

Intro:

In the autobiographical essay, *On seeing England for the first time*, Kincaid gives a detailed description of growing up in Antigua, and how English culture permeated every aspect of her life. She writes about coming of age, and realizing how the real England was far removed from the country that she was taught to idealize and revere. Kincaid describes the lasting psychological and social impacts of colonialism in Antigua by exemplifying the ways in which society had their African roots stripped away and replaced. Children in Antigua were encouraged to behave in the English way by learning English history and geography, having English names, buying English cars and clothes, and eating English breakfast. She vividly explains how living in a colony affected her identity by emphasizing the mismatch between her reality and the norms imposed by the English.

Thesis statement:

According to Kincaid, the English colonized Antigua in more ways than language. They took over Antigua with British culture by changing their education, traditions, food and fashion. While I agree with Kincaid in the relevance of these aspects to successfully colonize a society, I will expand on names and naming practices as powerful ways of colonizing a society. During colonialism, stripping African people of their names effectively erased their individual identity and collective memory. Lastly, I argue that individuals who change their “white” given names aid in the decolonization process by reclaiming their African roots.

Analysis:

According to shared African culture, we are connected to the spirit world, “when one bestows a name upon a child that person is not simply naming the flesh of the child, but rather the name is for the person’s soul.”⁴² During the Slave Trade, Africans were renamed by their masters with European style names like Mary, John and Sarah.⁷³ In doing so, the masters dehumanized African people and made identification of their property easier— as did hot metal branding practices. Moreover, future generations were bound to forget their African heritage because parents were not allowed to name their children. “The ‘unnaming’ and ‘renaming’ of new arrivants from Africa was, for the slave masters, an integral part of the act of taking possession.”⁷⁴

Nevertheless, there is evidence of African cultural retention because slaves in North America and the Caribbean named their children discreetly as a form of resistance. Thus some elements of their original names were kept on the plantations which aid in secretly preserving their identify and collective memory.

naming practices and their psychological significance.

I investigate African names and naming practices on the African continent, the United States and the Caribbean, not merely as elements of cultural retention, but also as forms of resistance – and their importance to the construction of identity and memory for persons of African descent. As such, this study examines how European colonizers attacked and defiled African names and naming systems to suppress

and erase African identity – since names not only aid in the construction of identity, but also concretize a people’s collective memory by recording the circumstances of their experiences.

Thus, to obliterate African collective memories and identities, the colonizers assigned new names to the Africans or even left them nameless, as a way of subjugating and committing them to perpetual servitude. In response, my research investigates how African descendants on the continent and throughout the Diaspora resisted this process of obliteration of their memories and how they deployed the practice of naming for survival in such a hostile environment. Therefore, this study not only focuses on the deliberate attempt made by European colonizers to obliterate African memory and instill a sense of shame within the African community, but also the various ways Africans resisted and sought to maintain their identity through names and naming practices, and the important role names played in their lives – both on the African continent and throughout the Diaspora.

Multiliteracy is a way of understanding communication, not only through words, but also by taking into account “social, cultural, and economic factors.”

Post emancipation

Following Emancipation, the “free names” adopted by formerly enslaved Africans in the Caribbean often belonged to their former owners, masters or white public figures.

African names: identity and protest

To cite the profound words of Sigrud King in “Naming and Power in Zora Neale Hurston’s *Their Eyes Were Watching God*”: Naming has always been an important issue in AfroAmerican tradition because of its link to the exercise of power. From their earliest experiences in America, AfroAmericans have been made aware that those who name also control, and those who are named are subjugated. Slaves were forced to abandon their African identities when they were captured, and were renamed with their masters’ identities when they arrived in America. In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong points out that for primarily oral cultures (such as the early slave communities) naming conveyed a power over things, for without learning a vast store of names, one was simply, “powerless to understand” (33). This sense of powerlessness could extend beyond the individual to include an entire community of “unnamed” people. Naming is tied to racial as well as individual identity: “To have a name is to have a means of locating, extending and preserving oneself in a human community, so as to be able to answer the question ‘who?’ with reference to ancestry, current status, and particular bearing, with reference to the full panoply of time.” 109

Black Power Era (1965 -1975)

During the late 1960s there was a massive movement by Africans throughout the Diaspora and on the African continent to reclaim their African identity by resisting what had long been white supremacy. For too long, Africans in the Diaspora have been other-defined, other-defended, and other-reliant under the wake of European enslavement and colonialism. 110

The identity of the decolonized people has to adapt to their newfound freedom by figuring out how to piece together their fragmented history. The first step into building a new-shared identity as an independent country is to change the names of people and places.

In “Naming and Linguistic Africanisms in African American Culture” Mphande asserts that: “Among the various endeavours that African slaves made in becoming African American in culture, orientation was the culture of resistance involving the process of renaming, constantly reverting to their African cultural forms, such as spirituality, burial rites and naming for inspiration and guidance, and thus reasserting themselves and reaffirming their humanity in a hostile world.” 85 Mphande further states: Through re-naming themselves, African Americans have continued the process of cultural formulations and reclaiming of their complex African roots in the continuing process of redefining themselves and dismantling the paradigm that kept them mentally chained.86

The concept of self-definition was essential to the Black Power experience.111 Black Power leaders throughout the Diaspora condemned the notion of Africans with European names, which they referred to as “slave names”. As such, during the Black Power Era 1965-1975, large numbers of black people in the U.S. and Caribbean, increasingly, abandoned their “slave names” and adopted African names. Throughout history, Diasporic Africans have been subjected to white supremacy and cultural ideology – for too long they have been forced to acclimate themselves to white hegemony and culture – brainwashed by racist education, European produced clothing and names. For example, Kincaid changed her name and Malcom X

In 1952, Malcolm Little joined the Chicago Chapter of the Nation of Islam where he called for Black Nationalism, and changed his name to Malcolm X. The surname “X” represented the identity and cultural heritage that was lost by black Americans, or otherwise distorted and suppressed through the centuries of enslavement.

Conclusion

Indeed, according to African mystical theology the name holds immense power. well as inspire African peoples to embrace their heritage and resist any injustice that is continuously being meted out to them. Therefore, the paper is not meant to tell all Africans – continental and Diasporic – to adopt African names; but rather it focuses on the centrality of names and naming among Africans, and its continued importance today seen ‘...either [as] an outright rejection of Eurocentricity or its converse – a positive recognition of African ethnicity’154 – or both...