980s, Somalia and Sudan currently) and Liberia and Sierra Leone in

West Africa. Refugees are usually resettled in places where they already have kin, under the "family reunification" provision, which explains the concentration of these populations here. The recent resettlement of the "Lost Boys of Sudan" in many parts of the U.S., including Philadelphia, is a special case that has gotten a lot of media coverage. These young men

arrived mostly as unaccompanied minors, and resettlement agencies have tried to respect the fictive family units that they formed in the Kakuma refugee camp in Kenya where most lived for years.

Most refugees have lived through events that are unimaginable to the average American. These descriptions by an Ethiopian refugee, who arrived in the U.S. in 1982, evoke his difficult experiences both before and after resettlement:

At that time there was the mass killing and they targeted the young. That is the time I left Ethiopia. I just walked to Sudan. My family had no idea of where I was going. They did not know until I wrote a letter that I was alive. For seven years they did not know where I was. Even if I had said that I was out of the country, it could have been trouble for my family. Any soldier had license to kill during the military government.

When I came I was only given one teacup and twenty dollars. In a room we were about five or six people, and those that came before me had no job. I was scared and I had a friend who lived in

Maryland. I called him and told him that I was going back to Sudan. He said 'no, no, no, come to Washington!' And he sent me money to take the bus to Washington. He told me that everything would be all right. He gave me some money and I came back. It is frustrating when you come at first.

have professional or personal commitments that are difficult to abandon on the spur of the moment.

Refugees experience special challenges upon arriving in the United States. At the same time that they need to adapt to a new society, they are recovering from the trauma of war or



Sudanese refugee youth, Fairmount Park. Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward

Those who apply for refugee status with the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees may have little choice about where and when they are resettled. In particular, refugees are given little warning about the timing of their departure. One refugee, from the part of Ethiopia that is now the independent nation of Eritrea, fled to Sudan in the early 1980s where he was working for a multinational oil company. He recounts what it was like when he received word of his immediate resettlement to Philadelphia: *"They tell you that you have to leave. That's it. You're a refugee. And you are not prepared. I was a professional, I worked eight hours a day, I was a busy guy, you know, I traveled, flew around. Then suddenly, poof! I was a refugee!"* Those living in refugee camps may be happy to leave as soon as possible. But other refugees have taken up residence in a second country while awaiting permanent resettlement, and may

persecution. They may be separated from their family members, or not even know where their family members are. Others have spent years in refugee camps under hard conditions before being resettled. These traumas can lead to problems in adaptation and feelings of resentment, sadness or depression. Refugees may also experience uncertainty about the future, since they do not know if conditions in their home country will permit them to go home one day. A Liberian described the feeling of insecurity that her departure from home has created: *"Back home, I could predict my life for the next five, ten years. I could predict based on planning with my family members, friends, from being in a familiar environment and community. For me, that is security. I miss that."*

Some refugees arrive in the United States with little education or job training. Many others

have a high level of education and were successful professionals at home. Whether educated or not, refugees did not choose to leave their home countries like voluntary immigrants, and they may not be prepared, either professionally or psychologically, to integrate into American life and work. Many African community associations are trying to address these needs through offering job counseling, computer classes, and other support to newcomers.

Philadelphia schools like Bartram High in Southwest Philadelphia are beginning to have large numbers of refugee students. African students often experience conflict with their American peers, a situation that one Mauritanian ESOL teacher is trying to correct:

I know some of my kids have gone through situations that adults would find hard to handle. I have kids here who told me that they saw firsthand people being killed. That is why some of them are very emotional, you have to understand. On top of the trauma they went through in their countries, they have to adjust to life in America and it is not always easy for them. Some of our students also have a tough time handling themselves with African American students. There is always this cultural conflict going on. But what I tell them is that they must understand that the African American people too went through a tough situation. The people who are coming from a war zone must understand that African Americans came through slavery, so they went through a hardship too.

The recently formed African Students Association at Bartram High also seeks to promote mutual understanding between themselves and American-born Blacks.

Some Africans escape the terror and undemocratic regimes in their countries on tourist visas. They are essentially refugees but do not have the benefit of being officially recognized as such and must apply for asylum upon arrival. Some asylum seekers arrive with false papers and are imprisoned while their asylum case is decided. These individuals suffer a multiple tragedy – the difficulties of civil unrest in their home country and the resulting psychological trauma, and the inability to access resources for refugees in the U.S. along with the

fear of being deported. Many asylum seekers are turned down the first time they apply for this status, and must appeal the decision. The entire procedure can take months or years.

There seems to be a spirit of mutual aid among refugees in Philadelphia. They advise and assist each other on adjusting to their new context, accessing services, and applying for asylum once here if they did not arrive already with refugee status. Recent refugees from Sierra Leone and Liberia may be part of the group that stayed as long as possible in their countries, hoping to be there to rebuild when conditions improved. Many refugees and asylees have the desire to return home should peace be restored. Their associations in Philadelphia may also take an active role in assisting people in their home countries. The following two statements reflect the kind of commitment that is common among African refugees in Philadelphia. The first is from a Sierra Leonean who has been in the United States since the 1970s:

I would like to retire there, if it is safe. If the war is over and they are not going out and hurting people anymore. I would like to go back out there. I think I have an obligation, now more so than ever, to go and do what I can for Sierra Leone.

A more recent arrival, a Liberian asylee who has been here since 2000, feels the call from a home country in trouble:

I think people of my age are thinking of going back home, and very soon, because that is where you think your place is. Going back home and establishing a home. You want to build your country, you want to take some of the technology that you see here and go back home and build your country upon what you observe here, the values and some of the good culture that can develop your country.

For the time being, however, African refugees in Philadelphia live a dual existence: they attempt to rebuild their lives in the United States while keeping tabs on political developments at home. Their hopes are extended in many directions.

* * *

EXTENSIONS OF THE SPIRIT: RELIGIOUS LIFE

Religious activity is a very important part of daily life in most parts of Africa, and these practices are continued when immigrants make their new homes in the United States. The wide array of African churches, and more recently mosques, in the Philadelphia area is evidence of the need for and appreciation of spiritual support practiced in familiar ways.

The religious practices in these churches differ from American churches in various ways. There is an effort to recreate an atmosphere from the home country through music and singing. Swaying and rhythmic movement often accompany music. Church decoration may also be somewhat Africanized, and many worshipers dress in traditional clothing. The overall feeling is one of "home."

Language use also differentiates these churches from American ones. Most use one or more African languages to some extent during the service – Yoruba (Nigeria), Krio (Sierra Leone), Bassa (Liberia), Twi (Ghana), Ge'ez and Amharic (Ethiopia), and Swahili (Kenya and other East African countries). Bambara and French are used in the Masjid Salaam, which draws West African Muslims from Ivory Coast, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso. Hymns may be sung in African languages as well.

Sermon topics often address issues of immigration or events in the home countries. Religion seems to be a solace in particular for refugees who have lived through atrocities, been uprooted, seen some relatives killed and lost contact with others. Prayers are said for those living at home in uncertainty, for people biding their time in refugee camps where conditions are hard, and for the souls of those killed during civil war. Even pastors without refugees in their congregation, regularly address issues of immigration in their sermons. Prayers are said for immigrants who suffer discrimination due to nationality, color, or accent. Worship is thus used as therapy for the distress associated with resettlement and immigration.

When many immigrants choose a church, nationality or ethnicity may take precedence over denomination. Thus, Sierra Leoneans of diverse church backgrounds attend the Mt. Zion United

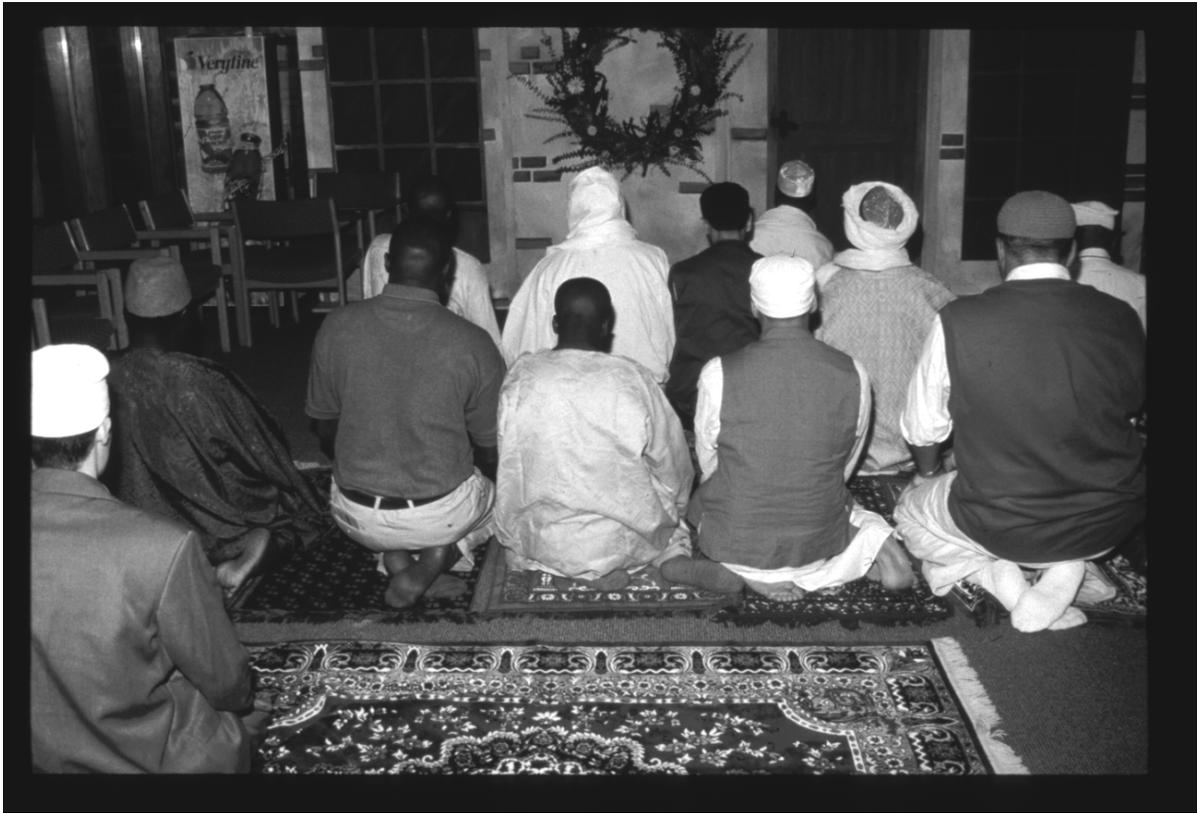
African Church, of the United Brethren denomination, in order to be with others from their home country and to hear some Krio. The Ghanaian Community Church announces this ecumenical approach on its program: "Serving Christians of all Denominations the Ghanaian Way."

Churches and mosques also serve as meeting places for immigrants of the same ethnicity or nationality. Sundays may be the only day of rest for many hard-working immigrants, so Sunday worship takes on a festive quality. Muslim taxi drivers may arrange their fares around prayer at one or more mosques, and thus take a welcome break from their long workday.

Religious institutions often dispense not only religious, but also social, services. Some of these services may be informal – membership in a church brings with it social gatherings (marriages, baptisms, or picnics) and their healing effects. Sometimes these services are more formal. For example, a psychological counselor who attends the Swahili Church offered his services free to fellow churchgoers who are having trouble adapting to their new context. Some pastors dispense advice on issues of immigration papers and asylum cases. And the Christ Assembly Lutheran Church, attended mostly by Liberians, has collaborated with Lutheran Children and Family Services to create the African Immigrant Ministry, which helps immigrants to adapt to life in the United States and provide services such as counseling, English classes, and after-school programs for youth.

* * *

Africans all over the greater Philadelphia area are extending their presence across the region through their family, community, political, professional, and religious activities. In raising children, adjusting to a new culture, healing from trauma, attending school, organizing parties, opening businesses, and running for political office, they are building a new home in America. As one of the newest immigrant groups to our shores, their communities are constantly growing and changing. It will be interesting to see how they evolve as their American experience extends through successive generations.



Liberian Church. Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward



Ritual for worship at the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Photograph by Vera Viditz-Ward.