

Talking Points

- What does “African American material culture” mean to African Americans vs society?
 - Is there a difference in the understanding of and the perception of the culture? If so, why is that? Is it due to a lack of education, a spread of misinformation, is it just not talked about enough, etc?
 - What parts of American culture are either directly African American or at least heavily influenced by African American culture?

“As an African-American I think that material culture in the community is seen as the physical evidence of social constructs or ideas. Some that are often not talked about in society. But at the same time not every African-American feels as though the material culture that is represented in society is a true representation of African American culture. I believe that there is a difference in perceptions of the culture and I think it is due to a lack of information and regional differences/geographical differences. I've lived in several places all across the US and people view the same topic very differently and it's often because of the environment that we are in. For example, someone in the suburbs might view rap music differently than someone who lives in a city. And again someone in a rural area might view hip hop music or might view rap music differently than those two people combined. Probably because of where they live, yes, and the people that they are around that encourage them to believe the way that they do. But also they probably taught them to believe the way that they believe. If there is a knowledge of why rap music might be important to people or why certain parts of African American material culture is important and should be respected, then I think that there will be less of a difference in understanding and maybe a more unified perspective and perception of the culture.

There are several parts of American culture that are directly from African-American culture in my opinion. Music, food, art, and fashion are just a couple of cultural elements that have been heavily influenced. I think that the saddest part of the influence of African-Americans is that our influence is sometimes overlooked. African Americans have fought for many years to be seen in this country and it is very sad to see the very thing that people have fought to save being stripped away or credit being stolen from the people who wanted it the most. And that is an example of something just not being talked about enough and there being a lack of education. There is probably in several cases, prejudice and racism mixed in as well but not everyone who appropriates African American culture is a racist in my opinion. I do believe that some people just don't know. Or at least I wish to believe that.”

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- How did the culture develop into what it is today?
 - How did we go from it being illegal for African Americans to read, and write to a full culture with a unique language, food and music?
 - What were the driving factors that really made the culture stick for so long and become so popular, not just among African Americans but across the world?
 - Where have the lines blurred between what was created by African Americans and what was created by pop culture?

“There is so much to talk about when you dive into the topic of how African American culture came to be what it is today and how the culture has grown. The reality is the history of African-Americans has been poorly documented compared to other communities in this country, especially the European population. They have tons of resources and books and written artifacts from their history that they can pull from versus African Americans who had to preserve their history and their culture, for the most part, by word of mouth. This is especially true during the time in American history where it was illegal for African Americans to learn how to read and write. I think in that struggle the culture developed into where it is today. Obviously there are changes and things that have shaped the way the youth are being brought up but for the most part the culture of African-Americans is rooted in that history and we've come so far from it being illegal for us to be able to read and write, but the impact of those experiences has definitely changed the community. And the reality of it is a little hard to wrap your head around. Because now we have African Americans who have led projects at NASA and who are CEOs. We even have Black scientists and we have Black teachers and educators. And those things should be normal but it is crazy to think that at one point if you were an educated Black man or woman that was a threat to your life. So I think understanding that reality, understanding that African-Americans have come quite a way (even though we're not totally there yet). There is still a lot of progress that has been made in the right direction and it's what's made the culture stick. I believe that there is a need for self-expression and identity in a lot of African-Americans. Also I believe that there is a need to connect with the culture and to connect with the history, for a lot of African-Americans those two factors are driving the change that we see in the community.”

- The history of African Americans
 - Roughly, how much has been left out of the history books or purposefully ignored?
 - What parts of the history and culture are missing that really need to be taught/added to the history books?
 - We are one of the only groups in America that doesn't have a direct tie to another specific country or to a completely different culture and history outside

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of colonization. (African Americans had to build their own identities and we still are. We have been taught about the lives that the Europeans lived before America and how their experiences led them to colonize the land and make particular laws.)

“I have and done quite a bit of research on history and stories that have been left out of the classrooms. Unfortunately, I feel as though a lot of these history lessons have been left out due to racism and prejudice. And the sheer fact that they're being left out of classrooms it's what's causing the culture and the history to still lack knowledge and understanding of how far African Americans have really come and the realities African Americans still face today. I would really love for African Americans and their experiences to be taught as a legitimate and authentic culture and classification of people. I feel as though when African American history and culture is being taught it's being taught as just some random social construct and not a legitimate grouping of people. The experiences that Black people have gone through in this country are very real and just because African Americans are a minority does not mean that our history should be ignored or excluded. Much like AAVE I feel as though African American anything isn't really taken seriously when it should be and I would love to see it be taken seriously in regards to education. Because African Americans are one of the only groups in America that does not have any direct tie to another country or a bridge to a completely different culture in a different continent I think it's very important to cultivate and to further expand the culture. Because if you take away African American history and culture, you end up with an entire grouping of people in this country that don't have anything to fall back on. Because racism still exists, many people don't even want Black people in this country. If you want young African-American children to succeed and to really grow into the best possible versions of themselves we have to give them a community, something to be a part of, a place where they belong, and as long as we keep on denying African American stories and culture they will not have that.”

➤ The future of the African American culture

- African Americans are still building their identities and fighting for equality
- Where do we think the future of the culture is heading?
- Where do we want the future of the culture to head? What are our hopes for the African American people?
- Will the perception of African American culture change again and if so, how?

“I hope the future of African American culture will continue to expand and grow. I would love to see more support for Black-owned businesses and for women owned businesses. Not just in the African-American Community but in mainstream American society as well. I think that the

Renee Ellis

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culture will always be evolving so I'm not quite sure where it will head next but my hope for the African American people would be that we continue to grow into a deeper and richer culture. The culture of African-Americans is already deep and filled with so many nuances and so much creativity, I would like to see that expand again. There's always room to grow and I feel as though the new generation of African Americans and the younger generations are going to add their own spice and flair to the culture and it's going to be a beautiful thing to see. A group of people can never be too good or too perfect to experience positive and productive change and I feel no different about the African American community. I hope that we can begin to tackle some of these social, political and economic issues that our people face. And I hope that we can spin this narrative that being pro Black and being for African American people means that you are hateful of others because that is not the case. There are some hateful African Americans, true, but the majority of Freedom Fighters really just want freedom for everybody and that needs to be shared.”

➤ Bonus: What are some of the most underrated soul food recipes?

“I'm not sure if I know any truly underrated soul food recipes. The ones that I think are overrated are pretty popular such as coleslaw, red velvet, and I've eaten something called banana fritters but they're made in a special way. (I'm not sure if that's traditional soul food though that might just be a new recipe). But I am excited to learn about more soul food and about different recipes. However, here are some things that I just do not eat. I won't eat chitlins, I won't eat things like pork blood and I don't think I ever want to try pigs feet or chicken feet. I'm also not a big fan of neck bones. I don't really like those but my grandma does. Pig's skin or like the crispy pig skin I don't really like. I think if I get a good brand of them they'll be good but the ones that I tried I wasn't too fond of. I've also never eaten okra but my grandpa likes okra. I know my sister doesn't like ham, but I do (and I think it's a little weird that she doesn't but that's a different story). And I'm not a huge fan of black eyed peas or there's a special bean soup, I think it's called 3 bean soup. I don't like soup.”