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## The Experiences of Highly Educated Nigerian Immigrants in the United States

Shila Bayor  
*Bard College*

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# The Experiences of Highly Educated Nigerian Immigrants in the United States

Senior Project Submitted to  
The Division of Social Studies  
of Bard College

by  
Shila Bayor

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“Many stories matter. Stories have been used to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.”

-Chimamanda Adichie

As I am about to embark on my flight back to the United States, a customs officer begins his long line of interrogation. "Why didn't you stay here to study?" he asks. "These nosy people," I think to myself. I don't have an answer, so I don't answer. "Hmm... It's ok. I understand," he says. Although I am a bit annoyed at the many questions that this man has for me, while I am expecting to board my flight, I can't help but ask myself if he has a point. "Togo... Do they have schools there?" another customs officer says. "Ah Ah" I say in shock. How dare he? Even if it is the truth... "These Ghanaian custom officers are rude," I think to myself. However, they might have raised an important question.

## **Abstract**

As the Child of Brain Drainers ( Highly educated immigrants that moved from a developing country to a developed country) and a soon to be highly educated African immigrant, I often ponder the effects of immigration on the families of those who immigrated as well as countries within the African continent. Oftentimes, African countries are perceived as stagnant places where progress may seem impossible because of corruption, poverty and their failing economies. Therefore, for an African to immigrate to a western country is not something unusual; this seems to be a common pattern. The narrative seems to be that if you have a chance to leave the continent, you should. It seems to be something so normal that we rarely question why people immigrate.

The objective of this paper is to explore the push and pull factors of the emigration to the United States of highly educated Nigerian immigrants and their families, a subgroup of African immigrants. Push factors are the reasons why immigrants are leaving their countries of birth. Pull factors are the reasons why immigrants move to the receiving civilizations or the destination countries. This paper will also describe the experiences of highly educated (People with a bachelor's degree or more) Nigerian born citizens living in the United States, speak of the effects of the increasing immigration of African immigrants or the brain drain (Void created in developing countries when many highly educated and skilled people immigrate out), highlight some of the expectations of highly educated immigrants, and speak of the effects of the increasing immigration of African immigrants on Nigeria's brain drain.



**Keywords:**

Assimilation: [T]he process by which a minority individual or group takes on the characteristics of the dominant culture.

Acculturation: 1. (*noun*) The process of change that occurs when two or more cultures come into contact.

First generation: foreign-born immigrants in the United States.

1.5 generation immigrant: foreign-born immigrants who immigrated to the United States when they were very young.

2<sup>nd</sup> generation immigrant: people who were born in the United States from first-generation immigrant parents

First generation transplant immigrants: first generation immigrants

African born immigrants: Immigrants that were born on the African continent.

Brain Drainers: Highly educated immigrants that moved from a developing country to a developed country.

Block assimilation: The theory that some immigrants are prevented from assimilating.

Remittance: In this project, remittance stands for payment sent to Nigeria. This payment is either economic or social.

Social Remittance: skills, ideas, and practices that immigrants take from the receiving nation back to the nation of origin.

## **Introduction**

In January of 2018, Donald Trump used a vulgar term to imply that Haiti and other African nations were dirty and that immigrants from those nations were undesired. Several lawmakers state that President Trump said in a meeting "Why are we having all these people from shithole countries come here?" (Dawsey, 2018). I watched my Instagram timeline fill up with Nigerian Americans who wanted to show Donald Trump what a product of such countries looked like; lawyers, doctors, engineers, accountants and many more, all wrote briefly about their achievements in the United States. This could not come at a better time, as I was writing this project. While some of the conditions in Nigeria pushes people to immigrate to the United States, many of these immigrants are people who are contributing a lot to the American society by using their knowledge to better the lives of many Americans. What these stories taught me is that while many Nigerian immigrants may have similar experiences, their stories and immigration journeys vary. Although at first, I attempted to use the stories of highly educated Nigerian immigrants in the United States as a sample size for African immigrants, it is important to recognize that Nigeria has a different history than the other 53 nations and, therefore, Nigerian immigrants will have different experiences. This project serves as a narrative of the journey of the seventeen Nigerian Immigrants that I interviewed.

I was drawn to the topic of highly educated immigrants in a sociology class I took, "Social Problems", in my junior year of college. We discussed and read about the topic of the Brain Drain (The Brain Drain is sometimes also defined as a flow of highly skilled immigrants

from the developing world to developed countries). Before that, I had never heard of the Phenomenon of the Brain Drain. After digging deeper into this phenomenon, I was intrigued to learn that there was very little research done on the African brain drain, even though the African continent is the continent most affected by the phenomenon of the brain drain. My experience as the child of brain drainers, my curiosity about the effects of the immigration of highly educated African immigrants in the United States, and my interest in the topic of brain drain (The Brain Drain is sometimes also defined as a flow of highly skilled immigrants from the developing world to developed countries) pushed me to do this research project. My research will answer the following questions:

### **Research Questions**

What are some of the push factors (reasons for leaving their country of origin) that causes highly educated Nigerian immigrants to immigrate out of Nigeria? What are some pull factors (reasons for choosing to immigrate to a specific country) that causes highly educated Nigerian immigrants to choose to move to the United States? How do highly educated Nigerian immigrants acculturate in the United States? Do members of this immigrant group assimilate into American society? Do highly educated Nigerian immigrants have opportunities for economic mobility in the United States? Through their subjective analyses, what plans do highly educated Nigerian immigrants have for their future?

### **African Immigrants in the United States**

In order to understand Nigerian immigrants and their experiences, it is important to put them in context with the existing research on African immigrants. Gambino & Trevelyan state in a report by the Census Bureau (2014), that the number of African-born people living in the

United States has doubled every decade since 1970, with the largest increase between 2010 and 2012. In 1970, about 80,000 African-born people lived in the United States. Today, there are about 1.6 million African born citizens who are living in the United States. Although the African-born population remains a smaller number, relative to other foreign-born groups, it has experienced rapid growth in the last 40 years. Among the African born population, 36 percent were from West Africa, 29 from East Africa, and 17 from North Africa. The majority of these immigrants came from Nigeria, Ghana, Egypt, and Ethiopia, making up about 41% of the total African-born population in the United States. Certain states such as Minnesota (19 percent), Maryland (15 percent), Virginia (9 percent), Georgia (8 percent) and Massachusetts (8 percent) had percentages of African-born in their foreign-born populations that were at least twice the national percentage of African born citizens, which is 4 percent. High concentrations of African-born immigrants in a state's total foreign-born population are also found in North Dakota, South Dakota, and the District of Columbia.

Africans have different legal status, when they enter the United States. The kind of visa a person is granted is often reflective of the reason why they are moving into a country. For example, student visas are given to students with the purpose of allowing them to study within a country and an asylum gives refugees admittance into a country. Student visas, asylums, and the diversity visa are all modes of entry into the United States. According to McCabe et al. (2011), twenty-one percent of African immigrants were admitted into the United States as refugees while 17 percent were admitted through diversity visa program. This can be explained by the number of conflicts that has pushed some people to move and leave their country due to existing political conflicts, wars, and famines that have happened in many countries within the African continent

in the last decade. Between 2001 to 2010, the leading origin countries of African refugee arrivals were Somalia (59,840, or 40.0 percent of total African refugee arrivals), Liberia (23,948, or 16.0 percent), Sudan (18,869, or 12.6 percent), Ethiopia (11,400, or 7.6 percent), Burundi (9,869, or 6.6 percent), the Democratic Republic of Congo (7,900, or 5.3 percent), Eritrea 6,493, or 4.3 percent), and Sierra Leone (6,280, or 4.2 percent). During the same period, African nationals accounted for 21.2 percent (58,232) of the 274,848 total individuals granted asylum. However, when it comes to Nigerian immigrants, very few of them immigrated to the United States as refugees or with an asylum. According to the National Center on Immigrant Integration Policy, in 2010, out of a total number of 13,376 Nigerians who gained admittance into the United States, only 1 percent came in with an asylum. Meanwhile, 60 percent came in through relatives, 11 percent through family-sponsored preferences, 22 percent through diversity programs and 7 percent through employment and other means. It is also important to note that Sub-Saharan immigrants were much less likely to gain a green card through employment pathways (5 percent) compared to the overall immigrant population (16 percent) (McCabe et al., 2011).

As African immigrants move from their various countries to the United States to settle, they become a part of the United States' population and shape its culture. Forty-nine percent of the 1.5 million sub-Saharan immigrants were naturalized U.S. citizens, compared to 47 percent of all immigrants. In the year 2013, almost half of all sub-Saharan immigrants who became lawful permanent residents (LPRs) in the United States were immediate relatives of U.S. citizens (45 percent) (Batalova & Zong, 2014). This is evidence to support that a lot of sub-Saharan immigrant families move to the United States with the intention of settling here. When it comes to adapting to the life in the United States, African immigrants have to adopt other parts of the mainstream

American society such as learning English, joining the workforce and much more. According to the Migration Policy Institute, sub-Saharan immigrants were more likely to be proficient in English than the overall U.S. foreign-born population. Approximately 25 percent of sub-Saharan immigrants spoke only English at home, versus 16 percent of all immigrants. The Limited English proficiency refers to respondents who indicated on the American Community Survey questionnaire that they spoke English less than “very well” (Zong & Batalova, 2017).

Most African immigrants living in the United States are older than 18. According to the Census Bureau of the African immigrants residing in the United States in 2007, 10.9 percent were minors or under the age of 18, 76.3 percent were of working age or between ages 18 and 54, and 12.8 percent were seniors or age 55 or older. This means that most of the African immigrants living in the United States are of working age. (Zong & Batalova, 2017)

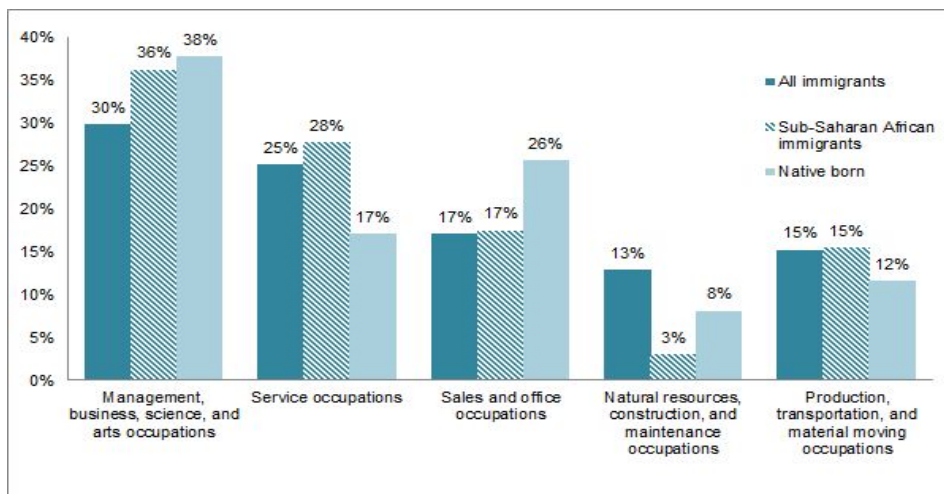


Figure 1, (Zong & Batalova, 2017, Figure 5)

As shown in figure 1, a graph that was produced by the MPI tabulation of data from the U.S. Census Bureau's 2013 American Council Survey, the occupations of employed African

Immigrants in the United States vary. Many Sub-Saharan African immigrants also worked in the category of service occupations, the category sales and office occupations, and the category production, transportation, and material moving occupations. The lowest category was the natural resources, construction, and maintenance occupations. From the data collected by the 2013 US census, we can conclude that most African Immigrants who were 16 or older and employed in 2013, worked in the management, business, science, and arts occupations.

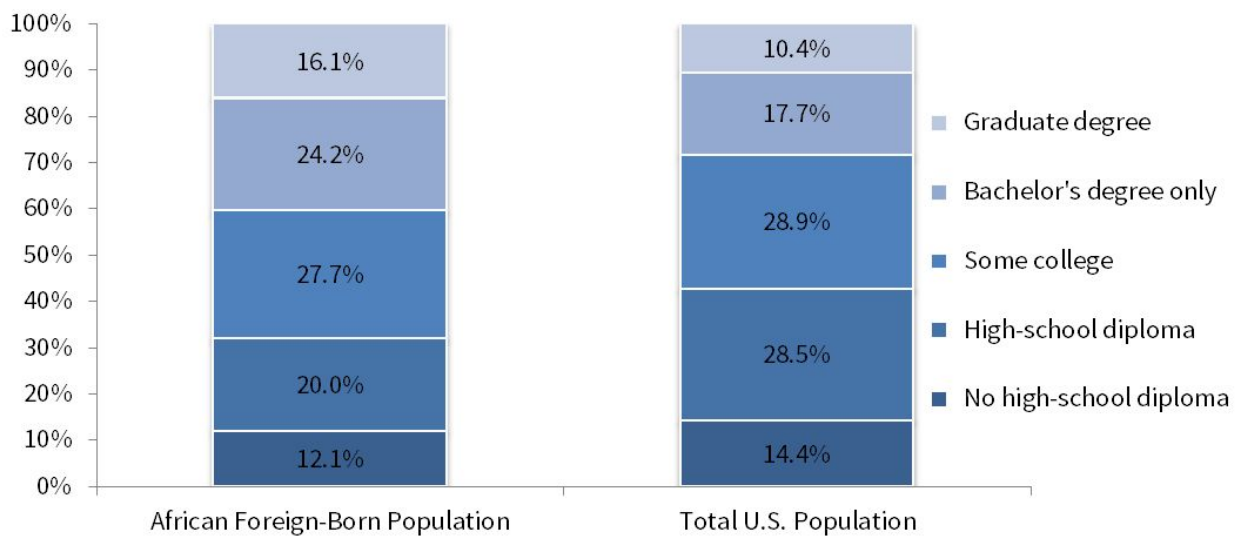


Figure 2, (“African Immigrants in America: A Demographic Overview”, 2012, Figure 12)

According to Figure 2 in the year 2010, 40.3% of Foreign-born African citizens have their bachelor's degree, meanwhile, 28.1% of the total U.S. population has their Bachelor's. When we compare the educational attainment of African immigrants to all immigrants we find similar results. However according to Jeanne Batalova from the Migration Policy Institute, of the “1.4 million of African immigrants, who are 25 and older, 41% have a bachelor's degree,

compared with 30% of all immigrants in the United States and 32% of the U.S.-born population.” ( Ann M. Simmons. 2018. par 9, “African Immigrants in America: A Demographic Overview”, 2012)

While this statistic does not tell us how many of them are brain drainers, or immigrants who moved to the United States with a bachelor's degree or more. However, we know that the three nations that produce the more brain drainers respectively were Egypt with 63.9% of Egyptians entering the U.S. with their bachelor's degree or higher, 60.9% Nigeria, 57.3 % of South Africans. Statistics also state that, within the foreign-born population from Africa, educational attainment varied by place of birth. While between 2008 and 2012, 40 percent of the Somali-born population had less than a high school education, 64 percent of Egyptian-born individuals had a bachelor's degree or higher. (Fitzwater et al, 2014) This could be explained by how people of different nationalities enter the United States. For example, Somalian immigrants mostly gained admission in the United States as refugees. According to the National Center for Immigration Integration, 82 percent of 4,558 people who gained admission into the United States in 2010 came as refugees or were granted asylum. Therefore, it is logical that the number of highly educated people in this population is lower than a country such as Nigeria, where more than 22 percent of people came in through the diversity visa and employment (See chapter 2 for more information about the diversity visa program) (Capps et al, 2012). Moreover, another reason why Nigerian immigrants are a great population to study is that among African immigrants, Nigerian immigrants in the United States are the second largest population of brain drainers. This phenomenon is referred to as the Brain Drain. The "Brain Drain" phenomenon describes the sudden movement of a large number of specialized human capital from developing



countries to developed countries. I put “Brain Drain” between quotations because some researchers have argued that it does not exist (Turn to the conclusion for more information on this debate). Brain Drainers are specialized or highly educated immigrants. The experiences of this group is one that is different than those of that of many other immigrants. Looking at what happens to this group of immigrants in the receiving civilization is something that also adds to the brain drain debate. Refer to my conclusion for more information.

Even though we see an increase in the population of African immigrants in the United States, their experiences and immigration stories are topics that are not often studied. In this paper, we will be focusing on the experiences of highly educated Nigerian immigrants as the sample group for highly educated African immigrants. Nigerian immigrants are not only one of the most educated group of African immigrants in the United States, but they are very numerous in the United States. Nigeria is also an English speaking country. Therefore, Nigeria as a Sub-Saharan, English speaking country could serve as a sample group in the study of Highly educated African Immigrants from countries that are similar to Nigeria. This paper serves to explore the assimilation, acculturation, and experiences of highly educated Nigerian immigrants in the United States. In this next chapter, we will describe the design of this study. The next chapter will help to demonstrate various motivations for immigration to the United States. I will, then, discuss why the United States is the desired destination for African immigrants and highly educated Nigerian immigrants, theories on the acculturation and assimilation of immigrants in the United States that relate to African immigrants, and theories on the Brain Drain.

## **Methods**

In my study, I used snowball sampling. I recruited members by asking people to refer other people who may qualify for this research. I, then, sent those people emails asking them if they would like to participate in my research. I interviewed them in person (at coffee shops and public spaces in NYC) as well as through Skype or Facetime. My participants were asked approximately 27 questions and interviews took about 45 minutes. To view this study's interview questions, please refer to the end of this chapter. My goal was to interview 20 to 30 people for this study from all genders, race, and ethnicities.

In order to qualify for this study participants had to identify as Nigerians that immigrated to the United States within the last 15 years. I choose this population and timeframe because I wanted people who left Nigeria fairly recently and lived in America long enough for them to integrate into American society. I believe that this allows us to gain a sufficient amount of information about their lives in the United States and in Nigeria prior to immigrating.

For my interviews, I obtained a verbal and written consent. Before starting my interview, I read the verbal consent to my participants. I, then, handed them the written consent. If my participants agreed to the terms, they were asked to sign the paper consent form. The participants who were interviewed through Skype and Facetime were required to read and sign the consent form, prior to our interview. During our interviewed, I also received verbal consent from them. The procedures for this study were approved by Bard College's Institutional Review Board (IRB). Please refer to the appendix to see the letter of approval from the IRB. I used pseudo names in my project to protect the identity of organizations and people. In addition, my interviews and transcriptions are kept on my computer, where only I have the password and access to.

Some of my research limitations were my inability to reach a wider population and timing. My participants were mostly located in New York City. I would have liked to reach people from more states. A more representative sample would include people who reside in different states. Another limitation was time. I began collecting data in December and therefore, collected data for only two months. This resulted in a low population size. Moreover, because I only interviewed seventeen people, my findings cannot be considered to be representative of all Nigerian immigrants who live in the United States. My study highlights the perceptions of the seventeen people that I interviewed and their perspectives. A better study would include people of all ages, gender, a larger population size, and participants who live in different states.

## **Interview Questions**

Email:

What is your age range?

What is your race?

What is your gender?

Are you married?

How long have you lived in the United States?

Do you have United States citizenship? ( if, respondent reports that they are undocumented, stop recording and delete recording) If so, when did you gain citizenship?

What State do you reside in?

If you speak any languages other than English, do you speak any language(s) other than English at home? Please list. (skip if the answer to the last question is no)

What is your last degree earned?

What is the name of the school where you received your last degree?

What discipline did you get your last degree in? ( Computer Science, Mathematics, Sociology, etc)

What is your current occupation (s) and title (s) ?

How long have you worked at that job(s)?

What was your life like in Nigeria before you left?

Why did you leave Nigeria?

Why did you decide to move to the United States, rather than other countries?

## **Financial**

Approximately, what is your yearly income ?

Thinking about your current job(s), what are some of your positives and negative experiences?

Do you think that you have enough room for upward economic mobility?

Did you find it difficult to find a job in your field?

### **Assimilation**

What were your first impressions of the US, when you first moved?

Have your initial impressions of the US changed over time? in what ways?

Do you have friends in the United States?

How diverse would you say that your friend group is? Please explain ( skip if the answer to the earlier question is no)

What is the nationality of your spouse?( skip if the person is not married)

What does it mean to you to be a Nigerian in the United States?

In the last five years, how often have you visited your birth country?

Do you see yourself moving back to your country of birth?

Thinking about your racial identity, how do you see yourself in America?

How do you think strangers view your racial identity?\*

What do you think your responsibility is to Africa?

How do you maintain contact with people in Nigeria?

What advice would you give Nigerians who are thinking about moving From Nigeria to the United States?

## Project Outline

This chapter is followed by three other chapters and a conclusion. In my second chapter titled *Theories on Highly Educated Nigerian Immigrants*, I will be delving into the history of Nigeria and existing theories regarding African brain drainers, Nigerian immigrants, and African immigrants. In the section on the *A brief history of Nigeria*, I will be writing about the history of Nigeria. This will give us a background on events that were happening in Nigeria at the time when my participants immigrated. In the *push factor, pull factor, and Assimilation and Acculturation of African Immigrants* sections, I plan on surveying the existing literature on black immigrants and African immigrants in the United States because there is not a lot of information on the experiences of African Brain drainers specifically. Since African Brain Drainers are black immigrants, brain drainers, and African immigrants, the information on those groups will allow us to gain more insight into the experiences highly educated Nigerian immigrants. I will also survey the push and pull factors that leads Africans to move to the United States

My third chapter is titled *Immigration Experiences*. In this chapter, I will do a thorough analysis of immigration experiences of my participants. In the section titled *Their Stories*, I will be writing on the push factors or the reasons why my participants left Nigeria.

In my fourth chapter titled *The Experiences of Highly Educated Nigerian Immigrants in the United States*, I will be speaking about the experiences of African immigrants in the United States. This chapter contains two different subsections, one on their social experiences and another on their economic experiences. In the subsection titled *It's "like peeling an onion": On Being Nigerian in the United States*, I will be speaking of their racial and ethnic identities. The

information in this section will answer the following question. How do highly educated African immigrants assimilate/ acculturate in the United States? I will also be able to speak of the way they identify in the United States. Therefore, I would be able to tie my findings to theories on acculturation and assimilation. In the other subsection *From Grace to Grass: Giving up social status in Nigeria for more opportunities in the US*, there will be evidence that allows us to answer the question: Do highly educated African immigrants have a chance of economic mobility? Additionally, I will tie it back to literature and data on the economic mobility of Black immigrants, African immigrants, and brain drainers. Through comparing their past situation to their present situation, I will be able to speak on how their life has improved or not economically.

In the conclusion, my participants answer questions on their expectations and hopes for their futures. I will also be bringing into the discussion, debates on immigration today (such as the repeal of DACA, the immigrant ban, etc.) and how it may affect Nigerian immigrants. I will also be going over the existing literature and how they apply to my participants. I will explain how my research adds or stands against their findings. I will also answer my research questions, based off my findings and present policy recommendations.

### Participants` Information

Name	Gender	Age	Marital Status	Year of arrival	Occupation	Residence	Diploma
Emma	Female	24	S	2003	Graduate Student	NY	Bachelor`s
Caleb	Male	22	S	2010	Engineer	CA	Bachelor`s
Ava	Female	21	S	2014	Intern	NY	Bachelor`s
Isabella	Female	22	S	2014	Medical Scribe	NY	Bachelor`s
John	Male	30	S	2003	PhD student	PA	Masters
Mike	Male	25	S	2016	Paralegal	NY	Bachelor`s
Adam	Male	45	M	2006	Security Supervisor/ Building Manager	NY	Masters
Abigail	Female	53	M	2005	Engineer	NY	Masters
Andrew	Male	51	M	2003	Financial Analyst	NY	Masters
Arnold	Male	30	S	2003	Hospital Admin	NY	Ph.D.
Stella	Female	54	M	2005	Doctor	MA	MD
Anthony	Male	60	M	2003	Doctor	MA	MD
Bernard	Male	36	M	2006	Journalist	NY	Masters
Claire	Female	27	S	2016	Makeup Artist	CA	Bachelor`s



Anna	Female	40	M	2008	Nurse	NY	BSN
Gabriella	Female	25	S	2014	Entrepreneur	NY	Bachelor's
Ben	Male	29	S	2004	Hospital Admin	NY	Bachelor's

## **Theories on Highly Educated Nigerian Immigrants**

### **A brief history of Nigeria**

In the previous chapter, I African immigrants in the United States and presented some statistics to help you better understand my sample size. It is important to discuss some general statistics due to the lack of research and information focused solely on Nigerian immigrants. This chapter will present a brief history of Nigeria that focuses on the economic, social and political settings. This history will help us understand some of the push factors or factors that are leading to many Nigerians immigrating out of Nigeria. The pull factors or the factors that lead to people moving to the United States will also be discussed in this chapter.

Nigeria has always had multiple people immigrating to other countries. This includes forced immigration and voluntary immigration. Between 1400 and 1900, about 12 million slaves were exported from the area we now call West Africa. While there is little to no data that tracks the immigration of people from Nigeria prior to the 20th century, there is a lot of evidence to prove that immigration to or from Nigeria was popular within the African continent (Osoḡba 1969; Ojo 2014).

Nigeria, a former British colony, made English as its official language after independence its. On October 1st, 1960, Nigeria gained independence from Britain as a confederation of three districts; Northern, Western and Eastern. Nigeria was to have a parliamentary form of government. However, in October 1963, Nigeria proclaimed itself a federal republic and wrote a new constitution. The Nigerian Civil War, commonly known as the Biafran War, took place between July 6th, 1967 and January 15th, 1970. This war was fought

between the government of Nigeria and the secessionist state of Biafra. Biafra represented nationalist aspirations of the Igbo people (an ethnic group found in Nigeria), whose leadership felt they could no longer coexist with the Northern-dominated federal government. The Biafran war began as a result of political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions which preceded Britain's formal decolonization of Nigeria from 1960 to 1963 (History.com. 2009; Ojo 2014). However, following the Biafran war, a series of military coups took place and led to Nigeria being run by military governments (the July 1975 Coup, 1983, 1985 coup).

Nigeria did not gain the status of a democratic country until 1999. The election of Olusegun Obasanjo in 1999 marked an important event in Nigeria's history. It was the emergence of a democratic Nigeria, which ended 16 years of consecutive military rule. Olusegun Obasanjo became the steward of a country suffering economic stagnation and the deterioration of most of its democratic institutions. Obasanjo, a former general, was admired his claim to represent all Nigerians regardless of religion, and his claims of working to fix Nigeria's economy (history. 2012, Ojo 2014).

Nigeria experienced its first transition of power between civilian administrations when President Obasanjo stepped down on May 29, 2007. Newly-elected President Umaru Yar'Adua, a moderate and a respected governor from the northern state of Katsina, pledged publicly to work for peace and security in the Niger Delta. On November 23, 2009, the president of Nigeria at the time, President Yar'Adua was flown to Jeddah, Saudi Arabia for urgent medical treatment. He remained in Saudi Arabia for months. In February 2010, Vice President Goodluck Jonathan was given the responsibilities of Acting President. President Yar'Adua died on May 6th, 2010, and

Goodluck Jonathan was sworn in as President. In 2011, Goodluck Jonathan once again became President of Nigeria by winning the 2011 elections (Ojo 2014).

In 1970, when the Biafran war ended, there was a lot of hope for the economic development of Nigeria. However, following the Biafran war, a series of military coups took place and led to Nigeria being run by military governments. In terms of economics, Nigeria had huge growth after the Biafran war. During this period, Nigeria earned its title as the “Giant of Africa” Since the late 1960s, its economy has been based primarily on the petroleum industry; Starting in 1973, the world saw a series of oil price increases which produced rapid economic growth in transportation, construction, manufacturing, and government services. In the late 1990s, the government began to privatize many state-run enterprises such as communications, power, and transportation as a way to enhance the quality of service and reduce dependence on the government. By the beginning of the 21st century, most of the enterprises had been successfully privatized.

At the turn of the 21st century, Nigeria faced an unsteady revenue flow. The government attempted to counter this by borrowing from international sources and introducing various austerity measures. As a result, a continuous increase of the national budget was needed for debt repayment, which, with corruption dominating government operations, meant that very little of Nigeria’s income was being spent on the people and their needs. Furthermore, many different governments within the last decades have been proven to be corrupt by padding the national budget and finding other other means of stealing from the Nigerian people. All of these existing conditions have to lead to Nigeria’s struggling economy, especially within the last fifteen years (Hamilton & all 2018; Ojo 2014). Today, Nigeria is now the most populous country in Africa

with about 186 million people and over 250 ethnic groups (Blessing U. Mberu, Roland Pongou 2010). However, according to the Migration Policy Institute, thousands of Nigerians demand refuge and asylum from other countries every year.

Currently, the country known as Nigeria is in crisis partly because of groups such as the IPOB, the YOLICOM that have emerged asking for secession. In addition, for the past eight years Boko Haram, a Jihadist militant organization in West Africa, wages a war on citizens by kidnapping young girls and displacing people from Nigeria to Niger, Chad, and Cameroon. In the deep central south of Nigeria, the Niger Delta militants are fighting to liberate the delta region from oil corruption. A group called The Yoruba Liberation Command (YOLICOM) is also threatening secession. Groups such as the YOLICOM believe that Nigeria as we know it is a failed state and that secession is the key to bettering the lives of people living in Nigeria. Furthermore, in the South East, a movement for a modern Igbo secession has gained traction, also known as Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The existence of these organizations reveals that there is a growing division among members of different ethnic groups in Nigeria. They also reveal certain issues that past and the current government have yet to address. While none of my participants referred to the ethnic tensions or Boko Haram as a cause for their immigration, knowing the events that are currently happening in Nigeria helps us to gain a better picture of why many Nigerians are leaving their country. ( Mantzikos 2014; Barkindo 2015; Yare & Essomba 2017)

### **The Push Factors**

African nationals choose to move away from Africa for different reasons. The severe economic difficulties, increased poverty, and the political instability in many countries in Africa have pushed people to seek to leave the continent (Takougang 2005). As stated in my introduction, many African immigrants come to the United States as refugees and through lottery visa programs. While many Africans immigrants from certain countries come to the United States to flee conflicts that are happening in their countries, this is not the only reason why Africans choose to leave the United States (McCabe 2011).

Another possible reason for one to move is the declining value of the currency in their country and economy in their home countries. Reynolds writes that the economy of the sending civilization often leads to many of the immigrants deciding to leave and also pushes them to stay abroad (Reynolds 2002).

Some people decide to leave their countries because the conditions in their countries make it very difficult for them to support their families and thrive. Bhargava, A. and Docquier, F. (2008) interviewed people who choose to stay in their countries, rather than move abroad. They state that while “only a few correspondents simply ‘blamed’ developed countries for luring the talent away from developing countries”(Bhargava, A., & Docquier, F., 2008, P. 364), many their respondents found fault with their own countries for not being able to keep talented health professionals. The reasons they gave for the migration of talented health officials included general poverty and poor working conditions resulting from local health policies and depleted economies-some of which were laid at the door of the countries' governments but some were attributed to greedy rich countries, fuel social conflict (Bhargava, A., & Docquier, F., 2008).

Many immigrants may also blame the governments in their countries of origin for not addressing, and sometimes for causing, the issues that worsen living conditions.

One of the problems caused by the failing economy in developing countries caused is the poor quality of education. Many young people also leave their countries to further their education and gain a world-class education (Das, 1979). The US State Department attracts and pulls students from other countries to come study in the United States. Lower wages and unemployment are another economical problem, as it causes people, even professionals and those highly educated, to leave their country of origin for another country. Bhargava and Doquier (2008) write that “Individual doctors were understood to be striving for a better life elsewhere-some for themselves and for personal gain, but many so that they could better support their families who had been left behind. Doctors and nurses also desired and needed better training, which poor countries cannot satisfy” (Bhargava, A. and Docquier, F. 2008). According to Bhargava and Doquier, some highly educated people decide to move because of the working conditions in their countries, the lack of opportunity, and the desire for greener pastures.

This point is also expressed in “An African Brain Drain: Igbo Decisions to Immigrate to the US” by Rachel R. Reynolds, who also writes about the reasons why highly educated African immigrants migrate to the United States. Reynolds focuses on the Igbo, an ethnic group of Nigeria. She writes:

I have pointed out that they are highly skilled professionals, which I call 'brain drainers', whose migration order was predicated upon economic pressure, but that also, their decisions to immigrate were precipitated first and foremost by the desire for

professional education abroad. I have also discussed middle-class Igbo family expectations for education, including the ways that education is assured to youth, and how education is gendered. I also discussed how the extended family system of support and inheritance law facilitates young men's decisions to emigrate (Reynolds, 2002, P. 282).

Reynolds highlights the fact that some people immigrate, not only to improve their own lives but also to improve the lives of their family members who depend on them. Her research, which relates to a subgroup of Nigerian Brain Drainers, shows that the lack of opportunities, the want of better living standards, the desire to support their families in Nigeria by sending money back home, and the need to aid the failing economies back home is a major motivation for African Brain Drainers to move away from their home countries (Reynolds 2002). While the conditions in the sending society contribute to people leaving the country, the conditions within receiving civilization also promote this immigration. In this case, there are a lot of factors and conditions that lead Nigerians to immigrate from Nigeria to the United States. In the next section, we will explore the pull factors, or the factors that lead to Nigerians moving to the United States, specifically, and not other countries.

### **The Pull Factors**

The American Dream is also a reason why many people are moving to the United States. In *Once the American Dream* (2010), Bernadette Hanlon writes of the origins and effects of the American dream. She states that The term was first coined by historian James Truslow Adam in *The Epic of America*. In this book, Adam defines the American dream as, “that dream of a land



in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. . . . It is . . . a dream of social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position’(Adams, 1931).” (Hanlon, 2010, P. 1). The American Dream promotes the belief that even those from the humblest origins can achieve success and a richer standard of living in the United States. This dream has inspired many Americans and has attracted millions of immigrants to the United States in search of prosperity and a new life. Hanlon also states that “It has shaped the country’s image and has brought forth strong feelings of national pride (Mennell 2007)” ( Hanlon, 2010, P. 1). As a pull factor, the American dream draws immigrants from all over the world with the idea that America is the ideal place for them to live a prosperous life.

There are several other reasons why the United States is the desired destination for many African immigrants. There are several opportunities such as the lottery visa and school programs that enable African citizens to attempt to gain visas to the United States. The diversity visa lottery, also known as the lottery visa program, has requirements that allow for talented and educated people to apply for a visa to move to the United States and receive a temporary visa.

The requirements are that:

Must be from a country which sent less than 50,000 immigrants to the U.S. within past five years. the citizens of countries that sent more than 50,000 people to the US in the past 5 years are not eligible to participate in the green card lottery”. (Green Card Lottery USA - Eligibility Requirements. (n.d.), Par.1)- Among those countries are many countries within the African continent. To be considered for the diversity visa, you “must

have a high school diploma or about 2 years of work experience” (Do you qualify to enter the American DV-2020 Green Card Lottery? (n.d.), Paragraph 9-10) (Instructions for the 2018 diversity immigrant visa program, 2016, par. 4)

The 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act and the Diversity Visa Program, which was introduced as part of the 1990 Immigration Act, enables Africans to come to the United States through lottery visa programs and much more (Takougang 2005). They also led to an increase in the number of Africans that moved to the United States in the decades after they were passed.

Another factor that makes the United States a desirable place to move to for many African immigrants is the existing networks in America. Many urban cities like New York and Boston have become a place, where Africans move to because of the existing network of people from their countries there. Reynolds writes:

As Nicholas Van Hear notes, one is far more likely to immigrate successfully if one's own cultural traditions include migration (1998:38). Many Igbos in Nigeria were or are traveling merchants, and probably close to one- third of the people in the ONI network lived outside of Igboland within West Africa at some time in their childhood. The impetus to travel and even immigrate in order to establish business ties and far-flung family outposts is certainly reflected in my interviews. Another source of cultural capital for Igbo immigration and African immigration, in general, is, of course, the immigrant association. As I mentioned before, the ONI organization facilitates the system of

exchange and support in which members help each other during a funeral, after the birth of a child, and so forth (Reynolds. 2002, P. 282).

Networks are important because they support new immigrants and encourage the immigration of others. Networks such as family members make immigration to the United States has become a cultural tradition for some. This is the case for those in the ONI organization, an organization for Igbos in Chicago, promotes the idea that traveling will lead to success. In some cases, it seems that the immigrant networks and immigrant associations not only helps new immigrants to assimilate and adapt to their new country but also promotes immigration. The ONI organization supports immigrants through life-changing events such as childbirth, funerals and much more. This kind of support is crucial for newcomers, who are often looking to move into places where they already have family members or a support system (Reynolds 2002). Apart from social networks in America, people also immigrate to further their studies.

Between the resources available to students and graduates and the existing social networks in developed countries, many people in the African continent wish to immigrate to countries like the United States (Bhargava and Docquier 2008; Das 1979; Reynolds 2002). While some African born immigrants desire to move in order to continue their education, the opportunities available for foreign students to move and go to school in the United States makes moving to the United States very desirable.

In 1979, Singh Das wrote “Implicit is the idea that many students from these less developed countries go to the more highly developed and industrialized countries for study and decide not to return to their homeland ” ( Das, 1979). However today, more and more students

who originally come to the United States on student visas, gain the opportunity to settle in America after graduating because they gain employment. According to the Institute for International Education, unlike international students from some countries -India for example, the majority of African students wish to stay in the US after graduation because of more job opportunities and higher wages (Institute for International Education, 2010). The increasing number of African international students that settle in the United States after graduation is proof that living in the United States has only become more and more desirable by Africans.

There are a number of reasons why many African nationals decide to move to the United States, such as the existing networks of immigrant people from their country to America, the immigration acts that promote people moving to the United States, and the acts that give students the opportunity to study and work after graduation in the United States. These pull factors are among the reasons why the African community in the United States is a growing community. In the next section, we will explore theories related to the assimilation and the acculturation of African immigrants.

### **Assimilation and Acculturation of African Immigrants**

Many theories on the assimilation and acculturation of immigrants suggest that factors such as race, culture, and class could affect the assimilation and acculturation process for African immigrants. Yu Xie and Margaret Gough write on the ethnic enclave theory in their article “Ethnic Enclaves and the Earnings of Immigrants”. Ethnic enclaves are neighborhoods that are populated mostly by members of a certain ethnic group. They write of the enclave thesis, which speculates that immigrants benefit from working in ethnic enclaves (Xie, Y., & Gough, M.

,2011). In their research, Xie and Gough compared the economic outcomes of immigrants working in ethnic enclaves with those of immigrants working in the mainstream economy. Their research does not support the enclave thesis. Their results indicate that for some immigrant groups, ethnic enclave participation actually has a negative effect on economic outcomes. Therefore, an immigrant who is working in an ethnic enclave may earn less than immigrants who work in the mainstream economy. As mentioned in my earlier section on motivations for moving to the United States, many African immigrants move to the United States because of the existing network. These networks often exist in ethnic enclaves or areas with high concentrations of members of one ethnicity. Therefore, African Immigrants are likely to live in ethnic enclaves when they move to the United States.

In order to study the economic mobility of black immigrants in the United States, it is imperative to explore theories on race because in the United States, race is intertwined with economic mobility and social settings. Moreover, Zoua M Vang speaks about the effect of housing segregation on the ability of African Immigrants to assimilate. Vang writes that “Results show that African immigrants in Ireland have achieved spatial integration with Irish nationals, while their counterparts in the United States remain spatially separated from white Americans” (Vang 2012). In the United States, Africans face housing segregation that prevents them from assimilating into American culture. This is an example of how structural issues affect black African immigrants in the United States (Vang 2012). It is very important to note that block assimilation, the inability to assimilate, impacts mostly the experiences of black African immigrants who end up living in either ethnic enclaves or poor neighborhoods that are populated by mostly native blacks and other minorities. As a result, they end up facing similar obstacles as

the native blacks in America, such as social problems like police brutality. An example of how race impacts African immigrants is the killing of Amadou Diallo in February of 1999 (Olmeda and Marzull, 1999). Amadou Diallo, an unarmed black man, was shot 41 times and killed by police officers. The story of Amadou Diallo shows how black Africans immigrants are impacted by the race dynamics in the United States.

Daniel Green and Tracy Poe have theorized that Black African immigrants are clumped into the category “African American” (Daniel Greene and Tracy Poe 2013). The grouping of all black immigrants in the category “African American” prevents researchers from fully understanding the complexities of their identities and also disregards the difference in culture between groups of black African immigrants in the United States. Green and Poe about categorizing all blacks as “Negro Americans.” They state that in this context, blackness is absolute. (Daniel Green and Tracy Poe 2013). In the United States, the term “black” and “African American” are used interchangeably. However, my participants and other black immigrants are not ethnically African American. African Americans, a term commonly used for descendants of people who were forcibly brought to the United States through slavery. Making this distinction is very important for this project because African immigrants and African Americans have different experiences. Kwame Anthony Appiah writes that African Americans are Africans in the context of America while American Africans, or African immigrants living in the United States, are Americans in the context of Africa. While African Americans and American Africans share similarities because they both have their roots in Africa, they should not be grouped in the category African American (Daniel Green and Tracy Poe 2013). In this

project, I will not refer to my participants as American Africans, but simply African or Nigerian immigrants. (Daniel Green and Tracy Poe 2013)

Another theory that is helpful in understanding the experiences of an African immigrant is the segmented assimilation offers a theoretical framework for understanding the process by which the new second generation immigrants become incorporated into the system of stratification in the host society and the different outcomes of this process (Zhou, 1997).

According to this theory, African immigrants would then also be incorporated into American society. Incorporation means that the children of immigrants are grouped into American society with the category that they most likely fit in; many times for black African immigrants, this category is “African American”. Therefore, African immigrants are grouped and treated like African Americans in the United States.

We can see examples of how race matters for African immigrants by looking at the differences between Black African immigrants and African immigrants of other races. In “Differences in Earnings Among Black and White African Immigrants in the United States, 1980–2000: A Cross-Sectional and Temporal Analysis”, Casey Borch and Mamadi K. Corra write about the difference in earnings between white and black African immigrants in the United States. They write that “Our findings suggest that Black immigrants earn significantly less per hour than White immigrants. This finding was evident for male and female immigrants. Thus, we found evidence that the racial advantage of “being White” transcends the disadvantages of gender.” (Borch and Chora 2010). While black African immigrants who are employed face unequal pay in the workforce when compared to white Africans, race is not the only thing that impacts the difference in wages between Africans (Borch and Chora 2010). Other factors such as

language and gender also impacts the difference in wages between Africans. Due to some of these challenges that African immigrants face in the workforce, many are forced to take up jobs that they are overqualified for, to make ends meet (Wiltz 2015).

Other theories place less of an emphasis on assimilation but focus instead on acculturation. In “Ethnic and Racial Identities of Second-Generation Black Immigrants in New York City”, Mary Waters speaks of the acculturation of black immigrants in the United States. According to Mary Waters, compared to inner-city blacks, ethnic blacks or second-generation immigrants tend to behave like middle-class black Americans. She finds that ethnicity is used for second-generation immigrants to distance themselves from the poor native blacks and to gain social capital. She also writes that because the second generation does not have an accent or other clues which show their ethnic status to others, they must convey their identities in order not to be seen as poor, black Americans. However, in the eyes of white America, they are still seen as blacks. Therefore, their effort to establish ethnic status is futile. Walters states that the children of second-generation immigrants are less likely to use their ethnicity to attempt to convey class because they are seen as assimilated and therefore African Americans (Mary Waters 1994).

Other social scientists that have studied the experiences of African immigrants and other immigrants in the United States have come to a similar argument than that of Waters. In an article titled “Triple acculturation: The role of African Americans in the Consumer Acculturation of Kenyan Immigrants”, Wakiuru Wamwara Mbugua and other researchers write on triple acculturation. African immigrants seem to preserve their ethnic identities in the United States, although they also become aware of their identity in the United States (Wakiuru Wamwara Mbugua & al. 2008). The triple acculturation theory is a theory that states that immigrants'



consumer behaviors are influenced by triple acculturation forces: dominant; subcultural and original culture. We find that immigrants do not arrive in the United States aware of their need to acculturate to a subcultural group. Critical incidents alert the immigrants of the need to acculturate to the African American subculture in order to fulfill some basic consumer goals. Through a series of critical incidents, immigrants learn that in order to satisfy basic consumer goals they must incorporate acculturation agents from their culture of origin, the dominant culture and the subcultural group as well as others (Wakiuru Wamwara Mbugua & al. 2008). Furthermore, some other researchers claim that acculturation takes place as early as in the first generation. Chinyere C. Nwokah discovered that first-generation Transplant Nigerian-American women are more likely to adopt a bicultural, or Nigerian-American, identity (Nwokah 2012). These theories on the assimilation of immigrants will allow us to contextualize the narratives of my participants.

In this chapter, we learned of the history of Nigeria, the push and pull factors that lead to Nigerians immigrating to the United States, and also of theories on the assimilation and acculturation of immigrants. The theories in this chapter will help us gain a better understanding of the reasons why my participants, or people whom I have interviewed, or their parents decided to move to the United States, which will be discussed in my next chapter. The theories on assimilation and acculturation that were presented in this chapter will also help us understand the content of chapter 4, which is focused on the social experiences of my participants in the United States.

## **Immigration Experiences**

In this chapter, I will apply theories on the push and pull factors of the immigration of people from undeveloped countries to developed countries to situate my participant's narrative. As a recap, we know that economic difficulties, poverty, and political instability in many countries in Africa, including Nigeria, have pushed many of its citizens to immigrate to other countries (Takougang, 2005; Reynolds, 2002; Bhargava and Docquier 2008). The poor quality of education in many countries is another reason why many, especially college age people move from developing countries to developed countries (Das, 1979). Some highly educated people decide to move to other countries because of the working conditions in their countries, the lack of opportunity, and the desire for greener pasture (Bhargava and Docquier, 2008). The desire to support their families in Nigeria by sending money back home, and aid the failing economies back home is a major motivation for African Brain Drainers to move away from their home countries (Reynolds 2002). Nigerian can move to the United States through different programs such as lottery visa and school programs (Takougang, 2005). Another factor that makes the United States a desirable place to move to for many African immigrants is the existing networks in America (Reynolds 2002).

Education in the United States and other developed countries is seen as something that will increase one's chances of being successful (Bhargava and Docquier 2008, Das 1979). The increasing number of African international students that settle in the United States after graduation is proof that living in the United States has only become more and more desirable by Africans (Institute for International Education, 2010). Another factor that pulls many immigrants, including Nigerians, to move to the United States is the American Dream. This idea

makes people in all corners of the world aspire to move to the United States (Hanlon, 2010). These push and pull factors are among the reasons why the African community in the United States is a growing community. We may see similar ideas through the narratives of my participants.

### **Their Stories**

Here are the stories of my participants and their reasons for immigrating to the United States.

#### **The 1.5 generation**

Emma is a twenty-four-year-old African American graduate student who currently resides in New York state. She moved to America from Nigeria with her mother and sisters. When asked about her life in Nigeria before she left, Emma responded that “I would say I was middle class. I went to a private school. I was done with high school and so I was waiting to take the test to go to university. I just hang out with my cousins.”

She states that she left Nigeria because her mother wanted a better life and best schooling. She later admits “I am not exactly sure why we left. It wasn't like a bad situation. It's just that my family members were going to different countries.” Emma lived in Nigeria at a time where a lot of her family members were leaving Nigeria. While the reason why her mother may have wanted to move was to get a better life for her and her children, it is important to acknowledge that people around Emma were also leaving Nigeria and moving to other countries. She states that “[my mom] used to be a businesswoman and I think business wasn't going well and for us- me and my siblings to have a better life. In terms of education, security and opportunity, coming here was a no-brainer for us.” As a child, at the time of her immigration,

Emma did not have much of a decision to make. However, her future was thought about by her mother before the decision to immigrate to the United States was made.

Arnold, a thirty-year-old Ph.D. holder moved to the United States at age 15 with his parents. He states that before they moved to the United States, his mother and father were doing fairly well in Nigeria. His mother was the secretary of the third in command of the Governor in Imo state. His father also held a position that was well respected. They moved to the United States to get a better life. Therefore, they lived a comfortable life as well. Arnold states that his parents wanted a better life for their children and that was the driving force that led to them emigrating from Nigeria to the United States.

Ben, a twenty-nine-year-old hospital administrator moved to the United States with his parents. He states that life in Nigeria was not great. He states “We often didn’t know how we were going to get by. We struggled a lot and had to move a lot.” Unlike most people that I interviewed, Ben states that life was not comfortable for him and his family. His family often struggled to find shelter and make ends meet. This began to change when his father moved to the United States. He and his sibling followed later. He states that his parents wanted to give them a better life because life in Nigeria was very difficult for his family.

Caleb describes himself as coming from a middle-class family. His father is a lawyer and his mother is a doctor. Caleb says that he attended a boarding school and lived pretty comfortably with his family. Although Caleb lived a comfortable life, compared to most Nigerians, he was affected by things such as power outage, traffic etc. He states that he moved to America after his mother got the opportunity to come to the United States for a training. His mother later got the opportunity to stay in the United States. She later called for him to also

move to the United States. He states that he was not too excited to move because he had to leave school, his friends, and his life to move here in the United States. He also states that he does not think that there was a particular reason for his mother moving to the United States, other than her getting the opportunity to come train in the United States and later work in the United States.

This was also the case of John, who is currently a thirty-year-old Ph.D. student at Cornell University studying Economics

### The Students

Ava is a twenty-two-year-old who immigrated to the United States four years ago to attend Cornell University. She states that immigrating to the United States was something that she believed to be natural. After graduating from high school or secondary school, she began applying for schools in the US and the UK. She describes this as a norm for people who were wealthy enough to afford it and wanted a better education. She describes her family as a middle class family as well. She states that they were wealthier than most Nigerians and lived a comfortable life. She states “there were certain things that we could not control such as water and power outage”, however, her family's life in Nigeria was a pretty comfortable one. She also states that due to structural problems with the countries such as water and electricity shortage, life in the United States was obviously much better. Nonetheless, what contributed to her moving to the United States and not the United Kingdom was the fact that she already had family members here in the United States and none in the United Kingdom.

Isabella, twenty-two-year-old medical scribe, also moved to the United States to attend university. Isabella describes herself also as coming from a middle class family. She states that they owned a house, went to private schools and had a car. However, even though her family was

doing fairly well, they were still affected by the country's situation. Events such as electricity outages, traffic, and water outage were things that money could not get them out of. Therefore, they did not live such a comfortable life because of the lack of amenities in the countries. She states that after she graduated secondary school or the equivalent of high school, she began thinking with her parents about the possibilities of her moving to the United States. She states that her older sister was studying in the United Kingdom at the time. However, she decided to also apply to schools in the United States because she felt that she wanted a liberal education, instead of the direct path in the UK's education system.

Automatically, what brought Isabella to the United States rather than the United Kingdom was the education system and the idea that it was best for one to get educated elsewhere if they had the opportunity. Mike, a twenty-five-year-old paralegal, also moved to the United States with his student visa to gain an education and was able to stay in the United States through sponsorship with his employer. Mike aims to go to law school in a year and eventually become a United States citizen.

### The Brain Drainers

Some of my participants tell a different story that explains why they moved to the United States. Adam, a forty-five-year-old male who moved to the United States ten years ago says that they moved because he wanted a better life for him and his children. Adam, who was a bank manager had his Bachelor's in accounting and says that although he was making quite enough to support his family, it was not where he wanted to be. He applied for the visa lottery program almost twelve years ago and was able to move to the United States. His wife and son followed two years later. They had another son two years later. He believes that he was able to immigrate

to the United States through the visa lottery program. This program allowed someone like him who met the requirement to apply for a chance to move to the United States.

Abigail, a fifty-three years old woman also moved to the United States through the visa lottery program. Abigail earned her Bachelor's degree in civil engineering in Nigeria and worked as a civil engineer in Nigeria. She states “it wasn't enough pay. Even there you had to prove that you were competent every second and even then, they would rather hire a Chinese person to do the job.” Abigail states that the lack of opportunity for economic mobility in Nigeria and the low pay lead to her moving to the United States. In addition, two years before she moved a tragic event turned her life around and made her income insufficient. Abigail lost her husband when she was thirty-eight years old. Her income became insufficient so she decided to apply for the visa lottery program. She states that she had always contemplated moving to the United States, but with her situation right before she moved it was more logical. She moved to the United States thirteen years ago and a few years later reunited with her two daughters and her son. She states that she did it mostly for them. She wanted to provide them with a quality education and could not do it with her meager salary in Nigeria. Andrew, a fifty-one-year-old man also moved to the United States, through the visa lottery program. Andrew had earned his BA in Economics and had a hard time finding a job in his field in Nigeria. He saved up enough money to move to the United States and moved right away. He moved to the United States when he was 36 years old, He wanted to go back to school and earn more and raise his kids in a comfortable environment. Five years after moving to the United States, his wife and three daughters moved here alongside with him.

Stella, a fifty-four-year-old doctor moved to the United States at the age of forty years old. She has kids in Nigeria. She immigrated to join her husband after he won a visa through the visa lottery and moved to the United States. She states that in addition to wanting to join her husband, she felt that she had more chances of providing a good education for her three daughters. She also states that it was very hard for her to practice medicine in Nigeria because the health sector was underfunded. She also states “I see that our leaders like to do medical tourism... that is when they go abroad for a simple medical checkup... and there are a lot of competent and talented doctors in Nigeria. What we need is for the government to invest in the health sector”. For Stella, the failing health sector was a reason why she felt that she needed to move. She also states “when I went to medical school, it was to save lives, and not to watch people lose their lives because there was a power outage, they don` t have money to pay for bills... that was very traumatizing for me”. Stella`s depiction of the health sector in Nigeria was one that was reaffirmed by my other participants that worked in the health sector.

Anthony, a sixty-year-old pediatrician moved to the United States with ten years of experience in Nigeria. He moved to the United States after his wife who won the visa lottery visa a couple of years before. Anthony moved from Nigeria fifteen years ago. He says that he moved here to be able to lay a foundation for his children. Although he decided that his children should attend secondary school in Nigeria, they were able to move to the United States for college because they had parents in the United States. He believes that life would have been a lot harder for his children had him and his wife not moved to the United States. Through their higher income here, they were able to pay for the finest education in Nigeria and help and guide them through their college career.



Bernard, a thirty six year old male journalist, moved to the United States at age 24 , twelve years ago. He moved to the United States with a Bachelor's degree of Arts in journalism and a couple of years after moving went back to school to earn his Master's degree in Journalism. He states that he came from a poor background and was homeless at one point in his life because his father died and only had his mother as a provider. Therefore, for Bernard, moving to America was a very big dream at first. He states that the dream of moving did not look like it can ever be possible until he earned his Bachelor's degree and started working. Bernard states that there were several obstacles that prevented him from being the journalist that he wanted to be. He states "There is not much freedom of press in the 'Giant of Africa '( a nickname that Nigeria earned in the late twenty century)". He states that he wanted to move to the United States to be the journalist that he dreamt of becoming.

Anna, a forty year old female nurse moved to the United States ten years ago. She moved to the United States after her husband applied for her. She moved to the United States with Seven years of experience with nursing in Nigeria. Anna states that although life was not best in Nigeria, that it was very comfortable. Her biggest reason for moving to the United States was wanting to reunite with her husband and to raise all of their children together. In addition, she states that while some people are able to finance their children's education from Nigeria, her husband and her knew that they could not do that. Therefore, they knew that they wanted their children to have United States citizenship before college. Anna states that if there were good paying jobs and quality education, she would not have moved. She states:

"quite frankly, I would have preferred for my children to be raised in Nigeria. I feel that the lifestyle here in America prevents you from paying attention to children... especially when you have to run to work on weekends. You can't even trust the people in the neighborhood. We live in a neighborhood that is a bit rough... because that is all we can afford."

Anna also spoke of the deteriorating economy and resources in Nigeria. She states “ I used to have hope, but after every term, I feel like I lose hope. Someone will come and promise you change... only for them to ruin the country and make things worse.” Anna describes moving to the United States as a sacrifice that she had to make for her children`s future because she did not think that the life quality in Nigeria would improve soon enough for her children to benefit.

Gabriella, is a twenty-five-year-old female who moved from Nigeria to the United States by herself. She had her Bachelors of Science degree of Accounting and had been working as an accountant in Nigeria. She moved to America because she actually did not want to do accounting in 2014. She states “I only studied accounting to please my parents”. I wanted to be a fashion designer and had always sewn clothes for people in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, she states:

“I was able to sponsor myself to the United States through my side gig... being a seamstress and not through my accounting job. I just wanted to further my dreams of becoming a fashion designer in the United States. I always saw myself here to be honest.”

She also states that having friends and family that lived in the United States helped her move to the United States. Having a network and knowing Nigerians in the United States encouraged Gabriella to move to the United States.

Claire, a twenty-seven year old female moved from Nigeria at the age of 25 through the visa lottery program. She states that she moved to the United States for several reasons, including wanting to pursue her dreams. She had a bachelor's degree in Sociology and was working as a HR manager before moving to the United States. She states that she moved because she was “very unhappy with life in Nigeria. I did not want to be a HR manager all my life. It was not my calling. I always wanted to start my own business and create change through art.” For

Claire, Nigeria did not provide her with an environment where she could follow her dreams.

Therefore, she moved to the United States. She states “ I thought what better place to further my dreams than the United States. Therefore, when the opportunity presented itself, I grabbed it.”

Many of my participants implied that the American Dream was a reason for wanting to emigrate. Although according to many, life in Nigeria was not best and there were not a lot of infrastructure, many of them from a early age saw moving to America or abroad as a goal. Nonetheless, a driving force for their immigration was Nigeria`s failing economy, the lack of resources and the low incomes. Among the pull factors were the American Dream, family reunification programs, and the visa lottery program. In addition, many of my participants, they all mentioned the desire for quality education either for themselves or their children as a reason for immigration.

Among the pulling forces, were the opportunity to move to the United States through programs like the visa lottery program, the family reunification program. Having relatives in the United States is also a pulling force that motivated many people to move to the United States and not other countries. In addition, the United States education system was said to be a reason for Isabella to move to the United States, rather than other countries like the United Kingdom. While these reasons brought my participants to the United States, their experiences in the United States affected how they assessed their decision or their parents` decision to move. In the next chapter, we will learn about the experiences of my participants in the United States.

## **The Experiences of Highly Educated Nigerian Immigrants in the United States**

In the United States, my participants describe their process of acculturation as one that involved “learning where they fit in the existing social structures” as John mentioned in our interview. Many of the theorist on the assimilation and acculturation of first and second generation immigrants agree that assimilation is not a process that happens when immigrants move to the United States, instead, it is acculturation and incorporation. This was also my finding. Since a lot of my participants are members of the 1.5 generation, we will use theories on second generation immigrants to contextualize their narratives because the experiences of members of the 1.5 generation immigrants resemble those of the second generation. Zhou`s segmented assimilation theory provides us with some theoretical concepts to understand the experiences of members of the 1.5 generation. Therefore, according to this theory, black African immigrants would be incorporated into the category of African American. Therefore, African immigrants are grouped and treated like African Americans in the United States (Zhou 1997). This is a finding that Mary Waters would seem to agree with. However, she finds that ethnicity is used by second generation immigrants to distance themselves from the poor native blacks (Mary Waters 1994). Because Waters`s theory is on second generation immigrants, we will only use this theory when looking at the narratives of those of the 1.5 generation.

Other theories such as Mbugua et al (2008) relate directly to first generation immigrants. Wakiuru Wamwara Mbugua and other researchers believe that what happens to African immigrants in the United States is triple acculturation and that African immigrants preserve their ethnic identities in the United States, although they also become aware of their black identity in the United States. In addition, they adopt traits of mainstream (white ) America (Wakiuru

Wamwara Mbugua & al. 2008). Furthermore, some other researchers claim that acculturation takes place as early as in the first generation. Chinyere C. Nwokah who found first-generation Transplant Nigerian-American women adopt a bicultural, or Nigerian-American, identity (Nwokah 2012). Overall, these theories enable us to understand the experiences of my participants as they are all either first generation or 1.5 generation.

### **It's "like peeling an onion": On Being Nigerian in the United States**

It is impossible to speak about the experiences of highly educated Nigerian immigrants without speaking of the stereotypes that hunt many of them. Many of my participants spoke about not feeling welcomed and some spoke about hiding their nationality to avoid bias. One person who vocalized how stereotypes affect Nigerians in America the most is Andrew, a fifty-one-year-old financial analyst who states "it's sad but sometimes I have to conceal the fact that I am Nigerian, especially with the field that I am in". Andrew states that Nigerians have a bad reputation in the United States. While he says that there are some bad apples, he believes that the "African prince con-man stereotype" has a huge part in establishing that reputation.

Andrew states:

"I first noticed this stereotype when I moved to the United States. After two months of moving with a family member, I thought it would be best if I found my own place because the house was very small and I didn't want to overstay my welcome. Also, I had found a job that will ...allowed me to pay rent. So, I started apartment hunting and I found this woman who was allowing me to sublet a bedroom in her three-bedroom apartment. Everything seemed ok... until within the first month of me living there...I told her I was Nigerian... I didn't see anything wrong with telling the person that I was living with about my background. As soon as this woman learned that I was Nigerian, her attitude started changing towards me... you know she basically threw me out of the apartment. She started accusing me of stealing her belongings. So I had to go stay with a friend until I found a place... It is very sad but this was just the first incident."

Andrew believes that the stereotype about Nigerians being scammers lead to this situation. He states that this stereotype has circulated so much that he has to hide his identity as a Nigerian immigrant.

Andrew also states “I feel that some people don` t trust me with their finances and taxes if I told them that I was Nigerian. So, I avoid it. Sometimes I lie, but I feel like this is necessary” Andrew spoke to me about concerns that he would get less clients if more people knew that he was Nigerian. He states “I come from a country of 186 million people...of course, there are going to be some bad eggs in the bunch. But to paint all citizens of that country as fraudulent based on the actions of a few people is very ignorant.” He also states that it is a shame because most of the people behind the Nigerian Prince scam are not even Nigerians.

Another stereotype that affected some of my participants at their arrival in the United States is the African Booty Scratcher stereotype. John, a thirty-year-old Ph.D. student who moved to the United States fifteen years ago still recalls being picked on by his classmates in a predominately black school. He states that he did not understand what or where the stereotype came from. But remembers hearing things like “you smell like an African... you`re an African booty scratcher”. John states that hearing statements like these made him feel very different from other black people in the United States. He states that he sees that things seem to have changed.

John states:

“It seems like more and more people are becoming more educated and want to embrace their roots within the black community. However, there is still a lot of ignorance. As an African immigrant in the United States with American citizenship, I now see myself as African American but in a different sense than people whose ancestors came to the United States through the slave trade. I see it as a difference in culture and experiences.”

Considering these differences, John states that he believes that being a Nigerian immigrant in the United States means that you have different experiences and relate differently

to Americans, even African Americans. John states that him being black in America means that he is often seen as African American and it takes people getting to know him to know that he is “not just African American”. All of my participants told a similar story. They seem to not have an issue with being classified as African American because they have come to terms with it. This is evidence of segmented assimilation.

Furthermore, Mike, a twenty-five-year-old paralegal states that when he moved to the United States with his parents, they lived in an area with a lot of poor African immigrants, an example of an ethnic enclave (Xie, Y., & Gough, M., 2011). He states that “there was a lot of danger in this community, as crimes rates were high. This was not the America that they had showed us Nigeria.” John states that although he was able to move out of this area because of College and gaining a job after graduation, staying in that community was one of his biggest nightmares. Mike also states that because he lived in that area, where gang violence was prevalent, he faced some struggles that other black people face in America such as racial profiling. Mike who was a resident of New York City states that “I was stopped very often by the police and searched on my way back to the store, from work and on my way to school”. He also says “It is a neighborhood where it is very rare to see a white person. As a matter of fact, they only come there for the Yankee Stadium... And even that they wish it was located in Manhattan.” When I asked him if his parents wanted to move out of that neighborhood, he answered “with their income and the housing segregation in New York, I do not think it is possible. I am sure they gave up on searching for apartments since I turned eighteen and went to college”.

Mike feels that he “learned more about American culture when he moved away from his neighborhood for college... I went to Yale University. New Haven was very different and had a lot of white people and black people living in close proximity.” Mike left his neighborhood, a known immigrant neighborhood in New York City, to move to a more racially diverse area. He states that he learned more of American culture in New Haven, Connecticut, where he was not surrounded by people of the same origin as him. This paints Mike’s neighborhood in New York City as an area that could lead Block Assimilation or the lack of assimilation.

When asked about their race, many of my participants answered black or African American. However, only the people with American citizenship added African American. Therefore, among all seventeen participants, only four people did not add African American. This result is not surprising because my participants are African immigrants who later came to gain their US citizenship, it supports the claims of Daniel Green and Tracy Poe (2013), who have theorized that black immigrants are clumped into the category of “African American” (Daniel Greene and Tracy Poe 2013). However, it is also meaningful that this is a category that my participants self-identified with. My participants often pointed out that they are different to African Americans because of their culture and their immigration story. However, they also recognized that in the United States, they are seen as black or African Americans. Their definition of African American seems to be a black, American, and not necessarily someone whose ancestors were forcibly brought to the United States. The grouping of all black people under the category of African American is one that not only oversimplifies both the identities of African Americans and American Africans, as Kwame Appiah puts it, but it also prevents us



from speaking of the effects of ethnicity and voluntary immigration on black people in the United States (Daniel Green and Tracy Poe 2013).

According to my participants, being a Nigerian immigrant is something that is very complex. Many explained it in immigration terms, and cultural terms. When asked (How does it feel to be Nigerian in the United States?), Ben, a twenty-nine-year-old hospital administrator responded that it feels like “you do not fit in”. Ben referred to factors such as immigration and race that lead him to make that statement. Many of my participants spoke about feeling othered in many spaces, including their predominantly black neighborhoods. In White circles, their race is the part of their identity that matters. However, in their predominantly black neighborhoods, their ethnicity, nationality and immigration status set them apart from others.

Emma, a twenty four year old graduate student reports that when she first immigrated to the United States, “the kids were really mean”. They often assumed things just because she was from Africa. For example, they believed that she would be good at track. Although Emma could not remember the exact things that her classmates told her in high school, she mentioned several times that “Kids are mean”.

Emma spoke about the negative comments that people made about her in high school. Below is a part of the transcript of our interview:

Q: Can you speak more on the ways in which your high school classmates were not welcoming?

A: For example, when I came here my accent was really thick... And all the kids already had their friends. I came here when I was 15 so everyone knew each other for a year. It was hard to make friends, which sucked for the first half of the year, but the second half, it was fine. In a way people were mean ... they would make comments... The teachers were great.

Q: What kind of comments?

A: For example, I ran track in high school and people would just assume that I was fast. They would make comments that Africans were bad. I was very quiet, so I did not mind people who were chastising me. I just kept to my own. Honestly, because of the way I am, I just forget bad things so I can't remember all the mean things that people said about me.

Emma spoke about how people expressed their stereotypes of Africans and Africa. She expressed that signifiers of her immigration status such as her accent may have been the center of her classmates' jokes. This experience made her aware that as a Nigerian immigrant her identity was different from others. Her immigration status made her different from other black people.

Ben also mentions that he feels that his experiences as a Nigerian immigrant are very different than that of African Americans. He mentions that it is because of culture and also the motives behind immigration. He believes that while some people tend to believe that African immigrants were more hard working than native black population, he believes that "the reason why we immigrate is to go to school and get a better life. Therefore, it makes sense that there is such a high rate of college graduates". Ben also states that, other than ethnicity, he does not feel very different compared to African Americans, however, has mostly African friends because "I can relate to them". Similarly, most of my participants said that they had a lot of African friends or friends of color because that is who they can relate to in the United States.

All of my participants spoke about changing their behavior and identity in certain spaces as a reaction to how they believed that they were being perceived. As Waters (1990) stated black people do not have ethnic options in America. My research finds that Nigerian immigrants adapt their ethnicity in certain spaces based on their perception of how people view them. This event could be best explained by the looking-glass self theory, a social-psychological concept introduced by Charles Horton Cooley (Scheff, 2005). This concept describes the development of one's self and of one's identity through one's interpersonal interactions within the context of society.

For example, at work, Stella states that in the mainstream society and at work, she is seen as black. She states that being a Nigerian in the United States is “like peeling an onion”. Stella says “ [In the corporate world, t]hey really don't know me except for the surface... they don't see how I dress for church, which church I go to, the other language I speak.” According to Stella, white or mainstream America does not notice her Nigerian identity. When she is in her neighborhood, a place where she is surrounded by other immigrants and black people, her Nigerian identity becomes a lot more noticeable. Stella says “In my neighborhood, they know we are the Nigerian ones on the block.” Similarly, Mike says that going to his parent's house in the Bronx is the place where it is very obvious that he is Nigerian. At work, when asked about his ethnicity, Mike tells me he says that he is “black because that is what they see”. I asked him “how about when you go visit your parents in the Bronx?” He answered “I'm Nigerian... There are a lot of Africans in the neighborhood and they know the difference. We usually know each other”. Mike also reflects on how this difference in his identity also meant a difference in treatment and the kind of prejudice. He states “ in my parents` neighborhood the prejudice is based off my ethnicity... me being African...At least that is how it was growing up. However today, the prejudice I experience in the workforce is because I am African American or black”. As shown by these narratives, my participants have shown that in the United States they are clumped into the category of African American by the mainstream society. However, in their black neighborhoods, their Nigerian identity is noticeable. Their treatment also changes depending on their settings. While in the mainstream American society they face racism, in their predominantly black neighborhood they face bias based on their immigration status and their

Nigerian identity. In the next section, my participants' views on economic mobility and their work experiences are discussed.

### **From Grace to Grass: Giving up social status in Nigeria for more opportunities in the US**

Gabriella, a twenty-five-year-old entrepreneur, says that she gave up being an accountant in one of Nigeria's biggest firms to move to the United States to pursue her dreams of working in the fashion industry and starting her own businesses. She states that she has always been a creative person and although her prestigious job allowed her to claim a high class in society, she always wanted to be in the United States. Gabriella stated that she never actually wanted to be an accountant, she wanted to work as a fashion designer. She states "I wanted to be a fashion designer and because of that, I knew that I had to move to the United States. A lot of parents, including mine, have an issue with creative jobs and careers". Similarly, to Gabriella, Claire, a twenty-seven-year-old makeup artist did not think that it was possible for her to do a "creative job" in Nigeria and live properly.

Claire states that she moved to the United States because she "wanted to take a chance and explore her talent". Both Claire and Gabriella describe creative jobs in Nigeria as something that is looked down upon because as Claire states:

"African parents expect you to become a lawyer, an engineer or a doctor. If you are anything else, you are considered a disappointment... a big one at that. I studied sociology and even with that some of my relatives were asking me if I could find a job in Nigeria with a degree in sociology."

Regardless of what her family believed, she found a job as an Human Resource personnel and was making considerably a lot. Within three years, she worked her way up to HR manager. She states that it was hard for her to decide to save money and move to America because she was leaving a secure job and going on an adventure. She moved to the United States at age 25. She

states that it was really hard for her to find a job. She had to do a training to become a Certified Nursing Assistant. That is how she was able to support herself. She started doing makeup for pay on her days off and within two years has moved to doing makeup full time and working part-time as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

For Gabriella and Claire, Nigeria was not a country where they can pursue their dreams and therefore they decided to move to the United States. They moved to the United States and are now working jobs that although pay better than their previous ones, are not esteemed as high in society. Gabriella says that she made \$30,000 in 2017, which is “way more than [her] salary in Nigeria” (If it were to be converted to naira. Naira is the currency of Nigeria). She states that although the cost of living in Nigeria was much cheaper compared to the United States, her salary in the United States allow her to do much more with her money. This is the same for Claire who made \$45,000 and states that her salary has allowed her to not only pay bills but also start saving.

Not only people in the creative field moved to the United States to pursue their dreams. Bernard also believed that he “had to move to the United States to attempt to reach my full potential”. Bernard, a thirty-six-year-old journalist had moved from Nigeria “frustrated with the limitations in doing journalism in Nigeria”, although he worked at a renowned Nigerian newspaper organization. Bernard states that he was frustrated with the censorship of the media. He moved to the United States not only to pursue a better life for him and his family but also because he wanted to practice journalism in a place where he could not be censored. He now works for a Nigerian News organization with offices in New York City and earns about \$70,000 per year. He states that the money is approximately six times what he would have made in

Nigeria. However, he states that most people in the United States do not even know the company he now works for. He adds “Some people here in the United States might even confuse me for a blogger”. However, Bernard feels that his job in the United States gives him a sense of fulfillment. Bernard traded his status in the Nigerian society for more pay in the United States. This is a trade-off that many immigrants make when they move to the United States.

Arnold, a thirty-year-old hospital administrator, also states that his parents left respectable jobs to come to the United States to gain better opportunities and for him and his siblings. He states that his mother was the secretary of the third in command in Imo state. Although his mother is now a college professor, he states that he feels that she had “a way better job”. While for some, moving to the United States present them with the opportunity to make more money and live their dreams, for others moving to the United States meant working jobs that you over qualify in order to make a living. Based on their experiences being overqualified, and underpaid many of my older participants questioned how much economic mobility is available for people like them in the United States.

### **The Depreciation of the Value Nigerian Talent in the United States: Over Qualification**

Many of my participants spoke about over qualification. Most people spoke of being forced to settle for jobs that they overqualified for due to their heavy accent and negative sentiments towards their country of origin, and their status as immigrants in the United States. Anthony and Stella both spoke of their experiences in their residency program. They report that their skills and intelligence were tested because of where they earned their medical degrees. Anthony, a sixty-year-old medical doctor who immigrated to the United States fifteen years ago states that getting into a residency program was a miracle because residency programs usually do

not like people who get their medical degrees outside of the United States. During the residency, Anthony believes that he was mistreated because he was a medical doctor from Nigeria. He stated, “they often asked me if I knew how to perform basic procedures that even first year medical school students should know”. Although Anthony would not say that his current job is a case of over qualification, he brings up a great point about the low value of Nigerian degrees in the American workforce. Stella, a 54 years old medical Doctor recounts similar experiences. She states that her “ten years of experience in Nigeria and her medical degree were not enough”. She states that her treatment by other doctors and her colleagues made her feel as if people questioned whether she was actually a doctor with ten years of experience.

Some of the medical professionals that I interviewed also reported that they felt as if they were paid less than their co-workers with equal credentials. Anthony and Stella reported that to earning less than their equally experienced co-workers. They had to work for several years and earn a lot of promotions to make the amount that they feel they deserved. Anthony states “I had to work for several years to earn what some white doctors made right out of medical school”. This supports several researches on the difference in wages among white and black immigrants. (Borch and Chora 2010)

In addition to not valuing the degrees and skills of Nigerians, some of my participants have also reported that xenophobia has led to their them working at jobs that they overqualified for. Adam, a forty-five-year-old building superintendent and supervisor of security staffs at a hospital, states that when he moved to America he first sought to find a job with his credential. However, when he saw that after a year, he could not find job, he decided to go to school to earn an American degree. Adam had received a Bachelors in finance before moving to the United

States and had gone back to school to receive his Masters in Finance at a renowned American university. He states that it did nothing for him. Adam says:

“Even with my American degree, I could not get a job in my field. Many times, when I went to an interview, it was like as soon as they heard my accent, they were not interested in listening to me or my credentials anymore. [...] I am not the only one that this has happened to. I know friends who feel like it was their accent, country of origin, and maybe even their age that prevented them from getting better jobs. It was as if it was too late for them to make their American Dream a reality.”

Adam also states that he often gets disrespected at his job. He says “these people sometime treat me like a nobody... no human being should be treated this way, but also someone who has degrees like me ...should not have his intelligence questioned every day because they are from Africa and speak with a heavy accent”. Adam`s story is one that shows the disappointment that some Nigerian immigrants feel when they move to the United States with great skills and cannot get the opportunities that they expect. This is evidence that some African immigrants are forced to take up jobs that they overqualified for (Wiltz 2015). In addition, Adam spoke about getting a job in his field of interest as the American Dream. The American Dream is not just a pull factor for the immigration of Nigerians into the United States, it is also their expectation for life in the United States.

### The American Dream

The American Dream is also a driving force behind how many of my participants live their life and what they hope to achieve. Although my participants were not naive of the adversaries that they have to overcome, they still believed that the American Dream is achievable. For many of them, it just means that they have to work harder. This can be explained by Mary C. Walters, who writes that “As voluntary immigrants in the United States, West Indians display certain psychological and cultural reactions to American society that are closer to



those of other voluntary immigrants than to African Americans who were absorbed into the United States involuntarily” (Waters, 1999, P. 141). One of the ways that voluntary immigrants differ from involuntary immigrants is the way they think about their identity. Waters writes about the idea that African Americans, as involuntary minorities or people who were brought into a society through slavery or colonization, develop a psychological orientation that is opposite in nature to the dominant group. Therefore, African Americans’ psychological orientation is opposite of white Americans (Waters 1999). This, however, is not the same for voluntary immigrants. My participants are considered voluntary immigrants because most of them choose to immigrate to the United States. As voluntary immigrants, my participants do not view discrimination and prejudice like African Americans, but instead, as other voluntary immigrants view it. According to Waters, “immigrant narrative includes an optimism about the immigrants’ life chances in the United States (Waters 1999, P. 142). Therefore, even with their awareness of the existing prejudice and racism in the United States, my participants were still optimistic that they too could achieve the American Dream.

All of my participants spoke about “the American Dream”, even when they did not name it. They spoke about their belief in a better tomorrow through hard work. When I asked my participants if they believed that there was enough room for economic growth, several answered “yes, with more education”. Emma, Caleb, Ava, Isabella, Mike, Anna, and Ben all attached education to economic growth. This belief is one that even participants such as Adam admitted to once believing. Adam, who spoke about working at jobs that he overqualified for in my previous section, stated that when he first came to the United States he went back to school to earn his

Masters with the belief that more education would lead to socio-economic growth. Adam states that:

“Although I knew that there is racism in America and that was part of the reason why I could not find a job, I believed at first that going back to school and getting a degree in the United States would increase my chances and even though I never expected to make as much money than my white counterparts, I still expected a change... a positive one.”

The American Dream also sells that upward mobility is earned through hard work in a society with few barriers. This idea is often portrayed in movies and the media. Therefore, many people, including those who live outside of the United States believe this. While Adam, called this idea an “illusion”, my other participants still believed in the American Dream. For many of them, this dream can be achieved through education. Emma told me that:

“So I am in school right now and I can move up and get better. But in this United States- I am a woman. I am a black woman; I think that it will be hard for me to... In terms of economics, I feel like men are always going to make more money... and I am black. Eventually, I hope to get up there. I wouldn't say it's easy. Right now I am taking the steps to help me get there more easily.”

Even after taking into considerations, obstacles such as her race and her gender, Emma still holds on to hope that she too can move up economically. Ben, a twenty-nine-year-old man with a bachelor's degree also states that he believes that there are chances of economic growth in the United States. He gives, for example, his father who moved to the United States and worked his way up. Ben's father, at first, worked at a grocery store but worked his way up and is now a store manager. Ben states that his father “now owns a house and a car... here in America.” For Ben, his father is a success story that pushes him to work harder to achieve the American Dream.

Although my participants exhibited that they did not feel like they fit in the United States because of the existing stereotypes about Africa and the treatments of foreigners in the United States, they were determined to move up economically through hardwork. Even Ben, who said

that he would not return to Nigeria until he was “old and dying”, spoke about his struggles while living in the United States and being forced to adapt and accept his situation. While Ben faces a lot of obstacles in America, he still believes that his life in America is more comfortable than in Nigeria. Like Ben stated in my interview with him “beggars can't be choosers”. My participants, even those who were part of the 1.5 generation do not assimilate into the poor black class. Instead, they assimilate into the middle class Black population in America because of their education and background. While many of my participants may have originally lived in poor neighborhoods, they have shown to have middle class values. We can see this in their discussion of economic mobility. Many of the older participants, participants in their late thirties or older, said that they believe that there is room for some economic mobility, they questioned how much economic mobility is available for people like them.

## **Conclusion**

The objectives of this paper is to explore the push and pull factors of the emigration of highly educated Nigerian immigrants to the United States, describe the experiences of highly educated Nigerian born citizens living in the United States, their hopes and intentions for the future and speak of the effects of the increasing immigration of African immigrants on Nigeria's brain drain.

Some of my hypothesis or expectations were to find out that the process of acculturation of highly educated Nigerian immigrants was different from the process of acculturation of most immigrants, due to their social status. I expected to hear a lot of stories of overqualification and being underpaid. I was expecting to hear views that were critical of the United States government. Lately, especially among immigrants that come from middle class or upper social class in Africa, there have been a lot of discussions on creating changes and a new form of remittance such as non-governmental organizations. Rather than just sending money like the previous generations, I expected the young adults among my participants to either want to move back to Nigeria or create social changes in their country. Some of my findings support my hypothesis while others do not agree with them.

Through this project, we were able to learn that there are many push factors and pull factors that lead to Nigerians leaving their country of birth. Some of the push factors include the failing economy, lack of opportunity. Among those pull factors are the American Dream, the lottery visa program and other programs by the United States' department of state, and the existing networks in the United States. Like many other immigrants, my participants immigrated

for better living standards, and opportunities to gain a world class education. The American Dream, family-reunification programs, and the visa lottery were the major pull factors. However, when they moved to the United States, some encountered obstacles and changes that they did not perceive.

We discovered through the narratives of my participants that highly educated Nigerian immigrants acculturate into American society, rather than assimilate. This means that they did not adapt the traits of the mainstream American culture, instead, my participants changed as a result of being in contact with several other cultures. While they may have adopted some traits of Black and mainstream American culture, they preserved their Nigerian identity and their culture. In addition, segmented assimilation is the process that seems to be occurring for Nigerian immigrants. As stated in my chapter *The Experiences of Highly Educated Immigrants*, segmented assimilation is a theory that states that second generation immigrants become incorporated into the system of stratification in the host society. According to this theory, the second generation Nigerian immigrants would be seen by the general American public as Black and therefore treated as African Americans. My participants, who were part of the 1.5 generation, were the children of highly educated immigrants at the time of arrival, do not assimilate into the poor black class. Instead, they assimilate into the middle class Black population in America because of their background. While many of my participants may have originally lived in poor neighborhoods, they have shown to have middle class values, especially when it came to discussions about economic mobility.

Most of my participants attached economic mobility to education. Although they recognized that there were obstacles such as racial bias, xenophobia, and ignorance that limited their possibilities for economic mobility, most of my young participants believed that they still had chances of economic mobility. They attached their hopes of economic mobility or their hopes to live the American Dream to earning a higher degree. This seemed to be a value that was passed on from generation to generation. Many believe that school and hard work is the way that they can have a shot at living the American Dream, especially as black people. While many of the older participants, participants in their late thirties or older, have been in America longer said that they believe that there is room for some economic mobility, they questioned how much mobility is available for people like them. Pay inequality, working jobs that they overqualified for and some people's inability to find jobs in the corporate world made them question the American Dream, this is a trend that was not existent for my younger participants.

While many theories such as Mary C Waters's state that second generation immigrants use their culture and ethnic status to position themselves as middle class Blacks and gain social capital within society, my participants shown that they did not put a lot of effort to separate themselves from African Americans. While they all recognized that ethnicity and culture were the demarcations of the difference, they saw themselves as Black in America and therefore African Americans. They have showed that there is some kind of racial solidarity. This may have to do with the period that many of them immigrated to the United States. Furthermore, none of my participants are second generation immigrants. However, because members of the 1.5 generation have experiences that are more similar to those of the second generation, I was shocked to see that they did not display any interest in aligning themselves with middle class

Blacks and away from poor Blacks. Among all of my participant Ava, and Isabella, who had immigrated to the United States four years ago to attend school told me that America was not what they expected. Isabella states “America is not what you think” when I asked her what advice she would give to someone who is thinking of immigrating to the United States. Isabella made references to the racial and economic inequalities when I asked her what she meant. Ava also stated something similar during our interview when I asked her about her initial thoughts of the United States. For Isabella and Ava, who came to the United States, while the Black Lives Matter movement was gaining popularity and while social media was filled with news of killings of Black people in America and other inequalities, America was a lot different than what they were expecting. This seems to have been a rude awakening for them. It seemed that the awareness of the role of race, and structural racism in the United States were major forces in their identification as blacks and the construction of what I think is racial solidarity.

In my study, I find that when Nigerians move to the United States, there is a very important change in their identity. When Nigerians move to the United States, their race becomes the preliminary identity, and their ethnicity becomes a secondary identity. This is a major shift, as race was not a part of their identity that they thought of often to Nigeria. Moreover, mainstream America, they encounter racism or racial bias. However, when they go back to their predominantly Black neighborhood, they encounter bias based on their immigration status and their country of origin. This has to do with the fact that in mainstream America, Nigerian immigrants have no ethnic options and are seen as black, while in their predominantly Black neighborhood, they have more room to express their ethnicity. Furthermore, their ethnicity

matters more in their Black neighborhood, while this part of their identity is almost invisible in mainstream America.

The experiences of highly educated Nigerian immigrants in the United States matter for the United States and Nigeria. Research about the experiences of highly educated immigrants is very important for policies that protect immigrants in the receiving countries. Issues such as overqualification and wage inequalities are issues that can be revealed by studying the experiences of highly educated immigrants. Furthermore, studying the experiences of highly educated immigrants in the receiving society can also give us other perspectives on debates around the brain drain.

The Brain drain has been studied and debated for decades. This issue is known to affect the developing world. However, many researchers have conflicting ideas about this phenomena. While some believe that this is an alarming phenomena, some believe that it is not. A. Adebayo writes that the immigration of African Brain drainers is often permanent and also entails the movement of physicians, surgeons, lawyers and other highly skilled people to countries where technology is more advanced than in the sending nations. (Adebayo, A. 1985) The Brain Drain is sometimes also defined as a flow of highly skilled immigrants from the developing world to developed countries (Docquiera and Rapoport, 2006; Donald Lien and Yan Wang 2005). The topic of the Brain drain was a very important topic in the late 90`s and the early twenty first century. People debated on whether the brain drain was an issue and whose fault or responsibility it was to fix it. There seemed to be three major camps in this debate: a group of scholars who thought that the Brain Drain was a serious problem and needed to be prevented, a group of



scholars who recognize the disadvantage, but also believed that the emigration of skilled people has its advantages and a third group who believed that the Brain Drain was actually not existent because it was a brain gain.

George B. Baldwin's writing puts him in the third camp. Baldwin argues that in the case of highly educated people moving from developing countries to developed countries, it is not a brain drain but an overflow. He states that the issue is not that these countries are being stripped of workers that they need, but that they cannot provide work for all these workers. Therefore, the movement of highly educated people is not an actual issue, it is more like a reaction to the overflow of talent in developing countries. Baldwin proposes that if we want to stop the increasing migration of highly educated people, the sending nations need to make reforms such as counseling for foreign students and ways to attract people who are working abroad to come back to their home countries (Baldwin, G.,1970).

Some other scholars recognized that the reasons why people left developing countries, but also acknowledge the troublesome effects of the large movement of highly educated people. Kwabena Akurang-Parry (2002), spoke to Ghanaian scholars that choose to stay in Ghana, rather than travel abroad. The people who Akurang-Parry interviewed speak of some Ghanaian scholars that consider Ghanaian scholars abroad as a link between Africa and other countries. Akurang-Parry's research highlights the possibility that the emigration of highly educated African immigrants could bring economic and social remittance to the continent. Therefore, from Akuarang-Perry's discussants often thought that study abroad programs could promote exchanges. The disturbing part of this "exchange" is that there are not a lot of people that go to

the developing world. This can be explained by processes such as globalization. In these discussions of globalization, it is important to also point out that the west is often glamorized. Therefore, globalization is also a possible cause of the brain drain phenomena.

The last camp is the camp of scholars believe that the Brain Drain is a disaster for developing country. Some researchers have argued that what is actually happening is not a Brain Gain, but a Brain drain. Brain gain is defined as the antithesis of brain drain. (Donald Lien and Yan Wang 2005 ) Donald Lien and Yan Wang write that because of issues on the level of human capital transferability, there is actually a brain drain, and not gain, with the movement of brain drainers. Immigrants face barriers in the receiving nations that prevent them from using their intellectual talent, thus, making their movement another brain power loss for the sending nations(Donald Lien and Yan Wang 2005 ).

It is important to note that the scholars who were skeptical of the Brain drain theory are those that published their articles in the 70`s. The immigration trends of today support the brain drain theories. Some researchers say that the receiving population causes the brain drain by making requirements for visas that fit most skilled people, the United States is filtering out the pool of applicants to include most skilled people (Reynolds 2002). Other scholars have also held African governments to be partly responsible for the African Brain Drain. Joseph N. Ana, Emmanuel Makasa and Birte Twisselmann (2005) state that a way of stopping the brain drain is to address it on a structural level. To reduce the brain drain, Akurang-Parry suggests (2002) that there needs to be jobs created for skilled people. The government could also institute policies to increase the number of people who return to their home country after studying abroad. What my

finding suggests is that there is definitely a brain drain. The underpayment, overqualification that my participant have attested to is evidence that there is, in fact, a brain drain because many of the highly educated immigrants do not get the opportunity to use their diplomas in the receiving society. However, I am not suggesting that people in Africa need to stop traveling to the developed world because there are clear reasons and situations that push them to do so.

When questioned about their future and whether it included Nigeria, all of my participants, who were in their 20`s or 30`s, expressed their hesitation to ever go back in Nigeria. They pointed out limitations such as the lack of jobs, infrastructures, the presence of corruption and the low quality as reasons why they would not want to move back to Nigeria. While a few said that they would probably move back to Nigeria when they retire, one participant, Ben, states “ I would have to be close to dying before I move back to Nigeria”. Meanwhile, Emma states that she would like to move back to Nigeria however, she felt that there is not a lot of money to be made in the public sector in Nigeria and she feels that working for the private sector means not working to better the lives of the poor, which she feels uncomfortable with. Among them, the only one who showed no interest in moving to Nigeria was Ben who expressed that his family struggled and was poor in Nigeria. For Ben, America was the place where his family began living comfortably and become property owners. For someone like Ben, who was not living a comfortable life in Nigeria, Nigeria is a memory of all the struggle that he went through. Therefore, Ben states “ I want to be close to dying before moving to Nigeria”. While this statement shows that he is not fond of Nigeria, he still reveals that he wants to live his last days

in Nigeria. This is representative of the kind of attachment he still feels for Nigeria, no matter how small.

Older participants also said that they were looking to move to Nigeria after retirement. Anthony, in particular, told me that “ I am counting down until I get to retire in Nigeria”. For Stella, Anthony, Anna, Bernard, Anna, and Abigail, living in Nigeria in the future was a strong possibility, Bernard states “ It is my home”. This view seemed to be shared by many of the first generation immigrants. Their strong ties to Africa seemed to be something that more than a decade in America could not have changed. Among all of them, Stella brought up that she was uncertain about her children`s future in America. She states “ within the last four years, I feel that I came to the conclusion that the treatment of black people in America is not going to get better... I always tell my children that they have to study something that allows them to move back home because this is not their country”. Stella feels that her children may not have the opportunities that she moved here for them to have. She also states “although I would not say that moving to the United States was in vain... after all, they were able to get a quality education and live a better life... however, I feel that they may live a much safer life and create opportunities for themselves in Nigeria now.”

Overall the narrative of highly educated Nigerian immigrants in the United States is one that allows us to see that the brain drain is a phenomenon that should be paid more attention to. It is worth noting that many of my participants still love their country and want to see it develop and prosper. However, moving to the United States was something that they did for their own prosperity. The issue here seems to be how to fix the brain drain. Is it the Nigerian government's

responsibility to work to better the nation so fewer people want to immigrate out and or is it the responsibility for those who are highly skilled and educated to go create change in Nigeria? As a developing Nation, Nigeria stands to lose and feel more of the effects because it is losing a lot of their talented population. While I believe that the brain drain issue is an issue that could be solved by both governments in Africa and highly educated people, who should seek to send remittance that would benefit the overall population and not just their family members, it is necessary for the Nigerian government to take the first steps. The Nigerian government should prove to brain drainers that they have an interest in bettering the country and investing in the youths. This will give the brain drainers more hope for their country.

Many of my participants addressed the issue when I asked them “What do you think your responsibility to Nigeria is?”. While some spoke about their responsibility to educate people about Nigeria and Africa and to represent their country in a positive way, some other people spoke about development. For many people like Emma, Stella, Anthony, Bernard, and Gabriella, they feel somehow responsible for the development of Nigeria. However, they also point to the fact that they are “powerless” like Emma stated. Two people who were more optimistic were Stella and Gabriella. Stella states

“Unfortunately, Nigeria needs a lot of help and this help cannot come from foreign nations. It has to come from Nigerians... Wealthy educated Nigerians who can start businesses, schools, open hospitals and Non-Governmental Organization. There is money to start all of this, but the issue is that people only think of their families when it comes to giving back to Nigeria.”

Stella brings up the issue of remittance and suggests that people should attempt to give back to the general Nigerian society and not just their families. Gabriella also stated that she feels that she would have to give back to Nigeria in the form of a Non-Governmental Organization. She states that she would like to empower women by training them as tailors.

In terms of policies and measures in the United States, I think there should be more measures taken to prevent the ending of the visa lottery program and the DACA program. As my research shows, Nigerian immigrants, African immigrants, and other Black immigrants are very impactful in the United States. Many of them are doctors, lawyers, engineers and much more. Ending a program like the visa lottery program would stop many brilliant and skilled people from immigrating to the United States. They are essential for the success of many and the proposal to end both programs are clearly racist. Moreover, I hope that one of the main takeaways that all the readers get is that immigration is a black issue and that Black people are affected by immigration issues too. I recommend future research on the topics of African immigrants, black immigrants, and Black brain drainers. I think that there is a lot to be learned on these issues in order for us to gain a better understanding of the different ways in which immigration affects Black people. Future research should include a bigger sample and also include people living in various states across the United States.

## Appendix A

### Consent to participate in this interview

Project Title: The experiences of highly educated Nigerian Immigrants in the United States.  
Researcher: Shila Bayor  
Bard College IRB Contact: [irb@bard.edu](mailto:irb@bard.edu)

I am a student at Bard College and I am conducting interviews for my Senior Project. I am studying the economic and cultural experiences of highly educated Nigerians in the United States. You qualify for this research because you are a highly educated Nigerian immigrant.

During this study, I will ask you some questions as regards to your experiences in the United States and I would like you to respond to these questions. Feel free to take as much time as you want. This interview is designed to last approximately *45 minutes*. You will be asked questions about your experiences in the United States. In addition, you will be asked about the circumstances around your decision to leave Nigeria.

Interviews will take place in a coffee shop or by Skype.

There is no direct benefit in participating in this project. However, indirect benefits include the opportunity to contribute to the general understanding and having the opportunity to request a final draft of this project. Potential risks of participation include feelings of discomfort when recalling events that may have been traumatic. If I ask any questions that you do not want to answer or feel uncomfortable answering, please tell me and we will move on to the next question. We can also take a break or stop the interview. If you disclose anything that makes you uncomfortable or may be used against you in a court of law, such as legal status in the United States, I will stop recording and delete the tape.,

If you wish to request a copy of the completed project after May 2nd, all you need to do is email me and I will send you a copy. You have the right to review the parts where you have been quoted, comment on and withdraw information prior to April 1st. You could access the quotes in my paper, by emailing me. All the information you provide will be confidential. I will use pseudonyms when I write about your experiences in my project. I will keep my interview notes and recordings secured in a password-protected file on my personal computer. Upon completion of this project, all interview notes and recordings will be destroyed.

### Participant's Agreement

I understand the purpose of this research. My participation in this interview is voluntary. If I wish to stop the interview for any reason, I may do so without having to give an explanation.

The researcher has reviewed the benefits and risks of this project with me. I am aware the information will be used in a Senior Project that will be publicly and permanently available online in the Bard College library in Annandale on Hudson, NY and through the Digital Commons. You have the right to review, comment on and withdraw information prior to April 1st. You could access the parts where you have been quoted in my paper, by emailing me before April 1st. Please note that I will only be providing you

with your statements that are included in my project and not my analysis of them. To see my analysis, you can access the finished project after May 2nd online through the Bard Digital Commons.

The information gathered in this study is confidential with respect to my personal identity. I understand that complete confidentiality cannot be guaranteed, since the researcher may be required to surrender notes and/or recordings if served with a court order.

If I have questions about this study, I can contact the researcher at [sb9448@bard.edu](mailto:sb9448@bard.edu) or the faculty adviser, Yuval Elmelech, at [elmelech@bard.edu](mailto:elmelech@bard.edu). If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can contact the chair of Bard's Institutional Review Board at [irb@bard.edu](mailto:irb@bard.edu).

\_\_\_\_ I have been offered a copy of this consent form to keep for myself.

\_\_\_\_ I am at least 18 years of age and I consent to participate in today's interview.

\_\_\_\_ I have had the chance to ask questions and my questions have been answered.

\_\_\_\_ I was not coerced in any ways to participate in this research.

\_\_\_\_ I consent to the audio-recording.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's printed name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's email address

\_\_\_\_\_  
Interviewer's signature

### **Verbal consent**

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. Your participation is expected to take about 45 minutes. During this time you'll be asked to answer some questions about your experiences in the United States. In addition, you will be asked about the circumstances of your departure from your home country.

If you're ever uncomfortable for any reason and would like to stop participating, that is OK, just say so. If you disclose anything that makes you uncomfortable or may be used against you in a court of law such as legal status in the United States, I will stop recording and delete the tape. You have the right to review, comment on and withdraw information prior to April 1st. You could access the parts where you have been quoted in my paper, by emailing me.



Your data will be stored in a folder on my computer (that is protected by a password), so your responses will remain confidential.

Before we start you need to read this consent form carefully. Consent forms are necessary so that you are accurately informed about the research process and you understand your rights. If you have any questions, just ask me. Then, if you agree with the content of the consent form, sign at the bottom. If you'd like a copy of the consent form, you can take a copy with you.

## Appendix B

Bard College

Institutional Review Board

21 November 2017

Shila Bayor  
[sb9448@bard.edu](mailto:sb9448@bard.edu)

Re: The experiences of highly-educated Nigerians and South Africans in the United States

DECISION: APPROVED

Dear Shila,

The Bard Institutional Review Board reviewed your proposal request (and the minor revisions made in response to the IRB's comments). Your proposal is approved through 21 November 2018. Your case number is **2017NOV21-BAY**. Please notify the IRB if your methodology changes or unexpected events arise.

We wish you success with your research.

Sincerely,

Justin Hulbert  
IRB Chair

cc: Deborah Treadway and Yuval Elmelech

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