

## West African Artifacts in the Divine Design Museum Exhibit:



## A Cultural Materialist Perspective

## Introduction

**Thesis:** By applying the theory of cultural materialism to West African artifacts, it can be shown, in a display in the Divine Design Exhibit, that basic human needs determine West African social organization, political organization, belief systems, and ideology.

## Introduction

*"Cultural materialism is based on the simple premise that human social life is a response to the practical problems of earthly existence."*

*Marvin Harris*

- Purpose: Present an overview of successful findings that resulted in a completed display that demonstrates the relation between infrastructure, structure, and superstructure

## Methods and Tasks

- Divine Design website
- Conduct initial culture research
- Collect artifact data to establish provenience
- Theory application
- Write Divine Design display theme and texts

## West African Infrastructure: Sacred Fertility

1. Modes of production variables
  - Environment: temp. rain, trees-link to the soil
  - Ecology: Dependent on small scale farming



## West African Infrastructure: Sacred Fertility

2. Modes of reproduction variables
  - Demography: high twin birth rate

- Reproduction:
  - Fertility cults

- Osun-Osogbo Sacred Groves and Festival



## West African Structure: Divine Kingship

### 1. Domestic social behavior

- *Ogbani* councils:

- King selection and coronation ceremony

- Advisors: Adherence to rituals

- King Follows guidelines



## West African Structure: Divine Kingship

### 2. Political economy behavior

- **Agriculture: centralization of political power**

- **Shared by king and council of elders**

- **Elaboration of rituals**

**Sacred arts-**

**Kente cloth/beaded items**



## West African Superstructure: Yoruba Religion

### 1. Active belief system

- Shrines with sacred objects
- Add to over 400 gods (*orishas*)



- Find novices through nature's indicators

## West African Superstructure: Yoruba Religion

### 2. Ideology

- Ancestor veneration
- Rituals
  - Earth sorcery
  - Diviner



## Conclusion

- Explanation of West African Culture by applying Harris theory



- International Case of the Anthropology Teaching Museum
- Potential Research concerning Divine Design

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