African Diaspora Heritage in the Americas

© Christopher C. Fennell (University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign)

Orcid No. 0000-0002-1170-8755

Abstract: This chapter addresses a remarkable diversity of legacies and heritage for African diaspora populations in the Americas. Overcoming the horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade, captive Africans further developed myriad forms of cultural knowledge and practices drawn from their homeland cultures and conveyed those aspects of heritage to their descendants and social affiliates. Special knowledge of agricultural industries led to transformed landscapes. Resilience and fights for freedom were represented in self-emancipation, rebellion communities, reverence of burial grounds, and commemorations of lost settlements and ancestors across terrains and seascapes. Elements of cosmologies from multiple African cultures were integrated to form new religions and forms of cultural heritage. Over the past six centuries African diaspora peoples have pursued vitality in their cultural heritage and continue to fight for reparative justice to address European colonial wrongs.

Key words: diaspora, trans-Atlantic, heritage, emancipation, slavery, rebellion, religion, landscape, reparation

Introduction: Heritage Transformations

People from complex societies in West, West Central, and Southeast Africa were entangled in diasporas to the Americas over the past several centuries. They transformed and created new cultural configurations in those new locations across the Atlantic. African descendant populations built the infrastructure of colonial economies and reshaped landscapes. By the term diaspora analysts focus on a dispersion of people to new locations due to abduction or due to hostile circumstances in the landscapes from which they departed. African diasporas to the Americas were caused primarily by the forced abductions of people by European colonial systems operating the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Yet, diaspora heritage can be 'dynamic and ever-changing' and 'forged through historical plays of power and agency and the continual remaking of diaspora as a social reality' (Perry, 2008: 638). This perspective mediates between an involuntary character of diaspora and a recognition of Africans and African descendants as conscious, active subjects (Perry, 2008). Researchers committed to community engagement can contribute knowledge on diaspora pasts which can be incorporated in heritage claims and employed in activism opposing societal inequities today (e.g., Fryer, 2023; hooks, 1994).

I employ a variety of conceptual terms when discussing the extraordinary histories and heritage of these African diaspora groups. Social scientists often examine facets of the cultural configurations of groups in the societies in which they started and in the diaspora sites in which they found themselves. Culture, as an organizing concept and set of questions, entails the learned

beliefs, knowledge, practices, and behaviour with which a people live as a group. Heritage can be viewed as a principal constellation of beliefs and practices through which people subscribe to a particular cultural group identity. Populations unified by such a shared set of beliefs and practices are often referred to as a society, culture, or ethnicity. However labelled by researchers, such social groups experienced profound impacts when they were swept up in the large-scale developments that led to their diasporas. Those impacts propelled many people from one place and cultural configuration to new locations where they confronted adversities, tragedies, opportunities, and the challenges of persevering.

Researching and analysing a social group's heritage involves complexities in diaspora settings in which multiple cultural groups interacted. The formulations and changes in a social group's shared sense of heritage can involve dynamics of remembering and forgetting (Lowenthal, 1997; Shackel, 2001). Researchers studying the formation of cultural heritage claims by particular groups often characterize heritage as a selective emphasis on elements of a people's past that includes instances of omission, as well as commemoration and remembrance. David Lowenthal (1996: xi) observed: 'History explores and explains pasts grown ever more opaque over time; heritage clarifies pasts so as to define them with present purposes.' Molefi Kete Asante (1993: 139–140), an advocate of pan-African intellectual movements, similarly contended that people tend to express their heritage in a focused way, 'despite the multiplicity of cultural backgrounds that go into that heritage.' Asante (1993: 140) observed that a group's 'heritage might be composed of many backgrounds but in the end we inherit a unified field of culture, that is, one whole fabric of the past rather than split sheets or bits and pieces.'

Such heritage includes tangible facets, such as material culture and built environments, and intangible elements in beliefs, cosmologies, practices, and performances. In 2003, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) worked to promote and protect diverse cultural heritage traditions worldwide by issuing the 'Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage.' Earlier efforts by the UN to protect the cultural heritage of diverse peoples around the globe focused primarily on tangible expressions, such as monuments, architecture, and the built environment (Ahmad, 2006; UNESCO, 2003).

The Convention on intangible heritage was ratified and took effect in 2006. Since then, a variety of African diaspora heritage traditions in the Americas have been recognized for their global significance. These include musical and song performances in Peru, Jamaica, and Columbia, and music, dance, and chants in the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Columbia, Ecuador, Uruguay, and Argentina (UNESCO, 2023a). Several tangible monuments have been recognized by UNESCO which commemorate aspects of African diaspora heritage. These include buildings and cultural landscapes in Antigua, Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Cuba, Haiti, Jamaica, and St. Kitts and Nevis. Prominent among these tangible sites are the entry port of Valongo in Brazil, independence buildings in Haiti, and remains of settlements of self-liberated African descendants in Jamaica (UNESCO, 2023b).

Researchers should expect and embrace complexity when examining the histories of African diaspora communities in the Americas. Members of those groups confronted myriad forms of oppression and precarity and lived often in locations marked by interactions of varied Indigenous, African descendant, and European colonial populations and their diverse cultures. Most researchers today expect that individuals abducted into the trans-Atlantic slave trade could retain their cultural knowledge from their home societies and attempt to utilize that knowledge in

new locations in the Americas. Such cultural beliefs and practices might be developed in new directions and combined in various ways with the beliefs and practices of members of other cultures.

Studies have addressed a variety of organizing themes. Researchers use culture concepts to examine the movement, development, and change of particular African cultural configurations in new locations in the Americas. Others view the trauma of the trans-Atlantic slave trade as so severe as to have inhibited such transfers of cultural knowledge. They instead propose forms of cultural creativity specific to the contexts of colonial locations. Some analysts focus on historically and geographically particular contexts to compile specific histories of networks of individuals and their achievements. Many researchers examine the impacts of European racism in its multiple, colonial forms, upon African descendant groups in particular regions and time spans. Scholars of African descent also address the ways in which racism and political perspectives distorted historical accounts generated by European-descendant analysts and writers. Interdisciplinary methods have proved vital to uncovering multiple lines of evidence of diaspora pasts from archives, literary legacies, artistic performances, oral histories, archaeological remains, landscape changes, and built environments (e.g., Ogundiran and Falola, 2007; Olaniyan and Sweet, 2010).

In the following sections of this chapter, I address myriad forms of heritage for African diaspora populations and critical debates related to those subjects. An initial challenge concerned the degree to which captive Africans could be expected to retain cultural knowledge from their homelands in the face of the horrors of trans-Atlantic slavery. Such debates found remarkable resilience, and many instances of rebellion and creation of independent settlements. Particular African societies were also targeted by slave traders for their technological prowess, leading to profound changes in landscapes and coastal terrains in the Americas. Captive Africans and their descendants also shaped new forms of religions and liturgical performances across the Americas. A final section focuses on reparative justice initiatives.

Diversity and Survivance

Debates of whether cultural traditions and heritage are vital and continuing, or are ephemeral, have been paralleled by a debate within studies of African diasporas to the Americas. Finding evidence of particular cultural group histories can be challenging. Many African-descendant people lost the histories of the particular cultures from which their ancestors were abducted into slavery. The trans-Atlantic slave trade impacted approximately 40 particular societies and their cultures in West Africa, West Central Africa, and Southeast Africa. The operators of the slave trade and plantations often worked to strip enslaved persons of their histories, names, religions, and literacies. This created practical obstacles of absences of evidence with which to reconstruct individual and group histories and heritage.

Historians and social scientists also debated whether a more profound loss of African culture histories occurred. This debate was illustrated by the contrasting perspectives of E. Franklin Frazier (1966a, 1966b) and Melville Herskovits (1941). In one view, espoused by Frazier, the brutality of the trans-Atlantic slave trade very likely destroyed the ability of captive Africans to retain memory and knowledge of their home ethnic groups and cultures. Abduction and the horrors of the passage across the ocean traumatized individuals. As a result, captives

would be unable to continue the beliefs and practices of their home cultures in the settings of plantations. This view was supported by evidence that the operators of some slave forts, vessels, and plantations purposefully mixed individuals from different cultures and language groups. They would do so to minimize chances of coordination and rebellion among the captives.

Sidney Mintz and Richard Price (1976) similarly focused on this line of evidence and reasoning. They argued that captive Africans would likely abandon efforts to continue the ways of their home cultures in settings of colonial bondage. Instead, they would form new social relationships with other enslaved people they encountered. These social relationships would be constructed by focusing on the more prosaic cultural assumptions shared across multiple African societies. African diaspora populations in the Americas lived in diverse communities of enslaved people from multiple cultures. Therefore, some contend, there would be less value in trying to promote the beliefs and practices of a particular culture like the Igbo, Asante, or Yoruba (Mintz and Price, 1976). In the terminology of cultural heritage debates, one could translate this view into the contention that particular cultural traditions of specific African societies were often forgotten or elided in diaspora communities due to the traumatic impacts of the system of bondage. The result of these dynamics was the creation of new ethnicities and cultures one could call, for example, African-American or Afro-Brazilian (Fennell, 2017).

Herskovits (1941) and other scholars advanced a different set of questions and views of the available evidence. They found contrasting evidence that on many occasions the operators of slave forts, vessels, and plantations facilitated the movement of large groups of captives from the same African culture and language group to new locations in the Americas. Researchers also uncovered a growing body of evidence that captive Africans in fact retained detailed knowledge of the cultures from which they were abducted. Enslaved laborers further conveyed that knowledge to their descendants and fellow community members in colonial locations. In turn, African diaspora peoples continued to develop the beliefs and practices of particular African ethnic groups and cultures in new locations. Scholars have analysed these dynamics as processes of creolization, ethnogenesis, and ethnogenic bricolage (Falola and Childs, 2004; Fennell, 2007; Heywood, 2002; Lovejoy and Trotman, 2003; Odewale, 2019; Ogundiran and Falola, 2007; Shepherd and Richards, 2002; Thompson, 1993; Thornton, 1998).

The *Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyages* database provides evidence that supports both of these perspectives, but in different locations and time periods (Eltis and Richardson, 2008; Slave Voyages, 2023). Slave ships at times transported cargos of captives from a variety of ethnic and language groups, delivering them to particular destinations. Plantation owners often preferred such a mixture to minimize chances of coordination and rebellion. But that preference was not universal. At other times, plantation owners requested captives from specific ethnic groups known to possess skill in a particular commodity production, such as rice growing, or those rumoured to be resistant to coastal diseases. Such demand was met readily, and ships transported numerous captives from particular ethnic groups to specific locations (Eltis and Richardson, 2008). The *Trans-Atlantic Slave Voyages* database estimates over 12,521,000 captive individuals were transported out of African locations from 1501 through 1866 CE. Of those who survived the horrors of slave vessels, at least 366,961 arrived in North America, 3,822,109 in the Caribbean region, and 5,329,55 in South America (Slave Voyages, 2023).

Thus, researchers can at times uncover evidence of African descendants in the Americas who developed particular cultural practices from specific African ethnic groups in new ways. Research projects have examined evidence, for example, of Asante, BaKongo, Bambara, Dahomey, Igbo, and Yoruba cultural heritage developing in new trajectories at specific sites in the Americas (Beaudry, 2008; Eltis and Richardson, 2008; Fennell, 2011; Gomez, 1998; Hall, 2005; Mitchell, 2005). Evidence is lacking, however, to make similar connections at other locations. The purposeful impacts of European racism and slavery shaped histories at many colonial territories with simplifying labels of racial categories. In turn, discussions of ethnic traditions in locations such as the United States often refer only to a broad-scale, African-American ethnicity rather than to historical connections to particular African cultures (Agbe-Davies, 2010; Fennell, 2017). Recent African diaspora studies have moved beyond older, simpler debates over retentions and continuities to focus on the dynamics of multilinear cultural developments. New theoretical and interpretative frameworks are applied to increasingly robust sets of data from archives, oral histories, and material and archaeological evidence. These efforts are transforming our historical accounts of African diaspora populations, communities, and heritage.

Social and cultural influences of diverse African traditions and practices are widespread in the Americas. For example, song, music, dance, carnival, and masking performances have been shaped by African influences in North American blues and jazz, Puerto Rico's music and dance styles of salsa, plena, and bomba, and candombe and tango dances in Argentina and Uruguay. Commemorating these cultural heritage accomplishments is vital (Andrews, 2004; Thompson, 2005). Many nation states in the Americas have attempted to erase these legacies as part of their selective, nationalist ideologies. For example, Afro-Chileans contributed significantly as soldiers in the war for independence from the Spanish crown. Yet, their heritage was largely ignored thereafter. Similarly, Afro-Peruvians performed most of the tasks to build the infrastructure of Spanish colonial holdings in Peru, including urban resources in Lima and Cusco. Particular African culinary traditions had significant impacts on cuisine throughout the Americas. Yet, African descendants struggle for recognition of such accomplishments and continue to fight against erasure of their histories by dominant, European-descendant social groups.

Resilience and Independence

For enslaved and free African descendants, myriad forms of self-initiatives opposed European colonial systems shaped by inhumanity and racism (Dunaway, 2003; Rucker, 2006; Semmes, 1992). Expanding colonial, capitalist economies included racist and sexist social ideologies to justify the expropriation of greater amounts of surplus capital. Racism and sexism served to legitimate the undervaluing of labour and the expropriation of resources at multiple stages and nodes in commodity chains spanning hemispheres (Nash, 1988; Wallerstein, 1988). Historical and archaeological studies of these subjects can yield take-away lessons and promote efforts toward social justice initiatives in today's societies (e.g., Franklin et al., 2022).

In extreme forms, these racial ideologies facilitated the treatment of humans as mere commodities themselves, rather than as labourers, producers, and consumers. European systems of racism developed from the 1400s onward to justify expropriations of lands and resources by expanding colonial regimes. European ideologies of racism were further elaborated to legitimate

treating African people as commoditized, chattel laborers in a growing system of bondage. African diaspora populations engaged in remarkable lives of resilience and self-initiative in the face of deplorable oppression. Everyday survivance defied tides of subjugation.

Captive Africans rebelled against bondage whenever possible. Uprisings on ships and in plantation areas of the Americas achieved occasional victories. Many other enslaved Africans and African descendants escaped plantations through routes that traversed land and water on paths both clandestine and open (Aptheker, 1939; Thompson, 2006). Some attempted to find family members sold to distant plantations. These escape routes and related sites serve as tangible heritage of those individual legacies. Many others sustained freedom by joining communities of self-liberated persons in rebellion collectives referred to as palenques, quilombos, and maroon settlements (Blight, 2004; Diouf, 2014; LaRoche, 2014; Vlach, 2004; Weik, 2012).

Numerous rebellion communities spread across the Americas, from British North America, through Mexico, Caribbean islands, Columbia, and Brazil. These communities often became stages for creation of new cultural configurations by diverse populations. For example, captive Africans and Indigenous people escaped from Portuguese plantations in Brazil and created the Palmares quilombo settlement in the Pernambuco region by the early 1600s. Nine villages were established, and the settlement likely hosted 20,000 people by the late 1600s—close to a third of the enslaved population in Brazil. In the 1670s, the defence of Palmares was organized by one of their members called King Zumbi. The quilombo was finally conquered by colonial forces after several decades of successful defence. A memorial statue honouring Zumbi in Rio de Janeiro now serves as a site for current-day protests against economic disparities. Brazil's 1988 Constitution created an initiative for legal recognition and related land and resource allocations for local populations who demonstrate their connections to a past quilombo community as part of their heritage (Ferreira and Symanski, 2022; French, 2004, 2009; Weik, 2012). Farther north, the National Park Service in the U.S. commemorates the many sites that operated as part of a network of escape routes called the 'underground railroad' (LaRoche, 2014; NPS, 2023).

Landscapes and Seascapes

By the mid-1600s, British investors colonizing Barbados had claimed most of the land on the island, with an emphasis on sugar plantations operated with enslaved labour. British colonialists looking for new venues focused on the coastal area of what would later be the colonies of South Carolina and Georgia in North America. New initiatives of expropriation focused on rice as a valuable commodity. These British investors did not know how to create rice plantations. They therefore concentrated on obtaining captives from the region of Senegambia in West Africa, where societies had grown rice for centuries. From the late 1600s through the mid-1700s, these African descendants transformed that coastline into a complex landscape of rice plantations (Silkenat, 2022) (Figure 1). In later periods, captives from other cultures, including the BaKongo, also lived and laboured in that space. Together, those African descendants developed a new, rich culture called the Gullah Geechee. An aerial view of the southeast coast of the U.S. today shows the largest tangible artifact of such African diaspora transformations of American landscapes (Ferguson, 2004; Morgan, 1998; Wood, 1974).
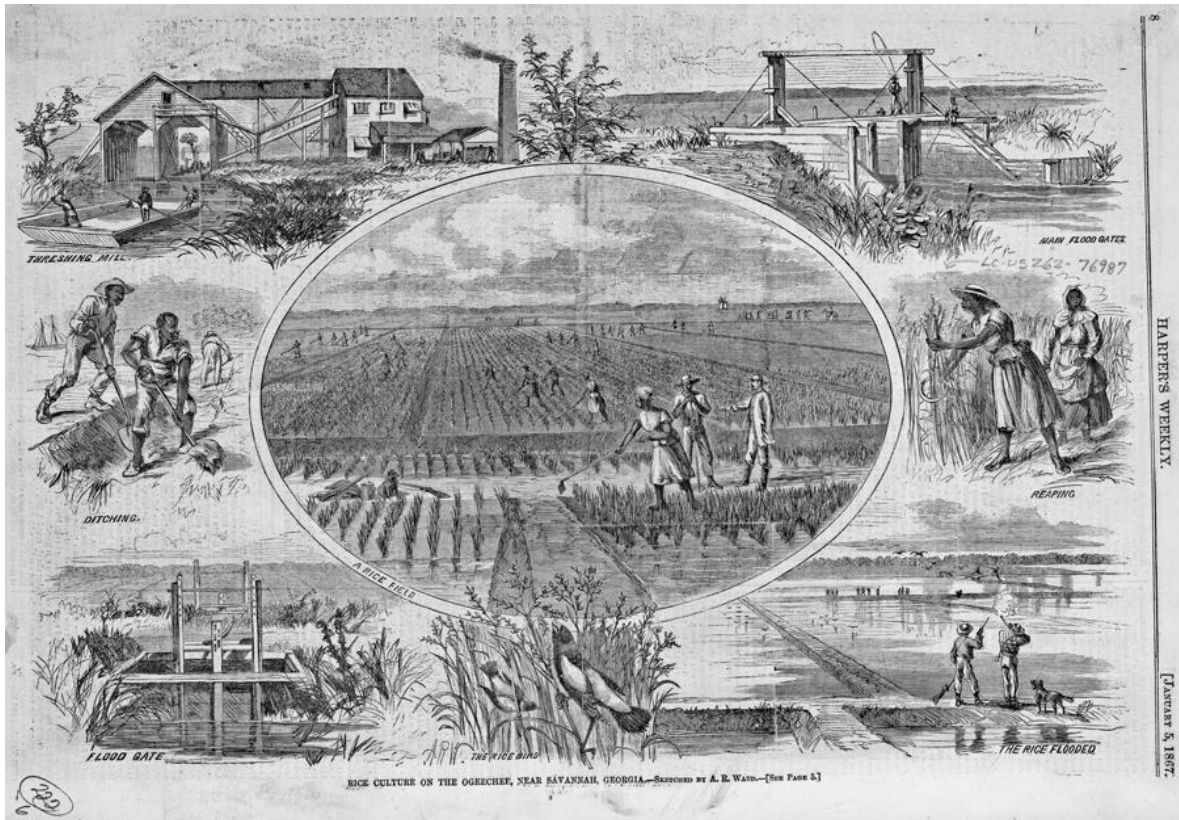
Figure 1. "Rice Culture on the Ogeechee, near Savannah, Georgia," by A. R. Waud, 1867, illustrates landscape transformations created by enslaved Africans and African Americans across the southeast, Atlantic coast of North America. Image courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress Collections.

Reverence for family and ancestors is evident in African diaspora graveyards across the Americas. Gatherings and ceremonies in those spaces serve to reinforce social relationships, individual identities, and the solidarity and heritage perceptions of community members. As Angèle Smith (2008: 14) observed in regard to cultural landscapes, they are 'made by the people that engage with them, and in making landscapes, the people themselves are made: their sense of place, belonging, and their social identity is constructed alongside the constructions of the landscape.' Preservation of such burial grounds is vitally important. These landscapes provide highly valuable lessons in social histories, genealogies, art forms, botanical practices, and cultural traditions. The heritage of religious beliefs for honouring the dead are manifest in the shaped terrains and material objects used to commemorate and engage with ancestors (Balanzátegui Moreno, 2018; Blakey, 2001; Saunders, 2015).

The ruins of slave ships lie in wreckage across the Atlantic and Caribbean. One could view the sites and debris of such wrecks solely as the dreadful reminders of colonial evils. Yet, those ships were touched by captive Africans, many of whom perished on board, and many others survived and lived out their lives in the Americas. A poignant example occurred on the island of St. Vincent, in the southeast region of the Caribbean Sea. A Dutch slave ship sank in nearby waters in 1675, and several captive Africans survived and swam to the St. Vincent shoreline. They integrated into settlements of Indigenous Carib peoples, and the island was later

a haven for escaped captives from Barbados and St. Lucia. The 'Slave Wrecks Project' and 'Diving with a Purpose' initiative work to commemorate such connections by identifying and recording wreck sites and compiling histories of the captives swept into their passages (Dunnavant, 2021). Recent collaborations of these projects have uncovered the remains of the *Clotilda*, the last vessel to bring captives to the U.S. (in 1860) and provide new insights for the descendants of those Africans (Delgado et al., 2023).

Collaborative and activist initiatives also seek to commemorate the heritage of past African-descendant communities that were destroyed by racial violence. For example, the 'Mapping Historical Trauma in Tulsa, 1921-2021' (MHTT) project is undertaking a systematic, archaeological, and historical investigation of the Historic Greenwood District in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Greenwood was a thriving, affluent community of African-American businesses and residences in the early 1900s. One of America's most violent race riots erupted in 1921 as European Americans in Tulsa attacked African Americans and burned to the ground the neighbourhood of 40 square blocks, with a hospital, library, and over 1,250 businesses, homes, schools, and churches. Approximately 300 people were murdered in the rampage, and their bodies were buried surreptitiously in mass graves by the perpetrators. A silence about the incident followed, and little was mentioned about the riot in media, schools, or any public discourse (Odewale, 2020).

The MHTT project works to uncover the lost histories of this community as it existed before the riot and as it sought to recover in following generations. This project undertakes restorative justice, with a focus on multivocality, continual dialogue with members of local and descendant communities, understanding historical contexts, and dedicated community engagement and collaboration (Odewale, 2020). A similar project commemorates the legacies and heritage of the African-American community of Rosewood, Florida, which was destroyed in a race riot in 1923 (González-Tennant, 2018). Another example is seen in New Philadelphia, the first town in the U.S. that was planned in advance and legally founded by African Americans. Established in 1836 in western Illinois, the community grew as an integrated, multi-racial town through the late 1800s. Residents reportedly aided enslaved laborers to escape from bondage. The town dissipated in the late 1800s when transport arteries and economic opportunities in the region were channelled away from its location (Fennell, 2017). Although the community was erased from the visible landscape, years of archaeology work revealed its remains and legacies of accomplishment. The New Philadelphia town site received the highest federal recognition for U.S. historical significance in 2022 through its designation as a national park.

Religions and Cosmologies

Myriad forms of religious beliefs, cosmological perspectives, and cultural knowledge were brought to the Americas by Africans ensnared in trans-Atlantic diasporas. The impacts of those beliefs and practices are seen pervasively throughout the hemisphere today as aspects of intangible and tangible heritage. For example, facets of African traditions had strong influences on the development of Protestant and evangelical Christian denominations in British North America, including call-and-response practices and ring-shout performances during prayer meetings. African descendants also created a new denomination, the African Methodist Episcopal church, which was active in the abolition movement and aiding emancipation. Similar dynamics occurred in Venezuela, with mask, dance, and song traditions from West Central

African cultures being combined with Catholic Christian celebrations of primary saints and Corpus Christi. More complex developments of particular African cultural beliefs were seen in locations such as Haiti, Brazil, and Cuba (Fennell, 2007, 2011; Genovese, 1976; Gomez, 1998).

The dynamic blending of different African religions into new beliefs and practices occurred notably in regions in which the European colonial institutions exercised less surveillance and control. Plantations and slave communities within western Saint Domingue (later called Haiti) and in Brazil provided such opportunities (Mulira, 1990). In both Haiti and Brazil, several factors contributed to this rich blending of African traditions. The population of enslaved Africans and African descendants was far greater than the number of European plantation operators and their associates. Control and surveillance were less strict, and plantation operators tended to seclude themselves from the daily affairs of the work force. Social interaction and communications between enslaved persons were undertaken with greater ease and regularity in those circumstances. Religious and political leaders asserted themselves within local slave communities, organizing the residents socially while employing beliefs, practices, and expressive motifs derived from African traditions (Barrett, 1977).

Captive Africans first arrived in Saint Domingue in the 1500s. The majority of those persons were abducted from the areas of the Gulf of Benin, Kongo, and Angola, with most coming from the region in which the BaKongo people resided. The religion of Vodou developed as a blending of African belief systems in Saint Domingue from the early 1700s onward. Elements of the Catholicism of the French colonialists were incorporated as well. With strong instigation from the ritual specialists of Vodou, the enslaved population rebelled over the span of a decade and won their independence in 1804, creating the nation of Haiti (Eltis, 2001; Genovese, 1976; Trouillot, 1995; Vanhee, 2004).

The word Vodou (or Vodun) was derived from the Ewe language and referred to lesser deities within the religious beliefs of the Fon people of the Dahomey region in West Africa (Klein, 1986). However, Vodou represents a rich blending of numerous African religions, including the Fon, Yoruba, and BaKongo. As Leonard Barrett (1977: 199) observed, Vodou represented 'a divine confederation honed on African pragmatism' and an example of the 'flexibility' that enabled African traditions to survive and evolve in Saint Domingue. Vodou beliefs include a broad array of sub-deities, called loas, each with variant names from the principal contributing religions. The rich temples, ceremonies, iconography, and ritual performances of Vodou have been recognized as the 'national religion' of Haiti.

A similar process unfolded among the enslaved Africans and Indigenous people of Brazil. Portuguese colonial efforts promoted the operation of large-scale plantations, focused primarily on sugar and coffee production, from the early 1500s onward. The first captive Africans imported into Brazil were abducted primarily from the areas of Senegal and Sierra Leone. However, from the late 1500s onward, the Portuguese obtained most enslaved people for Brazil from the area of Angola and Kongo (Eltis, 2000; Orser, 1996; Sturm, 1977).

Plantation owners in this region of Brazil typically ran large-scale operations with less consistent control and surveillance of their work force than occurred at locations in North America and the Caribbean. As a result, greater opportunities were available for enslaved persons to engage in social interactions within their communities. Many rebelled and won their freedom from the plantations. Yet, slavery persisted in Brazil until the late 1800s, and nearly 2

million newly enslaved persons were imported into the region between 1811 and 1870 (Wolf, 1982).

Communities within Brazil developed new beliefs and practices, called Macumba and Candomblé, through a blending of different African religions, Catholicism, and Indigenous cosmologies (Figure 2). Concepts drawn from the cultures of the BaKongo, Dahomey, and

Figure 2. "Candomblé in Bahía (Brazil), a Ritual Dance," photographed in 1962 in a public history project sponsored by the Organization of American States. This image shows a group of women in traditional dress of African heritage engaged in dance as part of Candomblé religious ceremonies. Image courtesy of U.S. Library of Congress Collections.

Yoruba, and the saints of Catholicism, were creatively integrated using the complementary elements of those religions (Genovese, 1976; Matory, 2005; Thompson, 1983, 1990). Similarly, the Indigenous Tupi-Guarani people of Brazil possessed religious beliefs concerning ancestor spirits that blended readily with BaKongo and Yoruba concepts of powerful spirits and sub-deities (Genovese, 1976; Orser, 1996; Sturm, 1977). As in Vodou in Haiti, Macumba and Candomblé in Brazil developed with a rich complex of iconography, ritual performance, and temple spaces, and have expanded within the nation to this day.

The experiences of African descendants in colonial Cuba were shaped by dynamics distinct from those seen in Haiti and Brazil. Spanish colonial administrators in Cuba initiated a strategy in the 1500s to create mutual aid societies, called cabildos or cofradias, which served to cluster Afro-Cubans into different ethnic categories (Brandon, 1993; Klein, 1986). This was a

strategy of divide and rule. Colonial operators worked to foster social differences among groups within the enslaved population so that captives would not find a unifying focus through which to organize and rebel against the government (Klein, 1986). This strategy had the unintended effect of contributing to the cohesive development of different African cultural systems in Cuba.

Enslaved Africans in Cuba had been abducted from several cultures, including the Ashanti, Ewe, Fon, BaKongo, and Yoruba (Howard, 1998). In contrast to the extensive blending of diverse African cultures in Haiti and Brazil, Cuban cabildos contributed to rich continuations of Yoruba culture in the development of the religion called Santería, and largely separate developments of BaKongo beliefs in Palo Monte Mayombe, Regla de Palo, and Reglas Congas (Brandon, 1993; Childs and Falola, 2004; Duany, 1985; González-Wippler, 1989; MacGaffey and Barnett, 1962). A similar dynamic of populations clustering according to ethnic affiliations developed in more remote, rural locations in Cuba, where fortified palenques were established by escaped enslaved people. For example, some palenque settlements were largely populated by persons of either BaKongo or Yoruba heritage (La Rosa Corzo, 2003; Matibag, 1996).

Reparative Justice

Members of African diaspora populations have also advocated for reparative justice in the present. For example, Caricom is a consortium of 15 nations in the Caribbean, including Barbados, St. Vincent, Suriname, and Grenada. Representatives of Caricom filed a lawsuit in 2013 in the United Nations International Court of Justice against 11 European nations. Caricom claims that those European nations profited from colonial and slavery regimes which expropriated property and wealth that should have been allocated to the Caricom nations and their citizens. In the U.S., legislation has been proposed to create a Congressional commission to consider reparations for descendants of enslaved Africans. Advocates' proposals for government sponsored reparations in the U.S. include community and educational programs and monetary compensation funds with total outlays ranging as high as $111 trillion. Complex debates have unfolded across the Americas. Some African-descendant scholars argue that African nations that engaged in past slave trading should also contribute to reparations funds. Others place the onus on European and European-American regimes that created the demand for enslaved laborers. Proposals at local, state, national, and international scales have experienced increased momentum and debate in the past two decades (Coates, 2017; Darity and Mullen, 2020).

Repatriation initiatives can also become entangled in notable complexities. For example, a not-for-profit organization called the Restitution Study Group (RSG) filed a federal lawsuit in 2022 against the Smithsonian Institution to halt the latter's repatriation of 29 Benin bronze statues to Nigeria (RSG 2022). The plaintiffs claimed that the statues were made from metal ingots which European colonial regimes paid to the Kingdom of Benin for providing captive Africans to the trans-Atlantic slave trade. RSG claimed that descendants of enslaved West Africans in the U.S. should see those statues retained by the Smithsonian as part of their own heritage. The lawsuit was dismissed due to a lack of standing and the repatriation proceeded (Art Forum 2022).

Conclusion

European colonial regimes deployed a system of trans-Atlantic enslavement that had brutal impacts on numerous African societies and millions of people in African diasporas. This slave trade system is often examined as a form of globalization which resulted in profound cultural, social, and economic disruptions. Researchers from multiple disciplines examine the ways in which particular forms of cultural heritage are created and displaced in varying contexts. For example, nationalist movements and capitalist economies have often destroyed or displaced the cultural heritage of societies targeted for resource extraction. In campaigns of extensive labor and resource extractions, European colonial regimes rationalized their actions by deploying belief systems of Christian stewardship and racism. European cultures thus developed heritage claims of religious and enlightenment philosophy responsibilities to justify the destruction of African systems of heritage. Methods for erasing the past heritage and cultural identities of African diaspora individuals pervaded the slave trade. Against this brutal aspect of European heritage, African diaspora populations nonetheless sought to preserve, develop, and advance their own legacies. African diasporas have created profound heritages of new religions, social organizations, philosophies of freedom, artistic expressions, and the infrastructures of global economies. Their survivance, successes, and vitality are tributes to human resilience and creativity.

References

Agbe-Davies, A.S. (2010). 'Foreword: an engaged archaeology for our mutual benefit: the case of New Philadelphia,' *Historical Archaeology*, 44(1), pp. 1–6.

Ahmad, Y. (2006). 'The scope and definitions of heritage: from tangible to intangible', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 12(3), pp. 292–300.

Andrews, G.R. (2004). *Afro-Latin America, 1800-2000*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Aptheker, H. (1939). 'Maroons within the present limits of the United States', *Journal of Negro History*, 25, pp. 331–62.

Art Forum (2022). 'US Restitution Organization Sues Smithsonian to Prevent Repatriation of Benin Bronzes', December 7, https://www.artforum.com/news/us-restitution-organization-sues-smithsonian-to-prevent-repatriation-of-benin-bronzes-89809.

Asante, M.L. (1993). 'Racism, consciousness, and Afrocentricity', in G. Early (ed) *Lure and Loathing: Essays on Race, Identity, and the Ambivalence of Assimilation*. New York: Penguin Books, pp. 127–43.

Balanzátegui M., Catalina, D. (2018). 'Collaborative archaeology to revitalize an Afro-Ecuadorian cemetery', *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, 7(1), 42–69.

Barrett, L. (1977). 'African religion in the Americas: the "Islands in Between"', in N.S. Booth Jr (ed) *African Religions: A Symposium*. New York: NOK Publishers, pp. 183–215.

Beaudry, M.C. (2008). 'Not presentism but honesty: symposium and lecture series at Boston University commemorates the 200th anniversary of the ending of the U.S. Atlantic slave trade', *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter*, June, Available at: http://www.diaspora.uiuc.edu/news0608/news0608.html#7.

Blakey, M.L. (2001). 'Bioarchaeology of the African diaspora in the Americas: its origins and scope', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 30, pp. 387–422.

Blight, D.W. (ed) (2004). *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*. Washington, DC.: Smithsonian Books.

Brandon, G. (1993). *Santeriá from Africa to the New World: The Dead Sell Memories*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Childs, M.D. and Falola, T. (2004). 'The Yoruba diaspora in the Atlantic world: methodology and research', in T. Falola and M. D. Childs (eds) *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 1–14.

Coates, T. (2017). *We Were Eight Years in Power: An American Tragedy*. New York: One World.

Darity, W. A. and Mullen, A.K. (2020). *From Here to Equality: Reparations for Black Americans in the Twenty-First Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Diouf, S. (2014). *Slavery's Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. New York: New York University Press.

Delgado, J.P., Marx, D.E., Lent, K., Grinnan, J. and DeCaro, A. (2023). *"Clotilda:" The History and Archaeology of the Last Slave Ship*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press.

Duany, J. (1985). 'Ethnicity in the Spanish Caribbean: notes on the consolidation of Creole identity in Cuba and Puerto Rico, 1762-1868', *Ethnic Groups*, 6, pp. 99–123.

Dunaway, W.A. (2003). *Slavery in the American Mountain South*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Dunnavant, J.P. (2021). 'Have confidence in the sea: maritime maroons and fugitive geographies', *Antipode*, 53(3), pp. 884–905.

Eltis, D. (2000). *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Eltis, D. (2001). 'The volume and structure of the transatlantic slave trade: a reassessment', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 58(1), pp. 17–46.

Eltis, D. and Richardson, D. (2008). 'A new assessment of the transatlantic slave trade', in D. Eltis and D. Richardson (eds) *Extending the Frontiers: Essays on the New Transatlantic Slave Trade Database*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, pp. 1–60.

Falola, T. and M.D. Childs (eds) (2004). *The Yoruba Diaspora in the Atlantic World*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Fennell, C.C. (2007). *Crossroads and Cosmologies: Diasporas and Ethnogenesis in the New World*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Fennell, C.C. (2011). 'Early African America: archaeological studies of significance and diversity', *Journal of Archaeological Research*, 19(1), pp. 1–49.

Fennell, C.C. (2017). *Broken Chains and Subverted Plans: Ethnicity, Race and Commodities*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Ferguson, L.G. (2004). *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press.

Ferreira, L.M. and Symanski. L. (2022). 'Transformation and resistance: African diaspora archaeology in Brazil', *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/21619441.2022.2159377.

Franklin, M., Dunnavant, J.P., Flewellen, A.O., and Odewale, A. (2022). 'The future is now: archaeology and the eradication of anti-blackness', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology*, 24, pp. 753–66.

Frazier, E.F. (1966a). *The Negro Church: The Negro in America*. New York: Academic Press.

Frazier, E.F. (1966b). *The Negro Family in the United States*. Chicago: Academic Press.

French, J.H. (2004). 'Mestizaje and law in Indigenous identity formation in northeastern Brazil: after the conflict came the history', *American Anthropologist*, 106, pp. 663–74.

French, J.H. (2009). *Legalizing Identities: Becoming Black or Indian in Brazil's Northeast*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Fryer, T.C. (2023). 'Heritage as Liberation', *American Anthropologist*, DOI: 10.1111/aman.13844. Available at: https://anthrosource.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/pdfdirect/10.1111/aman.13844.

Genovese, E. (1976). *Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made*. New York: Vintage Books.

Gomez, M.A. (1998). *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

González-Tennant, E. (2018). *The Rosewood Massacre: An Archaeology and History of Intersectional Violence*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

González-Wippler, M. (1989). *Santería: The Religion*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications.

Hall, G.M. (2005). *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Herskovits, M. (1941). *The Myth of the Negro Past*. New York: Academic Press.

Heywood, L. (ed) (2002). *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

hooks, b. (1994). *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. New York: Routledge.

Howard, P.A. (1998). *Changing History: Afro-Cuban Cabildos and Societies of Color in the Nineteenth Century*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Klein, H. (1986). *African Slavery in Latin America and the Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press.

LaRoche, C.J. (2014). *Free Black Communities and the Underground Railroad: The Geography of Resistance*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

La Rosa Corzo, G. (2003). *Runaway Slave Settlements in Cuba: Resistance and Repression*. Translated by Mary Todd. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Lovejoy, P.E., and Trotman, D.V. (eds) (2003). *Trans-Atlantic Dimensions of Ethnicity in the African Diaspora*. London: Continuum.

Lowenthal, D. (1996). *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. New York: Free Press.

Lowenthal, D. (1997). 'History and memory', *Public Historian*, 19(2), pp. 30–39.

MacGaffey, W. and Barnett, C.R. (1962). *Cuba: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*. New Haven, CT: Human Relations Area Files Press.

Matibag, E. (1996). *Afro-Cuban Religious Experience*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Matory, J.L. (2005). *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mintz, S.W. and Price, R. (1976). *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective*. ISHI Occasional Papers in Social Change, Volume 2. Philadelphia, PA: Institute for the Study of Human Issues.

Mitchell, P. (2005). *African Connections: Archaeological Perspectives on Africa and the Wider World*. Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press.

Morgan, P.D. (1998). *Slave Counterpoint: Black Culture in the Eighteenth-Century Chesapeake and Lowcountry*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.

Mulira, J.G. (1990). 'The case of Voodoo in New Orleans', in J.E. Holloway (ed) *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 34–68.

Nash, J. (1988). 'Cultural Parameters of Sexism and Racism in the International Division of Labor', in J. Smith, J. Collins, T.K. Hopkins and A. Muhammad (eds) *Racism, Sexism, and the World-System*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, pp. 11–36.

National Park Service (NPS). (2023). National Underground Railroad Network to Freedom. Available at: https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1205/index.htm.

Odewale, A. (2019). 'An archaeology of struggle: material remnants of a double consciousness in the American south and Danish Caribbean communities', *Transforming Anthropology*, 26(2), pp. 157–72.

Odewale, A. (2020). 'New efforts in restorative justice archaeology: Tulsa, OK', *Society of Black Archaeologists Newsletter*, 2(1), pp. 12–13.

Ogundiran, A. and Falola, T. (eds) (2007). *Archaeology of Atlantic Africa and the African Diaspora*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Olaniyan, T. and Sweet, J.H. (eds) (2010). *The African Diaspora and the Disciplines*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Orser, C.E., Jr. (1996). *A Historical Archaeology of the Modern World*. New York: Plenum Press.

Perry, M. (2008). 'Global black self-fashionings: hip hop as diasporic space', *Identities: Global Studies in Power and Culture*, 15(6), pp. 635–64.

Restitution Study Group (RSG) (2022). 'Smithsonian Hit with Lawsuit to Stop Benin Bronze Transfer to Nigeria', https://www.rsgincorp.org.

Rucker, W.C. (2006). *The River Flows On: Black Resistance, Culture, and Identity Formation in Early America*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Saunders, P. (2015). 'Analysis of an African burial ground in nineteenth-century Jamaica', *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*, 4(2), 143–71.

Semmes, C.E. (1992). *Cultural Hegemony and African American Development*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

Shackel, P.A. (2001). 'Public memory and the search for power in American historical archaeology', *American Anthropologist*, 103(3), pp. 655–70.

Shepherd, V.A. and Richards, G.L. (eds) (2002). *Questioning Creole: Creolisation Discourses in Caribbean Culture*. Kingston, Jamaica: Ian Randle.

Silkenat, D. (2022). *Scars on the Land: An Environmental History of Slavery in the American South*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Slave Voyages. (2023). Slave Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database. Available at: https://www.slavevoyages.org.

Smith, A.P. (2008). 'Landscapes of clearance: archaeological and anthropological perspectives', in A.P. Smith and A. Gazin-Schwartz (eds) *Landscapes of Clearance: Archaeological and Anthropological Perspectives*. Walnut Creek, CA: Left Coast Press, pp. 13–24.

Sturm, F.G. (1977). 'Afro-Brazilian cults', in N.S. Booth, Jr. (ed) *African Religions: A Symposium*. New York: NOK Publishers, pp. 217–39.

Thompson, A.O. (2006). *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas*. Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press.

Thompson, R.F. (1983). *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy*. New York: Random House.

Thompson, R.F. (1990). 'Kongo influences on African-American artistic culture', in J.E. Holloway (ed) *Africanisms in American Culture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, pp. 148–84.

Thompson, R.F. (1993). *Face of the Gods: Art and Altars of Africa and African Americas*. New York: Museum for African Art.

Thompson, R.F. (2005). *Tango: The Art History of Love*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Thornton, J.K. (1998). *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Trouillot, M-R. (1995). *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.

UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). (2003). Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: https://ich.unesco.org/en/convention.

UNESCO (2023a). Intangible Cultural Heritage. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: https://ich.unesco.org/en/lists.

UNESCO (2023b). World Heritage List. Paris: UNESCO. Available at: https://whc.unesco.org.

Vanhee, H. (2004). 'Central African popular Christianity and the making of Haitian Vodou religion', in L.M. Heywood (ed) *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 243–64.

Vlach, J.M. (2004). 'Above ground on the underground railroad: places of flight and refuge', in D.W. Blight (ed) *Passages to Freedom: The Underground Railroad in History and Memory*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Books, pp. 95–115.

Wallerstein, I. (1988). 'The ideological tensions of capitalism: universalism versus racism and sexism', in J. Smith, J. Collins, T.K. Hopkins and A. Muhammad (eds) *Racism, Sexism, and the World-System*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, pp. 3–9.

Weik, T.M. (2012). *The Archaeology of Antislavery Resistance*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

Wolf, E.R. (1982). *Europe and the People without History*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Wood, P.H. (1974). *Black Majority: Negroes in Colonial South Carolina from 1670 through the Stono Rebellion*. New York: Norton.