Erasing Invisibility, Inequity and Social Injustice of Africans in the Diaspora and the Continent

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Edited by

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On behalf of the International Association of African Educators (IAAE), the editors would like to dedicate this book project to our beloved and dedicated IAAE board member, newsletter editor, and parliamentarian, Dr. David Mburu, who passed away in October 2016. We thank him for inspiring us and modeling humility and grace for us all. He is deeply missed!

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Foreword

African Immigrants and the Yearn for Visibility

Peter I. Ukpokodu

In political rhetoric and campaign engineering, the Age of Trump—Donald J. Trump, the new president of the US that is—may very well be the age of aggressive nationalism, of flag-waving patriotism and of the rise of political ultra-conservativism. It seems to be an anti-immigrant, anti-immigration age that advocates wall-building across the US Southern borders to ward off immigrants from Mexico and Latin America, the opening of a national registry of Muslims, and the halt to potential immigrants from a certain region of the world entering the United States of America. In pursuit of executing the Trump campaign motto of "Make America Great Again," the Age of Trump could be the age of insularity in America, of a trade war with China and Mexico, and perhaps a new arms race. Some impatient critics and philosophers have also referred to it as a "post-truth" era in which truth is no longer the conformity of the intellect with reality but a figment of one's imagination, and the line demarcating truth from lie is blurred. But the age of Trump is better understood within antecedent world events in which Britain seceded from the European Union, a "Brexit", as it came to be known, that the irrepressible and vociferous Nigel Farage, one of the aggressive champions of Great Britain's exit from the European Union, proclaimed unwittingly in the euphoria of victory as British Independence Day.

Brexit, in a way, was an anti-immigrant, anti-immigration referendum. It came in the wake of an exodus of emigrants from the Middle East and Africa to Europe through the Mediterranean and Aegean Seas, turning those seas into one massive marine graveyard of immense depth and making the lucky survivors the most wretched immigrants on earth. Brexit was the answer to this human surge from a timorous, not a xenophobic, Britain. Great Britain, from where citizens migrated to all corners of the

earth establishing the British Empire and the British Commonwealth of Nations that came in the wake of the empire, was now afraid of immigrants. When Trump made his political entrance, it was on the altar of anti-immigrant, anti-immigration sentiment. Not even the Roman Catholic Pontiff, Pope Francis, was spared from Trump's attack when he gave a personal moral opinion, not speaking ex-cathedra, that the world is better off with building bridges rather than erecting impenetrable walls at the borders.

With world politics so out of joint and anti-immigrant rage in the US quite feverish, what then in the world--let me rephrase this since we are at the dawn of Trumpism where politically-correct language is under assault--what the hell is propelling the International Association of African Educators (IAAE) most of whose members are African immigrants of all races and their descendants, to flaunt its intellectual power and international aspirations to write the book*, Erasing Invisibility, Inequity, and Social Injustice of Africans in the Diaspora and the Continent* (henceforth referred to simply in its shorter rendition as *Erasing Invisibility...*). What collective brain tumor, what incubuses or the prodding of demons would make the editors and contributing authors of the book to write about Africans and their experiences at this inauspicious time in American history? Have the authors forgotten that the gestation of the Age of Trump may well be traced to the Obama presidency when Trump told the baffled world that Barack Obama, the first US President of African-American descent, was born in Africa, perhaps an African and, therefore, not qualified to be an American President? Even when President Obama showed his birth certificate to the world, Trump remained unconvinced. The logical conclusion, even if the major premise is erroneous, is that Obama is an African immigrant in the US and at best a naturalized citizen of the US. A naturalized citizen cannot be an American president. With the mounting rage and deafening clamor over immigrants and immigration that have not spared even a seating president from corrosive verbal albeit fallacious attacks, is this not bad timing for a book of this nature that raises the visibility of African immigrants? There is only one answer to these seemingly rhetorical questions: it is the call of Sankofa or "the anguish of severance"—to borrow a phrase from Wole Soyinka. Herein lie the importance and the relevance of *Erasing Invisibility...* And if a book is ever timely, it is this book written mostly by immigrants about the educational, cultural, and social experiences of African immigrants in the diaspora and of Africans in the continent.

Sankofa is the Akan (Ghanaian) word that exhorts an African, perhaps it could apply to anyone, to go back to the ancestral, historical, and cultural roots and sources physically, spiritually, and/or mentally. It renders void the concept of expatriate or expatriation--the permanent self-exile or withdrawal of one from his or her land of birth and citizenship and from allegiance to it. Wole Soyinka, the Nigerian Nobel Laureate for Literature, may have raised this concept to a metaphysical and inescapable level in his theorizing of the separation of deities from humans and the indescribable psychic and spiritual deep yearning by one for the other (deities and humans, that is) as "the anguish of severance." That irresistible response to restore one's severed nature in order to have a harmonious and complete self-propelled Ogun, the Yoruba god of iron, steel, metal and war, to create a bridge across primordial chaos to essentially reunite the heavens and the earth, the divinities and the humans.

Many African luminaries have felt the anguish of severance. While living in the West, Soyinka responded to it by helping Nigeria find its way back to true democracy after many years of successive military dictatorial regimes. Chinua Achebe, just before his death in the US where he had lived for many years, returned to his anguish about the Nigerian civil war in his memoir- cum-autobiography, *There was a Country*. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, while living in English-speaking Western world, departed from his usual practice of creative and critical writing in English to writing first in Gikuyu or Kiswahili before translating the work in English. His primary argument is one of allegiance to Africa, of placing the Gikuyu and Kiswahili languages on a pedestal among other world languages because language primarily carries and affirms a people's culture. Ali Mazrui's manifestation of that pain of separation was in his monumental nine-part documentary series and the accompanying book, *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*. Like these eminent scholars, Omiunota Nelly Ukpokodu may have felt the anguish of severance, the pain of separation from Africa and the invisibility and isolation in her new "home"—the U.S.—when she founded the IAAE. It is the same feeling then, expressed collectively, that materialized itself in the inaugural conference of the IAAE from which the book, *Erasing Invisibility…*, has emerged as an external concretization of the members' internal disposition towards the continent of their origin. Whether the departure to the diaspora was forced or voluntary, these Africans have two homes, two nations—the native land that gave birth to them and the host country that has given them habitation and has enabled them to grow new roots and stability, no matter the process they have gone through—sometimes seemingly hostile and inimical, at others confusingly

amicable and amiable. In their relative peace, stability and success in the host country, they have heard the silent call of their native land. In periods when they felt the pangs of social invisibility and marginalization, the call to come home has become louder and urgent, almost impossible to resist because of its seeming incessancy and stridence. These African immigrants and transnationals have responded to this call mainly in two forms—in material (mostly pecuniary) and social remittances. The chapters in *Erasing Invisibility...* reveal the fulfilment by authors of one or both of these remittances.

Material remittance to Africa is often pecuniary. African immigrants remit billions of dollars annually mostly to their respective African nations. They also send books, equipments, computers, and electronic software, among other things. As exemplified in Jane Adeny Memorial School in Kenya where an all-girls' boarding school experiments with, and implements, new ideas of educating young females, an IAAE member and chapter contributor, Teresa Wasonga, has joined forces with a charitable organization to erect a model school that aspires to merge intellectual training with preparing students for a sustainable practical economic achievement. In this way, Jane Adeny Memorial School prepares its students towards an immediate contribution to Kenya's economy and the students' own economic survival, independence, self-fulfillment and empowerment. Thus, even though it may be true that some immigrants may have left their poorer and less developed countries in Africa to seek fame and fortune, self-fulfillment and self-worth in Western countries, their successes in the diaspora have shed light on their altruistic spirit that belies the selfishness and egotism that some caustic critics and detractors in some African countries have heaped on them.

The book itself and the ideas behind the formation of the IAAE as an organization visibly manifest the social remittance by African educators to the homeland and to their host country. As educators, immigrants also export ideas, attitudes, skills and beliefs from abroad to their native countries. In the age of social media, the exchange of influential ideas has become easier than in any other generation, through letters, postcards, photographs, cell phones, Skype, emails, blogs, facebook, twitter, Instagram, I-pads, computers, artworks, music and whatever the ubiquitous internet permits. As in the case of Jane Adeny Memorial School, when some immigrant educators seize available opportunities (such as those offered by the Carnegie Foundation African Diaspora Program, the Fulbright, the university sabbatical leave system, Federal grants, and non-profit organizations) to return to Africa to teach or carry

out research for a defined period, they transfer skills, ideas, and technology to Africa. *Erasing Invisibility...* itself is linking its members abroad with their African counterparts, thus facilitating and improving the exchange of educational information, innovation, and general communication. But the engagement in social remittance is not a one-way affair. There is also a flow of cultural influence from Africa to the Western world through social media and when immigrants return to the diaspora after a short-term or prolonged stay in Africa or when Africans visit relatives and friends abroad, spend a sabbatical leave in the West, or are sponsored by governments and other bodies for some training abroad.

Omiunota N. Ukpokodu's chapter on immigrant students and their families is a testimony to the contribution of immigrants to the education and professional development of American educators. Among other things, it directs a searchlight on the issues and challenges that African immigrant students and families in the US Pre-kindergarten through 12th-grade education grapple with. These challenges may affect their academic achievement and effective social integration. Let it be known that African immigrant educators in America improve the intellectual growth and the social wellbeing of all students and their communities of residence. They are also cultural purveyors who enhance America's taste and knowledge of, at least, some aspects of global culture, and certainly of African cultures.

The book also makes visible the trauma that Africans in the Diaspora go through as they come face-to-face with the American way of life. In an elegiac and contemplative manner, David Mburu lays bare the confusion that immigrant families confront in Western nations, especially the transformation of gender roles in the family and the legal system. His is also, on the one hand, a nostalgic feeling for the "good" old days that used to be in an African country, when male primacy was recognized, upheld and beyond interrogation, the days when men were men, and on the other hand, a lamentation that the Western ideas and practices of gender equality have turned the world upside down for the African male in America and to some extent, in most regions of post-colonial Africa. Mburu is thus the audacious voice snickering at the stultified and timorous African male immigrant disenfranchised from male dominance (perhaps dominion?) by the pugnacious and belligerent African female immigrant in "conspiracy" with the Western legal system. For those uncharitable critics prone to irascibility who may want to dismiss this as hogwash and poppycock emanating from the dreams and splendid isolation of a lotus-eater, do I need to remind you that this is the Age of Trump? As Mburu points out,

families of Africans in the Diaspora are experiencing the waning of the authoritative family patriarch and this trauma has led to family pains and separations, and divorces for those who could not reconcile the differing and transitional ways of life from the African to the Western. Mburu did not live long enough to see if his recommendation—that would-be African immigrants seek counseling before migrating to the West—would be heeded, and what the social outcome would be. In October 2016, the mild-mannered, self-effacing Mburu embarked on another migration, this time the ultimate one, to the ancestral world.

Erasing Invisibility... gives voice to the challenges that African immigrants, both young and old, have to contend with in the diaspora. The immigrants have left their native countries for the US or other Western countries they had imagined would hold answers to their quest for personal, economic, social and intellectual fulfillment, where they thought they would be received and treated humanely and equitably. Unfortunately, many experience shattered dreams as their quest for cultural affirmation, educational excellence and achievement remains a chimera. The book's import is its belief that the problems African immigrants face in their transnational and transmigrant spaces must be recognized so that educators, counselors, policymakers and social service workers will become more informed and positioned to provide relevant and responsive services that would effectively nurture and support African immigrant students and families in their academic development and social integration in their new homes. When African immigrant students and their families receive necessary and meaningful support, they will be able to unleash the creative and intellectual energies that had hitherto laid fallow and dormant, and their achievements will become visible and recognizable. The IAAE and *Erasing Invisibility...* have brought public focus on the issues and challenges of African immigrants, as well as indigenous epistemic matters and pedagogical practices in African education that have proven to be excellent and durable and, therefore, exemplary for education in the Western world. The visibility the book and its authors engender is intended to inspire others to tell their stories, to find keys to doors that have been locked, to open windows that have been shut to let in fresh air and fresh insight, to break intellectual shackles that had kept them earthbound and to soar into space, and from that height lift up their colleagues, students and families in Africa and its diaspora. The book and the IAAE seek to create an environment where transnational and continental African educators can collaborate and learn from one another. That way, they share from best practices that have been made visible, and

the educators are energized to hone their craft instead of suffering from debilitating isolation and academic ennui.

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We also would like to express our deepest gratitude to Professor Peter I. Ukpokodu for graciously accepting to write the foreword of this book at a short notice. We greatly appreciate his sacrifice of time, commitment, diligent reading, professional skill and rigor in the editing of the manuscript.

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INTRODUCTION

TOWARD ERASING INVISIBILITY OF AFRICANS

OMIUNOTA N. UKPOKODU
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African immigrants have been described as the most educationally accomplished immigrant group in Western nations such as the United States, United Kingdom, and Canada (American Community Survey, 2009; Boyd, 2002; Cross, 1994; Dustmann and Theodoropoulos, 2006). Despite this acclamation and the fact that the African immigrant population is increasing in many Western countries, little is known about their experiences and the contributions they make toward the advancement of their communities, particularly, the challenges and issues they face in the larger society and institutions of learning. Negative images and narratives about Africa as the "Dark Continent" remain prevalent. An emerging body of research shows that African immigrant educators, students, and families are homogenized, marginalized, and ignored in Western institutions of learning across all levels (Arthur, 2000, 2010; Obiakor, Grant & Obi, 2010; Traore & Lukens, 2006; Ukpokodu, 2013). These scholars show that African immigrant educators, students and families are an invisible and silent minority within their transnational spaces and P-20 institutions.

This book, *Erasing Invisibility, Inequity, and Social Injustice of Africans in the Diaspora and the Continent,* originated from the first Conference of the International Association of African Educators (IAAE) held in September 2015, at the University of Kansas in Lawrence, Kansas. The forum served as a scholarly inaugural conference of the association. The title of the book was culled from the theme of the conference and the fundamental objectives that underlined the formation of the association. IAAE was conceptualized as a space where scholars and practitioners work on critical issues related to Africans in the diaspora and homeland. The organization's aim is to create a forum where visibility could be given

to the scholarship on Africa and African immigrants and their contributions to the academe. Through this exploration of the state and experience of African education both on the continent and in the diaspora, the authors present an optimistic view that despite many obstacles and challenges, the scholarship field of African education has promising prospects as attested by the growing scholarship and discussions on the same in the last decade. The papers in this book reflect and illuminate the stories of the contributors who speak loudly to the forms of invisibility and marginalization of African immigrants. The editors and contributing authors of the book engage the reader in understanding critical issues in African scholarship both on the continent and in the diaspora that have been marginalized, unexamined and under-researched and propose ways to make them visible. The contributors have imagined and reimagined African and African immigrants' educational scholarship in light of the issues and challenges that have been witnessed scholarly and experientially in this regard. The book consists of eleven chapters conceptualized around three central thematic areas. The first part, entitled *contextualizing educational scholarship from the diaspora*, consists of four chapters that unpack African immigrants' educational and institutional experience*s* in the U.S., perspectives of African immigrant parents and families and their experiences with regard to their children's education in U.S. Pk-12 schools; struggles and treatment of African immigrant students in U.S schools and their perceptions of educational and social experiences. Part two, Africans *negotiating transnational spaces*, with two chapters, focuses on identity and shifting positionalities and the redefinition and negotiation of African Diasporic masculinity. The third part, *contextualizing educational scholarship from the African continent*, consists of four chapters and engages critical, under-researched areas in African education that are vital in advancing the role of education to the future of the African continent in several spheres. This part demonstrates the vitality of IAAE; the critical and central role that African educators have played in nation building and as a catalyst for social, political and economic change; the effects of a transformative girl-child education and the potential it has for Africa's national development; and the role of indigenous education in democratizing education at all levels, primary, secondary and tertiary and the pathway to transforming pedagogical practices in African schools. In the following we provide brief overview of each chapter.

Chapter 1, by Omiunota Ukpokodu, presents the perspectives of African immigrant parents regarding their children's educational experiences in U.S. Pk-12 schools. The chapter reveals that while some

African immigrant families express appreciation for, and some satisfaction with, their children's education and schooling in U.S. schools, overwhelmingly, they report significant challenges that relate to marginalization, lack of cultural responsiveness and sensitivity, and inequitable practices and policies that adversely affect their children's educational development and success. The chapter discusses critical implications and suggestions for improving African immigrant families' experiences with schools and their children's quality of education and schooling. It seeks to contribute to the limited research on African immigrant parents and families and their experiences in relation to their children's education in U.S. Pk-12 schools.

In **chapter 2**, Margaret Mbeshena, presents a phenomenological study that explores Sub-Saharan African (SSA) immigrant parents' knowledge and perceptions about the special education services their children with disabilities receive in some U.S. schools. The findings of the study support the research on the challenges immigrant parents of students with disabilities face during their involvement in the special education process in the schools. Results from the data analysis in the chapter indicate that the SSA immigrant parents of children with disabilities start off in U. S. schools with little or no knowledge about disability, their children's special education services, and their role expectations in the special education provision process. The chapter notes however, that SSA immigrant parents gain a lot of awareness and knowledge after a couple of years in the system through their own personal efforts of educating themselves, and making sense of the educational differences between the U.S. and their home countries. The chapter provides insights into the disconnect that exists between policies and the implementation of special education programs in the U.S. It gives suggestions on how to implement effective practices that underpin educational excellence for SSA immigrant students with disabilities in the U. S. school systems that are vital in addressing inequities related to social justice and equality in special education.

Mercy Agyepong explores the perception and treatment of African students in American schools in **chapter 3**. The chapter argues that, despite the large increase in the population of African immigrant children and adults in the United States within the past four decades, not much is known about their educational experiences and academic achievement. Moreover, due to their continent of origin and racial make-up, Black African students are placed under, and forced to adopt, a pan-African *and* a Black racial identity, two identity categories that are viewed as

homogeneous in the U.S, thus further making Black African students invisible. The chapter examines the emerging literature that has developed in this area in recent years that seeks to expose the schooling experiences of this burgeoning population. By focusing exclusively on the experiences endured in U.S. K-12 schools by African immigrant students, the literature review examined in the chapter brings to afore ways in which African students are perceived and treated in school by teachers, administrators, and peers and how these experiences impact their educational realities. The reviewed literature in the chapter offers implications for educators and researchers for the inclusion and understanding of the educational experiences of African immigrant students. The chapter strives to erase the invisibility of African students by bringing to light the needs of a linguistically and culturally underrepresented group that is often overlooked in the research and discourse surrounding immigrant and non-immigrant students' educational experiences in the United States.

In chapter 4, Alex Kumi-Yeboah, Linda Tsevi, Gordon Brobbey and Patriann Smith discuss the educational and social experiences of African-born immigrant students in an urban high school environment in the U.S. Using analyses drawn from in-depth interviews and observational data, the authors examine voices and perspectives, the nuances, and academic journey of African-born immigrant students as they relate to their teachers, fellow students, and their academic engagement and achievement, and how they are fostered by the school context. In their findings, the authors note that African-born immigrant students experience acculturation and psychological stress, cultural and language discrimination, stereotyping, differential experiences, differential relationships with teachers, peers, and school environment, and different parental support. Their findings are expected to help teachers, educators, and policy makers understand the educational and social experiences that African-born immigrant youth go through as part of their efforts to achieve equity and educational excellence in American schools.

Omiunota Ukpokodu addresses the issues of identity and shifting positionalities of African-born Americans and their claim to the African American identity in **chapter 5**. The chapter underscores that African-born Americans have been questioned, challenged, harassed, denounced, vilified, and explicitly told not to identify as African American because the African American identity belongs to historically Black, native-born Americans. Drawing from emerging interdisciplinary research in the field, personal experiences and perspectives, the chapter explores the following questions: Who can claim the right to the African American identity or

label? What are the issues, challenges, and consequences of African-born Americans claiming the African American identity? By and large, the chapter discusses issues of identity and recognition and the space one occupies or is "assigned" in his/her new space of identity. In particular, it illuminates issues and challenges African-born Americans experience in transcultural, transnational and transmigrant spaces. It calls for creative resolutions that will erase their invisibility and ensure their humanity, dignity, and social justice in the education field.

In chapter 6, David Mburu examines the changing gender roles of Africans when they migrate to the Western world. He argues that when Africans migrate to the Western world, their gender roles go through metamorphosis and are redefined afresh. The chapter explores the dynamics and impact of this new social order on African masculinity. It asserts that due to the decrease in social and economic status of the African male coupled with his alienation from the new society and culture, his patriarchal power, social masculine identities and privileges often times are challenged and renegotiated in these new environments. The chapter provides perspectives on how to negotiate and renegotiate these new gender roles and identity in order to foster family unity and harmony.

In chapter 7, Zandile Nkabinde examines the importance of indigenous education in South Africa and its relevance towards democratizing education at all levels, primary, secondary and tertiary. The chapter argues that the current South African education system is based on a philosophy of education that is Eurocentric and foreign to Black Africans. The chapter illustrates that two decades of educational transformation in democratic, post-apartheid South Africa have not delivered desired learning and societal outcomes. It advocates for the need to explore indigenous approaches to education that can bring meaning to the education system in South Africa. It accentuates the need to offer education that is grounded in cultural experiences of Africans. The chapter asserts that indigenous knowledge, as a system of African knowledge, can provide a useful philosophical framework for the construction of empowering knowledge that can enable communities in Africa to participate in their own educational development. On the whole, the chapter demonstrates how indigenous education and theories can be utilized to erase the invisibility of marginalized groups in South Africa through promoting equity, equality, social justice and educational excellence in schools. Reintroducing indigenous knowledge systems in the South African educational system is seen as a vehicle of healing the wounds of apartheid.

Peter Ojiambo explores the role of African-centered educational biographies and the contributions of individual African educators to the transformation of Africa's social, political and economic spheres in **chapter 8**. Through examining the educational contributions and thoughts of Edward Carey Francis, a leading Kenyan educationist, to the development of Kenyan secondary education and school leadership that were transformative, holistic and virtue- centered, the chapter seeks to erase invisibility by acknowledging the contributions of individual African educators to the development of African education both in the colonial and post-colonial period. The chapter brings to afore the contributions of these individual African educators and sheds some light on the educational biographies scholarship that is limited in the field of African education. The chapter highlights critical lessons and insights constructed from the educational work of Carey Francis that will be valuable for transformative leadership development and practices.

In chapter 9, Michael Ndemanu examines the need to re-think classroom spaces in K-12 school settings as vehicles of reforming educational pedagogy and instruction in Africa and making them instruments of socio-economic and political transformations. The chapter articulates the importance of organizing classroom learning spaces in public schools in Africa in ways that can facilitate active and transformative learning. It argues that although many schools in Africa have successfully educated children through traditional pedagogical methods and limited resources, studies on contemporary pedagogical approaches and learning theories emphasize the importance of creating classroom learning spaces and child-centered pedagogy that are vital for effective learning. Drawing on current research in these areas, the chapter discusses ways of reconceptualizing classroom spaces to enable them foster transformative learning. It posits that redesigning classroom spaces in a multifaceted manner that allows students to engage in diverse experiential learning is vital in making schooling more productive and in motivating all children, which in turn has a great impact on socioeconomic and political developments. It notes that although increasingly African countries are embarking on curriculum reforms that can foster this, it is imperative for them to reconceptualize and restructure their classroom settings in ways that can maximize student learning outcomes.

Teresa Wasonga discusses the correlation between transformative education and empowerment in **Chapter 10**. In it, she examines innovative ways of providing quality basic education to all children, especially the poor and specifically the girls. The chapter discusses the on-

going educational work at an all-girls secondary school in Kenya, Jane Adeny Memorial School, where enterprise learning and democratic leadership are under implementation alongside the regular curriculum with the goal of empowering and equipping students with appropriate knowledge and skills that they can utilize to transform their communities.

In **Chapter 11**, George Dei provides reflections on the vitality of an International Association of African Educators (IAAE) from whose inaugural conference these chapters emerged. The chapter brings some personal reflections on the importance of IAAE. It engages the following questions: What does it mean to have a professional association on African education for African-born educators, students, and community? What do such professional associations bring to the professional and intellectual development of educators? What does it take to grow such a professional organization? What should be the identity, target goals, benefits and the strategies to ensure success? How would such collective associations articulate 'relevance' and 'debt to community'? The chapter, framed within anti-colonial, anti-racist and Afrocentric interrogations of collective leadership, addresses issues of invisibility and marginalization of African-born immigrant educators, students and families within a racialized society. The discourse in the chapter borrows from indigenous African philosophies and cultural knowings for understanding "collectivities" and what Black/African leadership means in such undertakings. The chapter underscores that Black educators and scholars, as part of the collective intellectuals, have a responsibility to build, create and sustain their complex communities as they seek to produce knowledge on, and about themselves and their realities and as they advocate for social justice. This is a historical duty that they must collectively seek to undertake and fulfil.

Erasing Invisibility, Inequity, and Social Injustice of Africans in the Diaspora and the Continent is not only relevant but also timely, and aims to encourage and further our collective work on erasing the invisibility of African educators, students, families and communities in the Diaspora and "motherland." It is our hope that the issues discussed in this book will be explored more and incorporated in educational research, theory, reform, policy and practice both on the African continent and in the diaspora to enrich the teaching and learning process and to produce rich and higher learner outcomes of African students. Numerous educators, scholars, students, administrators, policy makers and community leaders engaged in the field of education both on the African continent and in the diaspora will find the book a great resource for their work.

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PART 1

CONTEXTUALIZING EDUCATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP FROM THE DIASPORA

PERSPECTIVES OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANT PARENTS ON U.S. PK-12 SCHOOL SYSTEM

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Introduction and Background

African immigrants have been reported to be America's "new model minority." The U.S. media has highlighted this in headlines such as, "A success story: Immigrant Blacks in colleges," "Black immigrants collect most degrees" (Page, 2007), and "African immigrants now America's new model minority" (Kperogi, 2009). However, what these reports do not reveal is the number of outliers, especially newcomers, who experience significant academic failure that predisposes them toward engagement in anti-social activities (Traore, 2006; Ukpokodu, 2013). These reports do not consider other studies indicating that immigrant students struggle to perform well after their second year in school (Rong & Brown, 2002). A few qualitative studies on African immigrant students suggest that they are invisible and subjected to forms of marginalization and discrimination (Arthur, 2000; Gong, Saah, Larke & Webb-Johnson, 2007; Harushimana & Awokoya, 2011; Obiakor & Afolayan, 2007; Ukpokodu, 2013). The small but growing qualitative studies reveal that many African immigrant students in U.S. Pk-12 schools are struggling academically, falling behind, disengaged, failing, dropping out, and engaging in antisocial behaviors and criminal activities (Deparle, 2009; Medina, 2009; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001; Traore, 2006; Traore & Lukens, 2006). In her study of African immigrant students, Rosemary Traore (2006) documents African immigrant students' struggles in U.S. public schools that include dropping out of school, engaging in drug activities, prostitution, and getting pregnant.

As an African immigrant parent of children who for the most part fared relatively well in the U.S. public schools they attended, I did have some disconcerting experiences with teachers and counselors. For example, I

experienced frustration with a discriminatory school counselor when my child was recommended to take the placement test for the talented and gifted program. For three months, the counselor did not take action to administer the test. When my son's teacher asked me about the test result, I told her that my son had not been tested. She encouraged me to talk to the counselor. When I approached the counselor about the placement test for my son, she disdainfully said to me, "Who told you your son was gifted?" Reluctantly, she said, "Well, I will look into it." It would be another two months before the counselor would send a letter home, informing me that my son would be tested the next day. It got worse! After my son completed the test the counselor failed to communicate the result to me. I had to go back to the counselor to ask about the test result. The counselor's reaction and response shocked me. Without looking at any record, the counselor insensitively said to me, "He is not gifted." The counselor's decision to deny my son the opportunity to participate in an educational enrichment program was not only discriminatory but dehumanizing. The counselor's differential treatment toward me, her insensitivity, and her lack of responsiveness are a reflection of the challenging experiences many African immigrant families face in U.S. Pk-12 schools.

My experience as an immigrant parent occurred more than three decades ago. Since then, U.S. society and institutions have transformed demographically, and diversity is becoming an existential reality. Since then, much attention has been generated to reform teacher preparation programs through the promotion of diversity and teacher development for multicultural competency. Although some progress has been made toward enacting quality and equitable education for all students regardless of their race, ethnicity, culture, and nationality, the goal remains a dream deferred, especially for immigrant students and families who remain invisible. African Immigrant children and families remain marginalized and minoritized across many U.S. schools.

Within the past five years, I have encountered many African immigrant parents/families and their children who have painfully shared about their harrowing experiences with the U.S. education system—the schools, educators, and peers. In fact, some parents and families, in their desperation, have approached me for advice as they shared their harrowing experiences with the schools. Their stories have been heartbreaking and extremely disturbing. Their stories, and a reflection on my own unsettling experiences, motivated me to explore the study that provides the material for this chapter. Apparently, regardless of what some reports say about

African immigrants as the most highly educated immigrant group and as America's "new model minority," in reality, many African immigrant children and their families are not well served in U.S. Pk-12 schools. Unfortunately, little is known about their individual and collective experiences with U.S. Pk-12 schools.

The purpose of this chapter, then, is to bring a much-needed voice on African immigrant families' perspectives about their children's schooling and education and their own experiences with the schools, educators, and peers. The chapter aims to shed light on this invisible African minority group by understanding their individual and collective experiences, needs and challenges, and ways to support them so that they can effectively engage and participate in their children's successful schooling and education. The chapter contributes to the limited research on African immigrant families and toward the effort to erase their invisibility in U.S. society and institutions, particularly in Pk-12 schools. It is informed by data from a large, ongoing qualitative study. Two questions guided the study: 1) How do African immigrant parents/families perceive and describe their children's educational and schooling experiences in U.S. Pk-12 schools? 2) How do African immigrant parents/families perceive and describe their experiences with U.S. Pk-12 schools, teachers, and other school personnel? This chapter is a critical contribution because of the vital importance of parental involvement in their children's success in education. Today, there is an abundance of scholarship on parental involvement in their children's education and the need for schools and educators to collaborate with families and tap into their "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzalez, 1992) in order to effectively anchor students' learning.

Related Literature and Theoretical Perspectives

Because this study focuses on the phenomenon of African immigrant families, the literature review will first focus on their migration and lived realities and experiences in *transnational*, *transcultural*, and *transmigrant* spaces in U.S. society and institutions. Second, because it is important that teachers develop the cultural competency needed to effectively work with African immigrant students and their families, the literature review examines educational and schooling practices and culture of U.S. Pk-12 schools. The chapter draws on interrelated theoretical frameworks on migration and immigration, critical race theory and multicultural education