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# Introduction

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*Africanisms in American Culture* has been an important work in the field of diasporic studies for the past decade. It has inspired scholars and others to explore a field blazed originally by Melville J. Herskovits, the father of New World African studies. Since its original publication, the field has changed considerably in that Africanisms have been explored in their broader dimensions, particularly in the field of white Africanisms originally explored by John Philips in the first edition (ch. 13 in this edition).

We know more now than we did then. The new edition has been revised to include some recent essays based on research done two decades ago. One might ask why publish essays based on research at least twenty years old. Originally, the plan was to write the definitive work looking at the subject of Africanisms in American culture since Herskovits's classic study, *The Myth of the Negro Past*, came out in 1941. The volume on Africanisms in America was intended to break the ice and pave the way for a larger study on African transformed continuities in North America, updating Herskovits's seminal work. Needless to say, it was never completed.

Recently, the opportunity came around again and Indiana University Press suggested that an updated and revised edition would continue to be useful and important for another decade. I have written three additional essays for the new volume. The first (ch. 2), "What Africa Has Given America," was written in honor of Melville J. Herskovits, whose original six-page article with the same title changed the field. This chapter uses a transnational framework to examine how African cultural

survivals have changed over time and readapted to diasporic conditions while experiencing slavery, forced labor, and racial discrimination. This new focus uses a linguistic metaphor of creolization to demonstrate African transformed continuities in the New World. The second essay (ch. 4), "Africanisms in African American Names in the United States," originally appeared in *The African Heritage of American English* by myself and co-author Winifred Kellersberger Vass. The third essay (ch. 7), "The Sacred World of the Gullahs," is based on research done, as already mentioned, more than two decades ago. Some of the same people who served Lorenzo Dow Turner in his classic study, *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949), also served as my informants. This chapter reconstructs Gullah history, citing numerous Africanisms not previously identified by others, thus illustrating that research in any era is timeless.

Finally, "The African Heritage of White America" by John Philips has been revised and presents a new synthesis of approaches. When this essay first appeared, no one had taken seriously the study of Africanisms among white Americans. Researchers in the decades since *Africanisms* was first published have found far more instances of African cultural survivals in white America. Philips's revised chapter reflects this new development in the field in response to his original essay. Chapter 14, by Selase Williams, provides the definitive work on African American Language (AAL) (Ebonics). Williams demonstrates that Ebonics is a language and not simply a dialect of English as some linguists have argued, and that African American Language structure resembles or is identical to features found in African languages.

This revised collection of essays grew out of the need to update the original volume with new materials reflecting changes in the field of Africanisms since 1990. This new edition, like the first one, focuses on Africanisms in North America, especially the United States, from historical, linguistic, religious, and artistic perspectives. The goal and purpose of the new volume is to add to the influential findings of Melville J. Herskovits of a half-century ago. These essays intend to do just that, looking particularly at African cultural survivals in North America not previously described by Herskovits or other researchers exploring New World Africanisms.

### The Herskovits-Frazier Debate

The study of Africanisms—those elements of culture found in the New World that are traceable to an African origin—has been a neglected yet controversial area of inquiry in the United States since Herskovits's

pioneering study, *The Myth of the Negro Past*.<sup>1</sup> Studies following in Herskovits's wake focused on Africanisms retained in the Caribbean, Suriname, and Brazil, where an abundance of living African culture is still apparent. In North America the most direct remnants of African culture are found in a number of isolated communities, mainly in Florida, Georgia, and South Carolina. In many ways these hemispheric and geographic differences fueled the debate over the survival of African culture in North America.

The opposing sides in this scholarly debate were led by Melville Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier. Frazier believed that black Americans lost their African heritage during slavery; thus, he postulated, African American culture evolved independently of any African influence. In short, Frazier argued that slavery was so devastating in America that it destroyed all African elements among black Americans. For Frazier, black American culture began without any African antecedents. In *The Negro Church in America* (1963) he stated most forcefully his opposition to Herskovits, arguing that "because of the manner in which the Negroes were captured in Africa and enslaved, they were practically stripped of their social heritage." Slavery in the United States destroyed the African family institution and social structure, he asserted, while at the same time putting blacks in close contact with whites, from whom they learned new patterns of thought and behavior which they adapted to their own use.<sup>2</sup> At the time Frazier wrote this, blacks were attempting to blend into mainstream America and were reluctant to identify with anything that emphasized cultural differences.

It would be wrong to dismiss Frazier as someone with an irrational fear of African identification. A pioneer in African and African American sociology, he did not hesitate to discuss African societies in a positive light. He recognized pervasive African cultural survivals in the West Indies and Latin America but pointed out that even Herskovits had found such survivals in North America to be general rather than specific and pervasive. The culprit, he concluded, was the tremendous repression and social disruption Africans encountered in North America rather than any inferiority of African culture. Although Frazier was incorrect in arguing that North American slaves suffered a complete loss of African culture, he did recognize the strong role played by black churches in helping blacks reorganize their culture after slavery ended.

Herskovits, in *The Myth of the Negro Past*, illustrated many significant African contributions to American culture. Unlike Frazier he emphasized the continuity of West African carryovers in African American culture. But as more historical and ethnographic data on the African cultural background became available, the limitations of the Herskovits

model became evident. Although Herskovits spoke of Africanisms in the United States in a global sense, he looked for evidence to prove his theory almost exclusively in the Caribbean and South America. Moreover, his concept of Africanisms was based on a notion of West African cultural homogeneity that is not supported by more recent scholarship, which suggests a Bantu origin for many facets of African American culture. Nevertheless, Herskovits established a baseline theory of African retentions from which other researchers could assess African survivals in the New World and expand into areas he did not take into account.

Herskovits emerged from this debate as one of the most important scholars of Africanisms in North America. *The Myth of the Negro Past* not only confirmed that African traditions had survived in black cultures in the Americas but also revealed the presence of a distinctive African American culture in the United States. And the Herskovits-Frazier debate, though an old one, is still central to an understanding of developments in the field of New World Africanisms.

### The Study of Africanisms

One of the early studies aimed at recording and documenting Africanisms in the United States was *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* (1926) by Newbell Puckett. Puckett's book was the first anthropological study to examine African carryovers found in southern society. It presented some ten thousand folk beliefs of southern blacks, showing their origin when possible and indicating some general principles governing the transmission and content of folklore in general. Puckett discussed the preservation of African traits in African American burial customs, folk beliefs, and religious philosophy, including belief in ghosts, witchcraft, voodoo, and conjuration.<sup>3</sup>

Other early scholars examining African carryovers in American society were Carter G. Woodson and W. E. B. Du Bois. In *The African Background Outlined* (1936), Woodson listed several major African survivals—technical skills, arts, folklore, spirituality, attitudes toward authority, a tradition of generosity—and called attention to African influences in religion, music, dance, drama, poetry, and oratory. Du Bois presented the results of a similar study in *Black Folk, Then and Now*.<sup>4</sup>

In 1940, with scholarly research on Africanisms in its second decade, Guy Johnson, in *Drum and Shadows*, produced an extensive examination of African retentions in the Georgia Sea Islands and nearby mainland Gullah communities. This study was part of the Federal Writers Project that recorded the testimony of ex-slaves. It was the first to

use oral history as a methodology for analyzing Africanisms in North American culture.<sup>5</sup>

The next significant study was by Lorenzo Turner, a student of Herskovits. Turner's *Africanisms in the Gullah Dialect* (1949) demonstrated and documented Africanisms in the speech of black Americans. Turner was the first investigator to draw a direct link between Africa and America by examining linguistic retentions. He cited numerous derivations in African American speech from the Niger-Congo and Bantu family of African languages. Although Turner paid particular attention to the identities of African ethnic groups, providing lists of approximately five thousand words that originated in West and Central Africa, he, like Herskovits, concluded that it was the West African cultures that shaped and molded African American culture.<sup>6</sup>

Some twenty years later, Norman Whitten and John Szwed edited *Afro-American Anthropology* (1970), an anthology that sought to update Herskovits's work. This important book focused mainly on theoretical and methodological perspectives in anthropology and examined such persistent themes in African American research as family, kinship, ethnicity, economics, bilingualisms, code-switching, unconventional politics, adaptations to marginality, and the building of black identities. It included studies of blacks in regions previously unexplored.<sup>7</sup>

The 1970s also brought a useful anthropological study by Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective* (1976). The effectiveness of this study is attributable to its theoretical framework, applied methodology, and analysis of New World Africanisms. Its limitation is its failure to look at African acculturation and retentions outside the Caribbean.<sup>8</sup>

What Mintz and Price lacked was provided by Peter Wood's *Black Majority* (1974), a study that concentrates on Africanisms in colonial America. This exceptional work documented numerous African contributions to agriculture and animal husbandry, including cattle breeding, open grazing, rice cultivation, medicinal practices, and basketry. It also showed that Africans in colonial South Carolina introduced innovations in such fields as boat building, hunting, trapping, and fishing.<sup>9</sup>

Lawrence W. Levine's *Black Culture and Black Consciousness* (1977) is an extensive analysis of black American culture. Levine examined the sacred world of the slaves and looked at some African antecedents as a way of understanding this culture. He explored the meaning of slave tales and showed how the African animal trickster figures found their way to North America.<sup>10</sup>

John W. Blassingame's *The Slave Community: Plantation Life in the Antebellum South* (1972) is considered by many scholars to be among the

most important studies of slave culture. It is one of the few that looks at slave culture from the slaves' perspective. Blasingame not only described and analyzed the life of slaves but also focused on their African heritage.<sup>11</sup>

Winifred Vass, in *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States* (1979), opened a new dimension in the study of Africanisms. She analyzed and determined the African content in various aspects of American language and culture and, using a methodological approach similar to Turner's, elucidated the contributions of Tshi-Luba, a Bantu language of Zaire. Her in-depth focus on Central Africa rather than West Africa distinguishes her study from previous scholarship. She pioneered the thesis of a Bantu origin for black American culture.<sup>12</sup>

The Bantu thesis received strong backing in the work of Robert Faris Thompson, who was one of the first scholars to demonstrate the survival of Central African carving and sculpturing techniques in the folk art of black Americans, in this case blacks living in coastal Georgia and South Carolina. Both *The Four Moments of the Sun* (1981) and *Flash of the Spirit* (1983) established a strong relationship between the folk art of African Americans and their Bantu predecessors. *Flash of the Spirit* is a landmark book that shows how five African civilizations—the Kongo, Yoruba, Ejagham, Mande, and Cross River—exerted their influence on the aesthetic, social, and metaphysical traditions of North America.<sup>13</sup>

*After Africa* (1983) by Roger Abrahams and John Szwed is one of the most comprehensive examinations of African culture in the New World to appear in recent years. It is a persuasive work utilizing travel accounts to record New World Africanisms in activities such as baton twirling, cheerleading, and broken field running in football. The book also records Africanisms connected with the production of such foods as rice, yams, and sweet potatoes and in such linguistic retentions as *okay, wow, uh-huh, and unh-unh, daddy, and buddy*.<sup>14</sup>

*Down by the Riverside: A South Carolina Slave Community* (1984) by Charles Joyner is a classic study of Gullah folk life in All Saints Parish. Using the testimony of ex-slaves and the children and grandchildren of slaves, Joyner examined direct African parallels in the community's folktales, legends, proverbs, and songs. He drew direct African parallels to such aspects of slave life as the naming of children after the days of the week, the use of the hoe, and the manner of planting rice.<sup>15</sup>

Sterling Stuckey's *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (1987) explored and resolved one of the most perplexing problems in African American culture: the origin of the ring shout, an activity closely related to the development of black American

culture. Stuckey showed that while the ring shout was endemic to both West and Central Africa, the powerful circle ritual imported from the Angola-Congo region was so elaborate in its religious vision that it exerted the central influence on slaves in Carolina. Today on the island of St. Helena church elders still employ circle formations in singing spirituals.<sup>16</sup>

*"A Peculiar People": Slave Religion and Community-Culture among the Gullahs* (1988) by Margaret Washington (published under Creel) is the most recent study of African retentions in Gullah and African American religion. This seminal work combines anthropological and historical studies with reports, manuscripts, and letters relating to the Gullahs. Washington argues that large numbers of slaves imported into South Carolina between 1749 and 1789 came from Senegambia, the Gold Coast, and Liberia, and that these areas of West Africa contributed the majority of the Gullah population. Other recent research suggests, however, that the dominant elements of Gullah culture were contributed by the Bantu of Central Africa.<sup>17</sup>

*The Gullah People and Their African Heritage* (1999) by William S. Pollitzer shows that the Gullah people are one of our most distinctive cultural groups surviving directly from Africa. His study of the population isolated off the South Carolina and Georgia coastal islands show that this vibrant culture which originated in Africa still survives today. This landmark study tells a multifaceted story of cultural survivals. William S. Pollitzer discusses Gullah history, culture as language, religion, family, social relationships, music, folklore, trades and skills, and arts and crafts. He provides in great detail the indigo and rice growing skills that enslaved Africans taught their masters. He traces Africans in woven baskets, quilts, and Gullah speech. In addition, Pollitzer presents data on blood composition, bone structure, disease pathology, and other biological factors regarding the Gullahs. This medical anthropology research is useful in understanding ongoing health challenges to the Gullah people that ties them directly to their African ancestors. Pollitzer draws from archaeology and anthropology to linguistics and medicine to tell the story of the Gullahs.<sup>18</sup>

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### New Interpretations

This present collection explores both West and Central African cultural carryovers in America. The fourteen essays are grouped into five categories: history, language, religion, the arts, and new directions. This grouping includes areas that allow innovative interpretations of New World Africanisms not fully addressed in previous studies. The con-

tributors to this volume hope to increase the recognition and appreciation of the impact of African influences on these important areas of American culture.

### *History*

This section aims to identify the African ethnic and cultural groups that contributed to a variety of African cultural influences and survivals in North America.

In the first essay I look at the historical origins of African American culture, addressing the diverse African cultural and ethnic roots of African Americans. The focus is on identification of specific African nations that contributed to the development of African American culture in the United States. My primary purpose is to show that although West African slaves arrived in North America in greater numbers, the Bantu of Central Africa possessed the largest homogeneous culture among the imported Africans and, consequently, had the strongest impact on the future development of African American culture and language.

This study further reveals that as southern planters became more keenly aware of the agricultural practices in Africa, they used their newly acquired knowledge as a basis for selecting Africans for importation to North America. Thus, African occupational designation in the New World was largely determined by African culture, ethnicity, and region of origin. The Africans who lacked special agricultural skills were assigned to unspecialized agricultural tasks according to their individual talents and dispositions.

### *Language*

One of the most important areas in African cultural survivals is in the area of language. For decades the debate over the linguistic status of the communication system used in the daily lives of the majority of African Americans has been argued by scholars in the field.

Selase W. Williams is groundbreaking and contributes new information on African American Language in chapter 14. Through a comparative analysis of a number of features of African American Language (AAL), with languages of Africa and with Sierra Leone Krio, he demonstrates profound linguistic similarities in their grammars and phonologies. His analysis reveals the resilience of the African character in the linguistic makeup of African American Language, in spite of nearly five centuries of social, economic, political, and cultural pressure to lose

that character and to adopt an exclusively Anglo one. In the process of his comparative analysis, he discovered that an undocumented naming system among African Americans has developed since the 1960s that not only presents further validation of the existence of the African character in AAL but also opens the door for an entirely new line of research in the areas of African continuities in African diasporic communities.

Molefi Kete Asante's essay (ch. 3) describes the continuity between certain communicational styles of African Americans and West Africans. Tracing the relationship between West African languages and certain African American linguistic patterns, Asante argues that by and large black Americans have retained the basic linguistic structures of their African origins. The linguistic features discussed support this proposition and reveal that African American speakers have maintained this fundamental aspect of West African culture despite their relative acculturation into the language patterns of mainstream American culture. According to Asante, African Americans have retained a linguistic facet of their Africanness, and this African style generally persists even as Anglicization occurs. For example, almost every language spoken in Africa south of the Sahara is tonal, using pitch distinctions to differentiate words in much the same way the European languages use stress. The more evident the African rhythm, tone, and pitch are in vocalization, the more distinctly African is the intonation.

Another example of an African language retention observed in African American speech is that certain tense distinctions can be traced to the Yoruba, whose speakers do not distinguish between the past and present indefinite forms of a verb. When it is necessary to make a distinction between past and present, the Yoruba use an adverb of time. Asante shows that the English language spoken by imported Africans was greatly influenced by the phonological and syntactic structures of their language origins. He concludes that whatever semblances of English they learned bore the unmistakable imprint of an African linguistic pattern.

### *Religion*

Religion, the dominant element in many cultures, reveals much about a people. Religion forms the core foundation of the African world and is central to understanding the numerous Africanisms that have carried over into the New World. Some of the most visible Africanisms are found in such African American religious practices as the ring shout, the passing of children over a dead person's coffin in the Sea Islands, and the placement of objects on top of graves. Many Africans believe

that a Supreme Being, or God, exists and is present in all things, both the inner and outer universes, and that a person's life experiences evolve around a world filled with spirituality.

In this tradition, Jessie Ruth Gaston describes the spiritual world of voodoo, once recognized as a state religion in New Orleans (see ch. 5). In her essay Gaston provides valuable insights into the African survivals among blacks in New Orleans. African religious survivals and retentions are defined as those religious beliefs, activities, cults, deities, and rituals that can be directly traced back to Africa. The Dahomean religion of *vodu*, as it is called in many parts of West Africa, is a highly structured and complex religious and magical system, inclusive of duties, symbols, rituals, and faithful supporters. The term *vodu*, variously spelled *voodoo* and *hoodoo* in the United States, is Dahomean, originally meaning "spirit" or "deity" in the Fon language. Gaston's discussion is centered on five topics: the history of *vodu* in North America; the African religious system, with special reference to Dahomey; the cult initiations among voodoo practitioners in New Orleans; the role of songs and prayers in voodoo worship in West Africa, Haiti, and New Orleans; and the historical reconstruction of voodoo practices and practitioners in New Orleans. This original study shows how the voodoo religion was transplanted almost intact from West Africa.

Margaret Washington's essay (ch. 6) explores the cosmic world of the Gullahs. Washington shows that Gullah Christianity is a vital folk religion filled with peculiar patterns and beliefs that link its worshippers with their traditional past. This West and Central African view is consonant with the idea that in a cohesive society each member has a place and the spirit world cannot be set apart from secular or communal concerns. The Gullahs, for example, believed that God offered an explanation for life and provided a model for virtue. Their religion instilled confidence in their eventual freedom on earth and helped them maintain a passionate love for humanity.

Furthermore, Washington shows that the Gullahs attached a tremendous significance to death and encouraged a zest for living. She found little evidence of any apprehension or fear of dying, for death was not considered an end of life but the beginning of a new life as an ancestor. In other words, death did not signal a break with the community of the living; it represented a continuity between the communities of the living and the dead. Washington also shows that the African view of religion encouraged the Gullahs to live as rich and full a life as possible. Although the Gullahs did not fear death, they recognized its power and attempted in their customs to please both God and the "power of darkness." Night vigils, singing, and praying around the bedside of the dy-

ing were believed to strengthen a person as he or she passed "through death's door." The same practice is found in the Kongo (Zaire) and Angola, most noticeably among the Bakongo and the Ovimbundu, and is common in most Bantu-related cultures.

Robert Hall's essay (ch. 8) raises a number of issues in African American culture and religion by examining the religious experiences of blacks living in Florida during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Hall addresses certain distinct elements of African American culture by placing spirit possession and ritualistic dancing at the heart of the African survivals controversy in the United States. Because the cultural transformation of African Americans is best viewed as a dynamic process occurring over a long time, a consideration of early American history, particularly the pivotal eighteenth century, is crucial to understanding the relevance of African cultures to African American culture in more recent times. After a brief examination of the formation of African American culture during the eighteenth century, the bulk of Hall's essay describes, in considerable detail, African survivals in nineteenth-century Florida. Although ritual scarification, naming practices, magical beliefs, and material culture are mentioned, emphasis is given to ecstatic religious rituals, musical styles, and funeral rites.

The crux of Hall's essay is his demonstration through literary evidence (newspapers, black diaries, autobiographies, travel accounts, and the like) that belief in spirit possession persisted in many parts of Florida throughout the half-century following emancipation. Hall's demographic profile of Florida's black population in 1870 (only eighty-eight black Floridians had been born in Africa) requires an explanation of how possession and other African-influenced cultural traits could have persisted long after the death of African-born blacks in Florida. The oral traditions of black Floridians suggest that vivid memories of African-born parents and grandparents served as conduits of African cultural influences. These African ancestors, no longer in the earthly world when the census takers made their rounds in 1870, passed along their songs, sayings, basket-weaving techniques, and aesthetic learnings to their descendants. Among these legacies was the penchant for ritualized spirit possession, a tradition that remained quite strong among black Floridians even at the turn of this century.

George Brandon's essay (ch. 9) focuses on religious retentions that came to the United States as recently as the 1940s. Santeria, a neo-African cult indigenous to Cuba, has increased its following since it arrived in the United States. A key Africanism preserved in Santeria is the practice of sacrifice. Brandon examines the concept and the elements used in Santeria sacrifices and briefly compares them with traditional

Yoruba practices. He examines how these sacrificial practices bring Santeria devotees into conflict with the culture and laws of the United States and concludes that Santeria is basically African in its rituals and that the ritual of sacrifice has a central role in this religion. He further suggests that the United States is undergoing a slow but significant infusion of African-based religious forms as a result of African emigration and ongoing relations between Africans and African Americans.

### *The Arts*

Aesthetics, folklore, and music are areas of artistic creativity. The persistence of Africanisms in these areas suggests that a vibrant culture is still being transformed into newer forms. Culture is sometimes judged by its existing artifacts and legacy from the past. In African American culture, folklore and musical forms have retained evidence of strong African influences.

Robert Farris Thompson's essay (ch. 10) contributes to our understanding of Africanisms found in African American aesthetics, revealing that the majority of African retentions in African American folk art are Bantu in origin. Thompson shows that the impact of the Kongo on African American culture contributed to the foundation of black American aesthetic and musical culture in the New World. The Kongo influence contributed to the rise of the national music of Brazil (the samba) and to one of the most sophisticated musical forms in the United States, jazz.

Thompson demonstrates that Kongo influences were widespread. For example, in the northern Kongo there are specialized ritual experts, *nganga nkodi* and *nganga nsibe*, who cut designs on the bodies of living fish or turtles and release them back into their element, water, hoping that the ancestors will receive the messages and act upon them on behalf of their descendants. In South Carolina, on the island of St. Helena, when preparing fish the residents make three incisions. I am told that the tradition survives even though the local people have forgotten the meaning of the incisions. Other Kongo survivals are the Charleston dance pattern, which strongly resembles a dance pattern in northern Kongo, and *pakalala*, a pose with both hands on the hips that forms the challenge stance in the Kongo. To stand with hands on hips in the Kongo proclaims a person ready to accept the challenge of a situation. In the United States this akimbo pose has become a classic black woman's challenge pose. In addition, the African Haitian ritual dancing based on a dance form found in northern Kongo was adopted by the baton-twirling "major jonc" called *rara*. Its members twirl batons and strike a Kongo pose when confronting a ritual group. It is hypothesized

that in Mississippi, where many Kongo slaves resided, such groups had a major impact. Mississippi has become a world baton-twirling center.

Portia K. Maultsby's essay (ch. 11) shows that Africanisms survived in American music over time and were transformed into newer forms, the result of new experiences and a reshaping of European American idioms to conform to African aesthetic norms. Africanisms survived in the music of the New World because blacks maintained ties to their African past. This supralingual bond enabled African Americans to survive and create a meaningful existence in a world where they were not welcome. They adapted to environmental change and social upheaval by relying on familiar traditions and practices. Music played a major role in this process. Although specific African songs and genres eventually disappeared from the culture of American blacks, they created new ones using the traditional African styles, vocabulary, and idioms. Maultsby shows that the fundamental character of culture and music created by slaves persisted into the twentieth century and was reinterpreted according to the demands of the social setting. Africanisms in African American culture, therefore, exist as conceptual approaches—unique ways of doing things and making things happen—rather than as specific cultural elements.

The essay by Beverly Robinson (ch. 12) explores the full range of African American folk culture, from the epic hero Henry to dance, drama, food, and medicine. She shows that Africans carried vestiges of their material and nonmaterial culture on board the slave ships and that some of this culture resurfaced in the New World in the form of such folktales as Brer Rabbit. Robinson further describes how many North American black traditions, songs, and musical styles were rooted in Africa and later emerged on the plantation. Songs sung by Africans on slave ships while being transported to the New World resurfaced in the form of spirituals. The popular cakewalk dance, an expression of the early 1900s, had roots in the folklore of the slave culture, as did juba, a slave food, and a dance called juba, which later became known as the Charleston.

### *New Directions*

For too long scholars have focused on African cultural retentions in black culture only and have neglected to examine vestiges of the African cultural heritage among white Americans. John Philips reassesses the Herskovits-Frazier debate and suggests that partisans on either side of the issue ignored the presence of African cultural survivals among white Americans as they arrived at their respective theoretical positions.

Philips asserts that Herskovits was correct in believing that significant African influence is pervasive in American culture. Philips also believes that Frazier was correct in putting emphasis on the legacy of slavery and segregation rather than on the degree of African cultural survivals as factors that distinguish African American culture from European American culture. His essay (ch. 13) is historiographical, concerned primarily with identifying some sources for definitively exploring Africanisms in white American culture.

Philips supports his thesis by giving evidence from music, cooking, agriculture, folklore, linguistics, religion, and social structure. He shows that despite the reluctance of scholars to investigate the matter, much African culture has already been found in white American culture, some facets of which appear to exist no longer among black Americans. Philips further explores possible avenues of cultural transmission and arrives at certain theoretical implications for the study of cultural influences. These theories also have underlying implications for racial relations in the United States. Philips's essay is groundbreaking in that it prepares the way for future research in a neglected area.

#### A Note on Nomenclature

The study of Africanisms in the New World has sparked much debate over the survival of African culture in America. Historically, part of the debate has been over the use of the term *African*. The name controversy begins with the landing of Africans in Jamestown, Virginia. More recently, this argument has come full circle with the call for black people to adopt *African American* as a descriptive instead of *black* because the term will give black people their proper historical-cultural base with reference to a homeland. The name controversy is central to understanding black culture in America because its history reveals much about ideological and cultural developments in black life.

In 1619, when the very first Africans were brought to Jamestown, John Rolfe wrote in his journal that "a Dutch ship sold us twenty Negars." This was the first non-African reference made to blacks in North America, even though the term *African* had been used since the thirteenth century to identify black people from Africa. The English word *Negro* is borrowed from the Spanish meaning "black."

From the eighteenth century through the first third of the nineteenth century, black religious and educational organizations used the prefix *African* in their names, providing a sense of cultural integrity and a link to their African heritage. The first black religious organization estab-

lished in Savannah in 1787 was the First African Baptist Church. The second oldest black denomination in North America, founded in 1787, was the African Methodist Episcopal. In 1806 blacks constructed the first African Meeting House in Boston. This pattern also is seen in such names as African Free School, African Clarkson Society, African Dorcas Society, Children of Africa, and Sons of Africa. The first mutual beneficial societies that had direct roots in African secret societies called themselves African as late as 1841. One such society was the New York African Society for Mutual Relief.

Identification with Africa was strong in both the North and the South. In the North, African cultural institutions were established in the black governor's parade during the Pinkster celebration, where African dances and songs were performed. In New Orleans a corresponding African extravaganza at Congo Square took place every weekend.

Also in the 1800s a movement was started by blacks who worked as house servants, many of whom had white as well as black forebears. The term *colored* was used by these offspring to distinguish themselves from the Africans who worked in the fields. The light-skinned children who were the product of relationships between planters and house servants formed themselves into a distinct class. In Charleston in 1794 the Brown Fellowship was established, admitting members of mixed heritage. A similar society in New Orleans was called the Blue Vein Society; membership was based on skin color so light that the blue veins could be seen.

By the 1830s the term *colored* was no longer used exclusively by blacks of mixed heritage but was common in black leadership circles that included abolitionists, integrationists, and nationalists. Many blacks sought to disassociate from their African identification because of the activities of the American Colonization Society, which wanted to send free blacks back to Africa. Fearing both lost status and the possibility of a forced return to Africa, the black leadership moved away from African identification. From 1830 to 1860 integrationism and nationalism began to ascend over the forces of African cultural identification. A major thrust was to remove the word *African* from both educational and organizational titles. The idea was to fight the colonization scheme by denying that blacks were Africans.

Beginning in the 1890s, the age of Booker T. Washington, strong support arose for black nationalist ideas and linkage with Africa. Marcus Garvey's back to Africa movement of the 1920s contributed to strong nationalistic feelings. The term *Afro-American* gained popularity in the titles of black organizations. Washington himself played a role in get-



ting the U.S. government to use the word *Negro* to refer to African Americans instead of *colored* and *mulatto*. He fought for *Negro* as a unity word.

In the 1960s and 1970s the term *black* finally gained respectability with the coming of the civil rights, African independence, and black power movements. These movements helped elevate black status and pride throughout the world. The word *Negro* became outdated.

Race in the modern world is defined by land of origin: Japanese American, Mexican American, and Chinese American. But there is no land mass called Negro, Black, or Afro. These terms are hybrids, with no real reference to the African continent. The term *African American* defines black people on the basis of identification with their historic place of origin. Backed by Jesse Jackson and Ramona Edlin, among others, the term *African American* has been gaining in usage among the black leadership, including artists, poets, and a variety of intellectuals.

Thus this debate has come full circle, from *African* through *brown*, *colored*, *Afro-American*, *Negro*, and *black* back to *African*, the term originally used by blacks in America to define themselves. The changes in terminology reflect many changes in attitude, from strong African identification to nationalism, integration, and attempts at assimilation back to cultural identification. This struggle to reshape and define blackness in both the concrete and the abstract also reflects the renewed pride of black people in shaping a future based on the concept of one African people living in the African Diaspora.

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## One

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## The Origins of African American Culture

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*Joseph E. Holloway*

The history of the New World is a story of cultural interaction, integration, and assimilation. The rediscovery of the New World by Columbus in 1492 opened the gate to world powers and prompted colonialists and private individuals to search for wealth. The fertile land attracted farmers, especially from Spain, Portugal, France, and England. The new immigrants needed cheap labor to mine precious metals and to work on plantations. Their desire led to the transatlantic slave trade, in which millions of Africans were brought to the New World to meet this new labor demand.

The transatlantic slave trade established a permanent link between Africa and North America as Africans sold into slavery transplanted their cultures to the New World. The largest forced migration in history, the slave trade brought an estimated half-million Africans to what is now the United States over some two hundred years. This total is thought to represent about 7 percent of the entire transatlantic slave trade, though the exact figures are in dispute and the total volume of the slave trade may never be known. If one considers those who perished in the stockades and on the cargo ships in estimating the volume of traffic to the New World, the total may well be between sixty and one hundred million. So great was this traffic that "by 1850 a third of the people of African descent lived outside of Africa."<sup>1</sup> African slaves came from diverse regions of Africa but particularly from those areas stretching along the coast through West Africa to Central Africa (see map on page 20).

Scholars over the years, in their endeavors to define an African American culture separate from European American culture, discovered a sig-

nificant number of cultural and linguistic properties of African origin and labeled them Africanisms. Until recently scholars used the term *Africanisms* synonymously with *West Africanisms*, implying that the cultural heritage of the majority of the North American slave population was West African in origin and that this culture was homogeneous. This essay argues against the assumption of West African cultural homogeneity. Instead it sees the culture as conglomerate and heterogeneous.

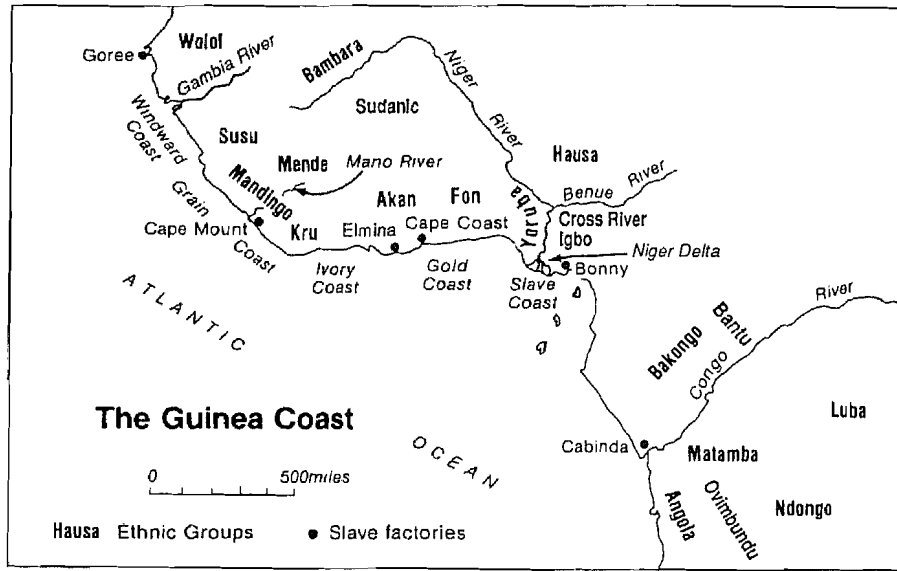
Focusing on the example of South Carolina but not limiting its overview to that state, this essay also sheds light on the theoretical controversy that arose from scholars' attempts to identify the major African cultural groups that contributed to the development of African American culture. I will show that although the West Africans arrived in North America in greater numbers, the Bantu of Central Africa had the largest homogeneous culture among the imported Africans and the strongest impact on the development of African American culture. I will also address the problem of multiplicity in the origins of Africanisms in North America by identifying the contributing African cultural areas.

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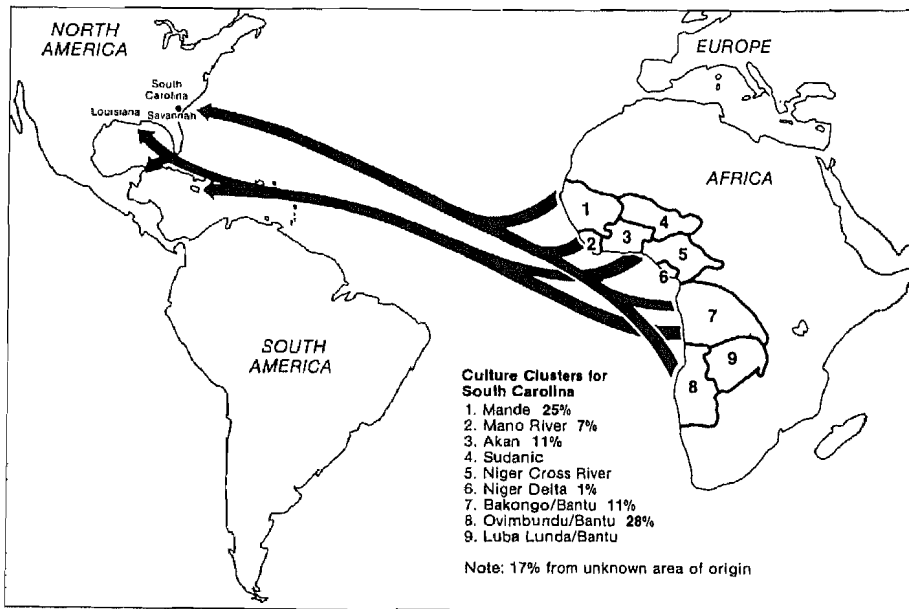
### Geographic Areas

The historical literature shows little agreement on regional and coastal names along the West African coast. Melville J. Herskovits used the term *Guinea Coast* to include the southern portions of the Gold Coast (Ghana), Dahomey (Republic of Benin), and the Bight of Benin (the Niger Delta).<sup>2</sup> Philip Curtin noted that *Guinea* as a geographical designation was always an unstable concept, changing in usage with each century. Early in the sixteenth century it referred to the whole western coast of Africa from the Senegal River to the Orange River. Later it included the coast from Cape Mount to the Bight of Benin. Curtin concluded that during the eighteenth century *Guinea* roughly designated present-day Gambia, Senegal, and Guinea-Bissau.<sup>3</sup>

For clarity I will follow Curtin's definition of Guinea, roughly designating the area between the Senegal River and the Sherbro estuary, including the Canary and Cape Verde Islands, Guinea-Bissau, and present-day Gambia, Senegal, and Sierra Leone. The term *Grain Coast* refers to what is known today as Liberia. *Windward Coast* represents all of present-day Sierra Leone. *Ivory Coast* represents all of present-day Ivory Coast. *Gold Coast* identifies the coastal stretch from Assini in the west to the Volta River in the east, equivalent to the coast of the present-day Republic of Ghana. *Slave Coast* designates what is currently Togo and Benin and a small coastal portion of Nigeria. *Bight of Biafra* refers roughly to the Niger Delta.



Map 1. The Guinea Coast



Map 2. People flow from West and Central Africa to the Americas

### Cultural Areas

Herskovits was the first scholar to identify the cultural zones of Africa.<sup>4</sup> His model is useful, but his cultural regions are too large to apply to specific cultures. Thus the cultural areas from where the enslaved Africans came must be revised into smaller cultural clusters: Mande, Mano River, Akan, Sudanic, Niger Cross River, Niger Delta, and Bantu. The Bantu cluster is further divided into Bakongo, Ovimbundu, and Luba Lunda. The cultural map on this page shows these areas in relation to the percentage of Africans arriving in South Carolina from each cultural cluster.

According to Herskovits the areas that furnished the greatest numbers of Africans were the “basin of the Senegal River,” the “Guinea Coast” (including especially the southern portions of what are today known as Ghana and the Republic of Benin), and the Niger Delta. Herskovits noted that Africans from the Guinea Coast, Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, the Bight of Benin, the Gold Coast, Dahomey, and the coastal ports of Nigeria were most often cited in the historical literature of slavery. He identified these cultural zones as the most significant in the formation of the patterns of New World “Negro” behavior.<sup>5</sup>

While historical documents are vague in terms of precise ethnic distribution, they do give the regional points of origin, designating cultural areas. It is likely that cultural groups living near the centers of trade rather than on the peripheries found their way into the slave trade. We can assume that groups living within a radius of two hundred miles of the ports of departure made up the Africans taken to North America. According to Herskovits the locale of the slave trade was the restricted region of West Africa rather than the continent as a whole. Recent research indicates, however, that Africans arrived from much of the Atlantic Coast of Africa, from the Senegal River to the ports of Angola, where buyers learned and became familiar with the diversity of Africans living on the coast and in certain parts of the interior.<sup>6</sup>

### The Slave Trade in South Carolina

In 1670 a permanent settlement of African slaves arrived in South Carolina from the English colony of Barbados in the West Indies. Peter Wood concludes that this Caribbean background contributed to the colony’s initial distinctive mixture of African and European elements.<sup>7</sup>

The transatlantic slave trade was in full-scale operation by the late

1600s. Documents from 1700 to 1730 are vague in identifying African ethnicity, but we do have data on total importations. Between 1706 and 1724, 5,081 Africans arrived in colonial South Carolina (table 1), and between 1721 and 1726, 3,632 were imported (table 2). Even though relatively few Africans were imported during the early years of the colonial period, they outnumbered the white population. In just twenty years after the original settlement the African population in the Carolinas was equal to that of Europeans. By 1715 Africans outnumbered Europeans 10,500 to 6,250. By 1720 Africans had outnumbered Europeans for more than a decade.<sup>8</sup> In 1724 the white population in colonial South Carolina was estimated at 14,000, the black population at 32,000.<sup>9</sup> A Swiss newcomer, Samuel Dyssli, observed in 1737 that Carolina "looks more like a negro country than like a country settled by white people."<sup>10</sup>

### *West Africans*

Between 1670 and 1700, Africans were imported to South Carolina predominantly from "Guinea." The majority of these "Guinea" Africans were Wolofs and other Mandes, such as Bambaras, Fulani, and Susus. The Wolofs, the most numerous of the African groups to arrive in the United States in the seventeenth century, were mostly house servants who had extensive and close contact with European Americans. They were, perhaps, the first Africans whose cultural elements and language were assimilated by and retained within the developing culture of America. They also had greater opportunities for admixture and interaction with whites than other African groups in the years before 1700.

The enslavement and transport of large numbers of Wolofs in the seventeenth century is attested by Senegambian history. Around 1670 the Wolof, or Jolof, empire broke up into a number of kingdoms owing to a revolt instigated by Mauretania marabouts. The disintegration of this one-time large empire caused instability, resulting in prolonged warfare as the Cayor region attempted to dominate other secessionist states. Each Wolof state tried to fill the power vacuum.<sup>11</sup> The long-term effect of this instability and continual warfare was that large numbers of Wolofs were taken as prisoners of war, sold to slavers, and transported to America. But after the seventeenth century the Wolofs were never again to provide such a significant number of Africans to the North American slave market.

The Senegambia region includes the ethnic groups Mandingo, Malinke, Bambara, Wolof, and Fula (plural, Fulani). Bambara, Man-

**TABLE 1.** Africans Imported into South Carolina, 1706-1724

<i>Year</i>	<i>Number Imported</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Number Imported</i>
1706	24	1716	67
1707	22	1717	573
1708	53	1718	529
1709	107	1719	541
1710	131	1720	601
1711	170	1721	165
1712	76	1722	323
1713	159	1723	436
1714	419	1724	604
1715	81	Total	5,081

Adapted with permission from Elizabeth Donnan, *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, 4 (Washington, D.C.: Carnegie Institution, 1935), 255.

**TABLE 2.** Africans Imported into South Carolina, 1721-1726

<i>Period</i>	<i>Number Imported</i>
May 30-September 29, 1721	104
September 29, 1721-September 29, 1722	215
September 29, 1722-September 29, 1723	527
September 29, 1723-September 29, 1724	602
September 29, 1724-September 29, 1725	433
September 29, 1725-September 29, 1726	1,751
Total	3,632

Figures reported by Wm. Hammerton, Nav. Officer, Port of Charles Town; adapted with permission from Donnan, *Documents*, 4, 267.

dingo, and Malinke are related ethnic groups that speak dialects of a single language and share the same Mande culture. Malinke, however, are Muslim, the Bambara anti-Muslim. Collectively, these West Africans from Senegambia through the Bight of Benin and Biafra represented 60 percent of Africans imported into South Carolina through the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (table 3). But their heter-

TABLE 3. Origin of Slaves Imported into South Carolina, 1733-1807

<i>Region of Origin</i>	<i>Percent of Slaves</i>
West Africa	
Senegambia	19.5
Sierra Leone	6.8
Windward Coast	16.3
Gold Coast	13.3
Bight of Benin	1.6
Bight of Biafra	2.1
Total	59.6
Central Africa	
Angola	39.6
Mozambique-Madagascar	0.7

Adapted with permission from Donnan, *Documents*, 4, passim.

ogeneous cultures placed them at a disadvantage in influencing African American culture.

#### *Central Africans*

As Washington points out, the Donnan and Treasury Report data based on documents from the early period (1733-44) show that 60 percent of the Africans entering South Carolina were from Angola in Central Africa; during the middle period of the trade, 1749-87, the figure dropped to 15 percent because of the Stono Rebellion; and in the final period, 1804-1807, Bantu forced immigration rose to 53 percent (table 4). A summary of these data shows that Angolans made up about 32 percent of the slaves brought into Charleston (table 5). Other data indicate the percentage actually was closer to 40.

Toward the mid-1700s, then, more Angolans than any other African ethnic and cultural group were being imported into South Carolina. Peter Wood found documents showing that between 1735 and 1740, 70 percent of all incoming Africans were Bantu from the Angolan region near the Congo River (table 6). Of 11,562 Africans imported in that five-year period, 8,045 were from Angola. The next largest group listed (2,719) was from "elsewhere in Africa." From Gambia only 705

TABLE 4. Slaves Imported into South Carolina, by Origin and Time Period

<i>Coastal Region</i>	<i>Number of Cargoes</i>	<i>Number of Slaves (Est.)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
<u>Early Period 1733-44</u>			
Senegambia	17	1,031	6.2
Sierra Leone	0	0	0
Windward Coast	0.5	34	0.2
Gold Coast	5.5	1,184	7.2
Bight of Benin	0	0	0
Bight of Biafra	2	609	3.7
Angola	46	9,831	59.5
Madagascar, Mozambique	0	0	0
Others (Africa, Guinea and Unknown)	32	3,844	23.2
Total	103	16,533	
<u>Middle Period 1749-87</u>			
Senegambia	116	16,038	26.3
Sierra Leone	27	4,210	6.9
Windward Coast	64	10,397	17.1
Gold Coast	55	8,604	14.1
Bight of Benin	6	1,394	2.3
Bight of Biafra	3	396	0.6
Angola	37	9,030	14.8
Madagascar, Mozambique	0	0	0
Others (Africa, Guinea, and Unknown)	75.5	10,875	17.8
Total	383.5	60,944	
<u>Final Period 1804-7</u>			
Senegambia	8	506	1.7
Sierra Leone	9	1,383	4.8
Windward Coast	42.5	5,123	17.6
Gold Coast	22.5	3,282	11.3
Bight of Benin	0	0	0
Bight of Biafra	2	909	3.13
Angola	55	15,305	52.7
Madagascar, Mozambique	2	473	1.6
Others (Africa, Guinea, and Unknown)	19.5	2,048	7.1
Total	160.5	29,029	

Adapted with permission from "A Reconsideration of the Sources of the Slave Trade to Charleston, S.C.," an unpublished essay by William S. Pollitzer.

**TABLE 5.** Summary of Slaves Imported into Charleston, S.C.

<i>Coastal Region</i>	<i>Total Slaves (Estimated)</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Senegambia	17,575	16.5
Sierra Leone	5,593	5.3
Windward Coast	15,554	14.6
Gold Coast	13,070	12.3
Bight of Benin	1,394	1.3
Bight of Biafra	1,914	1.8
Angola	34,166	32.1
Madagascar, Mozambique	473	0.4
Others (Africa, Guinea, and Unknown)	16,767	15.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>106,506</b>	

Adapted with permission from "A Reconsideration of the Sources of the Slave Trade to Charleston, S.C.," an unpublished essay by William S. Pollitzer.

Africans (6 percent of the total) were brought into South Carolina, probably to be trained as house servants.

After 1739, fewer Angolans were brought into the colony, for by then the southern planters were prejudiced against them. In the southern planters' minds, the Angolan dominance contributed to the unrest of 1739, in which Angolans revolted, killing whites while en route to Florida. Documents describing the Stono uprising mention that "amongst the Negroe Slaves there are a people brought from the kingdom of Angola in Africa."<sup>12</sup> In 1739-40 only 692 Angolans were imported into Charlestown, the Carolina port, and during the rest of the century Angolan importation dropped to 40 percent of the Africans imported into South Carolina (table 7). But even with this 30 percent drop, Bantu speakers still made up the majority of Africans employed in the fields in South Carolina.

Unlike the Senegambians, the Bantus brought to South Carolina a homogeneous culture identifiable as Bantu, the cover term used to capture the generic relationship of this large African cultural group. This homogeneity is indicated by a common language. According to Guthrie, Bantu languages have a common core lexicon of five hundred or more vocabulary items.<sup>13</sup> In forming the Bantu nucleus, the twenty-eight tested languages were ranked in accordance with the percentage of basic lexical items they contained. Among the twenty-eight languages, Tshi-

**TABLE 6.** Origin of African Slaves Arriving in Charlestown, March 1735-March 1740

<i>Year</i>	<i>From Angola</i>	<i>From Gambia</i>	<i>From Elsewhere in Africa</i>	<i>From West Indies, etc.</i>	<i>Total</i>
1735-36	2,029	—	612	10	2,651
1736-37	2,891	188	224	23	3,326
1737-38	827	—	228	7	1,062
1738-39	1,606	314	575	12	2,507
1739-40	692	203	1,080	41	2,016
<b>Total</b>	<b>8,045</b>	<b>705</b>	<b>2,719</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>11,562</b>
(%)	(69.6)	(6.1)	(23.5)	(0.8)	

Adapted with permission from Peter H. Wood, *Black Majority* (New York: Knopf, 1974), 340-41.

**TABLE 7.** Origin of Slaves Imported into South Carolina, 1752-1808

<i>Origin</i>	<i>Number of Slaves</i>
Direct from Africa	65,466
"Africa"	4,146
Gambia to Sierra Leone	12,441
Sierra Leone	3,906
Liberia and Ivory Coast (Rice and Grain Coasts)	3,851
"Guinea Coast" (Gold Coast to Calabar)	18,240
Angola	11,485
Congo	10,924
Mozambique	243
East Africa	230
Via West Indies	2,303
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,769</b>

Adapted with permission from Donnan, *Documents*, 4, 310, passim.

TABLE 8. Origin of African Cargoes in South Carolina, 1732-1774

Origin	Number of Cargoes	Origin	Number of Cargoes
Gambia	70	Whydah	4
Angola	55	Bance Island	3
Africa	40	Grain Coast	3
Sierra Leone	24	Bassa	1
Africa via West Indies	24	Benin	1
Gold Coast	21	Cape Coast	1
Windward Coast	15	Congo	1
Senegal	14	Gabon Coast	1
Guinea	8	Gambia River	1
Cape Mount	7	Tortola	1
Rice Coast	6	West Coast	1
Anamabo	4	Total	306

Adapted with permission from Donnan, *Documents*, 4, 276.

Luba, or Luba Kasai, had 47 percent of the basic vocabulary, Luba-Katanga had 50 percent, and Bemba 54 percent. For the Africans in South Carolina, the first stage in the acculturation process was the melding of numerous West and Central African elements in a culture such as Gullah. The creation of this creole culture allowed these Africans to form a kind of lingua franca, enabling them to communicate with each other as well as with the planters.

The Bantus, then, had the largest constituency in South Carolina and possibly in other areas of the southeastern United States as well. Herskovits noted that the Bantu center in North America was the Sea Islands off the Carolina coast. Elizabeth Donnan gives us a clear picture of the regions they came from in a listing of the sources of African cargoes advertised for sale from 1732 to 1774 (table 8). Given the homogeneity of the Bantu culture and the strong similarities among Bantu languages, this group no doubt influenced West African groups of larger size. Also, since the Bantus were predominantly field hands or were used in capacities that required little or no contact with European Americans, they were not confronted with the problem of acculturation, as the West African domestic servants and artisans were. Coexisting in relative isolation from other groups, the Bantus were able to maintain a strong sense of unity and to retain a cultural vitality that laid the foundation for the development of African American culture.

TABLE 9. Origin of Slaves Imported into Virginia, 1710-1769

Origin	Number of Slaves
Direct from Africa	45,088
"Africa"	20,567
Gambia (including Senegal) and Goree	3,652
"Guinea" (Gold Coast, Windward Coast)	6,777
Calabar and Bonny	9,224
Angola	3,860
Madagascar	1,011
Via West Indies	7,046
Via other North American ports	370
Total	52,504

Adapted with permission from Donnan, *Documents*, 4, 175-244, passim.

### The Slave Trade in Virginia

The picture is somewhat different in colonial Virginia. According to Herskovits's tabulation of data from Elizabeth Donnan's *Documents Illustrative of the History of the Slave Trade to America*, Virginia imported some 52,000 slaves between 1710 and 1769, but the origin of some 20,000 was given only as "Africa" (table 9). This shows that Virginia had no strict selective policy or strong preference for any particular African ethnic group. While Virginians showed some preference for Africans from the Senegambian coast and hinterland, they lacked the prejudice the South Carolina planters had against Igbo males and Africans from the Bight of Biafra, as indicated by the large numbers of Igbos Virginia imported. It is quite possible that South Carolina's merchants sent their male Igbo cargo exclusively to Virginia because of the refusal of local planters to purchase Igbo men.

These data indicate that many of the slaves coming into Virginia came from the West Indies, where they had already undergone an initial process of acculturation. By the time they settled in Virginia or North Carolina they had undergone a second stage of acculturation, losing more and more of their African heritage and culture with each stage of acculturation.

More recent data on slave importation into Virginia reveal, however, that Virginia imported a large number of Africans directly from Africa. A report to the Board of Trade showed that between June 1699 and Oc-

tober 1708, 6,607 Africans were brought in, only 679 by way of the West Indies (Barbados). Between 1699 and 1775 Virginia imported 69,006 blacks, and Virginia was second only to South Carolina in the direct African importation of slaves.<sup>14</sup>

### The African Heritage in America

Jacques Maquet divided the cultural areas of black Africa into six civilizations—the civilizations of the bow, the clearings, the granaries, the spear, the cities, and industry. The ones that concern us here are the civilization of the clearings, which includes the Guinea Coast, part of Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Ivory Coast, the Bight of Biafra, and the Congo-Angola region, and the civilization of the cities, which encompasses the Guinea Coast, including parts of Senegambia and the Niger Delta. The people of the clearings were familiar with the cultivation practices for rice, indigo, cotton, yams, maize, sorghum, okra, and sesame. The urban dwellers based their civilization on trade and commerce, and they had strong centralized political authorities. They were also excellent cattlemen and agriculturalists, familiar with the cultivation of yams, maize, corn, okra, palm oil, and sorghum. The Ashanti and Dahomeans in particular perfected artworks in stone, bronze, and iron.

The African slaves' cultural heritage was based on numerous West and Central African cultures brought together collectively from Senegambia (Wolof, Mandingo, Malinke, Bambara, Fulani, Papel, Limba, Bola, and Balante), the Sierra Leone coast (Temne and Mende), the Liberian coast (Vai, De, Gola, Kisi, Bassa, and Grebo), and the Slave Coast (Yoruba, Nupe, Benin, Dahomean [Fon], Ewe, Ga, Popo, Edo-Bini, and Fante). From the Niger Delta came Efik-Ibibio, Ijaw, Ibani, and Igbos (Calabars). From the Central African coast came Bakongo, Malimbo, Bambo, Ndungo, Balimbe, Badongo, Luba, Loanga, Luango, and Ovimbundu.

African cultural patterns predominating in southern states clearly reflect the specific cultural groups imported. That is, the upper colonies tended to be most heavily populated by West Africans and the lower colonies by people from Central Africa. The upper colonies included New York, New Jersey, Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Maryland, Virginia, and North Carolina. The lower colonies included South Carolina, Georgia—eastern coastal areas that were a part of the original thirteen colonies—and northern Florida. The Deep South included the fertile delta region of Mississippi, central Alabama, and Louisiana.

TABLE 10. North American Slaveholders' Occupational Preferences in African Slaves

Occupation	African Ethnicity Preferred	Culture
House servant	Mandingo	Mande
	Yoruba (Nagoes)	Cross River
	Dahomean (Fon), Fanti	Akan
Artisan	Bambara, Melinke	Mande
	Whydah, Pawpaw (Popo), Coromantee (Asante-Fante)	Akan
Rice cultivator	Temne, Sherbro, Mende, Kishee (Kisi), Papel, Goree, Limba, Bola, Balante	Mande
	Vai, Gola, Bassa, Grebo	Mano River
Field slave	Calabar, Ebo (Igbo), Efik, Ibibio	Niger Delta
	Cabinda, Bakongo, Malimbo, Bambo, Ndungo, Congo, Balimbe, Badondo, Bambona, Luba, Loango, Luango, Umbundu, Ovimbundu, Pembe, Imbangala	Bantu

Data from U. B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton, 1940), 42; Phillips, *Life and Labor in the Old South* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1929), 190; and Daniel Littlefield, *Rice and Slaves* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981); Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A Study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization* (New York: Knopf, 1946).

An examination of contemporary sources makes it obvious that slave owners in America had specific preferences concerning the regional origin of potential slaves (table 10). Guinea, Old Calabar, Bonny, Calabar, Whydah, Pawpaw (Popo), and Nagoes were the names used in the historical literature to indicate the place of origin of slaves to be purchased for the American market. Whydah was the capital city of Dahomey. Pawpaw served as a common name for Popo, a port city in Dahomey. Nagoes commonly stood for the western Yoruba, and Old Calabar and Calabar were names for the Igbo region. The table shows that North Americans preferred Senegambians (Mandingos, Fulani, Bambaras, and Malinkes) as house servants—butlers, maids, nurses (nannies), chambermaids, and cooks. They wanted slaves from the West African region—Whydahs (Fons), Pawpaws (Fantes), Yorubas (Nagoes), and Coromantee (Asante-Fante)—to work as domestic servants and artisans. These groups were also employed as carriage drivers, gardeners, carpenters, barbers, stablemen, wheelwrights, wagoners, blacksmiths, sawyers, washers, and bricklayers. The North Americans imported Africans from the Windward or Grain Coast (Mande and Mano River groups) because of their familiarity with the cultivation of rice, indigo, and tobacco.



The Yorubas, Whydahs, and Pawpaws were sold exclusively to the American market because they were considered less rebellious than the Coromantees (Asante) of the Gold Coast (Ghana). According to U. B. Phillips the Whydahs, Pawpaws, and Nagoes were generally considered the most esteemed of all because they were "lusty and industrious, cheerful and believed to be submissive." These qualities and their "disposition to take floggings . . . made them ideal slaves for the generality of masters."<sup>15</sup>

The planters in North America were known to purchase slaves specifically from these groups in West Africa to serve as house servants and artisans. The Africans that were considered most suitable for the American market were the Senegambians, particularly Fulani, who "had a strong Arabic (Muslim) strain in their ancestry." Because they were believed to be of mixed heritage with an infusion of Arabic blood, they were considered the most intelligent Africans and were to be trained especially for domestic service and as handicraft workers. Phillips, quoting Edward Long, noted that "they are good commanders over other Negroes, having a high spirit and tolerable share of fidelity: but they are unfit for hard work, their bodies are not robust nor their constitution vigorous." The Mandingos were considered gentle in manner but prone to be thieves. Since they were believed to fatigue easily because of a delicate physique, they were employed in the distilleries and boiling houses and served as fire watchmen.<sup>16</sup>

West Africans selected to work in the fields generally came from Senegambia and included the Goree, Serer, Fula, Balante, and Papel. Groups preferred from the Sierra Leone region were the Mende and Temne. Africans from the Grain Coast chosen for agricultural labor were the Bassa, De, Gola, and Grebo. In South Carolina the Igbos were at the bottom of the preference list, imported primarily to be common field laborers. For still unknown reasons, Igbo women were highly sought after.

The Mandes also worked as rowers, transporting crops and supplies as they did in their traditional watercraft on the Senegal and Gambia Rivers. These coastal Africans imported the art of netcasting, which became an established tradition in the tidal shallows of Carolina. Men who could handle nets were also able to make them; in 1737 a runaway named Moses was regarded as "well known in Charleston having been a Fisherman there for some time and has been often employed in Knitting of nets."<sup>17</sup>

Evidence supporting the fact that house servants were recruited from specific ethnic groups from West Africa is found in Myrtie Long Candler's reminiscences of life in Georgia. She tells us that her family's

house servant Black Mammy was said to be "descended originally from the Guinea tribe."<sup>18</sup> That Black Mammy was a house servant and came from Guinea was no accident.

A document showing a preference for Guinea Africans is a letter the Reverend John Urmstone wrote on December 15, 1716, from North Carolina, asking his correspondent to arrange for the purchase of Guinea Negroes, "three men of a middle stature about 20 years old and a Girl of about 16 years." He soon wrote again "insisting that he could not remain in North Carolina without two field workers and a domestic servant."<sup>19</sup> That Urmstone wanted Guinea Negroes to work as house servants and field workers suggests that Africans from the Guinea Coast were used both for field and domestic work, particularly in the cultivation of rice after the 1740s.

Igbos and Angolans from Central Africa were selected primarily for the field. Gilberto Freyre noted that "for the English colonies the criterion for the importation of slaves from Africa was almost wholly an agricultural one. What was preferred was brute strength, animal energy, the Negro . . . with good powers of (physical) resistance." Technological skills were also important, and planters were primarily concerned with how to apply such skills to agricultural pursuits in America.<sup>20</sup> Thus the majority of Angolans were used as field slaves because they were large and robust. The whole plantation system was supported by field slaves; they did the bulk of the work that made slavery efficient and economical.

The first preference in South Carolina was for Africans from the Gambia region, the Windward Coast, the Grain Coast, the Bight of Benin, and Angola. While Africans from the upper Guinea Coast were mostly pursued, planters were willing to invest in Angolans as prime field slaves. Historical documents show a strong relationship between type of agricultural cultivation and the various African ethnic groups being imported.

Maryland merchants also concluded that Gambia slaves were well suited to life in the Chesapeake area, and their preference was shared by other North American colonies.

In colonial Louisiana the French authorities favored Bambara slaves, much like the South Carolina planters. Africans were imported from Senegambia primarily because of their agricultural skills and familiarity with the cultivation of rice, millet, and maize, which they were assigned to cultivate in North America. The Mandes also were believed to be suited for house service in that they had been city dwellers throughout the Sudanic empire of western Africa. The women were trained to perform tasks similar to those they had performed in their home villages; they were wet nurses, cooks, and washer-women. According to

McGowan, "those slaves who did adapt were prepared by their background because of the similarity of the tasks they had performed in Africa." In other words, plantation tasks in North America did not place any new technological demands on African labor, and the Africans' familiarity with the cultivation of rice, corn, yams, and millet in the Senegambian hinterlands prepared them for the kind of labor that was required in the Mississippi Valley.<sup>21</sup>

Fulani accustomed to cattle raising in the Futa Jallon area of their homeland "oversaw the rapid expansion of the colonial cattle herd from a total of 500 in 1731 to 6,784 thirty years later." These Fulani, expert cattlemen, were responsible for introducing the husbandry patterns of open grazing practiced in the American cattle industry today. This African innovation allowed efficient use of abundant land and a limited labor force. The Europeans' initial attempts at raising livestock in North America had followed their custom of raising small herds confined to pastures. While settlers felt uneasy about open grazing at first, numerous Africans coming into South Carolina had witnessed and understood the success of this practice from their African experience. Peter Wood believes that from this early relation between cattle and Africans the word *comboy* originated in the same way that a slave who worked in the house became known as a houseboy.<sup>22</sup>

Senegambians were also employed as medicine men, blacksmiths, harness makers, carpenters, and lumberjacks. They brought with them highly developed skills in metalworking, woodwork, leatherwork, pottery, and weaving. Other slaves "on most plantations were taught with systematic care to excel in cabinet-making, iron crafts, blacksmithing, various domestic work and tailoring," Edith Dabbs reported. "It is not uncommon for slaves to be taught by an apprentice-type association with skilled African craftsmen."<sup>23</sup>

Slave merchants took great care in their advertisements to inform potential buyers of the African region and geographic point of origin of the slaves being sold. This was noticeable throughout the history of the trade. Many of the advertisements referred to the southern planters' familiarity with African ethnic origins. Advertisements for slave cargo occasionally gave the source from which the Africans originated, and runaway notices clearly indicated that planters distinguished the Africans by the various parts of Africa they came from: "he is a young Angola Negro," "a very Black Munding [Mandingo] negro man," "a native Madagascar," "a Congo Negro Slave," "of the Suso Country," "New Negro Fellow . . . calls himself Bonna [Bonny] and says he came from a place of that name in Ibo country, in Africa."<sup>24</sup> A cargo from Angola was

advertised as "mostly of the Masse-Congo country and are esteemed equal to the Gold Coast and Gambia slaves."<sup>25</sup>

American planters were also knowledgeable about the agricultural cultivation practices in various regions of West and Central Africa. The fact that they could identify the different African ethnic groups showed their familiarity. Generally we have been led to believe that North American planters were not very sophisticated about African ethnicity, but the sources suggest that they were familiar with rice, cotton, and indigo production in Africa and were often able to relate the various African ethnic groups to the types of cultivation found in Africa.

One notice of sale contains a clause referring to the African region and evidences a familiarity by the plantation owners with the "Negroes" experienced in rice planting: "the Negroes from this part of the coast of Africa are well acquainted with the cultivation of rice and are naturally industrious." Another states that Gold Coast Negroes "just arrived in the Brig Gambia . . . directly from Anamaboo. . . . A Cargo of very healthy prime Negroes, the greatest part of them are fit to be put into the field immediately."<sup>26</sup> Here we find the African place of origin identified with the type of labor task to be performed in America. Anamabo was a village of the Gold Coast, an area inhabited by the Fanti, a major Akan ethnic group. That the majority of this cargo would be assigned to the field was directly attributed to their acquaintance with the cultivation of rice, South Carolina's principal crop during the colonial period. Other slave advertisements mentioned other regions.

### Conclusion

Slave artisans and domestic servants, mainly West Africans, worked in close proximity to European Americans and were forced to give up their cultural identities to reflect their masters' control and capacity to "civilize" the Africans. By contrast, field workers—largely Central Africans—were relatively removed from this controlling, "civilizing" influence. Given the constraints imposed on artisans and domestic servants by plantation owners, one may logically conclude that the cultures of the Congo-Angola region of Central Africa rather than those of West Africa were dominant in North America. West African culture nevertheless supplied mainstream southern society with Africanisms through a process of reciprocal acculturation between Africans and European Americans.

In the area of folklore, the Brer Rabbit, Brer Wolf, Brer Fox, and Sis' Nanny goat stories were part of the Wolof folk tales brought to America

by the Hausa, Fulani, and Mandinka. Other West African tales of tricksters and hares were also introduced. The hare story is also found in parts of Nigeria, Angola, and East Africa. The tortoise stories are found among the Yoruba, Igbo, and the Edo-Bini peoples of Nigeria. Other examples of folklore from West Africa are such tales as "Hare Tied in the Bean Farm" and "Three Tasks of the Hare." These tales, widespread among the Mandinka and Wolof, are common in black folklore in the United States. The Anansi (spider) stories were Akan in origin and remained completely intact in the New World.<sup>27</sup>

The Senegambians were the first African slaves to arrive in South Carolina, bringing with them a unique cultural heritage. The Wolofs' skills became an integral part of the practices of the North American plantation, where numerous African carryovers of Wolof origin were found. Mande and Wolof were the two most widespread languages of Senegambia. Bilingualism was important for trade and commerce in the region. In the 1700s Wolof was by far the dominant African culture on both the upper Guinea Coast and the coast of South Carolina. Abd al-Rahman Ibrahim (known as Prince on the plantation), a West African prince from the kingdom of Tambo in the Gambia, was sold into slavery in New Orleans in 1788 at the age of twenty-six. He was Fulbe (Fula) and spoke fluent Arabic and possibly Wolof and Mande as well as other African languages. That suggests that Wolof was the lingua franca of the plantations before the 1730s, after which large numbers of Bantu were imported into the American South.<sup>28</sup>

Because the Wolofs were predominantly house servants and artisans, having extensive contact with European Americans, they were the first Africans to have elements of their language and culture retained within the developing culture of America. David Dalby identified certain early linguistic retentions among this group and traced many Americanisms back to Wolof, including such words as *OK*, *bogus*, *boogie woogie*, *bug*, *john*, *phoney*, *yam*, *guy*, *honkie*, *dig*, *fuzz*, *jam*, *jamboree*, *hippie*, and *mumbo jumbo*.<sup>29</sup>

Many other enslaved Africans were employed as field slaves. This occupation, in fact, was engaged in by the majority of Africans, suggesting that it was among the field slaves that much of African American culture and language evolved. These field slaves were mainly Central Africans who, unlike the Senegambians, brought a homogeneous culture identifiable as Bantu. The cultural homogeneity of the Bantu is indicated by a common language.

Once the Bantu reached America they were able to retain much of their cultural identity. Enforced isolation of these Africans by plantation owners allowed them to retain their religion, philosophy, culture, folk-

lore, folkways, folk beliefs, folk tales, storytelling, naming practices, home economics, arts, kinship, and music. These Africanisms were shared and adopted by the various African ethnic groups of the field slave community, and they gradually developed into African American cooking (soul food), music (jazz, blues, spirituals, gospels), language, religion, philosophy, customs, and arts.

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### Notes

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## Two

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"What Africa Has  
Given America"<sup>1</sup>

*African Continuities in  
the North American Diaspora*

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*Joseph E. Holloway*

Scholars attempting to define African American culture and language, as separate from Euro-American culture, have found a significant number of Africanisms in American culture. Scholars have long recognized African origins in the linguistic forms and cultural traits of African Americans, and assumed that these Africanisms derive principally from West Africa. This essay argues against the assumption of African cultural homogeneity and proposes, instead, that Africa possessed a conglomerate and heterogeneous culture. While West Africans arrived in North America in greater numbers, the Bantu of Central Africa had the largest homogeneous culture among the imported Africans and thus contributed significantly to the development of African American culture.

Although the usual assumption is that these Africanisms derive from West Africa, this assertion of African cultural homogeneity should be questioned. Africa has always had a conglomerate and heterogeneous collection of cultures. West Africans of a variety of origins came to North America in greater numbers, but the Bantu of Central Africa brought in the largest homogeneous culture. Thus Bantus as well as West Africans contributed significantly to the development of African American culture.

Enslaved Africans, not free to openly transport kinship, courts, religion, and material cultures, were forced to disguise or abandon them during the middle passage. Instead, they dematerialized their cultural artifacts during the middle passage to rematerialize African culture on their arrival in the New World. Africans arrived in the New World capable of using Old World knowledge to create New World realities.

Africans, and their descendants, contributed to the richness and full-