

THE FREEDOM IN LEAVING

A Black LGBT Guide to Choosing South Africa Over America

Media & Press Kit
by Elias Whitfield

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The Book in One Paragraph

What do you do when the country you helped build keeps telling you it doesn't want you? For one Black gay American, the answer after the 2024 election was not another protest, another petition, or another four years of waiting. It was a passport. Some call it a Black Exodus. Others call it Blaxit. More than 655,000 Black Americans already live abroad, and the number keeps climbing. *The Freedom in Leaving* is the exhaustively researched, unflinchingly honest account of choosing South Africa over America, part personal reckoning, part practical guide, and asks a question more Americans are asking out loud: what if the most powerful vote you have left is the one you cast with your feet?

Book Details

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Elias Whitfield

About the Author

Elias Whitfield is an IT professional turned author who spent two decades managing multimillion-dollar corporate projects, specializing in IT consulting for Fortune 500 clients across the telecommunications, oil & gas, utilities, and healthcare industries, before turning that same research discipline toward a far more personal question: where could he and his partner, two Black gay men, actually build a free and dignified life together? After the 2024 election, that question became urgent. *The Freedom in Leaving* is the result. He writes about the Black LGBTQ+ diaspora, relocation, and the freedom found in leaving. He divides his time between the United States and Cape Town, South Africa.

The title makes a bold claim, that there's freedom in leaving. What does that mean?

“There's freedom in having options. There's freedom in the awareness that you don't have to remain in the United States for the rest of your life. This isn't just political disenchantment, racial division, and LGBT angst. It's also inflation and cost of living, retirement, personal safety, and overall quality of life. The multiple stressors of American life often melt away by moving to a country that fits your life. An estimated 5 to 6 million Americans already live abroad, and more than 655,000 of them are Black Americans.”

Why South Africa? Most Americans wouldn't put it first on the list.

“For Black LGBT people in the US and worldwide, South Africa has become not only a tourist destination but a major relocation magnet. It's the only country on the African continent where LGBT rights are enshrined in the constitution, and that's been true since 1996. It was the fifth country in the world to legalize same-sex marriage, in 2006, and remains the only African country to have done so. It's home to eight LGBT Pride celebrations in a country of just 63 million. And yes, like the US, it has its own public challenges, but one country's challenges do not define the entirety of its everyday existence for everyone.”

You spent 20+ years in corporate America. How did that shape how you approached leaving?

“I approached leaving the country as if I was managing a massive multimillion-dollar corporate project. I researched, calculated, interviewed, networked, created contingency plans, and finally a timeline. I took seriously the cost of living, the value of the dollar against the rand, and its trend. I cross-referenced neighborhoods by LGBT presence, crime, and quality of life. This was going to be the biggest decision of my life. I wasn't going to leave it to chance.”

What do you say to someone who calls leaving ‘giving up’?

“I see it as passing the torch for the younger generation to step up. I've done the right thing my entire life, voted correctly for nearly five decades, spoken out, encouraged others. But as I grow older, I now choose me. I choose peace, a quieter life, in a country that embraces my Blackness and my sexual orientation, where I don't feel compelled to defend my very existence.”

What do you hope a reader feels when they finish the last page?

“That they have choices. That they are not trapped. The world is a big, beautiful place. We were not meant to spend our entire lives struggling, only to end up in a country that doesn't appreciate our efforts or our personhood. You don't have to stay.”

Story Angles by Outlet

News, politics & culture:

The quiet exodus, 655,000+ Black Americans already live abroad, and after 2024 the number is climbing. What does it say when the people a country marginalizes start voting with their passports?

LGBTQ+ media:

Choosing a country like your life depends on it, how one Black gay couple evaluated the world's constitutions and why South Africa, the first nation to constitutionally ban discrimination based on sexual orientation, won.

Personal finance & retirement:

The arbitrage of leaving, what an American income or retirement actually buys in Cape Town, with real numbers on housing, healthcare, and the visa math.

Travel & Africa:

Beyond the safari, the South Africa Americans never hear about: neighborhoods, banking, healthcare, community, and everyday life for a Black American in Cape Town.

Interview Availability & Contact

Elias Whitfield is available for podcast, radio, and audio interviews, and for written Q&As by email. Advance review copies are available to media on request.

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Evidence & Methodology

Every statistic in this book and on this site traces back to a primary source. Below is where each number comes from, including the places where an estimate required a real judgment call rather than a clean citation. Where sources disagree or a figure required calculation, that's stated plainly rather than smoothed over.

5.5 million Americans live abroad

The 5.5 million figure comes from the Association of Americans Resident Overseas, updated as of October 2024, up from 5.4 million the year before.

Source: Association of Americans Resident Overseas, aaro.org

~655,000 Black Americans estimated to be living abroad

Journalist Sonari Glinton first calculated and published it on March 21, 2025, on his *Vanilla Is Black* Substack, and Forbes picked it up and republished it soon after. Since then it's become a widely repeated, generally accepted figure, but it's still an extrapolation, not an official count.

The math: AARO's 5.5 million total Americans abroad, applied against the roughly 13 to 14% Black share of the U.S. population, lands in the 655,000 range. That assumes Black Americans emigrate at the same rate as everyone else, an assumption, not a documented fact.

Why this is labeled a calculation, not a citation: Presenting an inferred number like it was directly reported is exactly the kind of thing that can undermine a book's credibility the moment a journalist asks one hard question. Better to show the math than hide it.

180,000 U.S. citizens emigrated in 2025

Different outlets trace it to the Pew Research Center, to Department of Homeland Security data, or to the Wall Street Journal's own analysis of immigration records from 15 destination countries. Every source calls it the largest outbound migration of U.S. citizens in decades.

Source: Boston Globe, May 2026; Wall Street Journal analysis, early 2026

Not just South Africa: Black Americans are relocating worldwide

South Africa is this book's focus, and its legal protections are why, but it isn't the only place people are going. Ghana, Portugal, Costa Rica, Mexico, Spain, Brazil, and increasingly Kenya all show up again and again in current relocation reporting as active destinations for Black Americans leaving the U.S.

Black women specifically have built their own infrastructure around this. The ExodUS Summit, founded by Roshida Dowe and Stephanie Perry, is now an annual virtual conference for Black women planning a move abroad.

Source: World Footprints; Travel Noire; The Black Expat; ExpatDen; Associated Press

Passport renunciations: From 400/year to nearly 5,000. 40,000 people in the renunciation pipeline.

Before 2009, renunciations averaged 200 to 400 a year. In 2024, that hit 4,820, a 48% jump over 2023. In just the first quarter of 2025, 1,285 Americans expatriated, a 102% jump over the same quarter the year before.

Next to those government numbers sits a different figure from a different source, best kept separate rather than blending together. Americans Overseas, an advisory organization for U.S. citizens abroad, says it's currently advising roughly 40,000 people who are either in the process of renouncing or actively inquiring about it. That's not a government backlog count, it's one organization's own caseload, but it points at the same gap: a lot more people are moving toward the exit than the completed-renunciation numbers alone show.

Source: U.S. Treasury Department, Quarterly Publication of Individuals Who Have Chosen to Expatriate (renunciation counts); U.S. Department of State; Americans Overseas (the 40,000 figure)

America's first net emigration since the Great Depression

In 2025, more people left the United States than entered it, the first time that's happened since 1935. The Brookings Institution puts the net loss at roughly 150,000 people.

Ireland saw a 96% surge in Americans relocating there, 9,600 people in the twelve months to April 2025, up from 4,900 the year before.

Source: Wall Street Journal, Feb. 2026; Brookings Institution; Ireland Central Statistics Office

1 in 5 Americans want to leave permanently (Nov. 2025)

Gallup has tracked this figure for decades. It held steady around 10 to 11% through the Bush and Obama years, climbed to 16% during the first Trump term, and hit one in five Americans by November 2025, the highest level Gallup has recorded.

Source: Gallup longitudinal polling

50,000+ members: the Blaxit Tribe community

A massive connected network filled with Black men and women, either seeking out the possibility of living abroad or those who already are living abroad as expats who're showing the rest the way forward to their country of choice.

The term “Blaxit” was coined by Dr. Ulysses Burley III, an academic, journalist, and human rights consultant, modeled on “Brexit.”

Source: Travel Noire / Yahoo Lifestyle, Sept. 2025; Wikipedia, cross-referenced against cited academic sources

~\$204 billion: global Black LGBTQ+ purchasing power, across four markets

No single organization publishes this. It's a calculation, built from each region's own documented buying power.

United States: around 2.7 million Black LGBTQ+ adults (9% of 30 million Black adults). Black American buying power (Selig Center, ~\$1.6 trillion) times that rate: \$144 billion.

Europe: about 847,000 Black LGBTQ+ people (7% of 12.1 million Black Europeans). Against \$300 billion in combined buying power: \$21 billion.

Sub-Saharan Africa excluding South Africa: around 34 million people, a deliberately conservative 3% rate given 34 of 54 nations criminalize same-sex conduct. Against \$1.1 trillion in household consumption: \$33 billion.

South Africa specifically: about 2.3 million people (5% of 46 million Black South Africans). Against \$125 billion in buying power: \$6.25 billion.

Combined: roughly 40 million Black LGBTQ+ people worldwide, representing \$204 billion in annual purchasing power, bigger than the GDP of Hungary or New Zealand.

Source: Selig Center for Economic Growth; U.S. Census Bureau 2024 ACS; Gallup; Williams Institute, UCLA; World Bank & African Development Bank; UCT Liberty Institute (2022)

South Africa: 30 years, 20 years, 1 country

South Africa's constitution, signed by Nelson Mandela on December 10, 1996, was the first in the world to explicitly protect against discrimination based on sexual orientation. Same-sex marriage followed a decade later, the Civil Union Act, signed November 30, 2006. 2026 marks the 30th and 20th anniversaries.

Source: South African constitutional history; Civil Union Act, 2006

8 visible Pride celebrations, one country of 63 million

South Africa hosts eight distinct, visible Pride celebrations across the country, a density of LGBTQ+ public life you won't find anywhere else on the continent.

2028: the first time World Pride comes to Africa, and it's happening in Cape Town

Cape Town is the host city for World Pride 2028, the first time in the event's history it will take place anywhere on the African continent. This ties the win back to the fact this entire page keeps returning to: South Africa is the only country on the continent of Africa with constitutional protection for LGBTQ+ people.

Source: Washington Blade; Cape Town Pride (cptpride.org); MambaOnline; PinkNews; Black Enterprise; Cape Town Etc; Discover Africa; EveryQueer; IOL / Cape Argus; Smile 90.4FM

Uganda: Death. Nigeria: Prison. Ghana: Prison.

One region, three very different legal realities. Uganda's 2023 Anti-Homosexuality Act carries the death penalty for “aggravated homosexuality,” upheld by the Constitutional Court in April 2024. Nigeria's federal law carries 14 years imprisonment; the death penalty only exists in about 12 northern states under Sharia law. Ghana's parliament passed its own bill May 29, 2026, still awaiting signature, carrying up to three years imprisonment with no death penalty at all.

Source: Death Penalty Information Center; Human Rights Watch; France 24, May 2026; NBC News

33 of 54 criminalize you. 1 of 54 protects you and lets you marry.

More than 30 of Africa's 54 countries currently criminalize same-sex relationships. South Africa is the only one with constitutional protection against discrimination based on sexual orientation, and the only one where same-sex marriage is legal. That's 1 out of 54, or 1.85%. It's a share of countries, a legal landscape statistic, not a share of the continent's land or population, which are much bigger numbers. The point isn't how much of the map is safe. It's how few of the legal systems are.

Source: ILGA World

Despite homophobia, other Black Americans keep migrating to Ghana

Here's a real tension. Ghana just passed a bill carrying prison time for same-sex relationships, and yet Ghana remains one of the most popular relocation destinations for Black Americans overall, gay or straight. Most people moving there for the Year of Return or Beyond the Return aren't personally affected by that law, and the pull of ancestral connection,

community, and a genuine welcome is real and separate from the LGBTQ legal picture.

That contrast is exactly why this book focuses on South Africa specifically. Ghana can be the right move for a lot of people. It just isn't the same move, or the same risk calculation, for a Black gay man that it is for anyone else.

At least 1,500 African Americans relocated to Ghana, 2019-2023

This figure comes straight from Ghana's own government tracking, tied to the Year of Return and Beyond the Return initiatives.

Source: Ghana Diaspora Affairs Office

524 people, one ceremony, one government program now on pause

In November 2024, Ghana granted full citizenship to 524 members of the African diaspora in a single ceremony, the third since the 2019 Year of Return. Stevie Wonder accepted Ghanaian citizenship that same year.

This citizenship drive was suspended February 1, 2026, while Ghana re-evaluates its requirements.

Source: Ghana Ministry of the Interior; Citizenship Rights in Africa Initiative; Philadelphia Inquirer, Nov. 2024

1 in 1,000: a Black man's lifetime risk of being killed by police

This is one of the most rigorously documented numbers in this research base, a peer reviewed academic study. The risk peaks between ages 20 and 35, and holds across every U.S. region studied.

Source: Edwards, Lee & Esposito, Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, 2019

300,000 Black women left the U.S. workforce in three months

Chrishan Wright, founder of Blaxit Global, told BET: “The ground is shifting underneath our feet. In just three months, 300,000 Black women left the workforce, mostly not by choice.”

Source: BET News, Sept. 2025

6 million Black Americans left the South, 1910-1970

This is the Great Migration. In 1910, about 90% of Black America lived in the South. By 1970, almost half lived elsewhere, in the industrial North, Midwest, and West.

Source: U.S. Census Bureau historical data

Further Reading

Sources marked verified were independently confirmed. The rest are presented as reported.

- Wall Street Journal, “Americans Are Leaving the U.S. in Record Numbers,” Feb. 2026 (verified)
- Essence, “The Black Girl's Guide to Travel,” Jan. 2025 (verified)
- Capital B News, “Black Americans Find a Racism Respite Through ‘Blaxit,’” Feb. 2025 (verified)
- Travel Noire / Yahoo Lifestyle, “The Diaspora Voted With Its Feet,” Sept. 2025 (verified)
- Word In Black, Feb. 2026 (verified)

- TIME, “For LGBTQ+ People, America's Promise of Refuge Is Fading,” June 2026 (verified)
- BET News, Sept. 2025 (verified)
- Center for American Progress, “Black LGBTQ Individuals Experience Heightened Levels of Discrimination” (verified)
- The Black Expat, Jan. 2026
- Expatsi, 2026 Pride Report, July 2026
- African American Intellectual History Society, Feb. 2025

How This Book Was Researched

This book wasn't written from a distance. It was walked, breathed, and lived through, Cape Town's Atlantic Seaboard and southern suburbs, Johannesburg's CBD and its northern neighborhoods, both trendy and residential, all visited in person.

I hired my own immigration consultant to assist with my personal visa journey as a Critical Skills applicant relocating to South Africa. Two Black American expats already living in South Africa sat down for extended interviews, sharing what the glossy relocation content leaves out. They discussed what actually surprised them, what they wish someone had told them before they left, what the first year really cost against what it was supposed to cost. I also spoke in depth with a South African native, who added the one perspective no outsider can supply alone: what it's actually like to live in this country from the inside, not just move to it.

I also stayed active in Black expat and Blaxit community groups across WhatsApp, Facebook, Telegram, and YouTube, keeping the research current, not just accurate on the day it was written.

Underneath all of it: hours of research across financial planning, legal pathways, healthcare systems, and visa requirements, checked against what real people actually experienced. I documented my own year-long visa journey, part of a two-year runway to leave, still in flight as this book is published in October 2026.