

Trotter Review

Volume 10
Issue 1 *Immigration, Ethnicity, and the Black
Community in the United States*

Article 2

6-21-1996

Introduction

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Recommended Citation

Jennings, James (1996) "Introduction," *Trotter Review*. Vol. 10: Iss. 1, Article 2.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umb.edu/trotter_review/vol10/iss1/2

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Introduction

By James Jennings

The Black community in the United States is undergoing major demographic changes that point to greater ethnic diversity. There are many ethnic groups that compose the Black community today, including people from Africa, the Caribbean, South America, and other parts of the world. This community can no longer be approached as socially or demographically monolithic. Individuals in these groups may define themselves as “Black” but not necessarily, “African American.” This issue of the *Trotter Review* explores facets of on-going ethnic transformation within the Black community. It begins with several essays that introduce broad themes related to this social and demographic development, and then presents selections by authors who discuss specific issues and questions.

In the first essay, Milton Vickerman examines how the issue of race is approached among West Indian immigrant groups. He illustrates that in certain stages of settlement and residential accommodation, West Indians may differ from African Americans in their understanding and response to racism.

Portia James provides an overview of an important national exhibit featured at the Anacostia Museum. This exhibit was devoted to the different ethnic groups that are beginning to comprise the U.S. Black community. Although the exhibit focuses on Washington, D.C. it certainly has applicability and implications for many major cities across the nation.

The next two articles, by Gemima M. Remy and Jean E. Barker, also examine similarities and differences in how Blacks in the U.S. and ethnic groups within this community view issues related to race. While Remy focuses on the Haitian community, Barker looks at Cape Verdeans. Both essays provide important historical information about the immigration of Haitians and Cape Verdeans to the United States.

The essay by J A George Irish focuses on the role of the church in mediating and accommodating immigrant groups in the Black community. He shows that the church continues to be a significant political and social institution that may serve as a bridge between new immigrant groups in the Black community and African Americans.

The next four essays discuss various aspects of African immigration in the U.S. Black community. This section begins with an article by Chris Nteta describing the role that Blacks in the U.S. played in the liberation of South Africa. Indeed, this is one of the most powerful examples of the social and political impacts that can result from collaboration between African Americans, African immigrants in the U.S., and the people of Africa. He suggests that a nation like South Africa, furthermore, now has an obligation to assist Blacks in the U.S. with on-going struggles against racism and poverty.



The essays by Kwaku Danso, Paul E. Udofia, and Mfon Ufot collectively provide some information and data about African immigration patterns and characteristics. Danso focuses on conditions that lead to African migration and describes the major explanations for this movement. He suggests several important queries facing African immigrants as a result of this migration. Udofia responds indirectly to the queries raised by Danso by examining political relations between Blacks in the U.S. and the African immigrant community. He argues that this issue will be molded significantly by the increasing number of second generation offspring of African immigrants. The issues raised by Danso and Udofia will depend, to some extent, on the nature and quality of leadership emerging from African immigrant communities. Ufot gives several examples of the kind of leadership that has characterized a few efforts, as well as some of the challenges that have to be overcome in order to make leadership effective.

The last essay by Sandra M. Grayson utilizes a Black literary and historical work to remind the reader of linkages in the culture of Africans and African Americans. She shows, by referencing Arna Bontemps's novel, *Black Thunder*, that slaves in the United States were heavily influenced by cultural practices and traditions of Africa. This is an important point to make in discussions examining relationships between Blacks in the U.S. and African immigrants today.

James Jennings is director of The Trotter Institute and professor of political science at UMass Boston. He is the author of a number of books, including *Blacks, Latinos, and Asians in Urban America* and *Race, Politics, and Economic Development: Community Perspectives*.