

# Africans in the New World

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The impact of [Africans](#) in the New World can be seen in Robert Farris Thompson's [Flash of the Spirit](#). Thompson, basically, looks at art and culture in five African civilizations - Yoruba, Kongo, Ejagham, Mande and Cross River - and shows how these civilizations are maintained in the New World, which includes the United States, Cuba, Haiti, Trinidad, Mexico, [Brazil](#) and other places. Furthermore, he demonstrates how African traditions are melded with those of Protestantism and Catholicism (a process called synchronism), creating a new belief system in the New World. In the following, I will focus on the art and culture of Yoruba and Kongo and show how these beliefs are synchronized into the New World.



First, Thompson explores the art and ideals of Yoruba, which consists of Africa's largest population. [Candomble](#) is a synonym for African religion or the religion of the Yoruba blacks. He explains how the Yoruba worship numerous deities, all of whom are a manifestation of *ashe*, the power-to-make-things-happen. There are thousands of deities or *orisha* in Yoruba territory, but only the most worshipped have survived the Atlantic Trade, such as *Ifa*, god of divination, *Ogun*, lord of iron, *Oshun*, god of hunting, and various other deities. Many representations of these gods and goddesses are found in Yoruba art, which has made a deep impact on black urban populations in the New World. For example, [Ogun](#), who is believed to have cleared primordial forests with his iron, is

honored by liturgical jewelry, iron or brass. In Cuba, *Ogun* art takes the form of a bucket-shaped iron cauldron (*caldero de ogun*). Such objects contain various ironworks, such as nails and iron bows and arrows. Also, the Cuban migration to North America has started the development of *caldero de ogun* tradition in Miami and New York. Despite attempts to stifle Yoruba culture, Yoruba art, rich in detail and emblematic power, continues to flourish in the New World.



### Bonfin Celebrants- Bahia (Candomblé)

Going beyond Yoruba, Thompson focuses on Kongo and its influence on the black Atlantic world. He starts out by stating that Kongo spelled with a *K* instead of a *C* distinguishes Kongo civilization and Bokongo people from non-Kongo people. He, then, explains the Kongo cosmogram, which is in the form of a cross (associated with Christianity). God is imagined at the top, the dead at the bottom, and water in between. At the points of the cross, there are four discs, which represent the four moments of the sun - dawn, noon, sunset, and midnight. Also, the circumference of the cross symbolizes reincarnation. Basically, the Bakongo believe in the continuity of a man's life, and that it constitutes a cycle, even after death. A connection exists between this cosmogram and similarly chalked signs of initiation among Kongo people in the New World. For instance, in the Americas, the Kongo cosmogram emerges as singing and drawing points of contact between worlds. Also, Thompson shows how the cosmograms of Kongo has reappeared in the Americas in the *minkisi* charm. *Minkisi* is an object used in black Atlantic art in healing a person from sickness and other phenomena. For example, in

Cuba, *minkisi*-figurines have been used to attack slaveholders and other enemies in the nineteenth century. Therefore, the presence of Kongo drawings and art is reflected in the New World.

In conclusion, African tradition and culture has not died out among black people in the New World, despite many attempts to extinguish it. It continues to flourish in many forms, such as in art and drawing, making a strong impact upon the black populations of the world.



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## Website Evaluations

The following sites each had their own good and bad points. I did not find any sites that were exceptionally bad or good.

<http://cultural-expressions.com/ifa/ifahistory.htm>

In this website, a short history is given of Yoruba history and culture. First, it starts out by stating that Yoruba cities and kingdoms, such as Ife and Benin, were founded in the fifteenth century by Portuguese explorers. Then, the article talks about Ifa theology and the sacred city of Ile Ife. Next, it gives a brief description of Yoruba cities and describes the areas where the Yoruba belief system dominates. Finally, the article shows how Yoruba culture has spread to the Americas by the capturing of Africans in slave ships bound for the Americas. This website, though very informative, is only a brief introduction of Yoruba culture and history. Also, no pictures are available of Yoruba art and tradition, thereby, underscoring the beauty and importance of Yoruba culture in the

Americas. A more thorough research of Yoruba history should be further explored in addition to this site.

<http://members.aol.com/inquiceweb/dondeKongo.html>

In this website, the meaning and depth of the Kongo religion and its influence on certain faiths in other countries are explored. First, the article starts out by defining the meaning of a Kongo derived religion. Second, it states that many Independent Christian traditions have come from or are a part of the Kongo religion. Next, the article shows that the Kongo religion has two main aspects: the bringing down of spirits/dead and the extensive work with Inquices (Nkisi). In addition, it presents a brief look at Nganga, meaning African priest, in Cuban Palo Mayombe. Finally, the article looks at the influence of Kongo religions in Jamaica, Brasil, and, finally, in the United States. Overall, this article gives a short, brief analysis of Kongo derived religions. However, this article does not give a complete look at the impact of the Kongo civilization on specific countries; the people and traditions of the Kongo culture are not explored, only the religious aspects. Also, this website includes no pictures symbolizing Kongo religions, such as the Kongo cosmogram. Therefore, though this is a good site, additional information is needed to find more information about Kongo culture.

<http://www.nando.net/prof/caribe/Gods.html>

This site provides a great deal of information on the art and altars of Africa and the African Americas. It links the visual grammar of altar traditions of West African (Yoruba) and Central African (Kongo) civilizations with those of Yoruba and Kongo descendants in Haiti, Cuba, Brazil, Puerto Rico and in Black and Latino North America. It is very thorough and informative. However, there are no images or links on this page for further information.

<http://brazilonline.com/aabc>

This site has a variety of links that lead to many aspects of Afro-Brazilian information. It has sites on Brazilian history, art, culture, music, and more. A good overview is provided. However, some of the links are not that specific or in-depth.

<http://www.geocities.com/Athens/Acropolis/1322/page9.html>

This site focuses on African religion or “candomble.” It gives a brief overlook at the origin of the religion and the impact of candomble on Brazilians. It is a good site, but it does not provide enough specifics on the subject, and it needs more images and links.

<http://www.seanet.com/~efunmoyiwa/orishas.html>

This site gives a short definition of orisha and provides a short description of the many deities. However, it does not provide any pictures, which would really enhance this site, and there are no links to more specific information about the gods.

<http://member.aol.com/starkana/ogun.htm>

This site provides a thorough look at Ogun, lord of iron. Further, it provides background information on the spiritual importance of this god in African life. The only criticism is that there is no artwork or pictures to symbolize the deity.

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