
African American Influence And Contributions

The U.S. has often been termed 'the melting pot' as it is a blend of cultures. Many different people from different locations, with different cultures, different values, and different lifestyles are proud to call this country home. While many people and cultures enter this country to make a better life for themselves, sometimes new cultures are introduced in ways people never expected. During the 17th and 18th centuries, many African people were brought to the U.S. to be slaves. While many settlers may have merely been looking for people to do their work, African Americans have deeply influenced U.S. culture. Three areas that have deep influence by African Americans are music, dance, and cuisine.

African Americans have brought new styles and influences of music to the U.S. Slaves had practices of singing away their sorrows to make themselves feel better. While this began as tradition, in the late 1800s and early 1900s African American singers such as W.C. Handy and "Ma" Rainey managed to harness this type of music and ready it for performance. They created the style of the blues. Another common music style taken from African roots is jazz. Unlike the blues, white musicians were the first to observe and produce this kind of music. By the 1920s and 30s, African Americans had inserted themselves into this music style. In addition to bringing new music to the U.S., famous African American musicians have made their mark on U.S. culture. One such person is Aretha Franklin, a famous singer. Franklin created well renowned music, blending styles such as gospel, jazz, blues, rock 'n' roll, and R&B. In fact, she was known as the 'Queen of Soul'. Her music was very popular, and Franklin used her far reaching art to push for equality. Even today, many people recognize her lasting impact and aspire to be like her.

Another large contribution to U.S. culture by African Americans came in dance. Like music, dancing was a tradition among slaves. They danced for special occasions and while working, meaning that these dances often focused on foot movement. The first dance that became popular with white people was called the Cakewalk. However, their influence did not stop there. African Americans also introduced many well-known dances such as the Charleston, the Jitterbug, and the Twist. Like in music, there were many well-known African American dancers who made large contributions to U.S. culture. Katherine Dunham was one of these people. She was one of the first dancers to make ethnic and folk dances a major part of her choreography. While she made many contributions to U.S. culture, one of her major contributions was the Dunham Technique. This is a way to teach dance that focuses on African, African American, Caribbean, and traditional ballet dances. This technique is so important that it continues to be used today.

Cuisine was another area that was deeply impacted by African Americans. As slaves, they were rarely given many resources to eat. The few resources they were given were often low-quality. Therefore, they were forced to be creative. This creativity paid off, as they created many dishes that still remain widely popular. These dishes include biscuits, macaroni and cheese, mashed potatoes, grits, and fried ice cream. Popular dishes are not the only way cuisine was impacted by African Americans. These people brought over new food items and ingredients from Africa such as kola nuts, okra, watermelon, black-eyed peas, and coffee.

Even though settlers may not have been aware of the impact African Americans were going to have on U.S. culture, these impacts are still great. Without African Americans, we may not have as easily achieved music styles such as jazz and blues, dances such as the Charleston, or some of our favorite food dishes such as macaroni and cheese. In addition, well known people such as Aretha Franklin and Katherine Dunham contributed lasting impacts that will not be forgotten anytime soon. In the meantime, the U.S. continues to be a melting pot where African Americans and other people can share their culture.

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