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### Our Strongest African Link?

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By C. L. SULZBERGER

FEZ, Morocco—Morocco has a special relationship with the United States that is generally unfamiliar both to Americans and Moroccans.

The country's complicated history stretches geographically from France into mid-Africa. Also through Spain, original colonizing and missionary influence in the Americas, Morocco's cultural impact on our continent is perceptible if indirect. Slave traders from the Moorish feudal society raided southward into Senegal and delivered slaves to European traders who, in turn, sold them across the Atlantic. The descendants of these slaves are U.S. citizens today.

The traditional teaching of history in the United States does not omit mention of ties between our early Republic and contemporary Morocco.

But more rarely discussed is the vaguely discernible link between Morocco and the American Negro minority. This U.S. knowledge gap is perhaps partially if inaccurately being filled by American Negro teachers, notably Black Muslims. In discussing this I am indebted to Prof. Morroe Berger of Princeton, who explores the question in "Horizon."

The Black Muslims and antecedent organizations, like Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association stressed the Moroccan, or Moorish ties of U.S. Negroes. Morocco, while African, is not a Negro state, although some of its famous leaders were Negroid. Morocco was also a channel in

the terrible slave trade that fathered our Negro community.

In evolving U.S. Negro tradition, this fact is mixed with Morocco's grandiose Islamic past which produced so great an impact on Europe. In a deliberate reaction against the inferior status imposed on them by slavery, certain American Negroes seek to connect Islam with the little-known tales of West African civilizations that, in times past, occasionally met in Morocco.

#### **Black Muslim Predecessor**

Garvey, a predecessor of the contemporary Black Muslims, attacked Christianity for failing to protect Negroes against the depredations of slavery and stressed their African heritage with particular reference to the Moors. Subsequent U.S. Negro leaders created a Moorish Science Temple of America whose practices were substantially adopted by the Black Muslims.

As the white American has consciously sought proud antecedents in Europe, ranging from Irish kings to Polish patriots and English religious rebels, the Negro American now seeks to fill in his missing African past, a past deliberately withheld from him by slavery's anonymity. One acute Negro leader protested: "Africa was no integral part of the world, because the world which raped it had to pretend that it had not harmed a man but a thing."

Some American Negro movements paradoxically take pride in vague Islamic connections while denigrating Christianity for slaving. Yet Moslem slave traders supplied Christian shippers in the ghastly

trans-Atlantic human commerce. Moslem traders were more brutally honest: unlike some Christians, they never pretended God had ordained slavery for black men. They simply preferred Mammon to God and also profited from the sale of white slaves in Levantine markets.

Mohammedan slaves in the Americas seemed to have had a special community consciousness. Some African tribes found it possible to elude Arab traders by embracing Islam. Moslem slaves, especially in Brazil, mounted serious insurrections against their white owners, and this is a source of pride to propagandists of the Black Muslim movement, which, despite aberrational deviations, claims kinship with Islam's main stream.

Most Americans are unaware of the special relationship between Morocco and the U.S.A. that developed subconsciously through the trans-Atlantic conquests of Moorish-impregnated Spain and consciously through contact between our early Republic and this old, dilapidated kingdom. Even fewer Americans seem aware of the complex contacts between Morocco, at Africa's northwest corner, and the ancestors of our Negro community.

When one ponders this subject in Fez, lovely, perplexing and fanatical, famed for an Occidental headgear we consider Oriental, one wonders how much more we will learn about ourselves by uncovering that portion of our national past, originating there.