Four

Africanisms in African American Names in the United States

Joseph E. Holloway

African Names in Colonial America

The purpose of this chapter is to make available a comprehensive list of linguistic Africanisms drawn from a wide range of domains. The focus is on names and words borrowed from African languages and found in Ebonies and American English.

Scholars searching for linguistic Africanisms in African American names have not been successful establishing a direct relationship between African and black American naming practices. Turner, Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect (1949), is the exception. Other scholars who have searched for Africanisms and focused on the phonology, morphology, semantics, and syntax of Black English in relation to African languages include Herskovits (1941), Stewart (1969), Baratz and Shuy (1969), Labov (1970), Wolfram (1969), and Dillard (1972).

This chapter explores the historical relationship between African and African American naming practices and the search for Africanisms in black names. It begins by examining runaway slave advertisements for possible Africanisms. The focus is on African names in Colonial America, Africanisms in black naming practices, and African American nicknames.

At the end of this chapter is a list of African lexicon found in American English compiled from a number of word lists, including Turner (1949), David Dalby (1972), and Holloway and Vass (1990). This chapter does not duplicate their works but seeks to correct the mistaken assumption that only West African languages contributed to the linguistic varieties found in American English. This essay demonstrates that both West and Central African languages contributed to the diversity of linguistic Africanisms found in American English.

In the colonial period, African linguistic survivals were numerous because the memory of the African past was still very much alive. Planters were aware of African ethnicity and attempted to prevent a continuation of African culture and customs on the American plantations they controlled. This actually accelerated the acculturation process among house servants, who were forced to learn English as the only medium of communication with one another and the planters.

The level of English proficiency among enslaved Africans was generally related to the slaves' jobs. House servants, because of their close contact with the planters in the "Big House," learned English more rapidly than field slaves, who had little contact with European American culture and remained unaculturated for a longer period. African acculturation in South Carolina took place at two levels, in the house and in the field.

The first Africans in North America were not completely unaware of English and other European languages. For instance, Africans arriving in South Carolina from the coastal communities of Africa generally spoke some form of pidgin or Creole English prior to coming to America. Many Angolans coming from the Congo-Angola areas spoke Portuguese. Le Jau reported in 1710, "I have in this parish a few Negro Slaves ... born and baptized among the Portuguese," and an account in 1739 declared that "amongst the Negro Slaves there are people who speak Portuguese." Some "Spanish Negroes" were mentioned among the runaways in the South Carolina Gazette as heading toward Spanish Florida, while others attempted to seek out other Spanish-speaking slaves.

Peter Timothy's "Negro Named Pierro" could speak "good English, Chickasaw, and perhaps French." A runaway mulatto, Antoine, could speak "very good French and English," whereas Clase spoke "good English, and a little Spanish." Phobe spoke "French and English" and Jupiter could speak "good English and some French." In 1772 Fenda Lawrence, the Gambian slave trader in West Africa who came to the American South as a tourist, must have had some knowledge of English to move around the South as she did. Obviously these Africans who spoke multiple languages had prior contact with Europeans on the western coast of Africa.

A brief survey of advertisements of runaways' slaves revealed that in
some cases Africans were speaking Creole or pidgin learned on the coast of Africa. An advertisement read that he or she spoke "good English," a sign of acculturation. If the enslaved African spoke "bad English," it was a sign the African had been in the colony for only a brief period and was probably an adult at the time of arrival.

During the colonial period, African ethnicity played a strong role initially in the development of plantation life. The South Carolina Gazette revealed that the majority of "New Negroes" arriving in South Carolina spoke little or no English unless they had been imported from the West Indies or central Africa. A sale advertisement in the Gazette read as follows: "A likely Negro Boy about 13 years of Age and speaks good English to be sold." That he spoke good English meant that he was probably "country-born"—raised in the colony and acculturated. Africans born and raised in the colony had little trouble learning the language. For example, a fourteen-year-old Angolan spoke "pretty good English," a seventeen-year-old Angolan spoke "broken English," and a nineteen-year-old spoke "good English." An Angolan woman, two Gambian men, and an Igbo man could speak "pretty good English." Obviously, acculturation and the learning of English among younger Africans were quite rapid, whereas older Africans learned English with greater difficulty.

An example of older and unacculturated Africans can be found in this advertisement: "Ran away from the Plantation farm belonging to Capt. Douglas, near Dorchester, a tall Negro fellow named Tower-Hill and talks bad English." Many of the Charleston newspapers revealed this slow progress in learning English. Four new Negro men were reported in the Gazette on January 22, 1737, out of the ship Shepherd from Angola in the beginning of November as "speaking no English and not knowing their master's name." Four other could speak "no English," and an Ebo runaway could "speak no more English other than his name is Jack." Thomas Wright advertised that his slave Paul "had been one year in my plantation near Silk Hope" and still spoke "little English." Another African could not speak any English when he ran away almost a year earlier, and three Angolan men had been in Carolina three years and still spoke "little English." But "country-born" Africans such as Jacob could speak only English.

African cultural and linguistic acculturation into the American culture took several generations. In each generation less and less of the Africanisms in American Culture Africanisms in African American Names in the United States the Africanization of the South. Generations of interaction with African speech patterns produced the distinct white Southern accent. Edward Kimber, a traveler in the South in 1746, noticed the impact of Black English on white Southern speech, writing that "one thing they are very faulty in, with regard to their Children, which is, that when young, they suffer them too much to prowl amongst the young Negroes, which insensibly causes them to imbibe their Manners and broken speech." In other words, the English of Southerners resembled the African version. Africans arriving in Colonial America, especially South Carolina, continued to give their children African names well into the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, African American slaves had retained Africanisms in their naming practices. The greatest percentage of African names occurred among male slaves in the eighteenth century, when the majority of the black population was still unacculturated. African names gave them a sense of cultural integrity and a link to their African past and heritage.

The Africans did not forget their traditional naming practices at first. During the colonial period, the practice of naming children after the days of the week, months, and seasons was retained. In some cases the African Americans retained the original African version of their day names, but as generations passed they substituted the original African name for their English equivalent. The following table lists Akan day names found in the South Carolina Gazette.22

Table: Days of the Week with Corresponding African Names

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Male Names</th>
<th>Female Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Cadjoe</td>
<td>Juba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Cebbenah</td>
<td>Beneba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Quiaco</td>
<td>Coba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Quiao</td>
<td>Abba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Cubfinn</td>
<td>Phenba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Quamin</td>
<td>Mionba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Qushbee</td>
<td>Qushbeha</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Temporal names such as January, April, May, June, September, November, March, August, Christmas, and Midday are also found in the Gazette and other publications. There are numerous examples of English equivalents of African day names such as Monday, Tuesday, or Friday. According to Cohen, male names derived from the season are Spring.
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(Ebo or Calabar) and Winter. Moon and Thunder are names connected with the state of the weather at time of birth. Other names which are probably English equivalents of African words are Arrow ("of the Pappa country"), Boy (Guiney), Huntsman (new), Little One (Ebo), Plenty (Gambia and Mandingo), and Sharper (Bambara). This Akan naming was practiced in the Sea Islands of Georgia and South Carolina until the 1930s.

After the first and second generation, Africans began to substitute African day names for the English translations. Paul Cuffee, a wealthy shipbuilder, came from this African naming system. Cuffe, the seventh of ten children of Paul and Mary Slocum, was born on January 17, 1759, on Elizabeth Island near New Bedford, Massachusetts. When he was nineteen years old, nine of the children dropped the slave name Slocum (the surname of their father's master) and adopted their father's slave name, Cuffe. This word is Ashanti, meaning "male child born on Friday," and comes from Kofi. Linguist Joel Dillard points out that female day names followed practices similar to the male day names and that Cuba was among the most common names given to female children born on Wednesday. The name often given to a female child born on Friday was Phibba, which later transformed into Phoebe. Abby came from Abba, the female day name for Tuesday. According to Dillard, the name Benah, from Gubena (Tuesday), was frequently misanalyzed as "Venus." Cudjoe, the male day name for Monday, might be Cudjoe in the first generation, Monday in the second generation, and Joe in the third generation.

The Georgia Writers' Project during the 1930s found that among the Georgia coastal blacks, a number of people had been named for week days or the month in which they were born. One ex-slave who was interviewed in regard to this practice, Thursday Jones, explained:

"Dey name me dat way jis cus uh happen tuh be bawn on 'Iursday, I guess. Sech things seem tuh be in our fambly. I had ah uncle who name tis Monday Collins. It seem tuh come duh fus ting tuh folks' mine tuh name duh babies fuh duh day is baw on.

Here we see how the English equivalents of African day names were being used. By the nineteenth century, the African day names often had lost their meaning, but African Americans continued to give their children African day names.

Quaco, the male day name for Wednesday, was also commonly found during the colonial period. But, later, Quaco became Jacco, Jacky, and Jack. Martin Jackson of Texas decided to become Jackson because one of his relatives had a similar African name:

By 1734, when the South Carolina Gazette was established, names of African origin included Bowbaw, Cuffee, Ebo Jo, Ganda, Quaque, Quomenor, and Quoy for males, Africans and Auba, Bucko, Juba Mimba, Odah, and Otta for females. African names common in the eighteenth century were Sambo, Quash, Mingo, and Juba. The most widely used day names were Cuffee (Kofi) and Cudjoe for males and Abba and Juba for females.

According to Cohen, African day names and their English counterparts existed side by side. Two male slaves named Friday, one of them "this country born" and the other from the "Angola Country," and two male slaves named Monday, one from "Bomborough" (Bambarai) and the other "A Barbian (Bambara) Negro," are mentioned in the Gazette. Blanche Britt supplied Mencken with this list of African names taken from Southern newspapers from 1736 to the end of the eighteenth century: Annika, Boohum, Boomy, Bowzar, Cuffee, Cuffey, Cauchee, Milla, Minas, Monimea, Pamo, Qua, Quaco, Quamina, Quash, Warrah, and Yonaha.

Cohen gives a list of African names found in the Gazette between 1732 and 1775 (table 1). A list of slave names from a 1656 land patent record suggest that these slaves came from the "Bight of Guinea" to Virginia on a Dutch ship, the Wittepaert, by way of New Netherlands. The Virginia importer was Edmund Scarburgh. The names are given in table 2.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. African Names from South Carolina Gazette, 1732-1775</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Male Names</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Askey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assim (Asone)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awuy (Asu)*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bebe (Bofe)*</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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TABLE 2. Names Listed on the Dutch Slave Ship Wittepaert

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male Names</th>
<th>Female Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tony</td>
<td>Juba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Udeler</td>
<td>Juba (Abi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asuora</td>
<td>Juna (Tshiana, fat child)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amsi (let him try)</td>
<td>Jina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aula</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assone (Assone, let him bring water)</td>
<td>Juna (Angue, let him seek)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Avi (Avi, let him send)</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muasfunke (Monia nfunke, see I'm pointing)</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yare</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Messon (Mesu-eyes)</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roundels</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcells</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Johney</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angora (Angora)</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Margareetta</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mosque</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vaco</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ogombe (Ogome-co)</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Werry</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Omsosca</td>
<td>Juna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Names are of great importance in West and Central Africa. Names are given as stages in an individual's life and, as among all people for whom magic is important, the identification of a real name with the personality of its bearer is held to be so complete that this real name, usually the one given at birth by a particular relative, must be kept secret lest it come into the hands of someone who might use it in working evil magic against the person. That is why, among Africans, a person's name may in so many instances change with time, a new designation being assumed on the occasion of some striking occurrence in the person's life. When the person goes through one of the rites marking a new stage in his or her development, a name change also occurs to note the event.25

Stuckey, in Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America (1987), noted that black naming practices were African in origin, in that African Americans changed their names just as Africans

*Luba words identified by Vass
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did, corresponding to major changes in the life of the individual. The name shifting is clearly demonstrated by the experience of Frederick Douglass, who, soon after escaping slavery, began a series of name changes.\footnote{Turner was surprised that previous scholarship had failed to note this practice or the importance of Africanisms in Gullah nomenclature.}

On the morning after our arrival at New Bedford, while at the breakfast-table, the question arose as to what name I should be called by. The name given me by my mother was Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey. I, however, had dispensed with the two middle names long before I left Maryland so that I was generally known by the name Frederick Bailey. I started from Baltimore; I found it necessary again to change my name. . . . I gave Mr. Johnson, Mr. Nathan Johnson of New Bedford, the privilege of choosing me a name, but told him he must not take from me the name of "Frederick," I must hold on to that a sense of identity.

Sojourner Truth, a crusader for black emancipation and feminine equality, was known as Isabella until about the age of twenty, when she was freed and left her master's plantation. She had a vision in a dream that told her about her new name and her mission to free her people. And Malcolm X, through various stages of his life, was known as Malcolm Little, Homeboy Detroit Red, Big Red, Satan, Malcolm, El-Shabazz, and Malik El Shabazz.\footnote{This naming practice still exists among the Gullahs and in the general African American population. In black naming practices, every child receives a given name at birth and a nickname that generally follows the individual throughout life. Some examples of these nicknames are Jo Jo, June, Tiny Baby, O.K., John John, Mercy, Baby Sister, "I," Sunny Man, Main, Bo, Boo, Bad Boy, Playboy, and Pats.} \footnote{The name given me by my mother was Frederick Augustus Bailey. I started from Baltimore; I found it necessary again to change my name. . . . I gave Mr. Johnson, Mr. Nathan Johnson of New Bedford, the privilege of choosing me a name, but told him he must not take from me the name of "Frederick," I must hold on to that a sense of identity.}

Such name shifting is common throughout West Africa and particularly Central Africa. In many parts of Africa every man who leaves his traditional setting and family is given or takes a new name when he turns or walks away from home. This situation parallels that of enslaved Africans who were brought to the Americas, away from their ethnic groups, but who remained in contact with others who shared a similar ethnic background.\footnote{Nowhere is this tradition as vivid as in the jazz world, where name shifting is common, serving a major event in the life of the musician: Jelly Roll Morton (Ferdinand La Menthe), Satchmo (Louis Armstrong), Yardbird (Charles Parker), Lady (Billie Holiday). The story of these name changes follows the African pattern of using a new name to adapt to new circumstance and changes in the person's new life.}

As Malcolm X, through various stages of his life, was known as Malcolm Little, Homeboy Detroit Red, Big Red, Satan, Malcolm, El-Shabazz, and Malik El Shabazz.\footnote{This naming practice still exists among the Gullahs and in the general African American population. In black naming practices, every child receives a given name at birth and a nickname that generally follows the individual throughout life. Some examples of these nicknames are Jo Jo, June, Tiny Baby, O.K., John John, Mercy, Baby Sister, "I," Sunny Man, Main, Bo, Boo, Bad Boy, Playboy, and Pats.} \footnote{This naming practice still exists among the Gullahs and in the general African American population. In black naming practices, every child receives a given name at birth and a nickname that generally follows the individual throughout life. Some examples of these nicknames are Jo Jo, June, Tiny Baby, O.K., John John, Mercy, Baby Sister, "I," Sunny Man, Main, Bo, Boo, Bad Boy, Playboy, and Pats.}

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system consists of an English (American) name given at birth and a more intimate name used exclusively by the family and community. Turner was surprised that previous scholarship had failed to note this practice or the importance of Africanisms in Gullah nomenclature. Slaveholders recognized this dual naming practice among enslaved Africans in the eighteenth century. In their advertisements of runaways in the South Carolina Gazette, owners always included "proper" (given) names and "country names," the African names retained.\footnote{Name shifting is closely associated with African culture. The practice of changing names is a way of adapting to new circumstance and changes in the person's new life.}

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Among enslaved Africans this practice also was evident in names used by slaves, such as Pic Ya, Puddin’-tame, Frog, Tenise C., Monkey, Mush, Coon, John de Baptiste, Fat Man, Preacher, Jack Rabbit, Sixty, Pop Corn, Old Gold, Dootees, Angle-eye, Bad Luck, Sky-up-de-Greek, Cracker Jabbo, Cat-Fish, Bear, Tip, Odessa, Pig Lasses, Battler, Pearly, Luck, Buffalo, Old Blue, Red Fox, Coon, and Jewshup. Turner found that Gullah-speaking people preserved their language and nicknames by what they called basket names or day names. Their children always had two distinct names, an English one for public use and an authentic African name for private use by the extended family alone.

Here are a few examples of Gullah basket names which are also straight, unchanged, present-day Tshiluba names: Ndomba is the name given a Gullah child whose hand protrudes first at birth. It means "I run alone." Its Luba source word is Mvuluki, a rememberer, one who doesn't forget his sins. The basket name Shinglh means "to save, help, deliver," while Kamba, a very common Luba name, comes from Munkamba, meaning "ancestor." The Gullah name of Kamba is "a grave." Anyika, a Gullah name meaning "to praise the beauty of," Sebe, a Gullah name meaning "a leather ornament," comes from the Mesu (eyes), Kidinn (to work or hoe), and Kudjus (to eat) are all Gullah day names, exactly the same in Gullah and Luba.\footnote{This naming practice parallels Bantu naming practices in Zaire. Net’s basketball center Dikembe...} In the Sea Island of South Carolina, children sometimes have not only their given names but also community names. The community gives the child a name that characterizes or is characteristic of the individual, that is, Smart Child, Shanty (showoff).\footnote{This practice parallels Bantu naming practices in Zaire. Net’s basketball center Dikembe...}
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Mutombo from Zaire illustrates this point. His full name is Dikambe Mutombo Mpolondo Munkamba Diken Jean-Jean Jacque wa Mutombo. In order, these names are his uncle’s name, his family surname, his grandfather’s name, his nicknames given by his village, his name given at birth, and his hometown village, wa Mutombo (which means “from the village Mutombo”).

Other creolized Gullah pet names (nicknames) so typical of Bantu practices are names of animals or fish: De Dog, Doggie, Kitty, Fish, Yellowtail, Croker, Frog Spider, Boy, Gal Jumper, Tooti, Crocki, Don, Cuffy, Akebee, Dr. Buzzer, and Dr. Eagle.

In Gullah naming practices, as in African naming practices, children are named after parents because they are believed to be the parent spirit residing in the children. The same name might appear in several generations in a family. In the Sea Islands, the name Litia appeared in four generations of female children.

An integral part of Bantu culture is the unchanging secret “spirit name,” something that the individual has which is uniquely his or her own from the past and is carried on to the next generation, given to a new baby so that it may remain incarnate. Thus, by a strange interweaving of religion and language, the “inner soul” of the speech of a cultural group is preserved. As Munday reported:

Investigation brings to light the fact that the Africans of these parts, whether man or woman, have two classes of names: (a) spirit-names and (b) names of manhood or womanhood. Each has one (a few have two) of the names of the first class, and one or more names from the second class. It is by these names of manhood or womanhood that they prefer to be called; some are traditional African names of these parts, some are debased European words, some are European given or family nicknames, some are nicknames, given owing to some peculiarity; some are names given at baptism. All of these names of manhood and womanhood (except the last) can be, and are, changed for any and no reason, and according to who is changed, once it is finally given. It is of this spirit-name that the Lala aphorism says: The name is the Spirit.

Officials now prefer the African to be registered under his spirit name, because it is never changed, but there are two practical disadvantages which weigh against its being used for registration purposes. A Bantu with which we are concerned is exceedingly shy of using it for himself or another, and in some parts, the spirit names are so few in number that the majority of persons in one area may share half a dozen. However, for the Bantu the spirit name is never changed from the mother’s back to the grave.

The giving of the spirit name (literally, “of birth” or “of the navel”) is regarded as an event of the greatest importance. Every child born is regarded as the “come back” of some dead person, either of the same or of the opposite sex. The person has to be given the spirit name of the dead person.

Munday points out that the spirits of the dead are immortal only as they become incarnate again in another human being that bears their name. If a name is forgotten so that it cannot become incarnate, it wanders through the world as a ghost. This naming practice of spirit names and given names still exists with the African mother continent and African Americans in the North American Diaspora.

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adobe

Twi (Akan) a palm tree, leaves or grass used for roof covering.

ananse

Twi (Akan) and Ewe, spider; Bambara nansi, chameleon.

bad

Very good, used esp. in emphatic form, head. Cf. Michael Jackson’s “I’m bad!” Similarly are seen, in the sense of satisfying, fine, attractive; wicked, in the sense of excellent, capable. Cf. African use of negative terms, pronounced emphatically, to describe positive extremes: Mandingo (Bambara) a ke eye ke-jugu, it’s very good! (lit. “it is good badly!”); Mandingo (Gambia) a nuste nje, she is very beautiful! Also, West African English (Sierra Leone) gud haid, it’s very good!

bad-eye


bad-mouth

In Gullah, slander, abuse, gossip; also used as v. Cf. Mandingo da-jugu and Hausa mugum-baki, slander, abuse (in both cases, lit. “bad mouth”).

bamba

Bantu wakazhi, one who lies down in order to hide; position of antelope fawn for concealment (cf. Walt Disney, Bambi).

bamboula

African drum used in New Orleans during the nineteenth century. Also, a vigorous style of dancing there, early twentieth century. “Drum” in early jazz use. Cf. bambula, beat, hit, or strike a surface, a drum. Similar terms in other West African coastal language groups.

banana

Wolf’s word for fruit and was first recorded in 1563, and en-
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Banjo
Kimbundu mbunda, stringed musical instruments, whence also Jamaican English banjo and Brazilian Portuguese banxa.

Be with it
Mandingo expression, to be a la (lit. “to be with in, in it”) to be in fashion.

Biddy
Bantu bididi; a small bird; a small yellow bird. Ebonic: “a little biddy bird.”

Biddy

Boogie
Temne and Vai (Sierra Leone), friend; informal term of ad-dress for an equal. West African and Caribbean English ha, ba.

Bogue, bogus
Hausa baka, baka-kaka, deceit, fraud, West African English (Sierra Leone) bogo-bogo, Louisiana French bogue, false, fraudulent, phony. The ending of bogus has an analogy with Bantu bogo-bogo, to annoy; this form; pronounced in eighteenth century with stress on second syllable, may reflect the nomi-nal prefix m-in Wolof mbaga, hindrance, annoyance. The same element may be contained in British and American English humbug, to hoax, impose upon.

Bogo, bogu
Bantu muku, stupid, blundering act; error, blunder. Common nickname found in black English.

Booby
Bantu kuki, act of emission, sex. Cf. black American slang: “give me that booty.”

Booger, buckra
Bantu kuku, divination, consultation of the spirits; ghost, spirit.

Boog, bug
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### Africanisms in American Culture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>dashiki</td>
<td>a loose, colorfully patterned, bottomless pull-on shirt. Garment and word were introduced during the civil rights movement of the 1960s, when young black men wore dashikis to reassert their identity with African culture. Made famous by (Ron) Maulana Karenga in the 1960s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>day-clean</td>
<td>Bantu <em>kutsa kulu</em>, dawn, &quot;clean sky&quot;; Wolof <em>bina</em> sa, it has dawned (day is clean); Mandingo <em>daga sen</em>, it has dawned (day has become clean, clear). Found in Gullah, West African and Caribbean English <em>do-bin</em>, day-clean, and black Caribbean French <em>ju neve</em> (lit. &quot;day-cleaned&quot;).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diddle</td>
<td>Bantu <em>dinga</em>, deceive, trick, cheat; cheat, swindle.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>diddy-wa-diddy</td>
<td>Bantu <em>wa-wa-didi</em>: you eat and eat; legendary place of plenty to eat.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dig</td>
<td>Wolof <em>deg</em>, daga, understand, appreciate, pay attention to. Convergence with Black English to &quot;dig,&quot; understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dirt</td>
<td>Akan <em>den</em>, earth, soil. Common in U.S., as in &quot;dirt road&quot; or &quot;dirt track.&quot; West African and Caribbean English <em>do</em>, <em>dot</em>, dirty, earth. Convergence with British English in its original sense of &quot;dirtly.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>doll-baby</td>
<td>Yoruba <em>owo langida</em>, little child; <em>oyedeji</em>, wooden images. Southern dialect idiom common in black English, distribution mainly along Atlantic Coast.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>do one's thing</td>
<td>Mandingo <em>ku a fone ke</em> (lit. &quot;to do one's t'ing&quot;), to undertake one's favorite activity or assume one's favorite role.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>done</td>
<td>Wolof <em>daw</em>, past completive marker, &quot;he done go&quot;; Mandingo <em>tan</em>, past completive marker. Cf. also black West African English <em>den</em>, past completive marker. Convergence with English <em>done</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fat-mouth</td>
<td>Mandingo <em>da-ba</em>, excessive talking (lit. &quot;big, fat mouth&quot;). Same as <em>bad-mouth</em>.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>foo-foo</td>
<td>Akan <em>fiofo</em>, new, fresh, strange. An outsider, a newcomer, one who does not belong or is not accepted, fool, a worthless person. Convergence with English fool. Cf. black Jamaican English <em>foo-foo</em>, fool-food, credulous, easy to take advantage of, stupid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fuzzy</td>
<td>Wolof <em>fas</em>, horse (<em>fas mi</em>, the horse, <em>fas yi</em>, the horses). &quot;Horse&quot; in two specialized senses: <em>range horse</em> and *sure bet at a horse race.&quot; Hence, perhaps, <em>fuzzy</em>, policeman,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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hear it), bearing in the sense of understanding. Cf. similar application of v. meaning “to hear” in other West African languages.

leap hip

Wolof lhep, lepi, to open one’s eyes, to be aware of what is going on. Hence lhep-kar, someone with eyes open, aware of what is going on.

hollie

Wolof hong, red pink; color used to describe white people in African languages. Cf. also pink, a white man, and rosace, a powerful white farmer in the U.S. In Ebonics hongkis referred to whites who would come to the black community, park and honk their horns for their black dates. This term was used before the 1960s.

hoodoo

Hoodoo, as opposed to voodoo, is less centrally organized as part of voodoo religious practices. It generally connotes the mystical and magical aspects, usually evolved for negative purpose. “To hoodoo someone” implied that an individual was made to do something against his will by the use of various concoctions, which could be drunk, eaten, or worn, in order to make someone fall in love or to cause a death.

hullaballoo

Bantu kalis kafula, when those that are coming arrive. Hence noise, uproar, racket of greeting.

hully-gully

Bantu akalakala, compare (the hands, to ascertain the one holding the rock). A child’s game.

jam

Informal gathering of jazz musicians, playing for their own entertainment. Same element may be contained in jamboke, noisy revel, celebration, a full hand of cards, first recorded in 1860s. Possible convergence of Mandingo and black West African English jenu (from Arabic), crowd gathering, and Wolof jami, slave (in U.S., a gathering of slaves or former slaves for celebrations). A related Wolof term is jaimbour, freeman, freed man.

jamboree

Celebration by emancipated slaves made famous with Juneenth celebrations.

jazz

Bantu jaju, to make dance. Obsolete forms jazz, jay. The numerous applications of this term center on basic x sense of “to speed up, excite, exaggerate, act in an unrestricted or extreme way.” Note corresponding use as n. and as adj., “jazzy.” Applied to copulation, frenzied dancing, fast music, exaggerated talk, gaudy patterns and colors, excessive pleasure-seeking. Cf. Mandingo jaju, to become abnormal or out of character, either diminished or excessive. Cf. similar Wolof jooj and Tenne jay, to be lively or energetic to an extreme degree, applied to exaggerated styles of dancing or music, excessive love-making, etc.

jelly, jelly-rol

Mandingo jeli, minstrel, who often gained popularity with women through his skills in the use of words and music. A virile man who curries sexual favors of women. Epithet applied in U.S. to several black musicians, including “Jelly Roll Morton” (piano), “Jelly” Williams (bass), and “Jelly” Thompson (guitar). Convergence with English items of food, jelly and jelly-roll.

jenk

Bantu njika, reserve, reticence, inhibition. “To spread my jenk”: relax, have a good time.

jilly

Bantu njipi, short. In a second, in a moment.

jigger

Bantu njiga, sand flea, insect.

jigaboo

Bantu njikabo, they bow the head docilely. Derogatory term for black person. In black English a jigaboo is someone who is extremely black, with strong African features, as opposed to high yellow, or light-skinned.

jitter-bug

Mandingo ji-to, frightened, cowardly, from ji, to be afraid. Jitobaga, a frightened, cowardly person. To tremble and shake, have “the jitters”: nervousness, fear, cowardice. Jitter bug: an excited swing addict, who shakes and trembles in dancing.

jive

Wolof jen, jir, to talk about someone in his absence, esp. in a disparaging way. Misleading talk; to talk in a misleading or insincere way. Applied to sexual and musical activity. Cf. semantic range of jazz. Convergences with English jive, jibe, to sneer at, disparage.

john

Mandingo jon, slave, a person owned by someone else. An average man, esp. one who can be exploited or easily taken in; a male lover, a prostitute’s client. Also used in black American folklore, as in John Henry, name of hero-slave frequently in conflict with “massa.” The term massa provides a convenient convergence of English master and Mandingo massa, chief. That Mandingo speakers in U.S. were conscious of this convergence is suggested by the cycle of black American tales involving John—versus-Mass, which corresponds to a similar genre of Mandingo tales in West Africa involving jon, the slave, versus massa, the chief.

juba

A group dance with complex rhythmic clapping and clapping of knees and things, as done by plantation slaves (1834). Both dance and word are of African origin.

One of the earliest records of the term juba dates to American minstrel days. Both Juba and Jube consistently appeared...
Africanisms in American Culture

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as names of enslaved Africans who were skilled musicians and dancers.

**juba** (3) Bantu, juba, jibba, or eiloba, to beat time rhythmically. Used to describe an African dance step, the Charleston; recorded particularly in South Carolina and West Indies. Juba is also the Akan female day name for a child born on Monday.

**juba** (4) Traditional slave food. Refers to the food that enslaved Africans working in the plantation house collected from the massa's leftovers. Such leftovers were called juba, jibba, or jiba. On Saturday or Sunday the leftovers were thrown together; no one could distinguish the meat from the bread and vegetables. This juba was placed in a huge pot and those working in "de big House" shared it with those working in the fields.

**juba** (5) Bantu nguba, kingspade, peanut, groundnut, "goobers," from which an old African melody is derived. The Juba dance was originally performed on plantations but became so popular that whites gave it the name Charleston, after the southern city and major slave port. The dance was introduced in 1926 to the American stage in an all-black production by E. F. Miller and Aubrey Lyles entitled *Runnin' Wild,* and as the "Charleston" it became the dance craze of the 1920s.

**jule** Wolof daag, to misbehave, lead a disorderly life; Bambara dzunga, wicked. Brothel, cheap tavern, low dive. Mainly Gullah and black use in South. To *jule* (1939), to make the rounds of taverns and low dives, go drinking; used mainly by Southerners. By early 1940s to *jule* came to mean "to make the rounds drinking and dancing to jukeboxes." (1939) *Juke joints,* taverns or roadhouses that featured jukeboxes. *Juke Jule-*joint, a hand-out bar. Cf. also Bantu juka, rise up, do your things.

**ju ju** Bantu aju, danger, harm, accident. A charm or fetish against such.

**katatulu** Bantu *kakatulu,* to take off, remove; vi. to be still, immobile. Name of a large bird, mockingbird.

**keto** Bantu *keleka,* filter, strain; catch the drippings, pale stuff. A light-skinned black person.

**kickeraaboo** The Africanisms "to kick the bucket" evolved from *kickersaba* and *kickeraboo,* killed or dead. Term has two African sources: Krio (the English-based Creole of Sierra Leone) *kickersaba,* kakatulu, dead, to wither (as leaves or fruit); Ga (West Africa) *kibro,* dry, still; and *ko,* to befall, end. "Kicking the bucket" was used in American blackface minstrel songs, referring the death of a black person, until about the mid-nineteenth century, when it moved into Standard American English.

**kik** To affect strongly, as in "you kill me!" Similar usage in a number of West African languages, including Wolof and Mandingo, or verbs meaning lit. "to kill."

**kook, kooky** Bantu *koek,* dots, blackhead. A strange, peculiar person.

**kong** Bantu *aenge,* mixture, conglomeration. Bootleg whiskey.

**luba** First used in America in 1732 to identify slaves from Niger Delta. Use of African name indicated a first-generation African or a newly arrived "saltwater" African.

**mahoolu** Bantu *mahula,* secrets, divulged matters, indiscretions. Silly talk.

**man** Mandingo *ao,* man, the man; power, authority. Term of address.

**massa** Hausa *mata,* chief.

**mean** Hausa *mata* or *mawo,* woman, wife.

**mooja** Similar to bad, as "don't be mean to me."

**mooja** Fula *mooja,* to cast a magic spell by spitting. Hence mean, magic spell, incantation uttered while spitting. Originally, magic spell, charm, amulet, spell cast by spitting. Mainly used today in sense of something working in one's favor: "I got my mooja working!" Also, narcotics. Cf. Gullah *moot,* witchcraft, magic. Black Jamaican English *mooja,* plant with renowned medicinal powers.

**moolaa, mula** Bantu *moolaa,* receipts, tax money. Money, wealth. Cf. black English "give me some moolaa!"

**mother ya'** West African, esp. Wolof; used as term of severe abuse or of jocular abuse between friends. Includes use of explicit insults, such as "motherfucker."

**mouse** Mandingo *mawo* and Vai *maawo,* woman, wife. Attractive girl, young woman, girlfriend, wife. Convergence with English mouse. Of several terms for "woman" taken over into black English from major West African languages.

**nana** Bantu *nana:* grandmother; Akan: *nana:* grandmother or grandfather.

**ofay** White man. Extended form: *ofai ginay. Occurs as a nominal/adjunct prefix in many West African languages. Term for "white," beginning with "of." It also occurs widely: *Bama fa,* Gola *feu,* Nufruit, etc. It has been suggested that ofay represents a rearrangement of the letters of the English word for
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into pig Latin, but from its form, the weed is more likely to have an African origin.

okay (1)143

Mandingo o-er; Dogon o-key; Djibouti o-er; Western Fula o-yi koy; Wolof o-waw bokoy, mar ke, all meaning "yes, indeed!"

"That's it, all right." Note widespread use in languages of West Africa of koy and similar forms as confirmatory markers, esp. after words meaning "yes." Recorded use of o-ke, indicating surprised affirmation, in black Jamaican English 1816; predates by over twenty years the popularization of OK in white speech of New England. Affirmative use of koy-ke in black speech in U.S. is recorded from as early as 1776. Early attempts were made to explain OK as initial letters of misspelling of English words "all correct" or as French words au get, on the quayside. Subsequent attempts have been made to derive term from German, Greek, Scots, English, Finnish, and Choctaw, but little consideration has been given to possibility of origin in black speech.

okay (2)144

Mandingo o-ba-len, after that (lit. "that being done"). Use of this syntactic construction is widespread in West African languages. "After that" serves as link between sentences in running narrative or discourse, serving to confirm the preceding and anticipate the following sentence.

ekra145

Bantu kungombo, okra, main ingredient of gumbo. Food plant indigenous to Central Africa and brought to New World by enslaved Africans. Known to most Southerners by 1780s.

palooka146

Bantu paluwa (shishisiki), to have a fit, spasm, convulsion. A stupid person; an inferior prizefighter.

pampe147

Bantu jambu, be worried, upset, afraid, disappointed. To scold or "bliss out" someone.

poeda148

Bantu jambu, peel off outer skin. A light-complexioned black girl.

phasooh149

Kanuri fenzi girl. Girl, girlfriend, blues term.

ponyey150

Mandingo fiini, fiin (to be) false, valueless; to tell a lie. Counterfeited, sham, something false or valueless. Note also bokoy, bogoy.

pin151

Tenne pin, to stare at, see. Black West African English (Sierra Leone) pin, staring, as an intensifying adv. After v. denoting "to see." Convergence with English pin.

pinto152

Tenne (a-) bokota, bier for carrying corpse. In South Carolina and Georgia, means "coffin."

plat-eye153

Bantu paluwa, scratch like a dog at the door. Malevolent, su-
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sand, and saltwater, commonly used in building slave houses in Georgia and South Carolina.

Bantu tullualua, we're coming! Words of a song.

Kikongo tota, to pick up; Kimbundu tuta, to carry, load.

Bantu tuta, to carry, load. Similar forms meaning "carry" found in a number of western Bantu languages.

Uh-hum, yes; mhm, no. Cf. widespread use throughout Africa of similar responses for "yes" and "no." Note also occurrence of intonational variants of these forms to indicate differing intensities and situations of response, both in African languages and black American English, as well as in black African and Caribbean English. African origin of these items is confirmed by their much wider use in American than in British English.

Fan (Dahomey) oodu, todun; feti, witchcraft; to bewitch.

Mandingo epithet for a bad but powerful chief. Arabic Yaqub, Jacob. Also Yacub, described by Malcolm X as creator of white race. A white racist.

Crebo ya, used after commands; Tenne ya, used after statements or commands. An emphatic concluding particle: "Indeed!" Often said in an earing tone, thus softening a statement or command. Also black West African and Caribbean English ya, said after statements or command.

Wolof nyam, taste; Serer nyam, eat; black West African and Caribbean English nyam, to eat. Also Bantu nyambi, to eat.

Bantu ya nata ya nata, of the passing moment only temporary. Idle chatter, monotonous talk.

You pl.; similar use of you-all. Regular differentiation between second-person sing. And pl. pron. in African languages undoubtedly played a part in introduction of comparable differentiation in American English, esp. in South. Reinforced perhaps by differentiated pron. of French and Spanish. Cf. esp. Wolof you, you sing., versus yen, yena, you pl. Hence convergences with you in sing. And you + one as new second-person pl. form. Note first-person we-you by analogy. Cf. black West African and Caribbean English you, you sing, versus ana, anu, you pl. used in Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Ja-

Notes


4. Ibid., June 14, 1740; Sept. 22, 1737.

5. Ibid., Feb. 8, 1748; Feb. 25, 1749; May 28, 1750; Feb. 18, 1751.


7. South Carolina Gazette, July 8, 1732.

8. Ibid., Dec. 21, 1738.


10. Ibid., Feb. 1, 1746.

11. Ibid., Nov. 8, 1751; June 14, 1742; Jan. 17, 1743.

12. Ibid., Jan. 17, 1743.


15. Ibid., Mar. 16, 1738.


17. Ibid., Jan. 22, 1734.


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42. Joseph E. Holloway, personal interview with Mrs. Etta Williams (age eighty-six), St. Helena Island, Jan. 18, 1984.

43. Turner, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect.*

44. Ibid.

45. David Dalby, “The African Element in Black English,” in Thomas Koch-
74. Holm and Shilling, Dictionary.
82. Dalby, "African Element."
83. Ibid.
84. Ibid.
85. Holm and Shilling, Dictionary.
86. Ibid., 186.
87. Ibid.
88. Ibid.
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90. Ibid.
91. Ibid., *Random House Dictionary*, 582.
95. Robert Parris Thompson, this volume, chapter 10.
97. Jessie Gaston Mulira, this volume, chapter 5; N. W. Newell, in *Journal of American Folklore* 2 (1889), 44.
99. Dalby, "African Element."
100. Ibid.
101. Ibid.
102. Ibid.
103. Ibid.
104. Mulira, "Case of Voodoo," 56.
105. Thomas, *South Texas Negro Folk Songs*; Vass, correspondence with Madge B. MacLachlan, Jackson, Fla., regarding terms used by her childhood playmate on the turpentine "flats."
108. Ibid.
109. Ibid., 181.
113. Ibid., 768.
114. Ibid.
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117. Ibid.
119. Robinson, "Africanisms and the Study of Folklore."
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121. Ibid.
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125. Ibid.
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134. Ibid.
135. Ibid.
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137. Ibid.
139. Ibid.
140. Ibid.
The Case of Voodoo in New Orleans

Jessie Ruth Gaston

This essay provides insight into African religious retentions among blacks in New Orleans. Such survivals include beliefs, activities, cults, deities, and rituals that can be traced directly back to Africa. In particular we are concerned here with voodoo. The Dahomean religion of vodu, as it is referred to in many parts of West Africa, is a highly structured religious and magical system. This system is both complex and functional, with duties, symbols, rituals, and faithful adherents. After giving a brief history of vodu in North America, I will describe the African religious system with special reference to Dahomey, then investigate cult initiations among the voodoos of New Orleans and the role of songs and prayers in voodoo worship in West Africa, Haiti, and New Orleans. Finally, I will present a chronological review of voodoo practices and practitioners in New Orleans.

**Voodoo in North America**

The word voodoo, which is Dahomean in origin and means "spirit" or "deity" in the Fon language, generally produces one of three responses from most Westerners: fear, laughter, or respect. The response of fear is based on exaggerated negative views of the supernatural world and of Africa. The laughter response is often motivated by an ignorance that associates voodoo with "mere superstition." Respect comes with one's knowledge that voodoo is a functional religious system in West Africa.

The word and the system arrived in North America when the first