

THE ARTS OF BLACK PEOPLE IN THE AMERICAS:

A CONSPECTUS

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Introduction

The involuntary trans-Atlantic migration of millions of black Africans which extended for a period of nearly 350 years brought into the Americas a tremendous reservoir of human creativity, most of which was untapped and even deliberately destroyed since the fundamental intention of those who conducted the migration was to build up quite another kind of reservoir, a pool of mindless chattel labor to work the mines and plantations of the Americas in the interest of European prosperity. The complex interactions and vicissitudes of history, however, have given us in the twentieth century a number of plural societies in which the African presence is of crucial importance.

The societies result from the varied confluence of the African element with European societies, Dutch, English, French, Spanish, and Portuguese. It is a tangled mosaic seen from the European perspective. Seen from the African perspective, a considerable unity of culture and expressive behavior can be seen to exist in these societies, with variations resulting from the extent to which the African component has been diluted in its interaction with the European complement.