

# African immigrants: How race and gender shape the American dream

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A study led by Michigan State University finds that gender and race play a major role in how African immigrants assimilate into American society. Credit: Michigan State University

Africans represent one of the fastest-growing immigrant groups in the United States, but women far outpace men for securing high-skilled jobs and earnings growth, indicates a new study led by a Michigan State

University sociologist.

Black [immigrant women](#) from Africa—well-represented as registered nurses and other health-care professionals, accountants and social workers—saw a 130 percent increase in wages between 1990 and 2010. By 2010, their earnings had surpassed those of black and white [women](#) born in the U.S.

Black African men, on the other hand, earned less than U.S.-born [white men](#) and worked largely as taxi and truck drivers and nurses' aides, despite having much higher rates of college education than white men and even after having been in the U.S. labor market since the 1980s. This finding suggests black [immigrant](#) men may experience institutional racism.

"In sum, race plays a part in determining immigrant men's earnings, but it doesn't have the same role in immigrant women's earnings," said Stephanie Nawyn, MSU associate professor of sociology and lead investigator of the research.

While the study couldn't measure the reasons for the struggles of black immigrant men, Nawyn said it may have to do with similar factors faced by black men born in the U.S.

"Black immigrant men may experience more stereotyping, they may experience more criminalization - there might be a lot of things going on where they get discounted and marginalized the same way African-American men do in this country," Nawyn said.

Among major immigrant groups coming to the U.S., Africans had the fastest growth rate from 2000 to 2013 - increasing 41 percent during that period, according to a Pew Research Center report. By 2015, there were 2.1 million African immigrants in the U.S.

The MSU-led study is one of the first to examine how race and gender shape assimilation for African immigrants. Specific findings include:

\*While black African immigrant men saw their earnings increase 79 percent between 1990 and 2010, they made, on average, only \$45,343 in 2010 - less than the \$49,478 earned by white men born in the U.S. Black men born in the U.S. made an average of just \$24,160 in 2010.

\*Some 52 percent of black African immigrant men had a college education, compared to 30 percent of white men born in the U.S. and 13 percent of black men born in the U.S.

\*The massive earnings growth of black African immigrant women was the big surprise, Nawyn said. Their average earnings jumped from \$17,727 in 1990 to \$40,699 in 2010. Those earnings in 2010 far outpaced the \$27,114 earned by white U.S.-born women and the \$21,696 earned by black U.S.-born women.

\*Although black African women had a higher rate of [college education](#) - 37 percent, compared to 27 percent for white U.S.-born women and 17 percent for black U.S.-born women - their earnings were still higher than expected after controlling for education.

"The [earnings](#) trajectory of black African immigrant women was surprising," Nawyn said, "and it's because they have more occupational mobility than their male counterparts. After 20-plus years in the United States, black African women have greater representation in high-skilled jobs in health care, whereas black African men still have 'driver' as their top occupational status, even though they have pretty high levels of education."

Yet despite the gains by black African women immigrants, women generally continued earning less than men in the U.S., Nawyn noted.

The highest paid group of women in the study, black African immigrant women, made an average of \$40,699 in 2010, which was lower than all groups of men except for black U.S.-born men.

Provided by Michigan State University

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