

# The Effects Of Western Civilization And Culture On Africa And African– American Blacks

KORVI PADMALATHA M.A., M.Phil.  
LECTURER IN ENGLISH  
M.R.Government Sanskrit College.  
Vizianagaram.

## Abstract

The effects of western civilization and culture on Africa are in several phases: Neoliberalism, liberal democracy, globalization, individualism/family values, etc. Again, all these can conveniently be accommodated under the scope of wider phases of effects of western civilization. Western civilization is a commitment to Neoliberalism, commitment to liberal democracy, commitment to consumerism and commitment to Christian worldview as the origin of western civilization. Colonialism and liberal democracy will be put under political effect, neoliberalism under economic effect and missionary to be under social effect. This observation provides a broader perspective on the phenomenon of Westernization and its effect on African - America, an observation made as early as the late nineteenth century by the great African cultural theorist Edward Wilmot Blyden and summed up in the late twentieth century by Ali Mazrui as “the triple heritage”.

Key words: western civilization, Neoliberalism, liberal democracy, globalization, etc.

## INTRODUCTION

Indeed, the significant fact about African cultural history is the convergence upon the indigenous tradition of the two external influences—the Arab-Islamic and the European-Christian—to which the continent has been exposed for well over a millennium. The values and lifestyles associated with these traditions have been assimilated and to a large extent indigenized on the continent and the Diaspora in the other parts of the world and America. This observation provides a broader perspective on the phenomenon of Westernization and its effect on African - America, an observation made as early as the late nineteenth

century by the great African cultural theorist Edward Wilmot Blyden and summed up in the late twentieth century by Ali Mazrui as “the triple heritage” (Irele, 2010).

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### 1. Political

The colonial factors that led to migration and settlement are essential to the understanding of the process of Westernization in Black world over. The holistic distortions of the hitherto well organized African societies in every sphere of life pointed to the depth and effectiveness of colonization in the process of westernizing African societies and their cultures. Political effect includes:

- Distortions of natural boundaries without due recourse to antecedent institutions and cultures.
- The western civilisation submerged and dismantled indigenous institutions and, in their place, a foreign rule was established and it continues. Traditional institutions before then were regarded as not only political authorities but also custodians of cultures
- Introduction of British liberal democracy: This does not just work in Africa alone. It is not that Africa did not have its own pattern of democracy before imposition of liberal democracy but the typical democracy in Africa and its processes were submerged by westernisation to migration in African Americans.

But the point is that the so-called Kabiyesi syndrome, which has been accorded as an explanation for the shortage of democracy in contemporary Africa, is actually a betrayal of inadequate understanding of the workings of the African traditional political systems and due to illiteracy and immaturity of the migrated lot

among African Americans. This proposition is strongly disputed as unhistorical and therefore invalid in the context of Blacks. Our hypothesis is that in the epoch before contact between Europe and Africa, the latter not only developed relatively advanced state structures, but that emergent pre-colonial African states also had “sophisticated systems of political rule” with strong democratic foundations. It speaks that the basis of the advertised inability of these societies to sustain democracy in contemporary (postcolonial) times could not have consisted in the absence of a democratic culture on their part. Rather, it is the residue of constraints that were attendant upon imperialism, which has been the dominant experience of the African peoples since the fourteenth century – defined most profoundly by slavery, colonialism, neo-colonialism, and their handmaiden, military governance and due to loneliness felt by the forced migrants in the prevailing American cultural and political domination.

- *Liberal Democracy*: The question is: what is the effect of embracing Western democracy on Africa? A lot of people will say it is the right way to go as it creates opportunities to participate in affairs, that liberal democracy promotes development. Should democracy be defined and contextualised on the principle of substance? Is it not evident that Africa is not able to do business with liberal democracy? Is it compulsory to use western type? Is it not feasible and appropriate to arrive at the principles of democracy using African forms, patterns and processes?

## 2. Economic Effect

- A major effect of European colonialism was the progressive integration of Africa into the world capitalist system, within which Africa functioned primarily as a source of raw materials for Western industrial production
- There was imposition of taxation, which forced Africans into wage labor
- Colonial economy also caused agriculture to be diverted toward the production of primary products and cash crops: cocoa, groundnut, palm oil, sisal, and so on.
- There was sudden shift in production mode from production of food crops to cash crops, a situation that caused hunger and starvation in Africa. Africa began to produce more of what she needs less and produce less of what she needs most those who could not produce, surrendered and shifted.

- Africa was perpetually turned to producer of primary raw materials, a situation that caused unequal exchange.
- The plunder age method and systematical kleptocratic enterprises established in the colonies to expropriate natural resources of Africa to Europe has, in the perspective of Rodney, facilitated “underdevelopment of Africa while engendered the development of Europe”
- This required a total reorganization of African economic life, beginning with the introduction of the cash crop and inexorable alteration of economic pattern. In the settler colonies—notably in Kenya and Rhodesia—the alienation of native land complicated the economic situation of the indigenous populations (Alkali, 2003).
- Economic Plan: it also altered the way they produce, create and recreate as well as what they consume.
- The infrastructure undertaken by the local governments for colonial administrations was minimal, developed strictly as a function of the requirements of the new economy, which saw the rise of the colonial cities.
- Neoliberalism: It is an economic process that distrusts the state as a factor in development; it is a nineteenth century philosophy that has continued to be repackaged, its latest form is monetarism. It believes that market mechanism is the most efficient allocator of productive resources and, therefore, to have an efficient and effective economy, forces of demand and supply must be allowed to play a leading role. This changed economy of Blacks life from communalism to capitalism and, lately, Neoliberalism.

### 3. Social Effect

- Family/Social Relations: Extended family giving way to nuclear family. Traditional African family values breaking down very rapidly. Extended family that was wonderful instrument like social verve, social security in our community has given way to nuclear family. Little wonder that there is no more respect for age; no more respect for values that they held sacrosanct in Africa; younger ones now find it very difficult to greet elderly ones.

- Individualism: They now have children of single parents, a phenomenon that is identifiable with America. People no longer communalise, nobody wants to be anybody's brother's keeper.
- Building Pattern: The way they build now is different from the way it was; they no longer take into cognizance our own peculiarity in the building process. We now build houses without ventilation.
- Urbanization: It led to rural exodus and the displacement of large segments of population.
- Corruption: western civilization has promoted corruption; leaders in Africa now look up to Europe and America as safe havens for looted funds. It is a consequence of Western civilization vis-a-vis the local American capitalists have plundered the lebowresonra and exploited opportunities.
- Sexuality: The conception of sexuality has changed completely; the desire to be like the Westerners by the children has suddenly made them promiscuous; doing things that were not imaginable several years ago. This does not, however, in any way support cultural isolationism. Cultural isolationism is not possible in the context of globalisation. Cultural ideas and values grow and flow across borders unimpeded, but that should not make us lose sight of the fact that the weaker you are; the more likelihood of cultural dominance. Blacks have been very weak and vulnerable since the last century. Africa now suffer from level of mental enslavement; cultural imperialism; the need for decolonisation of the mind. The trend of Western civilization in Africa and western Diaspora is pathetic; the strength of wave of Western civilization is such that Blacks are hardly capable of resisting it. The wave is so strong that it has become irresistible.
- Language: Proficiency in our language is declining in Blacks because they are compelled to embrace Western culture and civilization as Western language; Western language has created a dichotomy between an elite and mass of their people who still cannot do business with foreign language. It causes alienation for people who cannot speak English or French. Language is a vehicle of culture; they are in a very serious problem. They must define and design means of helping Blacks out of this language, cultural logjam.
- Christianity: The impact of Christianity has to be considered, for this has been the most important single factor in the process of Westernization in Afro - Americans. Western education, involving literacy and the mastery of a European language, became the condition for entry into the modern

sector. For most of the colonial period, education was in the hands of the Christian missions, who sought not only to convert migrants but also to inculcate Western values. Christianity challenged traditional belief systems and promoted the diffusion of new ideas and modes of life; in particular, it sought to impose monogamy and nuclear family as the norm.

- Ironically, the drastic reduction of infant mortality it has made possible has also complicated the demographic issues in Blacks, with consequences for agriculture and social services. Although no major effort of industrialization took place during the colonial period, and there has been no significant development since, Western technology has long entered the lives of Africans and African Americans through familiarity with manufactured for use.
- The cultural alteration provoked by the pressures of colonial rule and the Christian missionaries in all spheres of life are pervasive enough to qualify as the signs of a new cultural imposition. This is more noticeable in the area of science and technology on African experience and consciousness. Modern medicine has largely taken precedence over traditional methods in matters of health.

#### CONCLUSION:

The trend of cultural westernization of Afro - American has become very pervasive and prevalent, such that Western civilization has taken precedence over Black values and culture and the latter is regarded as inferior to the former. As with other societies and cultures in the so-called Third World, the impact of Western civilization on Blacks has occasioned a discontinuity in forms of life throughout the continent. This has led to a cultural dualism that often presents itself as a real dilemma in concrete, real-life situations. In other words, the Afro - American experience of modernity is fraught with tensions at every level of the communal and social settings.

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