

(In)Visibility and Duality of the Civil Rights and Yoruba Movements: 1950s-1990s

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This paper will illuminate the Yoruba movement in the U.S. founded by Oba Oseijeman Adefunmi I who is the first African American born in the U.S. to be initiated into the Yoruba priesthood. An examination of the Yorubas in the U.S. in relation to the rise of Dr. Martin Luther King's civil rights movement that also began in the 1950s will explore the dauntless task of addressing the African American racial and cultural identity malady identified by sociologist W.E. B. DuBois as double consciousness: (1) A civil rights agenda based on King's vision of an inalienable right to pursue educational, employment, housing opportunities, and other civil liberties on an equal basis with white Americans or (2) the re-creation of cultural habits based on an approach from a traditional African perspective? DuBois' double consciousness theory as it relates to black-face minstrels in the U.S. will be utilized to illustrate the extent that the bifurcation process of Americanization damaged the racial psyche of African Americans

When slavery ended at the close of the Civil War in 1865, the captives emerged culturally blind and viewed their indigenous African heritage as an extinct relic of "primitive savagery" resulting in what sociologist W. E. B. DuBois defined as double consciousness. Not only were the freed bondsmen alienated from their mother countries, but they were also estranged from captives taken to other parts of the New World.¹ The host country serves as the filter by which those in the diaspora measure the authenticity of their racial heritage. The greater the contact those in the diaspora have with the homeland the more intact their ethnic and cultural identities are likely to be. Conversely, the more the disassociation with the home country experienced by the diaspora population, the greater the erosion of customs, ethnicity, and culture. Assimilation into the host country is the desired norm. Although factors such as environment and political considerations can disrupt the interchange with the home country, the diaspora will only cease to have

meaning if the idea of an ancestral home is totally lost.² In the case of the U. S. population, not only was the idea of an ancestral home lost to the former slaves and their descendants, but the nature of the U. S. slave system itself was not conducive to maintaining ties with the homeland. This was in great part due to the drastically changed diet that strict and ancient religious customs were dependent upon, and the unfamiliar climate of the North American continent.³ Whereas, other major slave distribution countries; namely, Cuba, Brazil, Surinam, Haiti, Trinidad, and Puerto Rico maintained a rich cultural exchange with West Africa during the era of slavery, and after it ended, contact between the homeland and slaves in the U. S. was almost entirely severed.⁴ After the Civil war ended in 1865 and lasting until the rise of the civil rights and Yoruba movements in the 1950s, African Americans in the U. S. were left to view the indigenous homeland through a prism of extrinsic, distorted images that were about them, but not innately from them.

Prior to the outset of the era of slavery beginning in the sixteenth century, European imagery depicting African people was not based on prejudicial racial stereotypes but on their lifestyles ranging from depictions of everyday normal activities, warrior images, images of servants and entertainers, to images of black or 'mixed' Pharaohs.⁵ In antiquity, the color black did not carry the ominous and racist aura that it later came to have during and after the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Washington observed that "Robert Gainish, John Lok, William Towerson and the entire company which first regularized trade with Africa, good Christians all, returned from Guinea bearing more than slaves and gold. As surely as they deposited gold on English shores they impressed upon English minds their very definite judgments about black people." ⁶ The first of many racist images that questioned the humanity of African people and depicted them as beasts without any redeeming qualities surfaced along with the rise of the slave trade. Armpit hair, genitalia, fleshiness of the buttocks, width of the nostrils, hair texture, skin coloring, and the intelligence of African people were put under a racial magnifying glass and tediously scrutinized for any similarities to animals. The overwhelming consensus was that African people shared similar traits, physiognomies, and anatomies with animals ranging from domesticated goats to wild apes. Edward Long freely acknowledged the alleged link between African people and the animal species in his pseudoscientific writings. He wrote, "[African people's] & faculties of smell are truly bestial, nor less their commerce with the other sexes; in these acts they are libidinous and shameless as monkeys, or baboons. The equally hot temperament of their women has given probability to the charge of their admitting these animals frequently to their embrace."⁷

Although the image of the beast was the most potent and dangerous representation associated with the freed slaves, several others merit comment. Centuries old representations of the former slaves as ungodly and savage left them open to the whims of a frontier America whose independence and freedom coincided with irrational racism. Images of Africans against a backdrop of jungle plants and animals were often depicted in popular and commercial art. "The iconography of Africans as savages was determined by the association with nature and flora---often the kind of wild and overwhelming landscape which makes humans appear small."⁸ The image of Africans as ungodly pagans destined through a biblical curse to remain in a position of perpetual servitude was widely circulated and embedded in the ethno-centrist outlook of white America.⁹ Not ready to recognize their chattel slaves as human beings and equal citizens, America incorporated these primary images--beastliness, savagery, and ungodliness--into the very framework and infrastructure of America's legal system, popular culture, and religious institutions. "Books such as Charles Carrol, *The Negro a Beast* (1900) and R. W. Shufeldt, MD, *America's Greatest Problem: The Negro* (1915), expressed the racist backlash."¹⁰ At the close of the Civil War, America did not only reformulate the humanity of the freed slaves but also sought to define itself in relation to millions of ex-slaves that they must now accept as equals or relegate to a caste system that was inherently racist in ideology. The latter was chosen and subsequently a bombardment of theories circulated throughout American popular culture supporting images that purported ex-slaves to be an inferior race of people and deserving of the ensuing laws and attitudes revolving around lynching, share cropping, racial segregation, Jim Crowism, and the gamut of all that it means to be a second-class citizen in the land of one's birth.

Because theatre was the popular entertainment of the day, it served as an ideal conduit to popularize and disperse distorted racist images pertaining to the African race. Although rubbing burnt cork on the face to darken the skin when portraying African characters is a European theatrical tradition, this did not become popular in the United States until the 1860s when blackface minstrels became a mainstay of national popular culture that lasted well into the 20th century.¹¹ White entertainers blacked up their faces with soot or burnt cork and donned a distorted stage persona of what they alleged were true enactments of the plantation slave community. Traveling throughout the U.S. and internationally, "white" blackface minstrel performers portrayed ex-slaves as a people of profound stupidity and uncontained emotion. Toll described the event as a ludicrous imitation of what white America

perceived to be the dominant traits of African people. "They burst on stage in makeup which gave the impression of huge eyes and gaping mouths. They dressed in ill-fitting patchwork clothes, and spoke in heavy "nigger" dialects. Once on stage, they could not stay still for an instant. Even while sitting, they contorted their bodies, cocked their heads, rolled their eyes, and twisted their outstretched legs." ¹² Needless to say, these stage impressions of a people whose humanity was simultaneously deemed subhuman, savage, and ungodly were extremely damaging to any concept of a cohesive ethnic identity. The former slaves and their racial identity were placed in an even more precarious position than legalized slavery. The minstrel messages penetrated deeply into every strata of American society probing and questioning whether African people were of the human race.

For their part, African American performers attempted to address the putrid images of the minstrel show through a focused and unwavering resistance. Krasner explained, "Black representation in the performing arts is rooted in a tradition of resistance to generations of white image makers." ¹³ The images that "white" blackface minstrel performers inundated into the psyche of America through constant performances of distorted "black" representations twisted and hammered out an American rationale that justified the murderous lynching of thousands of freedmen during the early part of the 20th century. The images further consigned the entire African population to a marginalized existence of shame and humiliation about their ethnic identity. The following attitudes formatted as questions help to define the impact of white America's unbridled racism on African Americans: Did the demands of the white audiences who relied on the minstrel performers perceptions of African people actually filter down to the former slaves themselves? Were these false perceptions the foundation on which the freedmen themselves resisted as racist yet ultimately embraced and identified with? The answer to both of the above questions is a resounding yes and serves to shed some light on why a cancerous blanket of self-hatred engulfed the African American mind from Reconstruction to the mid-1950s.

When the slaves entered the post-slavery workforce, there were only two occupations open to them: servitude and entertainment. Those who became entertainers were required by the status quo to cast themselves into an imitation of what "white" blackface minstrel performers called plantation "niggerisms." Beginning in the 1860s, ex-slaves entering the entertainment industry applied burnt cork to their own dark skins and took to the stage in a strange admixture of confrontation, resistance, and parody. In an ironic flux of unwitting racial betrayal,

the "black" blackface minstrels readily and willingly participated in the dangerous "game" of denigrating their own racial identity. Although African American minstrel histrionics were invented to entertain, rationalize, justify, and bring to life white America's illogical racist laws and ethnocentric attitudes, the "black" blackface performer had a covertly veiled hidden agenda which was to restore a measure of dignity to the stolen and trampled image of African people. Their mission was to resist, challenge, and de-script the "white" false images and perceptions on the humanism of African people against an ingrained American kaleidoscope of comic "nigger" humor.

Thus, African American performers were forced to negotiate between representations of the "authentic" self and representations of blackness fixed in the minds of audiences accustomed to "white"-created racial smears.¹⁴ The paradox of the "black" blackface minstrel performer is easily applicable to the pre-1950s African American quest for a respected racial identity albeit by blending the derogatory images of beastliness, savagery, and ungodliness into a (re)creation of the race based on a bifurcated Americanized ideal. Noting the resulting severed and fragmented identity, DuBois wrote his famous words, "It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness---an American, a Negro; two souls in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder." ¹⁵

The Rise of the Yoruba and Civil Rights Movements

The New World racial dilemma that DuBois so passionately and poignantly wrote about in his monumental work, *The Souls of Black Folk*, still burns deeply in the consciousness of African Americans whose racial identity remains fragmented and even more compounded with troublesome implications and ramifications associated with the distant relationship and loss of indigenous customs. Hence, Shakespeare's quixotic question "to be or not to be" is the constant irresolvable that African Americans decisively and consistently pondered.

The fifties ushered in a sedate American popular culture firmly entrenched in its racist ideology along with total control over the segregated and second class masses of African people subsisting within the dynamics of American-style apartheid. Racial attitudes of white superiority dominated in all areas of black and

white contact as America ruthlessly enforced an oppressive mantle of racial inferiority on the African population. However, the dawning of the decade also saw African Americans stirring and uniting with a renewed resolve to resist attempts to undermine their humanity and racial origins. Keenly aware that African people were caught between the two opposing forces of double consciousness---the demand to conform to the distorted images created by minstrels and the desire to reclaim their humanity, two race leaders emerged that felt compelled to address the chronic malady related to the fragmented racial psyche of African Americans.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. became an immediate race leader on December 1, 1955 after a woman named Rosa Parks refused to compromise her humanity and sit in the back of a public bus with designated segregated seating for African Americans. Under King's leadership, the Montgomery bus boycott culminated with the successful overturning of Jim Crow laws that relegated African people to segregated seating arrangements on public transportation. When the boycott ended one year later, King had become the celebrated and recognized national spokesman of African Americans and the undisputed leader of the burgeoning civil rights movement.¹⁶ The emergence of Oba Oseijeman Adefunmi I, the spearhead of Yoruba culture on U. S. soil, was far less spectacular. In 1956, the same year King was crowned by the mass media as a national spokesperson, Adefunmi took two trips out of the country. The first trip was to North-east Africa where he became enthralled with Egyptian antiquities that served to heighten his desire to know more about his African ancestry. In the later part of 1956, he took another trip to the Caribbean islands of Haiti and Cuba where he was introduced to West African indigenous culture and religion within the New World African diaspora.¹⁷ These two journeys marked the beginning of Adefunmi's affinity with indigenous African culture. Fifteen years later he established the only community in the U. S. based on traditional West African culture.

When William Bascom, Professor of Anthropology and former director of the Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley traveled to Oyotunji Village in the late 1970s, he expressed surprise at the level of accurateness the residents displayed in (re)creating and (re)inventing the indigenous West African culture of their ancestors. "What is truly remarkable is the success of the community in recreating, with amazing accuracy the culture of the Yoruba of Nigeria."¹⁸ Today, Oyotunji Village, located in South Carolina's Low Country stands as a testament to the resilience of Adefunmi, who is the first African American born in the U. S. to be initiated into the Yoruba priesthood

approximately 600 years after the inception of the trans-Atlantic slave trade.¹⁹ Along with the rebirth of traditional religious in the U.S., Adefunmi, who is a professional artist, also revived traditional religious art. Oyotunji Village enjoys an international reputation for its plethora of New World art forms. "As a result of their fervor to proclaim their African identities and their determining that [the deity] Olokun represented the profoundness of the spirituality, genius, and character of African peoples, some of the Olokun sculptural art they created exaggerated older Yoruba/Bini aesthetics and created monuments that were larger than life size."²⁰

Adefunmi and King who were born in 1928 and 1929 respectively matured under the choke hold of American apartheid, yet these astute and intelligent men thoroughly understood the critical identity crisis plaguing African people at the outset of the 1950s. Although they addressed the inter-racial quagmire from entirely different perspectives and methodologies, both of these race leaders were equally challenged to resolve the unsettling questions revolving around the alleged inferiority and sub-humanity of African people. King tackled the angst by pursuing a civil rights agenda based on *jure divino* and devoutly advocated that God gave his people the right to pursue education, employment, housing, and all other civil and legal liberties on an equal basis with white America. He optimistically believed that an American society built upon the ideals of equality for all its citizenry would allow African Americans the opportunity to strive for their highest potential and would also arouse a sense of fair play from white America to implement justice on behalf of all its citizens.²¹ As a result of the envisioned success off this two-pronged strategy, King adamantly believed that the problem of double consciousness could alleviate itself and that African people would naturally assimilate into American society. His famous words from the "I Have a Dream" speech in which he states that someday African people "&would be judged by the content of their character rather than the color of their skin" validates this over-all thesis.²² Adefunmi, polarized at the opposite end, believed that African people could only remove the obtrusive taint of their collective inferiority complex if they "&embraced a cultural background from which they could draw."²³ He made this observation after attending a Shakespearean drama that was staged with a cast of African Americans. He recalled that his disappointment with an African cast playing white characters led him to Harlem's Schomburg library where he checked out a number of books on Africa. He became interested in African history, but his immediate goal was to write plays about Africa and the diasporic experiences of African Americans so that they would not have to depend on Shakespeare

anymore.²⁴

An investigation of the Yoruba and civil rights movements, one virtually invisible and functioning as an outsider and the other under constant public attention and scrutiny, and striving to become an insider can help to extrapolate and examine the continuing problem of Africa America's double consciousness syndrome. Could King's vision couched in such terms as universal suffrage and integration in all areas of America's political, civil, and social liberties resolve the testy crisis surrounding the cultural and racial identity crisis of African Americans? This question exposes the crux of essential aspects of the civil rights movement that were problematic to King and which he seemingly sidestepped or avoided. Furthermore, did he consider the African homeland at all as a primary source of healing when he formulated his objectives for the civil rights movement? Lastly, did he theorize as white America did that African Americans were creolized to the degree that all connections with the homeland were severed as a result of the four hundred year separation?

Adefunmi was undaunted by the magnitude and length of the separation and set out to challenge and change the prevailing creolist view of American citizens---black and white. He advocated that African Americans were not creolized to the extent that a claim to a West African ethnic and cultural identity was forever lost in the tragedy of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the subsequent four hundred years of chattel slavery. His unwavering belief that a return to traditional West African culture and de-hegemonization would best address the identity crisis motivated him to boldly embrace African customs during the late 1950s while at the same time, King was formulating his integrationist objectives for the civil rights movement. "On May 6, 1957, Adefunmi planned and carried out an African Freedom Day which consisted of a parade on horseback through Central Park and the heart of Harlem. The participants wore African garments made by Adefunmi himself. The parade launched him as a cultural leader, and from that point on, he was a recognized leader and was called upon to speak and plan various activities."²⁵

After his 1959 initiation into Santo as a member of the Yoruba priesthood of Obatala at Mantanzas, Cuba, Adefunmi returned to New York consumed with the task of (de)assimilating the African American psyche from its gravitational pull toward the values, mores, and culture of western civilization. He believed there was an acute need for African Americans to (de)assimilate the mind and (re)invent

their West African culture if there was to be any rehabilitation of their fragmented identity. "After he was initiated into Santo, he opened the Shango Temple, later named the Yoruba Temple, and began to wear Yoruba clothing. He made a rule that no one could enter the Temple unless they wore African clothes. The simplest form was the dashiki which he introduced in 1960."²⁶

The external debate of whether African Americans were creolized to the degree that their West African roots were no longer important, discernible, or identifiable is well documented in the polemic between Melville Herskovits and E. Franklin Frazier. Herskovits and Frazier who are two leading proponents of the creolist school advanced opposing theses on the question of whether any West African customs survived in the

U. S. According to the creolists, the U.S. slave population and their descendants did not share a common culture and their customs, religious beliefs, dialects, and social structures varied too greatly to influence ethnic and cultural cohesiveness.²⁷ While Herskovits agreed that traditional African culture had been severely eroded, he nevertheless analyzed that some degree of traditional African culture had survived.²⁸ Conversely, Frazier who is of an extremely conservative creolist persuasion expounded that all cultural remnants of the indigenous culture had been destroyed in the melee of slavery and in effect the West African heritage had little or nothing to do with the present African American population in the U.S.²⁹ It is to the revisionists with their emphasis on the continuities in African history and the layered metamorphosis of that history as it relates to diaspora populations in the New World that Adefunmi's Yoruba movement is most closely aligned, while King's ideology is more compatible with Frazier's conservative creolization analysis.

Rather than reach back to Africa for confirmation and healing of their battered and fragmented social identity, King swayed his followers to believe that they should pursue an idealized American dream based on their collaborative efforts to enter American society via the objectives of self-respect, high moral standards, leadership, nonviolence, and a wholehearted work ethic.³⁰ "Martin defined the black freedom struggle as an American movement, or, as he said at the March on Washington, 'a dream deeply rooted in the American dream.'"³¹ In his early career, King also recognized, expressed, and exhibited solidarity with Nigeria, Ghana, and other oppressed and colonized countries in Africa in the mutual struggle for human rights, but his Protestant background and upbringing were too thoroughly

embedded in Southern Baptist Christian doctrines to allow him to embrace authentic African beliefs and customs. King was born into a line of civil rights leaders and inherited the powerful legacies of his grandfather and father who were also prominent Baptist ministers in the Atlanta African American community. "Home and church were the most important influences upon the early life of Martin King, Jr. In both contexts, he was introduced to the integrationist values of protest, accommodation, self-help, and optimism as they were related to the religious themes of justice, love, obedience, and hope." 32

Like African scholars who create artificial historical boundaries because they fail to study African Americans from their collective diasporic experience as a transition, and yet a continuum of African history, did King create further fragmentation among the masses by further alienating them from the fountain of their traditional African origins? Today, we look around and can see African Americans holding prominent positions throughout American government and in all areas of the professional and business sectors. In fact, the National Security Advisor Dr. Condoleezza Rice and Secretary of State Colin Powell are African Americans serving in the administration of President George W. Bush. This reality can be presented in two observations: (1) King's dream is an undisputed fact for African Americans, and (2) it is a vehicle for white America to use as a tool of convenience to promote its international post-fifties political, legal, and social platforms of integration, ethnic tolerance, and equality. Although both of these observations are true as America and its African American citizenry are witnessing tremendous reforms in all areas of social liberties, equality, and civil integration, there is something horribly amiss with the outcome equation. A Los Angeles Times article reported that internecine urban warfare has taken the lives of thousands of African American men and women in this country. 33 This mayhem began during the 1970s when young African American gangs such as the infamous Crips and Bloods gangs were beginning their rise to street power in poor inner city urban areas just as King's civil rights movement was gaining momentum in terms of a noticeable increase in African American social, political, and professional involvement in American society. Crouch's disturbing commentary questions the validity of the civil rights movement. He theorizes that African Americans are slaughtering each other in their own communities due to a "crisis of ethnic identity that infects not only the black lower class but too many of the black middle class young as well."34

The disparity existing between those that have actually assimilated into

American society as a direct result of King's vision and the masses of African Americans that continue to exist in a pseudo-integrated but marginalized and unequal society cannot justify the taking of even one life due to the unresolved identity crisis that continues to ask the haunting question: Who am I? The mere fact that the Bloods and Crips gangs base their internecine hatred on the colors red and blue causes one to speculate: If the Bloods (red) and the Crips (blue) were aware that from an indigenous cultural perspective red and blue represent profound cosmological concepts in terms of West African traditions and are the colors used to venerate powerful Yoruba divinities, would U.S. African American youth still wantonly murder each other in respect to these colors? Hence, did King's civil rights philosophy unknowingly feed into the double consciousness syndrome and further divide the African American psyche with yet another layer of self-imposed (de)Africanizations and consequently add to a more intense bifurcation problem of multiple identities and thereby manufacture an even greater schismatic alienation?

Although the importance and relevance of an African background is recognized in the U.S. and slave descendants use the racially envogue nomenclature African American, it was not until the advent of Adefunmi's Yoruba movement that a historical correlation between the indigenous homeland and the diaspora population in the U.S. was identified and the (re)invention and (re)creation of the "authentic" culture began to take a recognizable form. The primary contention of the creolist school articulates that the process of enslavement itself coupled with the passing on of earlier generations born in Africa and their non replacement with a continual supply of fresh slaves coming directly from the homeland helped to destroy West African customs in the U.S. However, the revisionist school believes that the above approach is negligible because it is founded on assumptions that do not include the African component.

The revisionists explain that historians must view New World slavery as a continuum in the over-all evolution of West African people, their culture, and history. Lovejoy explains, "&from the perspective of Africa, therefore, it is fruitful to examine the condition of slaves in the Americas on the basis that they were still Africans, despite their chattel status, the deracination that accompanied their forced migration, and the sometimes haphazard and sometimes deliberate attempts of Europeans to destroy or otherwise undermine this African identity." 35 Inquiries into the nature of post-slavery African customs in line with the revisionist approach require a cultural reconstruction of the African past in order to uncover historical links between West African traditions and a critical examination of how

the authentic culture was impacted in the U.S.

Adefunmi's revisionist approach to the identity crisis was soon dominated by the ancient religion and culture of the Yoruba people whose geographical home is southwest Nigeria. Bascom concluded that Adefunmi's choice of the Yoruba was not surprising. "Not only are the Yoruba one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa, but they also have had a greater influence in the New World than any of the other African peoples brought here during the slave trade." 36 Like King, Adefunmi was also heavily influenced by his father. However, his father unlike King's was an ardent supporter of Marcus Garvey's Black Nationalist movement and the Moorish Science Temple movement of Noble Drew Ali. Young Adefunmi learned early in his childhood that his responsibility was to concern himself with the condition of his own people before anything else. He recalled asking one of his father's associates if he was going to join the army and fight in the Second World War. The man said, "No, why should I go to war?" Adefunmi replied, "To fight for the country." The man told him not to be a fool because "&this country is not yours or mine."37 Differing distinctly from King's southern Baptist background, a Christian ideal based on a western value system was nonexistent in young Adefunmi's childhood, for his father adamantly espoused that freedom for the African American would become a reality only if the people had the foresight and ingenuity to culturally identify with their West African origins. In fact, Adefunmi's father planned to repatriate to Africa, but the war hampered his plans, and he died before it ended.38

Meanwhile, by 1957, King had become the first president of the newly formed Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC). The purpose of the SCLC was to eliminate segregation from all segments of American society and nonviolent direct action was chosen as the best method to achieve civil rights. As the 1960s came into view, King's goal was no longer human rights and racial dignity for the slave descendants but a newly directed objective based on an integrationist policy. "Integration is the great issue of our age, the great issue of our nation and the great issue of our community."39 In sharp contrast, Adefunmi was in the process of (re)creating and (re)inventing Yoruba traditions and customs in the "inner sanctum" of Africa America's most populous community---Harlem, New York City. Working far from the spotlight and the roar of the crowd, Adefunmi and a Haitian singer that he met while designing the costumes for a folk play co-founded a society called the Order of Damballa Hwedo in 1960.40 This event is significant because it marks the resurgence of organized traditional West African

religion and its practice in the U.S. by the descendants of the slave population. Damballa Hwedo is a Fon/Yoruban deity that traveled to the New World in the consciousness of captive slaves bound for plantations on the island of Hispanola, present day Haiti.

The veneration of Damballa Hwedo required Adefunmi's early followers to disavow all of the basic tenets of their Judeo-Christian background and embrace the large pantheon of West African Yoruba deities. The order of Damballa Hwedo dissolved after several years because its members began to argue that African Americans could not understand the complexities of venerating a pantheon of deities.⁴¹ Adefunmi disagreed because he believed that African Americans could re-inscript their culture even after such a long separation if they were strict and based the foundation of their teachings and religious rituals on traditional West African religious doctrines. Although Adefunmi's early goals were to arrest the images of the minstrel show and bring some measure of respect to the African American image on the stage, he began to advocate that the (re)creation and (re)invention of traditional African religion was a required element in the restoration and reconstruction of the battered African American image and identity. "History has shown that religion can be, and has been, used as a tool to oppress, exploit and alienate or discriminate. It has also been used to liberate and restore people's life and dignity. Either way, it offers to those who view it as the basis for struggle a realization of their full humanity, faith, hope, and courage to continue struggling, in spite of all obstacles and costs."⁴²

The religion of the Yoruba people is an extraordinary complex of ancient ontological, cosmological, mythological, and mystical esoteric doctrines and rituals that Adefunmi assiduously investigated, researched, and internalized. He attracted a sizable following of Harlemites to his Yoruba Temple and throughout the 1960s devoted himself to learning, teaching, and training others in the mystical traditions of the Yoruba. In 1968, he made a much anticipated move. Like the Yoruba deity and prototype Ogun who represents the force of and symbolizes the characteristics of the primal outsider, Adefunmi moved his spiritual base from the urban glare of New York to the reclusive swamps of South Carolina. Although Ogun is often characterized as the eternal outsider who chose to live alone in the forests with only his faithful black dog, Yoruba mythology and folklore also have many legends that characterize Ogun as the machete-wielding deity responsible for and the builder of human civilization.⁴³ Following the directives of Ogun and other powerful Yoruba deities, Adefunmi not only moved his spiritual base, but he also

sought to establish an independent Yoruba state within America. He wanted to depict through a living entity the continuity and hegemony of West African ethnic identity and indigenous African culture even in the U. S. among the culturally deprived and disadvantaged African American diaspora. Bascom who lived for many years with the Yoruba people in Nigeria said that what he witnessed in Oyotunji Village was indeed an authentic (re)invention and (re)creation of Yoruba customs in America. "As one who has studied the Yoruba of Nigeria for more than thirty years, and who has spent some time studying Yoruba religion as it is practiced in Cuba, I am fascinated by the degree of success that has been achieved."⁴⁴

Although Oyotunji Village is off the beaten path, many devotees throughout the New World African diaspora and from the homeland itself come to Oyotunji Village to venerate sacred Yoruba deities enshrined there and to fulfill obligatory rituals and initiations. Adefunmi envisioned Oyotunji Village as a monastery where worshippers could come to be initiated into the various priesthoods and be trained to serve the Yoruba pantheon of deities through chants, dance, and ritual sacrifice. From its founding in 1970 to the present, many hundreds of African Americans have come to Oyotunji Village to perform initiation rites and complete the necessary training required to become a novice. Some of these devotees went back to their urban communities located in inner cities throughout America and established temples and shrines for the feting of the divinities.

Currently, it is impossible to qualify with accuracy the degree of success that Adefunmi's movement has enjoyed in terms of throwing off the chains of mental slavery and healing the African American psychosis of its double consciousness. However, the impact of the Yoruba movement has osmotically expanded to every large city across America that has a sizable African American population. "If one considers the large number of groups that have evolved since Osejeman Adefunmi began promoting cultural nationalism in the late 1950s, it would appear that they have already had a noticeable effect. In many cities across America groups whose main purpose is the worship of African religion in particular and the resurrection of African culture in general are evolving."⁴⁵ The tidal wave of African-based religions sweeping across the U. S. caused Dorothy Ferebee, a radio-station administrator and journalist in Philadelphia to remark, "This is not an alternative religion. If you're black, this is something that's in your cultural DNA."⁴⁶ Professor of Religion Dr. Tracey Hucks added, "While churches have spawned great civil rights leaders such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., some young people

still think of them as the institutions that taught slaves in Haiti to rise up against their French masters and fend off Napoleon's army."⁴⁷

When King's great voice was silenced in 1968 by an assassin's bullet, he was a recognizable icon on the international stage where he lobbied for unconditional love and nonviolence as universal values for all of humanity. King's evolved efforts and advocacy for nonviolence as a method of protest and civil disobedience won him world-wide praise and in 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. However, even with integration and the visible progress of African Americans assimilating into all areas of American society as well as King's much deserved praise, the ramifications of the following underlying issue have yet to be explored in terms of double-consciousness and the ongoing identity crisis: Because religion in America is based totally on Christian doctrines, no one, especially an African American, could become an influential spokesperson representing American ideals without identifying with and appealing to the spirit and teachings of Christianity which are the antithesis of indigenous West African religious and cultural beliefs. Therein lies the enigmatic duality of King's civil rights movement. Indigenous Yoruba religion with its blood sacrifices, trance possessions, divination, polygamous marriage, ancestor worship and nonwestern forms of medicine and healing was unacceptable to status quo American philosophy of religion. Its vilification and demonization by the status quo diminished its acceptability as a source of moral and ethical philosophies that could provide a guide for the good life. This made it impossible for King to embrace the culture and the origins of his forebears if he was to lead his people into an equality of civil rights. The only acceptable code was based on the dominant Protestant ethics of Christianity. Thus, King was constrained to be totally unaware of his traditional origins. In essence, he was forced to repudiate and align the civil rights movement with Christian ideals that validated old, entrenched notions advocating European values and Christian ideals as superior to the "savage" paganism of traditional African religion and culture.

In line with the revisionist school, Malcolm X said, "Our forced importation into this country was not the beginning of our heritage, but a rude interruption. The worst crime white people have committed was to teach us to hate ourselves, destroying our past, and making us think that our foreparents did nothing but pick cotton." ⁴⁸ Since his assassination, King has been immortalized as an American hero whose birthday is celebrated as a national holiday every January 3. Although he remains an obscure footnote in African American history, Adefunmi is a sought

after mystic, priest, teacher, healer, and respected elder in the international New World diaspora as well as in the homeland of the indigenous Yoruba people of southwest Nigeria. In 1981, the Ooni, who is the supreme religious leader of the Yoruba ordered the Chiefs of Ife to perform the rites of coronation on him. "He was crowned, Oba Efuntola Osejeman Adelabu Adefunmi I and given the ceremonial sword of office inscribed with the name of his Liege Lord, the Ooni, which grants him the rights to speak in the name of the Ooni. He is the first African American to receive such an honor."⁴⁹

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