

# Slave culture- african or american

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Despite the abduction of millions of blacks from their homeland, slaves developed a strong familial camaraderie in America, retaining their African traditions as seen through dance, language, clothing and hairstyle. Although kinship ties were usually broken during the slavery process, blacks living on the same plantation created a strong-knit community that took part in festivals that highlighted the vibrant music and dancing of the African culture. Additionally, blacks expressed the individuality and uniqueness of their African tribe through their clothing and distinct hairstyles.

The constant influx of black slaves into America guaranteed the survival of the African culture, as more and more generations of slaves replenished the African heritage (Yacavone 570). Although most evidence suggests slave culture was rooted in Africa, slave advocacy in adopting Christianity supports the theory of their assimilation into American culture. In dealing with the hardships of slavery, blacks endeavored in numerous efforts of rebellion and escape to avoid assimilation into the American culture.

Nat Turner's revolt embodied African resistance towards American tradition, as Turner sought to free his fellow slaves from oppression and achieve a sense of equality, as seen through the eyes of God (eblackstudies.org). As a result of enslavement, blacks became united in times of resistance, as their ethnic heritage bonded and emboldened them and underlay their New World identity as 'Africans,' forged in their common struggle (Rucker 285).

Similar to the tightly bonded African extended family, slaves exhibited strong camaraderie during times of escape, as it was common for Africans to leave in bands of six or more people (Couvares 290). Slave participation in

communal festivals each year promoted the existence of the lively African culture, as they congregated by the hundreds to perform rituals, sing, and dance. The Pinkster festival featured a mass assembly of blacks that would dance to the “ hollow Sound of a Drum, made of the Trunk of a hollow Tree... the grating rattling Noise of Pebles [sic] or Shells in a small Basket” (White 8).

Music along with dancing took various shapes and forms as the Jonkonnu festival reflected the African importance of nature, as it was accompanied with “ songs strange, monotonous cadences” (Warren 9). Slaves were also successful in maintaining their African dialects, which “ not only allowed them to endure the collective tragedy of slavery, but to bequeath a notable and enduring heritage to generations to come (Joyner 280). Slaves also exhibited their allegiance to the African culture through their clothing and hairstyle.

Hair was regarded as one of the most important parts of the body for Africans as “ elaborate hair designs reflect[ed] tribal affiliation, status, sex, age, [and] occupation” (White 49). In addition, hairstyles conveyed different messages to society and nature, as people of the Yoruba culture braided their hair to send messages to the gods (Wiki). Similarly, African-American women made cloth that incorporated the West African ideals of design, using radiant colors to embody the highly spirited culture (Thompson 170).

Although blacks maintained several traditions of their past African culture, many slaves gave up their pagan beliefs and adopted Christianity in order to gain a sense of belonging in the new American culture. Christianity became

an Americanizing force on slaves not only because it served an opportunity for them to escape the white encroachment towards their African religion, but it also “ fit into West African ideas about the deities, the universe, and rebirth (Frey 282).

Likewise, blacks were so quick to adopt Christianity because it acculturated them into American society with a feeling of equality among their white counterparts (Raboteau 283). Despite many blacks retaining their past cultural traditions, the goal in converting slaves to Christianity was successful as “ slaves turned not to traditional African sources of wisdom and solace but to Christianity for a useful and restorative understanding of daily life” (Couvares 283).