



U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice (right) talks to French Foreign Minister Bernard Kouchner during their press conference after a one-day conference concerning Darfur on June 25 in Paris. Rice said last Monday that Sudan's "history" of backsliding on commitments means that sanctions pressure must be maintained, despite the country's acceptance of a larger peacekeeping force planned for Darfur. (AP photo/Michel Euler)

Dropout rate down statewide, up in Boston

Brian Mickelson

While high school dropout rates declined slightly statewide during the last school year, Boston's dropout rate was about three times the state average, the city's highest in 15 years.

The alarming statistics were detailed in a state Department of Education report released last week that provides annual dropout data to education leaders for developing and strengthening dropout prevention programs in the state.

During the 2005-06 school year, 3.3 percent of Massachusetts students in grades nine through 12 dropped out of school. Boston's rate, on the other hand, climbed two percentage points to 9.9 percent.

The overall decrease of half of a percentage point from 3.8 percent in the 2004-05 school year is offset by the absence of almost 3,000 return dropouts. Unlike prior annual dropout reports, the '05-'06 state report removed "return dropouts," or those students who dropped out but eventually passed the high school equivalency exam by the following October 1, from the overall dropout total.

Of the 9,910 total dropouts across the state, 50 percent were

white, 28.1 percent were Hispanic, 18 percent were black and 2.9 percent were Asian.

The Boston Public Schools also recently released a dropout report for the same year, limited to the City of Boston but with strikingly similar results.

According to the BPS report, Boston's dropout rate for the '05-'06 year was

9.4 percent, slightly lower than the percentage given by the Department of Education report. The percentages for Hispanics and blacks were also comparable.

Boston public school officials were quick to offer explanations and solutions to a thorny problem that is sure to frustrate efforts by incoming school superintendent

Carole R. Johnson. But solving the problem starts with information.

"We've been working a lot with the Boston Private Industry Council to make phone calls over the summertime to kids who dropped out the previous year, in order to get an idea of why they're dropping out and if there's anything we can do to convince them to come back and re-enroll in school," said BPS spokesman Jonathan Palumbo. "The reasons for dropping out are wide-

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"There's no question that the dropout rate is too high. There's movement, and it's slow and steady, but there definitely needs to be more change to get the improvement that we want to see."

— Jonathan Palumbo

Diverse influx of Africans finds opportunities, some wariness

David Cray

WASHINGTON — They range from surgeons and scholars to illiterate refugees from some of the world's worst hellholes — a dizzyingly varied stream of African immigrants to the United States. More than 1 million strong and growing, they are enlivening America's cities and altering how the nation confronts its racial identity.

Some nurture dreams of returning to Africa for good one day. But many

are casting their lot permanently in America, trying to assimilate even as they and their children struggle to learn where they fit in a country where black-white relations are a perpetual work-in-progress.

"To white people, we are all black," said Wanjiru Kamau, a Kenyan-born community activist in Washington, D.C. "But as soon as you open your mouth to some African Americans, they look at you and wonder why you are even here."

"Except for the skin, which is just a facade, there is very little in common between Africans and African Americans. We need to sit down and listen to each other's story."

The 2000 Census recorded 881,300 U.S. residents who were born in Africa. By 2005, the number had reached 1.25 million, according to Brookings Institution researcher Jill Wilson.

Since 1990, the African popula-
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Boston's connection to Freedom's Journal

Jacqueline Bacon

On the evening of Monday, Feb. 20, 1827, a group of prominent African American Bostonians gathered at the home of abolitionist David Walker. Among the guests were John T. Hilton, leader of the black Freemasons in the city; Walker's neighbor George B. Holmes — a hairdresser, musician and Mason — and the Rev. Thomas Paul, pastor of Boston's African Baptist Church.

The meeting was convened to consider the Prospectus for the first African American newspaper, Freedom's Journal, which would begin publication the following month in New York.

"In the opinion of this meeting," they resolved, "there is reason to believe that great good will result to the People of Colour by the publication of

the 'FREEDOM'S JOURNAL.' ... [W]e freely and voluntarily agree to give it our aid and support, and to use our utmost exertions to increase its patronage."

From the beginning, Boston's African American community contributed to Freedom's Journal in vital and significant ways. Published in New York City from 1827 to 1829, Freedom's Journal was an international outlet for news and opinion pieces by, about and for African Americans. It was distributed in the United States throughout the North and parts of the South, with agents also in Haiti, England and Canada.

"We wish to plead our own cause," editors Samuel E. Cornish and John B. Russwurm asserted in their first editorial. "Too long have others spoken for us."

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Charlene Pirckle (left) and her daughter, Caring O'Neil, of Roxbury, Mass., took part in the Boston Asthma Games on June 2 at the Roxbury Family YMCA. The event, sponsored by the Boston Public Health Commission, Children's Hospital Boston and the YMCA, is a fun-filled day for children with

asthma and their families. Participants have a great time being active while learning how to better manage their asthma. The event is free and features asthma-friendly outdoor field activities. (Photo courtesy of Children's Hospital Boston)

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