

African Women's Alliance Survey: A Preliminary Analysis

The last century has witnessed forced and voluntary migration of people from Africa across the world. We can now be found on all continents, but we have little knowledge of, and contact with one another. The African Women's Alliance, (AWA), an international organization of women from Africa and the Diaspora, is launching an initiative to promote greater understanding of, and among people of African descent. The organization sought the opinion people at the following fora: The Black Expo at Jacob Javitz Center, New York; The African Street Fair at Boys and Girls' High School, Brooklyn; and in one of the Colleges in the New York metropolitan area. The purpose of the questionnaire is to help AWA develop appropriate intercultural activities and community projects that would enable it to do the following:

Effective advocacy for people of African descent

Gather Information/data on what the needs are in the community that it would like to serve.

Treat people as experts who are able to identify the relevant/pressing issues, problems and agenda, and use their vision to shape AWA's response.

Based on its objectives of creating a forum for the airing and analysis of issues, topics, and subjects on Africa and Africans; fostering a greater understanding of African culture and African cultural diversity; encouraging self-empowerment; strengthening the capacity of women, families and communities; promoting community development and advocating African perspectives, the African Women's Alliance (AWA) conducted a survey in 1998. The survey was in questionnaire form. There were 125 respondents. They included customers, business people and vendors at the Black Expo and African Street Fair as well as the population on a college campus, this sample includes workers, students, and administrators. All respondents were asked questions in three categories: Profile; Knowledge of Africa; and Interaction. This preliminary analysis is based on the profile and knowledge of Africa categories.

Part 1: Profile

Under the profile category, respondents were asked to self-identify on the basis of descent. Majority of the subjects **87.2%** identified as people of African descent; **4.8%** did not know; **4%** gave no answer; **4%** as not of African descent; **1.6%** as other, with **0.8%** as other, with Puerto Rico identified as the country of descent; one **0.8%** as other without specifying area/region of origin.

Respondents were also asked to identify where their ancestors originally came from. Majority of respondents **60%** did not know; **22.4%** had ancestors from West Africa; **3.2%** from South Africa; **2.4%** from North Africa; **0.8%** from Central and South Africa; one from East Africa; **0.8%** identified as a mixture of Japanese and Black; **27%** respondents gave no answer.

A third question in the profile category was "Where does your family come from now?" Majority of respondents **25.6%** identified North America; **23.2%** the Caribbean; **3.2%** continental Africa; **2.4%** South America; **1.6%** Central America; and **5.6%** gave no response.

Question four in this category asked: "Where do you live now?" Majority of the respondents **93.7%** live in the United States. The breakdown by city and state shows that the following numbers of respondents live in the cities/towns identified in New York State: thirty, **24%** reside in New York City, **25.6%** in the Bronx, NY; **17.6%** in Brooklyn, **5.6%** in Queens, **2.4%** in Hempstead, **1.6%** in Staten Island, **0.8%** each in the following towns/cities in New York State: Williamsburg, Rosedale, Baldwin, Mt. Vernon, and Westbury. One respondent, **1.6%** straddles between New York City and Yonkers; **4%** claimed to live in New York State but did not specify city of residence; **4.8%** gave no answer; **0.8%** indicated no state, town, or city. From New Jersey, there were **1.6%** from Teaneck; **0.8%** each from Union and Englewood. **0.8%** of respondents identified New Jersey as their state of residence, but did not specify their city/town of residence. **0.8%** of the respondents reside in Blount, California; **0.8%** in Alexandria Virginia; There were also **0.8%** of respondents from the following countries: Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, and Saudi Arabia. **0.8%** of respondents reside in Mississauga, Ontario, Canada.

The fifth question asked for the range of the respondent's age. **20.8%** of respondents were Under 25 years; **28%** 26-35 years old; **21.6%** 36-45; **20%** 46-55; **9.6%** 56-65; and **1.6%** over 65 years old. **1.6%** gave no answer. One of these wanted to know why this question was necessary.

Question six asked respondents to identify their gender. Majority of respondents, **74.4%** identified as female, **24%** as male, and **1.6%** gave no answer.

Question seven asked for the family status of respondents. The responses were **41.6%** single; **20.8%** married with children; **17.6%** married; **8%** single with children; **4%** had no responses, and **5.6%** other. Of these, there were **1.6%** divorced with child(ren); **1.6%** divorced **0.8%** single with grown children, and **0.8%** living with parents.

The last question in this category asked for respondents' occupations. This inquiry was open ended.

The responses are listed below

Physician	Student/Clerical Assistant	5 Secretaries
Nurse Supervisor	Student/Floor clerk	Office Aide
RN & Social Worker	Student/Counselor	Assistant
4 Nurses	Student/Bank Supervisor	Assistant to the Director
Optometric Technician	Student/Student Aide	Licensing Coordinator
Nursing Assistant	5 Students	Researcher/Direct Care Counselor
Medicine/Health care worker	2 Housewives	Reverend Minister
2 Medical Assistants	Juvenile Counselor	Paralegal
Health Worker	Human Resource Manager	Banking
Emergency Medical Technician	Human Resource Worker	Advisor
Social Work	Accountant/Dancer	City Marshal/Office Manager
Retired Guidance Counselor	Tax Accountant	2 Educators
Counseling	Accounting/Administration	Professor
Graduate Economics Student	Executive Secretary	Book editor/writer
2 College Students	Administrative Secretary	2 Writers
Student/Secretary	4 Legal Secretaries	Entrepreneur

Business
 Advertising
 Independent Marketing
 Representative
 Clerk
 2 Teachers
 3 Assistant Teacher

Teacher's Aide
 Executive Director
 Personal Trainer
 Activist in race movement
 Engineer
 Computer Operator
 Data entry/Computer operator

Computer Graphics
 Security
 Machine Operator
 Customer Service Manager
 Retail
 38 No Response
 1 Undecipherable

*For breakdown, see appendix.

Part 2: Knowledge of Africa

The first question asked how much the respondents know about Africa and its Diaspora. According to the responses, 12% know a great deal; 53.6% a fair amount; 34.4% very little; 4% nothing at all; 2.4% gave no answer. 2.4% of the respondents gave two answers. Of these, 1.6% checked a combination of fair amount and very little, while 0.8% combined a great deal of knowledge and a fair amount.

The second question was open-ended. It asked respondents to list five things that they associate with African American culture. The following are the responses:

African
 African Liberation Day
 Almost Everything
 Ancestry
 Angry
 Appearance
 13 Art
 books
 Athletics
 Basketball
 2 Black
 Books
 Brotherhood
 Capable
 Cars
 Characteristics
 Children
 Church
 13 Clothing
 Ethnic Designs
 4 Color
 Combines with Native American
 Confused
 Confusion
 Cooking
 Creativity
 2 Culture
 2 Customs
 20 Dance
 Depression

Determination
 2 Diverse
 Don't love one another
 4 Dressing
 Drugs
 Drums
 2 Education
 Endurance
 Environment
 Living
 Faith
 Fake
 2 Fashion
 8 Family
 relations
 traditional rituals
 3 Family values
 Features (strong)
 Folklore
 35 Food
 eat lots of
 fast
 particular kinds
 soul
 spicy
 southern
 Freedom fighters
 Gangster
 Gardening
 Gold
 7 Hair

Braiding
Locks
Natural Grooming
 Hard work
 2 Heritage
 Hip-hop
 5 History
 2 Humor
 International African American
 Festival
 Ignorance
 Intelligence
 3 Jewelry
 Kindredness
 Kwanzaa
 Umoja
 Karamu
 Land
 12 Language
 Southern Drawl
 Many
 Large Continent
 Large Mineral Resources
 2 Lazy
 somewhat
 2 Lifestyles
 4 Literature
 Look
 Malcolm X
 2 Money
 45 Music

6 Rhythm & Blues
 5 Jazz
 Soul
 Rap
 Muslim
 Mutuality
 Natural Living (Earthiness)
 3 Oppression
 Perms
 2 Pictures
 Polygamous
 2 Poverty
 2 Pride
 Productivity
 Racism
 9 Religion
 Recognition
 Respect

Rhythm
 Science
 Selfish
 Sex
 Singing
 6 Slavery
 Smart
 Socio-economic problems
 Spirit
 Spirituality
 4 Sports
 Statues
 3 Strength
 Strong Features
 3 Struggle
with oppressive forces
 Struggling
 4 Style

of clothing
 3 Surviving
 Symbols
 2 Tradition
1 beliefs
 Tribe marks
 2 Tribes
 Underemployment
 Unemployment
 Unspoiled
 2 Values
 Violence
 White People
 Wilder
 37 No Response
1 Demand for a definition

The next question was also open-ended. Respondents were asked: "List five things that you associate with Caribbean culture." The responses are as follows:

6 Accent
Way of Talking
 Ancestry
Same family
 9 Art
 Beaches
 Beads
 4 Beliefs
Old
 Birthright
 Books
 Brotherhood
 Capability
 2 Carnival
 Climate
 13 Clothing
Colorful Outfits
 Coconut Bread
 4 Colors
Bright
Red, Green and Gold
 Community
 Coo coo
 Crop Over Festival
 Culture
 17 Dance
 Dedication
 Differences
 Diversity
 Drugs
 Endurance
 Environment
 3 Family
 Festive

47 Food
Spicy
Rice & Peas
Roti
4 Cooking
 Gardening
 3 Hairstyle
Dreadlocks
 Hardworking
 Heritage
 History
 4 Islands
Life there
Jamaica
Blue Water
 2 Labor Day Parade
Stilt Walk
 7 Language
Dialect
 Land
 Lifestyle
 Literature
 Location
 Mixture
of non-white & white
 44 Music
 3 Calypso
 Jamaican
 3 Reggae
 Rhythm & Blues
 2 Steel Band
 Nationalism
Garveyism
 Palm Trees
 3 Party

Plantains
 3 Pride
 4 Religion
 Rhythm
 Schools
 Sea
 Sensuality
 Serious
 5 Slavery
 2 Spices
 2 Spirituality
 2 Sports
Cricket
 Song
 Strong willed
 Storytelling
 Speech
 Spirits
 Strength
 Struggle
With oppressive forces
 2 Style
 Sun
 Survival
 Tradition
 2 Unity
 Variety
 Viewpoints
 Warmth
 Work hard
 Workers
 50 No Response

The fourth question in this category asked: List five things that you associate with African culture. The responses are as follows:

Ancestors	Egypt	Movies
<i>respect for</i>	<i>King Tut</i>	Multicultures
Ancestors of all mankind	<i>Hieroglyphics</i>	30 Music
Ancestry	Ethnic groups	<i>Blues</i>
Animals	<i>Yoruba</i>	<i>Drums</i>
Apartheid	<i>Akan</i>	<i>Hip-hop</i>
15 Art	6 Family	<i>Instruments</i>
<i>Artifacts</i>	<i>Love</i>	<i>Loud</i>
Beauty	<i>Relations</i>	<i>Jazz</i>
Beliefs	Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)	Oil
2 Books	Folklore	Oppression
Brainwashed	29 Food	3 Polygyny
Capable	<i>Fast</i>	Poverty
2 Civilization	<i>Fufu</i>	4 Pride
Clans	<i>particular kinds</i>	Too much
22 Clothes	<i>Home cooking</i>	9 Religion
<i>2 Attire</i>	<i>outdoor cooking</i>	<i>Islam</i>
<i>Big</i>	Gardening	<i>Voodoo</i>
<i>Colorful fabrics</i>	Generous	Respect
<i>Dress Code</i>	Grand	Rich
<i>Fabric</i>	2 Heritage	Serious (<i>Very</i>)
<i>2 Fashion</i>	4 History	5 Slavery/Slave Trade
<i>Lovely</i>	Home	Spice
<i>Traditional</i>	3 Hair	3 Spirituality
<i>Turbans</i>	<i>Braids</i>	<i>Wholistic</i>
2 Color	<i>Locks</i>	2 Strength
2 Community	Islands	Struggle
Confusion	<i>Beautiful</i>	Survival
Corruption	Intelligence	Symbols
<i>in government</i>	Jewelry	Together
Creativity	2 Knowledge/Knowledgeable	4 Traditions
7 Culture	8 Language	<i>Old</i>
2 Customs	Land	3 Tribes
18 Dance	3 Lifestyle	Values
2 Diamonds	Literature	Viewpoints
Dignity	Location	Wealth
Diversity	Look	2 Work
<i>Language</i>	Love	<i>Hard Workers</i>
<i>Appearance</i>	Male dominance	52 No Response
Drugs	Money	Can't tell
<i>Smoke Ganga</i>	<i>Fast</i>	
Education	Motherland	

For the question, "How did you get your information?" 8% of the respondents identified their family as the source of information; 7.2% friends; 10.4% from school or the workplace; 1.6% from the television or radio; 1.6% from newspapers; 7.2% from books; 6.4% chose the "Other" category. These broke down as follows: Church: 1.6%; festival: 0.8%; personal experiences: 1.6%; world cup: 0.8%; being around them: 0.8%; didn't specify: 0.8%. 49.6% of the respondents gave multiple answers. 9.6% gave no answer.

The next question was: "Would you like to know more about African cultures?" **90.3%** of the respondents answered yes. **4%** answered no. **2.4%** don't know. **3.2%** gave no answer.

For the question: "Which culture would you like to know more about?" **33.6%** want to know more about continental African culture; **13.6%** about African American culture; **2.4%** want more information about South American culture; **6.4%** want to know more about Caribbean culture. **0.8%** of respondents checked the other category, and want to know more about "Oriental" culture. **9.6%** of respondents gave no answer; and **33.6%** gave multiple answers.

Of the multiple answers, **16%** of respondents checked a-d, i.e. a) Continental African; b) African American; c) South American; d) Caribbean; **1.6%** checked a, b, d; **2.4%** checked c, d; **1.6%** checked a, b; **5%** checked b, d; **6.4%** checked a, d; **1.6%** checked a&c.

The final question in this category was "In your opinion, what is a good way of sharing knowledge about the various African cultures?" This was an open-ended inquiry. The following are the responses:

Advertisements	2 lectures	2 Tapes
17 Communication	2 pamphlets (small scale to start)	5 Television
<i>depend on eyewitness</i>	<i>Publish more</i>	<i>weekly newspaper/gleaner</i>
<i>information from those born there or who</i>	6 reading	2 meeting people
<i>traveled there</i>	2 School (maybe intermediate)	5 meetings
<i>speaking freely</i>	Elementary	<i>frequent</i>
12 talking/ word of mouth	2 Seminars	<i>of Africans together</i>
	talks	Museums
3 Community groups &	<i>teach children in the schools</i>	5 network
activities/projects	<i>teaching by Africans of own culture</i>	Peer Group
Discussion of relationship between	2 workshops on African history	Personal experiences
Africans and African-Caribbeans	3 expos/fairs	11 Social events/gatherings
Dance	family	<i>mixed age, gender, nationality</i>
<i>classes</i>	friends	2 cultural functions
54 education	Honesty	<i>festivals</i>
<i>Accurate information</i>	4 interaction	<i>mingling</i>
16 Books	5 Internet/world wide web	<i>picnic</i>
<i>classes (more)</i>	21 media	<i>relaxed atmosphere</i>
<i>colleges</i>	<i>at African Am. Museum</i>	<i>shows</i>
3 conferences (open to all)	cable	<i>traditional celebrations</i>
<i>courses</i>	<i>documentaries</i>	Travel
<i>debates</i>	11 film/movies/videos	Unity
6 discussion/fora/seminars	<i>inexpensive</i>	Visitors
<i>"each one teach one"</i>	<i>magazines</i>	Don't know
<i>exposure to multiple cultures</i>	<i>newsletters</i>	35 No response
Group Study	<i>newspapers</i>	
<i>information dissemination</i>	<i>show videos of modern African cities</i>	

From preliminary analysis of the information provided, it is clear that there is need for more factual information on the various peoples of Africa and its diaspora. The profile questions show that **82%** of respondents are of African descent, but majority of them (**60%**) do not know where their ancestors originally came from. Most (**25.6%**) identified North America as their area of origin now. The data collected show that **95.7%** of the respondents live in the US at the present time, and majority are also domiciled in the New York City- New Jersey metropolitan area. This is followed by the Caribbean which is the domicile for **23.2%** of the respondents.

The American chapter of AWA would concentrate its initial efforts on developing a larger presence in this area. At the same time, it will develop linkages with other branches throughout the United States and in other countries where there are people of African descent. These linkages will facilitate collaborative work toward achieving the organization's objectives. Although the age distribution shows that most of the respondents are in the cluster of ages that range between under 25 to 55 years, AWA intends to serve all people regardless of their age. Majority of respondents (74.4%) are women, but AWA will also serve all people regardless of their gender.

The data collected does not indicate that the higher the level of education, the more informed an individual is about Africa, thus, AWA will also serve a population that is multidimensional in terms of the spread of educational levels.

When asked the questions relating to knowledge of Africa and its Diaspora, most respondents claimed to know a fair amount about Africa (53.6%), however, 34.4% know very little, and 4% nothing at all. This question, combined with the open ended questions on things associated with African-American, Caribbean, and African culture reveal the persistence of many stereotypes that can only be corrected by providing not only accurate information, but opportunities for people from Africa and all parts of its Diaspora to meet, mix, and exchange information, opinions and ideas. The question on the source of information on which the associations are made are revealing. 49.6% of the respondents gave multiple answers. However, the fact that only 10.4% of those who gave only one answer got their information from school or the workplace, and only 7.2% from books demonstrates the need to include substantial segments in school curricula that enhance students' exposure to such vital information. Since a lot of texts tend to present negative accounts and or analyses on Africa and people from its Diaspora, For the future, AWA will investigate how best it can assist in this respect. However, this is a huge task which will be taken on in the future. At the moment, AWA will endeavor to plan workshops, lectures, symposia and seminars in conjunction with some of the higher institutions of learning in the New York-New Jersey metropolitan area that begins to fill the gap.

Majority of respondents want more information about continental Africa (33.6%), followed by 13.6% for African American culture and 6.4% for Caribbean culture. Serious attempts will be made to provide such information. However, since AWA presently has limited resources, its initial focus will be directed at presenting information on continental Africa. Serious efforts will be made to facilitate increased interaction among all peoples of African descent in the seminars, symposia and lectures that are sponsored by the organization.

Information will be disseminated in several ways: The internet and world wide web are some avenues that will be used by AWA. However, so many people called for more education that AWA will focus its energies on ensuring that the avenues to facilitating education are pursued vigorously. It is inevitable that multiple strategies would have to be pursued toward achieving these goals. Numerous useful suggestions were made by the respondents. Various kinds of media resources, social events, as well as the multiple methods identified under the category of education will be investigated to inquire into the mechanisms through which the information that majority of respondents so clearly desire can be provided. This is a large but not impossible task. AWA is excited about the opportunities that these efforts are bound to provide for all peoples of African descent to relate to one another and learn more about one another. As we approach the 21st Century, this task takes on even more urgency. Accurate information is a

valuable basis on which knowledge can be built, and knowledge is power. Through providing more knowledge, nurturing social relationships, and opportunities for people from all walks of life to network with one another, we hope that we can facilitate unity among all our peoples and make a positive impact on the world at large. This is only the beginning. The best is yet to come.