In A Foreign Land: Stories Of African Immigrants And Their Children In Jackson, Ms

Renee N. Ombaba
University of Mississippi

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IN A FOREIGN LAND: STORIES OF AFRICAN IMMIGRANTS AND THEIR CHILDREN
IN JACKSON, MS

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Masters of Arts; Southern Studies
The University of Mississippi
April 2014
ABSTRACT

My research focuses on the characteristics of African community in Jackson, MS and the factors that contribute to the development and continued existence of African community in the U.S. South. I specifically look at African community as a subregion of the South and draw conclusions about African community and its connections to the larger Southern region of the United States. African community in Jackson, MS develops through the shared experiences of African immigrants who now share the geographical space of the Jackson metropolitan area. This research will show how African members identify their communities and how their children identify and negotiate these identities in accordance to national, regional and racial identity in America and Africa. This paper examines the various ways members of the African community in Jackson, MS negotiate and maintain a distinct African identity amidst vast social pressures to assimilate into both American society and African-American culture. I pay particular attention to the intersections of gender and age. Although some might consider these practices gendered, such as developing community, carrying culture, and passing on a legacy to their children, I argue that they are acts of courage and resistance, which enable the survival of the African community.
DEDICATION

I dedicate this work to my mother Mwendaendi Lewanika and grandmother Namaya Lewanika.

Your stories inspire me to be a woman of courage, strength, and virtue.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor Dr. Barbara Combs. Thank you for your motivation and encouragement. I would like to thank Dr. Kathryn McKee and Dr. Charles Reagan Wilson for serving on my committee and offering the courses that would be the framework for this study. I would like to thank Dr. Jennifer Stollman for guiding me in the right direction.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

As scholars examine the southern region of the United States, they seldom consider African immigrants to the United States and their children as contributors to the diverse fabric of Southern culture. One text that explores the diverse fabric of the U.S. South is Celeste Ray’s text on Southern communities. In Celeste Ray’s book *Southern Heritage on Display: Public Ritual and Ethnic Diversity within Southern Regionalism*, Ray examines the cultural diversity of ritual and performance in the U.S. South. Although Ray looks at a variety of cultures displayed in the South, she overlooks African community and its place in Southern culture. In the text, Ray brings to the light cultural communities who have historical connections to the South including Mardi Gras Indians in New Orleans, the Melungeon heritage movement of Appalachia, and Mexican community in Florida. This thesis shows how African community develops in Jackson, MS and the factors that contribute to the development and continued existence of the African community. “African presence enriches the cultural fabric of American society;”¹ therefore, African community’s unique tie to the U.S. South makes this an important study. African immigrants represented 3.9%² of the foreign-born population in the United States with the largest spike in African immigration happening after 1990: a 75% increase. Table 1 shows the growth of African community in the United States from 1960 to 2007.

Table 1. Growth in African Born Population in the United States

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Foreign</th>
<th>Percentage of Foreign Born</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<tr>
<td>1960</td>
<td>9,738,091</td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>35,355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>9,619,302</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>80,143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>14,079,906</td>
<td>1.4%</td>
<td>199,723</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>19,797,316</td>
<td>1.8%</td>
<td>363,819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>31,107,889</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>881,300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>38,059,555</td>
<td>3.7%</td>
<td>1,419,317</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://www.migrationinformation.org/usfocus/display.cfm?ID=719#6

This table shows the rapid growth of African community between 1990 and 2007. It shows the trend of Africans moving to the United States during the 1990s because of political unrest in African countries and educational opportunities in the United States. Although the community increased by number, ironically, the African community continues to be ignored as contributors to the diversity of Southern culture. There are, perhaps, several reasons for this. First, the most prevalent destinations for African immigrants are states with large metropolitan areas such as New York, California, Texas, Florida, and Illinois.\(^3\) Second, the U.S. South has

historically been perceived as having a binary racial structure with blacks and white. In this structure, all Blacks (even foreign-born immigrants) often are coded as Black or White- not African. These new immigration patterns challenge this notion. The largest and fastest growing population of African immigrants live in the South settling in the Southeastern states of Georgia, Virginia, and North Carolina. In table 2, this map show the metropolitan cities African immigrants settle in the United States.

Table 2. Share of Africans in Metropolitan Areas (Census 2000)

Source: http://www.migrationinformation.org/USFocus/display.cfm?ID=147

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4 Ibid.
According to the 2000 Census, four of the ten metropolitan cities with the largest African community are of the Southern region making it the largest region represented in the data. Despite the rapidly growing presence of African immigrants and African community in the U.S. South, scholars of the U.S. South and of immigrant studies rarely recognize the place and development of African community in this region. Because African community remains an underrepresented cultural community, scholars rarely study the lives of Africans independently of African-American culture. However, African community exists as a separate community and develops as a cultural entity of the U.S. South. This community meets the needs of African immigrants and their children while re-defining African culture and tradition in the South.

In my research, I examine the characteristics of African community of Jackson, MS and the factors that contribute to the development and continued existence of African community in the U.S. South. I specifically look at African community as a subregion of the South and draw larger conclusions about African community and its connections to the Southern region of the United States. African community in Jackson, MS develops through the shared experiences of African immigrants who now share the geographical space in the Jackson metropolitan area. In this community, Africans practice a culture that they hope to pass on as a legacy to their children who may also be first and/or second generation Africans. Although African community in Jackson, MS does not represent a homogenous group, the international group of African immigrants and their children continues to exist in the South and represents a community that

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contributes to the fabric of the Global South. In addition, the “closed society” of the South and Southern Americans’ view of Africa and its people cause Africans to develop a separate community to express their cultural values and practices outside of the restrictions of negative stereotypes and the Mississippi closed society.

Much of the history of the American South revolves around the interaction and conflict between African-Americans and White Americans. As Americans began to acknowledge globalization as a part of post-modern society, people who emigrate to the U.S. South from different countries are forced to find their place within the Southern racial binary. This misleading racial binary worked as an illusion of social order because the U.S. South long contained more than just Black or White Americans. In addition, the labels Black and White American fail to account for the diverse racial identities within each group. For African immigrants and their children, fitting into the racial binary of South makes expressing African cultures and traditional practices difficult in the South but even the more necessary. Unlike other immigrant groups, the racial identity assigned to African immigrants prohibits fluidity in cultural identity and heritage in American society. As a means for survival, African immigrants develop community to share similar cultural values and practices and to pass on a legacy of their African heritages to their children living in the U.S. South.

I research the community of African immigrants and their children in the greater Jackson, MS area. With a 79.4% Black population in Jackson, naturally studying African community

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7 In this research, I use the term global south to mean a globally diverse Southern United States.
9 I use African-American or Black American to represent generations of Africans beyond the fourth generation. White Americans are used to define Americans of European decent.
10 The greater Jackson area represents the cities surrounding the capital city including Clinton, Madison, Pearl, Brandon, and Byram. This definition varies but for the purposes of this research, I define it as such.
in this area becomes important to discuss a nuanced look at Blackness in the U.S. South. As a
globalizing city, Jackson provides a space for African immigrants to connect outside of their
American lifestyles and gives their children an opportunity to share their experiences growing up
African in the U.S. South. Previous immigrant practices, which relied on quotas restricted non-
European immigration.  

Before Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965, a quota and literacy test determined the number of immigrants from a particular country could enter United States.  

With the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, more Africans were able to enter the United States allowing the population of African immigrants to grow tremendously.  

Push and pull factors rule migration, and much like other immigrant communities, African immigrants push and pull to the United States. The modern Civil Rights Movement played a significant role in the growth of African immigration to the United States. In remarks made by Representative Philip Burton, "Just as we sought to eliminate discrimination in our land through the Civil Rights Act, today we seek by phasing out the national origins quota system to eliminate discrimination in immigration to this nation composed of the descendants of immigrants."  

The Voting Rights Act of 1965 helped change immigration laws and allowed more Africans to enter the United States, a pull factor. In addition, during the 1960s, some African nations gain independence from imperialistic power. This frames the Black freedom struggle in

America as a global struggle. Although these independent nations have newfound freedom, political unrest becomes an issue in many of these countries, a push factor.\textsuperscript{17} In addition, some African nations develop relationship with the United States and create government programs for the education of Africans in the United States. Although most research on the immigration change in 1965 focuses on other ethnicities, African immigration marked a significant change in Blackness in America. My research examines how African immigration experiences in the U.S. South shapes the African community in Jackson, MS and the lives of second generation Africans growing up in the city. This research shows how African members identify their communities and how their children identify and negotiate their own identities in accordance to national, regional and racial identity in America and Africa. This paper examines the various ways members of the African community in Jackson, MS, negotiate and maintain a distinct African identity amidst vast social pressures to assimilate into both American society and African-American culture. I pay particular attention to the intersections of gender and age. Although some might consider these practices gendered yet, they enable the survival of the African community.

Defining Myself

As the daughter of Zambian and Kenyan immigrants, I understand the hardships of growing up African in America. I grew up hearing stories from family and friends of displacement and exclusion from American society and African-American culture. The African community finds conflict with both White and African-American culture because of a shared space. As it relates to African-American culture, most Americans assume that Africans and African-Americans share a culture. As a member of what I call the African community, I have

\textsuperscript{17} Terrazas, "African Immigrants in the United States."
access to other members and a respect for their cultures and heritages. I move throughout the community and look at what the South means in developing this community.

With a last name like Ombaba, I was always an outsider before my classmates knew my story. Justly, I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts. I have only lived in Mississippi since I was three years old, but my family heritage places me outside the realm of Southern-ness as a child. By the time I was in kindergarten, I had the “Why I’m Different” Speech memorized: “My mom is from Zambia, and my dad is from Kenya.” Difference was a present part of my reality, and because of my name, I could never escape it. Other cultural differences set me apart from my classmates such as parent-child relationship, food, and special occasion attire.

My first semester in the Southern Studies program, a globalization positioned the idea of a global South and what that means for a place like Mississippi. As member of the global South, I realized that the experiences of Africans were not studied in any of the literature and wanted to explore how globalization related to developing African community. Thus, I examined my own experiences Mississippi as a part of a global South. Growing up in a strong African community in the South, I experienced firsthand the struggle of Africans in the South and heard stories about the importance of having community. I wanted to know more about the experience of Africans in the South.

Finding African Community in Jackson, MS

Mississippi’s closed society forces Africans to develop their own community as a tool of survival. Because of Mississippi’s closed society, Africans use community to preserve their cultural values that they are discouraged to display in American society. The shared experiences of Africans in Mississippi’s closed society pushed Africans in a space where they create a new
home in a foreign land. These Africans negotiate their identity and maintain their sense of African pride. Southern Americans often ignore African identity as a contributor to the fabric of Southern culture and diversity. As members of the Southern community, Africans have been forced under the umbrella of foreign and “Black” without regard to their particular cultures and heritages. Even in cases where Africans display their cultures and heritage through food or dress, Africans learn to feel shame in those identities and display their culture in hidden places and spaces. For Africans in the United States, their identities fall under Erving Goffman’s idea of a stigmatized identity. Africans work to find ways to respond to individuals who stigmatize through because of African and racial tribal identity. In the Southern region of the United States, Southern values share culture and often leave out groups of people who do fit into their constructed history. Through public memory, Southerners develop a history that labels and excludes any new members. In this space, Africans are more like to develop a transnational community as a means of survival. This allows African immigrants to carry their traditions, create a legacy through their children, and have ownership of their representation in American society. Unfortunately, without this research on African community in the U.S. South, African community will not be fully understood and appreciated in American cultural history.

In addition to the closed society, the South’s racial binary rules the meaning of Blackness or “other than Whiteness” in the South forcing Africans outside of both American and immigrant communities. A tradition of segregation in the South strived on the creation of a racial binary, which separated Black and White Southerners through constructed cultural, biological, and

social beliefs. In the modern South, the idea of Blackness is still limited, making it difficult for Africans to define themselves as their own community outside this constructed racial identity. Africans’ representations of Blackness in the United States are widely overlooked making this research on African community necessary. In addition, the section on the closed society focuses on how African community represents a marginalized group of people who adopt the values of performance and public memory as a means of preservation in the U.S. South. Through exclusion from the closed society of Mississippi, Africans develop community and contribute to the characteristics that foster African community.

Defining Community

African community develops in the U.S. South as do other communities in the United States. Researchers define community in a way that applies to the process Africans undergo to develop community in Jackson. Defining community for this research allows us to thoroughly examine the ways in which community development influences the survival of the African community. Many researchers define community as an idea or experience. In Community and Social Change in America, Thomas Bender describes community as “a fusion of feeling, thought of traditions, and commitment of membership.” Place does not define community but community evolves as a product of a sense of obligation to a shared understanding of a social space. African community evolves through these understandings and a sense of an old home in the new home. Furthermore, Scott Romine describes community as a social group linked by common understandings of reality in The Narrative Forms of Southern Community; community develops through common experience, which we see in the African community. Members of the

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African community connect through shared migration experiences and the necessity for African space in the U.S. South. In these communities, Africans develop personal and collective identities that represent the “panoply of African cultures.”

Douglas Powell examines region through the lens of thought. Powell does acknowledge the role of geography in region; however, he notes that “the construction of region” is a “rhetoric that connects specific local sites to a variety of other kinds of place and constructs various scales and motives.” For this research, community is defined as a space connected by shared beliefs, ideals, and for African community, ethnic heritage. Through a shared rhetoric of immigration and acculturation, Africans develop community in Jackson, MS.

As these authors agree, people develop community through common rhetoric and ideas. Specifically in the U.S. South, Africans develop community through the shared geography but mostly through their shared ideas- the idea of finding a new home in a new country and finding a space to express their cultural heritages. Community is important especially for this research because Africans in Jackson connect outside of American society and African-American culture. For them, this community represents a connection to home, and the community continues to exist through performance and public memory. Isabel Wilkerson notes the idea of freedom in mobility from Great Migrates in her book The Warmth of Other Suns. Specifically to the U.S. South, Africans create community as a tool of survival. In the closed society of Mississippi, Africans develop community in response to the various communities of the South.

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Through African immigrants’ shared migration experiences, African immigrants develop community. African community consists for Africans from various countries who migrate to the United States and create support systems through formal and informal meetings. These communities include religious organizations, college organizations, social events, or political organizations, which work as a liaison between the country of origin and immigrants living in the United States. They further characterize the community with shared cultural values and practices. Through the rhetoric of shared migration experience, Africans describe alienation from American society and a desire for home. Through their shared migration experience, Africans help each other cope with their lives in a foreign land amidst the pressures of assimilation. In his text *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States*, John A. Arthur notes that the United States is a place defined by cultural diversity, and through acculturation, we are able to understand the cultural adjustment that Africans undergo in the United States.

Furthermore, the African community in the U.S. South serves as a space where the local meets the global, and Africans often negotiate their ties to an American and African heritage. Yi-Fu Tuan defines space as an undifferentiated idea of freedom, openness, and mobility. However, place is definite object providing stability. In Thomas Gieryn’s article “A Space for Place in Sociology,” Gieryn defines “place is space filled up by people, practices, objects, and representations; an agentic player in the game—a force with detectable and independent effects on social life. Africans develop the space of African community as a means to reconstruct and imagine their identities in the U.S. South. As the community develops and grows, Africans

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23 These experiences include a remembrance and love of homeland, religious beliefs, oppression in the United States, etc.


define the place through markers of identity such as foods and dress and performance in Jackson, MS.

In the U.S. South, one of the most interesting points in the existence of African community is how Americans (Both Black and White Americans) view Africa. Americans’ understanding of Africa directly affects their understandings of African people. An emphasis on African problems continues to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Africa and its people further pushing Africans to develop community that serves as a space for the realities of Africa rather than the stereotypes. Most Americans learn about Africa through television, literature, and print culture, which often present inaccuracies about the continent and its people. As a result, Americans transfer negative language and depictions about Africa from television, literature, and print culture into African immigrants and their children in the United States. African community exists as a tool to display the varieties of African experiences, cultures, and heritages outside of the negative portrayal from media. The ways some Americans imagine Africa plays an important role in how African community exists and the characteristics and practices that Africans perform as a part of African community in the U.S. South.

African Community and Southern Identity

These African researchers offer an understanding of African community created through alienation. This is important because it complicates and explores an uncovered aspect of race relations in the U.S. South. In the U.S. South, Africans suffer from alienation at the hands of African-Americans and White Americans. Around the United States, Africans are alienated from American society; therefore, they develop a community to meet their social, political, and emotional needs in a foreign land. My contribution to this research stems from the uniqueness of
the U.S. South. Southern cultures and heritage function around a personal and collective memory and a highly contested history. Through festivals, rituals of place, and calls for environmental and cultural preservation, the South fights against what David Harvey calls “time-space compression.” These memories seek to recreate an imagined past South and more often than not always leave out those not a part of the hegemonic structure. Race and immigration status eliminates Africans from this structure.

Ironically, because the South values performance and public memory, Africans use these Southern practices to develop African community. Sharing these cultural values of performance and public memory connects African community to the U.S. South more than any other region of the United States. Both Africans and Southerners share a respect for land, a respect for heritage or family, and a sense of community through public memory. Despite this potential for bond between the Southern community and African community, space between the communities keeps individuals in either community from making these connections. Through these memories both collective and personal, African immigrants and their children are able to shape identities. African comprehension of these identities and memories helps them to navigate their Southern social life and negotiate the conflict and cultural ties.

Another characteristic of African community in the U.S. South is the connection between African and African-American because of a shared race. Some Africans see the United States as a promised land, but quickly learn how race plays into their acceptance in the United States. In this state, race is a determining factor in the way Africans understand their place in America. Furthermore, Africans and African-Americans meet in a space because of a shared race in

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Jackson, MS. In this community, Africans and African-Americans develop tensions because of difference in culture, yet find commonality in a shared story of place in the African Diaspora. This project also takes a more nuanced look at Blackness in the U.S. South and how specifically second generation Africans understand their identities as Black in America. These identities of race and space contribute to the existence of African community and help to define African community. It is in African-American spaces that Africans develop African community although the two community and cultures are separate.

One of the ideas widely held by Americans about African men is that they are domineering. However, the development of African community intersects with gender and age. I pay close attention the ways in which gender intersects with the development and continued existence of African community. Often women in stories of the region and dependents on men for mobility and livelihood. Often women in stories of region fulfill domestic duties as wives, mothers, and house cleaners or cooks and are positioned in the view of men. Although the stories of women by researchers are limited because of historical sources and these duties are important to the maintenance of the African community, researchers have an obligation to take a more nuanced look at how women are not only sustainers of African community but also contributors and developers of region. In the film Sherman’s March by Ross McElwee, McElwee uses the stories of Southern women in his family to tell about the culture and history of metropolitan Atlanta. He concludes that women carry culture in the South. Much like the women in his film, African women serve as cultivators of the community and help maintain the ideology of African community through markers of identity that display African heritage. In the United States, African women have more opportunity to take leadership roles in the community. Although gender relations are changing in many African countries specifically with the election of the first

female president in an African country, Liberia's President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, gender relationships in the United States take a new meaning for African women. In addition, women in African community in the United States nurture and transform the space created for Africans by challenging the traditional roles assigned to women in patriarchal systems. African women living in the U.S. South hold a valuable place in the community and adapt to the constantly changing social needs of the community. African women address social needs such as health awareness in the United States and programming for African community. Women function in the community in ways that men cannot. These functions allow women opportunities to take a critical look at the African community and make connections to African heritage and the future of their community. Even through systems of oppression, women find ways to reclaim their existence and roles for personal and collective expression and creation forging their own bond within Africa community.

Tensions between African Community and American Cultures

African community finds itself alienated from American society because of the tensions between both White and Black American cultures. According to the Migration Information Policy database, African immigrants are less likely to live in areas where there is a high concentration of African-Americans. The data shows that areas where African-Americans are a majority or a high number of the population, there are fewer Africans. Many circumstances contribute to this information. In the same ways that Americans, both White and African-Americans, learn about Africa through the negative stereotypes portrayed in media, Africans learn the myths and stereotypes of African-Americans. In an interview with African students at

30 Terrazas, "African Immigrants in the United States."
the Piney Woods Country Life School, CNN’s *Black in America* discovered that African students learned about African-Americans through the news and television, which deterred them from initially forming relationships with African-Americans at the school. Africans learn myths and stereotypes about African-Americans, which causes them to find places outside of African-American community to live. In addition to the tensions in media, Africans and African-Americans find tension in the display of African heritages and cultures. For some African-Americans, Africans represents a past that has not been reconciled. Africans represents a primitive self; destroyed by slavery and reconstructed through years of freedom from enslavement. In these cases, African-Americans often want to move past relationships with Africans. They may feel a sense of betrayal when they as African-Americans identify with Africans. In other cases, Africans find it difficult to form relationships with African-Americans because of the differences in the definition of African heritage and culture. These tensions can be resolved through meaningful dialogue about African community and further research on the relationships between Africans and African-Americans in the United States.

For African immigrants moving to the United States, the ideal of an American dream is closely tied to a White American identity or lifestyle. For the purposes of this research, many members of African community are middle and upper class individuals and finding a home in a lower income bracket in the U.S. South often means finding a home in a predominately African-American community. As result, many African immigrants move to White suburban towns or neighborhoods; communities where they feel their children can earn the best education and places where they feel they can move up in society. Some Africans enter the United States with the idea of being more culturally aligned with White Americans; however, this turns out not to be true. In these White Southern communities, Africans find it hard to adjust to American
society. They feel pressure from their neighbors to assimilate into Americans society. In the research, we discuss how Africans find it difficult to find community with White Americans.

Tensions in the African Community

Because African community represents a heterogeneous group of Africans, tensions arise in the community around leadership and development of African community. Because of global patriarchal systems, Africans men and women have tensions in the community. Women fight against traditional gender roles while some men try to hold onto these dominant roles. Furthermore, there are national tensions in the community. One of the largest countries represented in African community is Nigeria. Because many communities include a majority Nigerian population, Nigerians take over what it means to display African heritage, whether is it through language, food, or cultural practices. This creates tensions for Africans who are not Nigerians. They often struggle to represent their home in a space that uses Nigeria as a base for what it means to be African in the United States. The struggle between Nigerian cultures and other nationalities stem from the false belief that Africans are the same regardless of country. Even though African community creates a collective African identity, Africans who are not from Nigeria find it difficult to merge their cultures into this collective African identity.

In addition to national tensions, there are class tensions in the community. Specifically for groups like African Christian Fellowship, the group values those of a higher social class or those who are formally educated in institutes of higher learning specifically none- historically Black institutions. With these class tensions, many Africans in leadership positions are of a middle or high social class. These positions have a greater influence on the community. However, these conditions make it harder for those of a lower income to find place in these
African communities. Some of these Africans may continue to participate in African community and some find their own community among friends or Africans with similar socio-economic status.

Examining the various ways Africans negotiate and maintain African community amidst pressures by both African-Americans and White Americans takes a new turn in this research because it examines how African community functions specifically in the U.S. South. African and Southerners value memory and performance and use these values to develop their identities. Although African immigrants come to the United States with their own cultural identities, they negotiate their identities in the South through memory and performance and as a result develop community. The African immigrant community does not represent a homogenous group because Africans emigrate from several different countries and even within those national identities, there are representations of different ethnic and regional identities. However, many focus on their common African heritage. This enables them to “create community.” Some organizations like the African Christian Fellowship, U.S.A. (ACFUSA) focus on similarities, such as a love for Christ or a desire for home, as a way to unite the African community. In addition, college and university students develop African community to meet the social, political, and educational needs of African students. In these settings, African community functions as a way to unite Africans despite difference in a place far from home.

African community develops as a means to preserve a sense of African heritage in Jackson, MS. In a foreign land, Africans need to remain connected to a home they love. In American society, they do not find the ability to express their ethnic selves and develop meaningful relationship with Americans. The community works to navigate their cultures and
heritages through performance and public memory. My research contributes to the research on African community because it examines African community specifically in the U.S. South, a region with a fast growing population of African immigrants. In addition, the research sheds light on African community in the United States and how African immigrants and their children negotiate their identities and cultures in Jackson, MS. It nuances the homogeneity of Black in the U.S. South. In addition, this research focuses on how women help develop and continue community in the South. A part of other texts on African community, this research places women as the forefront of the development of African community in Jackson, MS. My research examines and analyzes the stories of African immigrants to give voices to the silenced African community. These stories prove how Africans negotiate in Jackson, MS and work within their community to express their distinct African identity despite the pressure to assimilate into an American society and African-American culture. It uses the oral histories of the people to draw conclusions about the community, its past and hopes for its future.

31 Terrazas.
CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As we examine the development of African community and how Africans negotiate and maintain their identities in the U.S. South, we look to literature that speaks to the closed society of Mississippi, Black immigration, Americans’ perceptions of Africa, and various themes of the process of immigrant acculturation. This chapter examine how existing research on these various themes help us understand African community, its place in Jackson, MS, and the evolving identities of Africans.

New Studies on Black Immigration

One of the noted texts on African immigration in the United States is John A. Arthur’s *Invisible Sojourners: African Immigrant Diaspora in the United States*. This text seeks to coax out the forms, patterns, and meanings associated with the migration transfer of Africa’s human capital to the country.” He uses a sociological perspective to examine immigration of Africans to the United States. Through surveys and interviews with about 650 African immigrants living in Atlanta, GA, Washington D.C., Charlotte, NC, and Minneapolis, MN, Arthur examines the “pull” factors of African immigration and the political and social structures that African immigrants develop in the United States. Arthur provides a quantitative and qualitative analyses of the information drawing conclusions about African immigration for places outside of the four cities.
Arthur describes the migration of Africans to the United States as a voluntary trans-Atlantic migration, which increased dramatically after African nations began to gain their independences shortly after World War II.\(^\text{32}\) Throughout his text, he explains how Africans acculturate rather than assimilate. He suggest that instead of fully integrating with mainstream American culture, African immigrants adopt aspects of American culture while trying to maintain the cultural values they bring from their homes. He notes that the United States is a place defined by cultural diversity, and through acculturation, we are able to understand the culture adjustment that Africans undergo in the United States.\(^\text{33}\)

In *The Other African-Americans: Contemporary African and Caribbean Immigrants* edited by Yoku Shaw-Taylor, Steven A. Tuch looks beyond Blackness to see ethnic and intra-racial disparities in the United States. The text largely disputes Ira Reid’s claim that the “Negro group” is not a distinctly ethnic group.\(^\text{34}\) Much like Arthur’s text, Shaw-Taylor and Tuch note that the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 transformed Black immigration\(^\text{35}\), which resulted in the increase in intra-racial relations in the United States. Unlike Arthur, the authors of these essays explore theories of immigration as it relates to Black immigration and immigrant communities and complicate the discourse on assimilation. They explore the choice of ethnicity and how the choice to display the ethnic self or express cultural homogeneity directly affects the lives of Black immigrants.

In these studies, African immigrants are constantly negotiating their existence in America. Unlike their parents, children of African immigrants usually do not have an accent that


\(^{33}\) Ibid, 69.


\(^{35}\) They use the term Black immigration to include immigrants to the United States of African ancestry from African nations and the Caribbean nations.
separates them for being American. As a result, they show their ethnicity at the risk of becoming “elsewhereness,” marked as outsider by skin, language and emblems. Therefore, second generation Africans have to choose between cultural homogeneity and assimilation. However, for my research, I discover that African children have to choose whether they adopt American or African values and are more likely use both, and live separate American and African lifestyles depending on their environment. For the newer generations, home becomes a new place leaving behind the foreignness expressed by their parents.

Shaw-Taylor and Tuch conclude that the study of contemporary African families and communities requires rigorous research, which again allows me some freedom in my research to discover what African community means in the U.S. South. These works on Black immigration explore how ethnicity separates these communities from African-American cultures. However, the struggle to express an ethnic self comes with the difficulty of adjusting other social pressures of living in the United States. These authors explore the lives of Black immigrants and point to a nuanced understanding of Blackness in America.

A Look at Mississippi’s Closed Society

The idea of a closed society dates back to 1963 with James Silver’s *Mississippi: A Closed Society*. In his text, Silver explains how violence and the threat of violence helped maintain racial order in Mississippi. He uses examples from Mississippi government and legal processes to analyze how Mississippi politicians kept a “closed society” in the state. The closed society of Mississippi violently created social order separated by race and class to keep a pace of power for

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38 Ibid, 79.
the elite White group. Those who did not fit within the group of power were victims of the closed society and were not allowed to fluidly move with the social caste system. As a closed society, Mississippi forced African immigrants to develop their own community as a tool of survival. The closed society only allowed certain groups to have social mobility in the Mississippi society.

Because of the closed society, Africans find it difficult to function fluidly in society as immigrants. Furthermore, a closed society forces those outside of the “accepted society” to find community elsewhere. In other words, Africans find community as a tool of survival in American society. One of the characteristics of African community that develop in the U.S. South that values public memory. In addition, the transformation of a closed society is a factor that contributes to the existence of African community in Jackson, Mississippi.

In James Silver’s Mississippi: The Closed Society, Silver examines how government and Mississippi politicians used violence to create social order and avoid social change. This text takes a close look at periods of the 1850s and 1950s including Reconstruction as a turning point in the creation of social order in Mississippi. Silver points out that for African-Americans, freedom in America meant a denial of political and social capital forcing them to operate under what Silver calls “the totalitarian society of Mississippi.” Silver discusses how various politicians enforced these values and used their political power to influence public opinion. Although the closed society of the 1850s and 1950s does not exist in the same way, African immigrants still fight against the closed society that limits mobility. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, “a closed society is one which an individual's role and function can

40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
theoretically never be changed,” while an open society relies on people to have the ability to move up in society.43

The purpose of this section is to show the extremes of a Southern closed society and how there is a genealogy of performance of a closed society where Southerners both Black and White adopt an ideal of the South rather than a reality. Although the Mississippi of 2014 does not represent the extremes of these societies, Mississippi still has remnants of its former glory. In James Cobb’s *Away Down South*, Cobb notes the change in the “Southern way of life” and marks the way Americans, both Southern and not Southern, understand and define the South.44 He explains that “the overthrow of Jim Crow seemed to result in a broader, biracial effort to keep it [the South] alive, although often are dramatically different.”45 Although George Tindall believes “that to change is not necessarily to lose one’s identity, to change sometimes is to find it.”46 Cobb believes that the South still holds onto “the burden of Southern identity,”47 which is the belief in a constructed history of nobility, rich Southern heritage, and salvation.

Cobb writes his text and relies heavily on Howard Zinn’s *The Southern Mystique* and W.J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South*. In Zinn’s text, Zinn, a Northerner, accounts his experience teaching at Spelman College in Atlanta. He visited Atlanta to learn about the South and Southerners as they relate to American society. He used social psychology principles and field theory to discover that the South is a distorted and extreme representation of national patterns.48 For his thesis, Zinn writes that Whites and Blacks should live closer together to create meaningful relationship. He only creates a plan for the South because he believes that the South

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45 Ibid, 338

46 Ibid, 338.


is the “worst place on Earth.”

Although he offers solutions to overcome racial prejudice in the South, his detachment from the South and Southern identity makes his definition of Southern identity as a distortion of American limits the complexity of Southern identity. Cobb also cites W.J. Cash’s *The Mind of the South* as a historical highlight in the definition of Southern identity.

In this text, Cash examines the true identity of the South through the lens of a Southern man. Although he tackles the struggle between construction and reality for Southerners, he does not find an inclusive way to understand the South.

In this case, Southerners *reimagine* the closed society and place African immigrants to the bottom of system. As we look at how the closed society has transformed over the last fifty years, we notice the connections between community in the 1950s and African community developed today. Although the government does not plainly place immigrants, especially immigrants of African descent, in the bottom of social status, social rules and public perception influence treatment of those perceived as different. The politics of the past heavily influence the politics of the present. With this in mind, we can understand how politics and social order of Silver’s closed society influence Mississippi’s current society as it relate to immigrant populations and what we are exploring, African community.

In his essay on “Globalization since the 1950s,” Alfred E. Eckes examines the U.S. South global economy between 1950 and 2000 and looks at the future of the global South. He notes that the end of the twentieth century marked a shift in globalization in the U.S. South. During this time, two Southern states ranked above the national average of foreign-born population making the South the largest region represented in statistics on foreign-born population. This

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49 Zinn, *The Southern Mystique*.
50 Cobb, 309.
information becomes true because of the relationships Southerners create with foreign nation in business and trade.\textsuperscript{52} However, in his research, he found that Mississippi only held about 1\% of the foreign-born population representing the only Confederate state with such a low percentage.\textsuperscript{53} In Mississippi, the connection to a foreign-born population largely lies in higher education and educational programs designed to bring in immigrants. Most likely, we can attribute the small percentage to the closed society of Mississippi.

These texts give a generalization of Southern society through violence and a fight to avoid change. Cobb and Silver show the transformation of Southern identity in critical places in history. These points in history transformed the perception Southerners have of their home and with the growing globalization, and identity that Southerners feel the need to hold onto tighter. Cobb writes his text at the height of globalization. In two moments in time, Southerners worked to hold tight to a constructed identity.

\textbf{Learning Africa}

Not much scholarship is dedicated to how America perceives Africa but there is scholarship that focuses on Americans’ experiences visiting and living in Africa. One of the most noted memoirs of American experience in Africa is Henry Morton Stanley’s \textit{Through the Dark Continent}.\textsuperscript{54} Stanley, a British journalist and Confederate soldier, is most famous for his role in discovery and tracing the Congo River. Financed by the \textit{New York Herald} and Britain's \textit{Daily Telegraph}, Stanley traveled through what he helped develop as the Congo Region and wrote about his experiences in his work published in 1878 \textit{Through the Dark Continent}. The book

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid, 44.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 43.
focuses on Stanley’s personal story, yet readers used the text to draw conclusions about the continent. Felix Driver calls Stanley’s trails as a part of cultural imperialism, to impose social and cultural practices onto an established culture to ensure political power over the less dominant culture. Stanley’s work was highly influential in Western culture, yet the text quickly judged Africans as inferior. The book becomes a resource for Americans interested in Africa even inspired by stories by Edgar Rice Burroughs and H. Rider Haggard, authors who wrote about the savage of African people and its effect on American culture. Even Booker T. Washington wrote about the work needed in Africa to civilize the Africans in his autobiography Up From Slavery published in 1901.

Several years later, Theodore Roosevelt would read the work and write about his experiences in African Game Trails: An Account of the African Wanderings of an American Hunter-Naturalist. He spent eleven months hunting in various parts of Africa and also spent some time in Sudan with his family. Roosevelt would continue the tradition of marking Africa as inferior and a place to be conquered relying on Stanley’s work as justification. In communications to America in his time in Africa, he referred to Africans as savages and children who need firming in his dealings with him. He urged Americans to have kindness for the Africans, but in a degrading and demeaning way. Because of his political pull in the United States, most Americans valued and adopted his opinion about Africa, which went unquestioned for a large part of the twentieth century.

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59 Keim, 48
A historian that challenged the relationship between Africa and Western society was Philip Curtin. With this book *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850*, Curtin analyzed the changing relationship between Africa and Western society and notably marked that Europeans knew more about Africa during the Atlantic Slave Trade.60 The work published in 1964 marked the shift in noting how racist and superior ideology ruled European and American perception of Africa. In 1977, Chinua Achebe, a Nigerian writer, wrote a reaction to Joseph Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* and targets Conrad’s racism and superiority complex as he names Africa, “the other world.”61 In this essay, Achebe takes a critical and analytical look at the way Conrad uses language and imagery to mark Africans as wild and savage.62 “As stated earlier Conrad did not originate the image of Africa which we find in his book. It was and is the dominant image of Africa in the Western imagination and Conrad merely brought the peculiar gifts of his own mind to bear on it.”63 Achebe notes that the dominant image of Africa according to the Western world negatively influences perceptions of Africans and allows White members of Western society to adopt racist attitudes towards the continent.

Specifically, the American invention views Africa as a primitive and pre-modern civilization. In his text *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*, Curtis Keim examines how the common American invention of Africa is a learned behavior and explores the tools used to continue the genealogy of what Achebe calls the “dominant image of Africa.” Keim argues that imagines provided by American culture help construct Africa as inferior.64 According to Keim, Americans use exoticism65 as a tool to understand Africa through

60 Curtin
61 *Heart of Darkness*, Joseph Conrad
62 http://kirbyk.net/hod/image.of.africa.html
63 http://kirbyk.net/hod/image.of.africa.html
their own lens. Americans use a limited view of Africa to understand what Arjun Appadurai describes as the “shrinking world.” In order to cope with a world that is losing boundaries due to globalization, Americans take what they understand about Africa and fill in the holes with stereotypes. A Romanized pre-modern view of Africa helps Americans to see themselves as superior culturally, scientifically, and academically creating Africa as a mirror for their own advancement.

In one of the most intriguing sections in the text, Keim explores the lives of Africans living in the United States. In the chapter on “Real Africa, Wise Africa,” Keim examines how Americans use “fragments of [African] culture to draw conclusions about the continent.” Keim uses the examples of print articles in Sports Illustrated and college-guide tours on how Americans try to find the “real and wise Africa.” In these cases, Americans try to find the real Africa in rural settings and through cliché phrases of simplistic wisdom. Through the commercialization of African cultures, Keim argues that Americans are less likely to form meaningful relationships with African immigrants living in the United States and learn truths about various countries and ethnic groups because of the learned behaviors of an imagined Africa.

With these inventions planted in the American psyche, African immigrants often have difficulty forming relationship with their new American neighbors. Some Africans note the discomfort they felt forming communities among Americans even if the encounters do not involve negative language about Africa. Keim writes this text in response to the lack of

65 The portrayal of Africa through only a portion of the culture and allowing the imagination to use stereotypes to fill in the missing pieces. Keim, 10.
67 Keim, 65.
68 Ibid, 46
69 Ibid, 47
knowledge his students have about Africa, and hrsees these negative images forming about Africa in grades K-12.\textsuperscript{70} He specifically writes his book to say what “Africa is not.”\textsuperscript{71} Keim’s text agrees with the argument Charles Onyango-Obbo makes in his article “Seeking Balance in a Continent Portrayed by Its Extremes,” which states that Africa needs good and fair journalism because journalism, one of Keim’s tools of learned behavior, influences how Americans understand the continent.\textsuperscript{72} Another tool Keim identifies that perpetuates the stereotypes of Africa is celebrities. In Uzodinma Iweala’s article “Stop Trying to ‘Save’ Africa,” he notes that celebrities overshadow the reality of Africa drawing more attention to disease and poverty in the continent and ignoring the efforts of Africans to “fix those problems.” In this article, Iweala describes his distress with the Western protagonist perspective of Africa in film and media.

Keim takes his look at the invention of Africa a step further than Milton Allimadi, author of The Hearts of Darkness: How White Writers Created the Racist Images of Africa.\textsuperscript{73} In this text, Allimadi specifically focuses on European journalists and writers making clear connections between their works and how the works influenced Western thought on Africa.\textsuperscript{74} However, his work does not expand how this invention is learned through other mediums. Keim takes a look a step further to focus on American invention and pass on a legacy of fantasy and stereotypes in education, print media, film, and literature.

Although Keim’s work explores how wrongful a limited view of Africa can be to the African community in the U.S. South, Keim fails to understand how his use of language can also contribute to the invention of Africa. Even in attempts to normalize Africa, authors rely on a

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{70} Ibid, xi
\bibitem{71} Ibid, xii
\end{thebibliography}
standard of normal largely dependent on the same Western standards they try to dispel. In the same chapter on “Real Africa, Wise Africa,” Keim shows how college guide-tours use “ordinary tools” in Africa. How do we determine what is normal or what tools are ordinary? In this example, Keim uses the term “normal” to mean Western tools. Holding Africans to the standard of Western normality perpetuates the same exoticism that Keim tries to dispel. Keim uses phrases like “ordinary hotel” and “ordinary bed” to make living Africa more comfortable for American visitors. Although Keim uses ordinary tools as an antidote to the fallacies of American invention, his work should also show the range of realities in Africa, a large continent with thousands of languages, cultures, and various ethnic groups.

With these ideas, Keim uniquely thinks about how Americans learn about Africa specifically in social studies programs. Yet, he does not fully explore the interactions between African immigrants and Americans. Keim does dedicate a short section on some of the experience of African immigrants; however, the reader does not get a true sense of African community and this reaction to these stereotypes. In addition to these holes, exploring the effect of these stereotypes on African immigrants in the United States, Keim fails to examine how race works in the invention of African stereotypes. Keim proves that race has no scientific bases; however, Keim does not look at how race plays a factor in perception. It seems that Keim wants to eliminate race and focus more on universal traits such as culture and being human, which helps connect Africa and a majority of Americans. However, race and African invention go hand-in-hand because both are social construct used to support each other in social hierarchy. In addition, most inventions of Africa do not involve Africans who do not look Black such as those of European, Indian, Chinese, or Arabic descendent. Race works within the invention of African perception because it further solidifies the foreignness of African culture. Although race is a
social construction, in order to combat the idea of an African invention, we must discuss the role of critical race theory in the lives of what it means to exemplify Africa in the physical sense.

Race and Immigration

Unlike other non-White immigrant groups (i.e. Asian and Latino immigrant groups), the racial identity assigned to African immigrants prohibits fluidity in cultural identity and heritage in American society. African immigrants fall under the label of Black immigrant according to the U.S. Census Bureau, which defines Black as any person of African descent. Because of the limited racial categories in American culture, African immigrants feel social pressure from White Americans to assimilate into an African-American culture. However, other non-white immigrants, mainly Asian and Latino immigrants, have several definitions in regards to their race and ethnicity. With this in mind, studies focus on Asians and Latinos political and social beliefs separately from other cultural groups in the United States. Specifically, research on Asian and Latino examines how their communities work around assimilation through acculturation to American culture to develop their community to meet their social needs. However, because African and other Black immigrants immediately fit in the category of Black, their own political and social beliefs and experiences are justified through the experience of African-American culture. However, much like other non-white immigrant groups, African immigrants experience a process of acculturation, which encourages them to develop their own political and social beliefs and behaviors separate from African-American culture in the U.S. South.

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R. Owoladi states that the opportunities available to immigrants are in relation to their whiteness. Because of this, African immigrants are alienated by two societies: American and immigrant. Often overlooked or ignored, these African immigrants feel detached in a place that is foreign and often unwelcoming. In his essay “Reflections of an African-Born Immigrant: Story of Alienation,” Godwin Okebaram Uwah argues that one of the dominant reasons for the alienation of African immigrants is race. As a means for survival, African immigrants create community among themselves to share similar cultural values and practices and pass on a legacy of their African heritages to their children. Helen Oliver writes that these spaces for community among African immigrants allow them to have a balance and sense of direction in a foreign land. The African community developed, although invisible, contributes to the fabric of Southern culture. As the African immigrant population more than doubles and these immigrants have children, the culture developed by Africans living in America can no longer be hidden by the racial binary of the South and other discriminative practices. In order to understand how Africans function in this society, we must understand how African immigrants and their children negotiate and maintain their distinctive African identities in Jackson, MS.

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77 Ibid.
78 Ibid.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The nature of immigration studies relies heavily on the specific and unique experience of immigrants. This research examines the experiences of Africans in their own words. Through oral histories, social theory, and observation in community spaces, I work to find themes that connect Africans and factors that contribute to the development and continued existence of this community. For my analysis, I use theoretical underpinning such as critical race theory, Black feminist theory, space and place theory, community development theory, and research on globalization. These underpinnings directly relate to the lives and evolving identities of African living in Jackson, MS.

Because of my close connection to the experiences of African immigrants and their children, I place myself inside of the research while letting my findings create the narrative and not researching with a pre-created narrative. I let the evidence guide my research and strive to remain true to the truths of my subjects. I hope my research will helps others observe and learn more about the African community in Jackson, MS, and learn how the globalizing South is a place for community and culture creation and development for African immigrants and their children.

To gather a complete story about African immigrants and their children in Jackson, MS, I employ a mixed methods approach including interviews, ethnographic case study, and
content analysis. Using the mixed methods approach for this qualitative study allows us to understand the social process Africans undergo in the South. I discuss general information about the interviewees’ demographic sample and examine the analysis of this data. For an interdisciplinary study like the Southern Studies program, a methodology serves as a valuable way of obtaining and analyzing data.

For my research, I wanted to contact Africans involved in formal community and those who find community outside of formal settings. I first contacted members of the African Christian Fellowship-USA (ACFUSA), a religious community for African immigrants and their children in Jackson, MS. To find Africans outside of ACFUSA, I interviewed African students at local universities: Jackson State University and University of Mississippi. Between these areas, there is some overlap, but the universities gave more depth to the sample. I interviewed thirteen subjects for in-depth analysis of the community. The interviews, or oral histories, serve as my primary resource for uncovering the African community. Through their accounts of movement, identity, and the development of a new home in Jackson, I worked to understand how African adapt and work against assimilation in Southern American society and African-American culture. These interviews play a significant role in my research because of the small number of secondary sources on African immigration in the United States and especially in the U.S. South. These oral histories allow the research to include the personal stories of immigrants and their children and allowed me to find some recurring themes in the interviews. The interviews gave insight into the history of African communities and the ways these subjects work within the development of community. In the table below, there is a list of the subject and information about their place in African community.
Table 3. Subject Sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Immigration to the U.S. (Year)</th>
<th>Generation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Janet Mvula</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robert Okonkwo</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethel Egwu</td>
<td>67</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1998</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Uba</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1987</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver Goma</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Republic of Congo-Brazzaville</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1995</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zion Falana</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wale Falana</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lionel Adeoye</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>1979</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca Mvula</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Samantha Ohakim</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brianna Ekwensi</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>First</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Megan Ayim</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abraham Bello</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>--</td>
<td>Second</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In the interview, I asked the interviewee about their childhood, country of origin, reason for coming to the United States and additional questions about their experiences in Jackson, Ms and with African community. As the interviews continued, I asked specific questions based on answers provided by the interviewee making the interview personal for the interviewee. I contacted one to two hours worth of interviews for each participant to have the most information and follow up on any unclear information. The interviews were recorded and logged to keep an organized account. Although the interviews varied, some recurring themes did come up in the research. I work to categorize these themes and find ways these themes relate to the development of African community. I tried to find a diverse group of subjects that varied in age, country of origin, generation status and gender. The varying group gives a depiction of the community and shows the heterogeneous group of African immigrants displaying the reality of African experience in the U.S. South.

Although oral histories are valuable to this research, there are limitations to using only these interviews. These accounts largely center on memories and are highly influenced by socialization in African community. In his book *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance*, Joseph Roach explores how memory aims not to forget but follow the process of *surrogation*, the process where the culture reproduces and recreates itself. Roach argues that the process of surrogation does not end, but as vacancies occur, the whole are filled with recreation and reproduction. As the memory lives within the performances, they change over time altering the memory between “retrospective and anticipation.” These accounts will most likely be constructed because they draw from accounts that the subject may feel fits better with the research. Jennifer Ritterhouse challenges researchers to understand this phenomenon. Although

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these accounts cannot “be taken at face value as historical facts,” oral histories do allow us to see what historical and sociological sources fail to show us. Despite the limitation of using oral histories, interviews serve as the best way to understand the experience of Africans in Jackson, MS.

In addition to the interviews, I conducted ethnographic research. The community and participant observation worked to expand the ideas of interviewees prepared in their interviews. Ethnographic study worked to complete the narrative of African community and the lives of the selected subjects. For a year and a half, I participated in African ceremonies, attended ACFUSA meetings and conferences, and attended African family events such as family reunions and funerals. Observing community spaces helped me learn how Africans lived in and outside of community in Jackson. In addition, the observations helped me understand how Africans developed relationships with each other. After these events, I took field notes or recorded my experiences and talked through my findings.

For my subjects, I wanted a variety of identities in African community. I wanted to choose community leaders in African community and American society such pastors, physicians, and student campus leaders. These people would have more insight into their place in African community and ways they work around leadership in American society. Naturally, a large percentage of the subjects were from Nigeria because Nigerians represent a large part of African community in my findings although the U.S. Census records Ghanaians as the largest community. Of the 659 Sub-Saharan Africans living in Jackson, MS, 17 Africans report

themselves as Ghanaian while no one reports themselves as Nigerian or any other nationality. In my research, ten percent of my subjects were Nigerian. One of the most important parts of my research was understanding the role of women in African community. Therefore, a majority of my subjects were women. I also wanted a multi-generational sample with the eldest subject being 67 and the youngest 18. Having a multi-generational sample allowed the research to look at how identities and the struggle for ethnic identity transcend through generation.

Table 4. Simple Sample Demographic Table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic Variables</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country of Origin</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigeria</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republic of Congo-Brazzavile</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-39</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40-59</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-67</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Having lived my life in African community, I felt comfortable working with my subjects and participating in activities in the community. I worked to see myself as research and analyze the data. I had to negotiate myself as an inside in the community and outside as a researcher.
Despite these difficulties, the research led me to find that African community worked in a more complex way in Jackson than I believed. My position in the community made my subjects more comfortable with the research as well. They were willing to share their experiences and express their love for their homeland and acculturation process.

Some of the strengths of my research come from its focus on the U.S. South as a region and African community as a cultural subregion. This research looks to the Southern region of the United States as a home special for African community to grow and exist. It gives voice to the silenced community and looks at expanding the definition of Blackness in Africa. The research focuses on women’s role in community at its inception rather than secondary members. The mixed methodology gave a clear picture of the community and worked to see how it functions in Jackson, MS.

Despite its strength, some limitations to the research include the limited representation of ethnicity in my subject sample. In addition, I wanted to find more subjects who find community outside of ACFUSA and on college campuses such as Jackson State University. However, the research works to start a conversation about African community in Jackson. It works to bring to light issues in the closed society of Mississippi and shows the international group of African immigrants and their children continues to exist in the South and represent a community that contributes to the fabric of the Global South.
CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION

Closed Society

The closed society functions as a caste system where “an individual’s role and function can theoretically never be changed.”82 Traditionally, the closed society of the 1950s and 1960s represented a society where race defined place in society. Regardless of education, social status, and abilities, African-Americans and others outside of the realm of Whiteness were placed in a caste system where they could not move in society and occupied few authoritative positions. Karl Popper formally introduced the terms open and closed society to academia in his 1945 work The Open Society and its Enemies.83 James Silver uses this definition of a closed society to describe Mississippi as a place that forced the segregation of the races and the disenfranchisement of African-Americans. However, since the Civil Rights Movement, laws allowed African-Americans to move, theoretically, through society and have the same privileges as those White elites who benefited from the system of segregation. However, the struggle for power in this ambiguous system of equality of the post-Civil Rights Movement transformed the closed society not into an open society but a society that poses as open. The closed society strives on an oppressive system based on the mobility of its citizens.

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82 Ibid.
As we think of the closed society of the 1950s and 1960s, let us consider how the closed society transformed into a society that continues to limit the mobility of some groups of people. In *Away Down South*, James Cobb discusses Southern identity and its transformation of its national and regional identity from 1768 to about 2003. He uses social realities of the South to create a historical framework of the American understanding of the South. He examines the South “as both a real and imagined cultural entity separate and distinct from the rest of the country.” By examining the South through identity, Cobb refers to perception of reality and relies on “a mixture of unvarnished and varnished or even the whitewashed truth.” He defines the Southern identity with a story of continuity within change.

As we look at the new South and the South of 1950, Southern identity personifies a “story of continuity within change.” The South continues traditions of exclusion and marginalization that keep some sense of the past. Both Black and White Southerners culturally exclude and marginalize African immigrant forcing them to develop their community to express their own cultural values and practices. The threat of rejection leads to the formation of the ethnic enclave communities. White and Black Southerners hold onto the nostalgia of the past and find new ways of segregation between what they understand and what they do not wish to understand. As laws change and social rules, there is a continuity of tradition. There is a continued tradition of racism, despite the change in segregation. There is a continued tradition of confederacy symbols although the confederate no longer exists. Memory serves as tool to remind the South of its past. In that way, Southerners mold public memory to reconstruct a past South. This past becomes a source of pride. However, these memories of Southern superiority

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85 Ibid, 6.
86 Ibid, 7.
87 Ibid, 7.
leave out those who were not imagined to be a part of the past South specifically African immigrants.

So what is Southern identity in the present? Who gets to define what it means to be a part of Southern culture? With the growth of globalization in the U.S South, what it means to be a part of the Southern fabric begins to include more identities and cultures. Southerners often feel the changing meaning of Southern and a Southerner will destroy their comprehensive understanding of the South. However, as Cobb states, the South is defined by continual change. The definition of the South changes with the social and political needs of the region. Especially with the influx of immigrants and African-Americans returning to the South, people who consider themselves true Southerners have held the definition of Southern identity tighter. White Southerners and now an increasing number of Black Southerners feel an entitlement to the definition of the U.S. South and exclude immigrants from this definition. Although we as Southerners are all outsiders to the constructed Southern identity, immigrants are more likely seen as outsiders to Southern identity and excluded from Southern society. With this in mind, immigrants are seen as a threat to Southern identity because they bring in new cultures and traditions to the South and call to question the practices of segregation, exclusion, and marginalization in the U.S. South. However, immigrants and immigrant communities contribute to the fabric of the South.

The transformation of the closed society now thrives on the limitations of power for minorities. This limitation of power directly translates to those in an even lower minority level: Black and Hispanic immigrants. These limitations come to life when we examine public space and accessibility to public resources. Unfortunately, immigrants do not have the same access to

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public resources, which keep them from having political influence in their communities.

Although some immigrant communities have political power such as the Dream Act and calls for Immigration Reform as it relates to countries in South America, the overall political power of the immigrant communities in Mississippi rarely influences the decisions made for people living in the states. The conservative political attitudes among White elites in Mississippi continue to provide evidence that they hold reservations to funding public services that many of the people they fear, such as the foreign-born population, would not benefit such as government assistant programs. Only through citizenship are immigrants able to express some sense of community as residents of the state. Some would conclude, this limitation of power is a consequence of living in a foreign area, however, the lack of mobility in these areas keeps immigrants in a closed society. The South is a place of tradition that continues to perpetuate the lack of mobility to groups elites do not trust.

In the Venn diagram below, we see how the transformation of the closed society works in Mississippi. Although the Civil Rights Movement and other social movements have brought progress to Mississippi, the tradition of the closed society continues with some of the same characteristics such as exclusion and marginalization of the minority and the struggle of power for the White Elites. The table below shows the overlap between the traditional closed society and the transformed closed society. In the table, we see that closed society keep social order through legal segregation and government violence. In this society, minority groups had no mobility much like a caste system. In the transformed closed society, minority groups appear to have some mobility in society. However, Mississippi practice racial and class segregation in residential areas and schools. In addition, minority groups have limited access to public resources or spaces. Particularly for African immigrants, the limited access to resources and
space forces them in African community, a space where they create their own political and social beliefs, resources, transnational flow of capital and labor, and ethnic expression. The principles that overlap in two close societies is the marginalization, exclusion, and power struggle that keep an elite White American group separate those who do not benefit from social and political power especially African immigrants.

Table 5. Transformation of the Closed Society

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silver's Closed Society</th>
<th>Modern Closed Society</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. No social and political mobility for minority groups.</td>
<td>1. Limited social and political mobility for minority groups.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Legal racial segregation</td>
<td>2. Practiced racial and class segregation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Government violence to keep social order.</td>
<td>3. Limited access to public resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tradition of a closed society in Mississippi creates a hostile environment for new comers especially immigrants to the region. The transformation of the closed society explains how Mississippi still uses the tradition of closed society in a new way to create social order.
Despite process in Mississippi, we see the continued tradition of a closed society in the lives of African immigrants and the transformation of their community.

Because the South is a region ruled by the idea of a shared culture, African immigrants find community in this region as a way to cope outside of the shared culture of the South. The African community is excluded from the Southern community, helping them to create a home within their new home because of the exclusion from the South. The exclusion that African immigrants feel is not a physical exclusion but a cultural exclusion that keeps Africans from functioning as their full ethnic selves in the closed society of Mississippi.\textsuperscript{89} We see this exclusion happen quickly for African immigrants especially in public spaces such as the workplace and school. Some Americans use exclusion as a tool to protect their Southern identity. They display this exclusion to people they see as foreign, and this makes the adjustment to American society difficult for African immigrants like Janet Mvula.

\textit{Initial Encounters}

For Janet Mvula, the exclusion began at her high school in Piney Woods, MS. Mvula completed her senior year at Piney Woods Country Life School, a historically Black boarding school founded in 1904.\textsuperscript{90} She moved to Mississippi from Zambian in 1979 because her brother taught Social Studies at the boarding school. When she moved to the school, she learned quickly that students would treat her differently because she was Zambian. Placed in living quarters with students four years younger than her, Mvula received questions about her lifestyle. Her classmates devalued her home and cited her move to the United States as evidence of African


problems. Some students quickly made assumptions about her ability to speak English and understand American culture. She quickly became silent about her experiences in America and did not feel comfortable talking to her older brother about her experiences. “I cried everyday for the first year.” Being excluded from her school community negatively affected the way Mvula viewed Mississippi and how she would be accepted in this new home.⁹¹

Mvula’s experience serves as an example of how some Southerners culturally exclude Africans based on assumptions about Africa. However, with cultural exclusion both in theory and in practice, Southerners want to protect their idea of Southern culture. Most Southerners fear immigrants’ influence on Southern culture and their identity. In this instance, Southerners rely on their own community based on the tradition of exclusion to maintain a sense of Southern identity. However, much like Cobb writes in his text, the Southern identity is based on continual change. Yet Southern pride in a constructed identity of superiority and tradition keeps Southerners from the reality of their existence, which has always involved immigration and smaller ethnic communities.

The South and its Subregions

Subregions characterize the U.S. South. Historically, the South contained of several subregions that break from the mode of the Southern identity. Although these subregions point to the larger south, these subregions separate from each other creating identities different with each other. Subregions such as wiregrass⁹² have geographical connections and subregions like Tennessee Valley subregion⁹³ are connected by government programming that group a set of

⁹¹ Mvula, Janet. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
⁹³ Powell.
people. All subregions feel some connection to what they understand as Southern, especially White Elite Southerners, who feel they have a monopoly on Southern culture. As a result, most Southerners capture their idea of the U.S. South through performance. The essence of region is the (to take for granted) a community’s ideas about itself. Even in an antebellum South, the South grouped by the practice of slavery was further divided into Upper and Lower South based on the aspect of the industry they practiced. Furthermore, over the span of the South, we see common themes in slave communities connecting these separate entities into a larger subregion of the South. We see how these subregions within the South exist together, yet Southerners are still threatened by the idea of newer communities. In Mississippi, which has the lowest foreign-born population, 2.2% with a 12.9% on a national level, these ideas of foreign-born communities that do not conform to the Southern identity become more real. The South is a place with a diversity of groups struggling to define themselves and preserve their Southern identity through tradition. In this setting, African immigrants do not fit making the South a closed society for their cultural expression.

Africans in Jackson, MS find community in the closed society of the South as a factor that contributes to the development of community in Jackson, MS. In the culture-oriented South, Africans find community to express their own cultural values and practices. Africans find the closed society of Jackson, MS less welcoming than they expected forcing them to find community among each other as a support group.

Mvula’s experience unfortunately is not an isolated experience. For many Africans, coming to Mississippi surprises them. Okonkwo, a father of three from Nigeria, quickly learned that Americans did not have the same values as he did. Okonkwo moved with his family to Jackson, MS in 2003 from Canada after completing his doctorate in microbiology. Okonkwo recalled the unique individualistic nature of American culture and how he felt many Americans looked out for themselves. He describes his interactions with his community as minimal because he felt that his community members did not practice traditions he wanted to share with his family. Although excited to find Christian community in the U.S. South, Okonkwo felt pressure to adapt the same principles in his home life and family dynamic. Furthermore, he felt discomfort with the way his community members assumed false beliefs about his culture and cultural expression. Okonkwo looked to African community as a place to find true relationship in the South. Okonkwo wanted his children to grow in an environment that accept his cultural beliefs.97

“Because of our largely Christian faith within the group we help each other out by being our brother's keeper. For instance if someone in our community has issues we will find a way of helping out be it paying some bills or even part of their mortgage. believe the African Christian Fellowship is a stabilizing factor in my life. through belonging to the group I have traveled through the US meeting and forging friendships with other Africans thereby getting to know them.”98

Only in African community could he find a space to express himself culturally and teach his children about Nigeria, his home. In this setting, Okonkwo could express cultural markers of his identity such as native language, dress, and memory of his homeland without fear of judgment or pressures to assimilate to an American culture.

For Mvula and Okonkwo, their new American home took on an unexpected role of cultural exclusion. With the idea of freedom of cultural expression in America, they found it

97 Okonkwo, Robert. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
98 Ibid.
surprising that Southerners would have so little knowledge about or respect for Africa. In these scenarios, both Southerners and Africans have unrealistic expectations about each other. Southerners expect African immigrants to completely emerge themselves into American tradition. Africans expect some sense of knowledge and acceptance from Southerners as newcomers to the United States. Because there is no or limited cross between the communities, neither side meets up to the unrealistic expectations or find spaces for dialogue outside of personal relationships. As it relates to the closed society of Mississippi, Africans find community to deal with these unmet expectations. African community then becomes a subregion of the U.S. South that points to the U.S. South yet develops as its own community.

*The Racial Binary and the Closed Society*

The closed society of the 1950s and 60s focused largely on racial segregation. Historically, the racial binary formed in the South as a result of this segregation in the closed society ruled the meaning of Blackness for centuries in America. As a result of this tradition of separation, Americans forced Africans into the box of Blackness. According to Elizabeth Grace Hale in her text *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940*, Hale describes whiteness as a construction based on the culture of segregation. She notes how segregation culture “created and staged racial difference for ...the modern South.”

This constructed difference centered on race continued as tradition in America and the South well after segregation ended. Although some African immigrants entering the United States before the 1990s have some memory of colonization and apartheid system in their countries of origin, these African immigrants come to the United States hoping to experience success without

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judgment based on their race. However, a genealogy of a segregated culture places Africans into Blackness.

In her text *Racial Americanization: Conceptualizing African Immigrants* in the U.S., Jemima Pierre notes that United States lacks the political cultural information to discuss African ethno-cultural diversity. Southern language on race does not give agency to the diversity of Black experience in the U.S. South much less the ability to discuss African cultural diversity. With this breakdown in language, we further notice to the breakdown in community among African-Americans and Africans in the South. With this in mind, we can examine how Africans are further pushed out of American society and automatically disregarded as an immigrant community. African community thus functions in limbo of being a Black community and immigrant community while working to identify itself as a safe space for Africans. Therefore, as Black immigrants move to the United States, a tradition of segregationist language forces Africans into the category of Black according to the standards of the U.S. Census. Unlike other ethnicities, African immigrants and children lack the range of identification according to the definition of race, which states, “**Black or African American.** A person having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicate their race as "Black, African Am., or Negro"; or report entries such as African American, Kenyan, Nigerian, or Haitian.” Placing African immigrants into a group ignores cultural difference and the ability to express their full self.

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102 Ibid.
In this sense, African community could develop as a more nuanced look at Blackness in America. Instead, people rely on the racially binary and treat Black as a homogeneous category. They develop community to find their own identity. When Mvula first moved to Jackson, she wanted to join a church that reminded her of home. She wanted the freedom to enjoy a church she remembered from her childhood in Zambia. She said she like the music, and it reminded her of home particularly the hymn, “What a Friend We have in Jesus.” In 1981, Mvula attended an all white Baptist church in Jackson for a few weeks hoping to join the church. In an evening small group with some women of the church, Mvula heard a statement that would charge her life forever. 103

“I went to a small function in the evening. In the process of talking, somebody mentioned that I would be more comfortable somewhere else. However, I did not understand what they were saying. I did not understand that language. I was not uncomfortable, so I did not pay too much attention to it. After that, I met some West Africans, and I was asking, ‘Why would somebody tell me that I would be comfortable somewhere else when I was already comfortable?’ So they explained me that they meant I would be more comfortable at a Black church. Therefore, I didn’t go back. I didn’t feel bad about it. I just knew I didn’t want to fellowship with people like that.” 104

Before this experience, Mvula did not have a racial identity especially one assigned to her by Americans. She always identified as Zambian and the new Black label pushed her further into American society. After this experience, Mvula joined Mt. Galilee M.B. Church, a historically African-American church located in the Southern part of Jackson. A Nigerian immigrant ministered at the church, which is how she learned about the church. Initially, she did not feel comfortable in the church because she felt more comfortable in a racially mixed church. Mvula grew up in an independent Zambia and attended a racially mixed catholic school. She describes this experience as one of the first times she was targeted because of her race or

103 Mvula, Janet. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
104 Ibid.
grouped in a setting because of her race. Because of her African community, Mvula developed relationships with other groups of people who were more welcoming.\textsuperscript{105}

\textit{Performance and Public Memory}

As a subregion of the South, African community does have some values that point to the larger region of the South. African community represents a marginalized group of people who adopt the values of performance and public memory as a means of preservation in Jackson, MS. Memory and performance serve as values that connect the cultures of the South. According to Roger Lyle Brown in his text \textit{Ghost Dancing on the Cracker Circuit: The Culture of Festivals in the American South}, Southerners hold festivals around the region to develop public memory about the community. Festivals continue community culture through symbols of public memory. Festivals create sites “for symbolic display of community.”\textsuperscript{106} Brown’s analysis of the South and what creates it as region lies in the way Southerners create their own identities.

One of the characteristics of African community focuses on performance and public memory as a tool of preservation. African community follows the same tradition of public memory through performance. Through celebrations of death, birth, and family reunions, Africans help to create new traditions in Jackson, MS. Merging African tradition with American practices, Africans reconstruct their identity in Jackson and find ways to pass on a legacy of African tradition for their children. In Joseph Roach’s text \textit{Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance}, Roach examines how memory and performance function in cultures of the South. Through performance, Roach captures Paul Gilroy’s \textit{Black Atlantic}.\textsuperscript{107} As the memory lives

\textsuperscript{105} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{106} Brown, 11.
within the performances, they change over time altering the memory between “retrospective and anticipation.” African community balances their memory of these celebration with the change in place. Over time and space aspects of the celebration change, yet African immigrants still hold these memories as a means to preserve some sense of the tradition and memory in the African community to share with children living or born in the United States. Memory through performance helps to share the culture among themselves and with their children.

In Darlington Ndubuike’s *The Struggles, Challenges, and Triumphs of the African Immigrants* in America, he describes an Igbo celebration in Houston, TX and the need to understand African cultures in the United States. During one of the ceremonies, a performer said, “I’m very happy that we are able to do the much we are doing to show our children what our culture is like. I hope they take it from us and run with African parents especially want to carry their traditions and cultural practices on in the United States and desire for their children to cherish these traditions are their own.” African parents find ways to educate their children on their African heritage. Despite the closed society of Mississippi, African community still has a close connection to the U.S. South. In the next section, I juxtapose the African community and Southern identity. These two communities share values because of their close physical relationship as a part of acculturation.

**Acculturation as a Process**

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109 Igbo, also called Ibo, people living chiefly in southeastern Nigeria who speak Igbo, a language of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. The Igbo may be grouped into the following main cultural divisions: northern (Onitsha), southern (Owerri), western (Ika), eastern (Cross River), and northeastern (Abakaliki). Before European colonization, the Igbo were not united as a single people but lived in autonomous local communities. By the mid-20th century, however, a sense of ethnic identity was strongly developed, and the Igbo-dominated Eastern region of Nigeria tried to unilaterally secede from Nigeria in 1967 as the independent nation of Biafra.
In addition to helping immigrants find resources, African community also serves as a space for Africans to share stories and challenges of migration to the United States. In ACFUSA, members discussed challenges at work and difficulties raising their children. With these experience, African community serves as a safe space to express and combat building a new life in America. Africans feel freedom among the familiar. African find home in these space, and these shared ideals develop the community and continue its existence.

Through the development of African community, African immigrants share their acculturation experiences. With these experiences, Africans share how they constantly negotiate and renegotiate their identities in the United States. They individually and collectively balance their identities as Africans and as immigrants in the United States. John A. Arthur states in his text that through acculturation, researchers examine the cultural adjustments that Africans undergo in the United States. According to Alfred Kroeber, through direct diffusion, African community, a minority culture, begins to see changes in their culture from the outside American and African-American cultures. Because the communities are close, Africans living within the American society, Africans learns the behaviors and beliefs of the American community and negotiate their involvement with these behaviors. Over time, however, Africans learn more behaviors and it becomes harder to avoid American influence in African community in Jackson. Although the influence of American culture in African community is not aggressive, African communities continue to re-construct their identities to balance their position in American society. Unlike European immigrants, non-white immigrants are less likely to experience the assimilation process, yet through acculturation theory, we understand how

112 Ibid.
Africans navigate through American society, which ultimately affects how they develop community. African immigrants are more likely to become emotionally invested in current political and social issues as they continuing living in the United States. These issues include healthcare, municipal and national elections and some social issues. Rather than fully emerge themselves in American culture and deny their connection to their African heritage, Africans do adopt some beliefs and behaviors similar to their surrounding community after living in Jackson for some time.

The closed society of Mississippi causes Africans to develop community outside of the assumptions of American ideals. In this community, Africans identify themselves and find their own ways to adapt to American influence. In these spaces, Africans carry their cultural practices to the United States. As Mississippi marginalizes and excludes Africans from expressing their ethnic selves and participating fully in Southern American society, Africans create community to share their own beliefs and practices. Africans are outsiders to Southern identity and Mississippi culture in a transformed closed society and Africans use this as momentum to develop a separate community. In this community, they negotiate their identities as Africans living in Jackson, MS and work to main their distinct African identity.
Shared Migration History: Sharing Experiences in African Community

Although my thesis focuses on how the U.S. South creates an environment necessary for an African community, I would not want to neglect the autonomy of African immigrants to develop community in the United States. In this section, I specifically focus on how Africans create community through their shared migration history and experiences. We will focus on how Africans find, forge, and negotiate relationships with other Africans living in the United States.

As with any immigrant group, similar experiences arise between individuals within the group. One of the characteristics of African community comes from the shared experiences of its members. As a result, African community continues to exist because of the need to share their experiences with one another and new immigrants. As with any community, the community develops through shared beliefs and ideas, which include shared experience.113

Sharing their common experiences coming to and living in Mississippi help strengthen the community and helps make connections between the heterogeneous groups. African immigrants develop community through shared experiences of migration to Jackson. Migrating to the United States can be a lonely process even if one is joining family in the United States. However, having African community, such as the ACFUSA, helps Africans adjust to living in America. During the early 2000s, Catholic Charities of Jackson, a charity organization designed to “empower people and build communities,” connected Sudanese refugees with ACFUSA as an open community to help the refugees find work, additional resources, and educational opportunities.114 In an interview with Uba, Uba describes ACFUSA as “a culture shock absorber

113 Bender, 7.
for Africans especially new immigrants.” He acknowledges ACFUSA as a place to call home Jackson. ACFUSA has been a support for many Africans in Jackson, MS.

Table 6. Simple Immigration Map: From African Countries to Jackson, MS, USA

A Support System

Egwu experienced the same support when she entered the United States in 1998. Margaret, born in 1947 in Nigeria, moved to the United States by the invitation of her eldest daughter. The family, along with her daughter’s husband and three children, lived in Dallas, TX before moving to Clinton, MS. In Dallas, Egwu cared for young children while their parents worked. However, when the family moved to Clinton, she wanted work outside the home. In their new neighborhood, a Nigerian family lived close by and the father introduced Egwu to ACFUSA. ACFUSA gave Egwu the outlet she needed to fellowship with other Nigerians and
African. In the fellowship, she met other African seeking to hold some sense of African tradition in Jackson. African Christian Fellowship reminded her of her church in Nigeria. “There is a different culture in the church. The way we worship in Nigeria, in many churches in Nigeria, you don’t see bands or trumpets. You clap your hands, dance, but here it’s not like that.”

After her initial shyness, Egwu became more comfortable with the members and she sees the members as her brothers and sisters. She even joined the local church, Mt. Galilee, which her neighbor, Uba and Adeoye ministered. When Egwu made her petition to find work in Jackson, Adeoye helped her earn a job as a housekeeper at the hospital where he worked. Because of the relationship the two built in African community, Adeoye helped Egwu find work. Adeoye experienced a similar struggle finding work in Jackson, and their shared experiences gave him the ability to help Egwu navigate through the job search. Because of their shared experience, Adeoye could help Egwu find work and make her transition as an immigrant in Jackson an easier one.

In Jackson, MS, a Nigerian family practiced a traditional Igbo and Yoruba tradition in the process of engagement and marriage. During the ceremony, the groom presents himself to the bride’s family and asks for her hand. In the home of the bride, the bride’s father arranged for the groom to be presented. Because a majority of the bride’s family lives in Nigeria, two Nigerian community members served as surrogate elders for the ceremony. The groom, an Igbo Nigerian immigrant, would talk with the bride’s family so the family could understand his intentions for the young woman. Although the couple knew each other and planned to be married long before the ceremony, the ceremony represented a call for public memory of Nigerian traditions in the United States. The bride, a second generation African, waited in her room with the company of

115 Egwu, Ethel. Interview by author. Clinton, MS.
116 Ibid.
young single women. The facilitator of the event clearly expressed that although Nigerians were living in America, they would continue to practice their Nigerian traditions because the traditions were a part of their identity.

The performance of this engagement ceremony serves as an example of how African community continues to exist. Although the facilitator and female elder were not directly related to the bride’s family, they represented an extended family developed in Jackson, MS. The ceremony represents the continued tradition from Nigeria in Jackson and new ways to practice the tradition in an American society. In an interview with one of the elder women, Egwu recalled her marriage experience. She never met her husband before they were arranged to be married. Her father picked her husband and discussed the issue with his family. After the agreement was made, her father told Margaret’s grandmother to bring the child to him. At fourteen, she left her home, school, and friends to follow her husband upstate.\textsuperscript{117}

Because this couple arranged their marriage without their families, the ceremony does not involve the same traditions as it did for Margaret. However, we see the transformation of the ceremony in America. Although the performance does not have the same elements such as dress, formality, and Nigerian foods and drink, the ceremony preserves a sense of African identity for the family and future family especially one that can be remembered by the bride’s nephew, a third generation African. In addition, the ceremony helps create a memory about Africa for the community. Immigrants recreate their memories and identities from Africa while their children and grandchildren learn about their family’s heritage. As we see, these ceremonies take place in private, proving that the closed society pushes the community outside the margins of Southern identity.

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid.
Reshaping Identity

As African immigrants began to adjust to living in Jackson, they also begin to develop what their community means and what aspects of American society they adopt or leave behind. The African community in Jackson negotiates it and individual members’ identities as immigrants living in America and having a distinct African heritage. As a part of shared migration history, Africans reconstruct their identities. Markers of identity serve as a way to reconstruct their identity. Celebrations, festivals, dress, and language balance their identities as living in the United States with direct connections to their African heritage. In many of the interviews, participants identify themselves by their country of origin as well as their specific ethnic group. For example, in his introduction, Adeoye introduced himself as Nigerian born in the Delta State and a part of the Yoruba tribe. In countries created by European colonial powers, ethnic identity plays a major role in a person’s identity. Even family name helps to further identity a person to a certain area. However, Americans label these same people as African and make the assumption of their similarity without regard to their specific self-identification and cultural differences. In these circumstances, identity becomes a way to remember their home and find their own sense of autonomy.

For first-generation Africans who moved to the United States as teen and second-generation Africans\(^{118}\), the same-shared experiences help them develop their own idea of African community in the United States. Although most do not have a migration history, creating community based on a shared experience helps the African community continue to exist in the South. Although not all second generation Africans participate in formal communities as

\(^{118}\) According to the Census Bureau, first generations refer to foreign-born. Second generation have at least one foreign-born parent. https://www.census.gov/population/foreign/about/faq.html
children, some do build relationships with other Africans, as they become adults through their shared childhood experiences.

Two Mississippi universities Jackson State University and the University of Mississippi host international organizations in which first and second generation Africans participate. In the 1970s and 1980s, Adeoye recalls being involved in an African association and forming an official school international association at Jackson State University. The group generally consisted of African immigrants studying at the university. Adeoye remembers living in what he called the White House on campus. The White House was a place that housed a majority of the Nigerian students at Jackson State. Every weekend the house would host a party. “The Nigerians were very very together way way back. We used to, they loved party every weekend, every weekend. At that time, I didn’t even drink, but they partied. Somebody would just get few bottles of drink and jollof rice and that place would be packed.”

For second generation Africans, the same tradition of African community on campuses continues, which host both first and second generation Africans. On the campus of the University of Mississippi, the African and Caribbean Association serves as a space for Black immigrants and children of Black immigrants. Although outside of Jackson, many of the core members of this organization carry the tradition of the African community in Jackson to the school. In conservation with a student from the West Indies, he expressed how he appreciated the association because the students act as his family when he is so away from his biological family.

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119 Adeoye, Lionel. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
Finding community for any minority group on a predominately-White campus such as the University of Mississippi can be difficult especially when the traditional a view of Blackness is limited to a few well-known organizations. For Ohakim, Ekwensi, and Ayim, finding African community was particularly important for their adjustment as freshman to the University. Two of the women met in Jackson through the ACFUSA, and the women met Ohakim on the first day of school. The women talk about their bond through common experiences. Ekwensi stated the group of women connected over shared foods and mostly over how their parents treated them as Nigerian or Nigerian-American.

“There’s a particular things that the parents do since they are from the same place. When we would discuss how our mom talked to us, Ohakim said, ‘That’s exactly how my mom is going to do.’ What my mom will say is the same Ayim’s mom will say, and the same things Ohakim’s mom will say. We look back on some things our parents have done to us and we talk about it.”

In addition to common parenting experiences, the women discuss how their legal name, a marker of their Nigerian identity, served as a consist reminder of their difference in the classroom. All the women remember the hubbub after hearing their name called during graduation.

Ekwensi: “There were two Africans in my high school, and our names sounded kind of alike. When they called our names at graduation, I remember [the audience] screaming like, ‘What kind of name is that? When they stated my full name, my principal could barely pronounce it. So everybody was like ‘Whoa!’ You could tell that people were staring at you. After graduation, I passed a girl, and she said, ‘That’s the girl; they were calling her name.’”

Ayim: “At my graduation, my principal asked me how to pronounce my first, middle, and last name. And I was trying to tell him, don’t worry about pronouncing the middle, save yourself the trouble. My parents don’t care; I don’t care; Just do the first and last name. But he kept trying to say the whole thing, and like took his time, and made a big deal out of it. It makes you

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120 Ekwensi, Brianna. Interview by author. Oxford, MS.
121 Ibid.
have this unwanted attention on you in front of all these people at graduation, so one thing that made me mad at graduation.”

Although these women do not have a shared migration history, their shared experience of an African upbringing and coping with difference draws them together and helps them make meaningful relationships at the University. The women understand their African community as a means to exchange stories and create their own identities outside of the direct of their parents. On these university campuses, we see how African community continues to exist and how first and second generations make connections because of an African heritage or experiences in the United States.

Despite their common experiences, the women disagree on how they identify themselves. Ohakim, a second generation Nigerian, identifies herself as an African-American. “When they see my name and they ask me where I’m from, I say Baltimore. When they ask me where my mom is from I say Nigeria. I’m African-American. I identify as American.” Although Ohakim has strong connections to Nigeria, she sees herself as a Black American with Nigerian parents.

African immigrants and their children develop community as a choice as well as a necessity. Sharing migration history or common experiences helps link the African community throughout the state and becomes one of the defining characteristics of the community. The community serves as what Arthur describes as a support group for veteran and new immigrants to Jackson. Having African community Jackson not only strengthens the community but it gives new immigrants a sense of identity. Africans develop community through shared migration

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122 Ayim, Megan. Interview by author. Oxford, MS.
123 Ohakim, Samatha. Interview by author. Oxford, MS.
experiences and further characterize themselves as a community with shared cultural values and practices.
An Imagined Africa: African Community as an Expression of African Realities

One of the larger impacts on the perception of African community lies on the way Americans imagine Africa. The false perception Americans create about Africa and its people keeps Africans and their American neighbors from forming meaningful relationships and further keeps Americans from seeing African community as valuable and a necessity in the South. For Americans, their idea of Africans rules their limited understanding of the African community. African community represents the variety of experiences of Africa and dispels myths Americans learn about Africa and its people. Because of these myths and beliefs about Africa, African community becomes a necessity in the U.S. South to display the social and cultural realities of Africa. In addition, how Americans understand Africa and African people contributes to the closed society that Mississippi develops as a shield for Southern culture and identity. Although Africans do not feel obligated to respond to the ideas of Americans, the limited knowledge most Americans have of African does negatively affect Africans. Africans develop community to represent the range of African experiences both in their country of origin and in the United States. African community forms as a means to develop community-based identity rather than media produced perceptions. An emphasis on African problems continues to perpetuate negative stereotypes of Africa and its people further pushing Africans to develop community that serves as a space of the realities of Africa.

Learning Africa...again

Most Americans learn about Africa through television, literature, and print culture, which often present false and limited information about the continent and its people. When it comes to knowledge about African, Keim notes that Americans deal in exoticism, the belief in the extreme
foreignness or the extreme normalness of Africa. In this sense, some Americans view Africa as a place in opposition to the United States or Western culture or just as “normal” as Western culture. Some Americans understand Africa as primitive and pre-modern place of comfort rather than a real place with a range of people, cultures, and countries.124

Although some images of Africa are positive, these stereotypes limit Americans understanding of Africa. In the study of Southern culture, one of the pieces that has been often overlooked is the presence of Africanisms in the culture. Besides the historical works of Joseph E. Holloway’s *Africanisms in American Culture* and Judith Carney’s *In the Shadow of Slavery: Africa's Botanical Legacy in the Atlantic World*, much of the research of Southern cultural studies fails to explore the role that Africa plays in the lives of southerners. However, in African-Americans’ literary works imagination of Africa shapes the Whites’ view of African-Americans and African-Americans’ view of themselves. For example, in Earnest Gaines’ *A Lesson Before Dying*, Jefferson’s defense attorney argues that because of Jefferson’s African ancestry, he is not able to think or act rationally.125 Many episodes like this one existed in the slave and then segregated South to justify the enslavement and treatment of African-Americans. Even Thomas Jefferson believed that the “Negroes” from Africa were naturally or inherently inferior with limited ability for intelligence and critical and analytical thinking and thus should not be considered man or free in the new country.126 In *Up from Slavery*, Booker T. Washington suggests that Africans were unfortunately uncivil and needed the help of African-Americans to improve the conditions of their lives and culture.127 He argues that although slavery was a

horrific institution, it civilized African-Americans so they could reach out and help their African brothers and sisters. This belief that Africans were uncivil as compared to African-Americans supported a belief in the domination of Western culture, religion, and ideology. This faulty ideology heavily damaged African cultures and civilization in the early twentieth century, and as a result, limited the abilities of African-Americans although removed by time and space.

With these images of Africans in literature, we understand how American’s learn about Africa. Furthermore, we understand how these works perpetuate negative stereotypes of Africa. In these cases, we continue to solidify the development of African community as a space to express the varying realities of African people. Americans transfer their negative language and depictions about African onto African immigrants and their children in Jackson practicing the tradition of the commodification of the Black body. In Stephanie Smallwood’s *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*, Smallwood examines archival records of slave traders and enslaved people to note the destruction of the enslaved individual during the Middle Passage.\(^{128}\) Slave trades limited the enslaved person’s identities and turned captives into commodities. Although the limitations of the African body does not take an extreme as during the Middle Passage, the tradition of owning the body through limited perception continues in the relationship between Africans and Americans.

Americans place their ideas of Africa onto Africans as a means of ownership over their body and their identity. This imagination of Africa and the ownership and civilization of African people contributes to the marginalization of African immigrants in America. In this sense, Africans find community where they learn about themselves and each other. They negotiate

their identities in a transformed closed society and use their display of African heritage in African community as a tool to teach Africa. Their constructed African identities in the U.S. South work to reclaim their histories and identity as Africans. Americans use their understanding of Africa to force African to assimilate into American society as Americans understand them rather than as through their own identities and experiences.

For second generation Africans, the ideas of an uncivil and primitive Africa takes place as early as elementary school. For Abraham Bello, the teasing started when he first introduced himself to his classmates. Bello attended a college-prep school in Oakland, California. Bello grew with an unknown African and Nigerian identity. He father left the family after Bello turned two years-old. Named for his father, Bello knew that he was different because of his name. Despite his absent father, Bello’s mother and grandmother worked to instill a sense of African pride and Bello used this pride to work hard in school. As his relationship with his classmates grew, they began to see him as normal yet media still influenced many of his interactions with his classmates.

“When you think about how Africa’s portrayed in the media, it’s never going to be anything good. They [Americans] go off what they see with that. When they found out that you’re African, you know it’s going to be negative. Roots came out. That’s a whole new level of crazy. The first time I punched a girl in the face. We were watching Roots, and people would be like Toby and hit me on the back. One day I was helping my teacher out, and this girl came in that I knew. She got the back of a bomb box cord, the kind that comes out, she took it out the wall and started beating me it. She kept calling me Toby. She was wailing at me so I slid under a desk. She hit the desk and I jumped on the desk, jumped on top of her and hit her in the face. She had some pretty hair, I grabbed her by her hair and dragged her to the principal’s office. And I was mad too and I was crying. I didn’t want my mom to know so I kinda kept it hush hush. The principal was just amazed and they didn’t just understand like, people don’t understand”

129 Bello, Abraham. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
130 Ibid.
Although Bello’s experience turned violent, which is rare, his classmate’s desire to own his body and construct his identity as ‘unruly’ marked a new level in the ways American understand Africans. This proved for Bello that media directly influenced how his classmate would treat him. Even though his classmates knew him since elementary, they felt entitled to reshape his identity as African. As he saw his classmate learn from media, he began to understand that he could not trust media’s interpretation of groups of people. Only until Bello moved to Jackson to attend Jackson State University did he learn more about being Nigerian and having African community. He initially connected with one of his Nigerian professors who encouraged him to do better in school and work like a Nigerian man. He offered to take Bello to Nigeria, but he died before they had the change to visit. “The older I got the more I wanted to know; I didn’t want to change my names. So if somebody had to say something about me or about me being African, so whatever I knew about Black people and Black culture, I’d say something about that.”131 Bello found community in Jackson that helped him learn about himself and his Nigerian heritage. In these spaces, Bello could examine his life experiences and learn the value of his Nigerian heritage in an American society. The communities that other Nigerian men developed for Bello helped him see himself in a new way: as Nigerian. Because of these experiences in his new community, Bello wanted to learn more about being Nigerian and started to renegotiate his identity as African and African-American in the U.S. South.

Rebecca Mvula, a first generation Zambian, felt some of the same pressures when she moved to Mississippi to attend Piney Woods Country Life School. Mvula recalled moving from Zambia and having to educate her schoolmates on Africa and Zambia, an education she felt should happen in their high schools.

131 Ibid.
“I felt people need to learn more about history. Because people think Africa is an island. When I say Zambia, they think Africa is just one country and we all speak the same language. I don’t want to go to Africa because it’s too hot. When I go there, I’ll get burned and I’ll be so dark and maybe I might get sick. The stuff they see on TV: Most people when they go, they go to the village and they’ll take pictures of those dirty kids and they’ll put them on TV like send a dollar to those kids so she can go to school and things like that. But that’s for their own profit. So people think Africa is this desert.”

Rebecca Mvula remarks that the display of “dirty kids” from Africa perpetuates a stereotype of a pre-modern Africa for Americans. Mvula noted that outside of the stereotypes about a mystical and primitive Africa, it is hard to find well-rounded depictions of Africa. However, Mvula used African community in high school and in college as a way to develop relationships without judgment. She focused on her studies and worked hard to earn her education. Mvula plans to return to an African country to work with public health. For Mvula, African community met her needs as an immigrant especially since a majority of its members were first generation Africans. When she started at Rust College, Mvula worked with Africans at the school to discuss issues dealing with students and administration. The community worked together to insure students had the appropriate resources to complete their studies and find job opportunities after college. African community continues to work against the stereotypes about Africans. In some cases, they work together to express their cultural selves and find ways to work in United States.

In these examples, the African body becomes a site to personify the beliefs that some Americans have about Africa. The ideas that most Americans learn through media, literature, and popular culture influence their understandings of the African body. In this respect, the African body becomes a place to be civilized. In many interactions, Africans report moments

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132 Mvula, Rebecca. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
133 Ibid.
when Americans expect them not to be able to speak English or other European languages or expect Africans to not understand daily processes, such as washing clothes in a machine, daily hygiene, or the politics of the workplace. Furthermore, the African male is civilized through emasculation and the female African body through domestication. In both examples, we see how Americans’ view Africans as a place to destroy through violence or violent words. The dehumanization for African immigrants helps Americans adjust their image of Africa and the reality of Africans and their homeland.

Table 7. The Commodification of the African Body
African community exists as a tool to display the variety of African experiences, cultures, and heritages outside of the negative portrayal from media. As African community continues to grow, Africans find ways to identify themselves and share their true and individual experiences. In Smallwood’s text, she tracks the enslavement of the slave body through commodification. Smallwood argues that slaves fought commodification through practicing African rituals to tell a “coherent story out of an incoherent experience.” Although new members of the Paul Gilroy’s *Black Atlantic*, Africans uses African cultural values and traditions to work against American perceptions of Africa. In these settings, Africans discuss how different their experiences are growing up in Africa and living in the United States as immigrants. Africans see the community as an opportunity for understanding about Africa in more complete light. Although the community does not represent the entirety of a large continent, it does vary the meaning of Africans in Jackson. Uba, a Nigerian immigrant and former minster for Mt. Galilee Church, believes that Africans contribute to the fabric of Southern culture. Uba says Africans can connect with Southern identity through religion, education, and athletics. “We are not [completely] separate from the American communities.”

An American understanding of Africa contributes to the development of African community in Jackson, MS. Because of myths Americans learn about Africa, some Southerners exclude Africans from society. Furthermore, they use these myths to take ownership of the African body and identity. However, African community develops as a means to dispel myths about Africa and express the varying identities of Africans in Jackson, MS. In African community, Africans learn about each other and themselves and define their own reality amidst the social pressures to assimilate into American culture in the lines of these myths. Africans

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continue to prove that they do not represent a homogenous group, but rather a group linked
together by common ideas through memory and performance of their home and reconstruct their
identities. Through necessity and their own sense of autonomy, Africans develop community to
agents to express their ethnicity in the United States.
African Christian Fellowship seeks to rebuild the community from their home and pass on an African legacy to their children. Fellowship becomes a safe space for Africans to practice and maintain their rituals. It also becomes an area, where they can create community. It is here, in the shared space where practices are merged and homogenized. The organization was found in 1976 by African students studying in America. Originally called African Christian Student Fellowship, the students sought to encourage each other. They did not find satisfaction in other organizations on campus, and it was hard being away from home. At the first national conference held in 1978 in Tulsa Oklahoma, the students appointed Meschach Ilobi as president and Wakoma was appointed as the coordinator of the Caretaker committee. As the organization expands, the need for bylaws and formal committees became important especially during the 1980s and 1990s as African immigration increased. African Christian Student Fellowship incorporated in 1981 and received tax-exemption in 1988. In 1989, the name of the organization changed from African Christian Student Fellowship to African Christian Fellowship under the leadership of Adiele Nwankwo.\(^{135}\)

\(\textit{ACFUSA: A History}\)

African Christian Fellowship now has fifty chapters across the United States serving its four principles: building bridges, building the family, passing the legacy, and reconnecting with Africa. ACFUSA is not a homogenous group and there is no guarantee that there is more than one family from one ethnic group with the thousands of ethnic groups and languages.

ACFUSA uses a typical governmental structure with a board of directors and voting body that consists of two representatives from each of the five regions. Each region governs chapters, and each chapter decides the best meeting days for its members and the activities for its members including special events such as Easter and Thanksgiving celebrations. In order to become a member of ACFUSA, one must be a Christian, be 12 years-old or older, and accept the purpose and statement of belief for the organization. Members must abide by the constitution and bylaws of the ACFUSA and make financial contributions to the organization. The organization has membership drives four times a year where they encourage Africans and friends to join the organization. Each chapter holds their own pinning ceremonies where the new members receive pins and a membership handbook.

ACFUSA holds annual conferences for the members of the organization. At the conferences, young adults meet friends and new young members and hold intelligent competitions and debates centered on issues in Africa and their futures as Africans in America. Authors sell their books; musicians sell their CDs; and other members network sharing their experiences and planning for mission work in Africa. The conferences would not be complete without the spiritual services held nightly. After the conference, members are revived with mission of ACFUSA “thriving Christian community that models integrity, excellence, and compassion to mobilize and empower Africans worldwide to impact their generation and Africa.”

The Jackson Chapter of ACFUSA upholds the mission of the national constitution providing the Greater Jackson Area with a Christian Africa community and remaining committed to the initial vision set for the organization.

137 Ibid, 12.
The Battlefield District south of Downtown Jackson is an African-American area where we find the most prominent African community. Known as Doodleville, among other names, the district experienced “white flight” after African-Americans moved into the neighborhood and was completely African-American in the early 1950s. The center of the community is the church, Mt. Galilee M.B. Church. This place is where the local meets the global. The church is the intersection of the local and the global. Servicing as the both a meeting place for the community and as a place for the meeting of the Jackson chapter of the African Christian Fellowship USA, Inc., Mt. Galilee is a place with a global dimension. The global dimension is a cultural interaction or lack of interaction between the African-American and African communities and the role of African Christian Fellowship USA, Inc. in adjustment into American society.

Mt. Galilee M.B. Church was organized in 1885 on the Galilee Hill a few miles from its present location in the Black community. Polly Barnyard named the church and Rev. William Wright served as the first pastor. After several years, the church moved to a lot owned by Mrs. Watkins on Julienne Street, its current location, in 1926. This was a period of struggle for the church moving to a new community and reaching new members. Under the leadership of Reverend J.A. Alexander (1944-1961), the church was able to add bathrooms, a choir stand and a baptismal pool to the main sanctuary. He was also responsible for purchasing new pulpit furniture and pews. The church didn’t receive air conditioning and a brick exterior until the late sixties. The church purchased land for a new building from Mother Sadie Jones in the early seventies. In 2002, Mt. Galilee built a new building on the lot they purchased from Mother Jones, and the small brick building that had served as a worship center and pillar in the

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140 Laguan, Ann. E-mail interview. 20 Nov. 2012.
community since its establishment in 1926 was dedicated as the Alfred Fellowship Hall. The fellowship hall serves as a place for celebration in the community. As families and members of the church began to move from the community surrounding the church, the momentum and vigor of the community began to die. From baby showers to church anniversaries, the fellowship hall is one of the last lights in the community hoping to bring the community together.

*Race and Immigration*

Research on race and immigration mostly focus on Latino and Asian immigrant community often limiting the research on how race influences Black immigrations prior to 1870. However, the findings on race and immigration in some ways connect to the experiences of African immigrants. In his article “Race, Nation, and Culture in Recent Immigration Studies,” George J. Sanchez discovers that many sociological studies suggest that Asian and Latino immigrants would assimilate fully into American society like their European counterparts especially after 1960. However, Sanchez states that race plays a factor in how these immigrants immerse themselves into American culture. His findings show that Americans racially separate immigrants and because of their “racial status often makes them susceptible to questions about their loyalty to the United States.” Unlike, Latino and Asian immigrant communities, Africans do not have an opportunity to develop their community as new. They work harder to find community and redefine Blackness and African immigration.

Some Africans see the United States as a fresh start or as a promised land; however, they quickly learn how race plays into their acceptance in White American society. Immediately

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142 Ibid, 17.
when they enter the United States, Americans label Africans as African-American and expect Africans to identify with the already established African-American community. Adeoye moved to the United States through a government program. The program placed Adeoye at a school in Alabama where he would study aviation. As a student at an Anglican high school in Nigeria, Adeoye started attending an Anglican church when he came to the United States but was the only Black person in the entire church of about 2000 members. He did not understand racial segregation and racism in the 1979 South, but he remembered how the pews would empty after he joined a row. On one particular Sunday, a church member confronted Adeoye about his experience at the church.  

“He asked, “Are you comfortable here?” I said, “Oh sure.” He didn’t even listen to me. He took me to way way way in the woods about ten miles from the church and it was, I’ll never forget I was sitting in the car like this. And some Black people came from that little church. And they came and they welcomed me. So he drove out. So I didn’t know anybody, so after that those people took me back to the school because the school had a dormitory.”

Adeoye never attended the Anglican church again and attended the small African-American Pentecostal church for the rest of the year. Adeoye felt welcomed at the church and the church member took care of him and never allowed him to miss one service. “They say, ‘Oh our ancestor has come.” (laughs) I was thrilled. I was thrilled.”

When the government program ended because of political unrest in Nigeria, Adeoye was forced to move to Jackson to be with his cousin. His new church warned him of moving to Mississippi, yet his only other option involved moving back to the Delta State in Nigeria. Adeoye moved to his understanding of Southern race relations and only interacted with his

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143 Adeoye, Lionel. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
144 Ibid.
145 Ibid.
schoolmates and Nigerian friends. When he wanted to join a church, he befriended a local deacon at an African-American Baptist church. The deacon would drive Adeoye to church every Sunday. Eventually, Adeoye began to work in the church and earned the position as pastor of the church. Because of his relationship with the church, the newly found ACFUSA started meeting in the church’s fellowship hall on Saturday evenings in 1998.

In Adeoye’s journey, the push into an African-American community helped to create stability for African community. Africans and African-Americans meet in the same spaces in Jackson uniquely because of their shared race. Mt. Galilee serves as the historically African-American space and opened its door to the community through their relationship with Adeoye.146

Mt. Galilee and ACFUSA: The Beginning

In interviews with many members of the Jackson chapter of ACFUSA, I learned how the fellowship is a created place of home and its global dimensions of outreach and community development. In an interview with Pastor Lionel Adeoye, the pastor of Mt. Galilee and member of ACFUSA, he shared the establishment of the Jackson chapter the missions of the organization in the Greater Jackson community and throughout the world. Adeoye grew up in Urhuoka Abraka Delta State, Nigeria. He moved to Alabama to study aviation as a part of a scholarship from the Nigerian government in 1979. After two years, political unrest in Nigeria ended the scholarship program forcing the young men to find their own way in the United States or return home. Adeoye moved to Mississippi and received his bachelor’s and master’s from Jackson State University in industrial technology. While at Jackson State, Reverend Ronnie Crudup, a

146 Ibid.
pastor from a nearby church, invited him to Mt. Galilee. Alfred Peen, for which the fellowship hall is named, would pick Adeoye up for church. His church was a good place for him to grow as a Christian. After four years of membership, Adeoye was called to the ministry. He was initially interested in the missionary, but the more he pulled away, he more felt compelled to preach the gospel. For two and a half years, Adeoye served under the leadership of Rev. Crudup. Crudup decided to leave Mt. Galilee to form his own church leaving Adeoye in charge. Adeoye was immediately appointed as pastor and has served at Mt. Galilee for twenty-five years.\footnote{Adeoye, Lionel. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.}

When Adeoye came to Jackson in 1981, there was an organization for African students called Scripture Union, an international group for high school students. The organization was designed for African students as a place for them to come together, pray, and be themselves. The sponsor was an Ibo man named Sunday who encouraged and uplifted the group. The group met at different houses on Friday evenings until Rev. Crudup offered the fellowship hall as a temporary place for the group to meet. After Pastor Adeoye became the official head minister, the church offered the place as a permanent meeting space for the group free of charge.\footnote{Ibid.}

At this point, the group still had very few members and was very disorganized. There were other ACFUSA chapters around the South. Strong chapters in Texas, Georgia, and Louisiana were able to reach large numbers of African immigrants and created a presence in their respective cities.\footnote{Akanji, Joy. \textit{ACFUSA Membership Pinning Ceremony.} Baltimore: Strategic Solutions, 2009.} In 1998, when he heard that African immigrants in Jackson were looking for a way to revitalize their group, John Ofagbu moved from San Antonio to Jackson to help create the Jackson chapter of ACFUSA. Ofagbu became the first president of the Jackson and help the chapter reach more African immigrants.\footnote{Adeoye, Lionel. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.}
In 1998, the group had reached many African immigrants, but there were only four dedicated families: the Ubas, the Adeoyes, the Ekugwums, and the Mvulas. When the Falanas, a family from Nigeria, moved from Atlanta, GA, they were immediately interested in being involved in the Jackson chapter of ACFUSA, having been involved with the Atlanta chapter. The Atlanta chapter was large and was very active in the African community. The Falanas realized that the Jackson chapter had reached its full potential and worked to increase the membership of the Jackson chapter. Dr. Zion Falana, a mother with two small children, looked in the phone book for African families and networked with Africans she met in the new city. Dr. Falana also introduced Africa Day, a celebration of the organization’s African heritage and a tool to attract new families and students looking for African community. Their efforts paid off and quickly the fellowship grew to twenty families.

When my sister, my mother Janet Mvula, a Zambian immigrant, and I moved to the Hightower Community in 1995, we joined both Mt. Galilee and ACFUSA, which filled our weekends with two different with similar spiritual services. My sister and I knew when Saturday evening came, we were walking to the fellowship hall to African Christian Fellowship. At the meeting, we sang praise and worship while dancing in a large circle. After praise and worship, we heard announcements and plans for special events and retreats for the chapter. Then, the chapter delivered a sermon on the importance of living a godly life and how to overcome the hardships of living and raising children in America.

Fellowship was the only place besides my uncle’s house that I could meet other Africans. It was another world very separate from my school life. ACFUSA introduced me to a world special and different from my school friends. The space created by ACFUSA taught me how to

151 Falana, Zion. Interview by author. Madison, MS.
152 Mvula, Janet. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
socialize with and show respect to African people. I learned the value of African traditions through performance. When family would visit from Zambia, I would know the proper way to greet, serve and speak to them. A large majority of the members of the fellowship are Nigerian, which introduced me to Nigerian foods, dress, and come cultural practices. ACFUSA was more than the annoying meetings I had to attend every Saturday. It was my connection to Africa, the part that I was missing living in America.

African Christian Fellowship uses the space to recreate the place, which they identify with. As the community becomes more global, there is a struggle between place and social “production of locality.”153 African immigrants feel the struggle between their place and the space they are in. The organization has a sense of place within their space. The South is a place that struggles with the understanding of heritage. They value memory and performance. This is the perfect place for Africans to display their culture. Living in America and most products of colonialism, there is a struggle between place and heritage. African immigrants and their children need a place to produce their cultural practices and create a legacy for their children. In the South, there is a value of tradition, legacy, and ownership. This allows for immigrants to carry their traditions, create a legacy through their children, and have ownership of their representation in the community. Minority groups are determined to link themselves to their ethnic identity. They link themselves to a religious affiliation in the case of ACFUSA. Since African immigrants do not present a homogenous group, they focus on their common interest: Christ and a desire for home.154

For many, ACFUSA is a home. It is hard to imagine living in a place that will never be home. Even if you’ve lived in a place for twenty years, there will never be a full adjustment. The organization supports its members creating a connection that the members do not have with the Americans they work, go to church, and send their children to school with.

Table 6. African Countries Represented in the greater Jackson, MS area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Estimate</th>
<th>Margin of Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subsaharan African:</td>
<td>652</td>
<td>+/-413</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cape Verdean</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ghanaian</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenyan</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberian</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nigerian</td>
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<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Senegalese</td>
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<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Leonean</td>
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<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Somalian</td>
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<td>+/-29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South African</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sudanese</td>
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<td>+/-29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Zimbabwean</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>African</td>
<td>627</td>
<td>+/-411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Subsaharan African</td>
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<td>+/-13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: http://factfinder2.census.gov/faces/tableservices/jsf/pages/productview.xhtml?pid=ACS_12_5YR_B04001

Oliver Goma, a lawyer from the Republic of Congo-Brazzaville, moved to the United State in 1995 and moved to Jackson, MS in 2000. His initial experience was “remarkable because of the friendship” he built in his religious community. ACFUSA served as a place for him to meet people with similar roots and experience. He and his family were able to have a gradual adjustment to American society instead of the sudden shock. Mahougou was pleased to meet people who determined to reach their goals even though they were living a life far away from home. He believes that because of groups like ACFUSA, the African community does not
have to copy American customs that they feel are morally or ethically wrong. He is more willing to raise his children around a community that values the strong family tradition of respect and take the responsibility of raising children seriously. He feels that the interconnectivity of the African community contribute to the fabric of the globalizing US South spiritually, economically, and socially.155

The president of the Jackson chapter of ACFUSA Dr. Robert Okonkwo, believes that ACFUSA serves as the “stabilizing factor in [his] life. He is originally from Nigeria, but lived in Canada while finishing his PhD in Microbiology. When he moved to Jackson, MS in 2003, he was looking for a community that would accept him and his family. He interacted minimally with his community because Americans did not share the same values that African shared. He felt that the individualistic characteristics of the Americans he met with were helpful for his adjustment to living in the United States. ACFUSA helped Okonkwo to network with other Africans and grow as a leader in the African community. The members of ACFUSA are their brother’s keepers connecting with each on a deeper level.156 Dr. Joseph Uba had a similar experience with ACFUSA. Dr. Uba was the second president of the Jackson chapter and for him, ACFUSA absorbed the feelings of culture shock when moving to the United States for the first time.157

An Evolving Identity

For second generation the struggle with African-American plagues relationships we form in school. For Wale, the struggle helped him to find community in African-American spaces. Wale, a second generation Nigerian, was the last and third child of Zion Falana and the only

155 Goma, Oliver. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
156 Okonkwo, Robert. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
157 Uba, Joseph. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
child born in the United States. He saw his identity as Nigerian as an ever-evolving system. His parents made sure he understood himself as different from Americans and his classmates saw him as different. He found himself somewhat isolated because of his Nigerian heritage.158

“There was hardly anyone around me that shared the same ambition and layered perspective through which I viewed my life, which made it quite difficult to identify with people throughout high school. Additionally, I often felt that being limited to just an American experience often alienated me from my parents and kept them from really understanding how life affected me while also making their expectations seem rather overbearing.”159

Wale Falana further felt isolated by his White friend and struggle with the idea of Southern Blackness.

“My interactions with African-American culture have evolved considerably over time. When I was very young, I was hardly cognizant of race and thus thought very little about any differences between my own culture and African-American culture. When I was in middle school I began to feel the effects of the differences in cultures and often felt that I did not much identify with the African-American culture, even feeling more comfortable in the dominant Caucasian culture. However, things shifted toward the middle of high school when I really became convinced that I would never truly be accepted in the Caucasian culture of Mississippi which included many people that were intimidated, fearful, or simply could not understand me. At the same time I started to play football with a large number of African Americans and got to know many of them better. In return they gave me a great deal of respect for being intelligent and also skilled in athletics. There was a particularly memorable moment right after graduation where a group of African-Americans who I had played football with for the last four years out of the blue told me that I truly represented for them and when I had been awarded for finishing in the top three of my graduating class, they felt like they were getting an award. That moment capsulated a fundamental shift in my perspective where I became convinced that even if the culture I was brought up in was completely different that the African-American culture around me the struggles we both faced due to the color of our skin bound us all together in a way that could not be severed. If I succeeded, their lives would be made better and vice versa. That kind of symbiotic relationship made me see African-American culture as something that I could adopt out of solidarity for my Black brothers going through the same struggles I would have to go through. Even as I began to understand and see myself more strongly in the light of my Nigerian culture as I went through college, at a the diversity of the Black community at Stanford solidified my view of the beauty and strength of try Pan-Africanism that embraces all people from the African Diaspora.”160

158 Falana, Wale. Interview by author. Email.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
Wale Falana’s evolution in understanding his race in Mississippi mirrors how the African community develops in African-American cultural society. As Wale Falana began to recognize his acceptance in African-American spaces, he began to understand how his Nigerian identity fit his life. Although Wale Falana understood himself as Nigerian, he builds relationship with African-Americans and finds ways to embrace others who embrace him.\textsuperscript{161}

As we have examined African, we see how Africans work within a Southern system to develop community as a means of self-identification in African-American space. By combating act of commodification and the closed society, Africans re-image themselves in Jackson, MS and work to preserve a sense of African heritage and tradition in Jackson. The tradition of racial segregation in the South also serves as a factor that characterizes African community and their interactions with American society. Africans navigate themselves in a race conscious region and develop community as a means to redefine Blackness. One characteristic that helps African community continue to exist is a shared race with the already established African-American community. This chapter examines how Africans understand race and their identity as Black immigrants. Africans are grouped into this existing group and expected to fit in the same way as African-Americans. However, African immigrants do not fully identify with the African community. Therefore, Africans develop community to construct their own ethnic identities. Through acts of resistance, Africans challenge the traditional meaning of Blackness in America and form community as a model of African ethnic identity in Jackson, MS. In addition, this chapter looks at how Africans support each in their community. Through shared migration experiences in a closed society, Africans develop as a means of survival in Jackson, MS amidst social pressure to assimilate in American society and African-American culture.

\textsuperscript{161} Ibid.
Women and African Community

In studies on community and regionalism, scholars speak of women’s participation in region as an afterthought. Two or three chapters into a text, the roles of women are discussed mostly as it relates to the needs and desires of men. Although historical sources are limited in their representation of women, as academics, we have an obligation to take a more nuanced look at how women work in communities both inside and outside of traditional domestic roles. Traditionally, scholars view women as sustainers of community rather than developers. Researchers particularly portray these women as secondary members of the region and dependents on men for mobility and livelihood. Often women in stories of region and community fulfill domestic duties as wives, mothers, and maids or cooks and are positioned in the view of men. In African community in the U.S. South, women serve as cultivators of the community and help maintain the ideology of the group through markers of identities that display African heritages. In addition, women in African community nurture and transform the space created for Africans by challenging the traditional roles assigned to women in patriarchal systems. African women living in the U.S. South hold a valuable place in the community and adapt to the constantly changing social needs of the community. Women function in the community in ways that men do not, furthermore, allowing women opportunities to take a critical look at the African community and make connections to African heritage and the future of their new American communities. In Elliot West’s Contested Plains, West shows the women as secondary to the movement West. In this new community, women worked as nurses, maids, and cooks rather than a part of the growth and development of the West.

Women find spaces for the community not only to survive in a hostile U.S. South but to thrive in the cultural development of an African Southern identity. Women create what Stephanie
M. Camp calls “rival geographies” inside the community to develop themselves as a group outside of the dominant community.\(^{162}\) A phrase coined by Edward Said, oppressed members of society created rival geographies in resistance to the dominant space.\(^{163}\) In African communities, women’s rival geographies are “alternative ways of knowing” and spaces formed in resistance to the male-dominated structured systems.\(^{164}\) We will examine these themes in African community and re-imagine African women as contributors to African community in the U.S. South and not secondary members of the region. African women do not passively participate in the development of community in the U.S. South. These women, through migration and community development, contribute to the meaning of the global South. Although capitalist systems and traditional cultural production value male-dominated systems, women are able to find a sense of autonomy and find outlets such education and leadership to build their own bonds to community.

**Women and Migration**

Migration research on African immigration concludes that men solely determine women immigration. The lives and migration of women are situated through “the lens of their male counterparts.”\(^{165}\) These research studies give women little to no sense of autonomy even though women are migrating at a faster rate than men. From 1980 to 2007, the percentage of Africa foreign-born\(^ {166}\) women in the United States increased from 36.3% to 45.6% while the percentage

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\(^{163}\) Ibid.

\(^{164}\) Ibid.


\(^{166}\) “When describing international migrants, the US Census Bureau uses the term *foreign born*, defined simply as "people who are not US citizens at birth." The foreign-born population includes immigrants, legal non-immigrants (e.g., refugees and persons on student or work visas), and persons illegally residing in the United States. By comparison, the term *native* refers to people residing in the United States who are US citizens in one of three categories: 1) people born in one of the 50 states or the District of Columbia, 2) people born in the US Insular Areas such as Puerto Rico or Guam, or 3) people born abroad of a US citizen parent.”
of men decrease steadily from 63.7% to 54.4%. According the Migration Information Source, in 2007, men outnumber women 54.4 to 45.6%. Only two years later, the number of women immigrants increased by .2% as the African foreign-born population also increased by .2% from 3.7% of the immigrant population in 2007 to 3.9% in 2009. The research shows that women are a growing part of African community. Studies focus on how women come as secondary members of African community. In addition to the numbers, women come to the United States for similar reasons as their male counterparts such as career advancement, educational training, and economic improvement. In other cases, women do participate in involuntary migration to rejoin their spouses and families or as refugees of war and conflict in their home countries. Some women migrate to escape patriarchal and paternalistic systems in their home countries. They can often find more opportunities and less gender discrimination (although not fully complete) in the United States. Despite the reasons for their migration, women construct and reconstruct their identities through migration and contextualize how their gender roles play out in a new space. Like their male counterparts, women have strong ties to their homeland while continually negotiating their place in the foreign land. These women use their migration as a symbol of freedom and still find ways to connect with their homeland. They desire, like men, to find community amongst those who may have similar experiences migrating and adjusting to American society.

169 Ibid.
171 Ibid.
Women in African Community

There are various ways women cultivate community in the South. We see this in the
development of one of the most common African community in Jackson, Mississippi is the
African Christian Fellowship-USA, Inc. (ACFUSA). Originally founded by college students in
1976, African students sought to help each other in a society they saw as unwelcoming. The
organization transitioned into African Christian Fellowship as the students left college and
started careers in Jackson. The Jackson chapter of ACFUSA holds weekly meetings on Saturday
evenings, including Saturday evening in November reserved for Thanksgiving celebrations.
They meet in a place founded in 1885 by former slaves. Mt. Galilee M.B. Church served as a
safe haven for people of African descent for several generations and now holds a new space for
newer members of the African Diaspora. Members of the fellowship came early to decorate the
room with harvest-themed decor: pumpkins, fall leaves, and warm colors. To start the
fellowship, the ACFUSA Praise and Worship team sings and praises God. The congregation
worships God with hands lifted and voices raised inside and outside of standards of Western
 tonality. Congo drums and a drum kit accompany the singing along with the syncopated rhythms
of clapping and stomping. During the services, a sister of the fellowship escorts the children to a
children’s service that mirrors the lessons learned by adults. Because the class will be larger
than normal because of the attendance for the celebration, the teacher appoints a teenage girl to
assist her in the children’s education.

After the children are dismissed, the fellowship continues with a sermon from the
president of the fellowship. The sermon focuses on evaluating needs from wants and sharing our
excess with those less fortunate. After the sermon, some women go to the kitchen to prepare the
Thanksgiving feast. Under the indirect direction of my mother, I follow the women, who include
the matriarch of the chapter and several women who brought food. Almost every woman in the kitchen is dressed in African attire for the celebration: long printed skirts, large headdresses, and fitted blouses to match the skirts. The first lady clearly leads the women in the preparations by giving orders about the food coming in and places to keep the food warm and readily available when it is time for dinner. Members and guests bring pizza, turkey, chicken, jollof rice, Zambian rice, pies, cakes, puff puff, greens, and other African and American dishes. The women in the kitchen warm and organize food, and the only food that has to be freshly cook is the fufu, a traditional Nigerian carbohydrate dish. The matriarch of the fellowship Sis. Ethel Egwu prepares the fufu. While she cooks at least thirty pounds of fufu, the women discuss how different the dish is in America because of access to traditional ingredients. They suggest ingredients to replace those traditional ingredients that are not readily available. They complain that the fufu will never taste the same, but they have found ways to make the dish as closely to their memory as possible. Because of the quantity of fufu needed for the event, the fufu must be prepared in a very large and deep pot. One of the women who prepared about fifteen pounds of jollof rice warms the rice in a pot large enough to hold a small child. The pots come directly from Nigeria, and the women discuss the ways they transported their pots from their country to America. The women discuss getting these pots through customs and dispute myths about larger pots that travel to the United States.

Outside the kitchen, the president announces that it is testimony time and confirms that the women have about forty-five more minutes to prepare the food. Although many women prepare food in the kitchen, not all women spend time in the kitchen. The first lady calls the women in the kitchen the “Marthas” for doing the behind the scenes work. This sparks a discussion about the real asset to Jesus in the story of Martha and Mary. While the women are
preparing desserts, one of the women asks, “Do they [Americans] warm apple pie?” Everyone turns to her and shrugs suggesting that they do not know what to do with the pie. Someone suggests that the pie just be served cold and all the women seem to silently agree and resume their activities. After the last testimony, one additional song, and two prayers, the food is finally served. After everyone eats, Sis. Egwu makes one of the young boys turn on Nigerian praise music and some members of the congregation, mostly women, dance until Sis. Egwu and the first lady are the only ones left on the dance floor.

Although no African country celebrates Thanksgiving, this celebration serves as a time to give thanks to God and fellowship with this group of Africans. In this special celebration where the local meets the global, Africans openly negotiate their ties to an American and African heritage. We see the role of African women in the community as critical to the development of the community in these scenes. The kitchen and space for dancing serves as a rival geography within a rival geography where women display their own identities. In the kitchen, African women discuss issues specific to their needs and ways of connecting their home country to their Southern home. In this space, women discuss the ways they adapt to Southern American culture through substitution and transporting items from their home country. Because of their significance to the development of African community, we see pictures of African community through the lens of these women and other women. Women transform their spaces for education and recreation of African traditions in the U.S. South, a place not prepared to accommodate the needs of Africans.

In 1998, the Falanas, a family from Nigeria, moved to Jackson from Atlanta, Georgia to advance their careers as physicians. They were members of the ACFUSA chapters in Atlanta and immediately looked for the organization in Jackson. Transitioning from a very large
metropolitan\textsuperscript{172} chapter to a smaller chapter proved difficult for the Falanas. The organization did not offer the same opportunities for Africans as the Atlanta chapter. The Falanas saw two Southern cities in different stages of globalization: Atlanta, a globalizing place and Jackson, a city looking to keep ties with its Southern identity. Dr. Zion Falana noticed the lack of involvement in the organization. She met many Africans around the city who never heard of the organization. She began thinking of ways to help the chapter reach its full potential and draw in new members. She connected with Africans she met and worked to increase the membership of the Jackson chapter. Although she had two small children and a newborn, she devoted some of her time to the organization. She looked in the phone book for African names and families and called to invite them to the fellowship.\textsuperscript{173}

Dr. Zion Falana built on the legacy of Lewanika and continued to be vocal in the activities of the organization. Because she noticed the diverse nature of a heterogeneous organization such as an African fellowship, she organized African Day, a celebration of the organization’s African heritages and a tool to attract new families and students looking for African community in the city. Her efforts paid off as they saw the fellowship grow from five families to twenty dedicated families. Dr. Falana ultimately moved her new place towards a more globalizing stage by developing the African community. African women’s leadership created a balance and growth within the organization. Because of their involvement in the leadership of the organization, women in ACF assessed the needs of the organization and

\textsuperscript{172} The general concept of a metropolitan area is that of a large population nucleus, together with adjacent communities having a high degree of social and economic integration with that core. Metropolitan areas comprise one or more entire counties, except in New England, where cities and towns are the basic geographic units.

\textsuperscript{173} Falana, Zion. Interview by author. Madison, MS.
carefully contemplated ways to improve the Southern place for Africans and especially African women.174

In Patricia Hill-Collin’s text *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment*, she argues that Black feminists “stand at the focal point” of two oppressive systems: race and gender.175 Black women, both African-American and African women, exist in an alternative epistemology. As African-American women, African women have collective experience and create safe space to speak freely, which becomes less safe with other groups present.176 In addition, African women do exist in the same social spheres creating safe spaces for discussion of lifes in their homeland and in America. Theses African women are agents of knowledge who work within African community to reconstruct identities and work to adhere to the social needs of the community.177 Through acts of resistance in African community such as the rival geographies, African women foster power as momentum to cultivate community. Although difficult to translate “Afrocentric feminist epistemology into a Eurocentric masculinity framework,” this chapter examines the ways in which African women help develop community and define themselves through the community.178

These two women served as opinion leaders in their community. They along with other women modeled ideas and behaviors of adapting to Southern life and negotiating their African cultures and heritages. Dr. Falana’s actions extended the boundaries of African community and displayed a culture that the South had not observed fully before this time. She created a program that expressed the pride and spirituality of the organization while tracing the community’s stage

174 Ibid.
176 Ibid, 100.
177 Ibid.
178 Ibid.
in the journey towards an identity.\textsuperscript{179} Through this performance of African heritages, Dr. Falana inscribed a sense of identity of the community connected by migration through the diversity of cultures and cultural practices. She spread knowledge about what the organization could be for Africans and influenced public opinion of the African community.\textsuperscript{180}

In critical regionalism theory, knowledge is used to “facilitate material change.”\textsuperscript{181} Powell describes this concept as the central aspect to region. Women in African community expand knowledge and use this knowledge to further develop ideas about the community and make connections among Africans outside of this particular community. Through this material change, the idea of an African community moves from the small dedication of a few to the idea that large space can exist in a place that restricts the mobility and racial fluidity of Africans. With the growth of African immigrants and their families, women help to expand the rhetoric of African community and thus socially influence the rhetoric of Southern identity and a globalizing South.

Women participated in cultivating African community from its inception and expanded the knowledge about African community in the U.S. South. They along with, and not secondary to men, help create a safe space for Africans in Mississippi. In addition to their roles as contributors, they transform the Southern place and display their ethnic selves creating new identities. These displays of heritages and cultures express the community but also are negotiated and renegotiated based on the social and political needs of the community. Because African immigrants in the U.S. South are overpowered by what it means to be Black in the U.S. South, African women take a unique approach to present themselves through dress, food, and language as ethnically different. As we see in the kitchen scene, these women use food and dress

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{179} Ray, 74.
\textsuperscript{180} Falana, Zion. Interview by author. Madison, MS
\textsuperscript{181} Powell, 26.
\end{flushright}
as a symbol of African tradition. They dress in African attire and prepare traditional African dishes as a way to remember their home. In addition to this remembrance, African women also navigate their identities as members of the Southern American society. They openly discuss and display the ethnic differences between their homeland and the new land where they are making a home. Replacing ingredients and inquiring about American traditions note that African women are fully aware of American custom and place. However, even in this place, they find ways to balance their traditions with those of their new land. Women carry with them the culture of their home as a tool to find and create African space in the Southern place. Through dress, food, and language, African women build African tradition specific to the U.S. South. These traditions will serve as a legacy for their children who are raised and live in America. Through displaying and carrying African culture to the U.S. South, African women transform not only African community but also Southern community.

Carrying a Culture and Passing on a Legacy of Community

African women also present their ethnic identities in child rearing practices. African women transform the role of parenting by educating their children on their heritages. Because the children live in America, the traditions and customs their parents grew up with are not universally practiced or cherished. Like the facilitator of the marriage ceremony stated, practicing Nigerian traditions continues a tradition that shapes African identity in Jackson.

African women hold a special connection in carrying African traditions to America because of their relationship with their children. In an interview with Rebecca Mvula, she discussed the role African women play in the development of African traditions in the U.S. South. Mvula, a Master’s degree student at Jackson State University, moved to Mississippi from
Zambia in 2005 to finish high school. She noticed the important role of African women in the development of second generation Africans. She lives with our cousin and her family. Mvula’s cousin, a Zambian immigrant, is married to an African-American man, and they have three young children. In the interview, Mvula discussed how the Zambian mother practices Zambian traditions with the children through dress, food and speaking Lozi to the children. She teaches them basic Lozi practices and mannerism. Mvula says that these practices give the children some senses of Zambia and their mother as Zambian. The couple’s three year old son believes that he actually lives in Mississippi but when travels the thirty-five miles to Jackson, he visits Zambia. He deeply connects with his mother’s heritage and creates an imaginary space that he shares with his mother distinctively. He identifies as both Mississippian and Zambian and cannot imagine a place where both Mississippi and Zambia are not closely connected like his mother and him.\textsuperscript{182}

On the contrary, Mvula believes that in families where the father is African and the mother is African-American, the dynamics shifts as it relates to carrying African culture. Although these children carry their family’s name, they are less likely to feel as connected to African cultural practices.\textsuperscript{183} Abraham Bello, a student at Jackson State University, grew up with his African-American mother when his father, an immigrant from Nigeria left the family. Although his mother and grandmother tried to instill a sense of African pride for Bello, he never fully understood Nigerian culture.\textsuperscript{184} African women hold a special place in the lives of children, and they share the legacy, ideals, and myths of the community that they wish will continue in the lives of their children.

\textsuperscript{182} Mvula, Rebecca. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Bello, Abraham. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
African women in the ACFUSA community construct religious identities for themselves. Women present themselves through the lens of female figures in the Bible especially those who transformed their traditional roles. In the scenes from the introduction, we see women comparing themselves to biblical figures. The women in the kitchen see themselves as Marthas and inadvertently label the women outside the kitchen as Marys.\footnote{The Holy Bible, New International Version. Grand Rapids: Zondervan House, 1984. Luke 10: 38-42. Print.} In this Bible story, Mary decided to sit at the feet of Jesus while her sister Martha is “distracted by all the preparations.”\footnote{Ibid, Luke 10:40.} Although Jesus gently rebukes Martha for being troubled by the preparations, the Marthas of ACF seem to empathize with Martha and see her position in the story as necessary. They value their work for the fellowship and understand the divides between the Marthas and Marys. However, the women see themselves as sisters and members of the same communities regardless of their contribution to the fellowship.

Women in African community continue to develop the community by challenging the traditional gender roles assigned to women and transforming these roles to accommodate the social needs of the community. Women take on leadership roles within their families and became an economic mainstay for their home families and communities. In my family, my mother Janet Mvula, a Zambian immigrant, serves as the head of the household as a single-parent. Our fathers chose to leave the family and leave my mother to raise two young children. For the first few years of our lives, my mother, my sister and I lived with two of my mom’s brothers in Denver, Colorado and Pearl, Mississippi respectively.\footnote{Mvula, Janet. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.} When I turned five, we moved to Jackson, Mississippi where my mom independently raised us. Because she raised us mostly alone, we were fully engulfed in Zambian culture in our home and were expected to behavior accordingly outside of the home. Our mother taught us how to serve elders and how to
respect elders in their presence. Although we didn’t speak the language, she taught us to say a simple greeting and basic directions like “Sit down.” “Get up.” and “Ma’am/Sir.”

Although my uncle had the more “traditional” nuclear family and more room, when my family would come and visit Mississippi from Zambia, they would mostly stay in our home. My grandmother, aunts, and uncles found our home more fully Zambian with limited American interruptions. We performed Zambian culture in our home, and my family felt more at home. Our home served as a Zambian space in Mississippi. They expected my mother to perform the rituals of a Zambian host with our help and work as a liaison between Zambian and American cultures. Our family in Zambia saw my mother as an example of the strength of character required in America not fully realizing that her independence allowed her to remain in some way strongly connected to her home. Like some women in African community, my mother expressed her freedom of cultural performance and self-identity more openly. She could solely teach us Zambian tradition and clearly distinguished differences in the “outside” American and Zambian culture for us.

Janet Mvula’s independence and freedoms contributed to her leadership in her home and in the community. Because she independently cared for her family, she felt no restriction openly praying and performing leadership roles in ACF. Her brother and sisters living in Zambia saw her leadership as a necessary tool to survive American culture and began sending their children to live with us. Over the course of ten years, we housed nine cousins who came to start university. Their parents felt my mom’s house was a space of transition. As my cousins grew older and started their own families, my mother still served as the center of the family connection in Mississippi. She coached them through difficult cultural experiences helping them find apartments, finishing school, and organizing them for jobs. Her understanding of our family and

\[188\] Ibid.
Zambian traditions and her adjustment to American culture made her the connection for the Zambian community in Mississippi. Although she has no grandchildren, my cousin’s children refer to her as Kuku, a Lozi word for grandparent and a symbol of respect. Her role in our family allows her to have fluidity in the African community in the U.S. South and transformed the meaning of leadership in African community.

Women reconfigure their identities in the U.S. South. In his book *African Women Immigrants in America*, John Arthur describes these identities’ multifaceted nature. Arthur suggests that these identities through gender, class, racial, and ethnic identities transcend geography, space, locality and nationalities. Because of their unique perspective of themselves, their homeland, and their new home, African women “marshal” their resources in the foreign country and their homeland. This especially affects immigrant women as it relates to the international flow of capital. Women share the responsibility of caring for their home families and communities mostly financially. Women send money, supplies, and clothes between the new places. The resources from America not only help the community, but they are tools that provide the women with a connection to their home. Likewise, when supplies, money, and clothes are sent from their homeland, the resources serve as a reminder of their home and help further shape a more African identity in the United States. The global system created by these women in spite of the patriarchal nature of the structured system helps to keep their identities intact while balancing an American identity.

Many African women feel obligated to rebuild their home communities. Inonge Mbikusita-Lewanika, a Zambian politician who served as Ambassador of the Republic of Zambia to the United States of America from 2003 to 2011, built her final home in Zambia employing Zambians, using Zambian resources, and supplying economic resources to her

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189 Arthur, 106.
village. She earned her degrees from New York University and worked as an international activist during the Civil Rights Movement in the United States and a political leader in forming leadership positions for women in African countries. Many women who come to U.S. for school intend to return to their home to work for their country. After completing her bachelor’s degree from Jackson State University and a master’s degree from the University of Tennessee in Special Education, Mbuywana Lewanika moved back to her village to become an educator. She now owns a school in the community for orphaned children. She uses her connections to the United States to get supplies and resources for the school and its students. She offers programs for teachers from America to teach at her school. These women and other African women contribute to a global system through the flow of capital and the exchange of resources and ideas. Rebecca Mvula, niece of Janet Mvula, wants to finish her master’s in Public Health so that she can move back to Zambia and work for the government. In 2007, my grandmother made her last trip to the United States to visit her children and grandchildren. During the visit, my mother noted my grandmother’s vision problem. As a caregiver, she acted proactively and learned that my grandmother was legally blind. Janet Mvula decided to take advantage of the American advanced medical treatment, and doctors performed a surgery to remove the cataracts from obstructing her vision. During the several months of recovery, my mother worked, cared for her family, and ensured that her mother received the proper medical care. When my grandmother returned to Mongu, Zambia, her American doctors equipped her with medicines and prescriptions that could be filled in Zambia. In this example, Janet Mvula provided economic stability and medical care for her mother; thus, she created a

190 Mvula, Janet. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
191 Ibid.
192 Mvula, Rebecca. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
miniature global health care system that functions within her identities as daughter, Zambian, and caregiver. African women fully understand their economic and political role in constructing these global systems. These women independently function within male-dominated structured systems and build and reconstruct these systems to benefit their needs and the needs of their families and communities. African women reshape their lives to support their communities giving us a sociological glimpse in the cultural mechanisms that foster their identities. They determine the needs of their communities and respond accordingly for its good. Women are the “guardians of regional cultural heritage and identity” for themselves and the African community in the U.S. South.

Working against Stereotypes to Find Strength

Despite their influence in the development of African community, men still target African women in the community. Although Janet Mvula holds a leadership position in the community, her status as single mother serves as a point of contention for some members of the community. Some members believe that she should focus more on her family and question her abilities as a professional and as a woman. Some men see her opinion as not valuable and perform small actions that demean her position in the community. During an ACFUSA meeting at the home of a Nigerian family, my mother gave health advice to the members. After she finished, a male doctor in the organization repeated her advice and presented the information as

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193 Mvula, Janet. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
194 Arthur, 63.
195 Mvula, Janet. Interview by author. Jackson, MS.
new marking her advice as invalid. Although these performances of masculinity are minor, they are used to challenge the autonomy that women express.

In addition to these small acts, some men in the African community perform threatening acts of control over women and their children. In 2006, Hinds Country convicted a Nigerian professor with one count of felony child abuse. The father came to the United States in the 1990s and later sent for his much younger wife and child from Nigeria. While living in America, the couple had five other children and moved to a larger home outside of Jackson. According to reports, his wife repeatedly reported child abuse to the police. In one instance, he abused his child so badly, the child had to go to the hospital. As a result of the child’s inquiries, the hospital sent social workers to investigate the family. The father was charged with child abuse and sentenced to prison.

During the trial, members of the African community confirmed the truth of the attacks not only on the children but also against the wife. The wife came to U.S. with no education and spoke very little English limiting her mobility in a foreign land. Her totally dependence on her husband allowed him to have complete control over her actions and the children’s behavior. She eventually left her husband and children because of the abuse. Supporters of this Nigerian family detail his position as a single father of six children as a stress for him. In some cases, supporters of the professor tried to justify cultural differences in child-rearing as a reason for the harsh discipline of the children.

“No attempt is being made to understand his position. He is being cast in the mould of a villain, or at best a bush man from Nigeria who needs to be reformed. He is up against the American justice system, and the island mentality of the American society, made worse by its extreme temporocentrism…. In Nigeria, it would not just be Oguhebe teaching his children to be disciplined; in our towns and villages where communalism is still in force, neighbours and relations consider it

part of their duty as elders in the community to help train errant children. The African world-view is structured in favour of age: older people are repositories of communal wisdom; young ones are expected to defer to them.”

However, many Africans speak out against these false depictions of African traditions. In an article by Dr. Robert Sanda for *Nigeriaworld*, he says,

“There is no justification or rationalizing the fact that any eleven years old child should be subjected to the offences our compatriot has been charged with….Well, if the Igbo readers are comfortable with this assessment who am I to cry louder than the bereaved? Whoever proposed that the recipes for an ideal child-rearing program comprises of home work and forced fasting? Even if the professor can give his brood the best food available in America, they will still need the emotional nurturing that is evidently lacking in this lame household…. It is my firm belief that even if Prof. Oguhebe has committed these violent acts against his children in Nigeria, he deserves no less punishment here than he would receive in USA. This is not just Igbo societal norms clashing against the American standard: it is a crime irrespective of where or when it is committed. If we don’t protect our children who will?”

Although the abuse of this woman and her family was well-known in the community, during and after the trial, no one spoke of the events. However, some members silently helped the family recover and help the woman move on with her life. The woman now earned an associate degree and has remarried. Despite the incident, this woman found strength in the community of women. She along with her children actively participates in ACFUSA in a way they could not before this time.

Women in this African community build their own bonds within the community to build each other and help others adjust in America. Even in hardships, women bond together to support each other psychologically and emotionally. On a trip to Dallas, Texas for the National Conference of African Christian Fellowship-USA, Inc., women formed rival geographies to

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discuss issues specific to their experiences. In the hotel room of the matriarch of the organization, women would gather and commune outside the confines of the organized conference. Between workshops and in the evenings, women would gather to complain about the American food the hotel served or about the stress and disorganization of the conference. Sis. Egwuhad her sister who lived in Dallas cook and deliver Nigerian foods for the women so they could feel more comfortable. In these conversations, the women reminisced about Nigeria and talked about the differences in American and African culture. They discussed new plans for the Jackson chapter and things they would do differently for the next national conference.

Women use a collective action to generate change in African community.  

The women also discussed the stress of raising children in the United States and finding spaces to practice Nigerian traditions. Sis. Egwu and other elder women offered advice on ensuring the development of children who were not progressing at a normal pace and offered comfort to the other women stressed in their lives. These women also discussed finishing their educations and finding ways to balance the need of their families and their desire for education. In these spaces, African women resist the roles traditional assigned to them of silenced and domestic beings. They redefine themselves through fellowship, education and tradition to find new identities in the U.S. South.

Women are continuing to shape their identities for themselves and contribute to African community in the U.S. South. Even though systems of oppression, women find ways to reclaim their existence and roles for personal and collective expression and creation. Women violate the doxa of male-dominated economic and political systems that oppress their contributions to

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200 Baptist and Camp, 107.
global communities. Going back to the Thanksgiving story, women celebrate in their identities and understand the importance of position in the community. Women are not secondary members in African community; they are contributors that shape and reshape what the community means to Africans and how it is presented to a Southern society.

Traditionally constructed identities of women influence how “other spheres of human organization and activities” view these women, which is both damaging and destructive to the understanding of African women in the South. Their ideals about women restrict their mobility and offer no sense of autonomy for women in African community. Positioning women in any community as secondary and dependent on the men in the community only hinders the full telling of the creation of region. As historians and academics, we are obligated to tell the stories of women in region as members of their respective regions. The transformative nature of African women in the U.S. South reconstructs a narrative about a seemingly monolithic and even more invisible group of immigrants. We have an opportunity to take a more nuanced look at how women create and re-create their identities and the identities of their communities, both local and global. When researchers examine region and community, they must examine it with a holistic approach to fully record the stories of the community and its formation and maintenance. Like their male counterparts, African women represent the composition of the Black Diaspora and their specific experiences give insight into the larger understandings of “global Black cultures.” Because community is an idea based on experiences and common realities, women find intellectual place in this specific community. African women challenge traditional beliefs while still negotiating their existence in an American society. As we see in the Thanksgiving story, African women pass on a legacy of leadership and education to younger native-born

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201 Arthur, African Women, 200
202 Ibid, 211
Africans. As the immigration of African women steadily increases, we must acknowledge their roles in community for years and look to the future for a promise of an even greater community.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

In American society, our race and ethnicity are largely reduced to checking a box. I hope that this research complicates America’s view of Black race and ethnicity in America. In Hill Collins research on black feminist thought, she notes the evolving state of identities. She concludes that social categories are not static but fluid and changing. This study highlights the “process of self-identification” for African immigrants and their children. I hope that the public learns Africa as more than needy children and disease-ridden people. I hope to expand African-Americans’ memory of Africa and bridge a gap between the people who are a part of the African Diaspora in addition to helping Americans see African community as a part of American society. The election of President Barack Obama has opened the door for the country to begin meaningful dialogues about African identity in America; however, we seemed to miss the conversation. Although he serves as the first African-American president of the United States, people overlook or push aside his ethnic identity as a Kenyan-American. In the future, I hope we do see an increase in recognizing first and second generation Africans as a part of the diverse fabric of Southern culture and identity.

In popular culture, we are beginning to notice an increase in first and second generation members of the Black Atlantic. These African immigrants serve as model of both African-American culture and African heritage and culture. For example, Chiwetel Ejiofor, a

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Gilroy.
Nigerian-British actor, and Lupita Nyong’o, a Mex-Keyan actress, both appear in the Academy Award winning picture *12 Years a Slave*. Since winning countless awards, these African entertainers serve as a link to African community and its growing recognition in America. Hearing these names on the television brings me so much joy because there is a respect that the announcer must have for the name and the pronunciation. In addition, the media is forced to reconcile with the artists’ background and heritage in interviews and discussions on race in America. As Americans begin to see more second and third generation Africans in media and the public eye, my research will give a lens to view and understand the experiences and representation of the African community in the American South. We, descendants of Africans living in America, are all members of Diaspora connected by movement; however, our stage in the movement creates barriers that divided our experiences and understandings of our place in America. I hope that African community research moves the conversation of African lives in American forward and helps give a voice to the silenced community. As the community grows, the importance of these works on African immigration increases. Through this research, we understand the ways in which Africans negotiates their identities through performance and public memory amidst the social pressures of assimilation into an American society and African-American culture.

One of the points of future research lies in the research of second generation Africans. It would be worthwhile for researchers to examine the lives of second generation Africans. Studies on second generation African would focus on how they pass on an African legacy to their children and how they express their ethnic selves in other communities. The research could examine how these second generation African negotiate their African-American and African identities. Particularly, the research could explore the ways second generation Africans see
themselves in African-American community and the closeness they feel (or do not feel) with African-American community. This study becomes even more interesting when we evaluate the lives of Africans who live in African-American communities and those who live in predominately White American communities. Since these Africans are less likely to have African accents, the marker of identity lies in their name or in their stories of African identity. It would be interesting to discover the ways second generation Africans view African community and its future. Second generation Africans are becoming leaders in African community especially in organizations like ACFUSA. As they assume leadership roles, we see second generation playing a dual role: African and African-American.

The next generation of Africans in the United States grows up with the understanding of pluralism in American culture. They will bring their own experiences to the organizations and communities and have the daunting task of remaining a visible community in the U.S. They will define the future of the African community and its role in the U.S. As they start families and raise children, they will have more insight into the difficulties of being African in the U.S. and look to their parents for advice and teaching their children.204

Many African immigrants find separate community to display cultures and values outside of the dominant American culture. African immigrants have a sense of national pride yet they find value in an African identity. For example, ACFUSA, a national Christian organization, serves a transnational African community. African deliberately accept this African identity as a way to develop a stronger community. In addition, African immigrants use community to dispel myths that some Americans learn about Africa through media. Through segregation, exclusion, and marginalization, African immigrants form community. Yet, this trend will not last in the future, whereas, second generation Africans will build community based on memory. Although

Africans develop community in the midst of adversity, the African community triumphs to create a legacy for its future.

As scholars research the cultural diversity of the U.S. South, they must acknowledge the presence of African culture and the ways in which the community contributes to the fabrics of Southern identity. As the African immigrant population continues to grow and many Africans move to Southern metropolitan cities, the community’s visibility increases, and knowledge of the community and its political and social needs helps Americans begin to have dialogue with the African community. This work places African community in conversation with the South and Southern identity, which mirrors the development of many subregions of the South. African community in Jackson, MS works as a supportive space to enrich the lives of Africans living the metropolitan area. I worked to prove that a tradition of a closed society, race, perceptions of Africa and shared migration history among Africans work as factors that contribute to the development and continued existence of African community. In this community, Africans negotiate their identities through performance and public memory to work against the social pressure of assimilation into an American society and African-American culture.

Examining African community helps to draw attention to the growing community because the South works within a “genealogy of performance.” This performance includes public memory, exclusion and segregation. Despite the closed society of Mississippi, African immigrants in Jackson, MS use their community as a space to express their ethnic selves and preserve their African heritages. In these spaces, African immigrants pass on a legacy of African cultures and heritages to their heritage to their children. These African immigrants hope that their children and grandchildren continue these traditions in the future. As African community grows,

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Roach, *Circum-Atlantic*. **205**
Africans have more opportunity to build relationships within the community. In addition, they can reach out to more immigrants that are new and help them adjust to an American lifestyle.
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William Winter Institute for Racial Reconciliation
Intern: August 2012-Present
- Organize campus and community events that promote education on racial tolerance.
- Created the WWIRR Protest CD Project.
- Updated and monitored information for the MS Civil Rights Website.
- Worked as a camp facilitator for the Summer Youth Institute.

Center for Undergraduate Research
Researcher: September 2011-May 2012
- Researched, studied, and catalogued music from the William Brown Collection.
- Contact universities for more information on the composers.
- Learned about research and the preservation of music in archives.
- Presented my findings to my colleagues and the research committee.

Aslan Performing Arts Centre (Madrid, Spain)
Professor: June 2011 – July 2011
- Taught children living in an urban community in Madrid.
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University of London, SOAS
Assistant to Coordinator of African Studies: June 2011- August 2012
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- W.E.B. DuBois Honors College (Jackson State University)
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