

# The African-American Subculture in the U.S

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## Introduction

African American culture is one of the most influential and internally diverse cultural formations in the United States. The original essay correctly recognizes African heritage, music, language, political struggle, and the continuing effects of racism. It also makes several claims that require correction. Enslaved Africans did not simply “immigrate”; most were forcibly transported through the Atlantic slave trade. African Americans are not a culturally homogeneous population, and broad claims about workplace behavior, disorder, or preferred personal space reproduce stereotypes rather than scholarship. The term *subculture* can be useful when it identifies a community that develops distinctive practices within a larger society, but it can also imply that white culture is the neutral American norm. African American culture should therefore be understood as a major component of U.S. culture created through African continuities, enslavement, resistance, regional adaptation, migration, institution building, and innovation. Its history reveals both the creativity of Black communities and the unequal structures within which that creativity developed.

## Culture, Subculture, and Internal Diversity

Culture includes learned meanings, values, practices, language, symbols, artistic forms, institutions, and ways of interpreting experience. African Americans share important historical experiences, but no single behavior, religion, dialect, family form, or political opinion defines every Black person. Differences of region, class, age, gender, sexuality, immigration history, religion, education, and national origin shape cultural life. A Black family in rural Mississippi may have different routines from a Nigerian American family in Houston or a middle-class family in Seattle, even while all encounter racial categories created in the United States. Describing African American culture responsibly therefore requires two commitments: recognizing patterns with historical significance and refusing to turn those patterns into fixed traits assigned to individuals. (Williams & Graham, 2021)

## African Origins and the Violence of Enslavement

African American culture developed from many West and Central African societies rather than from one undifferentiated African source. Enslaved people brought languages, musical systems, spiritual practices, agricultural knowledge, foodways, craftsmanship, family traditions, and political memories. Slaveholders attempted to suppress these resources by separating families, restricting movement, policing literacy, and forcing people into racialized labor. Cultural continuity therefore occurred under extreme coercion. Enslaved people adapted remembered practices to new environments and created

new forms across plantations, towns, ports, churches, and maroon communities. The result was neither pure retention nor complete loss. It was a process of survival and transformation in which culture helped people maintain personhood within a system designed to treat them as property.

## Resistance and Institution Building

Resistance included revolt, escape, work slowdowns, sabotage, preservation of family ties, secret worship, learning to read, mutual assistance, and daily refusal of the identities imposed by slavery. After emancipation, African Americans built schools, churches, businesses, newspapers, political organizations, fraternal societies, and colleges. These institutions provided education, leadership, welfare, burial support, employment, and collective strategy when public systems excluded Black citizens. Reconstruction briefly expanded political participation, but racial terror, segregation, voter suppression, and discriminatory law undermined those gains. Institution building remained central because Black communities often had to create resources that government and private organizations denied them.

## Family and Kinship

African American family life has frequently been misrepresented through deficit language. Slavery repeatedly separated spouses, parents, and children, yet enslaved and freed people created extended kin networks, fictive kinship, communal child care, and traditions of mutual obligation. Later migration, incarceration, employment discrimination, housing segregation, and unequal access to wealth continued to shape households. These pressures do not support claims that one family structure is culturally defective. Research instead shows the importance of grandparents, aunts, uncles, church members, neighbors, and nonbiological kin in providing care and continuity. Family practices should be examined in relation to history and resources rather than compared with an idealized white middle-class household as the only standard.

## Religion and Spiritual Life

Black churches became major centers of worship, education, music, political organization, and social support. Christianity was introduced and sometimes imposed within slavery, but African Americans reinterpreted biblical narratives around liberation, dignity, suffering, and collective hope. Spirituals could communicate religious faith and coded longings for freedom. The Black church later supported abolition, civil rights activism, mutual aid, and community leadership. African American religious life is nevertheless diverse. It includes Protestant, Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, African diasporic, humanist, and secular traditions. The Nation of Islam and Black Muslim movements, for example, offered critiques of [white supremacy](#) and alternative forms of identity and discipline. No single religious institution speaks for all African Americans.

# African American English

African American English, often called AAE or AAVE, is a rule-governed variety of English with systematic pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse patterns. It is not careless or incorrect English. Features such as habitual *be* communicate distinctions that Standardized American English expresses differently. Speakers may shift styles according to audience, purpose, and setting, a practice sometimes called code-switching or style-shifting. Schools and workplaces have often stigmatized AAE, confusing language difference with intellectual deficiency. Linguistically responsive education should help students gain access to dominant written conventions without treating their home language as a problem. The history of AAE reflects African language contact, regional English varieties, migration, segregation, and continuing cultural innovation. (Rickford, 2000)

# Music as American Cultural Formation

African American music has transformed global culture. Spirituals, blues, gospel, jazz, rhythm and blues, rock and roll, soul, funk, disco, house, techno, and hip-hop emerged from specific Black communities and historical conditions. Call-and-response, rhythmic complexity, improvisation, vocal expressiveness, and the creative reuse of existing material appear across many forms, though no feature belongs exclusively to one group. Music provided worship, entertainment, political commentary, income, and historical memory. It also generated recurring problems of appropriation: Black artists and communities often created styles that white performers or companies commercialized more profitably. Recognizing influence therefore requires attention to authorship, compensation, archives, and the social conditions from which the music arose.

# Literature, Oral Tradition, and Visual Art

African American cultural expression includes folktales, sermons, autobiographies, slave narratives, poetry, novels, drama, film, painting, photography, quilting, dance, and digital media. Writers from Frederick Douglass and Zora Neale Hurston to James Baldwin, Toni Morrison, and contemporary authors have explored freedom, migration, memory, gender, language, and belonging. Oral performance remains important through storytelling, preaching, spoken word, comedy, and rap. [The Harlem Renaissance](#) demonstrated how art could assert Black modernity while debating whether artists should represent the race politically or claim individual creative freedom. Similar debates continue: cultural work may challenge racism, celebrate ordinary life, experiment with form, or do all three.

## Foodways and Regional Memory

African American foodways developed through African knowledge, Indigenous and European exchange, plantation economies, regional agriculture, migration, and adaptation to limited resources. Okra, rice cultivation, black-eyed peas, greens, barbecue traditions, gumbo, cornbread, and many other foods carry complex histories. “Soul food” became a powerful expression of identity, especially during and after the Great Migration, but African American cuisine is much broader and varies across the South, Gullah Geechee communities, cities, the Caribbean diaspora, and other regions. Health discussions should avoid blaming cultural food alone for unequal disease rates. Food access, income, marketing, work schedules, environmental exposure, healthcare, and stress all shape nutrition and health.

## The Great Migration and Urban Transformation

During the twentieth century, millions of African Americans moved from the rural South to northern, midwestern, and western cities. The Great Migration changed music, politics, labor, neighborhoods, language, religion, and family networks across the nation. Migrants sought safety, voting rights, industrial employment, and better education, but they encountered restrictive housing covenants, redlining, employment discrimination, and racial violence. New urban communities produced institutions and artistic movements while maintaining ties with southern relatives and traditions. This migration demonstrates that African American culture is not a static inheritance from slavery. It is continuously remade through movement, contact, and changing economic conditions.

## Political Participation and the Freedom Struggle

African Americans fought for citizenship long before the election of Barack Obama. Abolitionists, Reconstruction officials, journalists, lawyers, labor organizers, women’s clubs, veterans, students, and civil rights groups challenged slavery, segregation, disfranchisement, and discrimination. The modern Civil Rights Movement used litigation, boycotts, direct action, voter registration, media strategy, and federal advocacy. Black Power movements emphasized self-determination, economic control, cultural pride, and resistance to police violence. Black Lives Matter continued this tradition by directing attention to policing, state power, and the value of Black life. Obama’s presidency was historically significant, but it did not end racial inequality or represent one uniform Black political viewpoint.

## Work, Professional Life, and Stereotypes

The original essay claims that African Americans prefer closer personal space and do not like matters conducted “orderly.” Such statements have no responsible basis as general cultural facts. Workplace behavior varies by individual, occupation, region, organizational culture, and power relations. What

may appear as mistrust or guardedness can reflect previous discrimination, exclusion from informal networks, or the burden of being stereotyped. African American workers have contributed to every sector while confronting wage gaps, occupational segregation, hiring discrimination, and unequal promotion. Cultural competence does not mean memorizing supposed racial preferences. It means listening to individuals, examining institutional bias, communicating respectfully, and creating fair procedures.

## Health, Racism, and Cultural Strength

Health disparities affecting African Americans are often incorrectly attributed to culture or biology alone. Structural racism influences housing, environmental exposure, wealth, insurance, healthcare access, treatment quality, stress, and neighborhood resources. Historical abuses, including the U.S. Public Health Service study at Tuskegee, contribute to mistrust, but mistrust is a rational response to documented institutions rather than a cultural flaw. Community strengths include churches, family networks, professional associations, advocacy groups, and traditions of mutual care. Effective healthcare requires evidence-based treatment, representation, respectful communication, and attention to social conditions instead of stereotypes about compliance or belief.

## Contemporary Identity and Diasporic Change

Today, African American identity includes descendants of U.S. slavery as well as people connected to African, Caribbean, Latin American, and other Black diasporas. These groups may share experiences of racialization while maintaining different languages, histories, and national traditions. Social media has expanded cultural exchange and debate over colorism, gender, class, sexuality, immigration, and authenticity. Younger generations inherit civil rights history but also create new artistic and political forms. Terms such as Black and African American may be preferred differently depending on context and personal identity. Respectful discussion should use the terms people choose for themselves and avoid assuming that one label communicates the same history for everyone.

## Conclusion

African American culture is not a marginal variation of a supposedly neutral American culture. It is foundational to the nation's language, music, politics, religion, literature, food, labor history, and democratic development. It arose through diverse African inheritances, the violence of enslavement, resistance, emancipation, migration, institution building, and ongoing innovation. Shared historical experiences create recognizable cultural patterns, but African Americans remain diverse by region, class, religion, gender, generation, and family history. Responsible cultural analysis therefore rejects claims that Black people possess one workplace style, one dialect, one political belief, or one family form. The most accurate understanding combines appreciation of cultural creativity with analysis of

the structures that have constrained Black life. African American culture is a record of survival and transformation, but it is also ordinary living culture: changing, contested, and central to the United States. (Holloway, 2005)

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