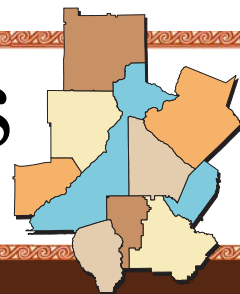


GLOBAL ATLANTA SnapSHOTS

A LOOK AT ETHNIC COMMUNITIES IN THE ATLANTA REGION



N I G E R I A N S

The Global Atlanta Snapshots were created to foster understanding among all people of the Atlanta region. The Snapshots show the rich ethnic and cultural diversity that our region now enjoys. The residents of Atlanta's ethnic communities may have lived in the region for a long time or may have recently arrived. They may come from cultures and have customs significantly different from each other's, and from those of the general population of the Atlanta region. What they have in common with the rest of the region is that they make it their home, and they share in and contribute to its success. The Snapshots introduce and portray selected communities in terms of their backgrounds, their customs and cultures, their roles in the regional economy, and specific local resources available throughout the region.

Nigerians in the Atlanta Economy



While there is great diversity in Nigerian life, some of the common characteristics often attributed to the Nigerian people are independence, self-confidence and a spirit of enterprise. These characteristics are evident in the roles taken by Nigerians in Atlanta's economy. Fully 40 percent of Nigerian men are in management, business and financial occupations. Another 24 percent are in professional positions, predominantly in computer and engineering. Nigerian women in

Atlanta are similarly found in management, professional, service and sales/ office occupations. More than 450 are in health services, including about 300 as Registered Nurses. Some community members have reached positions of prominence in government and corporate America. The former CEO of Grady Memorial Hospital is Nigerian, as is the head of the DeKalb County Chamber of Commerce.

Nigerians have proven to be very resourceful in establishing a foothold in the local economy. Those educated in the United States tend to depend upon the networks they developed in school to gain employment. Those who received their education in Nigeria often rely on their ethnic and tribal community ties, using word-of-mouth (by way of taxi drivers at the airport, for example), or searching the telephone directory for Nigerian surnames to establish employment leads. When they cannot find local employment commensurate with their education, some (an estimated 300, currently) become taxi drivers themselves. Others start their own businesses, including some entrepreneurs who own multiple small businesses.

African Naming

African names play a significant role in shaping the life of a child. The child is given a name when he or she is eight days old in a "naming ceremony." The family and the larger community participate in choosing an appropriate name for the child. That name must meet the following criteria:

- It must reflect the characteristics of the child
- It must reflect the place the child is from
- The full name must be a meaningful expression
- It must be spiritual

The full African name reflects the full inner and physical identity of the person. Examples are:

Olubamidele (*The Lord comes home with me*) can be shortened to **Bamdele**

Olubunmi (*A gift from the Lord*) can be shortened to **Bunmi**

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A PERSONAL STORY

Born in Nigeria's Imo State, Charles Chibuike Onyirimba showed his leadership qualities at an early age. Just out of high school, Charles founded and served as the first president of his post-secondary school's Academic Union and led Youths Against Corruption. He continued in leadership roles after he came to America in 1981. While at Oklahoma State University, where he received his BA in Political Science and Journalism, Charles was elected as president of the African Students Association and, later, the International Students Association, representing students of 25 countries.

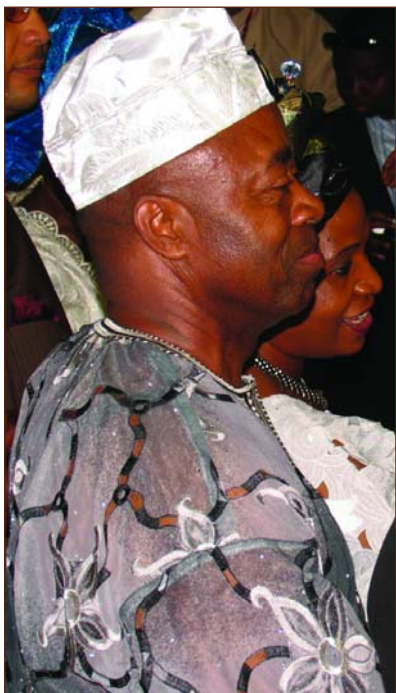
Charles continued his education at the University of Florida, where he obtained his graduate and Doctor of Law degrees. In 1989, the young attorney moved to Atlanta and soon became involved in many local civic and religious groups. In 1993, he was elected

president of the Igbo Union, Atlanta, and was instrumental in uniting all 32 organizations of Igbo origin then operating in the Atlanta region.

With other Nigerian-American leaders, Charles Onyirimba helped to found the World Igbo Congress headquartered in Houston, Texas. In a number of other ways, he works to forge and maintain ties between the Nigerian American community and their homeland. In 1996, Onyirimba was chosen as chairman of the Nigerian Olympic Reception Committee. He currently serves on the board of the Imo Economic Development Council, a think tank aimed at attracting foreign investment into Imo State of Nigeria.

While serving as principal of his own law firm, attorney Charles Onyirimba is the publisher of The African Quest Magazine and host of The African Quest Television, both based in Atlanta.

Who are the Nigerian-Americans?



The Atlanta region is now home to about 8,000 people with Nigerian ancestry and is one of the major centers of Nigerians in the United States.

Nigeria, located in West Africa, is today Africa's most populous nation with 120 million people. Once a part of the British Empire, Nigeria gained its independence from British rule on October 1, 1960. With many natural resources, including oil production, Nigeria was expected to become an economic powerhouse. However, various setbacks, ranging from ethnic distrust to political instability from 1960 to the 1980s,

have made it difficult to realize those expectations.

Nigeria has around 300 tribes or ethnic groups, which are further divided into subgroups. The number of different tongues (languages or dialects) is between 300 and 400. The population also has clear religious divisions. About half of the population are Muslims, and another half are Christians of various denominations. Some of the remaining population follow indigenous ancient religions centered around good and evil spirits.

The three major ethnic groups are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo (Ibo). The Hausas, dominant in northern Nigeria, are mainly Muslims and typically worked as farmers or traders. The Yorubas, the principal ethnic group in Lagos, sub-Saharan Africa's largest city, are mostly Christian and more educated. The third group, the Igbos, are mostly in the southeast. They are predominantly Christians, well-educated and very enterprising. Besides these three largest groups, other ethnic groups include Fulanis, Efiks, Ibibios, Edos and Ijaws.

Holidays Celebrated

In addition to other Western holidays, Nigerians celebrate a combination of Christian and Muslim holidays, including:

New Year's Day

January

Eid-El-Maulud /

Maulid an-Nabi

(Muhammad's birthday)

September

Nigerian Independence Day

October

Ramadan

October–November

Christmas

December





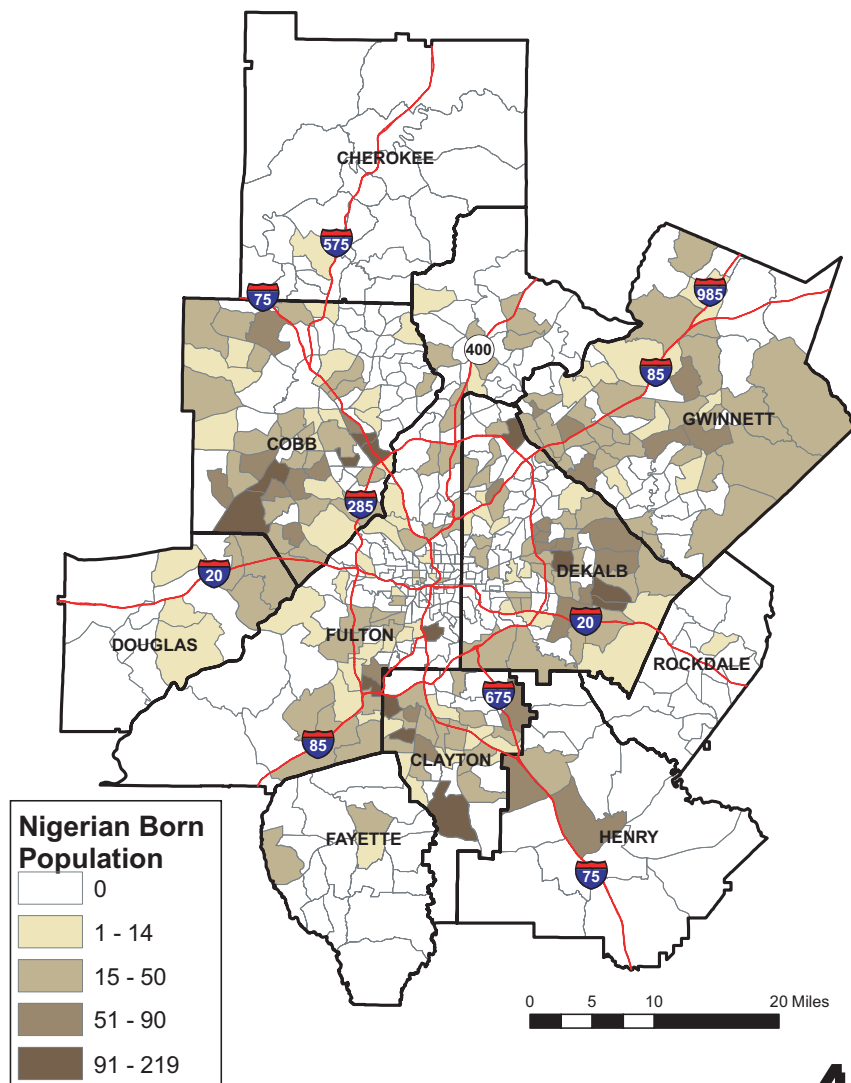
Nigerians in the Atlanta Region: By the Numbers

Cherokee: 7	Clayton: 1,039
Cobb: 1,955	DeKalb: 2,192
Douglas: 119	Fayette: 73
Fulton: 1,162	Gwinnett: 1,338
Henry: 137	Rockdale: 9

Total 10-county Region: 8,031

- **DeKalb County** is home to the **largest population** of those born in Nigeria, with 2,192 as of the 2000 Census.
- Approximately **27 percent** of the region's Nigerians (and 25 percent of the state's) live in DeKalb County.
- Although **Clayton** is home to **less than seven percent** of the region's total population, it was home to **13 percent** of the region's Nigerians.
- Despite being the region's **3rd most populous county**, **Cobb** is home to the **second largest Nigerian-born population**.
- The 10-county Atlanta region is home to approximately **42 percent** of Georgia's total population, but is home to **92 percent** of the state's Nigerian population.
- Like most of the foreign-born populations in the region, the **Nigerian population is concentrated along the interstates**, particularly **I-85 North in DeKalb and Gwinnett counties**, **I-75 North in Cobb** and **I-75 South in Clayton and Henry**.

NIGERIAN-BORN POPULATION IN ATLANTA Atlanta Region, 2000



(Source: 2000 Census Data on Foreign-Born Population by Region, Country or Area of Birth)

ARC

Languages Spoken

English is the official language of Nigeria due to the colonial rule of Britain during the 19th and 20th centuries. The three main African languages of Nigeria are Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba. In the Atlanta region, however, Yoruba, Igbo, and Ibibio are the languages spoken most often, in addition to English.

YORUBA

Pelé o - Hello

Báwo ni? - How are you?

Dada ni - Fine, thank you.

IBIBIO

Idem fo - How are you?

Ekere die - What is your name?

Sosongo - Thank you.

IGBO

Kedu ka imelo? - Hello, how are you?

Kedu ahagi? - What is your name?

Ndewo - Thank you.



Nigerian Life in Metro Atlanta



Nigerian Women Association of Georgia Members (in red hats)

Nigerians are clustered in many locations in greater Atlanta: Marietta, Norcross, Stone Mountain, Lithonia, Riverdale Road, Dunwoody, Sandy Springs and Austell. The different clusters at times represent the different ethnic groups and even hometowns in Nigeria. According to the 2000 census, Nigerians are found principally in the following counties of the region: DeKalb (2,100 persons), Cobb (2,000), Gwinnett (1,300), Fulton (1,200) and Clayton (1,000). See the attached map for a display of the residential distribution of the Atlanta region's Nigerian community.

There are almost as many homeowners (1,600 Nigerian households) as renters (1,800). Those owning homes have properties with a median value of \$130,300; their median rental unit costs \$635 per month. Both values are just slightly below those for the total population (\$135,300; \$644). As the community grows, many new institutions and establishments are springing up to serve their needs. There are now Nigerian churches and professional offices for doctors, lawyers and accountants. A number of community members have gone into

THERE IS A NEED FOR SERVICES TO HELP PEOPLE LEARN "TO NAVIGATE THE SYSTEM."



the homebuilding and general construction business. Others have opened real estate offices, childcare centers and travel agencies. Retail establishments include three Nigerian restaurants on Memorial Drive in DeKalb County and African/Tropical Food stores scattered all over Metro Atlanta. Examples are those located on Rockbridge Road, Caycee Stores on Roswell Street in Powder Springs, and Ideal Tropical Foodstore in College Park. Other retail businesses include catering services focused on Nigerian cuisine, boutiques selling Nigerian textiles and fashions, and music/video stores.

Special festivals and community gatherings are usually organized at local banquet halls and community parks. For example, Omega Hall in Stone Mountain (off Wesley Chapel Road in Lithonia) is frequently rented out for parties or to hold luncheon meetings. The CBS building, on Presidential Parkway in Atlanta, has become the regular venue for the annual banquet of the Nigerian Women Association of Georgia (NWAG). A new annual event is the celebration of Nigerian Independence, organized by NWAG and held on the last Saturday in September in one of the region's parks or community centers. When the Igbo Community Center on Old National Highway becomes fully operational, it is expected to serve as the center of Nigerian life and activities in Metro Atlanta.

While many individuals in Atlanta's Nigerian community are doing well economically and socially, others encounter challenges common to immigrants. Since Nigeria was a former British colony, most Nigerians speak English well. Nevertheless, new arrivals often do not know the nuances of American culture. They often rely on relatives and ethnic organizations to help them "learn the ropes". Thus, there is a need for services to help people learn to "navigate the system". Non-professional workers, in particular, need assistance and they often prefer to talk to people of the same ethnic background. The African Human Rights Coalition, the Coalition of Concerned Africans and the newly formed Alliance of Nigerian Organizations in Georgia (ANOG) are among the support groups currently providing assistance. Another source of support has been various Nigerian, as well as non-Nigerian, churches with which Nigerians are affiliated. Despite these existing support systems, more are needed. One of the major concerns of Nigerians is raising children who are torn between two cultures. This has led to the formation of the Nigerian Youth Alliance (NYA) to provide a forum for Nigerian-Americans to share common experiences and support one another. Other concerns include: the pressures on parents who have to work two or more jobs and have to leave children on their own more frequently than is common in Nigerian culture; assistance for women and children who are the victims of domestic violence; HIV prevention training; education and after school programs; and, increasingly, getting involved in and being properly represented in local politics.



What are Nigerian Customs and Culture?



When Nigerians are asked how they compare themselves to Americans, they often reply, “Well, we’re a lot the same.” Like Americans, Nigerians are individualistic, proud, and enjoy the finer things in life. They are enterprising, imaginative, and hard-working. They believe in education as the best road to economic success. Parents will sacrifice deeply to send their children to good schools.

Although in Nigeria the population is split about evenly between Christians and Muslims, most of the Atlanta Nigerian population is Christian. Most people worship at a church of their choice. A major Nigerian custom or ceremony surrounds marriage. Marriage is a union of two consenting families, not just two consenting adults. The marriage ceremony comprises a protracted series of exchanges of visits and gifts between a man’s extended family and the prospective bride’s extended family. The many visits serve to establish strong bonds between the two families, while the many, often expensive gifts by the groom attest to his financial stability and readiness for marriage. Another traditional practice still in use is that of the naming ceremony. This is done for newborn babies and is a private celebration for family and friends. The group gathers in the baby’s new home to welcome the baby into the community and promises to take care of him or her. After the ceremony, there is a party with lots of favorite foods. Most Nigerians in the Atlanta Metro area, except for the Yorubas, are beginning to substitute church Christening for the traditional naming ceremony.

Christmas is a two-week affair in Nigeria, beginning the week before Christmas Day and lasting until just after January 1. The celebration is smaller in America, but it is still an important time. Gifts are secondary to family get-togethers

during this time of feasting and dancing. Some families actually start to prepare family “pageants” in October, by teaching young children traditional songs and dances to be performed over the Christmas holiday. One of the favorite foods of this time is pepper soup, a hot and spicy stew made of goat meat with hot peppers and other spices. Another popular dish is goat meat with rice.

Nigerian cuisine is an important facet of the community’s culture. One of the most popular foods, not easily available in Atlanta, is foo-foo and soup. The foo-foo is similar to a dumpling, but made of cassava. Nigerian women have experimented with rice flour, semolina and Bisquick as substitutes, with varying results. For those who insist on the real thing, they are pleased that cassava flour is now being imported and available in the numerous Tropical Foodstores that dot the Atlanta area. Foo-foo is eaten with one of many Nigerian soups, such as okra soup, melon seed (Egusi soup) or bitter leaf (Onugbu soup). Other popular foods are peanuts, yams, and black-eyed peas, served highly spiced.

Nigerians possess a very rich cultural heritage from ancient times. The Kingdom of Benin (located in south central Nigeria) flourished for centuries before colonialism. Benin developed an elaborate ceremonial court where artisans crafted works of ivory, wood, bronze, and brass which are prized throughout the world today. The art of Nigeria also influenced art movements in other parts of the world. An example of this is the influence of Nigerian traditional sculpture on the works of Pablo Picasso and other modern Western artists. Nigerian art works are available locally in African Art studios or stores in downtown and Underground Atlanta.

Similarly, Nigerian music has influenced music, and has been influenced by music, around the globe. Older Nigerians in the Atlanta area still prefer Nigerian music to rock ‘n roll or rap; younger Nigerians share the same taste in music and fashions as American youth, to the chagrin of their parents. Nigerians love to wear very expensive, traditional colorful and fancy clothing. Nigerian parents ensure that all of their children have at least one fine Nigerian garment for parties and church attendance.



Nigerian Organizations, Associations and Resources

Below is a listing of selected organizations who work with the Nigerian Community. Additional resources are available at www.atlantaregional.com

GENERAL INFORMATION

Consulate General of Nigeria

8060 Roswell Rd.
Atlanta, GA 30350
(770) 394-6261
www.nigeria-consulate-atl.org

ARTS

African Cultural Dance Company

P.O. Box 10893
Atlanta, GA 30310
(770) 997-5626

ASSOCIATIONS

Anambra State Association Inc.

(770) 861-2455

Nigerian Women Association of Georgia, Inc.

P.O. Box 14532,
Atlanta, GA 30324
(770) 496-4380
www.nwag.org

Nnewi Union Atlanta, Inc.

P.O. Box 161236,
Atlanta, GA 30321
(770) 469-7878
(404) 408-8737
www.nnewiunionatlanta.8m.com

Women Watch Africa

4281 Memorial Dr., Suite I
Decatur, GA 30032
www.un.org/womenwatch

Zumunta Association (USA) Inc.

864 Chapman Circle
Stone Mountain, GA 30088
www.zumunta.org

MEDIA

African Experience Worldwide

(weekly radio program, Sat. noon-2pm)
WRFG 89.3 FM
1083 Austin Ave. NE
Atlanta, GA 30307
(404) 523-3471 Main line
(404) 523-8989 Request line
www.wrfg.org

Contact:

E-mail: globalsnapshots@atlantaregional.com

Order printed copies from the ARC Information Center at 404-463-3102 or download free from the ARC website at www.atlantaregional.com

Atlanta Regional Commission • 40 Courtland Street, NE, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.463.3100 • www.atlantaregional.com

Charles Krautler, Executive Director

Darlene Daly, Project Coordinator

The Atlanta Regional Commission is the official planning agency for the ten-county Atlanta Region including Cherokee, Clayton, Cobb, DeKalb, Douglas, Fayette, Fulton, Gwinnett, Henry, and Rockdale, as well as the City of Atlanta and 63 other cities. ARC provides a forum where leaders come together to discuss and act on issues of regionwide consequence.

The Community Foundation • 50 Hurt Plaza, Suite 449, Atlanta, Georgia 30303 • 404.688.5525 • www.atlcf.org

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