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Ibo Granmoun: *The Roots of Haitian Democracy*

By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
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IBO GRANMOUN

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By Idenze Ezeme · Historical Studies · Ozikoro.com

Haiti's journey toward democracy has been long and complex, deeply influenced by its African heritage. One of the strongest roots of Haitian democracy can be traced back to the Igbo people of Nigeria. While the term “democracy” originates from ancient Greece, the principles of self-governance and collective decision-making existed in various societies long before. Among them, the Igbo people had a well-established democratic system that emphasized the right of individuals to participate in governance. Their traditions and values were carried across the Atlantic by enslaved Igbo people, shaping Haitian resistance and democratic ideals.

01

The Igbo System of Governance

Unlike many other African societies that were ruled by kings or noble classes, the Igbo people practiced a decentralized system of governance. They had no monarchs; instead, they governed themselves through assemblies and councils of elders. Decisions were made collectively, ensuring that all voices were heard. This form of government was known as Igwe, a parliamentary system where respected elders, chosen from different family groups, would discuss and decide on important matters. This principle of self-rule is reflected in the popular Igbo saying: Ibo ama eze, meaning “The Igbo are their own authority.”

Igbo Influence on Haitian Culture

As a result of the transatlantic slave trade, many Igbo people were forcibly brought to the Caribbean, including Haiti. Their strong sense of self-determination and resistance to oppression played a significant role in shaping Haitian identity. The Igbo people's refusal to submit to enslavement is legendary. In various parts of the Americas, including Haiti and the United States, many Igbo captives chose death over slavery. The term Ibo touye tèt li, which means "The Igbo killed themselves," reflects their fierce resistance.

Ibo Landing: A Legacy of Resistance



Location of Igbo Landing in Georgia. Photo: Alexrk2

One of the most well-known examples of Igbo resistance is Ibo Landing in Georgia, USA. According to oral traditions, a group of Igbo captives who were brought to America for slavery chose to walk into the water and drown rather than live in bondage. Similar acts of defiance occurred in Haiti, where Igbo people played a major role in revolts against slavery. Their spirit of resistance was crucial in fueling Haiti's fight for freedom.



The area of Igbo Landing, Glynn County, Georgia, U.S. Photo: Jud McCranie

03

The Song “Ibo Granmoun”

In Haitian culture, the influence of the Igbo is preserved in music and dance. One of the most notable songs that commemorate their legacy is “Ibo Granmoun”, which translates to “The Igbo Are Their Own Authority.” The lyrics emphasize the Igbo people’s independence and refusal to be ruled by others:

Ibo Granmoun O / The Igbo are their own authority

Ibo Granmoun O / The Igbo are their own authority

Ibo Granmoun O / The Igbo are their own authority

This song captures the deep admiration for Igbo values in Haiti, reinforcing the connection between Igbo traditions and the Haitian struggle for freedom.

04

The Igbo Influence on Haitian Democracy

Haiti became the first independent Black republic in 1804, following a successful revolution against French rule. The Haitian Revolution was driven by people of diverse African origins, but the Igbo played a particularly notable role due to their emphasis on collective decision-making and resistance to oppression.

The Igbo legacy in Haiti is also evident in social and economic structures. One example is the practice of *sou*, a communal savings system where members contribute money to support one another. This cooperative financial model has its roots in Igbo traditions and remains a vital part of Haitian society today.

05

The Ibo Dance: A Symbol of Freedom

Another lasting Igbo influence in Haiti is the Ibo dance, a traditional dance that symbolizes breaking free from bondage. The movements in the dance represent the struggle and triumph of the enslaved Africans who fought for liberation. This dance is performed during ceremonies and celebrations that honour Haiti's ancestors and revolutionary leaders.

The principles of democracy, resistance, and self-rule brought by the Igbo people continue to shape Haitian identity and governance. From the phrase "Ibo ama eze" to the song "Ibo Granmoun", the Igbo influence remains strong in Haiti. Their legacy is a testament to the

resilience and determination of the Haitian people in their pursuit of freedom and democracy.

As Haiti continues to evolve, it is important to remember and honour the contributions of the Igbo people. Their belief in collective governance and resistance to oppression laid a foundation that still inspires Haiti's democratic aspirations today.

- Bookmanlit. (n.d.). Ibo Granmoun: The roots of Haitian democracy.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Idenze Ezeme

Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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