

## Chapter 51

# The Threat of Downward Assimilation Among Young African Immigrants in U.S. Schools

**Immaculee Harushimana**

*Lehman College (CUNY), USA*

**Janet Awokoya**

*California Lutheran University, USA*

### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter presents research implications geared toward preventing the downward assimilation trend prevailing among young African immigrants in US public schools. Secondary data from three qualitative studies of integration and adaptation processes of African-born immigrant youth in urban school settings helped identify signs of downward assimilation, especially among males. Salient signs of this trend include low academic achievement, gang inclination, and defiance towards authority. Four major theories—segmented assimilation, socio-ecological theory, intersectionality, and critical race theory—served as framework for the analysis of the risk factors that may lead young African immigrants to follow the downward assimilation path. The analysis reveals the need for intervention measures at the federal, state, and school levels to reduce the vulnerability of non-predominant minority youth in US school settings and the moral responsibility of school authorities to ensure their welfare. Recommended preventive measures include (1) educating immigrant families and school communities; (2) encouraging collaboration and dialogue between African community organizations, school administration, and policymakers purported at creating a favorable school climate for the marginalized African immigrant youth; (3) increasing intervention measures, such as school-community mediation and political representation.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

*The price of immigration is too damn high!*

*Families in desperation opt to leave behind*

*Loved ones, secure jobs, and their dignity*

*In pursuit of an American dream out of reach.* (Immaculee Harushimana)

Despite the Trump administration's nationalist agenda and anti-immigration stance, the prediction by demographers (Kotkin, 2010) and immigration studies scholars (Massey, 2008) that by 2050 the United States of America may become a "majority-minority" country requires deep thought and the development of sound, practical policies. A shift from the US being a predominately White nation to being one where ethnic minorities will become the numerical majority implies a major shift in the nation's politics, economy, and reputation. Racially, the US population has become markedly diverse as a result of the post-1965 new immigration wave (Massey, 1995). Though not mentioned in Massey's discussion of the post-1965 new immigration demographics, it is important to highlight the significant surge in African migration noted in the 1980's (Gordon, 1998; Takougang, 2003). A special feature of the new immigration population is that the majority of them come from non-western nations and consist predominantly of poor, economic and political refugees, some with little or limited education and finances (Dodoo, 1997; Gordon & Gordon, 1992; Noguera, 2004). If the descendants of this new wave of immigrants are expected to become US leaders of tomorrow, as demographer predictions indicate, it is critical that research should begin to focus on how adequately or inadequately this new generation is being nurtured and supported to assume leadership roles of this great nation. Critical reviews of the school adaptation processes of "new immigrant" youths, unfortunately, do not project a positive picture (Awokoya & Harushimana, 2013; Harushimana, 2013; Lukes, 2015; Mthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015; Portes & Rumbaut, 2001). The conditions under which these children learn, especially those attending public urban schools, are infelicitous. Some are either bullied (Mthethwa-Sommers, 2015; Harushimana, 2013) or underserved and overlooked (Agyepong, 2013; Ruiz-de-Velasco & Fix, 2000); others are either "shut out" or "pushed out" (Lukes, 2015). As the US population becomes more and more diverse, and cultural globalization (Held & McGrew, 1999) spreads around the world, the odds that contemporary immigrants can follow the straight-line model of assimilation, also known as vertical or classical assimilation, are considerably low. This unforeseen trend needs to be acknowledged and prevented.

Educational anthropologists (Fordham, 1985; Ogbu, 2008) have contended that "American minorities" develop an oppositional culture that directly challenges White, mainstream society's notions of success, particularly academic success. Due to living in poor, disenfranchised communities, alienation from parents, peers, and school, and low prospects of job and career opportunities, the threat of downward assimilation, or the prediction of downward mobility into a rainbow underclass (Portes & Rumbaut, 2001; Portes & Zhou, 1993), has been noted among late arrival African immigrant youth. Three research studies focusing on 1.5 African-born immigrants (i.e., children who either immigrated with or joined their parents at the secondary school level), and second generation or US-born children born to African immigrant parents, call attention to the dangers of generalizing what some researchers, such as Williams (2007), have identified as favorable factors for positive assimilation, including age at arrival, family cohesion, religious observance, and establishment of ethnic businesses on all African-born immigrant youth, regardless of their conditions of immigration and settlement. This paper centers research findings related to the downward assimilation of African-born (Sub-Saharan) refugee and immigrant youth, as

22 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:  
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-threat-of-downward-assimilation-among-young-african-immigrants-in-us-schools/296986](http://www.igi-global.com/chapter/the-threat-of-downward-assimilation-among-young-african-immigrants-in-us-schools/296986)

## Related Content

---

### **Movement Control Order (MCO) - A Viable Legal Mechanism in the Management of COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia?**

Suzana Muhamad Said, Aini Aman, Mohd Rohaizat Hassanand Omkar Dastane (2022). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-15).

[www.irma-international.org/article/movement-control-order-mco---a-viable-legal-mechanism-in-the-management-of-covid-19-pandemic-in-malaysia/315650](http://www.irma-international.org/article/movement-control-order-mco---a-viable-legal-mechanism-in-the-management-of-covid-19-pandemic-in-malaysia/315650)

### **Habermas and the New Populisms**

Henrik P. Bang (2020). *Political Identity and Democratic Citizenship in Turbulent Times* (pp. 54-88).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/habermas-and-the-new-populisms/257973](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/habermas-and-the-new-populisms/257973)

### **Bilateral Trade Between China and Other Countries: Role of "One Belt, One Road"**

Liwen Ma, Ali Mohsinand Haseeb Muhammad (2022). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-15).

[www.irma-international.org/article/bilateral-trade-between-china-and-other-countries/303675](http://www.irma-international.org/article/bilateral-trade-between-china-and-other-countries/303675)

### **Political Tradition and Compatibility of Universal Codes: Digital Dictatorship and Virtual Democracy**

(2021). *Universal Codes of Media in International Political Communications: Emerging Research and Opportunities* (pp. 121-137).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/political-tradition-and-compatibility-of-universal-codes/267802](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/political-tradition-and-compatibility-of-universal-codes/267802)

### **E-Government Initiatives Through Cloud Computing: Empowering Citizens**

Muhammad Anshariand Mohammad Nabil Almunawar (2019). *Civic Engagement and Politics: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 256-275).

[www.irma-international.org/chapter/e-government-initiatives-through-cloud-computing/220211](http://www.irma-international.org/chapter/e-government-initiatives-through-cloud-computing/220211)