



# Traditional African Religions

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# Traditional African Religions

↳ Main Idea (Objective):



↳ Traditional African religions shared certain beliefs and provided a guide for living together in an African tribal society.



# Traditional African Religions

↳ Lecture Focus (Essential Questions):



↳ What questions do most religions try to answer? As we go through this lecture think about the queries and solutions that have been discussed by traditional African Religions.

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# Traditional African Religions



↳ For centuries, Europeans believed that Africans did not have any type of organized religion...**Olaudah Equiano**, a member of the **Igbo** people disagreed.



# Traditional African Religions

- ‡ The Igbo people are an ethnic group of southeastern Africa and are one of the largest ethnic groups in Africa.
- ‡ In rural Nigeria, Igbo people work mostly as craftsmen, farmers and traders.
- ‡ Olaudah Equiano disagreed, stating that most Igbo people, “**believed that there is a Creator of all things and that he...governs events, especially our deaths and captivity**”.



# Traditional African Religions

↳ Most African tribes shared Igbo's belief in one supreme Creator, though sharing different names (**Chukwu, Nyame, Olodumare, Ngai, Roog** and **Mawu-Lisa**).

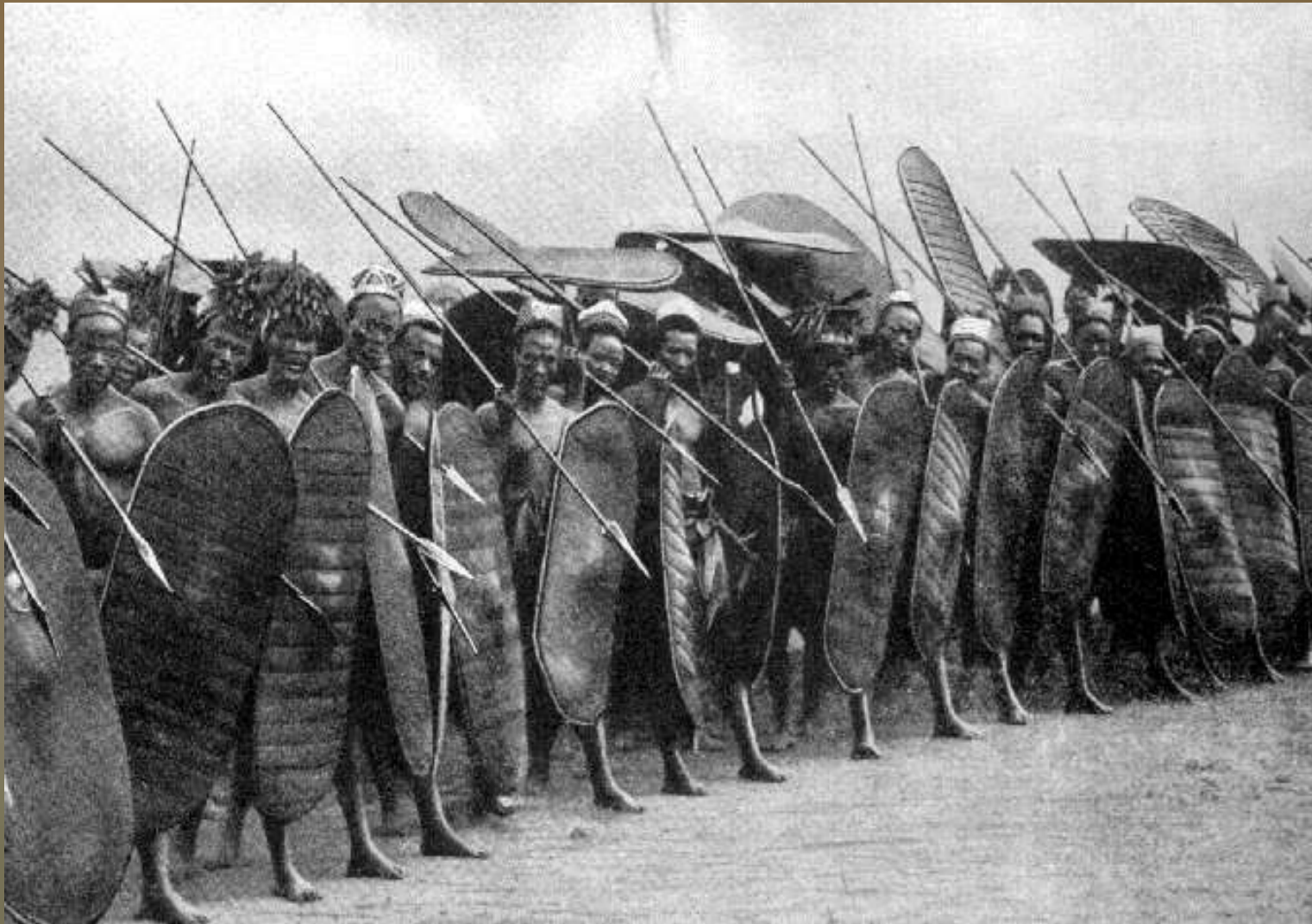


↳ They understood the Christian and Muslim idea of a single god, however, they wanted to continue their own practices and did not want to be forced to practice a new religions.



# Traditional African Religions

↳ These traditional African religious practices varied between the different tribes and regions of Africa.



↳ Some groups, like the **Nandi** located in East Africa, thought that they could talk directly with their god to better understand their history and what life means.



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↳ Other tribes, like the Igbo, believed their Creator could only be spoken to through the worship of less powerful gods and goddesses who assisted the Creator god.



# Traditional African Religions

⌘ The traditional beliefs and practices of African peoples were told through **oral stories**, rather than through written words...remember Griots.



⌘ A main element of these traditional beliefs include faith in a supreme creator, belief in spirits, worship of ancestors, use of magic, and traditional medicine.



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⌘ The role of people in African religion was generally seen as harmonizing nature with their supernatural beliefs.



⌘ It is hard to know just how many people are devoted to traditional religion in Africa, due to the introduction of Christianity, Islam, and Jewish religions throughout history.



# Traditional African Religions

⌘ Historians estimate that about one hundred million, or at least ten percent of the population of Africa still practice the traditional belief system.



⌘ African religions are also practiced in areas of the world with high populations of Africans, such as the Americas, Candomble, Santeria, and Vodou.



# Traditional African Religions

## ⌘ Questions:

- ⌘ 1) Europeans believed that Africans did not have a religion, Olaudah Equiano disagreed. What was his reasoning ?
- ⌘ 2) How were the traditions and beliefs of Africans religions passed down to people?
- ⌘ 3) How did people communicate with the creator spirit?



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# Traditional African Religions

## ↳ Questions:

↳ 1) Europeans believed that Africans did not have a religion, Olaudah Equiano disagreed. What was his reasoning ?

↳ He believed that most African group believed in one Creator of all things

↳ 2) How were the traditions and beliefs of Africans religions passed down to people?

↳ By Griots and oral stories, nothing was written

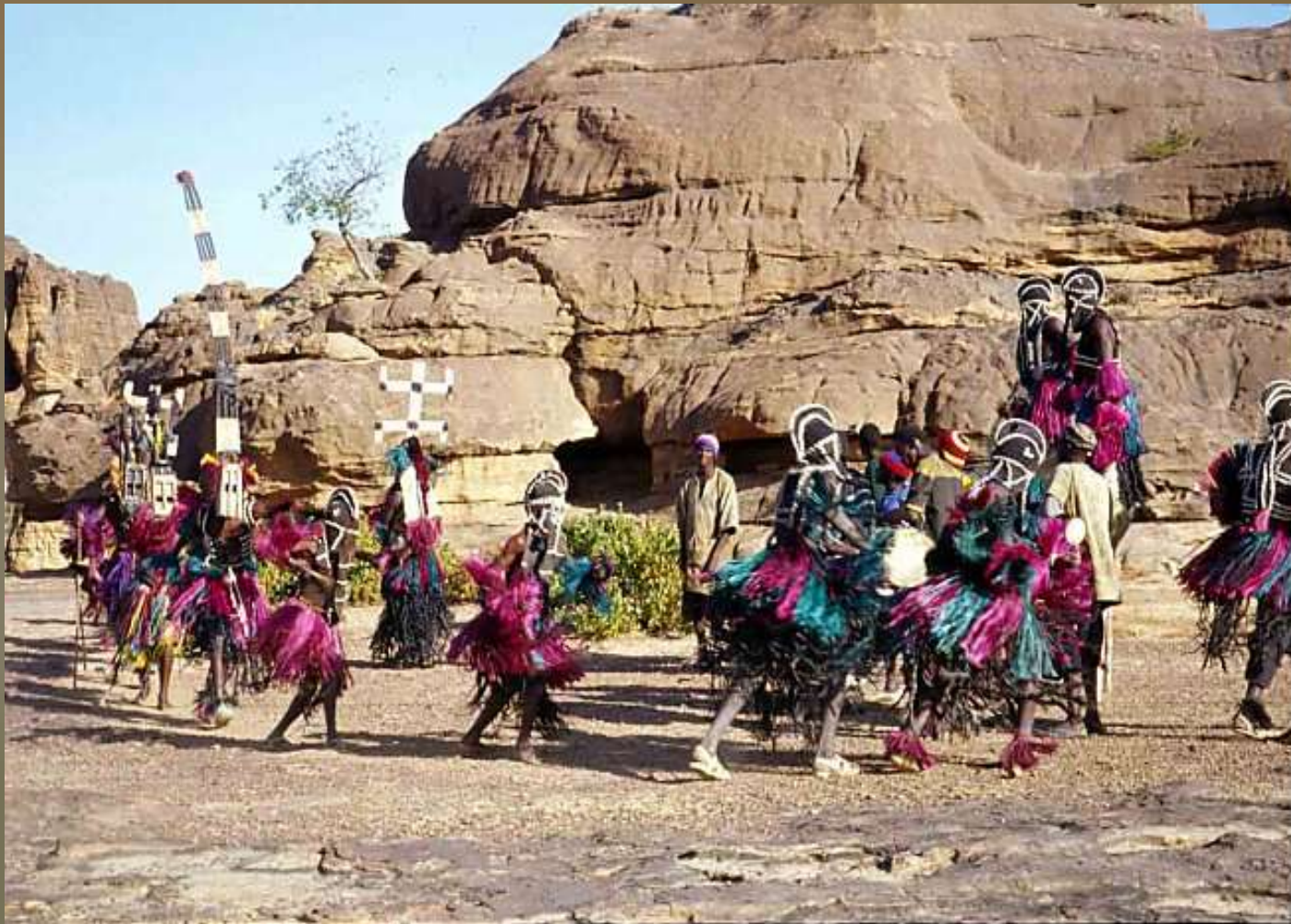
↳ 3) How did people communicate with the Creator spirit?

↳ Through the worship of less powerful gods and goddesses who worked for him.



# Traditional African Religions

⌘ Even though African groups and tribes practiced religion differently in places, their beliefs served similar purposes.



⌘ They provided rules for living and helped people stay in touch with their histories.



# Traditional African Religions

⌘ African religion and history is so much different then any other aspect of history we are studying this year because nothing was written down.



⌘ Everything from religion to government structure was told orally and makes studying their ancient history very difficult...almost like putting a puzzle together with only half of the pieces.



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# Traditional African Religions

⌘ When relatives died, many African tribes believed their spirits stayed within the community.



⌘ An essential part of African religion was communication with their deceased relatives, almost as messengers to the Creator...helping solve issues within the tribe.



# Traditional African Religions



↳ Due to the ability within traditional Africa religions to communicate with deceased relatives, honoring their ancestors was an important part of everyday life.



# Traditional African Religions



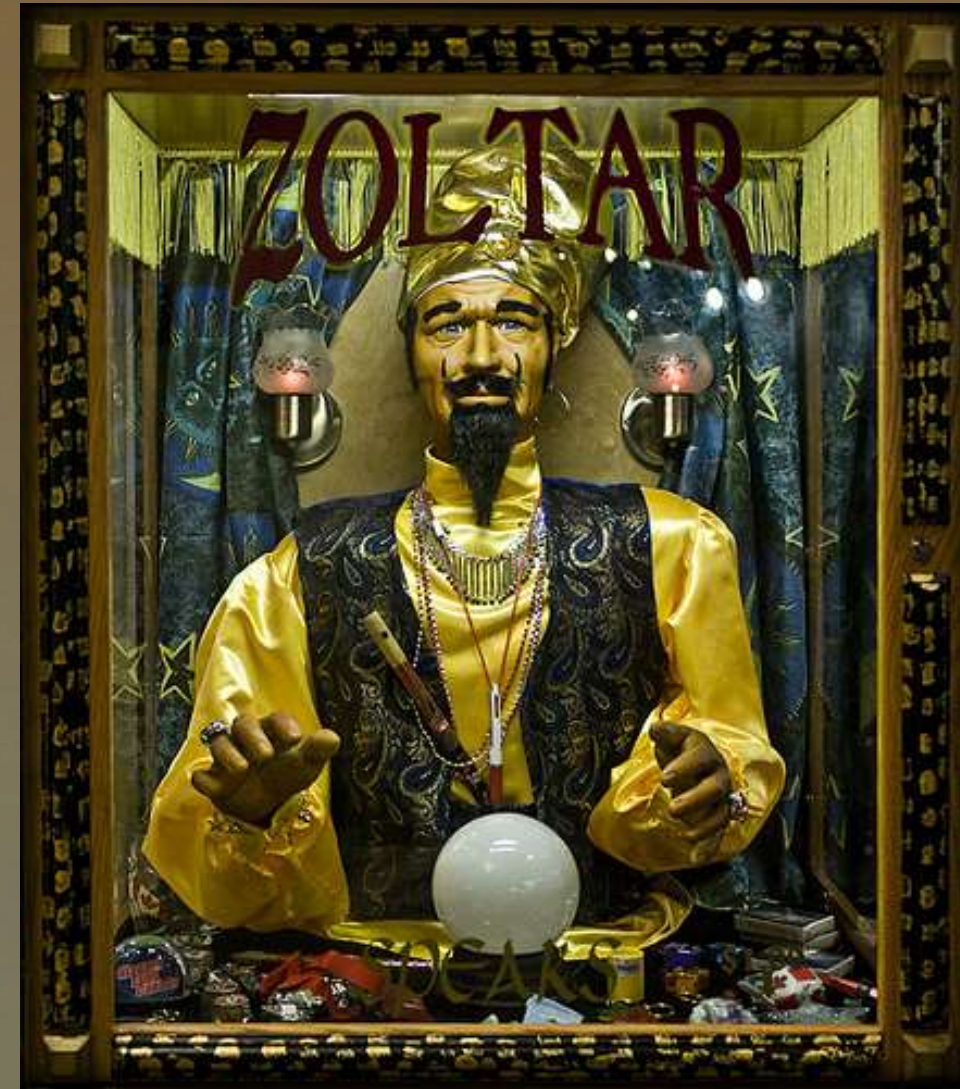
⌘ Who has ever hear of the term, **Divination**?



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# Traditional African Religions



↳ **Divination**- the practice of seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means.



# Traditional African Religions

⌘ Since Africa is a large continent with many ethnic groups and cultures, there is not one single technique of casting divination.



⌘ The practice of casting may be done with small objects, such as bones, cowrie shells, stones, strips of leather, or flat pieces of wood.



# Traditional African Religions

- ⌘ Some castings are done using sacred divination plates made of wood or performed on the ground (often within a circle). Castings are done in two different ways:
  - ⌘ Casting **marked bones, flat pieces of wood, nuts, shells, or leather strips** and numerically counting up how they fall...either according to their markings or whether they do or do not touch one another answers are formed to the questions.
  - ⌘ Casting a special set of **symbolic bones** or an array of selected symbolic articles, like a **bird's wing bone** to symbolize travel, a **round stone** to symbolize a pregnant womb, and a **bird's foot** to symbolize feeling would all form a symbolic answer to questions.





# Traditional African Religions

⌘ In traditional African societies, many people seek out diviners on a regular basis...there are generally no bans against the practice.



⌘ Those who divine for a living are also sought for their wisdom as counselors in life and for their knowledge of herbal medicine.



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# Traditional African Religions

## ⌘ Questions:

⌘ 1) What did African religions provide for its people?

⌘ 2) What would happen to relatives upon death?

⌘ 3) What does the term divination mean?



# Traditional African Religions

## ↳ Questions:

↳ 1) What did African religions provide for its people?

↳ They provided rules for living and helped people stay in touch with their histories

↳ 2) What would happen to relatives upon death?

↳ People would communicate with relatives as messengers to the Creator

↳ 3) What does the term divination mean?

↳ seeking knowledge of the future or the unknown by supernatural means.



# Traditional African Religions

## ↳ Lecture Check:

↳ Answer the following question in a well crafted 2-3 sentence open ended response.

↳ **The practice of divination is a very interesting tradition within traditional African religions. Is divination used in today's society and if so how?**

# History Mystery: **Voodoo**



⌘ History Mystery Time: **Voodoo**



# History Mystery: **Voodoo**

⌘ **Voodoo**, that one word is enough to conjure up bizarre, bewitching images... zombies shuffling through a graveyard at night, pins stuck in crudely fashioned dolls, and Voodoo priest conjuring spells with blood.



⌘ Unfortunately, none of these images paints a realistic picture of Voodoo...Hollywood has shaped Voodoo into a secret practice of mysterious, sinister, island magic that is simply not true.



# History Mystery: **Voodoo**

- ⌘ Voodoo is a legal religion, with roots as old as Africa and with millions of followers today.
- ⌘ Voodoo originated in the West Indies country of Haiti during the French Colonial Period, and it is still widely practiced in Haiti today.
- ⌘ The foundations of Voodoo come from the tribal religions of West Africa, brought to Haiti by slaves in the seventeenth century.
- ⌘ They were mainly captured from the kingdom of **Dahomey**, which occupied parts of today's **Togo, Benin** and **Nigeria**.





# History Mystery: **Voodoo**



⌘ The word 'Voodoo' derives from the word '**vodu**' in the language of **Dahomey**, which means '**spirit**' or, '**god**'.

⌘ The African tribes that were brought to Haiti shared several common core beliefs: worship of the spirits of family ancestors; the use of singing, drumming and dancing in religious rituals and the belief the followers were possessed by immortal spirits.

⌘ Once living in Haiti, the slaves created a new religion based on their shared beliefs, at the same time absorbing each tribe's strongest traditions and gods.



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# History Mystery: **Voodoo**

⌘ For many enslaved Africans spiritual traditions and practices provided a vital means of mental and emotional resistance to bitter hardship of slavery.



⌘ Their beliefs and rituals may not have freed them, Africans seemed to be successfully frightening their captors because slave owners began forbidding slaves from practicing their native religions threatening them with torture and death, and even baptizing slaves as Catholics.



# History Mystery: **Voodoo**

⌘ Catholicism became overlaid on African rites and beliefs, but the slaves still practiced in secret.



⌘ This new religion, **Voodoo**, considered the addition of the Catholic saints as an enrichment of their faith, and included Catholic hymns, prayers, statues, candles and holy relics with their rituals.



# History Mystery: Voodoo

Today Voodoo has also migrated to many other parts of the world, with particularly strong communities in New Orleans, Miami, Charleston and New York City.



Each of these communities has created new rituals and practices...worldwide, Voodoo has over fifty million followers.