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Living A Parent's American Dream

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HIS3208ID: US Immigration History

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14 May 2023

Intro:

Ghanaian immigration to the United States tells a part of the unique story of African immigration. The number of migrants has always been low and it is difficult to learn the whole story. Because for Ghanaian migrants the story is a recent one. Prior to 1980 less than 10,000 Ghanaians lived in the U.S. and by 2013 the number rose to 235,000. Most of these migrants arrived after 2000 (Rockefeller). To better understand Ghanaian immigration this paper focuses on Lambert Aryee. Born in the capital city Accra, Lambert immigrated to the United States in 2008 as a tween. His perspective is shaped by his adolescent experience, but general American immigration themes are prevalent in his story (Sebastian).

Push:

The United States is the second most popular immigration destination for Ghanaians because it offers abundant opportunities that Ghana lacks (Rockefeller). The Borgen Project, a 501 (c) (3) organization based in the U.S., outlines what life looks like in Ghana. Sixty-eight percent of the population lives in rural villages and many people rely on farming for their basic food needs. These areas lack water and electricity infrastructure and only thirty-five percent of the villagers have access to clean drinking water. Education options are limited and scarcely available. After completing household tasks, like dragging clay pots of water from the well, children begin their long walk to schools with sparse curriculums. This lack of education is highlighted by the country's two-thirds literacy rate. Cultural ties and allegiance keep people in their villages despite the relatively better economic, education, and lifestyle advantages available in the cities (Ngowera). When Lambert left Ghana he did so to join his father and step-mother in Baltimore, MD. Lambert's father migrated from Ghana to London, England in 1996 to join some uncles who were already living there. Lambert was just a few months old. A while later his father moved to the Bronx, NY where he met and

married Lambert's step mother. In anticipation of the two boys moving to the USA the couple moved to Baltimore, MD. The years Lambert lived in Ghana without his father he continuously anticipated his future move to the USA . This desire made the move exciting despite having to leave other family, friends, and familiarity behind (Sebastian).

Pull:

In comparison to the cities in Ghana, the United States offers dramatic improvements on these three pulls of Ghanaian immigration: Economic, Education, Lifestyle. Easy access to food security, clean drinking water, education for children, and jobs bring Ghanains to America. Statistically, second generation migrants¹ perform academically on-par with the general American population. Eighteen percent of Ghanains obtain a bachelor degree [general U.S. - Twenty percent] and twelve percent a masters degree [general U.S. - Eleven percent]. Interestingly, this education parallel does not translate into income. The median annual household income for Ghanains is \$44k while the general U.S. median is set \$6k higher at \$50k. This difference is not reflective of a lack of labor. It persists despite their youth working at a higher rate than the general U.S. population [16yrs+ Ghanains - Seventy-six percent U.S. - Sixty-four percent]. The key difference lies in the jobs each group is likely to hold. Only twenty-two percent of Ghanains hold managerial or specialty jobs [ie: law, engineering] while thirty-one percent of the general U.S. labor force does (Rockefeller). These similarities and differences aside, the economic, education, lifestyle opportunities in the U.S. are far more accessible and rewarding than those offered in Ghana. For Lambert's father and step-mother, Baltimore was particularly appealing. Both are teachers and believed Maryland was a good state to pursue education careers [economic]. Plus, the cost of housing was much lower than New York City and there was more room to raise the growing boys

¹ Children born in America to at least one parent born in Ghana.

[lifestyle]. Lambert furthered his education at the local University of Maryland [education] (Sebastian).

Means:

Lambert's immigration was arranged and paid for by his father. As soon as the visas were ready, Lambert moved to the U.S. He does not specify which visas his father prepared (Sebastian). The exact process he would have gone through depends on his immigration status [green card versus citizen]. Regardless, he would have to submit a Petition for an Alien Relative which would have granted Lambert a green card (USCIS). This petition was presumably easy because Lambert was a minor and a biological child of a legal U.S. resident.

Larger historical context:

The Immigration Act of 1990 helped set the historical precedence that led to the increase of Ghanaian immigrants in the early 21st century. The law created a lottery system for applicants from countries with low immigration rates. Many individuals from Africa capitalized on this new opportunity. Forty percent of the diversity visas were granted to African immigrants. These visas are particularly attractive to people who do not have the credentials required for other visas [family, employment]. It is possible that Lambert's father originally came to the U.S. on a diversity visa (Immigration History).

The political climate in 2008 America was intense. A presidential debate with polarizing figures on both sides was playing out. Immigration was a key issue at the beginning of the race but its relevance fizzled out to make space for other voter priorities. When President Obama won the race it was obvious immigration was something he would have to reckon with (Leonhardt). At the time of his migration Lambert's family did not know how this new president would affect immigration.

Conclusion:

It is easy to impose individual values and goals on strangers. But however much these values vary across all of the diverse American communities, it pales in comparison to the differences abroad. When migrants make the decision to leave their home country and come to the United States they bring their own values and goals with them. This is the basis upon which they rebuild their lives and determine success. To suggest that Ghanains are not successful in the U.S. because they do not achieve American-successful economic standards is ludicrous. Every immigrant who chooses to remain in the U.S. sees something here that keeps them. Lambert did not choose to move to the U.S. and his version of the American dream is influenced by his father's perspective, but it is clear from his interview that the dream is now his and he is excited to pursue it, beginning with earning his bachelor's degree.

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