

Black **H**istory **M**onth

By Joy Ramos

Edward Bruce Bynum is the author of The Africa Unconscious, a book about the roots of ancient mysticism and psychology. In his explanation, "the Africa Unconscious is paradoxically both the dark and the luminous deep structure that live within each of us, regardless of surface racial and ethnic diversification."

The following interview is about how the spiritual traditions of Africa have profoundly influenced the Black church in this country.

Q: The Black community in America has for centuries been centered around the church where community is regarded symbolically as a circle. Can you please explain its importance?

Edward Bynum: Historically, the strongest communities that was allowed, survived and thrived in America was the community of the Black church. In many African societies, and many extensions into this society today, the family consists of many different levels. There's the present generation that includes everybody who's living, up to three generations from the past, including the people who recently departed and one generation in the future. All of these are considered to be part of one's family. The different sense of time is much more circular. It includes the past, present and the future.

Q: The Black church has its roots in African traditions. What spiritual

practices have crossed over into this country?

Edward Bynum: African American spirituality, in both North and South America, was a fusion of West African lineages and those that, through West Africa, stretched back to the days of ancient Egypt and the civilizations of the Nile.

Some African traditions such as Spirit possession, incantations, beliefs in "medicine", witchcraft, and dancing religion with its associated facial expressions and bodily gestures flourished in the southern states of this country. This was most often seen in the ecstatic states of Black revivalist churches. The same rhythmic chants, foot stomping, shouts, and back-and-forth calls between preacher and audience could be seen.

Q: What about honoring spirit elders and ritual?

Edward Bynum: Veneration of one's ancestors is somewhat downplayed in Christian traditions. However, even in those traditions, there is a recognition that one can have spiritual contact with one's ancestors in the ancestral realm. The ancestors within the ancestors are still part of one's life. This is a tradition practiced all over Earth, including Africa but downplayed in Europe. Ritual and rhythm has a prominent place in Africa. They both help organize memory, organize community and reflect the orderly rhythmic

oscillating process of the universe. The music of the Blacks was carried across the Atlantic and still stressed call and response, syncopation, polyrhythms, slides from one not to another, hand and foot clapping, and a great deal of heterophony, much of which was thought to be

frightening, wild and "barbaric," yet "strangely fascinating" to the Whites. Almost the same can be said today whenever there is a new innovation in Black music, from the "hip" of rock-and-roll to the rhythmic incantation woven through rap music. It will be a powerful new

episode in the history of music and human consciousness, however, when the attention of America's Black musical innovators goes back to its real roots in the "possession" music of the Orishas (in Africa) and this ecstatic liberating force finds expression in popular music!

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Black History Month



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The role of priests, ritual and dance possession were believed by both Muslims and traditionalists. The whole process was alive and highly personal in one's experience.