

A COMPANION VOLUME · EXCLUDING ISLAM (COVERED ELSEWHERE)

Religions of the Crossing

What the captive carried with them besides chains — the gods, spirits, and saints of seven traditions, and what became of them across seventeen generations.

1619 – 2026 · Tribes, Generations, Prominent Figures, and Transformation

A Note Before Beginning

Islam is deliberately excluded here — it has its own extensive treatment elsewhere in this project (Bilal, Sumayyah, Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, Abdul Rahman Ibrahima ibn Sori, Omar ibn Said, and the Fulani/Senegambian Muslim thread running through Generations 1-8). This volume covers everything else that crossed the Atlantic: Kongo Catholicism, Yoruba Orisha tradition, Vodun, Kongo traditional religion, Akan religion, Igbo religion, and Senegambia's non-Muslim traditions.

An honest asymmetry. When researching which enslaved individuals were recognized for their African status and sent back, nearly every well-documented case is Muslim — Ayuba Suleiman Diallo, Abdul Rahman Ibrahima ibn Sori, Omar ibn Said. This isn't coincidence: Arabic literacy gave European and American observers a cross-culturally legible proof of foreign nobility that no other African status marker offered them. A Yoruba obi's son, an Akan chief's nephew, or a Kongo nobleman's child had no equivalent way to "prove" status to a slaveholder who couldn't read their language or recognize their titles. That asymmetry is itself part of the history, and this volume names it rather than papering over it with invented examples.

SECTION 1

The Seven Traditions

TRADITION	ORIGIN	CORE BELIEFS	AMERICAN SURVIVAL
Kongo Catholicism Kingdom of Kongo (Angola/Central Africa)	King Nzinga a Nkuwu baptized 1491; son Afonso I (Mvemba a Nzinga) made it the state religion	Christian Trinity blended with the Kongo cosmogram; ancestor veneration retained; crosses already held meaning in Kongo cosmology before contact	Carried directly by Gen 1 (Anthony, Isabella, Ndongo/Angola origin); shaped the Stono Rebellion's Catholic, Portuguese-speaking leadership; fed into the broader Black Christian tradition
Yoruba Religion (Ìṣẹ̀ṣe / Orisha) Bight of Benin (modern Nigeria, Benin, Togo)	Indigenous to Yorubaland; Olodumare as supreme being	Worship of the Orisha — Shango, Yemoja, Ogun, Oshun, Eshu, and others — and Ifá divination	Santería/Lucumí (Cuba), Candomblé (Brazil); revived in the US at Oyotunji Village, SC (1970)
Vodun Dahomey / Bight of Benin (Fon and Ewe peoples)	Indigenous to the Fon and Ewe; major slave port at Ouidah, 1670s–1860s	Veneration of the vodun spirits; close cosmological kinship with Yoruba Orisha tradition	Direct root of Haitian Vodou and Louisiana Voodoo
Kongo Religion (Bakongo spirituality) Central Africa (Kongo, Ndongo/Angola)	Indigenous to the Bakongo and related Bantu peoples	Nzambi a Mpungu as supreme being; minkisi (sacred objects); nganga (ritual specialists); ancestor veneration	Palo Monte, Kumina, Lumbalú, Hoodoo's mojo bags (mooyo = "soul" in Kikongo), parts of Haitian Vodou and Brazilian Candomblé Bantu
Akan Religion Gold Coast (modern Ghana)	Indigenous to the Akan/Ashanti/Fante peoples	Nyame (Nyankopong) as supreme god; the abosom (lesser deities); Asase Yaa, goddess of the earth	Jamaican Myal; Anansi stories surviving as a lwa figure within Haitian Vodou
Igbo Religion (Odinani) Bight of Biafra (modern southeastern Nigeria)	Indigenous to the Igbo people	Chukwu/Chineke as supreme deity; the alusi (spirits); strong ancestor veneration; Ozo title society	Less preserved as a distinct system in the US than Yoruba or Kongo religion, but fed generally into conjure/folk practice; seeing a modern revival in Nigeria and the diaspora today
Senegambian Traditional Religion Senegambia (non-Muslim Wolof, Serer, Mandinka)	Indigenous; the Serer religion centers on a supreme being called Roog	Localized cosmologies distinct from the region's large Muslim population	Smaller documented footprint in the Americas given Senegambia's already-substantial Muslim population by the trade's height

SECTION 2

Which Generations Carried Which Religion

Generations 1-8 received new African arrivals and their religions directly. Generations 9-14 received none — existing traditions fused into a single American-born tradition instead. Generations 15-17 see a second wave: voluntary immigration and deliberate cultural reclamation bringing direct, living practice back.

#	YEARS	RELIGIONS PRESENT
1	1619-1644	Kongo/Ndongo traditional religion; nominal Catholic contact (Portuguese presence in Angola) — Anthony and Isabella's likely background
2	1644-1669	Senegambian traditional religion; Akan religion; Kongo traditional religion/Catholicism continuing
3	1669-1694	Akan religion rising with Gold Coast imports; continued Kongo and Senegambian traditions
4	1694-1719	Igbo religion (Odinani) dominant with Bight of Biafra imports to Virginia
5	1719-1744	Senegambian traditions and Kongo Catholicism/traditional religion rise in Virginia; Akan and Igbo continue in the Lower South
6	1744-1769	Kongo Catholicism/traditional religion heavy in Virginia imports; Akan religion strong in the Lowcountry
7	1769-1794	West-Central African (Kongo) religion supplies the largest single share; Yoruba and Vodun-practicing peoples begin arriving via the Bight of Benin
8	1794-1819	Final legal imports — Kongo traditional religion/Catholicism, plus Bight of Benin Vodun/Yoruba-adjacent traditions
9	1819-1844	No new arrivals. African-born religions begin fusing into a single American-born tradition: conjure, hush-harbor Christianity, ring shouts
10	1844-1869	Same fusion continues through Civil War and Emancipation; spirituals encode Exodus imagery
11	1869-1894	Independent Black churches (AME, Black Baptist) become the dominant institution; conjure/Hoodoo persists alongside, in folk practice
12	1894-1919	Same — institutional Black Christianity dominant; Hoodoo as parallel folk tradition
13	1919-1944	Great Migration carries Southern folk religion (Hoodoo, conjure) into Northern cities; Zora Neale Hurston documents Hoodoo and Haitian Vodou directly
14	1944-1969	Civil Rights era sparks renewed interest in African heritage and identity
15	1969-1994	Oyotunji African Village founded, SC (1970) — first deliberate Yoruba Orisha revival community in the US
16	1994-2019	Growing US practice of Ifá/Orisha tradition and Vodou, reinforced by Nigerian, Beninese, and Haitian immigration
17	2019-2026	"African Traditional Religion" becomes an explicit, public identity marker for a growing number of African Americans

SECTION 3

Prominent Individuals, By Religion

As noted above, this category is asymmetric by religion. The Christian (Kongo Catholic) record includes state-level, not just individual, repatriation. The traditional-religion record is richer in preservers and revivalists than in individually-recognized "sent home" cases.

Christian (Kongo Catholic)

- **King Afonso I of Kongo (Mvemba a Nzinga)** — Made Catholicism the Kongo state religion; wrote repeatedly to Portugal's king protesting the kidnapping of "noblemen and sons of noblemen" into the slave trade (1526)
- **The Kingdom of Kongo's own repatriations** — Kongo's kings ran courts of inquiry into illegal enslavement and repatriated thousands of illegally enslaved Christian citizens from Brazil — without ransom — in the 1580s and again in the 1620s
- **Olaudah Equiano** — Igbo-born; converted to Anglican Christianity in Britain; bought his own freedom and became a famous abolitionist author; claimed elite lineage (his father reportedly held the Igbo title "Embrenche"); advocated for African resettlement but never personally returned home

African Traditional Religion

- **"Jemmy," leader of the Stono Rebellion (1739)** — Likely Kongolesse, Catholic, some of his company spoke Portuguese — religious identity and resistance were intertwined, though he died in the rebellion rather than being "sent back"
- **Marie Laveau** — Free woman of color, 19th-century New Orleans; the most famous practitioner and public face of Louisiana Voodoo, though never enslaved herself
- **Oba Efuntola Oseijeman Adefunmi I** — African American founder of Oyotunji African Village (1970), the first deliberate Yoruba Orisha revival community in the US, built on a former South Carolina slave plantation

SECTION 4

Practiced, Stopped, Transformed

Across seventeen generations, these traditions moved from open practice, to violent suppression, to underground survival, to fusion into something new, to — in the last two generations — deliberate, public revival.

YEAR	EVENT
1739	Stono Rebellion — Catholic, Kongo-led; rebels marched under a banner reading "Liberty"
1740	South Carolina's Negro Act bans drums, assembly, literacy, growing one's own food, and earning money — drums carried spiritual as well as communicative meaning
1750	"Hush harbors" emerge — secret nighttime gatherings blending retained African practice with Christian conversion, hidden from white oversight
1800	Ring shouts — a circular, shuffling shout-and-response dance-prayer, likely Kongo-derived — preserved especially in Gullah Geechee communities
1830	Planters intensify forced Christianization as social control even as enslaved communities build their own "invisible institution" of belief
1816	AME Church founded — the first independent Black Christian denomination in the US
1865	Emancipation; independent Black churches rapidly become the central institution of Black community life
1935	Zora Neale Hurston documents Hoodoo ("Mules and Men," 1935) and Haitian Vodou ("Tell My Horse," 1938) as living, serious traditions
1970	Oyotunji African Village founded in South Carolina — the first deliberate, organized Yoruba Orisha revival community in the US
2000	Growing formal US initiation into Ifá/Orisha priesthood, reinforced by direct immigration from Nigeria, Benin, and Haiti

The throughline: nothing was ever fully erased. Drums were banned, so the rhythm moved into the body and the voice. Open worship was banned, so it moved into hush harbors and ring shouts. Direct transmission ended in 1808, so what remained fused into spirituals, conjure, and the Black church — until, two centuries later, the original traditions began crossing the Atlantic again, this time by choice.

Compiled from a conversational research session. Sources include West African Vodún, Yoruba religion, Akan religion, and Kongo religion literature (Wikipedia/academic synthesis), the National Park Service's "Superpower of Singing," the Negro Act of 1740, Stono Rebellion scholarship (John K. Thornton), the Oyotunji African Village historical record, and Zora Neale Hurston's "Mules and Men" and "Tell My Horse." This document is a synthesis for personal reference, not a peer-reviewed publication.