

Junkanoo: Keeping a Community Alive

Imagine life for the African slaves of the 1500s. They were torn from their homes and brought to a strange land against their will. They lost their homes, culture, and even their names. For the sake of the common good, one African tribal chief insisted that the slaves be given three days off at Christmas to celebrate and preserve some of their cultural heritage. John Canoe, the father of Junkanoo, encouraged the slaves to take the opportunity to recreate some of the majesty of the Gold Coast and the Congo in a festival. When slavery was abolished, the Junkanoo festivals died in all areas except The Bahamas, where it has become a national festival.

Today, Junkanoo is a happy celebration of freedom. There are two huge parades in Nassau, The Bahamas. One starts at about 4:00 A.M. on December 26. The second is on New Year's morning. The parades take a year of planning and preparation. The beautiful costumes are made of brightly colored paper, fabric, and feathers. The loud and catchy music comes from African traditions and includes goat-skin drums, cow bells, and other traditional instruments and tunes.

Several groups, or factions, work together to create the best costumes, floats, and dances. They compete with other groups. They all hope to win the awards for best costumes, music, or overall presentation. These factions keep secrets from the other groups and pretend to really dislike the other groups. Each group, however, is working to protect the rights of their community and hold on to very old traditions. The groups also work during the year to help the minorities in their community in order to preserve culture and overcome difficulties.

The junkanoo festival is such an important part of Bahamian culture, that many local businesses and people give money to help continue the tradition.

What man worked for the common good?

Who shared their treasures for the common good?

What common good is promoted by the parades?

What common good was promoted hundreds of years ago by allowing slaves three days off?

What could be a bad effect of the factional fighting of the paraders?

What is a good effect of the factional fighting?

What "community capital" is banked by the factions?

