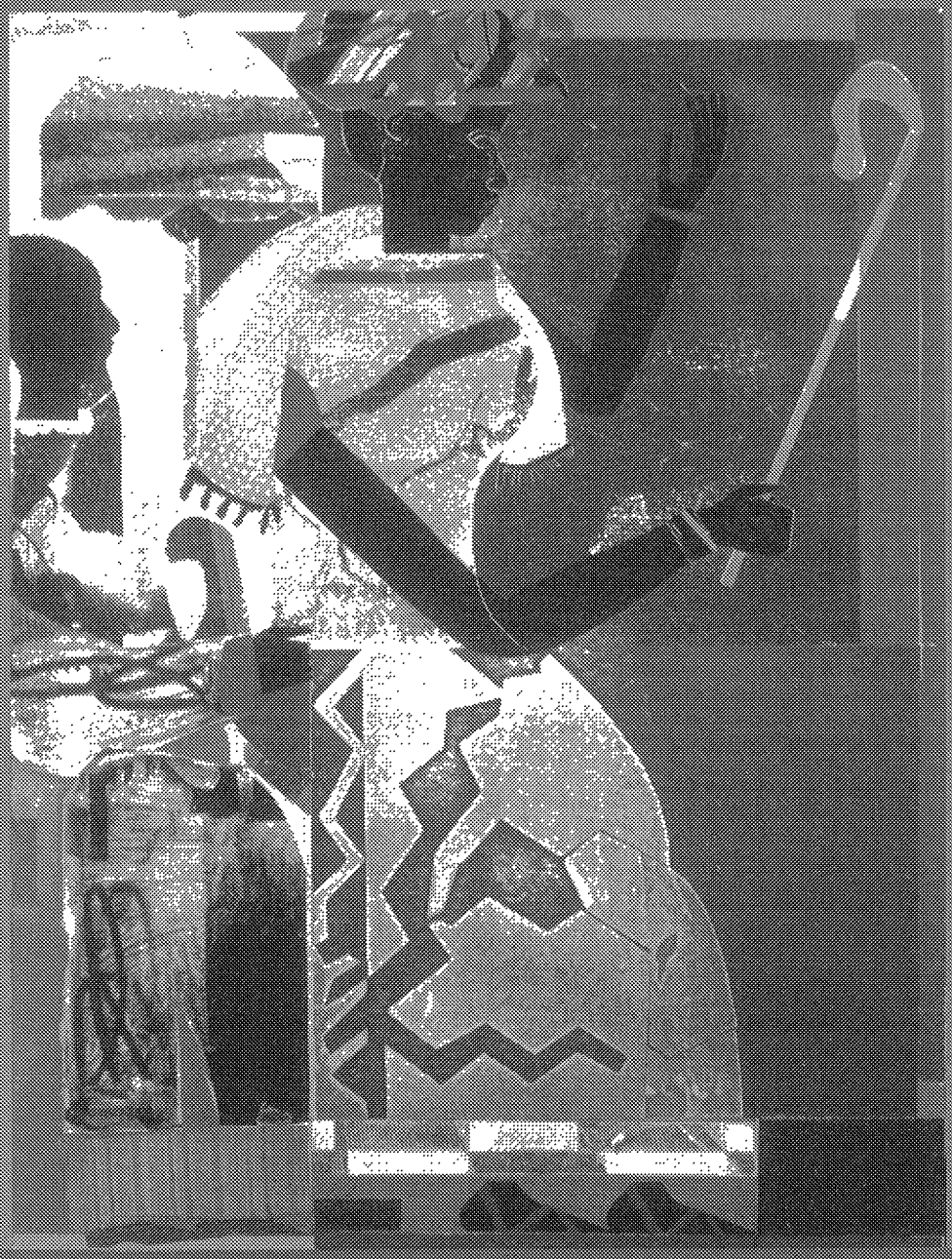

The African Diaspora

A HISTORY THROUGH CULTURE

Patrick Manning

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For Robin Kilson
brilliant historian of the black experience
ardent bibliophile
fearless critic
dear friend

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Preface

The history of Africans and people of African descent, a complex story in itself, lies at the center of the history of all humanity. The tale of modernity cannot fairly be told without full attention to the African continent and peoples of African descent. This book recounts the history of black people in the six centuries since 1400, as their world brought them global connections, enslavement, industrialization, and urbanization. Rather than being a history of specific regions or nations, this is a history of the interconnections of people throughout Africa, the Americas, most of Europe, and much of Asia. The Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean, rather than separating people into isolated groups, are seen in this volume as fluid pathways to and from the continents and islands where Africans have migrated and voyaged, voluntarily and under duress, for many centuries and up to the present day.

Since this is a story of overlapping and connected lives, I have written it for an overlapping and connected set of audiences. Most basically, the book is for those who seek to inform themselves on the relationships among black communities and who have an interest in viewing the modern world with an appreciation for the experience and outlook of people throughout Africa and the African diaspora.

Dividing potential readers according to their relationship to schooling, I will assert that, first, the book is written for undergraduate students encountering this material perhaps for the first time—students around the world who read in English. For these students, I hope the book will open new vistas about the breadth of connections in the historical past. If the quantity

of detail in the book appears daunting at times, I hope it will remind readers of how much has actually occurred in the past and of how the student as historian must have the confidence to select those details that help him or her develop clear interpretations of the past. Second, the book is written for historical professionals at graduate and postgraduate levels, who may wish to focus in more detail on the interpretive arguments and nuances. For this audience, more familiar with the concepts I present, I also hope the book will show the advantages of exploring history on a scale this broad. Third, the book is intended for general readers from black and other communities who are interested in the development of the modern world as experienced by black people. The conflicts and transformations addressed in this book are those of the real world, and I hope readers of various backgrounds and professions will find the interest and the patience to explore this history of the African diaspora. And even while the history of Africans on the continent and in the diaspora is the principal focus here, the narrative has substantial implications for world history more broadly and for modernity.

The same group of potential readers can be divided according to areas of primary interest. The first general topic is the history of black peoples. This volume presents a broad overview of that history wherever blacks have been and are now—in Africa, the Americas, Asia, Europe, and the islands—and the connections of those communities to one another and to other communities. The second general topic is world history. The story of the African diaspora addresses one-sixth of humanity over the past six centuries. The analysis here of the dynamics of interaction across the large part of the world in which black people have lived identifies a set of patterns that may have been representative in many ways of the world as a whole.

The third general topic is modernity. While some debates about the miraculous birth and the special nature of the modern world are couched in obscure academic language, this topic is important to all who wish to understand the African diaspora. Modernity is the condition of life today and in the recent past—a condition filled with triumphs, complexities, and disasters in industry, science, government, and communication, bringing progress, oppression, capitalism, and inequality. Modernity is a condition that is deeply felt and almost universally experienced. Too often, however, it is defined narrowly and then explained in such a fashion as to exclude black people from it. Modernity is the overall ethos of the modern world, in economic, social, cultural, and other realms; it is an exhilarating but difficult situation. The *experience* of modernity is unmistakable, and it is conveyed in songs and literature in every language. The *explanation* of modernity, however, is open to question. Some explanations treat modernity as a break from

the past, achieved by a few: this approach emphasizes the unique insights and accomplishments of genius and privilege and divides the world into the traditional and the modern. Other explanations emphasize the continuity of recent times with the more distant past and argue that the modern world was constructed through the efforts and interactions of many; such explanations divide the world into the masses and the elite and treat the elite as the beneficiaries but not necessarily the creators of modernity.

I propose an interactive view of modernity, to reveal the important place of black people in construction of the modern world. My view contrasts with the leading sociological interpretations of modernity and the leading historical interpretations of the modern world, which consign Africa and the African diaspora to the footnotes.[1] These interpretations virtually leave Africans, the African diaspora, slavery, race, and emancipation out of their interpretations—not simply because of respect for traditional interpretation or disregard for black history but as a result of flaws in their historical logic. They give too much attention to societies, nations, kingdoms, empires, and urban centers, and not enough attention to diasporas, networks, mixes, hinterlands, and exchanges on the roads between centers. Despite the dynamics of the world of today, the static worship of central places still reigns supreme in the academic conceptualization of society. Only when connective approaches to the past are given analytical parity with central places and ruling classes will we have a history of the past and an understanding of our present that acknowledges the acts of all our ancestors in creating our world. In short, to appreciate the history of the modern world, we need to treat diasporas with the same importance as nations.

Many skilled writers on the black world decline to celebrate modernity, focusing critically on the negative aspects of global transformation as reflected in enslavement, racial discrimination, and cultural deprivation.[2] Their concerns are appropriate, as these are the stories that are usually marginalized in the leading interpretations of modernity. Yet the same stories, seen from another angle, reveal black achievements in education, cultural production, and political leadership. The experience of black people is central to understanding the achievements and missteps that continue to shape modernity. But understanding modernity means addressing the choice of whether the modern world is considered to be uniquely complex—cut off from the traditional past and from those who live today in a world of the past—or whether it is seen as another stage in our evolving history. In these pages, life under the condition of modernity is seen as widely shared and sharply different from the times before, yet it is tied to those earlier times by a million strands of continuity, evolutionary change, strife, and destruction.

The advent of modernity—which involved triumphs and arguably unbearable costs—cannot be accurately understood or imaginatively and comprehensively engaged without a responsible narration of the role played in its making by African peoples and the African continent as a whole.

The key element of the book's organization involves treating Africa and the African diaspora as a whole. Rather than break the world of black people into localized regions and study each one individually, this volume encompasses large areas of the black world and emphasizes connections and interactions among them. The chapters are organized chronologically rather than regionally, and each chapter contrives to address most areas of the black world. More precisely, the analysis treats the African continent—its many regions and the details of its life—as equal in importance to the diaspora of Africans overseas. As will be argued in the chapters to come, the dynamics, conflicts, and discoveries of the African continent have been on a par with those of the Americas and the Old World diaspora.

The interpretation sustains five themes throughout the book. The first theme, encompassing the others, is the connections that held together the African diaspora as a global community of mutual identification. The remaining, more specific themes are the discourse on race, the changes in economic life, the patterns of family life, and the evolution of popular culture. These five themes, explored through sequential chapters, are braided together to show the changing character of the social struggles that dominated each successive period of history throughout the African diaspora from 1400 to 2000.

The cover illustration, Romare Bearden's *She-ba* (1970), anticipates several of the themes of this book. Bearden's collage, a decidedly modern work in its form, resonates with the heritage of the ages. The queen's dignity—her link to the welfare of her community—offers a vision of leadership viewed favorably on the African continent and in the New World diaspora. The image also evokes notions of family, culture, continuity, and visions of the future. Further, since the biblical Sheba is often linked not only to the Nile Valley but to Saba in South Arabia, this New World image makes a link to the Old World diaspora as well as the African continent. In this and other illustrations in the book, I have sought to present works and images created by black people. In certain cases, especially in chapter 2, I have selected views of diaspora blacks created by people outside their community. Otherwise, I have given priority to images conveying interpretive statements from black people about their world.

I believe that some remarkable patterns of the past emerge from studying history at this scale. It may seem surprising—to readers used to studying history at the local level—to hear an argument that the histories of North America, South America, southern Africa, West Africa, the Ottoman Empire, and India could be substantially similar. Yet, in the mid-nineteenth century, slavery was under attack in all of these areas and, along with this renunciation of slavery, former slaves were rising to positions of responsibility in government. In addition, at the opening of the twentieth century, while slavery was abolished or nearly so, new forms of discrimination—again, in all of these regions of the world—had removed almost all black people from those positions of responsibility in government. This is just one of the many striking historical parallels throughout the black world that await discovery.

In assembling this story of the global interactions and changes in the experience of black people, I have been guided by some big questions about the past and the future. First, the past:

Why did world slavery grow to such an extent in the modern era?
What have been the social contributions of black communities?
How did black communities create their cultural advances?

There are answers to these queries, but they cannot be compressed into a multiple-choice test. The chapters ahead take up the search for answers in many ways.

At the same time, looking ahead is equally important in motivating our study of history. So here are some big questions about the future that have influenced the organization of this book:

Will social equality ever be possible?
Should reparations be granted for past injustice?
Will racism end?
What is the future of black identity?

These questions, like those about the past, lie just beneath the surface of the narrative and analysis in the chapters to come. In the epilogue, I return to them and offer my responses.

This book focuses on the drama, the transformation, the agony, and the renewal in the lives of Africans at home and abroad. Further, the book demonstrates that the African diaspora—a vast dispersal of black people across the African continent, the Americas, the European and Asian continents, and the islands of the great seas—adds up to a large and representative part of the human population, and its activities add up to a large part of human history. This story of African experiences confirms the interconnections

that have linked human populations across the world. Tracing those experiences across time reveals that the issues of today—modernity, democracy, equality, progress—have been fought over in different ways over time. These past struggles were not simply archaic battles, however. On the contrary, they established patterns that continue to influence many aspects of life in the present world.

Acknowledgments

My first acknowledgment is to the people of Africa and the African diaspora, alive and among the ancestors, who created the experience of which I offer this chronicle. Taking up the task of recounting their past, with attention to honor and to truth, brought me excitement and anxiety. Writing it has brought me to look into the lives of black people throughout the world, and it has pulled together many aspects of my own academic life. I was encouraged ahead, despite the complexity of this task, by the thought that a broad overview of the African diaspora and its successive transformations will reaffirm some previously recognized patterns and will convey some new and global dimensions of issues that are commonly discussed mainly in national terms. I have sought to express my interpretation in explicit terms. I am comforted by the knowledge that others are now writing at this breadth, to ensure that there will be debates on the interpretation of the African diaspora, rather than an authorized story.

I offer my thanks to Bruce Borland for leading me through the exercise of proposing the book. Several readers of the manuscript helped me to close off some of its paths and open others. The list begins with special appreciation to Robin Kilson for the repeated and sometimes hilarious sessions of debate, critical reading, and bibliographical hints, with which she helped me to revise substantial sections of the manuscript, especially the epilogue. Of my other colleagues in African-American Studies at Northeastern University, I have benefited from the insights of the late Jordan Gebre-Medhin, Robert L. Hall, Ronald Bailey, Kwamina Panford, and William F. S. Miles. Kim D. Butler and Mamadou Diouf read the manuscript with great insight

and gave me the encouragement to make substantial modifications in organization and in argument. Colleagues in four other departments provided spirited responses to drafts of individual chapters: the department of history at the University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad (with special thanks to department chair Brinsley Samaroo and to Bridget Brereton and Claudius Fergus); the department of history and archaeology of the University of the West Indies, Mona, Jamaica (with special thanks to department chair Swithin Wilmot and to Glen Richards); the department of African and African-American Studies at Harvard University (with special thanks to Emmanuel Akyeampong, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, and Henry Louis Gates); and the department of history at the University of Pittsburgh (with thanks to Alejandro de la Fuente, George Reid Andrews, Seymour Drescher, and Marcus Rediker). Kim Alan Pederson edited and commented on the manuscript with a level of skill and insight I have come to depend on.

In addition, I offer my deep appreciation to Susan Manning, my companion in life, whose warmth and generosity have provided the appropriate mix of calmness and excitement, critique and reassurance.

The African Diaspora

1

Diaspora

Struggles and Connections

People of sub-Saharan Africa have migrated, in wave after wave, to other regions of the world. The initial movements—beginning seventy thousand years ago—involved settlement of the Old World tropics; this was followed by occupation of Eurasia, Oceania, and the Americas. In the last few millennia, as societies and civilizations grew up throughout the world, Africans have continued to migrate and settle overseas. For the black people of sub-Saharan Africa, this "sunburst" of settlement beyond their homeland has brought particularly close linkages to Egypt, other parts of North Africa, and Arabia. Further settlements across the waters of the Indian Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Atlantic Ocean brought African settlers to Asia, Europe, and the Americas. It is a sad reality that, from the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries, most African migrants beyond the continent were forced to travel and to serve as slaves. But in slavery and in freedom, African migrants and their descendants made their mark. Culture and commerce have flowed steadily and ties of personal attachment have been established and maintained among the regions of Africa and the African diaspora. In the twenty-first century, those earlier migrations and cultural interactions of people of African descent retain as much significance as ever.

This volume narrates the last six centuries of connections among black people in Africa and throughout overseas regions and provides some background on earlier times. It is a complex tale of cultural development, enslavement, colonization, struggles for liberation, and construction of modern society and identity. At the same time, this work poses and attempts

to address some of the important questions that still face us as a result of the African diaspora. The analytical framework that shapes the chronological narrative presented here relies on five central themes: diaspora and its connections, the discourse on race, economic transformations, family life, and cultural production.

Diaspora

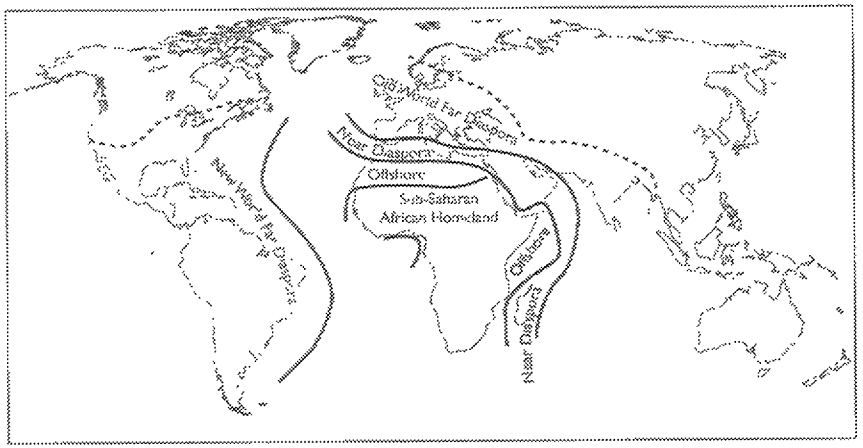
The analysis of diasporas—the migrations that brought them about and the dynamics of these dispersed communities—has become a significant topic in the work of historians, sociologists, and other scholars.[1] Social scientists today use the term "diaspora" to refer to migrants who settle in distant lands and produce new generations, all the while maintaining ties of affection with and making occasional visits to each other and their homeland. The diaspora of Africans takes its place alongside the diasporas of Chinese, South Asians, Jews, Armenians, Irish, and many other ethnic or regional groupings. Diasporas can be large or small: the Jamaican diaspora lies within the African diaspora; the Palestinian diaspora within the larger Arab diaspora. They are new and old. More than two thousand years ago, for example, a Polynesian diaspora launched the settlement of many central Pacific islands.

"Diaspora" is an ancient term, long used almost exclusively in reference to the dispersion of Jewish people around the world. An interesting history of the term comes out of the diffusion of Jewish and Greek populations in the ancient world. From the time of the Babylonian captivity, Jews had been divided between their Palestinian homeland and Babylonia, and after they were freed from enslavement in Babylon they spread from Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean shores. Jewish populations held onto their religion, but they tended to embrace the local language. For instance, many adopted Greek, and thus it was that the Greek-speaking Jews of Alexandria, the great commercial city of the Egyptian coast, decided in roughly 200 BCE to support a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Greek. This translation, the Septuagint, used the Greek term "diaspora" (from the sowing or dispersal of seeds) to translate several Hebrew terms that described the scattering of Jews outside the Jewish homeland. As Jews continued to scatter voluntarily and involuntarily through Europe, North Africa, and Asia, the term "diaspora" moved with them. With the rise of Christianity, the Septuagint and the term "diaspora" entered the Greek and Latin versions of the Christian Bible.

How did the term "diaspora" begin to be applied to the experience of Africans? According to two of the founders of African diaspora studies, George Shepperson and Joseph E. Harris, the term was used and perhaps coined at the time of an international conference on African history held at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania in 1965.[2] In an era when African and Caribbean countries were gaining independence and when movements for civil rights in those nations and the United States brought black people to the political forefront and into increased contact with one another, a renewed interest grew in tracing the historical contacts among Africans and people of African descent outside the continent. This was also a time—two decades after World War II and the subsequent creation of the state of Israel—when analyses of the Holocaust and of Jewish history brought attention to the Jewish diaspora and comparisons with other migrations. Expanding studies in African history and culture, including the importance of slavery in the history of Africans abroad, produced an interest in the Jewish diaspora analogy. Step by step, there developed scholarly studies of the African diaspora, university courses on the subject in Africa and in the Americas, and a growing public consciousness of diaspora-wide connections.[3] Continuing struggles for the independence and civil rights of black people (in South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the Portuguese-held territories of Angola, Mozambique, and Guiné-Bissau) encouraged and expanded transatlantic solidarity. One form of such solidarity was the large-scale involvement of Cuban troops in support of the MPLA government of Angola after 1975; another was the campaign for boycotting South African businesses led by Trans-Africa, the U.S.-based black lobby.

At a cultural level, diaspora-wide connections developed in the widespread adoption of Ghanaian Kente cloth, hair styles involving weaving and braiding, and the sharing of musical traditions from Africa, North America, the Caribbean, and South America. By the 1990s, consciousness of the African diaspora had become wide enough that the term "African diaspora" began to be used much more extensively, in academic circles and in black communities. As with other aspects of African diaspora history, adoption of the term "diaspora" took place not only in English, but in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and other languages. Then, once the term "diaspora" gained currency in the study of Africans abroad, scholars began applying it to Chinese and other migrant populations.[4]

I have chosen to organize the geographical framework of this study into three great areas, which I label as the African homeland, the Old World diaspora, and the Atlantic diaspora (see map 0.1). By "African homeland," I mean sub-Saharan Africa, the homeland from which black peoples have voyaged in freedom and slavery. By "Old World diaspora," I mean all the regions of the Eastern Hemisphere in which sub-Saharan Africans have settled: North



MAP 1.1 Regions of the African Diaspora

Africa, western and southwestern Asia, Europe, South Asia, and the islands of the Indian Ocean. By "Atlantic diaspora," I mean the Americas and also the islands of the Atlantic and the mainland of western Europe. Each of these three regions has its own history, but these histories are tightly connected. For instance, Africans first came to Europe as part of the Old World diaspora, but as the Atlantic slave trade grew, Africans came to Europe especially by way of the Atlantic.

In my opinion, something is gained in this history by giving attention at once to the African continent and to all the regions of black settlement outside the continent. So I propose a formal framework for studying the world of black people in this way: I call it Africa-diaspora studies.[3] This is an approach that traces connections among the various regions of the black world and emphasizes the social dynamics of those connections. In general, the sunburst of African settlement in the diaspora continues to interact with the continent's bright orb. More precisely, this perspective on the history of the African diaspora explores four overlapping types of connections in the history of black people: (1) interactions among black communities at home and abroad, (2) relations with hegemonic powers, (3) relations with non-African communities, and (4) the mixing of black and other communities. These four dynamic dimensions of Africa-diaspora studies, explored across the regions of the black world, add up to a comprehensive yet flexible concept for analyzing the broad historical experience of black people and for setting that experience in a broader social context.

Interactions Within the World of Black People

This initial dimension of analysis addresses the migrations from Africa to the Americas and elsewhere, the survival and development of African culture in the diaspora, cases of return migration to Africa, and the many instances of development and sharing of political and cultural traditions among black peoples. More broadly, this is the study of interplay among Africa, the Atlantic diaspora, and the Old World diaspora. These demographic and cultural connections among black peoples form the core of the history we will trace.

Relations of Black People with Hegemonic Powers

These hegemonic powers, imposing their wills on black people, included slave masters, imperial conquerors, colonial or national societies dominated by propertied elites, government-backed missionaries, and dominant national cultures of the twentieth century. The propertied classes—in the diasporas of the Atlantic and the Old World and, later, in Africa—not only dominated their slaves but mixed socially and sexually with them. For people in slavery, a great deal of their existence was conditioned by the masters who restricted and oppressed them, changing their lives relentlessly. Similarly, people in the African colonies of the twentieth century found their lives pressured and transformed by the colonial powers in general and by individual Europeans. This dynamic brought suffering, resistance, debate, accommodation, and imaginative innovation in response. Resistance to these powers has occupied much of the energies of black people.

Relations of Blacks with Other Nonhegemonic Racial Groups

In the Old World, blacks interacted with people of Arab, Iranian, Turkish, and Indian birth, and with those brought as slaves from the Black Sea region. In the Americas, black communities interacted with Amerindian communities. Later on, black people in the Americas and in Africa interacted with immigrants from India, China, and the Arab world. And in a steadily growing number of instances, black people interacted with white communities under conditions where neither group was a master class—in Europe, for instance. These community interactions engendered new ethnic groups, caused competition for land and for ways to make a living, created political rivalries, and encouraged cultural borrowing and occasional alliances.

Mixing—Biological and Cultural—of Blacks with Other Populations in Every Region of Africa and the Diaspora

These mixes in population and culture are sometimes counted as part of the African tradition: in the United States, for example, mixes of black and white commonly become part of the black community. Sometimes the mix is treated as a category unto itself: the notion of "mestizo," common in Latin America, is often treated as a social order distinct from its white, black, or Amerindian ancestry. And sometimes the mixes leave the black community and join the hegemonic white community, as in the case of the "passing" that has taken place throughout the African diaspora. In the Old World diaspora, including sometimes in Europe, the progeny of blacks and others tended to be treated as part of the dominant community. "Mixes," it should be remembered, can be of several sorts: residential mixing, family formation across racial lines (voluntarily and involuntarily), and eclectic sharing of cuisine, dress, music, and family practices.

❖ ❖ ❖

The point of this history of the African diaspora is to sustain a story of all four dimensions: the lives of black communities at home and abroad, their relations with hegemonic powers (both under the hierarchy of slavery and in the unequal circumstances of postemancipation society), their relations with communities of other racial designations, and the various types of mixing of black and other communities. The narrative shifts among these issues and pauses occasionally for an analysis of each era's major interpretive questions. Through narratives of social situations but also through cultural representations of life's crises and disasters, this volume balances the differences and the linkages among these four dimensions of the unfolding narrative of the African diaspora. The African continent appears not only as ancestral homeland but as a region developing and participating in global processes at every stage. The exploitive actions of slave masters and corporate hierarchies appear as a major force in history, but so do the linkages among black communities. The tale of an embattled but highly accomplished African-American community in the United States unfolds throughout the narrative, but so do the experiences of black communities in Brazil, Britain, and India. The African heritage shows itself not only able to retain old traditions but also to innovate and incorporate new practices through mixing, intermarriage, and cultural exchange of blacks with whites, Native Americans, Arabs, and South Asians.

My interpretation, organized around these four priorities, differs from other well-known interpretations of the African diaspora and its past. The difference comes partly because of interpretive disagreements I have with other authors, but mostly because this book is set at a wider scale than previous works. One such major interpretation is *Afrocentricity*, by Molefi Kete Asante. His work, which gained wide attention with its second, expanded edition in 1988, linked today's African-American population to its African heritage.[6] Dr. Asante put forth "Afrocentricity" as a philosophy and program for social change, and he connected it in particular to traditions of ancient Egypt and to West African traditions of the nineteenth century. His interpretation did not say much about slavery and emancipation in Africa and overseas, and it made only brief reference to the African diaspora in Europe, Latin America, or the Indian Ocean. The Afrocentricity approach focused on building pride in African-American communities but stopped short of analyzing interaction and transformation. Asante's emphasis was therefore more on race than on community, more on heritage than on exchange, and more on unity than on variety.

Another major interpretation focuses on "the Black Atlantic," a term that developed in the 1990s to describe widespread connections among black people. This phrase, popularized by the black British sociologist Paul Gilroy in his 1993 book of the same name, gained wide attention as a descriptor of literary culture.[7] The difference is one of emphasis, but it is an important difference. The "African diaspora" refers initially to the world of black people. The Black Atlantic, in contrast, focuses primarily on the interaction of black people and white people in the North Atlantic. It emphasizes blacks as a minority and often a subject population in an Atlantic world dominated by Europeans. Within that framework, it argues that black people created a "counterculture of modernity," a set of cultural contributions that expressed their particular response to the challenges of modernity and had a substantial creative effect on "Western culture" as a whole. From a time perspective, analysis within the Black Atlantic focus is restricted to postemancipation society, while the African-diaspora focus employed here includes not only the times since emancipation but also the previous era of Atlantic slavery, and even the times before the large-scale enslavement of Africans. The perspectives of Black Atlantic and African diaspora thus overlap substantially, but they also retain distinctions so significant that they should not be confused with each other. (In fact, both the terms "African diaspora" and "Black

Atlantic" have been given somewhat different meanings by other authors, so the reader should review the meaning of these terms in each text.)

In *The Black Atlantic*, Gilroy fiercely critiqued "essentialists," his term for those who affirmed that the black past consisted of unchanging African roots. He rejected Afrocentric myths paralleling "orientalism"—essentialized European views of the Middle East—which had previously come under attack by the Palestinian-born writer Edward Said.[8] Gilroy's critique clearly extended to the writings of Asante, who pictured an autonomous black American community and traced it to Africa, though not in great detail. Gilroy then argued that this essentialist view of black identity and culture remained locked in debate with a contrasting "antiessentialism." He explained antiessentialism as a sort of pluralism that deconstructs blackness yet falls short in explaining the appeal of black popular culture, and he illustrated this outlook with the writings of novelist Richard Wright. Gilroy offered, as his own position, an "anti-anti-essentialism" emphasizing that "racialized subjectivity" results from the exercise of power in history.[9] In principle, Gilroy affirms a historical rather than an essentialist or pluralist approach to the construction of black culture. In practice, in declining to analyze the days before emancipation, Gilroy implicitly treats the African past as lacking in value. On the other hand, simply to criticize Gilroy for his short time frame and North Atlantic focus does not in itself provide a dynamic interpretation of the past of black peoples.

In a study of "the making of the Atlantic world," a third author, John Thornton, chose to emphasize the agency of African elites, tracing how they made their way in the new Atlantic world by selling into slavery the subordinates they controlled.[10] This interpretation, however, left the African masses essentially without agency, at least until they reached the Americas.

Each of these interpretations provides reassurance for those seeking to locate an active and creative role for black people in the past. In all, however, Africa's place in the developing diaspora is vague and general rather than specific and current: Gilroy identifies foundational work by black creative figures in an emerging transnational culture of postemancipation days; Thornton attributes agency to slave-marketing African political elites in the early years of transatlantic enslavement; Asante portrays African-American populations as acting out the patterns of their deep African heritage. These interpretations address large areas of the past, yet each author worked within boundaries that exclude from discussion important experiences of black people of Africa and the diaspora. I argue that it is not necessary to leave out the other parts of the story. Considering the whole of Africa and the diaspora at once requires extra effort, but it is feasible and can bring a clearer view of

this long and broad historical path. As my interpretation, with its vision of Africa-diaspora studies, takes its place alongside others, I hope readers will recall two aspects of my argument: (1) the development of localized regions and social groups in interaction with one another, and (2) the continuing centrality of the African continent and its societies, along with the sunburst of its migrants, in the affairs of the world as a whole.

"Connection" is used as a technical term in this volume to ensure that readers note the variety and complexity of historical interactions. The African diaspora sustained itself and renewed itself as a broad community of shared identity through connections among individuals and local communities. Africa and the African diaspora provide a geographic and social space within which numerous elements and personalities have interacted, serving to unite but also to transform the patterns of the whole. Too often, simplified analyses have identified one-way movements from Africa to the Americas (as enslaved and displaced Africans brought their culture and labor power to the Americas), one-way domination of black people by slave masters or colonial governors, or one-way influences of modern American black cultural leaders on Africa. Instead, I hope that an elaborated notion of connections will make it easier to identify the many types of contacts among regions, people, or situations.[11] These can be one-way or two-way connections between any pair of situations, and these connections become more complex as one considers more situations. In the history of Africa and the African diaspora, the great distances and the restrictions of enslavement and colonial rule meant that many contacts were inhibited. In that same history, as we will see, contacts among dispersed people of African ancestry were also renewed in remarkable ways.

The transatlantic slave trade, linking the situations of West Africa and the Caribbean, can be interpreted as a one-way or a two-way connection. As a one-way connection, one can interpret the slave trade as the influence of West African slaves on the Caribbean (the contribution of their labor and the effects of their culture), combined with the assumption (probably implicit) that Africa experienced no change as a result of slave trade. Viewed as a two-way connection, the links between the two situations are more complex. The slave trade brought a great number of captive settlers to the Caribbean. These involuntary settlers interacted with Amerindians and Europeans and developed new cultures based on their old ones. The simple fact of the departure of slaves changed the population and society in Africa. Then the foods of the Caribbean—including peanuts, maize, and manioc—spread to West Africa. West African cooking styles continued to come to the Caribbean, and they now included ingredients of Caribbean origin. Notions

of racial hierarchy, developed in the Caribbean out of the population mix, spread to Africa. Ultimately, the two regions each became more cosmopolitan and more hierarchical through their connection. This approach reveals a historical complexity that is very different from the notion of a one-way connection or "the impact of West Africa on the Caribbean."

Included in the nuances of the two-way example above are what may be called a *departure effect*, where life in West Africa changed simply because of the loss of people to enslavement, and *interactions*, such as the change in African cuisine once peanuts and manioc arrived and the change in Caribbean cuisine once African techniques of stews and marinades arrived. In addition, one may contrast *parallels* and *divergences* in outcomes once situations are connected. For instance, the slave trade brought expansion of slavery in both the Americas and Africa, a *parallel* development. But since more males than females went to the Americas in captivity, there arose a shortage of women in the Americas, while Africa was left with a shortage of men. In this sense, the connection of slave trade brought a *divergence* between Africa and the Americas.

As I noted earlier, this interpretation of the African diaspora relies on overlapping emphases in the history of black people: interactions among black communities at home and abroad, their relations with hegemonic powers, their relations with non-African communities, and the social and cultural mixing of black and other communities. The logic and terminology of connections provides a framework for tracing the dynamics linking these historical groups and their situations. For instance, the interconnections among social situations are known by such terms as "encounter," "hybridity," "creolization," "fusion," "borrowing," "syncretism," "acculturation," "survival," and "resistance." These terms, though they overlap, are not synonyms: the shadings of meaning separating these terms for interaction are sometimes important. Further, it is sometimes helpful to distinguish the dynamics of connections *within* the black community (the connections among subgroups of the diaspora by region, language, or religion) from connections *without* the community (dealing with hegemonic powers, slavers, or co-workers of a different racial attribution) and from connections combining these two, such as those of families spanning racial and ethnic lines. For instance, as free communities of former slaves formed in the nineteenth century on the coasts of Liberia and Sierra Leone, these communities interacted with free black people in the United States and the Caribbean. At the same time, British colonial power and the white-dominated United States limited the options within which these transatlantic black contacts and choices could be acted out, restricting their political and educational options and their freedom of movement across the seas. The logic of connections can help keep track of the full range of the dynamics of the African diaspora.

Race

This story of black people in the modern world acknowledges but does not advocate the concept of "race." That is, my narrative accepts as historical reality that the peoples known as black, Negro, Ethiopian, African, Hamite, or colored (or categorized by any other such terms) have been grouped together under such designations and have, overall, accepted that labeling. At the same time, the narrative emphasizes that racial categorization is socially constructed and usually prejudicial. The changing interpretations of "race" thus become part of the story of the African diaspora.

Almost a century ago, scholar and activist W. E. B. Du Bois published *The Negro* (1915). At that time, he faced a dilemma that remains unresolved. How does one describe the shared experience of black people without accepting the essentializing and invidious concept of "race"?

> There have been repeated efforts to discover, by measurements of various kinds, further and more decisive differences that would serve as really scientific determinants of race. Gradually these efforts have been abandoned. Today we realize that there are no hard and fast racial types among men. Race is a dynamic and not a static conception, and the typical races are continually changing and developing, amalgamating and differentiating. In this little book, then, we are studying the history of the darker part of the human family, which is separated from the rest of mankind by no absolute physical line but which nevertheless forms, as a mass, a social group distinct in history, appearance, and, to some extent, in spiritual gift.[12]

Despite the many changes since Du Bois wrote, the debates persist. Is racism declining? Is it growing? Is it taking new shapes? Formal prohibitions of racial discrimination became widespread as the twenty-first century opened, but racial inequalities still characterize income, education, housing, health, and political participation. In a crucial scientific development, the biological discoveries of the last two decades have confirmed what Du Bois argued: race does not exist as a coherent reality for humans. Yet for this book, which traces centuries of social experience, I assert—as did Du Bois—the need to write of the shared historical experience of black people.