

Dreaming Ancestors Among African American: A Challenge to the Modern Igbo People

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Abstract:

This study examines the ancestral dream, an element of ancestor veneration that has persisted, in African religious life since the arrival of their enslaved ancestors in this country. Although changes have occurred in ancestor veneration, this study demonstrates its continued importance in maintaining harmonious family relations. It therefore advises the modern Igbo people on the need to continued veneration of ancestors.

Keywords: ancestor veneration; ring shout; ancestral dream; Kwanzaa

Introduction:

Although many Africans enslaved in the United States came from societies in which ancestors were venerated, until recently most of the literature on the slave religious life has not examined this dimension. The ground breaking research of Sterling Stuckey (1987) on the significance of the ring shout demonstrated that enslaved Africans in the United States did continue to venerate their ancestors. Subsequent studies of religious beliefs and practices corroborate the existence of ancestor veneration among enslaved Africans (Creel, 1988; Thompson, 1990).¹ However, one dimension of ancestor veneration, the ancestral dream, has received very little scholarly attention. This study examines the ancestral dream and demonstrates its role in maintaining family stability among contemporary African Americans.

Presently, many descendants of enslaved Africans residing in this country consider folk information a legitimate source of knowledge about the world they inhabit, especially the ancestral dream. Based on an analysis of dream narratives collected from the interviewees, ancestors who appear in dreams are believed to communicate requests and advice to their kin. And most African Americans find it difficult to ignore these communiqués. The ancestral dream is one of numerous forms of continuous revelations that enslaved Africans transplanted to the Americas (Thornton, 1992). However, African-derived forms of continuous revelation, such as spirit possession, divination, conjuring, and prophecy, have sparked the interest of scholars more than the ancestral dreams.

In recent years, scholars treated dreams as social facts and recognized the relationship between dreams and other cultural phenomena (Curley, 1983; Jedrej & Shaw, 1992; Kiernan, 1985; O'Flaherty, 1984). Thus, this research also explores the relationship between ancestral dreams and other forms of cultural

phenomena within these Sand hills communities. In this study, it is believed that the ancestral dream was a part of a larger system of ancestor veneration within African culture. Unlike the ring shout and other elements of ancestor veneration, the importance of the ancestral dream never declined. This African-derived method of knowing has persisted in African American culture since the colonial era.

Methodology:

The bulk of the data used in this study were collected intermittently during three summers in 2009, 2010, and 2011. This study conducted fieldwork among African Americans residing in two eastern North Carolina towns but on summer vacations in China. Fieldwork consisted of interviews conducted among 6 adults: 4 females and 2 males, ranging from 28 to 60 years of age. The interviews were open-ended, formal and informal. In addition to informing this study of their own dreams, participants recounted the ancestral dreams of family members and friends.

This writer was born and raised in one of the communities where belief in dreams prevails, and have known the participants in this research project most of his stay in China. Even though a steady stream of extended family members migrated to northern cities during the 20th century according to one of the respondents, the majority have resided in this region since the antebellum period. He further said, "Although I have not lived in the region since the completion of high school, I maintain close contact with my family and friends." He continued, "It is important to note that the members of my extended family appreciate dreams as a source of knowledge; during my childhood, I was taught to be attentive to my dreams and how to interpret them. Thus, I share many of the local beliefs about dreams."

As a little child, it was common to hear relatives discussing and interpreting their dreams. As a child, one feared dreaming because the appearance of deceased relatives and certain symbols in one's dreams made one aware of past or impending affairs. Although one's parents and other adult relatives could assure one that the ability to have such dreams was a blessing, one considered it a burden. However, with maturity one became more comfortable with this "gift," the local term often used to describe such ability. By the time one reached one's 30s, members of one's extended family and close friends were consulting one about their dreams. Therefore, this presentation combines anthropological methods of inquiry, observation, and analysis with the writer's personal knowledge.

As a result of extensive contact with citizens of African and Caribbean nations, the writer began to realize that they treat dreams in a similar fashion. Not only do all three groups share some of the same dream symbols, they also assign

great importance to ancestral dreams. On this realization, the writer began to ponder the anthropological significance of ancestral dreams among African Americans. Is the ancestral dream an aspect of an African sacred cosmology that was transplanted to the Americas? What role does it play in family life? And how does this category of dreams relate to other aspects of African American social and cultural life?

Historical Background

Although intensive missionary efforts among enslaved Africans began in the late 18th century, large numbers of enslaved Africans did not convert to Christianity until the 19th century. Thus, during the first 200 years of their history in the United States, the majority of the enslaved population practiced some variation of the religions they had known in Africa. In spite of distinct ethnic backgrounds, these enslaved Africans from Western and Central African societies possessed similar cognitive orientations and sacred cosmos (Blassingame, 1979; Gomez, 1998; Mintz & Price, 1992; Morgan, 1998; Raboteau, 1978; Sobel, 1979; Stuckey, 1987; Thornton, 1992). Unfortunately, we do not have a total picture of the African-derived religions that were practiced in the colonial era. According to Gomez (1998),

Although, the evidence rarely details the African's religious activities in North America, partial glimpses of activities associated with a larger worldview are provided, and it is reasonable to conclude that what is only partially revealed was in reality more of a coherent whole than not. (p. 250)

However, once large numbers of enslaved Africans began to convert to Christianity, during the 19th century, people learned more about African-derived religious practices and beliefs.

Unlike enslaved Africans in the Caribbean and South America, Africans in the United States did not integrate their deities into folk Christianity (save those enslaved by French Catholics in the Louisiana Territories). Nevertheless, many other African religious elements laid the foundation for the unique Protestantism that developed in this population. African influences found in the folk Christianity developed by the slaves, are most apparent in the conversion practices, spirit possession, burial rites, sacred dances, and oratorical, performance, and musical styles. As mentioned earlier, interest in ancestor veneration is a recent development in the literature on slave religion. Stuckey's (1987) groundbreaking research on slave culture, what Molefi Asante (1987) called African culture under duress, demonstrates that enslaved Africans performed the ring shout in honor of their deities and ancestors. After analyzing firsthand accounts recorded by colonial and antebellum Whites, as well as the former slaves, Stuckey (1987) concluded, "From the time of the earliest importations of slaves to the outbreak of the Civil War, millions of slaves did the

ring shout, unobserved, with no concern for white approval" (p. 24). The custom of dancing in a counterclockwise pattern is characteristic of ancestor veneration practiced in those Western and Central African societies from which the slaves originated.

Once large numbers of slaves began to convert to Christianity, following the African tradition of including dance in worship, they incorporated the ring shout into their newly adopted religion. Formerly a vehicle for communicating with the ancestors, after conversion to Christianity, the ring shout became a means of praising the Christian God and inducing possession by the Holy Ghost. What effect did this change have on ancestor veneration? Is it reasonable to assume that once the ring shout was incorporated into Christianity the practice of ancestor veneration was weakened? Or did the meaning of this spiritual practice change? The additive element prominent in African traditional religions would have made it possible for the enslaved to simply expand the concept to include the Christian God. Stuckey (1987) noted that long after the establishment of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church in Philadelphia, Whites recorded instances of free Africans performing a type of ring dance on the graves of their ancestors following a fair. Creel's (1988) study of the Gullah immediately following their emancipation demonstrates the significance of the ring shout in Christian worship. The practice of ancestor veneration as manifested in the ring shout would have been more threatened by conservative Christians who did not see dance as an appropriate vehicle for praise and devotion.

Following emancipation, some of the more conservative and educated members of the clergy, Black and White, began to attack those aspects of African American Christianity they considered pagan. By the early 20th century, this campaign to rid the religion of "pagan customs" caused the decline in African-derived practices such as the ring shout, grave adornment, and certain conversion rites, especially in the urban areas of the north and south. It was only in the more remote rural southern communities that these practices were not wiped out.

Is it possible that veneration of the ancestors remained important but was expressed in other ways? For instance, Stuckey's (1987) interpretation of the tale, "Bur Rabbit and the Little Red Church-yard," suggests that belief in the power of ancestral beings to communicate with the living was reflected in other aspects of slave culture. In this tale, the rabbit plays the fiddle as other animals dance on top of the grave of an elder. On hearing this merriment, the deceased elder appears and spends time talking to the rabbit. In light of this folktale, it is reasonable to assume that more subtle expressions of reverence for the ancestors persisted, as is the case with the ancestral dreams. It appears that conversion to Christianity did not change the essential role or function of the ancestral dream. How do we account for the persistence of this expression of reverence for ancestors among African Americans?

According to Gomez (1998), during slavery and immediately following its demise, people of African descent were discreet in divulging those aspects of

their religious life that met with White disapproval. For instance, the ring shout was rarely performed in the company of White Christians who oftentimes associated dance with paganism and as inappropriate for Christian worship. In light of such discretionary measures, can we assume that enslaved and free Africans may have been reluctant to divulge beliefs about ancestral spirits to outsiders? Surely, people of African descent would have known that White Christians would disapprove of such beliefs. Did enslaved Africans only divulge the existence of bad spirits because they knew White Christians regarded them as diabolical?

Thornton's (1992) study of the African's conversion to Catholicism, on the continent and in the Americas, covers a period of 200 years earlier than the era under consideration in this article. Nevertheless, it offers a model for understanding the process by which African religious elements were incorporated into the folk Christianity practiced among enslaved Africans in the United States. According to Thornton (1992), the process of conversion to Christianity was a dynamic process marked by the dovetailing of African revelations with Christian traditions. In his examination of the role of the Holy Ghost in the folk Christianity practiced by American slaves, Thornton concluded that they retained "a set of revelations that was acceptably Christian and yet conformed to their concepts of religious truth" (p. 271).

The persistence of ancestral dreams among African Americans may also be due to this process of the dovetailing of African revelations and Christian biblical traditions. Biblical dreams and visions would have corresponded to the enslaved African's perception of the dream as a mechanism of continuous revelation. Because this type of folk knowledge reinforced Christianity, the former slaves' beliefs about ancestral dreams were not attacked by church leaders as they attempted to Europeanize the folk Christianity practiced by African Americans.

Ancestor Veneration

In this study, ancestor veneration is simply defined as practices and beliefs that honour those men and women who lived and died holy. These men and women are believed to have lived well by observing all taboos of the land. In addition, they must have children and died good death with full burial rites. Following Kopytoff's (1997) theory on the status and role of ancestral spirits in African societies, this presentation regards ancestral spirits as the eldest members of the living community who have a vested authority and interest in the social and physical conditions of their kin. Among African Americans in these eastern Carolina communities, ancestral spirits are believed to be protective and supportive of the living. Most people in the region find it difficult to ignore the requests and directives given by ancestral spirits. Stories abound of individuals

who incurred the ancestors' wrath because they ignored their directives and advice, especially those that fortify family relations.

Although it is obvious to the anthropologists that these Carolinians of African origins believe that ancestral spirits affect the affairs of the living, they do not define this phenomenon as a form of veneration. Interviews with ministers from three separate denominations provided further insight on this issue. Two ministers view ancestral dreams as examples of the Christian God providing information to the living through their ancestors. The third minister is of the opinion that the ancestral spirit's concerns for family are sanctioned by God. None of these ministers expressed the possibility that ancestral dreams, as a form of continuous revelation, was a carry over from Africa.

Nevertheless, the social conditions anthropologists associate with societies that practice ancestor veneration are present in these African American communities located in eastern Carolina. First, beliefs in ancestral spirits are strongest in social systems in which kinship is the basis of membership and kin groups make and enforce decisions. Presently, kinship is still one of the most important criteria of membership in these communities. This is reflected in the crucial role the extended family members play in each other's daily lives, as well as special occasions such as funeral rites and family reunions. Second, ancestral spirits are active in societies in which they are localized and associated with the land. Among African Americans in the Sand hills, family identity and history are connected to land; thus, its loss is the source of outrage and shame. Studies on the extended family within the African American community suggest that the mother-child unit is more important than the conjugal unit in most African American families. In addition, the extended family exerts tremendous pressure on members who allow conjugal ties to alienate them from the kin group (Martin & Martin, 1978; Stack, 1975).

Presently, in the Sand hills communities under study, there are a series of beliefs and practices that reinforce the relationship between the living and deceased family members. First and foremost, there is the belief that those individuals who live a model Christian life will go to heaven. Once there, they will sit on the right-hand side of Jesus, implying that their spiritual powers have increased. These are the ancestors who are protective and supportive of their kin. The heavenly bound ancestors communicate with their earthly kin by appearing in dreams or as apparitions. Just as the elderly members of the family and community can curse way-ward individuals, locals believe ancestors can express their disapproval of such individuals by haunting them in their waking and sleeping hours. Special measures are taken when the parent of a young child dies because some people believe the spirit can return and entice the child to join him or her. This is why, among the Omambala Igbo people, *ijele* was normally tied to the wrist of such a child, the belief of which was that once the spirit of the deceased appeared to the child, the moment the child cried, raising her hands, the

noise of the *ijele* scared the spirit and could not do any harm to the child. In earlier times, the child was passed over the deceased's coffin. However, today a Bible is placed under the child's pillow, and instead of sleeping alone, the child sleeps with an adult who recites certain scriptures if the deceased person's spirit appears.

It is believed that a child will be born following the death of a mature person; the implication is that a child comes to fill the void created by this death. Oftentimes, the family assigns the physical and or character traits of the deceased member to the newborn. It is common for elderly kin to proclaim that a child is an "old soul," implying that a relative who has been deceased for a long period of time has been reincarnated in the child.

Adults often tell rude and disobedient children that the spirits of certain relatives will haunt them because of their behaviour. One respondent claimed to have been haunted by her Aunty:

At about 16, I began to smell myself, you know wanting to think I was grown and making decisions without the approval of my parents. That winter I started noticing strange things when I was alone. When walking home from basketball practice at night, I would periodically feel gushes of hot air on the back of my neck. I had the creepy feeling that I was not alone and I would run. Or I would try to open the front door and would find it damn near impossible. Now my parents never locked the door if I had practice or went to an out-of-town game. But that door would feel like it was locked. Some-times immediately after I stepped in to the house and closed the front door I would hear his squeaking sound, as if someone was sitting in the rocking chair on our porch. Finally, I told my father and mother 'about these strange experiences. They decided that it was my deceased aunt's way of expressing displeasure at my rude behavior. Girl, you can believe I began to change my ways.

The beliefs and practices just discussed clearly reinforce the idea that there is some type of continued interaction between the living and their deceased relatives. Among African Americans residing in the eastern region of North Carolina, the veneration of the ancestors is mild and less structured compared to that characteristic of African societies. Nevertheless, this study demonstrates its existence.

Dreaming the Ancestors

According to people in eastern Carolina whom the writer met in China, "... the dreams that we are unable to share have serious ramifications for the living. They bring us important news either through specific symbols or the deceased." Dreams' symbols have specific meaning that most adults can interpret. For instance, a dream of fish indicates that someone is pregnant. Or a dream of one's teeth falling out foretells of death. A dream of *udala* (Igbo type of

apple), signifies birth of a daughter. Although these are public symbols, there are others that are personal and perform the same function. A woman from eastern Carolina lived in a northern city when she gave birth to her first child. Exactly one week after the child's birth, the mother dreamt her newborn daughter fell down a flight of stairs and broke her neck. Unable to share the dream during the course of the day, this new mother called the grandmother and inquired about its significance. Her aging grandmother, who resided in eastern Carolina, urged the mother to be careful in handling the baby and to be watchful of her neck. This elderly woman insisted that the baby was trying to tell the mother something of great importance. A few days later the mother noticed a lump on the baby's neck and made an appointment with the doctor, only to be told that the baby had torn a neck muscle passing through the birth canal. A torn neck muscle is common in babies, and most doctors simply prescribe a series of exercises to stretch the muscle. However, this mother believed her dream helped to prevent the baby from having a permanent crooked and shortened neck. This dream was significant to this family because young babies are believed to be spiritually akin to angels; thus, the elder did not consider it strange that the baby had communicated with the mother in a dream.

Ancestral dreams bring a variety of useful information to the living, including lucky lottery numbers, impending death or injuries, and words of wisdom. Next are dream accounts that exemplify the main functions people of eastern Carolina attribute to ancestral dreams.

Jane lost her father more than a year ago when her mother was diagnosed with lung cancer. During the next 18 months of her ill mother's life, Jane had three dreams of her deceased father. According to Jane,

My daddy always showed up in my dreams whenever I was the most worried about my mother and feeling sad. In each dream, I walk into the living room of a strange house, but it is where I live by myself because I open the door with a key. As I enter the living room, I see my father but he is always sitting on the floor with his back to me. Before I can say anything, my daddy calls out, "Hey Penny-Winnie, ha'ya' doin'?" You see that's the nickname he gave me when I was real young, before I even started school. I want to see my daddy's face, but he always tell me, "Penny-Winnie you know what I look like, you don't need to see my face." Then he gets up and begins to walk toward the kitchen. Now he doesn't walk with a limp in the dream; it's like he is younger even though I only see him from the back. Just before my daddy gets to the kitchen door he tells me, "Remember Penny-Winnie, I am always with you." Then the dream would be over. Every time I had this dream, I always felt better even though I knew that my mother's condition wouldn't get any better.

Jane believed that her father appeared in her dreams to comfort her and assure her that he would always "look out for her."

Ancestors often appear in dreams when there is conflict in the family. According to Lester, a 41-year-old Army sergeant,

A few months after our mother died, Dad moved in with his new girlfriend. He came home every day and saw to it that we had food and stuff but he basically abandoned us. Hell, all four of us were between 6 and 12 years old. We didn't know how to live without adult supervision. I think we settled all our arguments with the fist; we would fight over the slightest thing. Our grandparents who lived next door would try to keep us from fighting each other and so did some of the mothers on the street. But we managed to fight every day over something.

Then one night I dreamed of my mother and she asked me why we fought all the . I could not answer her; I just cried. First thing she did was to tell me not to cry and that she missed us children as much as we missed her. The next thing she said changed me for-ever. My momma said, "Son I want you to be in charge of the children. If you stop fighting they will too. Now if you don't stop all this fighting I am going to have to whip y'all. I don't want my children fighting each other: All y'all got is each other."

Lester insisted that once he told the other children about his dream the fighting began to subside, and they began to be more cooperative.

Deceased relatives can also appear in dreams but not communicate a direct message. One 53-year-old woman described such a dream with her mother-in-law:

Miss Emma was in my dream and we were at a party of some type. She walks over to the table and stares at a pan full of ribs and pork chops, and then she tells me to fix her a plate. I am surprised by this and remind Miss Emma that her blood pressure is too high and that she's not supposed to eat any type of pork. She just laughs and says, "Sugar it don't matter no more what I eat." I knew she is trying to tell me somebody in the family will die but I am not sure who it is. Two weeks later, her only surviving son dies of a stroke.

Some ancestors inform relatives of how to handle impending danger. A 72-year-old man recounted a dream in which his grand-mother warned him of an impending heart attack:

The night before I had a mild heart attack, I dreamed of my grand-mother. I am driving the subway, and I get these whopping pains in my chest. I can barely drive the train, and I am sweating bullets. Someone is calling my name and I realize it's my granny but I don't see her. She tells me the next station is just ahead and that I must pull into the station and call for an ambulance. I try to focus, but the pain is so severe I am on the verge of passing out. Now my granny's voice gets louder and is very firm, "Get control of yourself boy and drive this train into that station." And as I pull

into the station my dream ends, just like that it ends. I swear before God, the next day every-thing I dreamt came true.

Robert believed his grandmother gave him a dress rehearsal for the heart attack he had the next afternoon while driving the train, preventing a possible catastrophe, a train wreck during rush hour.

Some people believe that deceased relatives appearing in dreams can bring good luck to the dreamer, especially among those African Americans who regularly play the "numbers," an illegal form of the lottery that operates in African American communities in urban areas. Eastern Carolina residents who have relatives in cities such as New York, Newark, or Philadelphia will call them and request that they play a number that came to them in a dream. Even among the Omambala Igbo people, dreaming a deceased ancestor guarantees one of old age. A 29-year-old woman recalled that after twice dreaming of her great-aunt in one week, she called a brother in New York and had him play her Aunt's birthday. She won several hundred dollars at a time when she sorely needed money. It is standard knowledge among African Americans that during the week preceding Mother's Day, number banks only pay half the sum won on 226, the numerical symbol for mother. This is a time when number banks experience a greater loss of money because so many of their customers usually win or "hit the numbers."

All the dream narratives mentioned here demonstrate the role of ancestors in maintaining harmonious relations in family affairs as well as their dual role as protector and provider. Although residents of these eastern Carolina towns do not perform any rituals to invoke their ancestral beings, they do honour them. This is done through story telling, recognizing their contributions to the family, honouring their wishes in family affairs, and maintaining their gravesites as among Chinese. Although it is not clearly articulated, local people do expect their deceased loved ones to come to their assistance in times of trouble. More than one respondent in this study recalled talking to a deceased family member and asking for advice and comfort during stressful periods in their lives. According to one informant, "When times are hard, I find myself praying in one breath and talking to my dead father in the next breath."

One ontological element in the African American worldview, since the days of slavery to the present, is the idea that humans are, by nature, social and communal beings. No one is self-made in the African American community; all have benefited from the efforts of the previous generation. This is an essential truth that must be acknowledged. This idea is expressed in variations on such sayings, "You never know who will help you in this life" and, "The Bridge I crossed over on." The African American reaction to another individual's success is very revealing. Whenever a person becomes successful and prosperous, he or she is warned not to forget where he or she has come from-not just the old neighborhood but also one's ancestry. In the 1980s, African Americans were more out-raged by Clarence Thomas's statement that he had pulled himself up by

his bootstraps more than his alleged sexual harassment of Anita Hill. He committed one of the worst possible social transgressions when he failed to acknowledge the sacrifices his grand father made to educate him. The quality of the African experience in this country, in bondage and freedom, has been shaped by the cooperative efforts of family and community. And it is believed that there are always people, dead and alive, who have contributed to the individual's well-being.

One views the holiday Kwanzaa as an attempt to institutionalize this ontological principle. The fact that Kwanzaa was established in 1967 on the tail end of the civil rights movement was not accidental. First, the late 1960s was a time when African Americans began to rethink their cultural identity and embrace their African heritage. Second, it was a period when Blacks demanded to be included in every dimension of the larger society. In light of prevailing attitudes about the superiority of Euro-American culture, if Whites were to be more inclusive, it would definitely entail some degree of acculturation on the part of African Americans.

How fitting that at this moment in history, Karenga, a leading activist and educator, created a holiday modeled on the African harvest festival." Ancestor veneration is a pivotal aspect of such festivals, whether they are celebrated among the Igbo of West Africa or the Bakongo of Central Africa. One common thread that runs through the various Kwanzaa ceremonies is the idea of praising the ancestors, national figures and family members, for their contributions to the living community. One has noticed in the Kwanzaa ceremonies, those held in southern and northern communities, that participants praise recently deceased ancestors by calling out their names, recounting their contributions to the family, and asking for their continued protection.

Although Kwanzaa is not celebrated as often in small rural communities, residents of eastern Carolina are aware of the holiday. Some families exchange Kwanzaa cards and gifts, as well as participate in Kwanzaa ceremonies at the homes of friends or relatives who reside in cities across the eastern United States. When asked about the significance of Kwanzaa, the respondents concurred that this holiday was created to remind Black people that they must never forget "where they come from." That is, they must never forget their ancestors. One middle-aged female respondent explained,

Nowadays we have to be reminded to honor our ancestors; my mother's generation didn't need a Kwanzaa. They honored them just like they did the old people. These days we don't have a lot of respect for the old, so you know we can't be remembering our ancestors. So, it's good we got this holiday. Too many folks forget what our forefathers had to go through to so we could have a better life.

Conclusion

This article demonstrates the significance of ancestor veneration in African American culture, from the colonial era to present. The form and intensity of ancestor veneration changed over the centuries, from a pivotal to a secondary role in the religious life of African Americans. However, the one element of ancestor veneration that has been consistent throughout the history of African Americans is the ancestral dream. Unfortunately, among the Igbo and some other African peoples from among whom the African Americans were exported, as a fallout of their conversion to Christianity, see this practice and belief as devilish therefore, ignoring the message of ancestors through dreams. It sometimes sounds funny that some people treat such interactions as malaria problems and therefore dismiss them with a mere wave of hands. One should understand that ancestors in dreams bring children to their descendants, who comes to life experience after all but sometimes, such benefactors seem to lose them as a result of non belief.

The ancestor dream, a form of continuous revelation that is recognized by African Americans, has been confined to the private sphere of life, as family and close friends share their dreams. One contends that the celebration of Kwanzaa, within the past 35 years, has served to return this custom to the public sphere of African American life. It should therefore be a welcome idea if the Igbo people where ancestor celebration is being tilted to Christian ceremony and renamed new yam festival instead of the original name, *alommuo*, to be weary of their actions. In view of this, the Igbo people and other African peoples should make haste and give at least one week public holidays for the celebration and veneration of ancestors as practiced among Chinese. The combination of dreams and the Kwanzaa ritual serves to reinforce the African American belief in the power and responsibility of the ancestors to guide and protect the living.

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