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## Igbo Immigrants In The United States Of America

An Igbo immigrant attended graduate school in Chicago, leaving Nigeria. He would soon be followed by friends and family, creating an Igbo identity in the United States. Although education in America causes culture change for Igbo Americans, Igbo Americans should integrate their native culture in America. Integrating Igbo culture would be a step forward to save their marriages, save their endangered language, and to maintain folklore in their community.

First, Igbo Americans should integrate their native culture in America to save their marriages. Culture change in Igbo families, is largely responsible for the increase in failed marriages within the Igbo community. "Though the dominant culture of individualism, privacy, equality, hard work, freedom of expression, are main stream American values, the same cultural values that have worked for Americans seem to have impacted negatively on Igbo marriages and affected Igbo families and children" (Reynolds 2009, 14). Unfortunately, once becoming accustomed to the American way's Igbo families are experiencing culture change. Igbo families raising children in America may experience their child's disinterest in learning Igbo culture. For example, some Igbo children have no desire to learn or speak the Igbo language or eat their traditional foods. This can cause issues within the marriage if the parents have opposing views on which beliefs and values to raise their children on. Igbo people traditionally view family as an integral part of their culture. "Family is the root of their society and when that concept of family is shaken, it invariably affects that society" (Reynolds 2009, 14). Culture change can be problematic for a society based on family. Traditionally the Igbo culture shows the father's role as providing for the family and the mother raising the children. However, living in the United States, being surrounded by American beliefs and values can contradict their roles as parents. In the United States the mother and father typically share equal roles of working and raising children. While pursuing education in the United States can advance personal interests and success, it may affect the Igbo cultures traditional beliefs and values pertaining to marriage.

Additionally, Igbo Americans should incorporate their culture in America to save their endangered language. Igbo Americans dealing with culture change seem to portray negative attitudes toward their language. The currently endangered Igbo language is heading towards extinction in the next fifty years. Some Igbo parents who are literate in their native language don't speak the language to their children in America. "Igbo language cannot be more important than its speakers' value on it. In other words, speakers of Igbo language, that can determine how important Igbo language becomes. If they have a positive attitude toward Igbo language, Igbo will be important and vice versa" (Odinye 2010, 3). Igbo Americans are the only people who can save their language. Their lack of interest in their native language is only adding to the problem. If Igbo parents don't use their native language in America, it can be expected that their children would have no interest in the language either. Living in America where English is the dominant language can be difficult for Igbo families. However, enculturating their language into their new American lifestyle can benefit their culture as a whole and their children for the future. "Igbo people abandon the use of Igbo language from primary school to higher institution because the language of instruction is English language" (Odinye 2010, 4). First educated in Nigeria, the Igbo are told to abandon their language, with hopes of receiving a higher education in the United States where English dominates. Taught to abandon their language while in school has caused a lack of appreciation for their language. This seemingly is

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the first step to the Igbo's enculturation of America. For the Igbo to succeed in America they need to focus on English for their studies. The result is a negative attitude to their native language and culture, coming from education.

Finally, the most important reason Igbo Americans should integrate their native culture in America is to maintain folklore in their community. The Igbo community has been going through culture change and becoming accustomed to American ways. Igbo Americans are dealing with difficulty to maintain their native folklore. For example, when they graduate from a Nigerian University, they move to major cities to accumulate themselves in an urban and social like environment. They do this knowingly putting their cultural traditions and values behind their vision of success in America. However, many who migrated to the U.S. for school planned on returning to Nigeria. Although they had this initial plan of returning, many stayed in America and became naturalized citizens. An Igbo immigrant named Elizabeth went through this process, Ibezim says:

She holds a BA in education and a MA in linguistics from a Nigerian University, but she decided to trade in Chicago as a medical records technician. She now has a flexible high paying job near her suburban home while she is raising her five children. (Ibezim 4)

Elizabeth decided to stay in Chicago, leaving her culture behind, raising her kids to follow American values. Raising Igbo kids in America can be difficult to accustom a child to two different cultures. This is typically why the Igbo Americans don't teach their children about their native culture. Once receiving an education, occupation, and success Igbo Americans want to give their children the same opportunity. "...These nearly or already middle-aged immigrants with college bound children at the turn of the millennium increasingly came to understand repatriation to Nigeria as a non-viable option" (Ibezim 2008, 10). At this point Igbo families are accustomed to the United States and have no desire to return to their native land. They saw the benefits of their education and want the same opportunity for their children. However, it is important that their children know their native culture in case they ever want to return to Nigeria themselves. Igbo families are beginning to realize the importance of teaching their native culture to their children. Establishing the Igbo community traditions in the U.S. is imperative for their culture's identity. Njoku explains:

Because of the increasing number of their second-generation, American-born children, the Igbo face issues of establishing an ethnic presence and permanence in the United States. The growing number of second-generation Igbo Americans has caused the Igbo to start seeking ways to keep their community traditions alive in America. (Njoku 8)

Second generation Igbo Americans caused the Igbo to attempt to keep the community's traditions alive in America. This is due to their children growing up in America and becoming accustomed to the American culture. There are Igbo families that find it significant to bring cultural traditions with them to America. There are ways to help Igbo families apply their culture to Americas culture as well. One way to help is an immersion class as explained by Njoku:

The 2009 summer immersion class provided Igbo families essential experiences and opportunities to develop mechanisms for applying acquired Igbo traditional knowledge to their homes and communities in their wider American experience. (Njoku 2012, 8)

This immersion class provided insight on ways to incorporate their native culture into their

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acquired culture. Although it is hard to maintain ethnic Igbo identity without establishing community tradition in the U.S., this immersion class was a good step in the right direction. Igbo folklore is threatened because of higher education. Coming to America for education, having to speak English, attempting to fit into an unfamiliar culture, all plays a part in losing Igbo culture and folklore.

Overall, education in America leads to culture change for Igbo Americans, Igbo Americans should integrate their native culture in America. Incorporating Igbo native culture into American culture could potentially save marriages, their native language, and save the cultural values, beliefs, and traditions in Igbo folklore. Igbo Americans should follow in the footsteps of many other cultures who incorporated their own culture into America. Igbo Americans can merge their native culture and Americans culture in different forms. For example, cultural traditions can be shared through storytelling, song, music, dance, or art. Igbo language can be shared as well, with other Americans who may find an appreciation to study the language. The first and most logical step would be to teach their children of their heritage. Igbo Americans should be teaching their children their native folklore. This can spark interest into their child who may have a desire to speak the language or eat their native food. Unfortunately, Igbo parents raising children in the U.S. don't find it necessary to teach their children their native language or values as they are becoming accustomed to the American culture. Igbo families could potentially save their native language by speaking Igbo in their homes and speaking English in public. Igbo families could introduce their cultural food to their children. This may show the children a simple difference in Igbo lifestyle in Nigeria compared to America. This may be an enduring process, but the result will be worth it. A community holding the values, traditions, and beliefs of their native culture will find it beneficial while living, working, and learning culture in the United States.