

AFRICAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS - QUICKFACTS

1. 40,000 African immigrants admitted to the US in year 2000. This number grew to 80,000 documented African immigrants admitted in 2005 (US Dept. of Homeland Security, 2006, p. 11)
2. Confronted with complex decisions regarding work, family and community (Rendon, 1996).
3. Developing a new identity in the US while maintaining ties to home country.
4. Needs are shaped by differences in culture, ethnicity, race, traditions, economic viability and socio-economic factors (Fanon, 1968).
5. African immigrants exhibit great variety in terms of religion, language, culture, and other factors (Stebbleton, 2007).
6. Many African immigrants have been impacted by colonialism, slavery, and identity, including racism and discrimination (Stebbleton, 2007).
7. Have generally experienced loss of independence, loss of sovereignty, economic stagnation and the psychological and socio-psychological aspects of the historical legacy of slavery (Yansane, 1990).
8. Come from an experience where they have been the racial majority and their adjustment to the US culture is additionally complicated by differential treatment of certain races in the US (Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2004, Levitt & Dubner, 2005).
9. May develop a negative self-concept as a result of an elevated social status in home country and being caught between two cultures (Halstead, 1991).
10. Experience an intersection of multiple identities: want to be seen as African and not African-American; struggle to find a middle ground between their native African identity and adapting to the imposed racial identity of "Black American" (Mellow, Van Slyck, & Eynon, 2003).
11. Contextual experience factors include multiple sources of trauma, including: on-going ethnic conflicts, civil war, on-going violence, sociopolitical events, wars, displaced and forced to flee from their countries, political oppression, historical circumstances, labor laws, disease, natural disaster, violence and poverty (Vondracek, 1990).
12. Loss and separation from community and loved ones to violence, disease or as a result of displacement and many don't know if they will ever see family again. Many could feel guilt about choosing to leave or having escaped (Espin, 1987).
13. **No concept of time** – concept of time is related to major events and not focused on the future; African cultures instead focus on past and present (Pennington, 1990); strong belief in sense of fate and predestination: God determines the destiny of the individual (Stebbleton, 2007; Young, 2003).
14. **Decision-making** is based on collective and communal experiences and needs. May avoid making long-range plans or exhibit what is perceived as lack of commitment to future (Stebbleton, 2007).
15. May have difficulty refusing requests since this is considered disrespectful for some African cultures.
16. Euro-centric models of decision-making and expectations often undermine contextual factors and may go against African traditions of family and community (Stebbleton, 2007).

17. Value collective wellbeing and decision-making over individual needs and wishes.
18. African worldview is heavily shaped by the community and individuals move the rhythm of a “communal dance” (Ogbonnaya, 1994).
19. The source of most African identity is the group and starts with the family unit, not the individual (Menkiti, 1984).
20. Many African students experience a psychological tension/contradiction between traditional African values that encourage harmony and cooperation and the Eurocentric approach supporting conflict, competition, and individualism (C. Young, 2003).

STRATEGIES FOR WORKING WITH AFRICAN IMMIGRANT STUDENTS

1. Learn about the student’s culture, African history and the immigrant experience (books, films, ask questions, etc.)
2. Take a holistic or systemic approach (McMahon, 2005; Patton & McMahon, 1999).
3. Acknowledge and respect collective worldview while emphasizing individual needs in US culture.
4. Focus on interpersonal and social relationships.
5. Consider the African focus on community decision-making, family and concept of time when making requests.
6. Name and address issues of injustice, discrimination and explain the benefits of understanding the US culture while embracing their native history and identity.
7. Support students’ individual process of identity development and the pace at which they move through the acculturation process.
8. Consider alternate ways of presenting information and providing options to African students.
9. Help students to tap into resiliency of overcoming the many historical and cultural stressors and trauma they have survived.
10. Be an advocate and social change agent for the needs of African students.

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