

This 18-page paper
presents an in-depth
study of the african
diaspora



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This 18-page paper presents an in-depth study of the AfricanDiaspora culture coming to the Southern United States of Ame

AFRICAN

DIASPORA CULTURE IN THE US DURING THE LATE 18th CENTURY

INTRODUCTION

The actual definition of Diaspora is the

breaking up and scattering of a people. This means that Diaspora has occurred

all over the world at various times in history just based on the wars the world has endured. People migrate all of the time but in the truest sense of the word

relating to the African culture it refers to forced breaking up and forced

scattering. For the last 150 years or so we have wrestled with the fact that we

condoned the purchase and ownership of other human beings and used them to

cater to our every whim and give us free labor on our plantations. While a

century and a half has passed since the days of slavery in America the

consequences are still felt in many areas including the culture of the African

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American today.

African Diaspora as it pertains to the

transportation and settling of Africans in the southern United States created a

culture and a way of life here that was unique to slaves. Many of them died en-route and the ones who

made it here often lost their family members and children to sales. The world

was turned upside down for those who were unfortunate enough to be sold to the

south, and given their circumstances they carved out a new culture that could

withstand the harshness of slave life while still preserving their dignity and heritage.

Through the Diaspora and the settling into

slave life once they arrived in America the Africans showed a strength and character that was strong with resolve. They were determined not to have their

spirit broken and refused to forget who they were and where they came from.

While the new culture was developed it incorporated both the old traditions of

Africa and newly acquired traditions of the southern US.

BUILDING

UP TO THE US MARKET

Before we can understand how the African

Diaspora developed into a culture in the United States we must first have a grasp on the years and events leading up to it.

Though the African slave traders began

sending slaves to the US in the 18th century the practice of slave

trading hit African centuries before that (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). It was in the end of

the 14th century that the Europeans began taking people from Africa

and selling them against their will to others (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). They were mainly

being used as servants for the rich in Europe.

To prevent worldwide outrage about them owning Africans against their will the Europeans claimed it was to benefit the Africans by allowing them to be Christians (African Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). This was during an

era in which the church had an extremely strong hold on every day life and people built their lives around church doctrine and church guidance (African Slave Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

Using this as an angle worked because by the

17th century the Christian Church was lending its full support to the act of stealing Africans and making them slaves (African Slave Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

When Spanish and Portuguese sea-captains

began to explore the Americas they took their African servants with them. Some

of these Africans proved to be excellent explorers. The most important of these

was Estevanico, who led the first European expedition to New Mexico and Arizona

(African Slave Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

However when European development began

to grow in new lands faster than they could keep up they needed labor workers.

Traders began to get the idea that many Africans meant lots of profit and began

to bump up the number of slaves they would request (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). It soon became

evident that the captured prisoners of war between tribes was not going to be

enough, so they then began wondering if they could obtain slaves in some other

fashion (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). The chiefs as well as the slave traders and

auctioneers began rounding up Africans by the thousands and capturing them to

sell as slaves. Children were no longer safe playing with their friends

outside. There were adults who went for a walk in the morning and were never

heard from again (African Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). Fathers left entire

families as they were snatched from the town they lived in. Those who lived in

rural areas had it even worse as it was generally accepted to be much safer to

steal from outlying areas because no one could hear them screaming for help

(African Slave Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

The

stealing of Africans and selling them as labor began with a vengeance

(African

Slave Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). British

merchants became every active in the theft and hiding of Africans until the

slave ships could come and the Africans would be put on slave ships bound for

various Americas, never to see their loved ones again.

The

slaves were actually given to the merchants by the African chiefs who traded them for European goods (African Slave Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

They started out being captured warriors

from tribal wars but the demand became so great that the chiefs were soon

organizing raiding parties to go out into the bush, capture healthy looking

Africans and bring them back for the purpose of trade (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

Olaudah Equiano was captured and sold as a slave in the kingdom of Benin

in

Africa. He wrote about his experiences in *The Life of Olaudah Equiano the*

African (1789) (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>)

Generally,

when the grown people in the neighborhood were gone far in the fields to labor,

the children assembled together in some of the neighborhood's premises to play;

and commonly some of us used to get up a tree to look out for any assailant, or

kidnapper, that might come upon us; for they sometimes took those opportunities

of our parents' absence, to attack and carry off as many as they could seize

(African Slave Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

One

day, when all our people were gone out to their works as usual, and only I and

my dear sister were left to mind the house, two men and a woman got over our

walls, and in a moment seized us both; and, without giving us time to cry out,

or make resistance, they stopped our mouths, and ran off with us into the

nearest wood (African Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). Here they tied our

hands, and continued to carry us as far as they could, till night came on, when

we reached a small house, where the robbers halted for refreshment, and spent

the night (African Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

He

was sold as a slave and never saw his family members again.

This was not an infrequent occurrence. One

man tells a story that he was captured to be a slave (African Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). His wife did not

want him to go alone so she offered to go also if they could bring their baby

(African Slave Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). The

African captures extracted a promise from the traders that they should be kept

as a family and the baby would not be sold. They had to leave their other four

children behind but that was okay as they were safe and they would be together

(African Slave Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). The

trader began traveling to get to the shore to the ships with his find and he had to rest over night. Rather than pay the innkeeper in cash the trader ripped

the baby from the mothers arms the next morning and handed him over as a future slave (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). He was probably

about three and old enough already to do chores around the inn. The trader whipped the parents until they agreed to leave the child behind and continue on

to the ship (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

AND

SO IT BEGAN

From there the slave trade market moved

to the Americas and the southern United States. It grew very quickly because

the development of America mean there was much work to do and that the

plantation owners needed workers that could run the plantations for them

(African Slave Trade[http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm)

htm). The

idea of free labor caught on quickly and it was not long before slaves were

being imported by the thousands to the southern United States (African

Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

The slave market became so prosperous that

Africans were being stolen and sold from their homeland by the thousands

(African Slave Trade[http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm)

htm). The

potential owners only wanted those that could work hard so the captains of

the

slave ships were charged with accepting or rejecting the prospective slaves.

They would put the Africans through very extensive physical examinations

(African Slave Trade [http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm)

htm). If a

potential slave had any problem at all such as bad teeth, a disorder, illness

or deformity that African was rejected (African Slave

Trade <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>). On the

surface it

sounds as if being unable to perform was a good thing for it got them out of

being slaves, however the contrary was true. Those who were rejected would

anger the traders so much that they would often beat the ill, and deformed

who

did not make the grade (African Slave Trade [\[schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm\]\(http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm\)\). Historical accounts talk about watching](http://www.spartacus.</p></div><div data-bbox=)

the

instant beheading of any African deemed unworthy of being as slave.

Therefore

it behooved the captured African to try and look and act as healthy and

strong

as possible for the slave ship would at least forestall death as long as they

could make the trip (African Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

The slave ships carried as many as they

possibly could because the more slaves they carried the more money the captain

made. In 1788 a slave ship called the Brookes was carrying over 600 slaves

from Africa to America and the ship was built for a maximum capacity of

450(African Slave

Trade<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASafrica.htm>).

SLAVE

SHIPS DURING THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

The ships were crowded far beyond

acceptable capacity. They bound together the hands and feet of the captured

slaves and they were left almost no room to move about or stretch their limbs

(Slave Ships <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>). There have

been estimates that only half of the slaves captured in Africa and taken to the

US actually became effective workers. Half of those put on the ships died and

others committed suicide by refusing all food or water. Those who did survive

the trip were often crippled for life because of the way they were chained up for the trip (Slave Ships <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>).

By

the 17th century slaves could be purchased in Africa for about \$25 and sold in

the Americas for about \$150. After the slave trade was declared illegal, prices

went much higher (Slave Ships

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>). Even with a death-rate of

50 per cent, merchants could expect to make tremendous profits from the trade

(Slave Ships <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>).

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NEW

COUNTRY NEW CULTURE

As the slaves began arriving in America

and living in the southern states they bore children, got married, had funerals

and other life events that are natural anywhere (Slave Ships

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>). However, tier circumstances

were anything but natural and normal and their culture was being squashed right

out from under them. Many things were tried to prevent them from reliving their

cultural traditions (Slave Ships

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>). They were banned from

owning drums for instance because the overseers believed the slaves might use

the drums to send signals to each other about uprising and escaping (Slave

Ships <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>). The drums were such

an integral part of the African culture that it was always a blow to have an overseer refuse to allow them. There were many instances such as this that caused the slaves to have to mold and reshape their culture in a way that would

be allowed while still allowing them some dignity of their roots and heritage (Slave Ships <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>).

Many times the development of the

African Diaspora culture was out of necessity and born of desire more than religious preference (Slave Ships

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>). However, there were also

religious considerations that were taken into account (Slave Ships

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>). Slaves families began to

create and carve out various traditions that they had brought with them from

the old country and they invented new ones that suited their master and allowed

the slaves to still have a culture that was separate and part form those who stole, purchased and now owned them (Slave Ships

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>).

One of the biggest and most heart

wrenching culture changes that took affect in the southern United States with

African Americans was the cultural rules of marriage (Slave Families

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASseparation.htm>). Because the law allowed for the sale

of slaves without regard to their marital status the sale of ones wife or

husband was entirely feasible and something that happened with frequency.

Even

more heart breaking the children were also allowed to be sold away from their

moms and dads without having to send a parent with them or ask a parents

permission (Slave Ships <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>).

It became part of the culture to hide ones

children and hope the slave trader, plantation owner or overseer would not

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notice the children lest they decide to sell them at market. Even when they removed them in masses, such as seven children from the same parents they would

sell them one by one along the way so the children were not given siblings to grow up with either (Slave Ships <http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>).

A

study of slave records by the Freedmen's Bureau of 2, 888 slave marriages in

Mississippi (1, 225), Tennessee (1, 123) and Louisiana (540), revealed that over

32 per cent of marriages were dissolved by masters as a result of slaves being

sold away from the family home (Slave Ships

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USAships.htm>).

Slave Music

The music of the African Diaspora that

brought African slaves to the southern United States had to change from what

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they had been used to in Africa. For one thing the Africans were extremely involved in the playing of drums. Drums were often used as the only instrument

in the tribe and it was cherished and thought of as a beautiful music-making instrument. However, once the slaves began arriving in the southern United States in the late eighteenth century. However, once they arrived in the southern states the overseers had concerns that the drums could be used to plot

escape and uprisings. Because many overseers had no idea what the drums were

saying: to each other they decided to play it safe and ban the use of drums all together when it came to the allowing of music ion the plantations.

Slaves

attempted to preserve the culture that they had brought with them from Africa.

Jeanette Murphy recalled: " During my childhood my observations were centered upon a few very old Negroes who came directly from Africa, and upon

many others whose parents were African born, and I early came to the

conclusion, based upon Negro authority, that the greater part of the music, their methods, their scale, their type of thought, their dancing, their patting of feet, their clapping of hands, their grimaces and pantomime, and their gross

superstitions came straight from Africa (Slave music

<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/USASsongs.htm>)."

Music remained a large part of the African

Diaspora culture and is still an important part of African American culture of today. The slaves were not giving up. During the late seventeenth century they

were told not to use drums anymore so they began using other instruments that

did not upset the overseers or plantation owners.

Attempts were made to stop slaves from

continuing with African religious rituals. Drums were banned, as overseers feared that they could be used to send messages. They were particularly concerned that they would be used to signal a slave uprising.

When the music was banned or forbidden they

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would not be stopped and instead began singing. There have been many tales of

slaves singing and historians have pointed to that and claimed that they were

happy. However, personal accounts from the slaves themselves paint a different

picture. Yes, the culture from the African Diaspora developed musically and involved singing on the parts of the slaves but that was a self-preservation method that the culture adopted. The slaves said that they sang to try and keep

their sanity and wits about them while being subjected to a fate that a dog wouldnt endure. In addition the loud and happy sounding singing would make the

overseers feel that things were going well and it saved many slaves from underserved beatings.

Another purpose for the loud and

boisterous signing was the rhythm. The culture that came from African Diaspora

was carried over to the southern states. The Africans had been used to using

drums and sticks to rhythmically beat out a tune while working. When the drums

were removed from their allowable pleasures they found a way to fill the gap by

singing very loudly. Many accounts of the slaves talk about singing that was so

loud it was heard for miles around in fields and woods. The songs were filled

with love as well as sorrow. The slaves of the late seventeenth century were

first generation slaves. They had not been born into ownership and they were not

naive about what their lives used to be like. The culture they built at that

time often times had a temporary feeling to it because they believed that

someday they would go home. The first generation slaves were more stubborn in

their resolve to hang on to the culture and traditions they had been forced to leave behind.

The music that they sang was often made up

of stories of their lives or the lives of those that they knew. In addition as

they were forced into the Christian faith they often wailed out the Christian

hymns that they heard coming from churches along the road. The slave music was

always an integral part of African Diaspora and was a part of every slave family in the south.

The overseers often complained because they

could not understand the words to the songs the slaves were singing. It sounded

like gibberish to the outsider but the slaves, who remember, were first

generation from Africa in many cases, were singing in their native tongue and

the style of music often mimicked the music they had learned before being captured and sold into slavery.

Often times the overseers felt the singing

was a sign of defiance as well. They would look upon a singing slave and decide

he was openly defying the plantation owner by signing his heart out and he would then inflict hundreds of whiplashes on the slave for the terrible crime of singing. This music that was developed as part of the African Diaspora

culture held both sad and happy sounds and are still popular to this day in the

African American culture.

OTHER

CULTURAL DEVELOPMENTS

The

African Diaspora caused a development of a culture that was part tradition from

the old country, part new tradition and part forced tradition. The thousands of

slaves who were here in the last part of the eighteenth century were many first

generation slaves. Therefore they remembered the culture from home and

attempted to keep it alive one they arrived in America. Many of the things they

did including games and songs remained the same even though they were thousands

of miles from home and were now owned as a dog would be owned. Those who were

old enough to remember the African nation traditions taught them to those who

had been too young when they came here. Those who were born after getting here

sat at the feet of the old timers and were told stories of their heritage and their homeland that they someday hoped to go and see. Those who had lost loved

ones due to trades and sales that they were not allowed to be a part of mourned

their losses by telling stories of them to those who remained behind. It was through this method that many of the African traditions were preserved and continued on in spite of the fact that there were overseers trying to squash the

culture.

In addition there were new traditions

introduced to mix with the old ones. This happened for several reasons The

African Diaspora caused Africans from the entire continent captured and sold as

slaves to come to the southern United States. They had different traditions

because they had lived in other parts of Africa. Their traditions may have been

different but when they got to America and were subjected to the brutal life of

slavery they bonded with other Africans for sheer support. As this occurred and

trading and sales brought different dialects and traditions together less than one plantation umbrella the slaves began to share their traditions and cultures

with each other. This cause an eventual blending of the cultures and a third culture developed. The African Diaspora culture is one that is a blend of several r as well as forced traditions that they eventually adopted as their own.

Finally there was the element of forced

traditions and cultural practices because the slaves were owned human beings

with no legal rights whatsoever they could be treated anyway the overseer or

plantation owner saw fit. They were often beaten for insisting on hanging on to

their former lives, beliefs and values (Porter PG). The overseers felt if the

slaves got to self confident they would decide to escape so many times for no

reason at all the slaves were told to stop something that had been a part of

their lives in Africa. The banning of the African drumming is a perfect example

of this happening. The overseers would try and force their own personal values,

beliefs and traditions of the life of the slaves, and the slaves, afraid of a

beating or of having one of their children hurt to punish them would comply.

These traditions included certain types of music as well as behaviors and they

eventually became so ingrained in the system the roots and origin were long forgotten.

The African Diaspora did not take a year to

develop nor did it take a year to develop culturally when the slaves arrived in

the southern states. Many things changed for the slaves over the years as the

people if Americans thought things over. There was a time that slaves were not

allowed to attend church. The fear was that they would take the bible stories

of Jesus and assumes that the bible and therefore God wanted them to be equal

to their owners. This was stopped by not allowing the Africans to go to church.

However, by the late 1700s the African slaves wanted to worship and had been

donning so on their own anyway, so church was allowed in many instances.

The

Africans had their won faith and songs that they wanted to utilize in the

church and those were allowed as long ass there was no reading involved.

Slaves

were not allowed to read even at the height of the Diaspora from Africa. The

reason for this was in the 1700s it was believed if slaves could read they

would decide they were good enough to be free and be able to plot a way to

escape and communicated with those who already had. Therefore in the 1700s it

was illegal to teach a slave to read. However as African Diaspora connived into

the southern states of the US many slaves did in fact learn to read and write.

They did not in secret but it was a part of the new African Diaspora culture.

The African Diaspora developed a culture in

America that would live until today. We often hear the songs as we walk down

the street, or we see the children playing the African games that came from their ancestors who were forced here during the Diaspora.

CONCLUSION

The African Diaspora was a movement that

began centuries before it came to the US. However, once it came to the US it exploded and the people turned a blind eye to the facts that were before them.

African Diaspora involved the stealing and selling of Africans for the purpose of being slaves in the southern united states. While they were here the new

culture developed out of habit and need. The late 1700s were an interesting time because many of the slaves were first generation Africans who could remember the culture and traditions of the homeland. However, as time went forward and they did not get home and overseers made their lives rough for not trying to adapt to the US they began to incorporate new cultural ideas into the old school of thought. The result was that a new culture was borne of the African Diaspora. The new traditions took hold and the next generation continued to add to them. In addition we often forced the African slaves to comply with our traditions and cultural beliefs and ideas. If they did not they were beaten or lashed or their children were sold out from under them as punishment.

The development of the new culture was for

necessity and survival and many of the traditions today had life saving meaning

back then. The music the food and the games were all adapted to the United

States way of life and the life of an owned human being. Many of the developed

cultural traditions involved survival as well as attempt to create some sense of normalcy for the children who were born into slavery. Today many of the music trains and art traditions remain a part of the African American culture.

And the blending of the old and new back when the 1700s were the present is

what caused the things we observe today.

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