

African retentions or Africanisms are elements of African culture that survived the inhuman oppression in the Americas and were adapted and transformed anew in the New World. The existence of Africanisms in Brazilian and American culture is evidenced in: the drumming techniques, dance, folklore, religion, language, traditional beliefs and customs. The survival of these retentions today reflects an ingenious creative spirit and a resilient African legacy.



The Drum

The drum, the heartbeat of African music, was used to communicate between villages; to record history, comment on events, discuss people's feeling and thoughts, and to deepen religious experiences. A dominant feature of African drumming is the use of polyrhythms (many rhythms played at once). Where have you heard a polyrhythm?

Musical Tradition

Polyrhythms are the foundation for African-American music such as jazz, samba in Brazil, and hip-hop. Can you think of a song that reflects your thoughts and feelings?



Body Percussion and Rhythmic Movement

The enslaved Africans used their bodies as "drums" and their hands to create rhythms. The tradition continued as "hambone," hand-clap games, stepping in the U.S., and as capoeira in Brazil. Name a hand clap rhythm that you know.

Call & Response

A lead person sings a line and the chorus or audience replies by repeating the line, or answering a question asked by the soloist. Call and response can also be done with instruments as well as movement. Give an example of a situation with call and response.

