

## PART IV THE WESTERN AFRICAN CULTURAL ROOT

### Chapter 11 African Backgrounds

1. The Nile gave rise to the world's earliest centralized states and cities.
2. Ideas, religions, and technology flowed in multiple directions, forming the ancient core of achievement that preceded classical Greece.
3. The cultures of Western Europe and those of Africa began to intermingle in the fifteenth century.
4. Little changed in Africa with the end of the colonial era and many in Africa and abroad suggest a new imperialist era has replaced the old one.

#### I. Images of Africa in the West

1. For centuries, the European and American view of African culture persisted as one of a civilization founded on principles of thought and religious behavior fundamentally at variance with those of the West.
2. Social and religious movements spurred intense efforts to "Christianize" and "civilize" Africans in the twentieth century.
3. Those who sought to tame Africa and Africans often succumbed to the "heart of darkness" described in the novel of that title by Joseph Conrad.
4. This European shorthand for the nature of human culture in Africa was rarely informed by substantial knowledge or the ability to accept the possibility of the legitimacy of differing civilizations.

#### II. Africa and America

1. Between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries, more Africans came to the Americas than did people of other lands.
2. The term *African survivals* refers to elements of African culture that African Americans retained and transformed in the New World.
3. Although Africans were put under pressure to abandon aspects of their own very diverse cultures, an amazing number of customs have survived.
4. It is often difficult and generally not significant to "date" African cultural artifacts in a way that it is helpful for understanding a Western poem or painting.

#### III. Stages in African History

1. The systematic European exploration of Africa began in the fifteenth century.
2. By 1497 Vasco da Gama had rounded the Cape of Good Hope, traveling up the east African coast, and on to Calcutta on the west coast of India.
3. His safe return to Portugal marked the establishment of a sea route to the east and a new era in the history of Europe's relationship to Africa as well as Asia.

##### A. Early Africa

1. Most of the historic accounts of pre-fifteenth century Africa come from travelers' accounts, mostly from Arab traders.
2. Oral traditions from native Africans are another source of insight into Africa's past.
3. Archaeologists and other western scholars have uncovered some of Africa's history in the same way that they have done in Egypt and Sumeria.
4. Africa is the cradle of humankind.

5. Iron-making technology, introduced through trade with Egypt and the Mediterranean, spurred on advances in African society.
6. A rich civilization called the Nok emerged in the river valley at the juncture of the Niger and Benue rivers in around 500 B.C. and lasted until about 200 A.D.

#### B. The Great Medieval Kingdoms

1. The ancient civilization of Ghana (700–1230) owed its rise to its control of the gold supply, which was vital to the Muslim trans-Saharan trade system.
2. Though not Muslim initially, the Ghanaians learned Arabic and mastered other methods of administration and trade from Arab merchants.
3. Islam and trans-Saharan trade spurred the development of other West African states.
4. Benin was one of the first African states to trade with Europe starting in the 1480s.
5. Benin bronzes are among the masterpieces of African art.
6. The Benin monarchy continues today as an important spiritual and cultural force in Nigeria.

#### C. Africa Since Contact with Europe

1. The slave trade and colonialism are the predominant elements of the relationship between Europe and Africa over the last five centuries.
2. Christian missionaries and the exchange of goods in trade also played a significant role in African history.
3. The decimation of Native American peoples made West Africans sought after as laborers for New World ventures.
4. Ten to fifteen million Africans migrated to the New World in bondage between the 1480s and the 1880s.
5. The slave trade was devastating to the social fabric of African societies.
6. While the slave trade ended, the African societies were still subjugated to the goals and needs of the colonial powers in Europe.