

# **The Black Diaspora**

**By**

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**What is a diaspora?** A diaspora is a scattered population whose origin lies in a separate geographic locale. The term stems from the ancient Greek language and it means, dispersion or, to scatter about. Essentially, that's what people of a diaspora do. Scatter around different areas of the globe and spread their culture as they go. The word is used to describe people that were forcefully removed from their homelands due to religious or national conflict as well as to describe people who identify with a homeland but live outside of it. The diaspora is composed of emigrants who most times leave their country in search of better opportunities.

**What is the African diaspora?** The African diaspora is the movement of Africans and their descendants out of Africa and into other areas during pre-modern and modern periods. The African diaspora is a worldwide collection of communities that descended from Africa. Many communities of African descent dispersed throughout the world as a result of historic movements. Historic movements such as the trans-Saharan slave trade and the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Unfortunately, little is known about the Trans-Saharan slave trade to this day as most history books do not mention it. Although there are many negative effects that the Trans-Saharan slave trade had on Africa, in light of that, there were many positive aspects as well. When the Arab traders began to travel across Africa, they came across Sudan which means "the land of the black people". With them, they brought religion, language, and culture. The Sudanese merchants were the first to convert to Islam, then after that they were followed by the Ghanaians who converted in the eleventh century. And after them the Malians in the thirteenth century. Another positive way Africa was affected by the slave trade was intermarriage between North Africans and West Africans. Both the traders and the natives also influenced each other very greatly with their different ideas when it came to architecture, culture, and food. If you go to certain West

African countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Senegal, Ghana, and many more, the descendants of those traders still live amongst the Africans and have been there for generations. Some have procreated with the natives while others have chosen to stay and reproduce amongst their people. Most of them are bilingual as they can speak Arabic but also the native language of the country they reside in.

The Trans Atlantic Slave trade is the slave trade that most people know and refer to when the subject of slavery comes up. The slave trade lasted from the 16th century to the 19th century so a span of about 400 years. This slave trade played a huge role in the formation of the diaspora. About 13 million Africans were stolen from their homelands and were treated like livestock. The Africans were mainly taken from West and Central Africa and were sold by other West Africans to the Europeans. Some Africans had made a business out of selling neighboring Africans to the Europeans. Or like the majority of them, simply stolen in coastal raids. They were taken to Brazil first in 1526. They then were taken to the Americas and the Caribbean islands to work on fields, sugarcane, and many other things. The traders could not stay in the land for too long since life expectancy for them on land was about a year due to not being immune to the diseases that were native to Africa. At first, when the slaves were brought over to the new lands, they had some status as that of an indentured servant coming from Ireland. But they soon became the property of their masters and because they were considered merchandise like tobacco, coffee, and sheep, they were sold in marketplaces like those things. The major slave trading nations were the Portuguese, Dutch, British, Spanish, French, and Danish. There is evidence that Africans were also taken to other states in Africa, Europe, and even Asia. They were traded for things such as muskets, clothes, mirrors, knives, and many more. People living in the land were taken to the coast and then traded for valuable things. Although people who were traded in Africa and still

stayed in Africa had a chance of escaping, those who were forced on the ship had little to no hope of returning to their homeland. After discovering the Canary Islands, the Europeans started to slowly migrate and mingle amongst the homelands, raided their villages, and began to take over. The once free villagers were now either enslaved or shipped off to the European lands where they would also be forced to work. The discovery of the islands led the Portuguese traders to travel down to the western coast of Africa in which they began to raid other villages. They captured people who would be later sold in the Mediterranean. At first, because the attacks were out of nowhere and the Africans were not expecting it, they were defenseless. But The African Naval forces started to realize what was happening. So the Portuguese started to be met with effective resistance. The African sailors, whose ships were better equipped and were made to navigate the West African coast and rivers smoothly began to attack and kill the crew of the Portuguese. A well-renowned historian said, “the actual motivation for European expansion and navigational breakthroughs was little more than to exploit the opportunity for immediate profits made by raiding and the seizure or purchase of trade commodities.”

In the late 1400s, The Portuguese had come to an agreement with the rulers of different West African rulers in which they were peacefully allowed to trade. This agreement allowed the Portuguese to expose themselves to Africa’s well-established economy and its resources in a peaceful manner. Historians argue that the agreement wasn't as peaceful as it was made to seem and rather the Africans were forced into a “colonial” trade. And that this agreement led to Africa being milked of all its natural resources over time. This was the slow beginning of what soon became colonization and what led to the formation of the diaspora.

What is Colonization? According to the Merriam-Webster dictionary, One definition of Colonization is the establishing of a colony or subjugation of a people or area, especially as an extension of state power. It is the action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area. Colonialism is the process of a country taking full or partial political control of a dependent country, territory, or people. The phenomenon of colonization is one that goes far back and stretches to all parts of the world. It has been around for quite a while. It has a history in ancient times that go as far back as the 14th century. Different factors play into why colonization took place. Colonizers use colonization to exploit the people and the country's natural resources. Colonial powers tend to have a belief that their lifestyle and way of thinking are the best and therefore, their values must be imposed on "ignorant and uneducated" people below them. Ideologies of the racial hierarchy are very prevalent within these powers. They believe themselves to be the most advanced in all matters of life such as education-wise, and economically. They see it as their duty to enlighten and bring new ideas to people who may already have a well-functioning and economically thriving society. The colonizers attempt to impose their religion, language, cultural and political beliefs, and practices on the indigenous people. These false racial stereotypes are what were used to justify colonization. Though colonialism is similar to imperialism, it is not the same. Both are methods used to gain control over a people or society by using force and influence. The stigma around colonization is often viewed as a negative one because of its disastrous history and terrible long-term effects on particular societies. However, some countries greatly benefitted from being colonized as it led to economic development that the country was in dire need of. It also led to the Europeans; who had a burdening trade market, being able to buy natural resources from underdeveloped countries during the industrial revolution. Many Asian, African, and European

societies that were affected saw many advantages such as lucrative trade contracts. British colonialism instilled different institutions such as common law and property rights which somehow set in motion some countries' journey to gaining independence down the long road. However, though there are a few positive effects colonization has had in some areas, there are also many negative effects that outweigh the good. Western Colonialism began around the late 1400s when a new sea route was discovered around Africa's southern coast and America. This was known as the age of discovery. With these sea routes being discovered, it led to the discovery of new nations, conquests, and settlements. During this time, new, strange, and strict laws were imposed and forced on the people whose lands were being occupied. Many indigenous people did not have liberty on the land in which they and their forefathers were born. Their culture was stripped from them in order to make room for the European's new ideologies. They were stripped of their identity, enslaved, murdered, and scattered across the world. Today, only two countries are considered to have escaped European colonialism. Liberia and Ethiopia. European colonization of Africa started in the 1880s. The Europeans worked very fastly to gain control of the continent to milk it of its natural resources and gain economical advancement. In the 19th century, Europe was going through an industrial revolution. And European colonial powers relied greatly on raw materials and natural resources from Africa in order to turn them into manufactured goods and marketable products. This economic benefit also played a role in what led to Africa being colonized. Slavery had just been legally banned, but a lot of the African countries were still affected by the damage. The English, French, Dutch, Germans, Italians, Portuguese, and Belgians all controlled different parts of Africa. So the continent was split up into different parts with different colonial powers. This is what is known as the "Scramble for

Africa.” All of these major nations were competing and all wanted a piece and did not want to be left without any colonies.

According to a report made by the Anadolu agency, the Dutch began to colonize the African continent starting with West Africa. It used human and Natural resources from Ghana And Senegal in the 16th century then moved along to Ivory Coast and South Africa in the 17th century and then to Namibia in the 19th century but not before colonizing them. Conquests of these territories led to natural and human resources being exploited. The indigenous were slaughtered, and removed from their homes, and a great sum of them were abducted to be used as slaves in America and Europe. They were put on public display for scientific and leisure purposes. Enslaved men, women, and children were treated as less than humans on their own land. As more of the African continent was discovered, peace and safety became a rarity.

In February of 1885, the head European powers who were actively seeking to control large parts of Africa signed what is known as the Berlin Act. This act formalized the process for the partition of Africa. It provided guidelines by which each of them had to define their territories. Some of the territories were desert lands that were not exactly suited for economic activity. This is another reason why some of the powers were so thirsty for expansion. They were all concerned with creating a niche for themselves that they thought would create economic benefits for them. They all wanted to bring as much land as they could under their name and control. The twentieth century is when their efforts proved to be successful.

The Dutch established a colony in Africa before many of the other European countries. Between the 15th and 17th centuries, the Dutch had what historians refer to as “The Golden Age” of colonialism. One could say the term is quite contradicting though. For the Dutch, that period of time was a period of great wealth. Their sciences, arts, and trade were among the most acclaimed in the world. Trade expanded quickly and it led to the expansion and population growth of main cities. The era was one of great success. But on the other hand, it was also a dark time for the Africans and a great deal of Dutch history revolves around colonialism and slavery but it is not common knowledge. During this “Golden Age”, the Dutch established colonies in Ghana and exploited one of their best natural resources, gold. Thousands of Ghanaians were sold by the Dutch to America and England. The Dutch eventually lost power and gave way to the French and English in the 18th century. The Europeans began to strengthen their bonds with African slave traders because, by the eighteenth century, slaves were an essential part of the trade they conducted in West Africa. The slaves were an important element in American and European lifestyles. They were destined to work on the new world plantations. The New World had a growing demand for labor that contributed to the capture, transfer, and consolidation of African people in West Africa. And some of the African population contributed to the demand in hopes of escaping the reality in the end.

The French and British exploitation of colonialism in West Africa proceeded together. They were both at work trying to solidify bonds and establish themselves where they found their interests lying. They focused on the exploitation of the resources and using human labor to benefit the metropole. They did have differing opinions when it came to the Africans though. They both believed they were superior, but the British believed that the Africans were essentially different from Europeans and things would stay that way. The French on the other hand were open to the



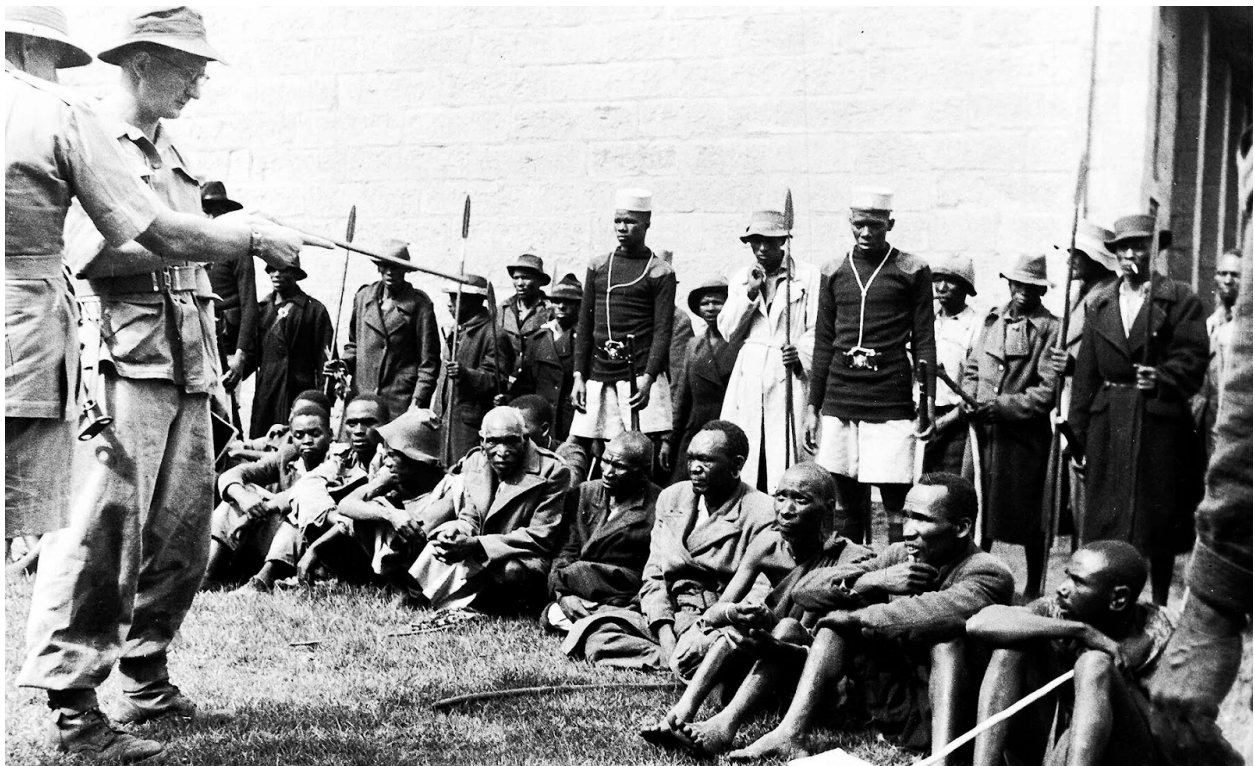
idea that the Africans would be considered equals just as long as they adopted French values, culture, and language. They believed that once they achieved a certain level of education on French values they would no longer be considered inferior. France worked on establishing a bond and closeness of some sort with their colony. The British believed because they had superior weapons and were more technologically advanced than the Africans, they had a right to colonization. This superiority complex is what led to the belief that colonialism gave birth to racism.

Britain had control over many colonies in Africa. In British West Africa: Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria, Southern Cameroon, and Sierra Leone. In British East Africa: Kenya, Uganda, and what is now known as Tanzania. In British South Africa there was South Africa, what is known today as Zambia and Zimbabwe, Malawi, Lesotho, Botswana, and Swaziland. The British had different colonial systems and ways of governing the colonies. Trading companies, indirect rule, the settler rule, and the condominium government were colonial powers that had a joint rule over a colony.

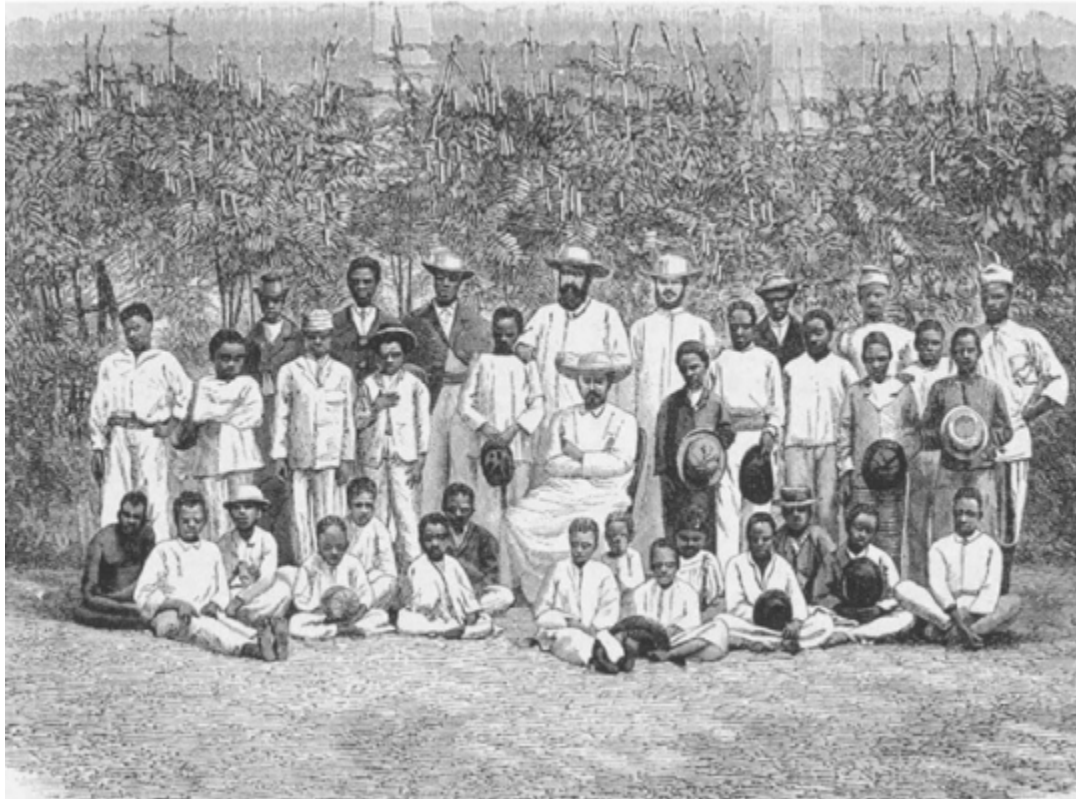
The main period of the French expansion came in the 19th century with the invasion of Ottoman Algiers. The conquests of the western part of Africa came during the “Scramble for Africa.” Some colonies under French rule were Senegal, Mali Federation, Côte d’Ivoire, Niger, Upper Volta, and Dahomey. The horn of Africa was also under French rule and so was Madagascar. The French were creating what they thought would be suitable French citizens. They began to install a federalistic type of rule within their colonies which had them under direct rule. In Senegal, The governor-general would report and take orders from the minister of colonies and government in Paris. However, in French West Africa, territories were divided into administrative units which were run by district commissioners. They were harsh in their ruling because of their zeal to

increase their economic foothold. The French, unlike the British, seemed to understand that they could not fully control the West Africans at the local level. So they opted for controlling the population instead. Despite their differences, ultimately both systems aimed to benefit the colonizers.

With the colonizers entering and mingling amongst the indigenous they brought with them disease. The colonial powers tried to control disease spread especially in the tropical areas. In most cases, cattle carried diseases that then spread to their consumers of it. Some of the Europeans carried some of these diseases but had developed immunity to it, unlike the indigenous people who they conquered.



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Africa is home to about one-third of the world's languages. Scientists believe that all the world's languages, approximately 6,000 modern languages, can be traced thousands of years back to a single mother tongue that was spoken in Africa fifty to seventy thousand years ago. Research conducted by the journal *Science*, suggests that this language alone is what propelled human civilization and laid the foundation for numerous cultures. It is believed that over time, speech evolved throughout the world and each language evolved independently. The first group of populations migrating from Africa took their language with them and evolved it through time. When the consonants, vowels, and tones in modern-day languages were traced, they were found to be connected to a long-forgotten dialect spoken in pre-historic times. There is a large population in Africa which resulted in a vast diversity of languages. There are about 75 languages in Africa with about 1 million speakers each. The most widely spoken languages of the black diaspora within Africa are Yoruba, Swahili, Igbo, and Fula. The Khoisan languages are believed to be the oldest languages and are found to be spoken mostly in South Africa. The Khoisan languages are very distinctive and share click consonants. The language group is also known for having the greatest amount of consonants.

It is common knowledge that languages evolve and develop over time. Similarities between these languages, are deep-rooted within the Black diaspora and sometimes lay in plain sight and wait on us, the speakers, to discover them. History shows that colonialism played a big role in the transferring of languages, the creation of dialects, and whether languages would be considered

worthy of being preserved or not. Colonial powers imposed their own languages on countries. Through this, native tongues were seen as inferior and secondary. A lot of the modern-day languages within the diaspora all have phrases borrowed from the French language. These languages have been heavily influenced by African, European, and Native American languages. They are considered creoles. They contain idiomatic references of numerous modern Central African and West African languages. Through a reverse process of language diffusing, Creole speakers and colonial powers have influenced the formation of Krio which is spoken in Sierra Leone.

A lingua franca means a language that is used as a bridge language or a language that is used as a medium of communication amongst people who may or may not have the same native language. It makes communication possible between people who do not share the same mother tongue. Lingua francas have been developed throughout history to ease the trading process and as means for exchanging information between leaders and scholars. For example, the English language can be considered the worldwide lingua franca. Creoles and Pidgins are a form of lingua franca. They both are used as communication between different language groups. A large majority of pidgins and creoles were formed through Colonial power and established over time because the Colonists needed to easily communicate with the indigenous people. The difference between a pidgin and creole is that pidgins are a grammatically simplified form of language. In short, pidgins are made up of words from a few languages and are not a native language. They actually develop through language contact between two groups. A creole, on the other hand, is a type of pidgin that has evolved into a well-established language. They are far more developed than a pidgin and have much more structure and grammar rules and have developed communities of native speakers. Another important term is the vernacular. The vernacular language is the

language or dialect that is naturally spoken by a particular group of people in an area. It is distinguished through speech rather than writing. It is spoken in a less formal tone than the codified version of the language.

Krio is the main language which is spoken in Sierra Leone. It is an English-based creole and it is the lingua franca of Sierra Leone. More than 80 percent of Sierra Leone's different ethnic groups can speak the language fluently. It is comprised of French and English words and perhaps even words from other languages. The language was a product of the British Colonization. It is the mother tongue of the Creole people of Sierra Leone who are, direct descendants of freed slaves from Nova Scotia, Jamaica, America, Canada, The West Indies, and The British Empire. It is the second language of numerous other ethnic groups residing in the country. It as a whole is a mixture of the variations of English brought in by the liberated slaves. It was heavily influenced by the Jamaican languages and African American Vernacular English. The language itself is very similar to the pidgin that is spoken by Nigerians, Cameroonians, Guineans, and various other west African countries. The pidgin is not the official language of these countries, but rather is a language of commerce and there is no standardized written form. Krio on the other hand is an established language that has grammatical rules. Another creole language that shares similarities with Krio is Jamaican patios. There are different dialects within the language. Patois, which is pronounced (pat-u-wah), is not only Jamaican creole, but it is also used to describe most Caribbean languages. It is a part of a continuum of Creole languages that range from pidgins to dialects, and full-fledged languages. Over time, Patios has developed into a distinct language. The word is used in France to describe vernaculars and dialects that are considered informal.

Jamaican patios is heavily influenced by the West African language Akan. It is spoken by a majority of the island's population and is the primary language spoken throughout the Jamaican diaspora. Its history goes back to the seventeenth century when Africans were captured. The language was formed by using words from the English language which was spoken by the slaveholders, the British. It was also influenced by African American vernacular English.

Jamaican Patios-speaking communities reside in numerous places across the globe and tend to have a heavy mark on the areas they occupy. A number of these expatriates live in New York, South Florida, Panama, Costa Rica, London, and many other places. Some descendants of the Jamaican maroons who managed to escape slavery and flee to Colombia also speak Jamaican patios and the native language of Colombia. Another close relative of patios, who also is a part of the creole family is Belizean Kriol. It also is an English-based language that is spoken by the Belizean Creole people. There is a large diaspora community in the United States, especially in Miami, New Orleans, and Houston, and some live in other Central American communities such as Honduras and Mexico. It is a distinct dialect that would be hard for non-speakers to understand. It is also the lingua franca of several ethnic groups that co-exist in Belize.

Approximately about one-third of Belize's population speaks Kriol as their first language. Most speakers tend to code-switch when speaking to others or in public. The rest of the population speaks other languages such as Spanish. But it is a more simplified version of the original language. Belize which is a former British colony is both multilingual and multicultural. The cause for this could be due to the fact that on one side of Belize is Central American countries, and on the other side lies the West Indies. Belize was not much of a plantation land but was rather exploited for their wood. It is believed that the slaves who worked as woodcutters were imported from Jamaica rather than Africa itself due to how close it was to Belize. But research

done implies that most of their ancestors had to be from Sierra Leone and from the Akan tribe in Ghana. A small population speaks Mayan, German, Chinese, and Arabic. Another Afro-Caribbean language that is spoken by some of Belize's population is Garifuna. It is a unique language that only about 4 percent of the population can speak. It is a blend of indigenous West African and Caribbean languages. It used to be only spoken by the people that live in St. Vincent and Dominica. But in the late 1700s, the Garifuna people were deported by the British to Honduras. Since then, they have spread to the southern coast of central America to Belize and Guatemala. They are direct descendants of West Africans from Cameroon, the Igbo tribe, the Ashanti tribe, and the Caribbean. The Garifuna are a prime example of the way the diaspora and language work. People being removed from their homeland, naturally or unnaturally, then move on to create their own mini societies while still maintaining some of their ancestral habits and norms.

Without even looking far, we can see that there are creole speakers in North America that have been native to this land since the 18th century. In Louisiana, a percentage of the population speaks Louisiana creole. Most of this population is from the older generation. The creole is a french based vernacular that developed on the sugarcane plantations in Louisiana and Mississippi when they were French colonies. Although it is a french based language, it is not easily intelligible to a french speaking person. It was influenced by the creole spoken by the Haitian slaves. In Louisiana, the term creole is also used to denote ethnicity. African Americans refer to themselves as such, and the descendants of colonial Spanish and French refer to themselves as such as well. But the Louisiana creole is usually associated with the African American population as it was their ancestors, who were enslaved and worked on the sugarcane plantations and developed French creole into the language it is today.



Another ethnic group of African Americans that are not often talked about, are the Gullah Geechee. It was only recently that I met a friend that was Gullah-Geechee and began researching them and finding the language and cultural similarities they share with my own country, Sierra Leone. I found that they are the direct descendants of the enslaved people who were kidnapped from Sierra Leone, Liberia, and other surrounding countries in West and Central Africa. The most prominent ones are Sierra Leone and Liberia. Today they reside mostly in South Carolina, Georgia, North Carolina, and Florida. Their ancestors were brought to those lower Atlantic states to work on the rice, cotton, and indigo plantations. The one notable fact about them is that they were able to retain most of their indigineous heritage as well forming new traditions. Their language, Gullah, which is spoken nowhere else in the world, developed independently. It is based on numerous west and central African languages, the English which was spoken by the white slaveholders, and West African pidgin English. Linguists traced that about 25% percent of the words in the Gullah language come from Sierra Leone. Spiritual songs sung by the Gullah were traced back to the Mende tribe of Sierra Leone. In the mid-1900s, research was done on the Gullah language and explorers found that they were few Gullahs living close to the sea, could count in Mende, and Fulani, and could even tell stories and recite songs in these west African languages. The Gullah people are famous for their rich storytelling tradition which goes back to their ancestors telling stories around large groups in Africa. Today, there are only about 3000 who can speak the language fluently. Due to it being considered a lack of knowledge if spoken around outsiders, over time, most speakers grew inclined to rather speaking it within their homes. Gullah is in close relation with many other creole-based languages spoken throughout the diaspora such as, Bahamian Creole, Trinidadian Creole, Guyanese Creole, and mostly Krio. A product of the language would be Afro-Seminole Creole which is spoken in some southern states

across the United States. It is spoken by the Black Seminole communities who are the descendants of Gullah people who were enslaved in the 18th and 19th centuries. They managed to escape slavery and dispersed into Florida and other states. Most Black Seminoles lived independently but did intermarry with the Native Americans that lived in the Florida woods. Over time, they adopted the culture of the Native Americans, began eating the same food, wearing the same clothing, and living in similar houses. However, the Black Seminoles practice an entirely different religion which was based on different beliefs. It is a blend of African beliefs, Christian beliefs, and Seminole rituals. Black Seminoles harvested, farmed, and even hunted wild game. They also worked as translators and became the bridge between the white man and the Seminole Indians. All these communities discussed are only just a few from around the globe that are so similar yet so different. They share various similarities and it is a beautiful experience learning about them all and educating yourself on the side of history that is not often talked about.



Black Seminoles.

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Garifuna people.

Researching, learning, and speaking about the diaspora will always be an engaging experience for me. Learning about how our ancestors settled in different regions, shaped cultures, developed cuisines, and still managed to share some cultural background. Among the diaspora, we have four distinct regions that share African heritage. Africans, African Americans, Afro-Caribbeans, and Afro-South Americans. These regions all share such similar beautiful cultures with each other and Africa is the root that handed out the tools to create the cultures or rather influenced the cultures. Personally, it has become one of my favorite things to do and it is crucial to educate yourself and others on it especially living in the era we live in now. Our generation may not be surrounded by all the things our ancestors were surrounded by, but we definitely live in an era in which our history is not taught in schools, and when it is taught, never as a mandatory course. But taking the initiative to learn about it on your own accord is very important. The diaspora consists of a very diverse population who live in all parts of the world. One thing these people all have in common is the fact that despite where they reside, their history has always had a dark side to it simply because of how they were racialized. A person in Brazil may experience Anti-Blackness similarly to the way a person living in Europe may experience Anti-Blackness. Despite where we live we have always been striving for equality and justice. In short, members of the diaspora all share disadvantages and problems. One way to solve these issues that we face would be to unite with one another and learn about our history, learn about our heritage, and our ancestors, and why we are where we are today. In the past, there have been influential movements created specifically to unite all of the African descent with one another. In the early twentieth century, Marcus Garvey founded the Universal Negro Improvement Association. It was an association dedicated to racial uplift and the betterment of Negroes

worldwide. Less than five years after it was created and the headquarters became New York, branches and offices started popping up all across towns and cities nationwide. By 1920, there were at least a thousand divisions in the United States, Africa, South America, Canada, and the Caribbean. Garvey created an association in which Black women felt they belonged and were not outcasts. It gave them an opportunity to develop and strengthen leadership and organizational skills. It was Garvey who created the red, black, and green flag which represented unity. Many other liberated African countries soon began using the base of the flag for their new flags.

The Black Diaspora has been very influential in all aspects of life, particularly music and clothing. Music has had a global impact most especially during the twentieth century. The most recognized are ones that originated from African American culture and Afro-Caribbean culture. As well as music, the diaspora has had an influence on dance, language, fashion, and culture. Most significantly taken from African American culture.

Unity amongst the Diaspora is very important because unity is the key to success and the betterment of ourselves. In the mid-1900s, Cameroon's President, Ahmadou Ahidjo, wrote, "Each time a black man [and woman] is humiliated anywhere in the world, all the Negroes the world over are hurt." This statement is true within the black community as we all feel it when one of us has been killed no matter how used to it we are. Ultimately, I'd like to go back to what El-Hajj Malik El- Shabaz, (formerly known as Malcolm X), said. He said, "You will never catch me with a free fifteen minutes in which I'm not studying something I feel might be able to help the black man."



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