

# Introduction

## *Kongo Christianity, Festive Performances, and the Making of Black Atlantic Tradition*

CÉCILE FROMONT AND MICHAEL IYANAGA

Lifting a veil on the secret origins of New Orleans's Mardi Gras Indians, seeing Brazilian Catholic songs anew as an expression of Afro-diasporic devotion, uncovering the deep Afro-Catholic roots of Caribbean Orisa religion and rituals, and analyzing the significance of black kings and queens feted in the Americas and their various forms of representations, the chapters gathered in this volume explore the role that Christianity and its festive traditions have played in the making of black Atlantic cultures since the era of the slave trade. Their arguments move beyond analyses of African diasporic religious traditions that consider their Christian dimensions as inherently exogenous, imposed elements that enslaved or disenfranchised populations of African origins or descent either resignedly accepted or else eventually transformed into syncretic objects of stealthy resistance and identity formation. Instead, authors in this volume draw transatlantic connections between festive traditions from North to South America and the Caribbean and precedents chiefly in the early modern Catholic kingdom of Kongo, an influential polity of west-central Africa and one of the main regions of origin of men and women enslaved in the Americas. This background, they argue, reveals how enslaved and free Africans, and later their descendants, often used Christianity and Christian-derived celebrations as physical and mental spaces for autonomous cultural expression, social organization, and political empowerment.

Scholars have written at length about identifiable aspects of central African and Kongo spiritual practices in African American religions such as Haitian

Vodou.<sup>1</sup> Yet these studies have maintained a strong focus on non-Christian traits of central African religions and often used as a point of departure ethnographies conducted after the end of the slave trade, in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These important works have played a key role in advancing knowledge of the African diaspora but have been ill equipped because of their methods and sources to identify and analyze historically how the worldly, ostentatiously Catholic culture of the Kingdom of Kongo shaped the religious, social, and political experience of the enslaved and free in the Americas. Drawing from scholarship of the early 2000s and reinterpreting older sources on central Africa and the early modern Atlantic world, the chapters in this volume bridge that gap. They identify and study the often elusive marks that early-modern central African Christianity has left on the festive events enslaved or free Africans and their descendants have staged in the Americas in the direct or indirect orbit of the church from the era of slavery to contemporary times. These chapters derive from a conversation begun among most of the authors in 2015 at Yale's Institute for Sacred Music on the occasion of the symposium titled "Afro-Christian Festivals in the Americas: Bridging Methodologies and Crossing Frontiers."

#### SLAVE TRADE AND CHRISTIANITY BETWEEN TWO SHORES

Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries, the Atlantic commerce in slaves forcibly uprooted close to twelve million men, women, and children from the African continent. The largest number of captives originated from populations in and around Kongo and Angola in west-central Africa, and in Gbe- and Yoruba-speaking areas along the Bight of Benin, although many other parts of the continent, including Senegambia and even the Indian Ocean coast also saw their people caught in the trade. A small number of those embarked reached European shores; the overwhelming majority landed in the Americas, and close to half in Brazil.<sup>2</sup>

This massive, centuries-long movement in population across the Atlantic is one of the two crucial background phenomena that underlie the practices and events analyzed in this book. The other formative element is the path Christianity followed along the routes created by the new political, diplomatic, and commercial networks that emerged across the Atlantic in the early modern period, including, but not exclusive to, those created by the traffic in slaves. Within months of the entrance of what would later be called the Americas into European history, upon the return of Christopher Columbus to

Europe, the pope recognized, with the 1494 Treaty of Tordesillas, Spain's and Portugal's secular claim over extra-European lands and, in exchange, mandated the evangelization of world populations as a task for the two seafaring, expansionist realms to implement and finance. From that moment Catholicism and conquistadors would advance hand in hand in the American, African, and Asian territories Spain and Portugal effectively or nominally controlled. Soon, as Europe tore itself along the Reformation schism, Protestant refugees and proselytizers from northern Europe reached the Americas, where they competed with Catholic Iberian ambitions. The ill-fated Calvinist colony of France Antarctique had settled, then failed, near Rio de Janeiro by the middle of the 1500s. Pilgrims to North America met with more success early in the next century. As their Catholic counterparts, European followers of the Reform made a central mandate the conversion of the people they deported across the waters or who lived enslaved or free under their rule.<sup>3</sup>

Meanwhile, Roman and Reformed Christianity reached the African continent, in sporadic missionary attempts as well as in the Euro-African societies that grew around trading fort enclaves. Most significant, however, in terms of scope and impact on Atlantic cultures, was the independent conversion to Catholicism circa 1500 of the Kingdom of Kongo, an event that started a deep and long lasting engagement among the inhabitants of the region with the religion and with European visual and material culture. The independent conversion of the kingdom, and its enduring appropriation of Catholic rituals, thoughts, and imagery, was a momentous event in the history of the Atlantic world. Not only was the realm influential in its own part of the world among neighboring central African polities who allied with or fought against it, but it also bore much weight on the formation of African-derived cultures in the Americas through the forced migration of massive numbers of its people and neighbors in the Atlantic slave trade.

Starting in the sixteenth century, Catholicism progressively impacted all sectors of Kongo society and reached to various degrees the kingdom's neighboring polities and vassals. But Catholicism did not simply replace Kongo traditions. Rather, a new Kongo Catholicism gradually took shape, built on ritual, aesthetic, and cosmological components drawn from both central African and European traditions. Perhaps one of the most striking examples of the ways in which Catholicism impacted Kongo socioreligious life, mentioned in nearly all the chapters of this volume (Miguel A. Valerio, Kevin Dawson, Jeroen Dewulf, Cécile Fromont, Junia Ferreira Furtado, and Michael Iyanaga), was the danced mock fight ritual known as *sangamento*. The elite of

the kingdom performed the *sangamento*, whose name is a lusitanized version of the Kikongo-language verb *ku-sanga*, on feast days, as part of ceremonies, and prior to important battles.<sup>4</sup> During the ritual the dancers displayed weapons, clothing, and musical instruments of central African origin or European provenance, either in combination or in a clearly delineated binary sequence.<sup>5</sup> Participants in this and other rituals and ceremonies of the Christian Kongo often played a mix of European and central African musical instruments.<sup>6</sup> The enthronization of Kongo kings in particular incorporated such a combination of locally rooted and once foreign symbols, instruments, and pageantry.<sup>7</sup>

Christian cosmology acquired local currency in early modern Kongo in a variety of ways beyond rituals. For example, Kongo Christians recast popular European saints as their patron saints and even as ancestors. The myth of King Afonso I's ascension to the throne with the help of Saint James, an army of divine horsemen, and the cross of Constantine—first written by the Kongo monarch himself in the 1510s—served as an early blueprint of the ways in which Christianity and its holy men and women took on a distinct Kongo significance. These two examples—the adoption of saints and the *sangamento* (and other rituals)—illustrate how during the early modern period, much of Kongo's Catholicism took on local form and gave once wholly European symbols and imagery distinct central African identities. The chapters in this volume build on the broad notion that this specific, distinctive form of Christianity played a significant role in shaping the worldview of a great many of the millions of central Africans uprooted to the Americas.

Yet if Christianity in the early modern Atlantic world counted a distinct and influential African dimension thanks to the Kongo Church, it was but one of its traits. Many were the entanglements between slavery and Christianity in the Atlantic world, and Africans from many parts of the continent displaced to the Americas experienced the two concurrently. The Church, Catholic or Reformed, was closely linked to European slave owners or merchants, even sometimes a slave owner or trader in its own rights, and was actively involved in the implementation of systems of exploitation. Christianity also became the mandated frame for the spiritual practices of the enslaved and freed, and its precepts ruled over their life, imposing, for instance, its definition of kinship or naming practices. Even so, the history of African American religiosity is one of resilience, resistance, and creativity in spite of the church's relentless cultural and spiritual assaults, but also thanks to the spaces of relative freedom it offered to the disenfranchised, whether enslaved or free. Readings of Christianity as a predominantly external or burdensome influence on African and African

American cultures or else as a thin veneer over deeper, non-Christian allegiances are inaccurate or at least lack nuance.

The chapters in this volume, in contrast, explore how Christianity could be a site for the formation of black Atlantic tradition. They join in this regard earlier scholars who have underlined the role of the church as a locus—albeit, in their views, a temporary one—for the development of African religiosity in the Americas. Anthropologist Roger Bastide, for instance, suggested for Brazil that lay Catholic confraternities often “developed into *candomblés*,” framing such sodalities as “incubators” for the later (re)development of a West African–derived religious tradition.<sup>8</sup> Transposing this interpretation to the Cuban context, David Brown and Stephan Palmié have since noted that colonial brotherhoods such as *cabildos de nación* also sequentially, and consequentially, antecede Lucumí houses.<sup>9</sup>

#### THE ORIGINS AND PATHS OF AFRICAN AMERICAN CULTURES

This volume is in conversation with scholarship on the history of African Christianity in the early modern Atlantic world and contributes to ongoing debates on the origins and trajectory of African American cultures. It comes at a moment when the impact of Atlantic history has pushed studies of the interrelations between Africa and the Americas in new directions. Scholars have become increasingly aware of the depths and reciprocity of the connections between the two continents and of the extent to which the two shores form a single constellation, bound up in a common fate that was largely created by, and intensified through, the commercial, human, and cultural networks of the slave trade. This space of mutual implication, circulation of goods and ideas, and shared transcontinental history, often referred to by scholars today as the “black Atlantic,” has not always been imagined as such a fluid, closely interconnected unit.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the field of study that has become African American or African diaspora studies began in large part with an argument about how much of Africa had been transferred and retained in the Americas.

Although the seeds of modern scholarly debates surrounding Africa’s link to the then called “New World Negro” are perhaps most accurately found in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century work of scholars such as W. E. B. Du Bois, Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, Fernando Ortiz, or Jean Price-Mars, the issue gained lasting traction in the United States only during the 1930s and 1940s.<sup>11</sup> This was in no small part owing to the comprehensive work of anthropologist Melville J. Herskovits and his now famous debate with sociologist E. Franklin Frazier.

The sociologist insisted that the traumatic and devastating nature of slavery all but erased the African past from African American culture, leaving nothing but “scraps of memories” of an African heritage.<sup>12</sup> Despite how odd such an interpretation may seem to our contemporary sensibilities, it was a position that, as Stephan Palmié reminds us, “had [by the early 1940s] clearly come to prevail among liberal North Americans, both white and black.”<sup>13</sup> In fact, Herskovits’s early writings, such as his 1925 article in *Survey Graphic*, suggest that he, too, saw African American culture as fundamentally American (rather than African).<sup>14</sup> Fieldwork in Suriname, Haiti, West Africa, and Brazil from the end of the 1920s to the 1930s shifted his views, however, and he became the leading oppositional voice to Frazier’s position. Indeed, the anthropologist insisted, perhaps most famously in his seminal 1941 book, *Myth of the Negro Past*, that African cultural traits and patterns, “Africanisms,” did in fact survive—in some cases even flourishing—in the Americas.<sup>15</sup> Even if the debate did not immediately end, the victor was no doubt Herskovits and his many likeminded colleagues (Fernando Ortiz, Arthur Ramos, Lorenzo Dow Turner, etc.) and students (William Bascom, Richard Waterman, René Ribeiro, Katherine Dunham, etc.).<sup>16</sup>

Landmark publications have since charted ways of approaching this “black Atlantic” that push beyond the models proposed by either Herskovits or Frazier.<sup>17</sup> In 1976, for instance, Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price circulated *An Anthropological Approach to the Afro-American Past: A Caribbean Perspective*, which was an argument for the need to historicize the Herskovitsian approach while also paying less attention to isolatable traits than to social processes and structures.<sup>18</sup> Although Mintz and Price were careful not to gainsay the African historicity of African American cultures, they turned decidedly away from what Africans (and their descendants) may have “retained” to focus on what was created anew in the Americas. This novel approach to African American religion and culture, however, spurred polemics of its own. Indeed, the decades around the turn of the millennium have seen innumerable debates between those who choose to emphasize a fundamentally American-based creativity as couched in Mintz and Price’s work, as in Michel-Rolph Trouillot’s idea of the “miracle” of creolization, and those who instead focus on contiguities from one shore to the next, a point of view embraced among others by Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, John Thornton, Linda Heywood, and Pablo A. Gómez—a perspective that historian Paul Lovejoy dubs “Africancentric” or “Afrocentric.”<sup>19</sup>

The depth and enduring vitality of the origins debate in its multiple incarnations has brought thinkers to consider its very stakes and players as historical and intellectual artifact worthy of analysis in their own right, yielding a range

of metastudies about the trajectory of this fundamental question.<sup>20</sup> Beyond this debate the rise of scholarship favoring an Atlantic-wide perspective has also engendered a deeper interest in the effects on the African continent itself of the transformative “interconnections” the Atlantic world system and the slave trade created between the ocean’s two shores.<sup>21</sup> The benefits of such a new emphasis are evidently exponential, as a better grasp of the situation on one shore enlightens approaches to the other.

#### A FOCUS ON CENTRAL AFRICA

A key moment in the study of African culture and religion in the Americas was the construction and publication of *Voyages: The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database* in the 1990s, a tool that, despite its limitations, buttressed cultural and historical studies on the slave trade and its effects with the authoritative weight of quantitative data.<sup>22</sup> An effect of the database, for instance, has been a refined attention to the diverse backgrounds of the enslaved as fine demographic data on place of embarkation and disembarkation over time made possible discriminating studies of specific populations in given location and periods.

For instance, using numbers from the online database, we know that between 1551 and 1575, an estimated 61,007 Africans were taken as slaves (81 percent from Upper Guinea, 6 percent from Lower Guinea, and 13 percent from west-central Africa and Saint Helena). However, in the following twenty-five years, when the total number of embarked Africans nearly tripled to an estimated 152,373, the ratio of central Africans became much more significant (29 percent from Upper Guinea, 2 percent from Lower Guinea, and 69 percent from west-central Africa and Saint Helena). Then, from 1601 to 1625 the numbers more than doubled, to an astounding 352,843 people, with captives from west-central Africa and Saint Helena making up more than 91 percent of the total number of enslaved Africans. These numbers suggest that although central Africans were not the first to arrive in the Americas, they were nonetheless the first to arrive on American shores in significant numbers. And the enslavement of central Africans continued well into the nineteenth century. As such, central Africans constituted just under half of all captives (roughly 45 percent or just under six million people), thus making up the largest single origination region of the African continent.<sup>23</sup>

What makes these data—raw numbers and dates—particularly significant is the implication that central Africans may have had an early, strong,

and lasting influence on the African American cultures that began to take root in the early years of the slave trade. This is, after all, the general notion Sidney Mintz and Richard Price proposed decades ago. The anthropologists, extrapolating (intuitively, it seems) from their work in Suriname, suggested that the first arrivals had an important role in defining the character of African American culture:

During the earliest decades of the African presence in Suriname, the core of a new language and a new religion had been developed; subsequent centuries of massive new importations from Africa apparently had little more effect than to lead to secondary elaborations. We would suggest tentatively that similar scenarios may have unfolded in many other parts of Afro-America. . . . The early stages of African-American history . . . stamped these [local slave] cultures with certain general features that strongly influenced their subsequent development and continue to lend to them much of their characteristic shape today.<sup>24</sup>

What is more, as historians have underlined, west-central Africa formed, in the words of Robert Slenes, a “single ‘cultural area,’” according to which the peoples from central Africa would share what Jan Vansina called “a common view of the universe and a common political ideology.”<sup>25</sup> Consequently, the captives sharing related central African languages and worldviews who were taken in such concentrated numbers may have been foundational in the Americas not only owing to their early arrival but also because they were able to find enough common ground to allow them to rebuild social institutions and practices in ways that other African ethnic groups might have found more challenging.

The power of the quantitative data gathered in the database lies in its ability to outline new questions based on its findings about the enslaved and the cultures they created. It may come as little surprise, therefore, that, in the same years as the database’s construction and publication, increased attention on the west-central dimension of the African diaspora started to emerge in scholarship. Yet Linda Heywood still remarked in 2002 how “general interest and knowledge of the history and cultural impact of Central Africans in the Atlantic Diaspora lag far behind that of West Africa.”<sup>26</sup> Although the tide has continued to shift since the publication of Heywood’s edited volume, studies in the religion and culture of the diaspora have still been to be strongly focused on their connections—however defined—with West Africa and in particular with Gbe-speaking regions and Yorubaland. This historiographic bend partly derived from the increased numbers of enslaved West Africans



taken toward the end of the slave trade to Brazil and the Caribbean, two areas of early focus for diasporic studies. In the palimpsestic construction of African American culture over hundreds of years, not only has this later wave left disproportionately visible marks but, as Iyanaga notes in his chapter, specific historiographic reasons, starting in the nineteenth century, inextricably link West Africa to a notion of African “otherness” in both scholarly and more popular ambits. Further, West African traits have been all the more identifiable, as their nineteenth-century counterparts across the waters are well known, thanks to ethnographic work conducted in the Bight of Benin starting only decades after the end of the trade. When ethnographer and photographer Pierre Verger wrote about the fluxes and refluxes between Bahia and Benin, for instance, he talked about trends belonging to some of his informants’ living memory.<sup>27</sup> Verger was also the first among a number of later scholars to write from the perspective of a practitioner of West African–derived Afro-Atlantic religion—a *babalawo*, or priest, in his case—explaining the particular emphasis in his observations on elements from his own faith.

While it has been evident that a comparison with central Africa could illuminate many African American practices and objects, the exercise has always been arduous because distance in time multiplies the challenges of spatial disconnect inherent to diasporic studies and complicates possibilities to perform historically grounded rapprochements. The robust scholarship emerging on central Africa before the colonial era contributes little by little to fill this gap.

Indeed, the focus of the chapters in this volume on the central African dimension does not emerge from a vacuum. To varying degrees and in more or less explicit ways, the chapters build on many decades of scholarship that has recognized the central African dimension of the aesthetics and logics of Afro-Christian festivals in the Americas. In fact, in the 1930s Brazilian psychiatrist-turned-anthropologist Arthur Ramos wrote that the Catholic processions, brotherhoods, and feasts of colonial Uruguay, Argentina, Venezuela, Colombia, Cuba, and Peru showed “cultural influences of the Bantu [i.e., central African] Negroes.” Importantly, Ramos did not believe that all the Bantu-speaking contributions to religion in the Americas were relegated to the past, observing that “the political organizations of the [central] African monarchies survive in certain popular festivals [of Brazil] . . . such as the *Congos*,” which Ramos understood as primarily “folkloric,” rather than religious, forms of expression.<sup>28</sup> Why would it be the case, though, that religions of Bantu-speaking Africans fail to “survive” in the way West African–derived religions do or that they might survive only within the structures of West African–derived

religious traditions (e.g., *petwo*, the supposedly Kongo-derived “hot” side of Haitian Vodou<sup>29</sup>)? It seems not unreasonable to suggest that there has been an ideological shroud over much scholarship, explicated famously in Brazilian journalist-cum-folklorist Edison Carneiro’s 1936 assertion that Bantu-speaking peoples had an “extremely poor mythology.”<sup>30</sup> The chapters in this book contest these readings, pointing to the religious mark, past and present, of central African Christianity—in all of its own complex integration and redeployment of local and foreign thoughts and symbols—on festivals in the Americas.

One reason central African resonances in the Americas have remained elusive to scholarly attention undoubtedly comes from the large role Christianity played in the formulation of some of its polities’ Christian and non-Christian rituals, that already, before the Middle Passage, included cross-culturally resonant forms. The redefinition appeared, for instance, in Kongo Christian crucifixes that mixed and merged local and imported iconography or, more broadly, in the nimble adoption of foreign objects and images, reendowed with local meanings. It seems anything but accidental that so many central African markers—whether sangamento-like practices, crowning ceremonies, musical instruments (e.g., xylophones, bow lutes known as *pluriarcs*, and specific drums types)—are linked to Catholic practices in the Americas.<sup>31</sup> Many aspects of African religious practices that would have been molded in Kongo and Angola, such as the use by different ritual associations of saint statues or crosses, could easily be misinterpreted in the Americas as new, Creole syncretisms.<sup>32</sup> Essentialist conceptions of Christian thoughts, forms, and rituals as strictly European and of African religious practices as necessarily non-Christian fueled these once predominant perceptions.<sup>33</sup>

The emphasis given in this volume to the central African, Christian dimension of the case studies considered contributes to shift the balance. The chapters build on early contributions by, among others, Mary Karasch, Winifred Kellersberger Vass, Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, John Thornton, Margaret Washington Creel, and Stuart B. Schwartz.<sup>34</sup> Further interventions emerged in the early 2000s and 2010s, by Robert Slenes, Marina de Mello e Souza, Linda Heywood, Ras Michael Brown, Jason R. Young, James Sweet, Roquinaldo Ferreira, Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz, and Christina Mobley.<sup>35</sup> The already-mentioned volume Heywood edited in 2002, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, was a landmark in English-language scholarship and included many of these older and newer voices.<sup>36</sup> The authors in the present book also mention Fromont’s work on Kongo Christian visual and material culture in central Africa and its resonances in Brazil, a line of research inspired and informed by many of the works just mentioned.<sup>37</sup>

Benefiting from the field's maturing bibliography, the authors bring in these pages a new or renewed central African perspective to case studies taken from a range of geographies, from several countries of the Spanish-speaking Americas (Valerio and Iyanaga) to the streets of New Orleans (Dewulf), the waters of northeastern Brazil (Dawson), and the Caribbean island of Trinidad (Stewart), even delving into West Africa (Furtado).<sup>38</sup>

#### WHY CHRISTIANITY? WHY FESTIVALS?

Religion in general and Christianity in particular have held a place of choice in studies of African and African-derived culture in the Americas because they are key terrains for the construction and expression of identities, power, and social relations. But studies of African diasporic religions have often followed templates dictated by other fields, an approach that has revealed much but also impeded other discoveries. This book is an attempt to bypass this limitation. Analyzing the diasporic experience from the specific perspective of central African Christianity requires crossing historiographic fault lines that have kept scholarship on British, Iberian, or French imperial projects but also on Protestantism or Catholicism too often at odds. A number of studies have explored the African Protestant experience chiefly within the British Atlantic.<sup>39</sup> Others have focused on the relationship between Africans and the Catholic Church, mainly in Latin America.<sup>40</sup> Yet central African Christianity stood as an experiential common ground that brought cohesion and empowerment to forced migrants from the region and their descendants across the Americas and throughout the centuries. Much insight, then, is to be gained in exploring the diasporic experience with a focus on central African-honed religion, a background shared by many in the Americas, across geographies and chronologies, the relevance of which transects scholarly patterns of inquiry defined by different concerns. The chapters in this volume illustrate the new insights that such an approach to diasporic studies, transverse to established fields, can bring. Dianne M. Stewart's chapter, for example, investigates the role of African Catholicism as a background for the formation of Obeah, a black Atlantic phenomenon long seen as the product of both Anglo-Saxon Protestantism and Yoruba religion. Her argument interrogates instead the frictions between Protestantism and Catholicism and between west-central African religion and West African faiths. Dewulf, in another thought-provoking chapter, follows the possibly obfuscated histories of Kongo Catholic ritual in the changing political, religious, and ethnic landscape of contemporary New Orleans.

The chapters in this volume all use, more specifically than religion at large, festive moments unfolding directly or indirectly in the orbit of the church as entry points into their examination of Afro-Christian presence in the Americas and the Atlantic world. Because the authors are historians or scholars of literature, religion, or music, they approach festive occasions as documents rather than objects of study *per se*. This is not a book about performance, but it is our hope that it will serve as an invitation to further study the events presented and contextualized here, in particular with a closer and more rigorous attention to the performative mechanics at play in their production and reproduction. If they do not directly grapple with performance theories, the present chapters are nonetheless concerned with historical and contemporary bodies and the ways in which they form and perform social memory. The authors usefully borrow from the field of performance studies its attention to the potential of these performative events, taken in each of their specific contexts, as revealing archives with the potential to fill lacunae in the existing written historical record. The festivals and events considered in the volume all enrich our understanding of past and present by completing and broadening the content and scope of textual archives often constructed specifically to ignore or silence African and African-derived cultural, political, and religious expressions. In some ways, then, the chapters turn us toward what Diana Taylor called the “repertoire,” always in a dialogic relationship with the “archive.”<sup>41</sup> In the events studied in these pages, those otherwise silenced, overtly or covertly, made themselves heard, “resist[ing],” as Joseph Roach once wrote, “the dominant public transcript by affirming the rites of collective memory.”<sup>42</sup> Moreover, the closer look taken here on the central African dimension of the social memory activated in American Christian festivals complicates and enriches understandings of the origins and form of African American religious practice and culture at large with a broadened attention to its multiple, complex, and intermingling forms.

Also emerging from this book’s study of bodies in movements within Afro-Christian festivals is a more complex understanding of the multivalent links between African and African-derived pageantry and other dimensions of American cultures. Lisa Voigt’s chapter, for instance, reflects on the multiple levels of mimesis in Brazilian baroque festivals, describing multidirectional acts of representation of and by Europeans, Africans, and Afro-Brazilians. Here the festivals, as well as their textual representations, illustrate the limits of official colonial discourses of differentiation and sociopolitical separation. That such textual productions would fail or stop short of performing what is largely

understood as the keystone of the colonial system—clear differentiation and insuperable segregation of social actors—is particularly telling. It brings to the fore the porous lines, or rather the deep interpenetration, between elite and African and Native American cultures. Between the lines of the former’s self-representation through written histories lay its multivalent entanglements with the latter two, not only in festivals, as highlighted here, but also in other aspects of life. In other words, confronting the written record with embodied social memory, one touches on “the yet unwritten epic of the fabulous cocreation” of history and memory.<sup>43</sup> Such attention to “bodily social memory” is all the more essential, given that it builds spatial and temporal bridges linking the era of slavery to contemporary times.<sup>44</sup>

#### OUTLINE OF CHAPTERS

In the first part of the book, the authors interpret or reinterpret three different American festivals revolving around ritual mock battles, using precedents from the Christian Kongo as an enlightening background to their staging, either as a direct model or as one of an array of inspirations. In chapter 1 Jeroen Dewulf challenges the idea that the origins of New Orleans’s Mardi Gras Indians can be traced solely to Buffalo Bill’s touring Wild West shows that wintered in New Orleans in 1884–85. Instead, siding with other historians, he argues that the phenomenon originated in much earlier times, developing out of the “Congo dances” of the city’s Congo Square and ultimately linked to the Christian Kongo *sangamento* ritual dances. As such, Mardi Gras Indians can be approached as one manifestation of the broader, hemispheric phenomenon of Afro-Iberian folk Catholicism. Kevin Dawson turns his attention in chapter 2 to saltwater and freshwater as key sites for the construction, transmission, and staging of African diasporic religion and social memory. Specifically, he probes how enslaved men and women staged a mock naval battle on the island of Itamaracá, in the Brazilian state of Pernambuco, in 1815, in a way that creatively reimaged the Iberian ritual drama of *Moors and Christians*. The transposition, he argues, allowed the enslaved actors to bring freshwater and saltwater west-central African traditions, spiritual and otherwise, to Brazil’s social and ecological environment. In a speculative, thought-provoking chapter, Miguel A. Valerio analyzes the first recorded festival staged by black performers in the Americas as part of the 1539 celebration of the truce of Aigues-Mortes in Mexico-Tenochtitlan, seat of the nascent Iberian colonial territory of New Spain. Using demographic data, he argues that the spectacular cavalry of black

men and women that staged a mock battle against heathens were *ladinos*, that is, Africans who came to Mexico after having lived in Iberia. These *ladinos*, moreover, came to Spain and Portugal predominantly from central Africa. They carried not only their African background but also their experience of life in Iberian societies, where free and enslaved Africans already staged festivals and gathered in religious institutions of their own, such as confraternities. Thus, he argues, it would be erroneous to think of the performers in the 1539 cavalcade as powerless actors in a European-designed event. Rather, the mock battle should be seen at least in part as the invention of *ladinos*.

The second part of the book turns its attention to the figure of black kings and the notion of representation in performance, diplomacy, and the archive. In chapter 4 Lisa Voigt considers the figure of African sovereigns in colonial Brazil not through the repertoire of embodied practices staged in the public sphere but through the archive that governed such performances and represented them narratively. Considering both kings and queens of *congados* festivals and African ambassadors to the Portuguese Crown, she analyzes how Africans found ways to represent themselves and their interests in colonial Brazil in positive and productive ways. Junia Ferreira Furtado, in turn, considers in chapter 5 how the rich Afro-Christian background of two priests born and raised in Brazil shaped their experience of ceremonial life in the African kingdom of Dahomey they were charged with visiting and describing on behalf of the Portuguese Crown in the late eighteenth century. How did these two men of different social and racial backgrounds experience and travel through the black Atlantic? How did their familiarity with the black royalty that the predominantly black populations of their homes in the Brazilian province of Minas Gerais and capital of São Salvador routinely elected and celebrated inform their perception of and interaction with the court of the mighty king of Dahomey?

Part 3 reconsiders well-known primary sources. In chapter 6 art historian Cécile Fromont takes a closer look at a lithograph created in the early nineteenth century after sketches produced by Bavarian artist Johann Moritz Rugendas during his travels in Brazil. The print is one of the earliest and best-known visual representations of the centuries-old celebrations organized by Brazilian socioreligious organizations called *congados* or *congadas*, whose very name draws an explicit connection between them and the west-central African region once home to the mighty Kingdom of Kongo. The chapter combines insights gathered from written and visual historical documents, secondary literature, and a careful formal analysis to form a rigorous examination of the

image. The chapter interrogates the extent to which the lithograph attempted, and variously succeeded and failed, to make visible the social, religious, and political stakes of the performance. It brings new light to a document that is emblematic but has been seldom critically approached. Dianne M. Stewart reads anew archival records in chapter 7 to propose a new interpretation of Orisa religion in Trinidad. Challenging the predominant interpretation of the genesis of the religious practice as syncretic fusion of Yoruba beliefs and “Euro-Western Christianity,” she points to the formative role and lasting impact of preexisting Afro-Catholic communities of the island in its formation in the second half of the nineteenth century. Her chapter brings to the fore the limitations of syncretism as a way of theorizing Afro-diasporic religions.

To close our collection is part 4, which looks at aurality and the making of diasporic tradition. In chapter 8 ethnomusicologist Michael Iyanaga turns our attention more explicitly toward the present, in a comparative, ethnographic examination of domestic patron saint festivals in Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, and the Dominican Republic. By analyzing music, instruments, dances, and cosmologies together with demographic information about the enslavement and disembarkation of central Africans in the Americas, he suggests that these Catholic celebrations might be contemporary fruits of central African seeds. In so doing, Iyanaga not only asks us to reconsider Catholicism as part of the African legacy in the Americas but also asks us to question the a priori notions at play in identifying the African diaspora in the first place.

## NOTES

Thank you to Genevieve Dempsey and Danielle Roper for conversations that enriched this introduction. We also want to point out explicitly that the references cited here focus on the English-language literature because of this volume’s intended audience, even if robust, seminal scholarly conversations on similar topics are unfolding outside of Anglo-Saxon academia. Latin American and Caribbean scholarship is paramount to this discussion, and thankfully some U.S.-based university presses have undertaken the crucial task to make these works available to English-language readers.

1. We use the term *African American* in this introduction in a hemispheric sense, to refer to people and phenomena from North and South America and the Caribbean. See, for example,

Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983); and Donald Cosentino, ed., *Sacred Arts of Haitian Vodou* (Los Angeles: UCLA Fowler Museum of Cultural History, 1995).

2. A full 45 percent of the total of 10,702,654 Africans who disembarked in slaving ports in the period between 1501 and 1875 did so in Brazil. David Eltis, Stephen D. Behrendt, David Richardson, and Herbert S. Klein, eds., *Voyages: Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database*, accessed September 15, 2018, [www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates/](http://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates/).

3. See Katharine Gerbner, *Christian Slavery: Conversion and Race in the Protestant Atlantic*

World (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018).

4. Cécile Fromont, *The Art of Conversion: Christian Visual Culture in the Kingdom of Kongo* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2014), 21; Thomas J. Desch-Obi, "Combat and the Crossing of the Kalunga," in *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations in the American Diaspora*, ed. Linda M. Heywood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 359.

5. Fromont, *Art of Conversion*, 24.

6. John K. Thornton and Linda M. Heywood, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles, and the Foundation of the Americas, 1585–1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 213–14.

7. Fromont, *Art of Conversion*, 40–43.

8. Roger Bastide, *The African Religions of Brazil: Toward a Sociology of the Interpenetration of Civilizations* (1978; repr., Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 128; see also Andrew Apter, "Yoruba Ethnogenesis from Within," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 55, no. 2 (2013): 375–77.

9. David H. Brown, *Santería Enthroned: Art, Ritual, and Innovation in an Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 62–67; Stephan Palmié, "Ethnogenetic Processes and Cultural Transfer in Afro-American Slave Populations," in *Slavery in the Americas*, ed. Wolfgang Binder (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 1993), 341.

10. The term *black Atlantic* has been popularized by Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

11. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Folk, Then and Now: An Essay on the History and Sociology of the Negro Race* (New York: Holt, 1939); Raymundo Nina Rodrigues, *O animismo fetichista dos negros baianos*, facsimile ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Fundação Biblioteca Nacional/Editora da Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2006); Fernando Ortiz, *Los negros brujos* (Miami: Ediciones Universales, 1973); Jean Price-Mars, *Ainsi parla l'oncle: Essais d'ethnographie* (Montreal: Mémoire d'Encrier, 2009).

12. E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939), 21.

13. Stephan Palmié, *The Cooking of History: How Not to Study Afro-Cuban Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013), 122.

14. Melville J. Herskovits, "The Dilemma of Social Pattern," *Survey Graphic* 6, no. 6 (1925): 677–78. Walter Jackson, "Melville Herskovits and the Search for Afro-American Culture," in *Malinowski, Rivers, Benedict, and Others: Essays on Culture and Personality*, ed. George W. Stocking Jr. (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1986), 102.

15. Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper, 1941).

16. See David F. Garcia, *Listening for Africa: Freedom, Modernity, and the Logic of Black Music's African Origins* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 94; Michael Iyanaga, "On Flogging the Dead Horse, Again: Historicity, Genealogy, and Objectivity in Richard Waterman's Approach to Music," *Ethnomusicology* 59, no. 2 (2015): 173–201; Margaret Wade-Lewis, "Lorenzo Dow Turner: Pioneer African-American Linguist," *Black Scholar* 21, no. 4 (1991): 10–24; and Richard A. Waterman, "On Flogging a Dead Horse: Lessons Learned from the Africanisms Controversy," *Ethnomusicology* 7, no. 2 (1963): 83.

17. Thornton and Heywood have made crucial contributions about the role of Africa and Africans in the Atlantic world and, reversely, the impact of the Atlantic system on Africa; see John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Thornton and Heywood, *Central Africans, Atlantic Creoles*.

18. Mintz and Price wrote the essay in 1972, presented it in 1973, circulated it in typescript in 1976, and published it as a book in 1992. See Richard Price, "The Miracle of Creolization: A Retrospective," *New West Indian Guide/Nieuwe West-Indische Gids* 75, nos. 1–2 (2001): 35; and Sidney W. Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992).



19. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana: The Development of Afro-Creole Culture in the Eighteenth Century* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992); Thornton, *Africa and Africans*; Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations*; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas: Restoring the Links* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Jason R. Young, *Rituals of Resistance: African Atlantic Religion in Kongo and the Lowcountry South in the Era of Slavery* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2007); Pablo A. Gómez, "Transatlantic Meanings: African Rituals and Material Culture from the Early-Modern Spanish Caribbean," in *Materialities of Ritual in the Black Atlantic*, ed. Akinwumi Ogundiran and Paula Saunders (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014), 125–42. See also Mintz and Price, *Birth of African-American Culture*; Michel-Rolph Trouillot, "Culture on the Edges: Creolization in the Plantation Context," paper presented at the colloquium "The Plantation System in the Americas," April 1989, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, revised and published in *Plantation Society in the Americas* 5, no. 1 (1998): 8–28; Paul E. Lovejoy, "Identifying Enslaved Africans in the African Diaspora," in *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*, ed. Paul E. Lovejoy (London: Continuum, 2000), 1.

20. See, for example, David Scott, *Refashioning Futures: Criticism After Postcoloniality* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Scott, "That Event, This Memory: Notes on the Anthropology of African Diasporas in the New World," *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* 1, no. 3 (1991): 261–84; Stephan Palmié, "Creolization and Its Discontents," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 35 (2006): 433–56; Joseph C. Miller, "Retention, Reinvention, and Remembering: Restoring Identities Through Enslavement in Africa and Under Slavery in Brazil," in *Enslaving Connections: Changing Cultures of Africa and Brazil During the Era of Slavery*, ed. José C. Curto and Paul E. Lovejoy (Amherst, N.Y.: Humanity Books, 2004), 81–121.

21. José C. Curto and Renée Soulodre-LaFrance, *Africa and the Americas: Interconnections During the Slave Trade* (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2005); Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, eds., *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London: Cass, 2001); Curto and Lovejoy, *Enslaving Connections*; Roquinaldo Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange in the Atlantic World: Angola and Brazil During the Era of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and J. Lorand Matory, *Black Atlantic Religion: Tradition, Transnationalism, and Matriarchy in the Afro-Brazilian Candomblé* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). See also the much older Pierre Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite des nègres entre le Golfe de Bénin et Bahia de Todos os Santos, du XVIIe au XIXe siècle* (Paris: Mouton, 1968), translated as Pierre Verger, *Trade Relations Between the Bight of Benin and Bahia from the Seventeenth to Nineteenth Century* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Ibadan University Press, 1976).

22. David Eltis et al. *The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade: A Database on CD-ROM* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), compact disc; Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Databases for the Study of Afro-Louisiana History and Genealogy, 1699–1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), CD-ROM. For earlier quantitative analysis, see also Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census*, ed. Societies American Council of Learned, ACLS Humanities E-Book (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

23. Eltis et al., *Voyages*.

24. Mintz and Price, *Birth of African-American Culture*, 50.

25. Robert W. Slenes, "Eu venho de muito longe, eu venho cavando": Jongueiros cumba na senzala centro-africana," in *Memória do jongo: As gravações históricas de Stanley J. Stein Vassouras, 1949*, ed. Sílvia Hunold Lara and Gustavo Pacheco (Rio de Janeiro: Folha Seca; Campinas: CECULT, 2007), 116–17; Jan Vansina, "Deep-Down Time: Political Tradition in Central Africa," *History in Africa* 16 (1989): 341.

26. Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations*, 8.

27. Verger, *Flux et reflux de la traite*.

28. Arthur Ramos, *As culturas negras no Novo Mundo*, 4th ed. (São Paulo: Editora Nacional, 1979), 174, 233; Ramos, *O folclore negro do Brasil: Demopscologia e psicanálise*, 2nd ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Livraria-Editora da Casa do Estudante do Brasil, 1954), 35.

29. Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*, 164.

30. Edison Carneiro, *Religiões negras: Notas de etnografia religiosa; Negros bantos: Notas de etnografia religiosa e de folclore*, 3rd ed. (1936; repr., Rio de Janeiro: Civilização Brasileira, 1991), 62.

31. See, for instance, plate 6 in this volume, in which a xylophone is depicted in a Carlos Julião watercolor of a black king festival from eighteenth-century Brazil; Rogério Budasz, “Central-African Pluriarcs and Their Players in Nineteenth-Century Brazil,” *Music in Art* 39, nos. 1–2 (2014): 11; Gerhard Kubik, *Angolan Traits in Black Music, Games, and Dances of Brazil: A Study of African Cultural Extensions Overseas* (Lisbon: Junta de Investigações Científicas do Ultramar, 1979), 23; Angela Lühhning and Pierre Fatumbi Verger, “The Voyage of the Drums: From Africa to the Americas,” *Art Music Review* 24 (2013), www.revista-art.com/the-voyage-of-the-drums-from-africa-to-the-americas/. While it might be possible to point to certain types of membrane drums, such as those seen in the central African photos in Lühhning and Verger’s essay (see caption for figure 8.1 in this volume), these are more difficult to trace, as membranes drums are part of so many different African musical cultures. Perhaps the least controversial example of a central African–derived drum still found today in the Americas is the Brazilian friction drum, known in Portuguese as a *cuíca*.

32. For examples of these so-called syncretisms in the prophetic Antonian movement or as part of the Kimpasi association in Kongo, see John K. Thornton, *The Kongoese Saint Anthony: Dona Beatriz Kimpa Vita and the Antonian Movement, 1684–1706* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); and Fromont, *Art of Conversion*.

33. See Fromont’s chapter, in this volume.

34. Mary C. Karasch, *Slave Life in Rio de Janeiro, 1808–1850* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987); Winifred Kellersberger

Vass, *The Bantu Speaking Heritage of the United States*, vol. 2 (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California, 1979); Robert Farris Thompson and Joseph Cornet, *The Four Moments of the Sun: Kongo Art in Two Worlds* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1981); Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit*; John K. Thornton, “I Am a Subject of the King of Kongo: African Political Ideology and the Haitian Revolution,” *Journal of World History* 4 (1993): 181–214; Margaret Washington Creel, *A Peculiar People: Slave Religion and Community-Culture Among the Gullahs* (New York: New York University Press, 1988); Stuart B. Schwartz, *Slaves, Peasants, and Rebels: Reconsidering Brazilian Slavery* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

35. See Robert W. Slenes, “L’Arbre nsanda replanté: Cultes d’affliction kongo et identité des esclaves de plantation dans le Brésil du Sud-Est entre 1810 et 1888,” *Cahiers du Brésil Contemporain* 67–68 (2007): 217–313; Marina de Mello e Souza, *Reis negros no Brasil escravista: História da festa de coroação do Rei Congo* (Belo Horizonte, Brazil: Editora da Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, 2002); and Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations*. See also Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures*; Young, *Rituals of Resistance*; James H. Sweet, *Recreating Africa: Culture, Kinship, and Religion in the African-Portuguese World, 1441–1770* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Ferreira, *Cross-Cultural Exchange*; Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz, *Kongo Graphic Writing and Other Narratives of the Sign* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013); and Christina Frances Mobley, “The Kongoese Atlantic: Central African Slavery and Culture from Mayombe to Haiti” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2015).

36. Heywood, *Central Africans and Cultural Transformations*. A veritable explosion of master’s and doctoral theses on Afro-Brazilian topics, including religion and performance, has taken place in Brazil since the turn of the twenty-first century. This invaluable corpus of scholarship is available to researchers from the country’s university portals.

37. The authors kindly mention Cécile Fromont, “Dancing for the King of Congo from Early Modern Central Africa to Slavery-Era

Brazil,” *Colonial Latin American Review* 22, no. 2 (2013): 184–208; and Fromont, *Art of Conversion*.

38. Jeroen Dewulf, “Pinkster: An Atlantic Creole Festival in a Dutch-American Context,” *Journal of American Folklore* 126, no. 501 (2013): 245–71.

39. Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting to Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Jon F. Sensbach, *A Separate Canaan: The Making of an Afro-Moravian World in North Carolina, 1763–1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Sensbach, *Rebecca’s Revival: Creating Black Christianity in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005); Edward E. Andrews, *Native Apostles: Black and Indian Missionaries in the British Atlantic World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013); John W. Catron, *Embracing Protestantism: Black Identities in the Atlantic World* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016).

40. See for instance, Mariza de Carvalho Soares, *People of Faith: Slavery and African Catholics in Eighteenth-Century Rio de Janeiro, Latin America in Translation/En Traducción/Em Tradução* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011); Herman L. Bennett, *Africans in Colonial Mexico: Absolutism, Christianity, and Afro-Creole Consciousness, 1570–1640* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003); Sherwin K. Bryant, Rachel Sarah O’Toole, and Ben Vinson

III, *Africans to Spanish America: Expanding the Diaspora* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2012).

41. Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003).

42. Joseph Roach, “Culture and Performance in the Circum-Atlantic World,” in *Performativity and Performance*, ed. Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 59.

43. *Ibid.*, 61. For bodily social memory, see also Suzel Ana Reily, “To Remember Captivity: The ‘Congados’ of Southern Minas Gerais,” *Latin American Music Review* 22, no. 1 (2001): 4–30. For central African Atlantic performance, see Maureen Warner-Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean: Transcending Space, Transforming Cultures* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2003); Monica Schuler, “Alas, Alas, Kongo”: *A Social History of Indentured African Immigration into Jamaica, 1841–1865* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980); Bárbaro Martínez-Ruiz, “Kongo Atlantic Body Language,” *Performance, art et anthropologie (Les actes de colloques du musée du quai Branly Jacques Chirac)*, December 8, 2009, <http://actesbranly.revues.org/462>; and Mamadou Diouf, *Rhythms of the Afro-Atlantic World: Rituals and Remembrances* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010).

44. Reily, “To Remember Captivity,” 4–30.