African Names and Naming Practices:

The Impact Slavery and European Domination had on the African Psyche,

Identity and Protest

THESIS

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By

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Abstract

This study on African naming practices during slavery and its aftermath examines the centrality of names and naming in creating, suppressing, retaining and reclaiming African identity and memory. Based on recent scholarly studies, it is clear that several elements of African cultural practices have survived the oppressive onslaught of slavery and European domination. However, most historical inquiries that explore African culture in the Americas have tended to focus largely on retentions that pertain to cultural forms such as religion, dance, dress, music, food, and language leaving out, perhaps, equally important aspects of cultural retentions in the African Diaspora, such as naming practices and their psychological significance. In this study, I investigate African names and naming practices on the African continent, the United States and the Caribbean, not merely as elements of cultural retention, but also as forms of resistance – and their importance to the construction of identity and memory for persons of African descent. As such, this study examines how European colonizers attacked and defiled African names and naming systems to suppress and erase African identity – since names not only aid in the construction of identity, but also concretize a people’s collective memory by recording the circumstances of their experiences. Thus, to obliterate African collective memories and identities, the colonizers assigned new names to the Africans or even left them nameless, as a way of subjugating and committing them to perpetual servitude. In response, my research investigates how African descendants on the continent and throughout the Diaspora resisted this process of obliteration of their memories and how they deployed the practice of naming for survival in such a hostile environment. Therefore, this study not only focuses on the deliberate attempt made by European colonizers to obliterate African memory and instill a sense of shame within the African community, but also the various ways Africans resisted and sought to
maintain their identity through names and naming practices, and the important role names played in their lives – both on the African continent and throughout the Diaspora.
Dedication

This paper is dedicated to my mother, Annette, and father, Leslie Snr., my brother, Leslie Jr., and my sister, Leslie-Anne. To my maternal grandmother Thelma and grandfather Carl as constant reminders of the miraculous Tree of Life that also gave birth to my deceased paternal grandparents Violet and Peter, and all my other ancestors, who paved the way for me to tell their story – my beloved ancestors whose names were seized, hidden, retained and reclaimed. And to my brothers and sisters in the movement towards the liberation and empowerment of humanity…
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Introduction

*Nothing on this earth –
and in much of the heavens – exists without a name.*

African and African Diasporic scholars alike have conducted research, and engaged in discourse on African names and naming practices both on the African continent and throughout the Diaspora. Scholars studying slavery, and its aftermath, have wondered what happened to the names that enslaved Africans had prior to their captivity and transshipment to the New World, and what impact and implication the obliteration of such names had on the psyche of these Africans.

This study, therefore, adopts a historical and comparative approach into exploring and investigating the spiritual and psychological significance of African names and naming practices on the continent prior to the *European invasion* in the early 15th century, and takes a contemporary look at such naming practices among African peoples. It compares and contrasts the naming practices of the imperial European powers, while scrutinizing the aims of slavery and colonialism, and how these would jointly have devastating impressions on the African psyche. Further, it examines the many ways Africans have retained, resisted, and reclaimed their African names and practices in the ghastly face of colonial domination, oppression, and discrimination in select regions on the African continent, the United States, and in the Caribbean.

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The study is a fertile area for investigative research into how African names and naming practices have been disrupted by the inhumane and unjust systems of slavery and colonialism, which were instituted on the African continent and throughout the Diaspora by the Europeans; especially, as these African names, typically, held spiritual reverence. For example, my own Zambian name, at birth, Liseli means God’s Divine Light; and my Yoruba designations, through initiation, Eji-Ogbe represents The Light – all that is known and unknown in the Universe, and Olakitan, which signifies wealth as inexhaustible. It is often said that language is the main conduit that transports cultural expression and marks one’s identity. Given this premise, it will make rational sense that one of the best sources of African names and naming would come directly from oral accounts given by local African and Diasporic peoples, alike. As such, the paper is based on anecdotal oral exchanges with Diasporic Africans, and my own knowledge about African names and naming practices. Growing up in Trinidad and Tobago – a space that is rich with African retentions – I have first-hand experience on the topic having been given an African name at birth, while inheriting another through an African naming ceremony within the past year.²

² Trinidad was a late starter in the Plantation system - the majority of the slave population was African born – Yoruba, Hausa, Congo, Ibo, Rada, Mandingo, Kromanti (Koromantyn) and Temne, although some slaves came from other Caribbean islands, they were considered ‘creole’. Following emancipation, immigrant Africans would continue to come to island to trade and eventually inhabit, bringing with them their various indigenous cultures. See Hollis Liverpool’s Rituals of Power & Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad & Tobago, 1763-1962 (Frontline Distribution International, 2001).
Literature Review

The first study is centered on the oral tradition of Calypso. Striking at the heart of my study on African names and naming, and the impact European domination had on the African psyche is a contribution by a Calypso artiste of Trinidad and Tobago, the late Cecil Hume, whose sobriquet was The Maestro. Well respected for his insightfulness as a modern day griot, The Maestro immortalized in his signature song – Black Identity – a berating of the denigration of Africans by stripping them of their name and true mark of identity:

“The first thing that is a shame African people with European name…. If yuh hear Seecharan, Ramkhalawan, Lalchan, Balchan, Well bet yuh life that is an East Indian man! Jose, Juan, Gonzalez, Manuel, Sanchez, Pablo, Yuh sure dem fellas from Mexico! So why my name couldn’t be N-jaca [satire on the local black conscious movement NJAC], Lumumba, Makeba, or Kenyatta? If we use these names then we sure to be on the stairway to true Black Identity.

Now some people walk round in Dashiki, some preach Ashanti, some Swahili, But when they dead, go and look at dey tombstone – Is Patterson, Atkinson, Jackson, Calhearn That is counterfeit identity, These people must be lost in world history.”
(Maestro, Black Identity, 1973)

In this particular song, the Calypso bard made clever reference to different ethnicities, and their easy recognition based on indigenous names, quite unlike the African man and woman. Incidentally, the roots of calypso have been traced back to Africa from where it was transported,
transposed, and transformed on the plantations of the Caribbean during slavery. The Calypso was not only used by the enslaved Africans to heap scorn on the slave masters, and to lament their own dreadful life, but it also mirrored the society. As a result of slavery and European domination, the Africans were largely debarred from their inalienable rights to their ethnic and ancestral African identity; fundamentally, a denial to the sanctity and honor in retaining their own names as a mark of distinction similar to all the other ethnicities.

My early observation of the popular discourse and literature on African names and naming is that the focus of study is centered on the indigenous meanings of names and naming practices on the continent. African cultural practices are steeped in spiritualism, where names are sacred to the people, and their very being. Indeed, names and naming among African peoples on the continent bore spiritual, psychological, and physical significance. Literary documents such as *1,001 African Names: First and Last Names from the African Continent* by Julia Stewart offer substantive evidence on African indigenous names and naming practices that have survived periods of European invasion and colonialism on the African continent. These studies also provide a reference of African names, naming practices, and meanings for those persons of African descent on the continent and throughout the Diaspora, who are interested in asserting and reclaiming their African identity, as well as, those who may wish to pass down the practice of naming to their offspring.

Other scholars have made reference to names and naming as one broad aspect of African cultural survivals where they have merely dedicated a few lines or chapters of their books to address the topic. Scholars such as Sterling Stuckey, Michael Gomez, and Jason Young have all

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conducted extensive historical studies that illustrate how African captives were enslaved, dehumanized, and debarred from practicing any of their cultural customs. More importantly, however, their studies emphasized how certain elements of African culture survived the oppressive conditions of the slave and colonial experience in the Americas. For example, Sterling Stuckey’s pioneering study *Slave Culture* examines how enslaved African peoples in the South interacted to form a common culture due to the haphazard and brutal capture of Africans during the Slave Trade era. Drawing on a range of anthropological evidence in West and Central Africa, Stuckey compares African cultural practices and folklore with that of enslaved Africans in America. According to Stuckey, enslaved Africans in America remained, inherently, African in culture even up to emancipation. Michael Gomez’s compelling book *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* argues that the Slave Trade seized persons from various geographic locations and cultural backgrounds in Africa, and forced them to co-exist in a shared environment, having the common experience of enslavement in North America. Gomez focuses his research on the period prior to 1830, and draws upon a wide range of primary documents in Africa, anthropological findings, folklore, WPA ex-slave narratives and slave runaway advertisements to trace the origins of African cultural practices that were evident in North America. He tracks the movement of the enslaved from the coast of Africa straight into North America. According to Gomez, the conglomerates of enslaved Africans brought not only their diverse cultures with them during the Atlantic crossing, 

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but also, they exchanged country marks, which shaped a collective identity that was centered around race rather than ethnicity. This study is important, as it accounts for the assortment of African cultural practices that exist in Diasporic communities, particularly, in the context of African names and naming.

Such scholars have made cultural and practical reference to the significance and implications of names and naming among the enslaved populations. Gomez, in his book discusses the names that appeared in the advertisements of runaway slaves – some of these included names such as Sambo, Mustapha and Mamado among others. It is important to note that the religion of Islam was prevalent in West Africa prior to the Slave Trade so many Africans had Muslim names. Moreover, some of the early African captives managed to escape the onslaught on their indigenous names upon their arrival in the New World, and so, Gomez was able to use those names to trace the ethnic and geographic locations of these African captives in Africa. For example, the name Sambo means second son among the Fulbe. Few scholars, however, have gone a step further in examining names and naming trends among both the enslaved and freed populations.

Herbert Gutman’s thoroughly researched book *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom 1750-1925* closely examines the naming practices of slaves and ex-slaves in South Carolina, Louisiana, Virginia and North Carolina, and how naming was used as a cultural device in maintaining and establishing kinship and progeny among the African enslaved and freed populations. Gutman’s book, published several years after the 1965 Moynihan Report,

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7 [http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm](http://www.dol.gov/oasam/programs/history/webid-meynihan.htm)
challenges sociologist Daniel Moynihan’s (later U.S. Senator) claim that slavery and its aftermath completely destroyed the “Negro” American family. According to Moynihan, the high prevalence of single-mother families among American “Negroes” was not due to the lack of employment, but rather, was inextricably linked to the historical absence of black fathers and husbands in black family households, which he claimed could be traced back to slavery and the Jim Crow era in the United States. Gutman denies that slavery completely shattered the “Negro” family, arguing instead that despite the oppressive nature of slavery and discrimination, enslaved and freed Africans sought ways to preserve and establish a culture among themselves; and one of the ways in which they did so, was through naming. While the severance of Africans from their homeland, and their enslavement in the New World had adverse psychological, physical and cultural impacts, human beings are innately resilient creatures. It is this resiliency that enabled the enslaved population to survive and create a life and culture of their own, despite the oppressive and restrictive conditions prescribed for them under slavery.

In “The Name ‘Negro’ – Its Origin and Evil Use” Richard Moore is often quoted as saying, “when all is said and done, slaves and dogs are named by their masters, free [people] name themselves”. This analogy by Moore to the dog and slave with respect to their given names, charts the course of this study to closely explore the relationship between naming, power, and freedom. Indeed, all these historical recounts are invaluable and lay the groundwork for my research as they, nonetheless, provide the physiological and practical use of names and naming among slave-owners, slaves, and ex-slaves. However, in addition to the external physical and

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8 Ibid, 232.
physiological effects of naming, de-naming, or re-naming the African, this study will also focus attention on the long-lasting impact and implications that European systems of slavery, colonialism, and white supremacy would have had on the African psyche, as a result of the obliteration of their indigenous names and naming practices. For instance, as sung in Black Identity\textsuperscript{10}, by the pronunciation of names, one’s ethnic identity was readily known, except in the case of the colonized and enslaved Africans, whose names were altered. But how has this phenomenon also impacted the psyche of these Africans after having undergone such an impermissible act on their person?

Murray Heller and Newbell Puckett’s book \textit{Black Names in America: Origins and Usage}, closely looks into the social role of names and naming trends among early blacks in America, and reveals that by 1935 most blacks ascribed to white values, which was indicated by name usage.\textsuperscript{11} Puckett’s study provides an extensive collection of 500, 000 names, 340, 000 Black and 160, 000 White between 1619 to the mid-1940s. As such, Puckett’s invaluable research and collection of names are used in this study to highlight the naming trends among Black Americans, and their White counterparts, throughout the years.

There is a wide range of research that shows the many ways African cultural practices survived, despite the injustices and constraints during slavery and the colonial and post-colonial eras. This paper examines the central role names and naming played in shaping, retaining, maintaining, claiming, and reclaiming an African identity and community, and at the same time

show how European slave masters and colonists used names and naming to subjugate Africans and obliterate their ancestral memory.

Following the abolition of slavery, African peoples continued to experience human injustices. Not only were Africans denied access to their rich ancestry, but they have been underrepresented and grossly misrepresented in Diasporic societies, even today. Irrefutably, there is a need for more inclusion of written sources that deal with African heritage within mainstream education, as well as, literature, which focuses on the impact that centuries of European domination and barbarism had on the African psyche and culture, and the broader implications, at present. In addition to acknowledging the devastating effects of slavery and its aftermath, there is urgent need to, also, truthfully examine the various cultural identities, behavioral patterns, and practices of the oppressed populations of enslaved Africans, who were subjected to such tyranny. It is necessary to observe and celebrate the resiliency, persistence, and significant contributions Africans made in shaping the fabric of society as a means of addressing some of the psychological and social issues that, continually, emerge not only as a result of slavery and colonialism, but also as a result of the subsequent years of racial injustices, and the mis-education that prevail in these societies.

While it may be considered a work of fiction, one cannot help but observe in the epic film and novel *Roots*, the many scenes of savagery meted out to the protagonist in his struggles to maintain his African name *Kunta Kinte*. In his defiance and seeming disobedience to * massa*, simply by wishing to be called only by the name he knew, he was hog-tied, in shackles, flogged, brutally beaten, and maimed. The cruelty he endured in the innocent quest to retain his birth name could scarcely leave any human being without deep emotional scars, bitterness, acrimony,
depression, and sadness, to say the least. The paper, therefore, traces the origins of indigenous African names and naming by drawing on a number of primary works, which include slave records, wills, photos and a collection of anecdotal oral testimonies, as it examines the impact the *Middle Passage*, slavery and colonialism had on the African psyche.

The works of those who took the time to document indigenous African names and naming among various ethnic groups across the African continent often go unmentioned as, usually, there will be no lengthy written record of such works.\textsuperscript{12} There are important studies on African names and naming, in particular, that have significantly shaped the course of my research. In *1,001 African Names: First and Last Names from the African Continent* Julia Stewart offers an analysis of indigenous first and last names, and naming practices throughout the African continent to emphasize the centrality of such names and practices in the lives of Africans. Stewart provides African names from over twenty-five countries and a variety of ethnic cultures in Africa for persons of African descent, who were either forced to adopt or given Western names during colonial-era slavery and its aftermath, and wish to assert their African identity through the reclamation of African names. In her book, Stewart devotes a short chapter on modern naming trends among African peoples, particularly, among African-Americans who have undergone name changes during the late 1960s and 1970s in a continued movement of re-naming and self-identification.\textsuperscript{13}

In *African Names and Naming* Jonathan Musere and Shirley C. Byakutaga utilize a


different investigative approach by focusing on the relationship between African names and proverbs. According to these authors, the subject of names related to proverbs is little written about, though it is an intriguing and important aspect of African names.¹⁴ Musere and Byakutaga argue that most previous studies lacked philosophical insight and discussion on the application of African names and naming, and offered simplistic definitions of names, thus having a limited scope. As such, they sought to fill the gap and stimulate further investigation in what they considered a neglected field of inquiry.¹⁵ Their research is, therefore, used to provide another point of reference on indigenous African names.

In many ways, this thesis seeks to build upon an old historiographic argument and offers new insight on African cultural retentions as it pertains to the centrality of names and naming. In the late 1930s and 1940s, sociologist E. Franklin Frazier and anthropologist Melville Herskovits engaged in a public and lengthy debate over the issue of whether people of African descent in the Americas had retained any aspects of their African culture. Frazier asserts that American enslavement was so damaging and traumatizing to Africans that all elements and cultural memory of African heritage were destroyed. In sharp contrast to Frazier’s view, Edward Brathwaite explains:

“There has been the persistent and established theory, which contends that the Middle Passage completely destroyed the culture of the African slaves, and such was the catastrophic and definitive experience that none of those transported during the period from 1540 to 1840 escaped trauma. But modern research is pointing to a denial of this, showing that African culture not only crossed the

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¹⁵ Ibid.
Atlantic, but also survived, and creatively adapted themselves to its new environment.”\textsuperscript{16}

Again, Melville Herskovits’ groundbreaking thesis \textit{The Myth of the Negro Past} sought to challenge the notion that the culture of African peoples was primitive, and produced evidence on the survivals of African cultures in Brazil, and the Caribbean.\textsuperscript{17}

Although it is a truism that African cultures were vastly disrupted as a result of the brutal removal of Africans from Africa – transshipped, and enslaved in a new and strange land, there is strong evidence that Africanisms were retained, which may be found deeply rooted in the slave naming practices. Therefore, before researchers like Moynihan could proffer claims that problems associated with the black family are inextricably linked to the period of enslavement, more so, that slavery completely destroyed the black family, and Africans were \textit{tabula rasa} when they arrived in the New World, it is important to trace the cultural practices, which existed on the African continent before colonial imperialism and the Slave Trade. It is also necessary to examine the adaptive mechanisms used by Africans in the New World such as naming practices to understand how they survived under the oppressive systems of enslavement, and adjusted to their strange environments.

In “Naming and Linguistic Africanisms in African American Culture” Mphande states that Herskovits’ findings on African survivals were derived primarily from Caribbean and South American experiences, and used West Africa as the exclusive base for the origin of Africanisms.\textsuperscript{18} According to Mphande, by focusing solely on West Africa as the basis for

\textsuperscript{17} Melville Herskovits, \textit{The Myth of the Negro Past}, (Harper & Brothers. 1941).
\textsuperscript{18} Mphande. “Naming and Linguistic Africanisms in African American Culture”,104-105.
Africanisms in the New World, Herskovits limits the parameters and applicability of his study.\textsuperscript{19} Mphande makes reference to later studies that have extended the area of enquiry of Africanisms on the continent, and throughout Diasporic cultures, which have served to inform this study in significant ways.\textsuperscript{20} Mphande cites scholars such Michael Gomez and Walter Rucker\textsuperscript{21} who claim that a vast majority of Africans were seized from West and Central African cultures and transported to the New World during the Slave Trade period to emphasize the wide range of cultures that crossed the Atlantic.\textsuperscript{22}

Building upon the work of Sterling Stuckey, Herbert Gutman, Lupenga Mphande et al., I have explored the many ways African peoples managed to retain elements of their African cultural ancestry, and how the sacred and integral practice of naming took shape throughout the abominable histories of European domination and white supremacy.

In his article, Mphande introduces another important area of investigation, as he mentions ways in which Diasporic Africans named elements in their new environment such as food, music, dance, animals, and places.\textsuperscript{23} Despite the fact that enslaved Africans were often refused the right of naming themselves, they, nonetheless, channeled their innate rights by bestowing names upon things in the environment.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[19] Ibid.
\item[23] Ibid., 106-107.
\end{footnotes}
Joane Nagel’s “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture” is considered, as she examines the formation and recreation of identity and culture as the basis for ethnic construction, which is very relevant to the study of the adoption of African names and naming practices in a Diasporic context, and its impact on consciousness and identity formation, particularly, during the Black Power Era and its aftermath.24

A similar approach is being carried out in this study for the Caribbean and North America where Diasporic cultures and communities exist.25 In “Names and Naming in Afro-Caribbean Cultures” Richard Burton uses a collection of primary sources such as plantation journals, ship logs and baptism records to compile his article on naming trends in the Caribbean and North America during plantation slavery and the post-emancipation era. In his article, Burton argues that the Afro-creole culture was an oppositional culture rather than a culture of resistance.26 By this, Burton means that Africans – enslaved and free – in their new environment, rather than retain their indigenous names, they often moved towards adopting the names of their powerful masters or famous European personalities. His research has been, particularly, useful for my study, as there is evidence that enslaved Africans also consciously resisted against white supremacy in overtly and covertly retaining their African names, though this phenomenon would dissolve throughout the years. Burton offers substantial data that attest Africans adopted more European-style names following emancipation, while some opted for new names.

During the Black Power Era in the 1960s-1970s and a few years prior, many African Americans and Afro-Caribbean individuals went through a process of self-identification and re-naming, and adopted names which were more in line with their African heritage. According to Mphande, although “the process of re-naming among African-Americans began at the dawn of American history…the most visible outburst of African name reclamation came with the Civil Rights movement in 1960s, the high profiles of the people involved in this naming exercise gave the process prestige.”

William L. Van Deburg’s *New Day in Babylon The Black Power Movement and American Culture 1965-1975* examines the Black Power paradigm and the collective thrust made by Black Power activists toward racial pride, self-reliance and self-definition, which evolved into the Black Power Movement. In his book he explores the cultural expressions of the Black Power, and the revolt in and of culture where the adoption of African names played a significant role.

Frantz Fanon avers in *Black Skin, White Masks* that colonized minds become alienated from their own culture and identity by speaking the language of the colonizer. Since language is the carrier of culture, Frantz Fanon contends that to take on a language at the expense of your own is to appropriate its world and culture. In the same way, historian Raphael Powell in *Human Side Of A People And The Right Name* says that the name belongs to the language of the one who has power – the one who controls the culture and the land. In *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* Stokely Carmichael and Charles Hamilton avow that black liberation could not be achieved through the traditional political processes, which existed in the U.S., but

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rather through the creation and organization of their own political systems. Accordingly, they rejected co-optation and endorsed Black Nationalism.

These studies provide accounts on the general mood and movements of Africans as they reclaimed their ancestral names, and have been used as source material in the primary references of the more contemporary naming trends among African peoples, and the ways in which Diasporic Africans sought to assert their ancestral identity, thereby, further invoking an African consciousness. Additional sources include Ben Martin’s article “From Negro to Black to African: The Power of Names and Naming” that examines the power of names and the politics of naming in an American context. Specifically, the article looks at ethnic consciousness and racial assertiveness that became more pronounced during the Black Power era, the announcement of African American as a “new ethnicity” and the move from being called Negro to Black to African, as the title of the article suggests, as well as its impact on the African psyche, and the political arena. Martin argues that “Names can be more than tags; they can convey powerful imagery. So naming – proposing, imposing, and accepting names – can be a political exercise.” He says that for blacks to be called African-American possessed deeper meaning. Martin cites Jesse Jackson, who at a December 1988 news conference in Chicago said, “To be called African-Americans has cultural integrity. It puts us in our proper historical context. Every ethnic group in this country has a reference to some land base, some historical cultural base.”

“Distinctive African American Names: An Experimental, Historical and Linguistic Analysis of Innovation”, a study done by Stanley Lieberson and Kelly S. Mikelson, offers

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31 Ibid, 83.
compelling insights into the increase in the creation of unusual names among African-Americans and mentions the role that the Black Power Era and related events played in intensifying African American names. In this study, Lieberson and Mikelson use race-specific data to measure the frequency of unique names among African American and White girls and boys in Illinois, 1916-1989. Their statistics reveal that African American parents were more likely than White parents to give their children unique names. Drawing upon previous studies such as Puckett et al., Lieberson and Mikelson report that there is enough evidence that supports the view that African American invented names, “are, at least in part, historical derivations from African practices and/or simply reflect a contemporary surge of interest in Africa among African Americans.”

Inversely, they contend, “…African origins do influence naming, but these influences do not operate in a societal vacuum and are modified by the existing practices within the dominant society.” While this argument bears truth, Africans – enslaved and free – did not all simply give in to the dominant culture but found creative ways to adapt in their new environment thereby shaping the very fabric of mainstream American culture as they found ways to retain key elements of their culture in names and naming practices. Lieberson and Mikelson propose the need for there to be a “before-and-after analysis” of what happened to African names and the practice of naming, when Africans were brought into the New World as a result of slavery and colonialism, and the clash of cultures.

The punitive measures which European colonizers, slavers, and slave masters enforced, sought to prohibit African names and naming practices, and this became the focus of

34 Ibid, 943.
35 Ibid..
investigation on the impact of slavery and European domination on the African psyche and culture. Ali Mazrui in *The Africans: A Triple Heritage* discusses the consequences of the European intrusion and imposition of different naming cultures on indigenous Africans. He also mentions the advent of Islam on the African continent, and the resulting shift in naming cultures. Further, Mazuri examines the indigenization of African names during the Pan-Africanist era in response to European Christian names, where to Africans the name signifies the spirit. He says, “Personal names are inseparable from the issue of identity”.³⁶ Linda Myers’s *Understanding an Afrocentric World View: Introduction to an Optimal Psychology* affirms that among Africans the spirit and material are the same – one. As such, Myers’s book is used in conjunction with Joy Leary’s *Posttraumatic Slave Syndrome and Counseling Persons of African Descent: Raising the Bar of Practitioner Competence* to study the psychological implications of the slavery for enslaved Africans, and their progeny, and the stigmatization of their names and identity in a Eurocentric environment.³⁷

Lastly, the recent MIT-Chicago 2002 study entitled: “*Are Emily and Brendon More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment On Labor Market Discrimination*” examines labor market discrimination against persons who possess ethnic names. The study is used in my research to provide quantitative evidence of discrimination against persons with African-American sounding names during the job application phase in the United States.

However, what is missing from the literature above is a central focus on the psychological impact that the annihilation of African names had on the African identity and

experience on the continent and throughout the Diaspora. Most of the aforementioned studies have tended to focus primarily on the cultural significance and implications of names and naming with little reference on the African psyche. I have not yet found a body of research that has discussed, extensively, the psychological impact of European imperialism on the African self, being, and identity resulting from the obliteration of their indigenous African names and the forced adoption of Spanish, British, French, Portuguese, and Dutch names, references, labels, or titles. In an article entitled “African American Names: A Brief Literature Review With Implications for Future Research”, Lori Sheppard et al. admit that there is an urgent need to now study the psychological impacts of names, and have provided several studies that look at different aspects concerning names and naming trends in the United States, and the stigmatization attached to unusual names. However, none of the studies has examined the psychological importance and history of names and naming among Africans, and the impact of slavery and its aftermath. In this context, it should also be noted that names and naming not only hold spiritual and psychological significance, but they also map the histories of people, places, and events. This study, therefore, seeks to explore how the obliteration of African names and naming practices by European colonizers served to inject a sense of shame and legacy of inferiority among Africans and African descendants in the New World. It encourages Africans to embrace their heritage and rise up against blatant and latent racism, as there is the current debate that parents who give their children African American-sounding names are acting irresponsibly given the negative impressions that mainstream society has with such names.

The study is part of an ongoing quest to stimulate African consciousness through emphasizing the centrality of African names and naming practices in the empowerment of the African psyche. It looks closely at the roles political movements, namely, the Black Power Movement played in shaping an African consciousness and identity by the adoption of African names, in post-colonial times. The study is both linear and non-linear in nature as it crosses both time and space to investigate names and naming practices and trends throughout the African continent, as well as world history. As such, it is divided into four parts, each of which examines the importance of names and naming in the lives of continental and Diasporic Africans. The following chapters demonstrate the deliberate attempts made by European colonizers to annihilate African memory and identity, and explore the ways in which Africans developed ingenious methods of resistance through names and naming practices.

Chapter 1: “African Names and Naming Practices” explores the myriad of African indigenous names and naming practices in Sub-Saharan Africa in an attempt to trace their origins and significance on the African continent. Contemporary books on African naming practices, names, and their traditional meanings have been referenced in this study to show the integral and diverse roles names and naming played in the lives of Africans throughout the continent, and Diaspora. The first chapter examines the available published sources in African names and naming and the few fieldworks that have been done by scholars in African linguistics, onamastics and anthropology.

Chapter 2: “European Invasion: The impact of Slavery and Colonialism” examines the impact that slavery and colonial domination had on African names and naming practices throughout the African Diaspora and on the continent. Drawing upon primary sources such as
slave records that include ship logs, baptism records, plantation journals, auction and runaway posters, manumission records and wills, the chapter affirms that names and naming played a pivotal role in the power struggle that ensued between European colonizers/slave owners and enslaved Africans as the former sought to claim ownership of the African, and the latter as s/he fought to retain identity. For the enslaved Africans, names and the practice of naming held special significance, which began as well as flourished in their homeland. However, upon arrival in the New World, Africans were often barred from exercising their right to name and the practice of their indigenous customs. As such, this chapter will explore the different strategies employed by slave masters to vilify and dehumanize Africans through the use of names and naming, and, simultaneously, show how Africans resisted and responded to those restrictions.

In Chapter 3: “African Names: Identity and Protest”, I maintain that the adoption of African names by revolutionary minded Blacks during the Black Power Era (1965-1975) both in the U.S. and the Caribbean evoked a pronounced sense of African consciousness. Certainly, there were percolating events prior to 1965 that led to the heightened call for black consciousness and identity among Diasporic Africans as well as those on the continent, in addition to individual actions taken by revolutionary minded persons in the U.S. and in the Caribbean, namely, Trinidad and Tobago that fueled black pride.

The Black Power Revolution in Trinidad, in 1970, is regarded as a crucial juncture in the shaping of black identity and consciousness, as many men and women abandoned their European names for African names and adopted and advocated for the adoption, inclusion and acknowledgement of African culture by the dominant society. Victoria Pasley’s “The Black Power Movement in Trinidad: An Exploration of Gender and Cultural Changes and the
Development of a Feminist Consciousness” offers an historical insight into the emergence of the Black Power Movement in Trinidad as she examines gender consciousness, and the cultural shifts that took shape as Afro-Trinidadians fought for African consciousness and racial justice. In this context, I not only seek to demonstrate how the adoption of African names aided in the construction of identity, but also how it concretized a people’s collective memory by recording the circumstances of their experiences. I have made reference to these available sources to reinforce the point that the European colonizer did seek to obliterate African collective memories by assigning them new names as a way of subjugating them, and consigning them to servitude. Given this historical context, the chapter addresses questions, such as, how did African descendants in the Caribbean and in the U.S. resist this process of the obliteration of their memories and African identity?

The chapter examines: (i) the impetus for the adoption of African names by revolutionary minded Blacks during the Black Power era both in the U.S. and Caribbean; (ii) how the adoption of African names impacted the formation and recreation of individual and ethnic identities; (iii) the ways in which Blacks went about changing their legally registered names to their newly acquired African names e.g. how practical and challenging was the process of changing one’s name; what were some of the reactions one faced following the adoption of African names; were they accepted by family members and the wider society; how widespread was the adoption of names; and (iv) how the adoption of African names during the Black Power era challenged white hegemony and revolutionize their surroundings by inserting a pronounced African presence, namely in the U.S. and the Caribbean? Moreover, what life-changing consequence did the

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adoption of an African name have on the African psyche e.g. did the name change bring about a
greater sense of self, belongingness and consciousness? All these aspects have been examined to
assess the impact the adoption of African names and naming practices had on the African psyche
and society, as well as the many ways in which names and naming were used to erase African
ancestral identity and memory, and at the same time, serve as a means of cultural retention and
resistance against racial oppression.

It is anticipated that this chapter will provide a deeper understanding and wider
awareness of African names and naming practices, and their central role in establishing an
African identity; and later on, resistance to the prevailing Eurocentric dominance and political
landscape. It intends to show how Blacks in the U.S. and the Caribbean asserted their ancestral
identities through the adoption of African names, and the impact such naming practices had on
African consciousness and presence in a Eurocentric dominated environment.

Chapter 4: “Discrimination, Stigmatization and Researching African Ancestry” closely
analyzes contemporary naming trends among Africans, and some of the systemic and individual
forms of racism and stigmatization that Diasporic Africans encounter as a result of having an
African-sounding name. Further, it looks at additional issues that surface when Diasporic
Africans seek to research their genealogy – tracing his/her ancestral lineage and identity, and the
physical and psychological difficulties persons of African descent face in such laborious and
racially biased pursuits.

Ultimately, the study seeks to shed light on African names and naming practices and how
these cultural elements have been impacted by European invasion, as well as, the effects such
would have on the African peoples, at home, and in the Diaspora in terms of identity, memory,
and their claim to genealogy. In this regard, the study looks at how African names and naming survived under the monstrosities of European domination, and as they came into contact with other cultures. In so doing, the project adopts qualitative methods with a reliance on some quantitative data gathered by other scholars in the field. It seeks to draw important connections between previous studies on this topic by refining the focus on the critical role names and naming played in the oppression and liberation of enslaved Africans, and how important African names are today to the psychology of Africans, as well as bringing about racial balance in Eurocentric societies.
Chapter 1: African Names and Naming Practices

*When a person is given a name, the spirits accept it.*  
- *Ibo proverb*

The African continent is a vast landmass comprising diverse peoples, ethnic groups, cultures, some 2000 languages, stunning landscapes, and 54 countries. Admittedly, while Africans are by no means a monolithic people, given their varied components “when it comes to indigenous naming practices there are common threads that can be traced” throughout this rich tapestry of peoples and their cultures.\(^\text{40}\) There is a spirituality that binds African people together, and guides their physical existence. In the African cultural worldview, the essential ingredient and essence of everything, including humans, is spirit.\(^\text{41}\) For Africans your name is your soul – your name has celestial powers and embodies spirit. This chapter focuses on indigenous African names and naming practices on the continent to show the importance of names and naming among African peoples.

According to the teachings of African spirituality, “when one bestows a name upon a child that person is not simply naming the flesh of the child, but rather the name is for the person’s soul.”\(^\text{42}\) This belief in naming also applies to how Africans give names to animals, places, and things – as Africans generally hold the view that everything embodies spirit, and is, therefore, given a name. It is very much in keeping with the sentiments expressed in a song

\(^{40}\) Stewart, *1,001 African Names*, 3.  
\(^{42}\) Sharon Bernhardt (Samaki), *African Names – Reclaim Your Heritage*, (South Africa: Struik Publisher, 2001), 7.
entitled “Colors of the Wind”, which is taken from the soundtrack album of one of my all-time favorite Walt Disney movies Pocahontas that says “…every rock and tree and creature, has a life, has a spirit, has a name.” This chapter, therefore, takes a look at some of the naming practices and patterns in Southern West, West Central and Southern Africa, and also addresses the influence Islam had on African names and naming systems, as early as the 7th century.

Among the Zulus and other Nguni-speaking people of South Africa, the word for name is igama ‘your symbol’ – its original meaning being a symbol engraved upon a flat stone. In some early African societies, when a child was given a name, the symbolic meaning of the child’s name was painted on a round pebble in red or black pigment, and this symbol was kept for as long as the person lived. Upon death, the “named-pebble” was broken into two pieces and returned to earth’s bed – transcending back into the spiritual realm. In some cases, as described in Sharon Bernhardt’s African Names – Reclaim Your Heritage, the name was incised with a sharp stone on a piece of hard wood, and when the person died, the carved symbol was ceremoniously burnt in a fire that was lit especially for that purpose. In other practices, once the person is dead, that person’s name is seldom spoken saved by close relatives, and still there is a special way in which this is done.

Southern Africa

Among Northern Sotho -, Southern Sotho-, and Batswana-speaking people in South Africa, a person’s name held immense spiritual power, so much so that it was extremely important to conceal your true name until tremendous trust was built between yourself and another person, then and only then your true name would be revealed. It was believed that if an

43 Ibid..
44 Ibid..
enemy wanted to hurt you all they needed to do was simply reverse your name. For example, if your name was *Lesedi*, which in Tswana or Sotho means ‘light’, and an adversary wanted to cause harm to you, all s/he needed to do was reverse your name to *Lefifi*, which means ‘darkness’.\(^{45}\) Thus, it was customary to have multiple names in addition to the true or sacred name in which you were given at birth.\(^{46}\)

*Leena*, which is the word for name among Batswana- and Sotho-speaking people, literally, means staying, remaining behind, and immortality – its practical definition means all that stays behind after your death.\(^{47}\) Thus, your name represents your immortality. This concept readily acknowledges the Afrocentric worldview, or *utamawazo*, and explains how African peoples on the continent, and later throughout the Diaspora, experience reality as a union between both the spiritual and the material.\(^{48}\) For Africans, the spirit is omnipresent. All matter is a physical manifestation of spirit – spirit, which exists both within and without. *Spirit* embodies the physical and is embodied by the physical – it possesses infinite energy. Spirit exists before, after, and beyond material existence.\(^{49}\) It follows, therefore, that the name, which is bestowed upon a child bears immortal energy.

**West Africa**

The Akan-speaking people of Ghana tend to name their children based on the day of the week they were born, that is, the day the ‘soul’ incarnates the body. For example, a boy, who was born on Monday, was given the name Kwadwo/Kojo; and, similarly, a girl who was born on

\(^{45}\) Ibid., 7-8.

\(^{46}\) A similar concept of names and naming can be witnessed among the Saramaka Maroons (“Bush Negroes”) of Suriname today. They believe in having sacred names, which they refer to as *gaan ne* and means “true” or “big” names that must be kept private. Most of their names are derived from various African languages.

\(^{47}\) Ibid..

\(^{48}\) Myers. *Understanding an Afrocentric World View*.

\(^{49}\) Parham, *Counseling Persons of African Descent*.  

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that day, as in my case, was bestowed the name Adwoa where each day carried its own characteristics. For instance, a child that was born on a Monday would have nurturing traits, protective of the home, and was considered to be reliable. The following table provides a list of Akan day names and their appellation.

Table 1. Akan Day Names and Their Appellation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DAY NAME</th>
<th>MALE NAMES</th>
<th>FEMALE NAMES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Twi</td>
<td>Fante</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKAN</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sunday</td>
<td>Kwasiada</td>
<td>Kwesi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kwasi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>Adwoa/Adwoa</td>
<td>Kojo/Kojo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>Kwabena</td>
<td>Kobina/Ebo/Kwamena</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>Wukuada</td>
<td>Kwaku/Kwakku</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Kwaku</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thursday</td>
<td>Yawoada</td>
<td>Yao/Ekow</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friday</td>
<td>Efiada/ofi</td>
<td>Kofi/Fifi/Fi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saturday</td>
<td>Memeneda</td>
<td>Kwame/Kwame/Kwamina/Ato</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In *The Significance of Names in Ghanaian Drama* Abu Ahardow Abarry explores the meanings of Ghanaian names, and naming from Euro-American cultures. Abarry cites W.E. Abraham who says that, “the names of peoples, objects, spirits, and God [in African cultures] tend to emanate from an inter-play of religious, mythical, social, and historical realities.” For example, a child that is predestined to cyclical birth and death is named *Bejina* (come and stay), and likewise, a child whose paternity is unknown, or who is born to aging parents is called *Nyame Kye* (God’s Gift). This practice of naming was also similar among other peoples in West Africa such as the Hausa, Ewe, Igbo/Ibo, and Diasporic Africans who were either seized during the Slave Trade era, or migrated from these regions to the Americas.

Among the Yoruba people of Nigeria, newborns are named at a naming ceremony seven days after the birth – within those days the child’s name is carefully considered and chosen based on the circumstances surrounding the child’s birth. Askhari Hodari in her book *The African Book*

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52 Ibid.
of Names states that the people of Nigeria say, “We consider the state of our affairs before we name a child.” Usually, the child gets his/her name from the father; however, mothers and grandparents also play an important role in bestowing a name. In fact, oftentimes it is the names selected by the grandparents and great-grandparents that are given preference. Yoruba names are generally classified into two main groups the first being the “Oruko Amutorunwa” or the destiny name, which is the name that was bestowed from the heavens, and the second classification being the acquired or assumed name – the name often given by a grandparent or close relative on earth. Giving birth to twins is also a special occasion for the Yoruba people, a mother who gives birth to twins is considered to be abundantly blessed. The first born of twins is named Taiwo, while the second born is given the name Kehinde, which are both destiny names. Taiwo means the one who comes first, and perceives the world for the one who comes after, Kehinde.

Also, among the Yoruba people, there is the Oriki, which is a praise song that is recited when a child is given a name and describes the child’s future, as well as the child’s purpose in life. The oriki also documents the achievements of individuals and ethnic groups – depending on its use, the oriki will vary in length. It is often invoked when praising a child for bringing honor to the parents, or when attempting to evoke virtuous traits that are considered innate in a person as a result of his/her incarnation. The Zulu name for oriki is izibongo.

Naming a child after the seventh day is common among the Edo ethnic group of Western Nigeria. The naming ceremony usually commences before 10:00 a.m., where family members, elders, and intimate friends gather, offering their prayers to God for longevity, good health, and prosperity for the child and its parents. Usually, the elders present the child’s father with the

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family name. Oracular consultations and divination often precede this phase. The main “naming ceremony” resumes at 7:00 p.m., and is attended by elders of the family, and their friends both male and female, although the event largely comprises female attendees. There are also several items that are usually offered up to the child’s ancestors, which bear deep significance in the child’s life. Examples of these items include bitter kola nuts, and honey and sugar so that the child experiences sweet things in life and good oratorical qualities. The bitter kola nut is added to bring balance and duality to the child’s experience.

**West Central Africa**

Gomez in *Exchanging Our Country Marks* provides evidence that many Africans, who were kidnapped and enslaved in the New World, came from the West Central region of Africa. Referring to West Central Africa, Gomez says “Regarding the whole transatlantic trade, the contribution of the region was huge, constituting some 40 percent of Africans transported to the New World between 1500 and 1870, with most going to Brazil.”\(^54\) These included the Bantu–speaking peoples of the Congo and Angola. Hollis Liverpool in his book *Rituals of Power & Rebellion: The Carnival Tradition in Trinidad & Tobago, 1763-1962* reveals that a sizeable amount of native-born Congolese population inhabited the island of Trinidad in 1813.\(^55\) There is no doubt, therefore, these Africans would have brought along their names and naming practices.

Naming among the Congolese also holds immense importance. Among the Kongo ethnic group for instance, a newborn was not regarded truly human until the bestowal of a name.


West Central Africa and Christian names

John Thornton’s “Central African Names and African-American Naming Patterns” discusses the impact Christianity had on the names and naming practices in the West Central region of Angola in Africa, prior to the start of the Slave Trade, in an attempt to understand the patterns that continued in the New World as a result of the transatlantic trade, and what it says about the assignment of names. According to Thornton, West Central African names can be hard to distinguish because a significant percentage of central Africans were converted to Christianity and “received Christian baptismal names” with the arrival of the Portuguese in the 1440s.56 Thornton dates the start of Christianity to 1491, with the conversion of the Kingdom of Kongo, before Christopher Columbus’s voyage to the Indies. Since then, Christianity and Kongolese spirituality served dual functions within the Kongolese culture. As a result of Christianity, however, Kongolese and Angolans have engaged in a practice of double naming where they would have a Christian name, but would also maintain their indigenous names. For example, the King of Kongo, who was baptized as Afonso I, was also known as Mvemba Nzinga.57 As such, during the early start of the Slave Trade there were Africans, who possessed Christian names as a result of the Portuguese invasion in Africa – this practice, however, became controversial when the “ethical” question concerning the enslavement of Christians was posed. Whether these Christians names were voluntarily adopted by the Africans themselves, or not, they nonetheless show the impact Christianity had on indigenous names and naming patterns in the West Central region prior to the Slave Trade, as well as, they provide insight into what the enslaved Africans

57 Ibid., 732.
from these regions brought with them when they arrived in the New World. The following section focuses its attention on the impact of Islam and cultural contact.

*African Muslim Names*

In *African Muslim Names* Sharifa Zawawi discusses the origins of African Muslim names, and the impact Islam had on African names, and its adaptation to African languages. It thus explains the synthesis that emerged between the indigenous and Islamic cultures. Islam is believed to have been first brought to Ethiopia in A.D. 615 by the Prophet Muhammad, and was, subsequently, dispersed throughout the entire continent. Zawawi asserts that the coexistence of Islamic and indigenous African beliefs produced an African-Islamic culture. Mazrui claims that the Arab had very enormous impacts on African culture, to quote, “One form is the linguistic impact, which includes, first, the role of Arabic in strengthening fellow Afro-Asiatic languages in Africa.” He goes on to say that another direct impact is the emergence of *new* languages. There is no question in Mazrui’s mind that Kiswahili – a language that is largely spoken along the Eastern coast of Africa – “is a product interaction between Arabic culture and African linguistic structures.” This rationale would later help to explain the naming practices, which emerged in the African Diaspora, largely, around the late 1940s, and then again in the mid-1960s to 1970s during the Black Power era, when African peoples adopted African-Muslim names as they sought to reclaim their African heritage. Indeed, names are products of language. Zawawi also concurs that personal names provide an important component of African cultural identities. As such, she quotes two African proverbs:

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59 Ibid.
“Oruko mi ro nen, apeja mi ro nen
As the name, so is the bearer,
Like the nickname, like the bearer’s.
(Ilaje proverb)

Wewe na jina lako.
You and your name.
You are what your name has made you.”
(Waswahili proverb)

Further, according to Zawawi:

“African Muslim names present a common cultural heritage extending from west to east and north to south crossing national and racial borders and at times even religious boundaries. First and foremost these names are based on the concept of a human being in relation to the Creator of all, whether he is referred to by Allah and his numerous attributes, or by his Swahili equivalent, Mwenye-Enzi-Mngu (the Almighty), Mola (Master), or Rabi (My Guardian) or by the Hausa-Fulani name of Maa Ngala (Master of All), Masa Dembali (Infinite Master) or Dundari (the Supreme One). This concept is the foundation of the way of life and nomenclature of all African Muslims.”

Certainly, while African naming ceremonies vary across the continent in terms of the nature of the naming ceremony, and the time that a name is bestowed on the newborn or adult, there are common themes rooted in the overall practice of naming in Africa. For example, a child is named on the seventh day in Yoruba custom, while Kikuyu people in Kenya name their newborn within mere hours following the birth of the child. Among the Ga-speaking people of Ghana, the eldest member of the family would say a ceremonial pray on the eighth day. Conversely, Muslims name twins and children of both sexes on the eighth day while males are named on the ninth. In Zambia, the name is given when the baby’s umbilical cord drops off. The Igbos/Ibos of Nigeria are known for naming their children on the twenty-eighth day, until such

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60 Zawawi, *African Muslim Names*, xii - xiii.
61 Ibid., xiii.
time the child is called *omo ofu*, which literally means newborn.\(^6\) In some African practices, several names of a deceased ancestor are offered up – the name of the ancestor chosen would be the name the baby smiles to, and assumes. In the African context, naming bears spiritual, psychological, and physical significance in the realities of their everyday existence and is revered in the African worldview.

\(^6\) This reminds me of a story I was once told of an Afro-Trinidadian mother who after a few months of not finding an appropriate name for her newborn son decided to continue to refer to him as “boy-boy” until the right name resonated. Some persons may view this as an act of negligence or insanity on the part of the mother; however, one can argue that there is an underlying element of African mysticism present in the process of finding an appropriate name for her son.
Chapter 2: European Invasion: The impact of Slavery and Colonialism

“However far the stream flows, it never forgets its source”
-Yoruba proverb

“It has long been noted that a person’s first name can often convey ethnic membership (Gerhards & Hans, 2009). As culture i.e. choice of name indicate either segregation from majority culture i.e. choice of a distinct name, or acculturation by choice of a common name (Gerhards & Hans, 2009, p. 1103). These authors note that history is replete with examples of how name choice can be forced or voluntary…. Africans’ cultural heritage in the United States reflects both coercion and free choice.”63

The brutality of the enslavement of Africans in the Transatlantic Slave Trade beginning in the mid-15th century following the invasion of Europeans on the African continent, and the expansion of European empires, has, indeed, caused a people to be tattered, torn, and stripped of their names, identity, culture, language, customs, and most importantly humanness. Thelma Foote notes that, “as Europeans from various maritime nations left the shores of their homelands and colonized overseas territories, they required a system of representation – a schema of naming, classifying, cataloguing, and enumerating – that would render newly encountered varieties of humankind intelligible to European colonizers and thus subject to colonial domination.”64 There is no gainsaying that European imperialism and its barbaric system of slavery had devastating and lasting impacts on the African psyche, which Joy Leary vividly

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64 Foote. Black and White Manhattan. 6.
outlines and defines in her book entitled *The Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing.*\(^6^5\)

Throughout their four and a half centuries of bondage, Africans, in their captivity, no longer enjoyed their inalienable rights of being human. Instead, they were regarded as chattels of the European traders before becoming the property of their slave masters, and were treated as such, which was enforced by the branding of slaves.

This account is charted in *The Middle Passage* experience where Africans were savagely kidnapped and transported to the Americas, under the most dehumanizing conditions, in which customs, and even life, were thrown overboard. Upon entry into the New World, enslaved Africans were debarred from practicing any of their local customs.

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\(^{65}\) Leary, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome.*

\(^{66}\) William O. Blake, *The History of Slavery and the Slave Trade* (Columbus, Ohio, 1857), p. 97; also found in later editions (Copy in Special Collections Department, University of Virginia Library).
The branding of slaves with a hot iron instrument leaving a permanent mark on the breast, upper arm or shoulder is said to have started with the Portuguese in Arguin during the 1440s, and was a common practice among slavers, which persisted throughout the Slave Trade era. The branding of slaves was to indicate that s/he was the property of the Colonial power, or alternatively, the slave master.

The method of branding slaves varied depending on the Colonial authority. For instance, slaves, who were seized from Luanda were often branded twice, for they had to receive the mark of the Luso-Brazilian merchants that owned them, and the royal arms – on the right breast – to signify their relation to the Crown. Slaves who arrived at São Tome during the early 16th century were branded with a cross on the right arm until sometime later, when the mark was changed to a “G” to represent the Marca de Guiné.

Figure 2. Metal Branding Irons with Owner’s Initials

In his book *The Slave Trade: The Story of the Atlantic Slave Trade, 1440-1870*, Hugh Thomas says that the baptism of slaves almost often led to further branding of the slave where a cross was superimposed over the royal arms. He reveals that slaves belonging to the Royal Africa Company were marked with the letters “DY” Duke of York, after the chairman of the company. Thomas quotes an account from interloper, Captain Thomas Phillips as he described the branding process of slaves:

“we mark’d the slaves [whom] we had bought on the breast or shoulder with a hot iron, having the ship's name on it, the place being before anointed with a little palm oil, which caused but little pain, the mark being usually well in four or five days.”

Further,

“In the early seventeenth century, it became customary for slaves in Africa to be baptized before their departure from Africa. This requirement was first laid down by King Philip III of Spain (II of Portugal) in 1607 and confirmed in 1619. The slaves had, as a rule, received no instruction whatever before this ceremony, and many, perhaps most, of them had no previous indication that there was such a thing as a Christian God. So the christening was perfunctory. In Luanda, the captives would be taken to one of the six churches, or assembled in the main square. An official catechist, a slave, say, who spoke Kimbundu, the language of Luanda, would address the slaves on the nature of their Christian transformation. Then a priest would pass among the bewildered ranks, giving to each one a Christian name, which had earlier been written on a piece of paper. He would also sprinkle salt on the tongues of the slaves, and follow that with holy water. Finally, he might say, through an interpreter: Consider that you are now children of Christ. You are going to set off for Portuguese territory, where you will learn matters of the Faith. Never think any more of your place of origin. Do not eat dogs, nor rats, nor horses.

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Be content.”

In the subsequent years, enslaved Africans oftentimes went nameless, and were objectified by the slave masters, and identified in terms of numbers e.g. slave #1, slave #2 strictly for the benefit of the slave master and bookkeeper so that they could keep count of their human stock or simply, enslaved Africans were referred to as “boy” or “girl” very rare were they allowed to keep their indigenous names. Later, during the twentieth century, these assigned slave names were used as derogatory and racist slurs among whites when addressing African Americans, these would include names such as ‘nigger’, ‘boy’ and ‘sambo’. According to Heller, the psychological impact was intended to, “reduce one to the level of a stereotype of non-person.” Certainly, this was one of the ways those in power sought to keep their feet on the backs of African and African Diasporic peoples through what psychologists, today, define as the labeling theory and self-fulfilling prophecy – by negatively penetrating the psyche of Africans.

“….this white man named things like ‘mulatoo’, and ‘quadroon’ and ‘octroooon’ and all those other things that he called us – you and me – when he was not calling us nigger!”

Murray Heller and Newbell Niles Puckett’s Black Names in America: Origins and Usage offers tremendous documentation on the naming patterns among Black Americans from as early as their arrival in the U.S in 1619 through the mid-1940s, in their research on unusual names, and their relationship with White values and names.

As mentioned earlier, during the Slave Trade, and upon their entry in the New World enslaved Africans were often stripped of their indigenous names, and renamed by their masters.

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69 Ibid., 398.
In the book *Slave Ships and Slaving* George Dow quotes Edward Manning, a sailor on the slaver *Thomas Watson*, who once said,

“...I suppose they...all had names in their own dialect, but the effort required to pronounce them was too much for us, so we picked out our favorites (slaves) and dubbed them *Main-stay, Cats head, Bulls eye, Rope-Yarn*, and various other sea phrases.”

Some slave masters “refitted” the enslaved with European-styled names such as John, Mary, Sarah, Jim, Dick and Louise. Examples of these names can be seen in collections of both slave auctions and runaway posters. Further, Burton states, “the ‘unnaming’ and ‘renaming’ of new arrivants from Africa was, for the slave masters, an integral part of the act of taking possession.”

African parents were not allowed to name their children, it was the slave master that did so, although the enslaved Africans did their own naming, discretely. One planter gave the following account:

“I name’d them here & by their names we can always know what sizes they are of & I am sure we repeated them so often to them that everyone knew their names & would readily answer to them.” (Robert “King” Carter, Chesapeake Bay: 1727)

In *Beyond Anthropology: Society and the Other* Bernard McGrane uses Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* to describe how Europeans went about defining and colonizing the world, and came about to perceiving the non-European as *Other* and “savage”. McGrane explains that Europeans felt it was their divine calling to Christianize the rest of the world, and so illustrates,

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74 Ibid., 41.
75 Ibid.
“What is the very first thing - richly symbolical - that Crusoe, the enlightened eighteenth-century European, does with this cannibal, this “savage” whose life he has saved? He exercises the divine and sovereign right of christening: he names him.”

In Catherine Adams and Elizabeth Pleck’s *Love of Freedom* mention was made about how slave-owners in New England went about naming their slaves:

“At least among the slaves initially brought to New England, it was common for masters to assign their property new names – in this case, Hagar Blackmore, which meant slave woman of African descent. A name was the link to one’s past, to a lineage; providing this woman with a new name was part of the dehumanization of slavery, erasing her previous identity and substituting one chosen by an owner. The surname Blackmore was probably more neutral than the choice of the first name Hagar. Black Moor was a synonym for the word Negro, which meant person of dark skin from sub-Saharan rather than North Africa. In the Bible Hagar was the Egyptian “bondswoman,” the concubine of Abraham who bore him a son because his own wife Sarah was unable to conceive. Abraham fathered Hagar’s son, Ishmael, but in jealousy Sarah forced Hagar and Ishmael “to be forsaken” (a literal meaning of the Biblical word Hagar).”

According to Adams et al., “on the one hand, Hagar Blackmore was the quintessential sexual victim of North American slavery, pregnant, robbed of her name, her husband and child, brought to court without any kin to defend or protect her. On the other hand, she was also a survivor, engaged in a sexual union with an African man in Cambridge. Nor had her memory been erased despite the trauma of her passage from Africa; as she recalled the time when she was an Angolan wife and mother.”

79 Ibid., 9.
One can easily make the counter-argument that in the case of Hagar Blackmore her memory about her African past was not erased as a result of the stripping of her Angolan name as she was able to quite vividly remember what life was in Angola. The study, however, examines the ongoing psychological impacts European domination and slavery had on the African psyche. Hagar Blackmore was among the first Africans to be brutally kidnapped and transshipped to New England during the mid-1600s, which may have allowed her the ability to more readily recall her Angolan past than those Africans who had been enslaved in the Americas for generations, particularly, following the abolition of the British Slave Trade, in 1807, when there was a steady decline in the number of native-born Africans who were enslaved and had, continuously, brought with them elements of their ethnic cultures. As Powell points out,

“A lapse of three hundred years since the black man’s captivity and his conformity to western civilization, the loss of his language, and the effect of a new name, have caused a pervasion of his mind to such a degree, that his thoughts are no longer centered upon the preservation of his own race, but seem to depend upon the good will of alien races to provide for his future.”

Indeed, scholars and Africans themselves have shown the different ways African cultural practices have been retained and transmitted from generation to generation – oral tradition being one of the main conduits. However, in an honest analysis of slavery and colonialism, one cannot overlook the adverse impact white domination had on the African psyche and identity through the obliteration of African names as some Africans assimilated the mentality and culture of the colonizer. Maureen Warner-Lewis, in her book *Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory* says that the erosion of African culture and language resulted from several factors,

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which include church activities, economic necessity and interrelationships, which we will see happening more as slaves became free.\textsuperscript{81} Burton provides evidence from Worthy Park and Drax Hall Estates in Jamaica, which offer substantial insight into the widespread decline in African derived names. For example, in 1730 26.3\% of the slaves at Worthy Park had Akan, or other African-derived day names. Between 1783 and 1838, only 4.8\% held such names. A similar trend occurred in Drax Hall where 50\% of the slave population in 1735 had African derived names as compared to 24.6\% in 1753.\textsuperscript{82}

During the most recent trip to conduct research in my home country, Trinidad and Tobago, I discovered the history of the Merikin community. I then learnt that the Merikins were black soldiers in the U.S., who fought in the American War of 1812 on the side of the British, and were promised their freedom from slavery in exchange for their military service. As a result, these soldiers were shipped to British colonies and arrived in companies. The first shipment of black soldiers arrived on the island of Trinidad, in 1815 and settled in communities, which they dubbed companies similar to their military assignments. They also called themselves the Merikins – a derivative from Americans, thereby, asserting their own identity. See APPENDIX A for a listing of free black Americans, who settled in Trinidad from 1815-16. The list closely resembles Pluckett’s listing of free black patriots, between 1700 and 1800, in that a large majority of names were European-styled names, or Christian names (See APPENDIX B). However, on Pluckett’s list, names such as Congo, Cuff, Freeman, Liberty and Freedom also appeared which has provided evidence that Black Americans, particularly, those who fought in

\textsuperscript{81} Maureen Warner-Lewis, \textit{Trinidad Yoruba: From Mother Tongue to Memory}, (Jamaica: The Press University of the West Indies, 1997), 50.
the Civil War, did seek names that asserted their African identity and free status, as Burton quotes in his article.

Historians often argue that the Merikins were responsible for introducing the Baptist faith to Trinidad, which was practiced in the southern States of America, when they arrived on the island. I sought to verify this, *inter alia*, through formal and informal interviews with elders in the community of 5th Company Moruga – one of the places inhabited by the Merikins with many surviving descendants, a strong Baptist presence, and many churches. I interviewed two female elders, both averaging in their mid 80s, who provided some perspective into the way of life for persons of African descent, in Trinidad, under the post-Emancipation colonial era. Drawing on their memory, they recounted how life was for their parents and grandparents, who would have lived during the time of slavery. Similar to all the other places that had been subjected to slavery and colonialism, Africans, in Trinidad, were considered inferior to the White inhabitants. Moreover, they were forbidden to practice any of their African cultural customs and religions, although they found ingenuous ways to still do so – as one of the ladies recalled, her aunt concealing and carrying a mini drum to church, the size of a pocketbook, which she held under her arm like the *Bible*. The Baptist faith, drums, and drumming were all outlawed by the colonialists, especially, upon the entry of the British to Trinidad, in 1797, as they feared *obeah*.

On the question of identity, when one of the women was asked how she was given the name Lucille, and later went about bestowing names upon her own children, she said that in most instances names were taken from the Catholic calendar and the *Bible* – a clear indication of the impact European domination and Christianity had on African names and naming practices in the Diaspora. She also seemed quite hesitant to discuss elements of African culture that would have
been present, though suppressed by the colonial authorities. On the other hand, Dainty the other interviewee appeared to have no hesitations in professing her African identity. When asked about her given name, she said that her father had given her the name because of her physical beauty. Although it was an European name, her father demonstrated that he was exercising an indigenous practice by giving his daughter a name that was invested with deep meaning.

**Multiple owners, multiple names**

Another area that needs to be closely examined under naming and slavery is the practice of *multiple naming*, which happened as slaves were being sold to multiple owners over time. It has been noted that European slave captors and masters often gave their slaves new names and/or numbers in order to mark their property, and reinforce their hegemony both at the slaving ports, in Africa, and when the enslaved Africans arrived in the New World. Moreover, there is evidence, which shows that slaves were often sold and bought multiple times once they arrived in the New World. It is, therefore, not unlikely that slaves were being “unnamed” and “renamed” by the number of masters s/he had – one now needs to consider the psychological impacts that this practice of involuntary *multiple naming* had on the African, who would have had to answer to multiple names, especially, when some of the names assigned were used merely as monikers to describe their physical features and work ability, e.g., derogatory titles such as “Buck”, “Wench”, “Blackie”, “Darky”, “Obey”, “Oxfoot”, “Lemon”, “Tomboy” and “Pussy” often appeared in slave records, and runaway and auction advertisements. When a slave changed owner, s/he was also liable to her or his name being changed. Evidence from Puckett’s research states, “Slave boy Malachi, for instance, was baptized seven times under different names, and
with different sponsors….“\textsuperscript{83} What are some of the implications when one is perusing historical documents for academic research and/or is researching one’s genealogy? It is likely that the person, who is looking over these documents, might unknowingly be encountering the same slave multiple times on different plantations due to multiple ownership and naming.

\textit{Retentions of ‘Slave Names’ and naming practices}

Notwithstanding such deprivation of their basic human rights, all was not lost at sea. The cultural resistance of African has not been destroyed, to borrow the words of Amilcar Cabral, “African culture has survived all the storms, by seeking refuge in villages, in forests, and in the spirit of generations of victims of colonialism” \textsuperscript{84}

In “Naming and Linguistic Africanisms in African American Culture” Mphande asserts that:

“Among the various endeavours that African slaves made in becoming African American in culture, orientation was the culture of resistance involving the process of re-naming, constantly reverting to their African cultural forms, such as spirituality, burial rites and naming for inspiration and guidance, and thus reasserting themselves and reaffirming their humanity in a hostile world.” \textsuperscript{85}

Mphande further states:

Through re-naming themselves, African Americans have continued the process of cultural formulations and re-claiming of their complex African roots in the continuing process of redefining themselves and dismantling the paradigm that kept them mentally chained. \textsuperscript{86}

Sufficient evidence shows that enslaved Africans both in the Caribbean and North America retained elements of their ancestral names on the plantation e.g. Cudjoe, which is a

\textsuperscript{83} Pucket, \textit{Black Names in America}, 41.
\textsuperscript{85} Mphande. “Naming and Linguistic Africanisms in African American Culture, 104.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid..
derivative of the Akan day name Kojo is still very common in Jamaica, and throughout the English speaking Caribbean today.

Another interesting trend was revealed in the diary of plantation owner Thomas Thistlewood where slaves commonly used two, three, or even more names. This occurrence can be traced directly to African naming practices. Burton reveals that on the plantation, Africans used an African name when talking to a fellow African, an European name in response to Massa or Busha, and yet another name or nickname, although largely European, in form, was indigenous, in substance. Burton states that during the 1800s, African derived day names were less prevalent, however, most survived un- and semi-detected beneath a “European onomastic veneer: Cudjoe as Joe, Kofi as Coffee or Cuffee, Quaco as Jacko, Abba as Abby and so on (Craton 1978:157).” Later studies on slave names in South Carolina reveal that whereas African-born slaves were often renamed by slave masters, most slaves in the subsequent generations chose names for their children.

In this connection, Cheryll Ann Cody would encounter slave children on the Ball Plantation in South Carolina with names after extended kin that spanned as many as four generations. She believed slave names give greater clarity to the development of historical awareness and consciousness, “the selection of an African ‘day-name,’ for example, would give a child a name used solely by blacks in the community and would serve also as a reminder of an

African past. Sharing a kin name was a useful device to connect children with their past and place them in history of their families and communities.89

In reviewing the development of the slave family and slave kin networks in a South Carolina plantation owned by the ancestors of John Foster and Allen Dulles, Gutman found a slave birth register kept for nearly a century, which was instructive in understanding the importance of the slave kinship group, and that slave children were usually named after blood kin (particularly fathers, aunts and uncles, and grandparents). The register reveals, among other things, how long slave marriages were compatible with distinctive slave sexual practices (particularly childbirth prior to mother’s marriage); and there were distinctive slave marriage rules (particularly taboos against blood-cousin marriage). It uncovered social and cultural practices that had been transported from Africa, and brought into the New World. Namesaking patterns, including genealogical data compiled from the 1796 slave lists at Newton and Seawell, both fairly typical Barbadian plantations, further indicated that naming children after kinsmen, including extended kin, was common.90 The same document shows the importance of viewing the slave experience in an enlarged time perspective. It also demonstrated how common familial belief and behavior after 1830 had their roots in adaptive slave practices, which had begun much earlier as Africans of diverse cultural backgrounds came into contact with each other.


It is well documented that enslavement had, in fact, severely changed the lives of the Africans and Afro-Americans in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which made it impossible for them to recreate the kinship that was integral to all West African societies. Despite this irreversible setback, slavery could not completely remove familial and social memories from the African psyche, though it would be one of its ultimate goals. For example, it was recounted that in adapting to the new domestic arrangements of enslavement in a distant land, the Blacks of the Good Hope plantation of Orangeburg, South Carolina between 1793 and 1855 had not given up their attachments to, or identification with their immediate and even distant kin. As such, their naming practices were connected to generations of blood kin where they continued to name their children after parents, or grandparents that revealed an attachment to a familial line, and suggesting a symbolic renewal of the birth of intimate familial experiences or memories associated with the respective kin.91

On another note, surnames existed in some West African cultures, but usually not family names in the European sense. In West Africa, the method of assigning surnames varied from group to group. For example, among the Yoruba the surname or acquired name usually signified the position of the family in society or the family’s occupation e.g. the family name “Agbede”, which means, the blacksmith. Some peoples of Sierra Leone replaced names given at birth with new names, including a surname: a boy’s surname could be the surname of his mother or some female relative; a girl’s could be her father’s or that of a male relative. Such surnames indicated descent but were not family names.92 Stewart states, “In many societies the father’s first name

became the child’s second name and in this way the child’s heritage was traced. An Igbo boy named NWANDI OJI was the son of Oji. His father, called OJI CHINUA, was the son of CHINUA.  

It is important to take note that in the instances where enslaved Africans were forbidden to name their children, they still exercised their “traditional” practice of naming as they named their environment, which served as an outlet for psychological empowerment as they adjusted to their strange and new environment in the face of the atrocities of slavery and white supremacy.

Mphande provides a list of some of the names Diasporic Africans gave to food, music, and places under cultural linguistic forms as he traces their African-origins. The list also includes slave names:

Table 2. Names Given to Food, Music, and Places by Diasporic Africans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Animal Names</th>
<th>Slave Names</th>
<th>Culinary Names</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>/kambologi/ “a gray bird”</td>
<td>Kato</td>
<td>banana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kandi/ “rabbit”</td>
<td>Tshituba</td>
<td>coffee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kanka/ “a large fish”</td>
<td>Zango</td>
<td>cola</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kekele/ “a marsh bird”</td>
<td>Zingo</td>
<td>gumbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kilombo/ “a black and white”</td>
<td>Zinka</td>
<td>okra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kimbi/ “a hawk”</td>
<td>(Puckett, 1936)</td>
<td>sesame</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kimbimbibi/ “quail”</td>
<td></td>
<td>sorghum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kinkwawi/ “patridge”</td>
<td>Tenah</td>
<td>cucumber</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kulu/ “a blue and white marsh bird”</td>
<td>Mima</td>
<td>akee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kusu/ “parrot”</td>
<td>Cutto</td>
<td>congo beans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/kutu/ “small pig”</td>
<td>Juba</td>
<td>and Harris 2001:170</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Turner, 1949: 196-197)</td>
<td>Mimo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mango</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mingo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place Names</th>
<th>Music</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angola</td>
<td>Quash</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Angila</td>
<td>Quaco</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Quomo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vigo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sambu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Gutman, 1976:242)</td>
<td>Banjo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jarm</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jazz</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Jive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\*Stewart. *1,001 African Names*, 159.
In Trinidad, there are several references to Africa in both places and customs. For example, there are a few villages named Congo; there is Sierra Leone Road, and Majuba Cross Road in a district with a profound history of plantation slavery; and Mandingo Road in Moruga, which was settled by Africans from the Mandingo ethnic group of West Africa, and later by the Merikins in 1815. There is also a Congo Road, as well as Congo Road Plantation in Barbados. It is also recorded that a cruel African slave driver, and jail warden was called Congo Barra, in Trinidad.

In addition to naming their landscape, foods today also bear close resemblance to African dishes like Coo Coo (Fu Fu of West and Central Africa) with Okras, Pound Plantain, Congo peas (black-eyed peas), Gub Gub beans and Congo Pepper. There is also the Bamboula, the Ghouba, Coramantee, and the Calinda/Kalenda (African stick-fighting) dance – which are all African derived names and cultural customs.

In my recent search, I also came across a place that was named “African Town” in Mobile, Alabama by the last shipment of illegal slaves, who were brought on the slaveship Clotilda to the U.S., in 1860. It was the home of Abaché and Cudjoe Kazoola Lewis. Cudjoe Kazoola Lewis was a native of Takon, north of Benin, and is said to have been the founder of Africa Town. His given African name was Kazoola, but Cudjoe, a derivative of the Akan day name Kojo was added when he came to the U.S., as well as the surname Lewis.

95 African Town was made up of two sections. The larger section spanned approximately 50 acres, while the smaller, located some two miles west of the other, was 7 acres in size. The smaller plot was called Lewis Quarters after one of the founders of the compound, Charlie Lewis, whose Yoruba name was Oluale. Possibly, it was a derivative of Oluwole, which means “God has come home”. This is where Cudjoe may have gotten the surname “Lewis”, similar to the story of the “Weston clan” of Charleston, South Carolina.
Before moving to the section on the *post emancipation era*, it is important to take note of some of the coping mechanisms enslaved and freed Africans adopted as a result of the blatant disrespect and disregard for their humanity by Whites throughout the years— as Whites, inhumanely, addressed Africans with names such as “boy”, “sambo”, “wench”, “buck” and “nigger” to list a few that were previously mentioned. Joy Leary in her book, *Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome: America's Legacy of Enduring Injury and Healing* comments on the innate strategies these Africans used to combat such defamation of their identity,

“… respect has always been an essential part of African and African American culture. The respect for adults and elders was demonstrated in numerous ways. One way was to acknowledge them first with a greeting upon entering a room by addressing them by appropriate titles. During slavery Africans were not given titles of respect by whites. They were never addressed as “ladies” or “gentlemen,” “Sir” or “Ma’am”, ‘Mister’ or ‘Miss’ or “Mrs.,” so they

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conferred their own designation of respect. They addressed one another as “Big Mama,” and “Big Daddy,” “Ma-dea,” “Sister” or “Brother” to convey honor. As a continuing legacy of slavery, African Americans today have recognized that the society around them does not always respect them, and have developed a hypersensitivity to, and anger about being disrespected.”

This phenomenon is highlighted later on in the paper, as it relates to contemporary forms of racial discrimination, and the psychological impacts and behavioral implications as a result of such acts of discrimination.

Post Emancipation

Following Emancipation, the “free names” adopted by formerly enslaved Africans in the Caribbean often belonged to their former owners, masters or white public figures. Names such as Beckford, Holder, Warner, Marshall, Campbell, and various prefixes of Fitz- such as Fitzwilliam, Fitzgerald, Fitzworme, and Fitzpatrick, are still very prevalent in the Caribbean islands today. It was not until after the Civil War that Africans in the United States were allowed to legally name their children. In his thought-provoking study, Gutman sheds new light on the naming trends that existed among enslaved and free African populations, specifically, as these pertained to the retention and adoption of their owners’ surnames over time – beyond emancipation. Gutman argues that the adoption and retention of the owners’ surname was a cultural means, which Africans – enslaved and free – used to identify with a family group of origin as early as the War for Independence, and so, signified slave ownership and family ties by the respective plantation owners. According to Gutman, such behavior reinforced given-name practices, re-emphasized the importance of the enlarged kin group, and symbolized separation

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97 Leary, Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome, 170.
from one’s owner over time; moreover, it was a strategy of maintaining progeny with family members who have been dispersed under the system of slavery. For example, the illegally manumitted slaves of Plowden Weston, a wealthy planter of Charleston District\textsuperscript{98}, all retained the surname of their slave-owner among them were Lydia Weston and Anthony Weston who were ‘emancipated’ in 1826, and formed themselves into the powerful free-black Weston clan.\textsuperscript{99}

![Nancy Weston](https://example.com/nancy-weston.jpg)

\textbf{Figure 4. Nancy Weston}\textsuperscript{100}

Slave names and naming practices have, therefore, been a valuable indicator for the adaptive capacities of enslaved and freed Africans in the New World.


\textsuperscript{100} Ibid..
Burton claims that, “the naming practices, which were present in the British West Indian colonies, had clear parallels in North American slavery”\(^{101}\). Though not as popular as previous years, African names, particularly day names, survived, though, as Burton puts it, these names would lose the precise temporal significance in the parent African cultures.\(^{102}\) For example, “Sambo” meaning second son, lost its original significance, and was given indifferently to any male child. Further, similar to the British West Indies, emancipated Africans sought to adopt the names of their former slave owner. As witnessed in the Caribbean, the first names and surnames of successful white public figures and politicians were principally adopted as forenames for African Americans. Burton cites the examples of the names of African-American jazz musicians following the American president Theodore Roosevelt (1901-09) Theodore Leroy “Teddy” Bunn, Theodore Walters “Sonny” Rollins.\(^{103}\)

Burton proposes that one of the reasons many free Africans took on the names of their former masters or powerful white political leaders, was to imbue themselves with power, and he argues in his book *Afro-Creole*, that there was “a particular importance to hats as a symbol of both power and of freedom” among the enslaved Africans. He quotes a slave who once said that, “Hat belong to me - head belong to Massa,” when he was asked why he took off, instead of put on his hat, when it rained. Burton raises an important issue as it relates to power and ownership, and I quote, “To put on Massa’s hat is to put on his power; to take over in addition his name is to arrogate the free status, as well as the power”\(^{104}\) – this quote offers an alternative answer to why some freed slaves took on the names of their former masters, which will instilling oneself with

\(^{101}\) Burton. “Names and Naming in Afro-Caribbean Cultures,” 41.
\(^{102}\) Ibid.
\(^{103}\) Ibid., 44.
\(^{104}\) Ibid., 52.
power to overcome one’s oppressed state within a Eurocentric framework, it would have adverse and diminishing effects on the retention of African cultural practices later on as one assimilates to white values, ideas of power and names and naming.

However, a significant number of freed slaves in the U.S. opted for completely new names e.g. “Freeman”, “Newman”, and “Liberty” to assert their free and new status. According to Burton, it was mostly the black soldiers in the Fourth Connecticut Regiment – who fought during the American Civil War – that adopted these “highly symbolic” names, which became popular among them.105 Taking on names such as these would appear less in the Caribbean, as most former slaves kept the surnames, which belonged their previous master.

The following is a testimony of Martin Jackson, a Texan ex-slave, quoted in Eugene Genovese’s Roll, Jordan, Roll: The World the Slaves Made that consciously rejected the otherwise customary practice of freed men and women who inherited the name of their former owners:

“The master's name was usually adopted by a slave after he was set free. This was done more because it was the logical thing to do and the easiest way to be identified than it was through affection for the master. Also, the government seemed to be in a almighty hurry to have us get names. We had to register as someone, so we could be citizens. Well, I got to thinking about all us slaves that was going to take the name Fitzpatrick. I made up my mind I'd find me a different one. One of my grandfathers in Africa was called Jeaceo, and so I decided to be Jackson.”106

This quote comes very close to describing what Burton probably means when he says that slaves and ex-slaves developed an “oppositional culture”, as opposed to one based on African

105 Ibid., 42.
“That culture is not, in my view, a culture of resistance but an oppositional culture, that is, to use a distinction made by Michel de Certeau, it is a subaltern culture in part derived from a dominant culture that, by definition, it cannot get entirely outside of in order to resist it, but which it can only oppose from within by all the means of manoeuvre, manipulation, mimicry.... Thus Creole culture is certainly differentiated from the dominant colonial culture it opposes, but it cannot, by dint of its very compositeness, be different from it, no more than the dominant culture, which is contaminated by the culture it dominates, can be separated entirely from it. Both dominant and dominated cultures are neither completely outside nor completely inside out of each other, they are intertangled and at odds, warring parasites that cannot do without each other, and the dominated culture, or sub-culture, is condemned by its very nature to operate on and within the terrain of the Other, just as Afro-Caribbean onomastics take place around and within the name of the Other.”

While Jackson adopted a European-styled name, within the confines of the dominant Eurocentric culture, the practice of taking on a name that was similar to the name of one of his grandfathers in Africa, is intrinsically African. Moreover, Africans did create novel names as they sought to dissociate themselves completely from white oppression and cultural hegemony, and often looked towards their African roots for inspiration; while others combined cultural elements in their new environment thereby forging a new identity, which scholars such as Stuckey and Gomez have laboriously illustrated in their work. According to Mphande, “…the plantation was the site where African cultures were forged into a new African-American reality, reformulated on the prevailing experience.” To out rightly state that Diasporic Africans did not resist white cultural hegemony but simply opposed it is too mild a view, and trivializes the

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107 Burton, “Names and Naming in Afro-Caribbean Cultures,” 55.
relentless and creative efforts and achievements made by Africans to uphold their African identity.

The interest of turning to Africa for inspiration – among Diasporic Africans – became especially prevalent in the 1960s, which helped to establish a strong sense of African consciousness throughout the African Diaspora. It is, therefore, worthwhile to examine the types of names freed Africans chose for themselves upon their freedom from the plantation and during the Black Power era in the U.S. and the Caribbean.
Chapter 3: African Names: Identity and Protest

“You must remember that slave-names will keep you a slave in the eyes of the civilized world today.” - Elijah Muhammad

To cite the profound words of Sigrid King in “Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston’s Their Eyes Were Watching God”:

Naming has always been an important issue in Afro-American tradition because of its link to the exercise of power. From their earliest experiences in America, Afro-Americans have been made aware that those who name also control, and those who are named are subjugated. Slaves were forced to abandon their African identities when they were captured, and were renamed with their masters’ identities when they arrived in America. In Orality and Literacy, Walter Ong points out that for primarily oral cultures (such as the early slave communities) naming conveyed a power over things, for without learning a vast store of names, one was simply, “powerless to understand” (33). This sense of powerlessness could extend beyond the individual to include an entire community of “unnamed” people. Naming is tied to racial as well as individual identity: “To have a name is to have a means of locating, extending and preserving oneself in a human community, so as to be able to answer the question ‘who?’ with reference to ancestry, current status, and particular bearing, with reference to the full panoply of time.”

**Black Power Era (1965 -1975)**

During the late 1960s there was a massive movement by Africans throughout the Diaspora and on the African continent to reclaim their African identity by resisting what had long been *white supremacy*. For too long, Africans in the Diaspora have been other-defined, other-defended, and other-reliant under the wake of European enslavement and colonialism.¹¹０

Emerging out of the Civil Rights era, Black Power was not only given voice but action by Trinidad-born and activist Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture) in the U.S. African peoples in North America and throughout the Diaspora were rising up and speaking out against white domination and propaganda.

Malcolm X’s legacy of self-sufficiency and armed defense influenced other revolutionary minded Blacks who were against “love and nonviolence” and turning the other cheek. As such, Stokely Carmichael, the leader of the SNCC incorporated Black Nationalism into his own philosophy in the mid-1960s, and so, convinced fellow organizers to expel white members from the group, in 1966. Eventually, Carmichael and several other disgruntled SNCC leaders broke away from SNCC in the following year, and co-authored the book *Black Power* to promote Malcolm X’s message. Carmichael was even more adamant in his drive to advance the works of Malcolm X in his previous campaign to divide the U.S. into separate countries while he was a member of the Nation of Islam—one for blacks, one for whites. In Carmichael and Hamilton’s book, *black power* was synonymous with self-reliance, independence, self-determination, militancy and nationalism within civil rights movement from the late 1960s to the early 1970s.

because most black people throughout the African Diaspora were unable to connect to any specific ethnic group, geographical area or language with which they could have a deep spiritual connection, the entire African continent became the focal point of their ancestral contact. As a consequence, the movement promoted African consciousness and pride – taking firm stance against white supremacy and racism. Africans started adopting African names, wearing dashikis and sandals as symbols of Black Pride. The Afro hairstyle also gained popularity in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

The concept of self-definition was essential to the Black Power experience. Black Power leaders throughout the Diaspora condemned the notion of Africans with European names, which they referred to as “slave names”. As such, during the Black Power Era 1965-1975, large numbers of black people in the U.S. and Caribbean, increasingly, abandoned their “slave names” and adopted African names. Throughout history, Diasporic Africans have been subjected to white supremacy and cultural ideology – for too long they have been forced to acclimate themselves to white hegemony and culture – brainwashed by racist education, European produced clothing and names. For example, the leader of the Nation of Islam, Elijah Muhammad is known for urging black people to drop their slave names. Books such as Message to the Blackman in America by Elijah Muhammad, The Autobiography of Malcolm X: As Told to Alex Haley and Assata Shakur’s Assata: An Autobiography echo the sentiments of these Black Power activists, who call on African people to abandon their “slave names” and reclaim their ancestral African names. Assata Shakur formerly known as JoAnne Chesimard in her autobiography

Assata: An Autobiography said, “I don’t feel like no JoAnne, or no Negro, or no amerikan.” Therefore, it is not uncommon among young African-Americans and African diasporic peoples today to have African and African Muslim names such as Jamal, Jamillah, Kenya, Kenyatta, Lesedi, Aisha, Zindziwe, Nzinga and Malik. Here, I investigate how these names would introduce a pronounced sense of African identity and consciousness throughout the years.

In 1952, Malcolm Little joined the Chicago Chapter of the Nation of Islam where he called for Black Nationalism, and changed his name to Malcolm X. The surname “X” represented the identity and cultural heritage that was lost by black Americans, or otherwise distorted and suppressed through the centuries of enslavement. According to Burton none of these changes, however, could match the exemplary metamorphosis of Cassius Marcellus Clay (after the prominent nineteenth-century abolitionist of that name) into Muhammad Ali in the early 1960s. Due to his wide international appeal, it is said that Muhammad Ali’s name change in 1964, and charismatic personality inspired countless persons to change their names and embrace their African heritage. Ali, was very opposed to having what he and others in the Nation of Islam called a “slave name”, and was so adamant about being called by his free African name that he took this fight into the ring. To cite Hodari, Muhammad Ali once stated “Cassius Clay” lacked “divine meaning”… “I am Muhammad Ali, a free name which means ‘beloved of God’ – and I insist people use it when speaking to me.” Hodari records instances when Ali defended his position to be called by his rightful name,

“True to his word, Ali verbally and physically insisted on the use of his new name. When Floyd Patterson called Ali

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113 Shakur, Assata, 185.
114 Burton, “Names and Naming in Afro-Caribbean Cultures,” 44.
“Clay”, Ali publicly punished Patterson for twelve rounds, neglecting to knock out an obviously hurt Patterson. Then, during a 1967 pre-fight press conference, Ernie Terrell refused to call Ali by his rightful name, instead referring to the people’s champ as “Cassius Clay.” Ali told told Terrell he would punish him just as he had punished Patterson. Ali beat Terrell for fifteen rounds, hurting him badly, but not knocking him out. He even held Terrell up while battering him with punches. Ali repeatedly (and loudly) asked Terrell, “What’s my name? What’s my name fool?”…Shortly after the fight, Muhammad apologized for taunting Terrell during the fight. He did so, Ali said, so people would respect his beliefs and his name.”

Indeed, Ali was successful since up until recent years I had no idea that Muhammad Ali’s name was anything other than Muhammad Ali, in fact I have never heard anyone refer to him as anything else other than Muhammad Ali. In the 60s Ali said, “Get used to me… Black, confident, cocky – my name, not yours. My religion not yours. My goals, my own. Get used to me.” As such, the chapter focuses on the psychological and political impact that the adoption of African names had in the creation of an African identity and consciousness, and its later implications.

The Black Power Movement also gave rise to the Black aesthetic – a collective consciousness. In The Black Arts Movement Larry Neal extrapolates a scene from Aimé Césaire’s play, Les Armes Miraculeuses (The Miraculous Weapons) where the rebel violently proclaims to his mother: “My name – an offense; my Christian name – humiliation; my status – a rebel; my age – the stone age.” This excerpt speaks volumes about black racial identity, and what was going on during the time period. It shows how the African psyche was affected and conflicted, and how Africans retaliated against white hegemony.

116 Ibid..
117 Ibid..
According to Neal, Black Art is the aesthetic sister to the Black Power concept. The Black Arts Movement was the voice of black America:

“…these two movements have begun to merge: the political values inherent in the Black Power concept are now finding concrete expression in the aesthetics of Afro-American dramatists, poets, choreographers, musicians, and novelists.”

The Black Arts Movement was the mouthpiece and information carrier for the Black Power Movement as we have seen in Aimé Césaire’s theatrical production and the important role the name plays in African identity and general psyche.

Another interesting event that occurred during the 1970s was the release of Alex Haley’s book and later movie series entitled Roots, which had an enormous impact on naming among African American, particularly, in Chicago, Illinois as points out in their research,

“The impact of “Roots,” first shown on television in January 1977 and watched by more people than any other dramatic series (Brooks and Marsh 1985:722), illustrates the attractiveness of names associated with Africa. After the program aired, Kizzy – in “Roots” the American-born daughter of an African who was captured and transported into slavery – ranked as the 17th most popular name given to African American girls born in Illinois in 1977; the previous year it was not in the top 200.”

A similar trend was seen with the name Marcus, as a number of African American parents in Illinois were naming their sons Marcus, after the Jamaican Pan-Africanist Marcus Garvey. According to Lieberson et al.,

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119 Ibid.
“...a resurgence of interest in Marcus Garvey, a pre-World War II separatist and nationalist who pushed for a return to Africa, probably inspired the sudden popularity of the name Marcus. The name ranked 164th for boys born to Blacks in 1956, 98th in 1960, moved to rank as the 13th most popular name in 1970, and finally fifth in 1983.”

As alluded to in the above, the Black Power era experienced the increasing influence of the Nation of Islam during the 1960s. This religious organization advocated African liberation and pride, through its Afrocentric teachings. Moreover, its leaders and members were severely critical of Africans with European names – though some blacks expressed great difficulty in pronouncing the African names, which Stewart attributes to the disparity of languages spoken between native and non-native African speakers. In this way, much can be said about Fanon’s stance on the impact slavery and colonialism had on language and the African psyche, and what happens as a result of cultural contact and domination.

As indicated earlier, the adoption of African names by Africans functioned as a means of empowerment for Africans in the Diaspora and continent who have been stripped of their names, or who have been given names that otherwise bore names that lacked profound meaning. For example, playwright and poet Ntozake Shange (formerly Paulette Williams), after going through a terrible separation with her husband during her college years, and an attempted suicide with intense feelings of alienation and depression, she changed her name in 1971 to Ntozake which in Xhosa means “she who has her own things”, and Shange which in the language of Zulus literally means “s/he who walks/lives with lions.” Similarly, in Assata: An Autobiography Shakur describes how she comes to acquire her African name as she approached to be a citizen of the

Republic of New Afrika. Upon her enquiry about how one becomes a member, the person who had approached her said, “you just sign your name in the citizen’s book.” Surprised by the response, the person then asked her if she wanted a name – an African name, which without much thought accepted. Shakur received the name Ybumi Oladele – a name that seemed “cool”, but I guess never resonated within young Shakur as the name faded with the years. As she became more in touch with herself and revolutionary minded following her college years that she contemplated changing her name. In her autobiography, she says, “The name JoAnne began to irk my nerves. I had changed a lot and moved to a different beat, felt like a different person. It sounded so strange when people called me JoAnne.” She went back to the name Ybumi Oladele, however, she did not know its meaning, which was problematic since she wanted the name to mean something to her and relevant to her life. As such, she choose the names Assata Olugbala Shakur – Assata meaning “She who struggles”, Olugbala “Love for the people”, and Shukur in honor of her close friend Zayd Shakur, Shakur meaning “the thankful”.

In African Names and Naming Musere and Byakutaga emphasize the importance of knowing the meaning of one’s name, and the relevance it has in one’s life – as they argue that African names are loaded with proverbial meaning that should not be taken lightly. Likewise, Trinidadian Rapso chantuelle Lutalo Masimba aka “Brother Resistance” (formerly Roy Lewis), revealed that prior to the Black Power Movement, and the adoption of his African name, he did not like himself. It was only through assuming an African name that he started to come into his own African consciousness and embraced his African identity, rather than be embarrassed by it.

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122 Shakur, Assata, 184.
123 Ibid..
124 Ibid., 186.
In the opening chapter of his book, *Ready for Revolution* Kwame Ture\(^{126}\) begins by describing his life growing up in Trinidad and Tobago. Interestingly, the chapter is entitled *Oríkì*, which as mentioned before, is a birth poem that is recited at the naming ceremony of a newborn among the Yoruba people of West Africa.

“*The oríkì* is said publicly in the ear of the child and then to the community, to welcome the infant into world. The *oríkì* imprints the child with its complex historical, spiritual, and social identities…it is a meditation on the meaning and significance of the new human’s name. It is an evocation of the strong deeds, character, and praise names of the infant’s ancestors, and, perhaps most important, it is an optimistic attempt to project (and define) in ways desirable ways the child’s future personality. By evoking lineage, the *oríkì* is ultimately about spiritual inheritance: that eternal life force that has many names (Ase among the Yoruba, Magara among the Dogon, Ike among the Igbo), which we receive from our ancestors.”\(^{127}\)

In South Africa, it is known as Izibongo among the Zulu people. The following is a letter that was written to the editor of the *Times* magazine by South African songstress, apartheid activist and former wife of Kwame Ture Miriam Makeba:

“Dear Editor,

There was a slight error, which I do not think you will mind my calling attention to. It concerns my African name. I would like to spell it correctly for you:

Zenzile Makeba Qgwashu Nguvama Yiketheli Nxgowa Bantana Balomzi Xa Ufun Ubajbulisa Ubaphekeli, Mbiza Yotchawala Sithi Xa Saku Qgiba Ukatja Sithathe Izitsha Sizi Khaba Singama Lawu Singama Qgwashi Singama Nqamla Nqamla Nqgithi.

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\(^{126}\) Stokely Carmichael would change his name to Kwame Ture in 1978 to honor two great African leaders, Kwame Nkrumah and Sékou Touré, who both fought for African Independence, and liberation from colonial domination. Kwame Nkrumah’s praise name was Osageya, which means “redeemer of the nation”, while Sékou Touré’s meant “the defender of the poor”, both of which Kwame Ture sought to embody and emulate in movement towards the liberation of African people through Black Power.

The reason for its length is that every child takes the first name of all his male ancestors. Often following the first name is a descriptive word or two, telling about the character of the person, making a true African name somewhat like a story.

Miriam Makeba”

It should be noted that African leaders such as Jomo Kenyatta on the continent also experienced colonial domination and the obliteration of their African names. Jomo Kenyatta would change his name from Johnstone Kamau around 1938 after being wrongfully accused, and imprisoned by British colonial authorities in Kenya. Upon his release from prison Kamau would assume the position as leader of Kenya. Interestingly, Keyatta was given name Kamau wa Ngengi at birth, where he changed it to John Peter in 1914 after converting to Christianity before his final name-change in the 1930s. To resist European domination Kamau takes on the name Jomo Kenyatta in what Bernhardt describes as a self-baptism. The name Jomo means “burning spear”, and Kenyatta was a type of bead that was popular throughout East Africa during the time. \( ^{129} \) Pan-Africanism also had revolutionary impact on the African psyche on the continent, and throughout the Diaspora where European names and ideals were rejected. Other African leaders who took on or reclaimed African names were Joseph Mobutu, Julius Kambarage Nyerere, \( ^{130} \) and Kwame Nkrumah. Joseph Mobutu, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, would become Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga in rejection of colonial domination. Further, during Mobutu’s reign as President, he ordered all Congolese to abandon

\(^{128}\) Ibid., 12.
\(^{130}\) In 1943, he received the name Julius, after he was baptized in the Catholic faith.
their Christian or alien names in exchange for their indigenous Congolese names, and identity. As a result, many Congolese reverted to using their Congolese names. However, the current naming structure involves having a first name, which is often Christian, followed by the indigenous names.

Conversely, the South African President and anti-apartheid activist Nelson Mandela, was born Rolihlahla Mandela. Mandela was Xhosa with Khoisan ancestry on his maternal side – his Xhosa name Rolihlahla means “to pull a branch of a tree” or more colloquially, “to stir up trouble”, is very telling of what young Mandela would do as he actively resisted white domination and apartheid in South Africa, which reinforces the concept of ORİKÍ/IZIBONGO. Mandela being the first member of his family to attend school would receive the English name “Nelson” from his teacher Miss Mdingane.

As we can see, this process of changing one’s name occurred among a wide cross-section of African peoples, men and women from both the African mainland and the Diaspora, who came from various walks of life. Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Assata Shakur, Kwame Ture, Jommo Kenyatta, Makandel Daaga, Mukasa Dada, Muma Abu Jamal, Muhammad Ali, Michael X, Imamu Amiri Baraka and Molefi Asante are all examples of such African people in the various strata of society on the Continent and in the Diaspora, who went through name changes.

Table 3. African Name Changes and Black Power

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIVEN NAME OR “SLAVE NAME”</th>
<th>AFRICAN-NAME</th>
<th>INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cassius Clay</td>
<td>Muhammad Ali (1964)</td>
<td>Heavyweight Boxing Champion, member of the Nation of Islam</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malcolm Little</td>
<td>Malcolm X (1952); El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz</td>
<td>Former member of the Nation of Islam; Black Power activist</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joanne Deborah</td>
<td>Assata Olugbala</td>
<td>Black Power activist,</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>GIVEN NAME OR “SLAVE NAME”</th>
<th>AFRICAN-NAME</th>
<th>INVOLVEMENT</th>
<th>COUNTRY</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Byron Chesimard</td>
<td>Sakur (1970)</td>
<td>member of Black Panther Party (BPP); Black Liberation Army (BLA)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Geddes Granger</td>
<td>Makandel Daaga (circa 1970s)</td>
<td>Black Power activist, founder of National Joint Action Committee (NJAC)</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael De Freitas</td>
<td>Michael X; Michael Abdul Malik (circa 1960s)</td>
<td>Civil Rights and Black Power activist</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago; London</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stokley Carmichael</td>
<td>Kwame Ture (1978)</td>
<td>Black Power activist, Student leader (SNCC)</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago; U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everette LeRoi Jones</td>
<td>Imamu Amiri Baraka (1967)</td>
<td>Writer, Actor, Teacher and activist</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arthur Lee Smith Jr.</td>
<td>Molefi Kete Asante (circa 1976)</td>
<td>Professor of African American Studies, Temple University</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paulette Williams</td>
<td>Ntozake Shange (1971)</td>
<td>Playwright and novelist, self-proclaimed black feminist</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamau wa Ngengi (birth); John Peter (1914); Johnstone Kamau</td>
<td>Jommo Kenyatta (circa 1938)</td>
<td>Political Leader; 1st President of Kenya</td>
<td>Kenya, Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dave Darbeau</td>
<td>Khafra Kambon (1970s)</td>
<td>Black Power activist; economist</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gloria Albertha Marshall</td>
<td>Niara Sudarkasa</td>
<td>Anthropologist</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willie Ricks</td>
<td>Mukasa Dada</td>
<td>Civil Rights activist, first coined the slogan “Black Power”</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lennox Phillip</td>
<td>Abu Bakr</td>
<td>Leader of the Jammat al Muslimeen</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wesley Cook</td>
<td>Mumia Abu Jamal (1968;1971)</td>
<td>Member of the Black Panther Party</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yvette Marie Stevens</td>
<td>Chaka Adunne Aduffé Yemoja Hodarhi Karifi Khan ‘Chaka Khan’ (1969)</td>
<td>Famous African American Soul songstress, member of Black Panther Party</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joseph Mobutu</td>
<td>Mobutu Sese Seko Nkuku Ngbendu wa Za Banga</td>
<td>Political leader, President of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire), Africa</td>
<td>Democratic Republic of the Congo (Zaire), Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GIVEN NAME OR “SLAVE NAME”</td>
<td>AFRICAN-NAME</td>
<td>INVOLVEMENT</td>
<td>COUNTRY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miltona Mirkin Cade</td>
<td>Toni Cade Bambara (1970)</td>
<td>Author, documentary filmmaker, social activist and professor</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alice Faye Williams</td>
<td>Afeni Shakur (circa 1970)</td>
<td>Political activist, former member of the Black Panther Party, mother of deceased rapper Tupac Shakur</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earl Wiltshire</td>
<td>Salim Muwakil</td>
<td>Political and social activist, member of the Jammat al Muslimeen</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asher Dottin</td>
<td>Dr. Asha Kambon (circa 1970s)</td>
<td>Black Power activist</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Alfred</td>
<td>Olabisi Kuboni</td>
<td>Black Power activist, Senior Lecturer at UWI</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ronald McKinley Everett</td>
<td>Maulana Karenga (1960s)</td>
<td>Professor and founder the pan-African holiday of Kwanzaa, Black Power activist</td>
<td>U.S.A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cynthia Knight</td>
<td>Liseli Daaga (circa 1970s)</td>
<td>Black Power activist</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sydney King</td>
<td>Eusi Kwayana</td>
<td>Political leader, Black Power activist</td>
<td>Guyana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roy Lewis</td>
<td>Lutalo Masimba</td>
<td>Rapso chantuelle, Black Power activist</td>
<td>Trinidad &amp; Tobago</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Going through the list of Africans – both native-born and Diasporic – who changed their names during the Black Power era, I could not help myself from laughing hysterically at what their former names were, especially since I have only known these influential men and women by their African names – their previous names sounded so surreal. Sharing my experience with my very dear and special childhood friend Muhammad Muwakil – through text exchanges – we
both agreed, to use his words, that, “their old names became powerless in the shadows of their new [African] names.” Their African names possessed immense power.

“The Black Power movement also had profound impact on the struggle for equality in the Caribbean, where freedom fighters (inspired by the Black Power movement) started the Afro-Caribbean Movement (ACM); activists in Barbados formed the People’s Progressive Movement (PPM); and grassroots organizers in Bermuda launched the Black Beret Group (BBG).”  

Maureen Lewis-Warner says that prior to 1970 parents in Trinidad were not as driven in giving their children African names. She says this was in large part due to the negative “reaction[s] of Christian ministers of religion and Creole values of relatives, teachers, midwives, and registrars of births and deaths.” She explains that the “cultural renaissance”, which occurred in Trinidad during the 1970s – fueled primarily by the Black Power movement in the U.S., and the dominant political and social conditions of racial injustice existing at the time – significantly revolutionized attitudes toward the use of African names. This was reflected as parents were now bestowing African names upon their newborns while they themselves were adopting African names both “officially – by affidavit – or unofficially.”

“African given names in Trinidad come from a wide cross-section of African languages and are made available to the public by various means: Africans residing in the West Indies and West Indians who have resided in Africa are consulted to offer names and furnish their meanings; and books on African onomastics are available either from

132 Warner-Lewis. Trinidad Yoruba, 78.
133 It should be noted that Caribbean men and women residing in the U.S. played critical roles in the Black Power Movement in North America, Trinidadian-born Kwame Ture (Stokely Carmichael), being one of the movement’s main forerunners.
134 Ibid., 78-79.
private sources, bookshops, libraries, or from African oriented groups.”

Like in the U.S., the resurgence of Islam and the Arabic language in Trinidad during the post-1970s era has also played a very influential role in providing a reference for African-Islamic names. Sadly, Warner-Lewis notes that while European names persisted with great force, during the 80s and 90s, African names dwindled. This phenomenon is indicative of the negative perceptions mainstream society still have towards African names, and by extension African culture and people, which is explored in Chapter 4.

*Oral Exchanges, Personal Knowledge, the Black Power Era and Names*

In a shared discussion with Trinidadian-born, Oludari Olakela Massetungi, also known as, *Oloye Orawale Oranfe*[^137], whom I affectionately call Baba (formerly Derick Moses), I found that his desire to change his name came as a result of the global revolution that took place during the 60s and 70s, which he defined as a period when human beings sought to redefine their social interaction between the various different races. During this time period, he shared that human beings were experimenting with mind-altering substances, the trans-material realm and consciousness, the exploring of Hinduism, Orisha, Free Love, Make Love not War, the Moonies, Flower Power and Hippie Era. In the Americas and the Caribbean, he said that this manifested itself in the only logical direction of social equality – Black Power. William Lux in his article “Black Power in the Caribbean” states,

“…Black Power and its Africanness is the driving force behind the Caribbean’s search for its identity…. In Trinidad, while the black Prime Minister Eric Williams and

[^135]: Ibid., 79.
[^136]: Ibid.
[^137]: Though not his highest title, Oludari Olakela Massetungi said *Oloye Orawale Oranfe* is his most cherished designation.
the Peoples’ National Movement have raised levels of material welfare for the blacks, as for everybody else, they have not accomplished much in redressing historical imbalance or giving the black man a sense of being master in the castle of his skin.”  

Oludari intimated that at the age of 14 years leading up to 15 years he was a part of the Black Power uprising of 1970, in Trinidad, and fortunately for him, everyone in his family was involved in the movement with the exception of his father, who he described as being “half-Chinese”. It was 5 years later that he took on the name Olakela Massentungi, which now appears on all his legal documents with the obvious exception of his birth certificate. 

A similar meeting was held with another Trinidadian, who had undergone a name change, Baba Erin Folami, formerly Esmond King – who happens to be a very close family friend, and spiritual elder. It was during my visit with Baba Erin that I was given the name Olakitan in a Yoruba naming ceremony. Both Olakela Massentungi and Baba Erin, were inspired by the Black Power Movement in Trinidad, and adopted Yoruba names. However, Baba Erin would have his name changed several years later. On the discussion of names, Baba Erin told me that, “An African without an African name is like a ship without a rudder”. According to Baba Erin, the African has no sense of direction if s/he is stripped of her/his African name and identity. 

Although, my mother did not change her name she, too, was influenced by the Black Power Movement as manifested by her then hairstyle, Afro-centric clothes, and thought processes. Before catching a flight on my return to Ohio during the summer of 2011, I remember

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having a very profound recorded conversation with my mother, who explained what it was like during that era. Her Afro-hairstyles and fashions all received negative feedback, almost leading to her disownment by my deceased great-grand mother, who although possessed with a heart of gold, was heavily influenced by the prevailing dominant culture of European values, where everything that was African and black was considered ugly and evil. It must be remembered that was over 40-odd years ago when the country had just emerged from a period of colonialism, but the value system was still embedded in the soil of the land, and the general psyche of the people.

Although, I was told the meaning of my name very early in life, and who I was named after; hearing the stories of what impacted my mother to choose my name is always inspiring, as it has taken on added meaning given my current research on African names and naming practices. The last of her three children, all being named after my father, I was the only one who was given an African name. Yet, it was selected to sound as close as possible to his, and often mistaken as such to the untrained ear. By now, we know that naming an offspring after the father is one of the common naming practices among the people of West Africa. My father’s name is Leslie, and so, my elder brother and sister were named Leslie Jnr., and Leslie-Anne, respectively. My mother said she always wanted to give one of her children an African name, and yet still be named after my father. Indeed there were other factors that also surrounded my birth, which led to my birth name, or what the Yoruba would call the “Oruko Amutorunwa” or destiny name, which as mentioned above means “God’s Divine Light” – a name that she ultimately received through divination.

In a conversation with the Department Chair of African American and African Studies at the Ohio State University, and my beloved elder Dr. H. Ike Okafor-Newsum, I learnt that he, too,
was driven to receiving a name change during the Black Power Era in the 1970s. Interestingly, he received his name by a Nigerian that went by the Christian-name of Emmanuel, and who according to Dr. Newsum never made his indigenous African name important. While some Diasporic Africans were in the process of redefining themselves, there were native-born Africans in the U.S. who had Christian names, no doubt, as a result of European colonialism and Christianity on the continent. The following is a perfect example of such parodies based on a story I was once told by Dr. Newsum, where a Diasporic African was using a calabash to pour libations, while the native-born African who traveled across the Atlantic to celebrate the occasion was using a plastic container to pour the libations. What this shows is the extent to which Europeans sought and succeeded in eradicating the customs and traditions of the Africans and the far-reaching impacts across the Atlantic on to the Continent. On the other hand, it demonstrates the triumph some Africans in the Diaspora had at retaining and reclaiming their identity, as many of the forerunners of the Pan-African movement in Africa and abroad came from the U.S. and the Caribbean, such as Michael Sylvester (Trinidad), Marcus Garvey (Jamaica), George Padmore (Trinidad) and W.E.B. DuBois (Massachusetts, U.S.A.), among the many women who also participated. While Dr. Ike Newsum is known by his African names, more specifically, Ibo names, these names do not appear on legal documents. When asked why? Dr. Newsum’s response was that he did not see the need to ask the white man’s permission to change his name, since he saw that as giving too much power to the white man’s institution, especially, if one is coming into one’s own African consciousness during Black Power era. Also, instead of completely wiping out his European names, he decided to merge them because his father said that no matter what he does, the name “Newsum” would always be on historical
records. To eliminate the name “Newsum” will be to eliminate the family history, as names embody the historic experiences of a people – he said the conversation with his father made him realize that if he eliminated “Newsum”, the act was un-African, based on his understanding of African names, names had deep meaning, and was also a mapping of one’s ancestry. Therefore, he said that if he eliminated “Newsum”, his name will no longer be telling the story that it is supposed to tell.

And indeed, Dr. Newsum through his name was able to trace his very profound history back to the slave plantations, where most of the family history was originally passed down through oral tradition where they were able to then trace the African origin of his great-great-grandmother. He extended this practice through the naming of his son, whose surname is Okafor-Newsum. He felt that his son needed to also preserve his grandfather’s name – his mother’s father – because Newsum was being preserved that meant that his father’s name and his father’s name were being preserved but – where was my mother’s father? So he actually named my son Okpara Nnamdi – Okpara in Ibo is the first son while Nnamdi means “he was born when his father was doing well” – Dr. Newsum had just graduated with his doctorate. His son was the first son, born when his father was doing well. Newsum went even further, his son’s full name is Okpara Nnamdi LaMondue. LaMondue was Dr. Newsum’s mother’s maiden name, her father was a creole whose ancestors were Africans who came to the New World, the United States via Marsa France. His daughter’s name was Chinyere Evelyn Okafor-Newsum, Evelyn was the name of his mother.

Generally, he received positive reactions from his family members. He said that there were some dissention on the outside towards his name change, however, the atmosphere at the
time was so charged with the notion of Black Power whereby increasing numbers of black people were adopting African names, and wearing dashikis and Afros. During his name change, he learnt a little about the naming practices among the Ibo of West Africa. It is important to note that all these names are invested with profound and powerful meanings. For example, Olakela Massetungi, Olakela translates to mean the principle of violence and destruction, similar to the Xhosa name Rolihlahla, and Ikechukwu Okafor together means “God’s Power born on the 4th Market day”. After talking to these various individuals, and I asked them about how they went about naming their progeny, all insisted that they gave their children African names as in the case of Dr. Newsum. Moreover, I learnt that those who were given European-styled names at birth seldom knew their meanings, and if they did, these names bore no special meaning, except for Oludari, who said that his previous name “Derick” is a device used in the process of drilling oil, and that iron has, therefore, been a prominent part of his life on planet Earth. Dr. Newsum’s sister changed her name to Imani, which means “faith” in Kiswahili. Although his brother did not change his name, he did give his son an African name as in the case of my mother. Moreover, although I am the only one in my family that has an African name, it symbolizes African consciousness in the home. And while not all Africans in the Africa and throughout the Diaspora have African names, the fact that there are some Africans who are bestowed with, or who proudly reclaim their African identity through adopting an African name suggests that there is consciousness in the global community. Thus, it is important that we exalt and honor these names as they hold in them powerful stories, and serve to bring balance in a Eurocentric world.

139 Spelt Derrick i.e. a framework over a drill hole (as for oil) for supporting machinery see The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (Springfield, MASS.: Maerriam-Webster, 1997).
The following is a list of some of the African names that were given to children whose parents either grew up or were involved/influenced during the Black Power era – who did not necessarily undergo a name change.

Table 4. Names of Children Born in the 70s, 80s, 90s (selected based on personal knowledge and encounters)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>AFRICAN NAME</th>
<th>FEMININE/MASCULING/UNISEX</th>
<th>MEANING</th>
<th>ORIGIN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ADANNA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>Father’s daughter</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AISHA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Life”, “She who lives”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASHA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Life”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AYINDE</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“We gave praises and he came.”</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KARIMAH</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Giving, generous”</td>
<td>Arabic/ African Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAYLA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Pure”</td>
<td>African-America</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LISELI</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Divine Light”</td>
<td>Zambia (Lozi)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LESEDI</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“The Light”</td>
<td>South-Africa (Sotho)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KHAFRA</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“Appearing like Re”, “name of an Egyptian Pharaoh”</td>
<td>Egypt</td>
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<tr>
<td>KWESI</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“Boy born on Sunday”</td>
<td>Ghana (Akan)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CUDJOE</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“Boy born on Monday”</td>
<td>Ghana (Akan)</td>
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<td>MANDISA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Sweet”</td>
<td>South Africa (Xhosa)</td>
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<tr>
<td>HASINA</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“Good”, “Beautiful”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAILA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Dark Beauty”</td>
<td>Arabic/African Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KENYA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“The Cradle of Mankind”</td>
<td>Kenya (Kikuyu)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MUHAMMAD</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“Praised one”</td>
<td>Arabic/African Muslim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFRICAN NAME</td>
<td>FEMININE/MASCULIN/G/UNISEX</td>
<td>MEANING</td>
<td>ORIGIN</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>ZENANI</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“What have you brought?”</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AKILAH</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Wise”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFIYA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Wealth”, “Health”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ADE</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“Royal”</td>
<td>Nigeria</td>
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<tr>
<td>AKIL</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“Wise”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDWELA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“God brings me”</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANDWELE</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“God brings me”</td>
<td>Tanzania</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATO</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“This one is brilliant”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MODUPE</td>
<td>m.</td>
<td>“I thank God”</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JAMILA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Beautiful”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAI</td>
<td>u.</td>
<td>“S/he is beautiful”</td>
<td>South Africa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KAFFI</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Born on Friday”</td>
<td>Kiswahili</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NZINGA</td>
<td>f.</td>
<td>“Beautiful”</td>
<td>Ndongo</td>
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</table>
Chapter 4: Discrimination, Stigmatization and Researching African Ancestry

“Go back and fetch what was left behind”- Akan proverb

In a BBC report “Researching African-Caribbean Family History” Guy Grannum explains the hardships African-Caribbean people and by extension African Diasporic peoples – whose ancestors would have survived the Middle Passage during Atlantic Slave Trade – face when attempting to trace their family ancestry. Not only do these challenges highlight the blatant neglect of the African experience, but they also offer evidence for some of the psychological impacts on identity formation in the Caribbean, and in North America where there was the tendency to link one’s ancestry to some white lineage, which may not be legitimate.

According to Grannum, standard genealogical research in the UK relies on three assumptions: (i) people have surnames; (ii) the surname is passed on from the father to his children; (iii) most parents get married usually before, or around the time of the first child. In the case of the kidnapped Africans, names were acquired through the following:

- Surname of an owner - this could be the last owner or a former owner.
- Surname of father - a white master or employee, a freed man, a slave from another plantation, or the name of the father's former or original owner.
- Surname of mother.
- Last forename - many captives had multiple names that were often used to differentiate between slaves who had similar first names. Many were surnames of local people and may have been kept as a surname after
emancipation.

- Chosen the surname - freed men and women could choose their surname, maybe to confirm family ties, to disassociate themselves from former owners, or after influential people.
- Given by the church or State for official purposes.\footnote{140}

It did not take into consideration any of the naming practices that occurred during slavery, and on the African continent, as alluded to in the above, whether or not it was custom for a certain African group to have surnames. Surnames, as we know them, are not indigenous to most African cultures. Stewart in her research on African surnames says that, “Traditionally, Africans have had one or more personal names, but rarely did there exist a common name handed down to all family members from generation to generation.”\footnote{141} Indeed, this is yet another area that needs to be explored and examined extensively considering the psychological impacts on Africans throughout the Diaspora. As most Africans throughout the Diaspora link their ancestry to whites due to their European surname, for example, if I simply searched the name Fitzpatrick it will link me directly to Ireland without putting the name in its proper historical context as it relates to the history of slavery and colonialism in the Caribbean. Moreover, when a person of African descent in the Diaspora seeks to investigate his/her genealogy and the surname “Brown” connects them to a Mr. Brown’s plantation, a sense of shame and inferiority is likely to be instilled – as the name links their ancestors to being mere property of one Mr. Brown.

In “Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture”, Joane Nagel says, “The differences between the ethnic options available to blacks and whites in the United States reveal the limits of individual choice and underline the importance of external
ascriptions in restricting available ethnicities.”\textsuperscript{142} This quote successfully sums up the black experience, in a political climate that favors white culture – which Grannum demonstrates as Africans seek to trace their ancestral lineage.

\textit{Stigma and Discrimination Attached to African-Sounding Names}

In the MIT-Chicago 2002 study entitled: \textit{“Are Emily and Brendon More Employable than Lakisha and Jamal? A Field Experiment On Labor Market Discrimination”} White names received 50\% more callbacks than black names. A total of 5000 \textit{fake} resumes were sent out to Chicago and Boston newspapers. Half of the resumes had African-sounding names such as Treymane and Aisha. The other half had what would be considered white sounding names e.g. Emily and Brad. Both sets of job applications contained low and high quality work experience. \textit{Results:} White names received 50\% more callbacks than black names. It mattered not if the advertisements of the employer were classified as, “An equal opportunity employer” discrimination was equally present. According to Lori Sheppard et al. in “African American Names: A Brief Literature Review With Implications for Future Research and Justice” state that, “…one’s name could function as a stereotype…an ostensible African American name could pose risks for the bearer in the form of prejudiced outcomes” as seen in the above study.\textsuperscript{143}

Conversely, Bill Maxwell African American columnist from the Petersburg \textit{Times}, said that,

\begin{quote}
“African-American parents have every right to give their children whatever names they wish. But knowing what we now know, I would say black parents, even the most well-meaning, are irresponsible when they give their innocent
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{142} Joane Nagel, \textquoteleft{}Constructing Ethnicity: Creating and Recreating Ethnic Identity and Culture,\textquoteright{} in \textit{Social Problems}, 41, no. 1, Special Issue on Immigration, Race, and Ethnicity in America (Feb., 1994), 156.

\textsuperscript{143} Lori Sheppard et al., \textquoteleft{}African American Names: A Brief Literature Review With Implications for Future Research and Justice,\textquoteright{} In Journal of Justice Studies (2011-2012), 56-59.
offspring names that hobble them with negative baggage from the start.” (Bill Maxwell, Times columnist)

To add further insult to injury famous African American actor-comedian Bill Cosby in a very controversial address commenting said,

“Ladies and gentlemen, listen to these people. They are showing you what’s wrong. People putting their clothes on backwards. Isn’t that a sign of something going on wrong? Are you not paying attention? People with their hat on backwards, pants down around the crack. Isn’t that a sign of something or are you waiting for Jesus to pull his pants up? Isn’t it a sign of something when she’s got her dress all the way up to the crack -- and got all kinds of needles and things going through her body. What part of Africa did this come from? We are not Africans. Those people are not Africans; they don’t know a damned thing about Africa. With names like Shaniqua, Shaligua, Mohammed and all that crap and all of them are in jail. (When we give these kinds names to our children, we give them the strength and inspiration in the meaning of those names. What’s the point of giving them strong names if there is not parenting and values backing it up).”

Messrs. Maxwell and Cosby fall short of recognizing that it is a system of sustained racism and white patriarchy that is failing our African American brothers and sisters rather than the name that is given. Name discrimination and stigmatization are extensions of a racist society.

These men are perfect examples of who Carter G. Woodson in his classic book the Mis-education of the Negro refers to as the “mis-educated Negroes” or better “Negroes of enslaved minds”. Why should we abandon our African-sounding names, our claim to African and African American ancestry to support a system that is racist and corrupt, instead of empowering our people and upholding our names through the teachings of our history? Woodson says,

144Transcription date 2010 by Michael E. Eidenmuller:
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/billcosbypoundcakespeech.htm>
“Here in America, however, we are ashamed of being black. So many of us who are actually black powder our faces and make ourselves blue. In so doing we become all but hideous by the slavish aping of those around us in keeping with our custom of imitation. We fail to take ourselves for what we actually worth, and do not make the most of ourselves.”145

Throughout the Diaspora, many of our African brothers and sisters are still combating psychological oppression and institutional racism. Ample research has been done that shows that there is correlation between unpopular names and discrimination. D. Kalist and D. Lee in their research, “First names and crime: Does unpopularity spell trouble?” found that unpopular names were rampant among the delinquent population for both African-Americans and Caucasians.146

In an earlier study done by S. Lieberson and E. Bell “Children’s first names: An empirical study of social taste” reveals that “unpopular names” were “popular” among persons who fell in the lower socioeconomic bracket, and that mothers tended to give their children unusual names.147 Thus, such studies led Kalist and Lee to suggest that the link between crime and names is facilitated by socioeconomic status. More relevant to my thesis, is a study that was done by Fryer and Levitt, which showed that names that were considered distinctively African American were given by parents of the lower socioeconomic status.148 Sheppard et al. added that Kalist and Lee raised an important issue concerning the degree to which one does not like one’s given name and/or the negativity that is associated with that name. According to these scholars, a decrease in psychological health and self-esteem can result from the negative outcomes of one’s name.149

146 Ibid., 61.
147 Stanley Lieberson and Eleanor O. Bell, “Children’s first names: An empirical study of social taste,” in American Journal of Sociology, 98, no. 3 (Nov., 1992), 511-554
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid., 61-62.
Sheppard et al., contend that the “Choice of a name viewed negatively by others could start a whole chain of events both internally and externally”. Moreover, “Names [can] therefore have circular effects. A unique, unpopular, or racially salient name might provoke discrimination and negative responses from others (e.g. bullying) which might then lead to socially undesirable behavior by the name bearer resulting in even more unfavorable outcomes,” – the hypersensitivity and anger Leary refers to in her work, which can prompt criminal activity.\textsuperscript{150} This might be a more accurate explanation into the long-lasting psychological and societal impacts that \textit{white supremacy} and slavery had on African peoples through names and naming among Diasporic Africans.

Further, Leary admits that while some positive strides have been made since the 1970s in how African and African Diasporic peoples are represented, these steps are almost indiscernible when, “in today’s popular culture, young women and girls are casually referred to, and sometimes refer to themselves, as ‘bitches’ and ‘ho’s’…. Music videos have managed to get done in a matter of minutes what full length films of yesteryear accomplished: namely, to provide the viewer with the immortal depiction of black stereotype complete with drama, wardrobe bling bling, sex and violence.”\textsuperscript{151}

Moreover, popular culture coupled with rapid technological advancements has drastically revolutionized forms of oppression and \textit{white supremacy}, as it is able to capture wider audiences through the use of theatrical depictions, convincing sounds and luring imagery. As such, this chapter ends with a quote by African-American psychologist Linda Myers, who says,

\begin{flushright}
150 Leary, \textit{Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome}, 170.  \\
151 Ibid., 152.
\end{flushright}
“Surviving a 300-year holocaust, African-Americans exemplify the transpersonal nature of an optimal psychology. Through the processes of racist oppression we were indoctrinated (often through terrorism) to believe our physical survival is in the hands of the slave captor. We have been denied the truth about our cultural heritage and history, while the cultural heritage and history of the slave captor has been elevated. To survive the most vicious and extended slavery in the history of humankind, the African-American has to master his/her mind, see beyond material appearance to a sustaining reality manifested through our indigenous culture. Our music, as an unspoken consciousness of a people, reflects our spirituality, creativity, adaptability, flexibility, genius, and, at times, dehumanization.”

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152 Myers, Understanding an Afrocentric World View, 35.
Conclusion

Indeed, according to African mystical theology the name holds immense power. Statements such as those that were made by the Times columnist and actor/comedian Bill Cosby represent internalized racism and a classic case of brainwashing as it calls for Africans, particularly, African Americans to reject their culture in order to survive in a society that promotes white supremacy and racial inequality. Based on experiences from friends growing up with African and African-sounding names during the late 1980s to early 1990s, many were targets of ridicule – since anything from Africa was considered dark, evil, poor and ugly. According to Sheppard et al., “Society still finds distinctive African names to be problematic.”

Today, African American names such as Lakisha, La Quisha, Jameel and Shaquanda are still often stigmatized, “blacklisted” and associated with low socio-economic status. This paper serves to empower, as well as inspire African peoples to embrace their heritage and resist any injustice that is continuously being meted out to them. Therefore, the paper is not meant to tell all Africans – continental and Diasporic – to adopt African names; but rather it focuses on the centrality of names and naming among Africans, and its continued importance today. Thus, the adoption of African names can be seen “…either [as] an outright rejection of Eurocentricity or its converse – a positive recognition of African ethnicity” – or both…

~ There is no end to African naming ~

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153 Ibid., 62.
154 Warner-Lewis, Trinidad Yoruba, 80.
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**Songs**


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Transcription date 2010 by Michael E. Eidenmuller:
<http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/billcosbypoundcakespeech.htm>
Appendix A: Free Black American Settlers in Trinidad 1815 – 1816

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<tr>
<th>Name</th>
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<td>24Jul14</td>
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Colonial Marines 4th Company

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## Black Names in America

**In the Beginning:** 1619-1799

### Source List C: FREE BLACK PATRIOTS, NORTH, 1700-1800

#### MALE

**Alphabetical (117 names)**

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