Thesis Statement:

Slaves in the Caribbean, Latin America, and the United States created complex social structures, unique religious traditions, and a vibrant culture that allowed them to gain a sense of community and humanity despite their second class status.
When slaves arrived in the new world, they lost the political structures, clan organizations, and family ties they had in Africa. Mostly illiterate, with little knowledge of each other’s languages, they were bound together by each other’s color and status in society.
What influences contributed to Afro-American culture?
Taking shape beginning in the seventeenth century, African American culture brought together African, European, and Native American traditions with American experiences. Large elements of emerging Afro-American culture influenced by Europeans included adapted tools, technologies, language, passions and ways of life, even in their ultimate adaptation to peasant agricultural practices.

Developed in small villages consisting of large plantation and urban households, plantations provided a community's identity among slaves in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Culture was not homogenous, merely expressed aspects of western norms established by whites. Other aspects were unique to Afro-Americans and provided an alternative value system.
Identity

Afro-American slaves developed a self-identity and community which allowed them to seek individuality despite forced integration into the white society.

- Standard practice for planters was to mix slaves culturally but divide them politically in order to fit into white class system.
- African traits adapted selectively to fit roles of African Americans.

Rejection to plantation society seen through hostility and obvious brutality expressed towards Afro-American slaves by their master-dominated societies.

White elite kept African, American, and European sources in bondage given conflict derived from different backgrounds.

Africans had to learn a lingua franca (common language) to communicate:
- Usually a pidgin speech from the dominant European language.
- Evolved to a creole language.
- Borrowed from African languages a little.
- Examples: Haitian Patois, Dutch colonial Papiamento, English-based Sranan of Surinam.
How did slaves organize themselves socially?
Social Structure

Work:

- Except for the very young and the very old, all slaves participated in manual labor, regardless of gender
- **Gang system**: slaves organized into gangs of 25 slaves working for one driver
- **Task system**: Each slave given a specific job per day

What gave slaves social status in the slave community? → **Knowledge** and **Autonomy**

- **Autonomy**: freedom from white oversight or control.
  - Examples: self hire slaves, independent craftsmen, or muleteers. These people were often the leaders of political or rebellious movements.
- **Knowledge**: understanding of either white culture or African Roots.
  - Examples: ability to read/write local language, knowledge of African witchcraft or religion, Elite status transferred from Africa
- Ability to mediate demands between master’s house and slave quarters
Marriage and Family

Families were a source of identity, strength, and humanity for the slave community; masters liked it because they believed it made slaves easier to control.

- Central Structure provided by “married couples”
- Several types of marriage ceremonies:
  - “Jumping the broom” a custom that established their commitment in front of the slave community
  - Formal wedding in main house with planter and his family
  - Simple verbal agreement from owner
- Typically cross-plantation marriage
- Splitting up of families was common, this often led to serial marriages and stepfamilies

Role of Women:
- Expected to maintain home and nurture children in addition to manual labor
- Began having children young, around age of 13
- Frequently sexually assaulted by masters
- Common for women to have premarital intercourse until first child, then would enter marriage or long term relationship
Marriage and Family, cont.

- Extended families determined social norms: who was allowed to marry (no sibling incest, no collateral cousin marriage), inheritance of property, where newlyweds would live
- Godparenthood became a significant part of culture
  - Formal relationship between adults, strengthened social ties
  - Close friend to support and provide for child

Maintaining Social Norms:
- Communities had no policing or communal self government of their own
- Familial conformity enforced by normal social pressure, but occasionally also witchcraft, violence to guarantee community peace and welfare
- Aggrieved adults who could not directly confront their opponents could do so through witchcraft, kept conflict within acceptable levels
Housing and Organization

Small black villages on large plantations
- Included African and American born slaves, family, kin groups, and new arrivals from many locations
- Helped create African American communities and culture in the Americas through exposure to different African beliefs.

17th and 18th century
- Usually planters made slaves construct their homes out of straw and mud
- Slaves could choose design and they were usually grouped around a communal area
- Usually traditional African styles
- Continued on smaller plantations and farms

Capitalized sugar plantations 18th and 19th century
- Planters had control over the design of houses
- Motivated by fear of fire and wanted more control, uniformity, and better hygiene
- Attached houses and barracks made of brick and mortar and had windows
- Slaves usually organized themselves in the barracks- families lived together, and unattached men and women had their own quarters
Housing and Organization cont.

Cuba sugar estates 19th century

Barracones- dormitories with one guarded exit
Super controlling and anti-communal
Didn’t last long and went to senzalas: long rectangles divided into family units and bachelor units

Oftentimes, slaves were provided with a garden for food- conucos
Basis for a peasant lifestyle
All adults had access and sometimes could sell excess on the market
Sometimes old and young worked these small gardens
Only allowed to work on these during free time on Sundays and Holidays
One of the first demands made by slaves was more time and land for their gardens
European peasant layout- Houses in the middle of land for farming
What were the religious traditions within Afro-American culture?
Previous to the antebellum period, culture was mainly expressed through oral traditions
  ○ A self identity paved the way for an alternative religious system to develop
  ○ European Christianity became the most dominant religion in most places
    ■ In Cuba, Haiti, and Brazil, and Afro-American plantations
    ■ Spirit possession, polytheistic beliefs and visionary experiences characterized many West African religions
  ○ Religious vocabulary was mainly Christian but was adapted to environmental influences
● Mixed religious ideals were incorporated into slave preaching
● Religion viewed from the master’s perspective was seen as method to control slaves
● Slaves conversion experiences viewed as foundation for their faith
  ○ God replaced authoritative role of Master, obedience to God
● Beliefs based on slaves and ex-slaves tales gendered large body of folk tales
  ○ Folk beliefs and supernatural beliefs, associated with witchcraft were part of mainly internal religious traditions
● Slaves developed a synthesized complex beliefs which related to supernatural healing, to signs and omens
● Sermons of slave preachers often focused on the centrality of spiritual and human equality as a principle of Christian belief
CRUCIFIX OF SAINT ANTHONY OF PADUA
CATHOLIC ROSARY PERU, 1615
What were other aspects of Afro-American culture?
Music

- Slaves sang songs and told stories in the fields to keep their mind off of the work
- Mainly African with **European** and **Native American** influences
- Musical traditions traveled with slaves from **Africa** to New World
  - **Ring Shout**
  - **Call and response**
  - Passing down stories and songs orally was an African tradition that was brought over and kept alive because oftentimes slaves were not allowed to **write**
  - Stories and songs changed daily
- **Spirituals**- religious song sung with a leader reciting a line and/or story of a religion from memory and the others singing a chorus
  - A way to express faith, sorrows and hopes.
  - Sometimes messages of **secret meetings**, of protest, or even of an intent to escape
  - Songs often used the **Old Testament** to express the hypocrisy and injustices of slavery
"Let My People Go"

When Israel was in Egypt's land,
O, let my people go!

Oppressed so hard they could not stand,
O, let my people go!

CHORUS--O go down, Moses,
Away down to Egypt's land,
And tell king Pharaoh
To let my people go! ...

We need not always weep and mourn
O, let my people go!
And wear these Slavery chains
forlorn--
O, let my people go!
Examples of Dances and Oral Traditions

- Samba and Capoeira in Brazil
  - African rhythms brought to Brazil through importation of slaves
  - **Samba** is a style of music with African, **Portuguese** and **Native American** styles
  - **Capoeira** is a martial art incorporating music and dance
- Often dancing and singing were **feared** by ruling class, leading to many bans on music
  - 1739 South Carolina went so far as to prohibit the beating of drums for fear that their rhythms would be used to incite **rebellions**
- Put African styles into useful items like quilts, baskets, bowls, and musical instruments
  - Patterns into quilts
  - Weaving styles into baskets and bowls
- Made drums, rattles, and **banjos** out of gourds modeled after African instruments
Capoeira
Berimbau


https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=1&v=6H0D8Vall0
Art and Recreation

- Didn’t have much free time- only on parts of Holidays and Sundays
- Conucos (gardens)
- Stories and storytelling
  - Rabbits were used in African stories to represent tricksters
- Weaving clothes(mostly women for themselves)

African styles and traditions were strongest in slave communities earlier in the slave trade, fading as slaves became more assimilated

Brer Rabbit?
“In the face of systematic legal and cultural degradation, they (slaves) re-affirmed their humanity through family and through faith. Sometimes carving out an identity in a social order that is constantly seeking to dehumanize you, is the most powerful form of resistance.”

- John Green
Kahoot: