
From Spirituality to Orthodoxy: Black American Assimilation and the Eschewal of African Spiritual Practices

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This article investigates complex historical processes illustrating how specific mainstream Christian denominations have played a significant role in shaping the religious and cultural identity of Black Americans, particularly through "shaming" resulting in upwardly mobile Blacks eschewing African spiritual practices they may have seen a grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt, or neighbor practice. Drawing on an anthropological approach that synthesizes ethnographic fieldwork among Black American Christian communities and a historical discourse analysis of denominational teachings, this study explores the zeal with which Black Americans embraced Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy particularly during the First Great Migration, which served as a strategic mechanism for assimilation into the dominant American culture. The research reveals that the reinforcement of negative perceptions, labeling indigenous African spiritual practices as "hocus pocus" or "mumbo jumbo," was not merely a passive cultural shift but an active, denominationally driven process tied to notions of respectability, social mobility, and the rejection of perceived "primitive" or "superstitious" associations. This deliberate distancing facilitated integration into predominantly white social structures and contributed to the formation of a distinct Black American Christian identity.

By examining this dynamic, the article illuminates the profound impact of religious institutions on cultural adaptation. It also provides critical insights into the ongoing negotiations of spirituality, tradition, and modernity within the Black American experience, while simultaneously offering a nuanced evaluation of the Black Church's multifaceted role—its unparalleled contributions to community survival, provision, and a unique theological framework for liberation, alongside its internal pressures towards assimilation.

Introduction

The spiritual landscape of Black America has long been a vibrant, often contradictory, tapestry woven from threads of African cosmological continuities and the imposed realities of Christian evangelism. From the crucible of enslavement to the promises of emancipation, religious institutions have served as sources of resilience, while acting as complex mechanisms of social transformation. Yet, within this narrative of adaptation and survival lies a less explored, yet critical, phenomenon: the active eschewal of traditional African spiritual practices by Black Americans, particularly as a strategic adaptation towards assimilation into dominant American culture

and mainstream Christian orthopraxis. This article argues that specific mainstream Christian denominations have played a significant and often overlooked role in reinforcing negative perceptions of African spiritual traditions among Black Americans, directly contributing to this assimilation process.

The nuanced tension between ancestral spiritual practices and emergent Christian orthodoxy reached critical junctures during pivotal periods of Black American history, exemplified by the First Great Migration (1910-1970).

As millions moved from the rural South to urban centers, seeking economic opportunity and social advancement, the embrace of mainstream Protestant denominations offered not just spiritual solace but also pathways to respectability and integration within a

racially stratified society. This dynamic is powerfully underscored by the trajectory of institutions like the National Colored Spiritualist Association of Churches (NCSAC). Once a prominent voice for a distinctly African-inflected spirituality, the NCSAC's eventual decline, particularly by the mid-20th century, stands as a stark illustration of this broader assimilationist trend—a poignant testament to the increasing disassociation from practices often derided as "hocus pocus" or "mumbo jumbo" by both external society and, crucially, by influential Black Christian leaders themselves.

Drawing on an anthropological approach that synthesizes rigorous ethnographic fieldwork among Black American Christian communities with a historical discourse analysis of denominational teachings, this study explores the zealous embrace of Christian orthodoxy and orthopraxy. We will demonstrate how influential Black churches, such as the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., the Church of God in Christ (COGIC), the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) Church, while providing vital community and liberation theology, simultaneously propagated narratives that subtly—and sometimes overtly—stigmatized spiritual forms deemed "unorthodox" or "primitive". This reinforcement of negative perceptions was not a passive cultural drift but an active, denominationally driven process, intrinsically tied to aspirations of upward mobility, social acceptance, and the rejection of associations that can hinder integration into predominantly white social structures.

This article will proceed by first outlining the historical presence and evolution of African spiritual continuities within the Americas. It will then analyze the specific theological and social doctrines of mainstream Black Christian denominations, illustrating how these contributed to a discourse of "shaming" traditional African spiritual practices. Subsequently, ethnographic insights will illuminate the lived experiences of upwardly mobile Black Americans who, often with personal connections to these ancestral practices through family members like a grandmother, grandfather, uncle, aunt or neighbor, made conscious choices to eschew them in favor of Christian orthodoxy. By examining this dynamic, the article illuminates the profound impact of religious institutions on cultural adaptation and provides critical insights into the ongoing negotiations of spirituality, tradition, and modernity within the Black American

experience, while offering a fuller evaluation of the benefits as well as the detriments of the Black Church in America.

Historical Presence and Evolution of African Spiritual Continuities

The transatlantic slave trade, a cataclysmic event in human history, profoundly reshaped the spiritual lives of Africans forcibly brought to the Americas. Yet, despite the brutal rupture from their homelands and systematic attempts to erase their cultural identities, West African spiritual traditions demonstrated remarkable resilience. These systems, often characterized by a holistic worldview, emphasized a permeable boundary between the sacred and the profane, incorporating ancestor veneration, the belief in various spirit entities, divination practices, and the significant role of communal ritual. Spiritual power was often understood as immanent in nature, manifest in specific sites, objects, and specialized practitioners who mediated between the human and spiritual realms.

This vibrant tapestry of beliefs and practices formed the foundational cosmological framework for millions of enslaved Africans, a framework that would subtly and overtly persist in the new world. Furthermore, recent scholarship by Afe Adogame (Adogame, Obadare, and Adebaniwi 2025) expands upon foundational understandings of African spirituality, highlighting its dynamic, trans-local, and evolving nature, moving beyond essentialist definitions to encompass its contemporary manifestations and diasporic connections, which is critical for a full comprehension of its enduring presence.

Survival in the Americas necessitated adaptive strategies for maintaining these spiritual continuities. Often, this involved covert practices, disguised rituals, and the embedding of African cosmological elements within ostensibly Christian forms. The Ring Shout, for instance, a communal ecstatic dance that combined African circle dance traditions with Christian hymns, exemplifies the syncretic ingenuity of enslaved Africans. Similarly, the development of various forms of Hoodoo and Conjure in the American South, while adapting to the new environment and sometimes incorporating European elements, undeniably drew heavily from West and Central African magical and healing traditions, serving as crucial means of asserting agency and seeking spiritual protection in a hostile world. For example, ethnographic work by Zora Neale Hurston in the 1930s (1935) meticulously documented

practices of Hoodoo in Florida and Louisiana, detailing the creation of protective charms ("mojo bags") and divinatory techniques passed down through generations, often blending biblical figures with African spiritual principles. More recently, scholarship by Yvonne Chireau (2003) has highlighted how these practices, though often marginalized, represented a distinct religious landscape, offering spiritual power and agency to Black communities beyond the confines of formal church structures.

Beyond formal practices, African spiritual understandings informed narratives, folklore, linguistic patterns, and even funerary customs, revealing a persistent, albeit often hidden, spiritual current beneath the surface of imposed Christianization.

However, from the very outset, these African-derived spiritual expressions faced intense scrutiny and condemnation from the dominant white society. Enslavers and missionaries alike frequently demonized African spiritual practices, labeling them as "savage," "primitive," "superstitious," or outright "Satanic." This denigration was not merely a matter of theological difference but served a crucial socio-political function: to justify enslavement, assert white supremacy, and to systematically dismantle any cultural or spiritual practices that could foster collective identity, resistance, or a sense of independent Black power. It was within this environment of external oppression and the demonization of their ancestral heritage that independent Black churches began to emerge. While offering essential spaces for community, leadership, and a unique theological interpretation of liberation, these nascent Black Christian formations also inherited, and in some cases, internalized, the broader societal bias against African-derived spirituality. The path toward "respectability" in the eyes of the dominant culture, even within Black-led institutions, would increasingly involve a conscious distancing from these stigmatized traditions.

Theological and Social Doctrines of Mainstream Black Christian Denominations and the Discourse of "Shaming"

Having established the tenacious presence of African spiritual continuities in the Americas, this section will now analyze how the theological and social doctrines of specific mainstream Black Christian denominations actively contributed to a discourse of "shaming" these practices.

This process was intricately linked to the broader project of assimilation into dominant American culture and was particularly salient during periods of increased Black social and geographical mobility, such as the Great Migration.

While these denominations undeniably played a critical role in community building, political organizing, and providing spiritual refuge for Black Americans, their pursuit of legitimacy within a racially hostile society often necessitated a clear distinction from anything deemed "primitive" or "un-Christian." The National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc. (NBC), as the largest Black Baptist denomination, exemplified this dual role. Its emphasis on a formalized, didactic Christianity, rooted in biblical literalism and a structured worship service, implicitly contrasted with the fluid, experiential, and often ecstatic nature of African-derived spiritual practices. Sermons and Sunday school lessons within NBC churches frequently exhorted congregants towards "respectable" behavior, often framing adherence to mainstream Christian norms as a sign of moral rectitude and social advancement. This included subtle, and sometimes overt, critiques of practices associated with folk traditions or "superstition," which could be interpreted as references to Hoodoo, Conjure, or African spirit beliefs. The pursuit of social acceptance and upward mobility, especially for those migrating to urban centers, made adherence to these "respectable" tenets a pragmatic choice, reflecting what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham terms the "politics of respectability" (1993, 14) within the Black Baptist tradition.

The Black Church: A Source of Protection, Provision, and Distinct Spirituality

Beyond the theological and social doctrines of shaming, it is vital to acknowledge and elaborate upon the profound and enduring positive contributions of the Black Church to the lives and spirituality of Black Americans, even as it navigated the complex path of assimilation. These denominations served not only as arbiters of respectability but as indispensable bastions of survival and empowerment.

The Black Church, across its various denominations, served as a fundamental source of protection. During eras of virulent racism and systemic violence, churches often functioned as physical sanctuaries and meeting places impervious to white surveillance and control. They provided safe spaces for community organizing, education, and mutual aid. For instance,

during Reconstruction and the Jim Crow era, many Black churches covertly housed freedom fighters, served as centers for voter registration drives, and offered legal defense networks against unjust laws and racial terror. They were places where Black dignity was affirmed, and strategies for collective survival were forged. This protective function was often a matter of life and death, providing a refuge when no other institutions would.

Furthermore, the Black Church was an unparalleled provider of provision. Beyond spiritual nourishment, these institutions were often the primary social welfare agencies for Black communities, particularly during periods when state and federal support was inaccessible or discriminatory. Churches established benevolent societies, offered informal credit unions, provided food and clothing to the needy, and created networks for job placement and housing assistance among congregants. They were educational centers, running schools and literacy programs when public education was segregated and substandard. Sunday school, for many, was the only pathway to formal learning. This extensive practical support fundamentally shaped the material and social well-being of Black Americans, serving as a vital counterforce against economic marginalization. For instance, in the early 20th century, many Black churches established mutual aid societies that provided insurance benefits, burial funds, and support for widows and orphans, filling critical gaps left by discriminatory government policies.

Moreover, the Black Church profoundly shaped the spirituality of Black Americans in unique and enduring ways. It offered a theological framework for liberation and justice, reinterpreting biblical narratives to speak directly to the experiences of oppression and the promise of ultimate freedom. The powerful oral tradition of preaching, the call-and-response patterns, and the deeply emotive, participatory worship styles—imbued with African aesthetic and performance elements—fostered communal solidarity and emotional release. Spirituals and gospel music, born from the crucible of bondage and the joy of resilience, became central to Black cultural expression and a unique conduit for spiritual experience, affirming identity and connection to the divine in ways that transcended formal doctrine. These forms of expression, while rooted in Christian faith, became distinctly African American spiritual manifestations, providing hope, solace, and a pathway to navigate a racially hostile world. The very act of worship often

became a form of psychological and spiritual resistance, reaffirming worth and humanity in a dehumanizing society.

However, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church and the African Methodist Episcopal Zion (AME Zion) Church, while rooted in protest against racial discrimination within white Methodism, nevertheless adopted much of the theological and structural orthodoxy of their white counterparts. Their strong emphasis on education, temperance, and structured church governance fostered an image of sophisticated religiosity. Within their pulpits, spiritual practices that did not conform to the established Methodist liturgy, particularly those involving trance, speaking in tongues (also known as glossolalia), ancestor veneration, or specific ritualistic uses of herbs and charms, were often dismissed as remnants of a "darker past" or uneducated superstition.

This theological distancing was a conscious effort to demonstrate that Black religious life was as "civilized" and "enlightened" as white Protestantism, thereby challenging the racist stereotypes that often-justified racial oppression. For many upwardly mobile Black Americans, joining these denominations was a clear signal of their commitment to a specific path of progress that involved shedding "undesirable" cultural baggage.

The Church of God in Christ (COGIC), while a Holiness-Pentecostal denomination that embraced ecstatic worship and spiritual gifts, paradoxically also participated in the discourse of shaming. Despite its own African-derived ecstatic elements and focus on spiritual experience, COGIC rigorously condemned what it termed "folk magic" or "conjunction," interpreting such practices through a purely demonic lens. This condemnation served to distinguish COGIC's "holy" spirit manifestations from what they perceived as dangerous or unsanctified spiritual power, often linking traditional African practices to malevolent forces or the unregenerate past. This theological purification, though from a different theological posture than the staid Baptist and Methodist denominations, still served to delineate acceptable spiritual expression from that which was to be eschewed, reinforcing the idea that legitimate spiritual power derived solely from the Holy Spirit as understood within their specific Christian framework.

This internal critique and shaming discourse were significant because they came from within the Black community itself, often from trusted religious leaders. For individuals seeking to integrate into mainstream

society, the warnings and subtle denigrations from respected pastors and church elders carried immense weight, often more so than external white condemnation.

The message was clear: embracing Christian orthodoxy and rejecting perceived "Africanisms" was not just a spiritual choice but a crucial step towards social and economic advancement, a pathway to respectability, and a means to escape the derogatory labels of "hocus pocus" and "mumbo jumbo" that haunted earlier generations.

Ethnographic Insights: Lived Experiences of Eschewal

This section transitions from historical and theological analysis to the lived realities of Black Americans, drawing directly from the rigorous ethnographic fieldwork conducted for this study among diverse Black Christian communities across the United States. Through a series of over two dozen in-depth interviews and sustained participant observations spanning nearly a decade, this research illuminates the deeply personal and familial dimensions of the eschewal of African spiritual practices, vividly demonstrating how the aforementioned historical and denominational "shaming" discourse has manifested in everyday life, shaping choices and identities across multiple generations. The qualitative data, meticulously collected and corroborated across numerous narratives, reveals that the decision to distance oneself from such traditions is often profoundly personal, shaped by intimate family narratives, pervasive community pressures, and an internalized understanding of what constitutes "respectable" and "legitimate" spirituality within the context of mainstream Black Christianity. This rich ethnographic tapestry aims to provide robust confidence in the data by affirming that the sentiments shared by the initial vignettes are indeed widely echoed across the informant pool, reflecting broader, deeply ingrained cultural patterns within these communities.

Many informants, a diverse chorus of voices spanning geographic regions and denominational affiliations (from the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., to AME and COGIC churches), consistently recounted childhood experiences or shared family stories that subtly, or sometimes overtly, conveyed the negative perceptions of African-derived spiritual practices. These narratives frequently highlighted a palpable generational shift, often driven

by the pursuit of upward mobility and respectability. Mrs. Clara Jones, a 78-year-old active and devout member of a National Baptist affiliate church in Chicago, provided a poignant vignette. She shared how her grandmother, a first-generation migrant from rural Mississippi who had carried vestiges of folk traditions with her, would secretly consult a root doctor for ailments or perceived spiritual afflictions that the rigid church deacons, in their adherence to emergent orthodoxy, dismissed as "God's will" or a lack of sufficient faith. "My Mama used to tell us to stay away from old Sister Mae's house," Mrs. Jones recalled, her voice softening with the memory, but firm with the ingrained caution she had internalized, "said she was into 'that old stuff,' things that 'weren't of God.' It was just how you talked about it, not mean, but like it was backward, something you left behind when you came North and got 'saved,' and wanted to be seen as 'proper,'" she concluded. This narrative highlights the familial transmission of the shaming discourse, where discretion and eventual rejection of such practices were learned behaviors intrinsically tied to aspirations for an urban, "modern," and undeniably Christian identity. Mrs. Jones's account was frequently and compellingly echoed by numerous other long-standing church members who remembered similar unspoken rules within their own families, particularly those with deep roots in the rural South, indicating this was a widespread phenomenon rather than isolated incidents.

Another compelling theme emerged from discussions with younger congregants, often professionals or those with higher educational attainment, who expressed a clear disassociation from practices they vaguely recognized as "African" or "folk." Mr. David Green, a 35-year-old professional and deacon in an AME affiliated church in Atlanta, acknowledged hearing whispers of his great-aunt's abilities to "read signs" or "fix things" with spiritual interventions that seemed to fall outside the accepted purview of formal church doctrine. "My parents always pushed us hard in church, no nonsense, just Bible," Mr. Green explained, his tone reflecting a sense of inherited imperative. "They saw anything outside of that, like what Auntie might have done, as 'hocus pocus,' something from a time people were trying to get away from. It wasn't 'Christian,' it was just . . . embarrassing if you really thought about it," he admitted. This sentiment consistently underscored how the quest for respectability, often intertwined with educational and professional attainment, fostered a

conscious distancing from practices labeled as pre-modern or antithetical to sophisticated Christian belief. Numerous other informants in similar social positions articulated comparable views, emphasizing the social capital gained by aligning exclusively with mainstream Christian norms. For instance, one interviewee, a Black female professor in her 40s from a COGIC background, recounted how her grandmother, despite her deep church involvement, would secretly use "blueing" in her wash water to ward off evil, a practice she dismissed as "superstition" even as she recognized its protective intent within her grandmother's worldview. This illustrates the subtle, yet persistent, awareness of these practices even among those who had outwardly rejected them.

Within COGIC communities, while ecstatic worship was a hallmark, the boundary drawn between "holy" spiritual manifestations and "folk magic" was particularly rigid. Field observations revealed sermons vehemently condemning "witchcraft," "sorcery," and "root work," often implicitly targeting practices with African roots. One sermon, witnessed in a large COGIC church in Houston with approximately 500 congregants present, emphasized that "any power not coming from the Holy Spirit is from the devil, and you cast it out! Don't be messing with that mumbo jumbo, that's how spirits get hold of you!" This direct and forceful language, while perhaps not explicitly naming African spiritualities, implicitly categorized them as dangerous and antithetical to true Christian faith, thereby reinforcing the imperative to eschew them for the sake of spiritual purity and communal acceptance. During a week-long revival service in a rural Mississippi COGIC church, several testimonies centered on individuals who claimed to have been "delivered" from "hoodoo" or "conjure," framing their prior involvement in such practices as a period of spiritual bondage from which the church had freed them. These public narratives further solidified the internal shaming mechanism.

These ethnographic insights demonstrate that the eschewal of African spiritual continuities is not a passive process of forgetting, but an active, culturally informed decision. It is driven by a complex interplay of denominational teachings, familial socialization, and the broader desire for social and spiritual legitimacy within a society that has historically devalued Black cultural forms. The "shaming" discourse, whether subtle familial nudges or overt pulpit condemnations, has profoundly shaped the spiritual landscapes of Black Americans, guiding them towards orthodox

Christian expressions as a primary means of navigating identity, community, and aspiration.

Discussion

This study has explored the complex historical and lived processes through which mainstream Black Christian denominations have significantly shaped the religious and cultural identity of Black Americans, particularly by actively contributing to the eschewal of African spiritual practices. Our analysis began by establishing the enduring presence of African spiritual continuities in the Americas, despite the brutal rupture of slavery, revealing their persistent manifestation in various syncretic forms and folk traditions. We then demonstrated how prominent Black Christian denominations—including the National Baptist Convention, USA, Inc., the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church, and the Church of God in Christ—developed theological and social doctrines that, while providing vital community and liberation, simultaneously fostered a discourse of "shaming" these African-derived spiritual practices. Finally, our ethnographic data vividly illustrated how this historical discourse translated into lived experiences, with upwardly mobile Black Americans actively distancing themselves from practices their elders or neighbors observed, driven by aspirations of respectability, social acceptance, and a desire to align with what was considered "civilized" and "modern" Christianity.

The effectiveness of this internal "shaming" mechanism lies in its source: not merely external white condemnation, but the powerful influence of respected Black religious leaders and community institutions. The church, a central pillar of Black life and a crucial agent for social uplift, became a significant arbiter of acceptable spiritual and social behavior. For Black Americans navigating a racially hierarchical society, the embrace of mainstream Protestant orthodoxy and orthopraxy served as a pragmatic strategy for assimilation, signaling a commitment to a specific path of progress.

The decline of institutions like the National Colored Spiritualist Association of Churches, once a vibrant alternative, stands as a testament to the powerful gravitational pull of these larger denominations and the social capital associated with their form of Christianity. This process highlights the profound impact of religious institutions not only on spiritual formation but also on the politics of identity

and cultural adaptation within marginalized communities.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the inherent complexities and nuances of this historical trajectory. The Black church was never a monolithic entity, nor was its role solely about assimilation. It has always been a paradox: simultaneously a site of profound cultural preservation, particularly through its music and preaching styles, and a force for cultural transformation, sometimes at the expense of overt Africanisms. The decision to eschew traditional practices was often a strategic act of agency, a means of survival and advancement in a hostile environment, rather than a mere passive surrender. Individuals and families made choices they believed were best for their progress and the future of their children, even if it meant consciously moving away from ancestral spiritual paths. The ethnographic accounts underscore that this was a process of negotiation, not simple erasure, often leaving a lingering awareness, if not practice, of the older traditions.

This study contributes significantly to the anthropology of religion by demonstrating how religious institutions, even those formed in resistance to oppression, can become powerful agents of cultural transformation, subtly or overtly shaping internal norms to align with broader societal expectations. It enriches African American studies by providing a deeper understanding of the internal dynamics of religious identity formation beyond simple conversion narratives, focusing on the active processes of acceptance and rejection within the Black community.

Furthermore, it offers critical insights into broader discussions of cultural assimilation, highlighting the role of intra-community pressures and the complex interplay between tradition and modernity.

Future research will explore the contemporary resurgence of interest in African spiritualities among younger generations of Black Americans, examining whether this represents a re-negotiation of the "shaming" discourse or a new paradigm for Black spiritual identity, detached from the historical pressures of assimilation that defined earlier eras. We see some anecdotal evidence of this emerging phenomenon in film Director Ryan Coogler's international hit movie, *Simers*, which is replete with overt references to Christianity masking Hoodoo ("rootwork") or African American spirituality, Voodoo (Vodun), Native American folklore, Celtic wicca and Vampirism. This cinematic representation suggests a cultural shift, where previously marginalized spiritual

expressions are being re-examined and re-integrated into contemporary Black narratives, signaling a potential move beyond the historical need for strict orthodoxy.

Conclusion

This research compels a critical re-evaluation of the forces shaping Black American religious identity, revealing a paradox at its core: the very institutions that fostered liberation and community also orchestrated a profound distancing from ancestral African spiritual practices, which is a common balancing act that upwardly mobile Black Americans were forced to negotiate. Akin to "code switching," this strategic adaptation allowed for navigation of oppressive societal structures.

Far from a passive cultural drift, though, this study demonstrates that the eschewal of these traditions was a deliberate, denominationally driven process, strategically harnessed by mainstream Black Christian churches for the explicit purpose of assimilation and the pursuit of respectability within a racially hostile America.

Our analysis has traced the tenacious persistence of African spiritual continuities from the brutal crucible of the transatlantic slave trade to their manifestation in American folk traditions. Crucially, we then unveiled how leading Black Protestant denominations—including the National Baptist Convention, the AME and AME Zion Churches, and the Church of God in Christ—articulated theological and social doctrines that actively stigmatized these traditions, often labeling them as "primitive," "superstitious," or antithetical to "civilized" Christian faith. The ethnographic narratives confirmed this internalized shaming, showing how generations of upwardly mobile Black Americans made conscious choices to reject the spiritual paths of their forebears, prioritizing social acceptance and material advancement over inherited spiritual practices.

This study powerfully illustrates that the Black church, while an undeniable bastion of resilience and self-determination, also functioned as a cultural gatekeeper, an internal arbiter of acceptable identity. The "politics of respectability" it championed, born of necessity in a discriminatory society, inadvertently forged a spiritual orthodoxy that marginalized deeply rooted ancestral connections. This finding compels scholars to move beyond simplistic narratives of religious conversion, embracing the complex tensions

between liberation and cultural conformity, resilience and strategic abandonment that have defined Black American spiritual evolution.

In conclusion, the legacy of this denominational shaming continues to ripple through contemporary Black American spiritual landscapes, fueling an ongoing dialogue between inherited faith and a burgeoning interest in re-connecting with ancestral spiritualities. Understanding this deliberate historical eschewal is not merely an academic exercise; it is fundamental to comprehending the profound negotiations of identity, belonging, and spiritual authenticity that continue to shape the Black American experience. It challenges us to ask: What has been gained, and what has been lost, in the journey from the spirit's flash to the orthodoxy's embrace?

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