

African American Culture & Foods

Country of Origin: America

Primary Language(s): English

Percent of Iowa's Population: 3.8%

Background

African Americans also known as black people were born in America since the 15th century western colonization beginning after the European discovery of sea routes around Africa's southern coast in 1488 and the discovery in 1492 of what would later become America in 1776, and the transatlantic slave trade of the 1500's also known as the triangular trade based on the connections between the three continents with countries like Spain, Portugal, the Netherlands, England and France, being the main triangular trading countries creating trading systems that lasted well into the 1800's. The term African American is deceiving because it refers to a multi ethnic and cultural group of black people with historical ties to America, Africa, Europe and Spain, as well as the original people of America. African Americans have played a major part in the construction of America, those that were free and those enslaved. We fought in wars like the American revolution of 1775 where Salem Poor and Peter Salem freed blacks both earned special distinction for their bravery. African Americans fought in the war of 1812 and the Civil War of 1861. Black soldiers served in the artillery, infantry and performed all noncombat support functions that sustain the troops. Black carpenters, chaplains, cooks, guards, laborers, nurses, scouts, spies, steamboat pilots, surgeons, and teamsters also contributed to the war cause. There were nearly 80 black commissioned officers. Black women, who could not formally join the Army, nonetheless served as nurses, spies, and scouts, the most famous being Harriet Tubman who scouted for the 2nd South Carolina Volunteers.

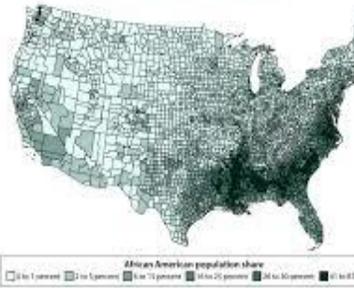
Traditions, Customs, & Taboos

Family reunions are an important ritual that have long contributed to the survival, health, and endurance of African American families. They help to maintain cultural heritage throughout turbulent times. Although it may appear different in the way it's done across the masses, some key elements remain consistent, like the importance of the elders as historians, the importance of food, but more importantly the recipes used to make the food; most likely passed down for generations, and the importance of music that tells a story and helps to bridge generational gaps. Religion is also another important facet of African American tradition, historically the Christian churches were used as meeting places to discuss escape during slavery. In recent years it has been a place to discuss religious values as well as the needs of the community.

Holidays & Celebrations

African Americans celebrate to some degree all US holidays but not all have the same value or meaning. Religious holidays and holidays that encourage family gatherings are amongst the most important such as Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving. Other holidays are culturally relevant such as Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Memorial day, which began with freed blacks after the civil war. Specialized holidays African American's may celebrate are Kwanzaa (Dec 26th-Jan 1), Black Love Day (Feb 1), Indigenous People Day (Oct). Most notably Juneteenth (Jun 19) the oldest nationally celebrated holiday commemorating the ending of slavery in the United States.

Distribution of the Black Population in the United States, 2010



African Americans recognize the American flag and this flag. The United Negro Improvement Association (UNIA) founded in 1914 created this flag in 1920. Red is the color of the blood which men must shed for their redemption and liberty; black is the color of the noble and distinguished race to which we belong and green is the color of the luxuriant vegetation of our motherland.



Education and Literacy

Education has not always been available for African Americans. African Americans were not allowed to read or write. African Americans today in Iowa make up 6.7% of all school enrolments. More than 85% of African American that are aged 25 and over have had high school education and more than 19% of them have associates degree or better.

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Health Disparities

A survey done by the University of Iowa Public Policy Center revealed that among Iowa children, African-Americans experience a higher rate of health care disparities than white and Asian children. These disparities include lower health status, lower quality of care, higher unmet need for care, more food insecurity, a higher likelihood to seek care from a hospital emergency room, and fewer safe and supportive neighborhoods. Maternal and Infant death rates are 2-3 times higher amongst African Americans.

Traditional Foods & Meal Patterns

African Americans are attributed with the creation of soul food, while this is true, we are responsible for much more. Soul food is largely due to the constrictions of slavery in America, but also because African people came and were brought to the western world along with their food and styles of cooking. Soul food was born out of necessity, because during slavery, slaves were given the smallest of rations of food each week, these rations were never enough to feed their families, so African people had to learn to make dishes; most often fried, with the scraps they had.

Considerations for WIC

African Americans as a people are continuously discriminated against, systematically ignored and denied, dehumanized and downgraded to second class citizens in America. All caseworkers need to understand the racial history of America when anticipating working with African American clients. Take some time for self-reflection to look at your own bias, prejudices and stereotypes. Look at you own family functioning, values, codes of conduct and parenting practices, then decide how your personal ecology may benefit or harm the African American families that you work with. Researcher Sandra Barnes suggests that social workers and human services agents who interact with African American families should continually evaluate the standard by which they judge these families (Barnes, 2001).

What's the Iowa Connection?

- Many African Americans have Native American ancestry that once called Iowa home
- For blacks Iowa was a safe haven as early as 1777, because Iowa was a free state that shared borders with Missouri a slave state. Iowa became an important place during the time of the Underground Railroad helping escaped slaves get further north.
- The great migration in the 1920's, where African Americans left the South for the North, escaping the brutality of the south in search of work and a better life many found employment here in Iowa working for the railroad.



How are we Living?

There are African Americans living in all fifty of the United States. The ten states with the largest populations of African Americans are New York, California, Texas, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, North Carolina, Louisiana, Michigan, and Maryland. Although most African Americans live in cities, it is impossible to generalize about how and where they live. African American families, like European American families make their homes in every type of community—urban, suburban, and rural. Iowa is considered to be amongst the top 5 worst places for African Americans to live in the United States mainly due to disparities in the courts.

