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Hist 374

December 12, 2020

Final paper

**Topic:**

Africa, Africa and People of African Descent : 400 Years After The Trans Atlantic Slavery

Cultural Transfer from Africa to America

## Outline:

- **Intro :** Europeans in Africa ; an overview of the idea of Europeans reaching Africa as a continent with a lot of opportunities to trade.
- **Body 1:** The origins and the progression of the slave trade; an overview of the factors that created a steady practice of slavery across the various cultures of the ancient world. African slaves in the Americas; an overview of the impact of slaves in America and Caribbeans and how the African slaves became part of the integration.
- **Body 2:**Cultural transfer from Africa to America ; the impact of the Transatlantic slave trade upon the transference of cultural practices from Africa to America
- **Body 3:**Discussion and analysis of cultural elements such as language,cooking, clothing and medicine brought over by African slaves to America have influenced the culture of the continent.
- **Body 4:** Recommendations on how to keep people of Africa connected to the Americas in terms of discovernes of cultural elements and what it means for Africa, African in the diaspora and people of African descent. Suggestions on how Africans can save their culture and leave it as a tradition to their kids in the USA or diaspora.
- **Conclusion:** summary of the entire paper from intro to body 4.

The Trans-Atlantic slave trade was unique in size, world dominance, and geographical reach. It is the world's most massive, historically documented enforced movement of humanity. The trade resulted from the collapse of the American population prompting Americans and Europeans to coerce Africans for slave duties in America and Europe. Although there were other systems of slavery in Africa and other parts of the world before the transatlantic slave trade, the scale for the human slave only increased. The Portuguese and Europeans used boats coupled with their seafaring technologies to make the oceans' tidal currents less problematic. The improved ships increased maritime contact amid the various continents; Europe, the Americas, and Africa. The purpose of this paper is to provide an historical background of the first ways Europeans used to enter Africa, the roots and the development of the Tran Atlantic Slave Trade and analyze the cultural transfer from Africa to America.

The Portuguese explored the west coast of Africa to trade for gold. However, they later began exploring human slavery. They started the transatlantic slavery by exporting roughly 235 Africans from Senegal in 1444 (Morgan 203). In 1564, soon after John Hawkins's expedition, the British joined in the slave trade. The Portuguese had set up a Navigator's School to help with traversing the Atlantic Ocean, which facilitated more than 300,000 sailors to West Africa for the slave trade between 1600 and 1800 (Morgan 199). The European entered Africa in the 15<sup>th</sup> century through the African coast with the optimism of outmaneuvering Islam. The Europeans wanted to find a sea route to India's riches for the food spices and the discovery of other additional food sources. The Portuguese landed in *Kongo Kingdom*, the northwest part of Angola, between 1482 and 1483; Bartolomeu Dias then traveled to Africa's southern tip. It was roughly ten years later, Vasco da Gama sailed to the east African coast before finally moving to India (Morgan 187). These voyages were initially bleak, but they symbolized the amalgamation

of the subcontinent into the novel world economy and the supremacy of Europeans over the native populations.

Slavery evidence predates written historical records. Evidence, as well as historical data, shows that slavery existed in numerous parts of cultures. Most ancient civilizations practiced slavery, including Sumer, ancient Egypt, Assyria, Persia, the Islamic Caliphate and Sultanate, Nubia, Akkadian Empire, ancient India, the Roman Empire, and ancient Greece (Morgan 190). Ancient slavery took many forms like debt-slavery, prisoners of war, punishment for crime, child abandonment, and the birth of slave children to slaves (Brahm & Rosenhaft 23). In Virginia, a British colony in the US, was the first legal modern-day community. These factors created a steady practice of slavery across the various cultures of the ancient world.

Mass slavery needed economic excesses coupled with a considerable population-density to remain practical. Following the Neolithic Revolution that occurred roughly 11,000 years ago, slavery proliferated. The demand for increased labor to work on the agricultural lands as more people traversed from hunting and gathering to agriculture and settlement (Inikori 45). Additionally, slavery was endemic in Africa as well, given the structure of their daily lives. The Europeans wanted to trade for gold in western Africa and locate a naval course to the Indies. The labor shortage in Europe for their massive plantations created the need for the Americas and Europeans to exploit the New World land for land resources. The free labor would be great for their capitalist ideologies.

The Middle Passage enabled the forced journey of enslaved Africans across the Atlantic Oceans to the Americas. Virginia, a British colony in the USA, was the first to establish slavery in 1661 (Inikori 34) legally. Only Georgia resisted the onset of slavery but succumbed to its pressure 17 years later. During the transatlantic slavery, roughly 600,000 slaves landed in

America. The 13 colonies received African slaves before 1776, while others went to the Caribbean (Inikori 34).

The African slaves toiled in every primary industry of the New World, including the Americas, where they extracted precious metals and timber, grew and harvested coffee, built railway lines, and cultivated tobacco, rice, and sugar (Inikori 28). The new industries never had enough labor, which the enslaved Africans provided. The other Americas that received slaves were Barbados, Bridgetown, Martinique, Spanish Caribbean islands, Saint-Domingue or modern-day Haiti, and the French islands (Brahm & Rosenhaft 33). As slave colonies expanded, so did the complexity of social and economic activities. Consequently, African slaves became part of the integration, and they soon learned skilled labor like nursing, masonry, carpentry, and distillery. The slaves in the Americas suffered physical abuse both during and after work. The slaves who worked on larger plantations often met harsher treatment, with many dying and others raped.

The Transatlantic Slave Trade was a tragedy that saw not only the mass relocation of millions of Africans to America but also some of the harshest travel conditions ever imposed upon any man that led to death and disease. However, this period of exploitation saw the transference of very many cultural activities and beliefs from Africa to America even as slaves were uprooted from the very land that had fostered these activities and beliefs. Some of these beliefs, attitudes and practices have endured both the test of time and the systemic indoctrination that could be termed as ‘Americanization’ exhibited in various regions of the continent over the years. In addition to uncovering some of these processes of systemic assimilation, this study aims at understanding the impact of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade upon the transference of cultural practices, beliefs and traditions from Africa to America. The two issues, additionally, point to the

inherent meaning and cultural significance of some of these beliefs and practices that signifies their importance to the people who hold them (Stuckey, 7). Therefore, it is also important to consider the various mechanisms through which other beliefs and practices brought over from Africa were suppressed by the colonialists and eventually eliminated from American society.

Much of the precolonial history of African communities is obscured primarily by a lack of reliable and uniform means of recording and writing information. However, some aspects of African culture can still be ascertained from various historical records. Understanding some of these features of African culture during this period is important to putting said cultural practices in their appropriate historical context. Before the transatlantic enslavement exercise of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, African culture varied depending on ethnicity as well as environmental conditions. For example, desert peoples were primarily nomads while those in the jungles survived by hunting and gathering. As a result, different cooking and diet habits existed alongside different forms of clothing as each community used what was immediately available in the vicinity. More importantly, each community had a distinctly different language, and all these factors work to influence the aspects of African culture that got transferred across the Atlantic as highlighted in this discussion.

Prior to the decision by the British parliament in 1801 to abolish slavery, and even three decades after, Africans were routinely kidnapped upon most interactions with European whites and transported to work in America (Turley, 404). This brutal economic activity attained its peak during the 17<sup>th</sup> century when a mixture of economic convenience and transport efficiency oversaw some of the most torturous experiences for some people (Kaller & Jacob, 49). The trade operated in a series of three stretches as highlighted below. Ships from Europe would arrive at the West African coast laden with manufactured products and various other trade goods. These

goods were in high demand in West Africa and came at a steep cost that included slaves. The Europeans relied on African middlemen who would raid the interior and transport the captured who were strong enough, transporting them to the African coast where the markets were. Over a period of months, the European traders would camp at these markets trading their goods for slaves and accumulating as many of the latter as could fit in their ships.

Much of the prevailing cultural practices of the time were brought over by African slaves to America, in turn influencing the culture of the continent. These cultural practices ported over to America surround particular aspects of the daily lives of the slaves such as food and eating habits, clothing, hair, language and medicine (Hawthorne, 1650). The slaves brought over their beliefs and practices to ensure their survival and continued heritage, while unwittingly shaping American culture itself, even amidst the adversity of slavery. This fortitude ensured that some of these influences have endured the ages and still impact American culture deeply. This section of the discussion analyses some of the aforementioned practices and beliefs as follows.

One of the most important differences between the American whites and African slaves was the language, and this difference would impact the language spoken in America for ages to follow. As slaves toiled in the cotton and tobacco plantations, they would converse in their own language and even mix it with the English they were taught by force. The slave owners would consider the language of slaves deficient and its use was considered a deviant act of defiance. However, as the population of Africans in America increased, so did the popularity of some of these slang words rise. Africans would soon begin to consider the use of such slang as part of their African identity and over the years, some of these words even made it to the English lexicon, further expanding the language. Some words such as ‘ofay’, which derives from a West African dialect to mean light-skinned, must have been used by slaves to secretly refer to their

slave masters. Others such as paddy, which was used as a derogatory slang for whites of Irish origin also fall into this category of words ported over to the English language by slaves from Africa.

African slaves also brought over many dietary, cooking and eating habits which have stuck and become part of the American way of life. Some of the food crops highlighted in this section did not exist on the American continent and came together with the slaves aboard the slave ships. The crops may have been carried to either sustain the slaves on the middle passage or to satisfy the growing demand for such crops in Europe. One such crop that has transformed American cuisine is rice. Only two families of rice exist; the Asian and the African strains. Africans who could cultivate rice were taken from the Senegambia region to the Carolinas to cultivate the crop where it now flourishes and sustains all Americans. Now rice is among the most thriving crops in America, earning the title Carolina Gold for its prevalence and presence as a nigh-staple for the region (Stuckey, 13). Cultivation of rice allowed African recipes to find their way to America in dishes such as jambalaya and black-eyed peas cooked as Akarajé in Brazil. Some of these foods have become such a significant part of American culture and are sold in high-end restaurants and cafés all across the continent.

Clothing is an essential part of any culture as it forms the plumage by which different social groups identify with, in addition to providing warmth and rudimentary protection from the elements. It therefore goes without saying that slaves were captured while in some form of clothing, albeit minimal, and transported to America in the same clothing. This factor, coupled with the trade of goods along the African coast facilitated by the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, ensured that African fabrics and styles of clothing and design made it to America (Clyde, 20). Despite efforts by slave masters to clearly define dress codes for each slave, Africans still put a

great deal of thought into their clothes by employing different styles to the simplistic garments provided by slave owners, turning them into stylish representations of precolonial African fashion (Walker, 390). Clothing also formed an important part of African burial rituals and fallen slaves were often adorned in African-style clothing with traditional adornments, perfumes and spices. To this day, African print remains a fashionable fabric for all forms of wear from formal to casual clothing, both in continental America and the rest of the world at large.

Medicine allows a social group to not only withstand disease but also traverse new territories where unfamiliar microbes may be found. As such, for the slaves being moved to America, medicine was particularly important if they hoped to survive both the journey and the diseases of America, according to Schwartz (12). Various healing and treatment methods were carried over from Africa to America by slaves struggling with filthy conditions rife with disease in the slave ships and humid festering conditions at the plantations (Fitzgerald, 46). While slave owners occasionally provided basic medical care to their slaves, some conditions could only be cured by the attentiveness of fellow African healers. Records indicate that some slaves carried over seeds of plants that bore medicinal value and the hay that lined cargo holds took root in the new world to provide familiar plants to the slaves. The slaves undoubtedly grew their skills by interacting with native tribes (Roberts, 21). Furthermore, traditional African healing pays heavy credence to religious realities of Africa which were carried over to America, such as the shapeshifting trickster god, Anansi. However simple the slave medicines were compared to those made by whites, African medicine still made its way and influenced medicine in the American continent.

Moreover, in all the historical periods, there has been the cultural transfer existing between different countries. The cultural transfer was attributed to the migration and transfer of

people from the native country to another country. It can be realized that every nation worldwide possesses its own unique culture that distinguishes it from others (Reiffen 270). For example, since Africans settled in America, they have influenced different countries' cultural elements such as clothing, cooking, language, and religion. These cultural elements have strengthened the connection between the two nations. Before independence, the Africans were forced to slaves. This was as a result of the large range of cultures and societies. Despite that, the Americans tend to describe the black people as 'Africans,' a word that was not recognized by most of the African, the African individual understood themselves according to ethnicity, lineage, and kinship groups that were defined by distinct languages and traditions. In this manner, those who belonged to the same lineage, ethnicity, and kinship saw others as 'foreigners.' Due to close interaction between the Americans and Africans, there developed a pidgin language. The pidgin language was first used between the African traders and Portuguese sailors along the central and West African coast.

As the trading concentration increased due to the Europeans' arrival, a similar language pattern evolved in all major European languages. This increasingly strengthened the connection between the Africans and the Americans because they could interact and understand each other. Consequently, the bi-racial children born by the European traders or sailors and the west coast African women could speak fluently in both languages. As a result, they were employed as traders and interpreters. After independence, the Americans and Africans adopted one common language of interaction that is the English language.

Clothing is another recommended cultural element that connects Africans with the Americans. The dressing style of the individuals of a particular nation demonstrates the culture

of those people. People always assimilate the culture of another nation through coping with their dressing style (Levesque 1790). For example, the *dashiki* is one of the strongest cultural symbols for African in diaspora and African Americans. The dashiki is an article of comfortable clothing worn by West African individuals due to the tropical climate. The looseness, vibrant color, and bold design of this clothe the African Americans' identity and freedom with their African heritage. The African Americans started to use the dashiki as early as the 1970s to break out racism, mainstream fashion, western cultural norms, and white supremacy. This indicated that despite skin color, the Africans and Americans should freely interact and share their cultures without racial discrimination. Because of the dashiki's fashion, the white people started to order the cloth from the retailer who started to import it from African countries. The dashiki was also worn by musicians such as Beyoncé, politicians, and entertainers to demonstrate African Americans' beliefs and cultural roots.

In the past decades, African countries have been the main source of south and North America's cuisine. The debate on American cooking is based on the celebrations that are considered European influence (Neubert). The absorption of African American culinary art has been increasing in the past few decades. The culinary heritage of the Africans has influenced the cooking styles of the Americans. For example, the West African cooks that include vegetables, meat, fish, rice, and beans dishes are heavily seasoned with hot spices and pepper, such as spicy cedar. The cooking methods, preparation, and specific foods came to America due to enslaved Africans to the south and North America.

The Africans' preparation of foods in America is usually infused with cultural and social meaning rooted in the African traditions to create, preserve, and transmit culture continuity and ethnic cohesion. Some of the foods that have connected African an American include rice pudding, and roasted cassava. For instance, rice pudding has a great influence on American cuisine. The rice pudding is considered to be symbolic of the African culture. Imagine America without rice. For example, during slavery, people plucked from rice production regions such as the south of Senegal. These African contributed to the economy of Carolina through rice production.

Due to modernization and development of technology, there has been a mass movement of the African people worldwide for economic benefits. Since the colonial periods, the African worked for both slave laborers and voluntary expatriations. The slave trade largely forced cultural migration in human history. African diaspora involves collecting communities that moved from sub- Saharan African and are dominantly occupying America (Levesque 1790). Historian has argued that diaspora has existed for millennia and was attributed by Atlantic slave trade for the African. The Africans were forced to migrate from their native country and used as laborers in European countries.

The word African diaspora has been commonly used in the modern 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the African union defines it as the people of native Africa. They move or migrate to the continent irrespective of their nationality and citizenship but are ready to contribute to the building of the African Union and the continent's development. Today, the native Africans emigrate to America

for a spirit of adventure rather than slavery in the pre-colonial period. Therefore the African in the diaspora has a significant role in the cultural development of both nationalities.

In the modern days, the international communities have taken the human rights of emigrants to be serious. For instance, the international communities have set the legislation meant to promote and protect human rights. The people of African descent live in many parts of the world, especially in America. The descendant of these African may have been contributed by the Atlantic slave trade or the Africans who have moved to America. More than 200 million people are living in America that identify themselves as African descendants. These African descents are influenced by racism and discrimination. The historians argue that even the afro-descendants who are not descended by slavery are faced with discrimination and racism.

The Africans are working in America with a close affiliation of keeping their traditions for their children. Though it is argued to be difficult, the Africans have looked for ways to keep or save their culture for their future generation. For example, Africans have developed fabric stores, grocery shops, regional restaurants, and hair braiding parlors to blend the African cultures (Maganda). For instance, the Sandaga market for African Senegal demonstrates the African customs, cultures, and language that symbolizes the African's efforts to protect and project their cultural identities

In conclusion, the transatlantic slavery marked a time of prosperity in the west. The slaves in the Americas were insecure because they never knew when they would be re-sold, bequeathed, inherited, or relocated. The brutality became possible with advancements in naval technologies that made access to Africa possible, together with the change from a hunting and

gathering and agricultural and settlement culture. These factors made the transatlantic slave trade possible, a trade that dehumanized millions of indigenous African populations. The Trans-Atlantic slave trade led to the relocation of many Africans who took parts of their language and culture over to America, in turn shaping the culture there. Aspects of African culture such as food and cuisine as well as clothing and even medicine travelled alongside the slaves over the Atlantic and took root in America. The cultural aspects and practices went on to shape the culture of American society so much that some of these influences are still exhibited in our present world. Slang that was introduced from West Africa has made it to the dictionary in the recent past, showing the real depth of this influence that African slave culture had on America. Therefore, the African culture has a significant economic development of the continents, and therefore Africans have to strengthen and protect their culture. For instance, Africans and Americans are connected in terms of culture to boost agricultural production, language acquisition, and dressing habits. The dashiki, Maasai beads, leather, and crafts products are imported to America due to their flavor and beauty, respectively. This helps to strengthen and protect the African culture in the continents.

### Bibliography

Clyde, Wanett I. "Clothing the Black Body in Slavery: What They Wore and How it Was Made." (2019).

Clyde describes what constituted clothing for slaves from the moment of capture to their time in slavery in America. Clothing for slaves was not only determined by their origin but also the whims and wishes of the slave runners and eventual buyers. Clyde also investigates the raw components that went into making clothes at the time. Such a factor determines the availability of these clothes to the slaves as well as the various different statuses each garment held within 'plantation society'. Clyde further highlights the different racial and discriminatory factors that influenced clothing available to slaves. Stereotypes of hardiness among slaves ensured farm hands worked bare-chested while chauvinistic attitudes had the young kitchen maids in neat delicate clothes. Throughout all this, Clyde notes the endurance of fabrics of African origin as a testament of the slaves' heritage.

Fitzgerald, Colin. "African American Slave Medicine of the 19th Century."  
*Undergraduate Review* 12.1 (2016): 44-50.

Fitzgerald highlights the nature of medicine among African Americans during a period where they were primarily enslaved. Medicine at the time was mainly sourced from herbs and roots to make different remedies for different diseases afflicting the slaves. Some of the skills and knowledge employed had been passed down through generations and thus originate ultimately from the African continent. The medicine employed by slaves, as Fitzgerald notes, was much simpler than what their white masters used. However, the teas and poultices made by slaves were also often used by slave masters were their own medicine fell short with varied efficacy levels. Essentially, Fitzgerald asserts that the history of medicine in America cannot

afford to ignore the impact and contributions of slave medicine to the whole body of medicine at large.

Hawthorne, Walter. *From Africa to Brazil: Culture, identity, and an Atlantic slave trade, 1600–1830*. Vol. 113. Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Hawthorne investigates the different cultural and social aspects of African daily life that were transferred to the American continent as a result of the transatlantic slave trade. The study by Hawthorne focuses on Brazil and the different cultural aspects of the region that borrow from African culture. More importantly, Hawthorne addresses the question on why planters shifted from Indian to African slaves, a factor which precedes, hence necessitating the cultural transfer. Hawthorne finally considers various religious and spiritual beliefs as well as societal attitudes towards issues as sex, family and violence. In the study, the author highlights how the slave trade either reinforced or jeopardized any of the aforementioned aspects of African culture.

Kaller, Martina, and Frank Jacob, eds. *Transatlantic Trade and Global Cultural Transfers Since 1492: More Than Commodities*. Routledge, 2019.

Kaller and Jacob highlight specifically the different cultural practices, beliefs, attitudes and norms that were exchanged between the partakers of the Transatlantic slave trade. The study follows the development of trade routes on Africa's west coast even as America was only just being discovered. Kaller and Jacob analyze not only the different goods being exchanged between the parties but also the cultural exchange ongoing between them. In this manner, Kaller and Jacob are able to identify the impact of the transatlantic slave trade upon the transfer of cultures. The study achieves this by investigating the conditions that necessitated said cultural transfer for all parties involved (African slaves, Plantation owners and European merchants).

Roberts, Carolyn Elizabeth. *To Heal and to Harm: Medicine, Knowledge, and Power in the Atlantic Slave Trade*. Diss. 2017.

Roberts points out at the nature of medicine during the transatlantic slave trade especially along the trade routes. The author considers the conditions under which the trade took place, particularly regarding shipping of slaves to America. By analyzing the different medical care practices applied during these voyages and considering the risks posed by the conditions the slaves were put in, the study questions the motives of medicine and medical practitioners during the period. Essentially, many of the facts put forward by the author point to the conclusion that while medicine may have not necessarily done anything to harm the slaves, it conversely did next to nothing in helping them.

Schwartz, Marie Jenkins. *Birthing a slave: Motherhood and medicine in the antebellum south*. Harvard University Press, 2006.

Schwartz considers the nature of maternal medicine among slave women in the south during the antebellum era where medicine for slaves was particularly expensive and difficult to acquire. For slaves, giving birth comes with significant challenges and unique stresses and Schwartz highlights some of the social and economic barriers that prevented slave women from acquiring the standard of healthcare afforded to their white counterparts. Additionally, Schwartz considers the alternatives that other slaves provided amongst themselves to solve such problems as lack of midwife services, employing ages old techniques and knowledge passed down the generations from their African ancestors.

Stuckey, Sterling. *Slave culture: Nationalist theory and the foundations of Black America*. Oxford University Press, 2013.

Stuckey, in his study, analyses the cultural beliefs and practices among African American slaves from a nationalist perspective in order to elicit the root of African American nationalist sentiments as they have arisen in history. The study focuses on the shared identity that African Americans subscribe to in recent years and how it has been shaped by the impacts of slavery upon American society.

Turley, David. "The British and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1838–1956: A History." (2017): 404-405.

Turley analyses the various abolitionist programs and initiatives that arose following the law by the British parliament to abolish slavery. The study by Turley focuses on the anti-slavery society from its inception after abolition, through the civil war and the two world wars to the onset of the civil rights movement. The study provides a historical account of the efforts of the society to end slavery in America and across the globe even amidst mounting pressure by opposing forces benefitting from the proceeds of the scourge.

Walker, Tamara J. "'He outfitted his family in notable decency': Slavery, Honour and Dress in Eighteenth-Century Lima, Peru." *Slavery and Abolition* 30.3 (2009): 383-402.

Walker highlights the nature of dressing and clothes among slaves in Latin America and how clothes were used as a status symbol even among the slaves themselves. The study highlights the importance of clean, fashionable clothes as a standard of decency and wellbeing. Walker also notes the personal touch that slaves often use to adorn their garments lending to an African authenticity even in the adversity of slavery. Furthermore, the author identifies the use of clothes by slave masters to not only separate themselves from slaves, but also to divide up slaves according to their field of operation.

Zenni, Stefano. "Birth and Evolution of Jazz as Effects of Cultural Transfers." *Understanding Cultural Traits*. Springer, Cham, 2016. 135-143.

Zenni considers the evolution of music within the context of a post slavery America where an entire group of half a million or so individuals were relocated away from their homeland. The author traces this evolution from the crew hands upon slave ships humming tunes to stave off fatigue and hardship to black musicians in social halls performing for crowds. The author acknowledges the impact of slave trade upon this transfer of cultural aspects, affirming the source of jazz to be the music made by slaves in fields and plantations, which evolved to the familiar genre of Jazz music.

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