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ONE-IN-TEN BLACK PEOPLE LIVING IN THE U.S. ARE IMMIGRANTS

1. The Caribbean is the largest origin source of Black immigrants, but fastest growth is among African immigrants

BY [CHRISTINE TAMIR](#) AND [MONICA ANDERSON](#)

The vast majority of Black immigrants are from two regions: the Caribbean and Africa. These two areas accounted for 88% of all Black foreign-born people in the United States in 2019.



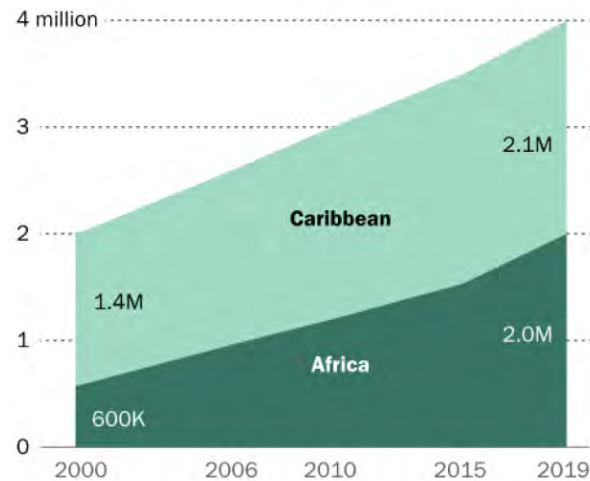
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Number of Black immigrants from Africa living in the U.S. more than tripled from 2000 to 2019

U.S. Black immigrant population born in Africa and the Caribbean



Note: Population numbers rounded to the nearest 100,000. "U.S. Black immigrants" refers to all people who self-identify as Black, inclusive of single-race Black, multiracial Black and Black Hispanic people and were born outside of the U.S. to non-U.S. citizens. Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 2010 and 2019 American Community Surveys (1% IPUMS) and the 2000 decennial census (5% IPUMS).

"One-in-Ten Black People Living in the U.S. Are Immigrants"

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Black immigrants from Africa have been the primary driver for much of the overall recent growth in the Black immigrant population. Between 2000 and 2019, the Black African immigrant population grew 246%, from roughly 600,000 to 2.0 million. As a result, people of African origin now make up 42% of the overall foreign-born Black population, a substantial increase from 2000 when that share was 23%.

Still, the Caribbean remains the most common region of birth for Black immigrants. Just under half of the foreign-born Black population were born in this region (46%). Jamaica and Haiti are the two largest origin countries, accounting for 16% and 15% of Black immigrants, respectively.

Beyond Africa and the Caribbean, about one-in-ten Black immigrants (8%) were born in South America, Central America, or Mexico, while relative to the total Black immigrant population, 2% were born in Asia (1%).

A brief history of Black immigration to the U.S.

The trans-Atlantic slave trade marked the beginning of the Black record of an enslaved African person in the U.S. in 1619. The im



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persisted until 1808, when this practice was outlawed. By 1810, there was already a significant U.S. Black population (19% of the overall population, according to the [1810 decennial census](#)). Restrictive immigration policies on non-Western Europeans after the U.S. Civil War slowed the voluntary [migration of Black people](#) to the U.S. until the mid-20th century.

The most recent wave of voluntary Black immigration – as well as the arrival of immigrants from Latin America, Asia and the Middle East – is mostly due to [changing immigration policies](#) over the 20th century, such as the [Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965](#). The 1965 act [marked a departure](#) from the United States' previous long-standing national origins quota system (which restricted the ability of immigrants from outside Western Europe to move to the U.S.) to a new system that emphasized family reunification and skilled immigrants. Black immigration to the U.S. would later be expanded further with the [Refugee Act of 1980](#).

The 1980 act both created a definition for refugees and created a system for refugee admissions. This act also allowed for the refugee ceiling to be amended in emergency situations, such as the large influx of the refugee situation created by [the Vietnam War](#) in the late 1970s. The act also paved the way for refugees from countries such as the [Democratic Republic of the Congo](#), [Eritrea](#) and [Ethiopia](#) to come to the U.S. in more recent years. A decade later, the [Immigration Act of 1990](#) created the [Diversity Immigrant Visa Program](#) to encourage immigration from countries that did not send many people to the U.S. The Diversity Immigrant Visa program increased the number of immigrants from Sudan, Ethiopia and Kenya, among other countries.

Jamaica and Haiti remain top countries of origin for Black immigrants

Top birthplaces for Black immigrants in U.S., 2000 and 2019

	2000	2019
Jamaica	530,000	760,000
Haiti	410,000	700,000
Nigeria	130,000	390,000
Ethiopia	70,000	260,000
Dominican Republic	80,000	210,000
Ghana	70,000	190,000
Trinidad and Tobago	160,000	170,000
Kenya	30,000	130,000
Guyana	110,000	120,000
Somalia	40,000	

Note: Populations rounded to the nearest 10,000. "immigrants" refers to all people who self-identify as of single-race Black, multiracial Black and Black Hispanic and were born outside of the U.S. to non-U.S. citizens. Source: Pew Research Center analysis of 2000 decennial census (5% IPUMS) and 2019 American Community Survey. "One-in-Ten Black People Living in the U.S. Are Immigrants"

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The top 10 countries of origin accounted for 69% of the foreign-born Black population in 2000 and 66% in 2019. All of these countries are in Africa or the Caribbean.

Though there have been some shifts in the top countries of origin for Black immigrants to the U.S., Jamaica and Haiti have been the top two countries, respectively, in both 2000 and 2019. In 2000, those two Caribbean nations accounted for almost four-in-ten (39%) Black immigrants, but in 2019, their collective share had decreased to 31%, indicating a greater diversity of Black immigrants to the U.S. Nigeria and Ethiopia were the top birthplaces for Black African immigrants to the U.S. in 2019, with roughly 390,000 and 260,000 immigrants, respectively.

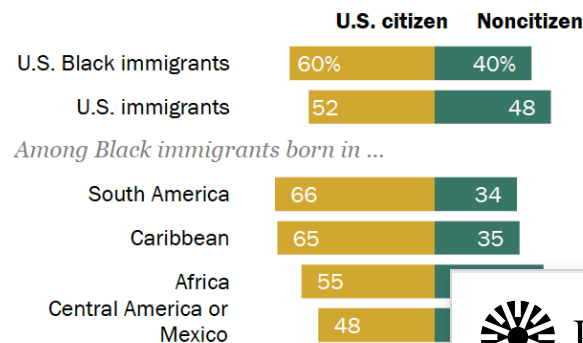
Some countries of origin have seen large increases since 2000. Kenya has seen the largest increase, with 348% growth, and there has been an almost 300% increase in the number of Ethiopian-born immigrants from 2000 to 2019. The Somali-born population in the U.S. has seen a 205% increase in the population of immigrants to the U.S., while the number of Black immigrants from Nigeria and Ghana have grown almost 200%. There have been similar increases in the number of Black immigrants from the Dominican Republic (144%). Jamaica and Haiti have seen more modest increases, with 42% and 68% increases respectively since 2000.

The legal status of Black immigrants

Black immigrants more likely than immigrants overall to be naturalized U.S. citizens

Black immigrants more likely than immigrants overall to be U.S. citizens

% of immigrants, 2019



Note: "U.S. Black immigrants" refers to all people who identify as Black, inclusive of single-race Black, multiracial Black, and Hispanic people and were born outside of the U.S. who are not U.S. citizens.

Source: Pew Research Center tabulations of the 2019 U.S. Community Survey (1% IPUMS).

*One-in-Ten Black People Living in the U.S. Are Immigrants

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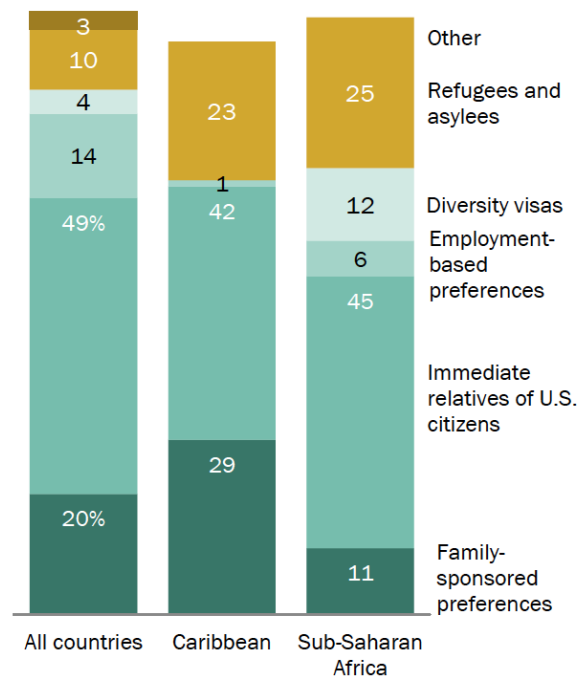
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The Black foreign-born population differs from the nation’s overall immigrant population on several measures, including the share that gained U.S. citizenship through naturalization. A majority of the Black foreign-born population are naturalized U.S. citizens, which is slightly higher than that of all U.S. immigrants (60% vs. 52%)¹. Citizenship rates differ among Black immigrants, with South American- and Caribbean - born immigrants having the highest rates (66% and 65%, respectively). Just over half of African-born Black immigrants hold citizenship (55%), while close to half (48%) of Central American or Mexican-born Black immigrants hold U.S. citizenship.

Admissions to the U.S.²

U.S. immigrants from Africa, Caribbean more than twice as likely as immigrants overall to have refugee status

% of legal immigrants by admission category, 2019



Note: Figures are for fiscal year 2019, which ended June 30, 2019. Caribbean countries include Guyana and Belize. Africa statistics include only sub-Saharan African countries. Data by racial category is not available. Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding.
 Source: U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Yearbook of Immigration Statistics, Table 10, 2019.
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In fiscal year 2019, roughly 144,000 immigrants from the sub-Saharan Africa were admitted to the U.S., but the work status adjusted varies by region. About one-quarter of sub-Saharan African legal immigrants in fiscal 2019 were admitted as refugees, compared to all immigrants. People from the Democratic Republic of



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group of African-born people who were admitted entry to the U.S. as refugees or asylees that fiscal year, accounting for 24% of sub-Saharan Africa’s refugees and asylees in the U.S. Cuba made up the largest group of refugees and asylees admitted to the U.S. from the Caribbean, accounting for 98% of all Caribbean-born immigrants admitted as refugees or asylees in fiscal year 2019.

There are also substantial differences in admissions through the [diversity visa program](#). While less than 5% of the fiscal 2019 foreign-born population in the U.S. was admitted through the program, this share is 12% among those from sub-Saharan Africa. The single largest source country among diversity visa admissions from Africa is the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Still, [family sponsorship](#) is the most common way for immigrants overall – including those from sub-Saharan Africa or the Caribbean – to enter the U.S. or to adjust their status. The Dominican Republic and Nigeria were the two largest sources of family-sponsored entry to the U.S. in fiscal year 2019.

The foreign-born Black population is less likely than U.S. immigrants overall to be in the country without authorization

Foreign-born Black people are less likely to be in the U.S. without authorization than other U.S. immigrants. There were 625,000 Black immigrants living in the U.S. without authorization in 2017, accounting for 14% of all Black immigrants, according to [Pew Research Center estimates](#). By comparison, 23% of the nation’s nearly 45 million immigrants are unauthorized.

Next: 2. Over half of Black immigrants arrived in U.S. after 2000

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1. To be [eligible](#) for U.S. citizenship, immigrants must be age 18 or older, have resided in the U.S. for at least five years as lawful permanent residents (or three years for those married to a U.S. citizen), and be in good standing with the law, among other requirements. The multistep process to obtain U.S. citizenship begins with submitting an application and paying a \$725 fee, including an \$85 biometric fee for the United States. Current processing times range from seven months to a year. For more information, see [Immigration processing times and rates among U.S. immigrants up since 2005, with India among the biggest](#).
 2. The data available on legal admissions to the U.S. identifies the immigrant by race. Not all immigrants from these countries would self-identify as Black.

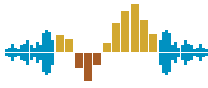


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Acknowledgments

Methodology

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