The African Diaspora

A HISTORY THROUGH CULTURE

Patrick Manning

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.

The black peoples surveyed in this book account for a substantial portion of all humanity. With modern censuses, we know that the African-descended population of Africa, the Americas, and other regions makes up one-sixth of today's world population. The African diaspora in the Americas includes 150 million people; the Old World diaspora of Eurasia and North Africa totals nearly fifty million people; and about eight hundred million black people live today in sub-Saharan Africa. Altogether, nearly a billion people can trace their ancestry in the last few centuries to Africa's black population. By comparing global birth and death rates over time, we can be certain that black people once made up an even a larger proportion of the human population—perhaps one-fifth of the human population at the beginning of the seventeenth century and probably a somewhat greater proportion before then.[13]

Overall, I present the history of black people as a history of *community* rather than *race*. The many communities of Africa and of black people throughout the world exemplify the human condition. Community interaction has shaped the historical African diaspora more than the common ancestry and inherent unity of black people. Some characteristics of and traditions in black communities go back so far and down so deep that they can appear to be essential, even racial, traits. Such characteristics and traditions include family structure, elements of philosophy, musical practices, and methods of food preparation. At the same time, the boundaries of the black world set by characteristics and traditions have been permeable—many people have joined the "black race" and many have left it over time. Ideas and practices, as well as individuals, have commonly crossed the "frontiers" in both directions.

Definitions of Racial Difference

So what is "race"? That is, how is it socially constructed? The idea of "race" is the belief that each group of people has some *essence* that makes it different from other groups. In our own time, people usually experience "race" through defining groups that "look different" from one another. That is, we commonly use *color* to identify racial difference. But over time, people have used at least four overlapping definitions of race—four different characterizations of essential differences among groups. The first three definitions focus on superficial differences in *phenotype* (that is, physical characteristics, especially skin color), in *lineage* (for instance, the argument that "purity of blood" defines racial lines), and in *culture* (particularly religious affiliation but also dress). Those who identify Jews as a separate race typically focus on lineage or religion; those identifying black people as a separate race focus

on phenotypical differences in color and hair type. Such identifications of superficial racial differences by phenotype, lineage, and culture have probably reinforced one another for thousands of years. The fourth definition of race—the assumption of *biological differences* among human subspecies—emerged and joined the others beginning in the eighteenth century, when the successes in scientific classification of animals and plants suggested to some that the human species could be divided into subspecies. Later, as scientific study progressed, these purported internal biological differences came to be labeled as *genetic* variance.

All four of these visions of "race" rely on a fundamental logic that emerges from human psychology: categorizing people into "us" and "others." The ability to categorize the world around us is perhaps the greatest strength in human thinking: it enabled our ancestors to make distinctions that gradually built our complex society. Yet categorization requires judgment. For some purposes, human psychology tends to exaggerate the unity *within* and also exaggerate the differences *between* categories such as family, ethnicity, religion, or race. The assumption of "otherness"—affirming the unity of one's own group and assuming that "they" are all alike within their groups—underlies the logic of racism. For this reason, it seems that practices of some form of racism have long existed. In addition to the *practice* of racial discrimination, theories and *concepts* of race have arisen from time to time—as with Christians and Muslims demonizing each other, with medieval Iberian insistence on *limpieza de sangre* as a blood purity among Christians to which Jews could never aspire, and later with categories identifying people from each continent by color. Biological racism, in which color and phenotype were seen as reflections of fundamental biological differences, became the most fully developed concept of "otherness," one that reigned from the late eighteenth through the twentieth centuries.

Racial Hierarchies

The categorizations of humans into the groups described above focused on racial *differences*. In addition, people have often ranked the groups they identify into a racial *hierarchy*. With this reasoning, people go beyond assuming a *racial essence* for each group (dividing the world into "us" and "the other") and take the further step of *ranking* racial groups. This hierarchical ranking of groups is of crucial importance, yet it is subtle and sometimes difficult to demonstrate. For instance, historian Frank Snowden studied Greek and Roman representations of black people extensively and concluded that blacks were clearly identified but did not suffer discrimination in those soci-

eties. (Not all scholars have been convinced by his argument.)[14] On the other hand, white plantation owners and leading anthropologists of the nineteenth century definitely placed "racial" differences in a hierarchy, putting themselves at the top.

Of the four main types of racial categorization, one—biological racism—has now undergone a definitive test. Racial theorists argued that the superficial aspects of race provided the key to far deeper differences. In their view, biological differences *between* populations, such as between black and white, were greater than the differences *within* populations of either whites or blacks. For the genetic composition of humans, scientific analysis has now shown the reverse: genetic variations *within* populations—black or white, local communities or communities defined almost any other way—are substantially greater than the genetic variations *between* populations.[15] I argue that this result can be generalized. Not only in genetics but in physical characteristics, culture, and lineage, the differences *between* "races" (or any other population) are dependably smaller than the wide range of individual variation *within* any population. The assumption of "race"—of the unity and coherence of subgroups in the human population—is fundamentally flawed. But that has not stopped many humans from making the assumption of "race" in the past, and it may not stop people in the future.

Thus, "race" exists not in nature but in the choices of individuals and groups. As a result, "race" has a history, like everything else in human society. Some social processes reproduce the meaning of "race," while others transform it. All through the history of human interaction, people labeled and discriminated among one another based on visible differences in color, facial features, dress, language, religious practice, and other customs. The need to define the "other" in this manner recurs again and again.

Changing Definitions of "Race"

In generation after generation, changing social situations brought new meanings and new terminologies to what we now call "race." No new era could be completely new, however, because the previous conflicts and attitudes survived, sometimes in altered forms, into succeeding periods. The enslavement of Africans in the ancient and medieval Mediterranean provided an example of racial and social discrimination, though black people were surely a minority of the world's slaves for most of that time. In medieval times, the notion of "blood" or "bloodline" suggested that inheritance of visible and invisible characteristics sets a person's destiny, and in medieval Iberia the notion of "purity of blood" became a formal concept. In this case, genealogy, rather than appearance, provided a destiny one could not escape.[16] The readiness of Portuguese voyagers of the fifteenth century to enslave Africans was an extension of this medieval logic of distinct bloodlines as much as it was a response to skin color.

By the eighteenth century, slavery in the Americas had grown to the extent that Africans became the majority of the world's slaves. In this slave society, "race" came to mean more than ever. The biological description of race became the most powerful justification of fundamental differences among races ever to be advanced, giving new strength to every other sort of prejudice. This expanded vision of race, first hinted at in the eighteenth century as biological theories became more specific, developed in the nineteenth century into formal and more systematically oppressive interpretations of racial hierarchy: this was "scientific racism." Racial discrimination, somewhat remarkably, accelerated with the steady emancipation of black slaves and reached its peak in the early twentieth century. As that century proceeded, new forms of scientific and popular racism emerged—for instance, in medical experiments on blacks and Jews and in Nazi Germany's mass hysteria. By the end of the twentieth century, however, the continuing advances in genetic studies had fully discredited the notion of deep-seated biological differences among races. These scientific results reinforced the political trends of democratization and decolonization that grew after the end of World War II and further challenged surviving practices of racial discrimination.

Defining Racial Mixes

Defining *racial mixes* is as central to racial discrimination as defining *racial essences*. By the logic of separate racial stocks, those labeled as "mixed" are somehow seen as deviant from an ideal of racial purity. If we accept Caucasian, African, and Mongol races as pure stocks of ancestral types, then biological mixing must have created impure combinations. People developed terminologies over time to label each "pure" racial type and to define an elaborate list of mixes: mulatto, mestizo, colored, and many more. The logic of racial mixes is slippery in several ways. For instance, the doctrine of racial segregation confuses biology and culture by claiming that social mixing of different biological types might bring cultural impurity. In biological reality, each of us has drawn randomly on the genes of our two parents, and each parent drew similarly on two ancestors. As a result, even in small communities, we are all mixes resulting from myriads of ancestors. If the notion of racial "purity" has often gained its advocates, the limits of this logic arise with the dangers of inbreeding. Nevertheless, as Du Bois found, we must accommo-

date the notion of racial mixes, as well as that of racial essences, in order to write a history of human interactions. So I will use such terms as "black," "brown," "mulatto," "mestizo," and "people of color" as they appear in the sources. The term "mixed race" may even appear from time to time in this book, though I find it especially worrisome because it reintroduces explicitly the concepts of purity and impurity in race.

On the other hand, while racial hierarchy has been central to the history of recent centuries, humans tend not to be as orderly or conformist as their leaders might wish. Those who use racist labels sometimes act in practice without regard to color, just as those who condemn racist language remain capable of prejudicial actions. Many people of all races, in their practical social behavior during the last several centuries, ignored or actively disbelieved the social prejudices and scientific arguments for racial hierarchy. Even in societies permeated by racial hierarchies enforced by cruel retaliation, individuals have ignored or reached across the racial divide, motivated by recognition of another's talent, by interest in another perspective, by sexual attraction, or by a simple response to common humanity.

Economy and Family

The two themes of economy and family are introduced together here. While they differ, they are deeply interdependent. Both have changed greatly over the centuries, but in different ways. Economic life—very much in the public sphere—has changed through commercial and capitalist expansion, industrial revolution, urbanization, technical change, and waves of globalization. Family life, mostly in the private sphere of existence, has nurtured old traditions that survive despite changes in economic organization. But family too has changed under the pressure of migration, enslavement, emancipation, and urbanization.

Economic Transformations

The changes in black economic life, though enormous, must not be exaggerated. More than six centuries ago, African societies had already developed sophisticated systems of agriculture, animal husbandry, and artisanal work. Their local and long-distance trade linked most areas of the continent, and their currencies of gold, copper, iron, shells, and cloth facilitated the transactions. Their artisans worked in textiles, metal, wood, leather, ceramics, earth, and stone; they constructed public buildings, watercraft, and elegant

jewelry. Africans exchanged ideas and innovations in all directions, so that improvements discovered in one part of the continent were sure to spread to other areas, despite the distances. On the other hand, whenever wealth became concentrated in the Mediterranean and Indian Ocean regions, demand rose for African luxury goods and slaves.

With the opening of Atlantic commerce, the African gold trade expanded, followed by the slave trade. Western Africa's involvement in the global economy now became as deep as that of northern and eastern Africa. But for all parts of Africa, enslavement was to become a growing part of economic life.

Black people in the Old World (including those in Europe) worked especially in domestic service but also in transportation, both as boatmen and teamsters. Blacks also became prominent at the courts of Old World rulers as soldiers, musicians, and domestics. In the Americas, African slaves were put to work on mines for silver, gold, and emeralds, and on plantations for sugar, wheat, indigo, tobacco, and later for cotton and coffee. Other Africans were put to work in personal service, military service, and in artisanal and transport work.

In the nineteenth century, the two great processes of industrialization and emancipation transformed life in the African diaspora. Industrialization brought railroads, steamships, telegraphs, electric power, automobiles, radio, air transport, and new types of work. The end of slavery usually came in two steps: the abolition of the overseas slave trade and then the emancipation of slaves. In the decades between these steps, slavery continued, but in a changed fashion. The system of slavery without slave trade spread in a wave across the Americas, the Old World diaspora, and into the African homeland. Even in the Ottoman Empire, when the slave trade was outlawed in 1857, slave owners had to take better care of their slaves because of the difficulty of replacing them. As slaves but especially as free people, blacks of the diaspora moved deeply into industrial life.

Nineteenth-century economic change in Africa was at least as great as in the diaspora. The previous system of female slavery was replaced by one in which male and female slaves were held in slave villages at a distance from their owners. The growing world trade of the nineteenth century provided work for many. Agricultural exports from Africa, especially palm oil, palm kernels, peanuts, cloves, and later cocoa, grew at remarkable rates. Perhaps the most dramatic change for Africa was the sudden and complete conquest of the continent by several European powers, from about 1885 to 1900. The conquerors abolished the slave trade almost everywhere on the continent but rarely emancipated the slaves—so the African era of slavery without slave trade ran from about 1900 to 1930.

Only after World War II, as political movements arose and claimed independence, did urbanization, widespread literacy, and improved health care come to Africa. Africans hurried to take up urban life, as blacks of the diaspora had done more than a half century earlier. In country after country, black populations became dominantly urban. Professional classes expanded, and both in homeland and diaspora, blacks with higher education joined the top levels of business, medical, and scientific life.

For continent and diaspora, therefore, it is wise to keep in mind the many stages and levels of the economic systems in which black people have participated.

Families Under Pressure

Families are deeply rooted, regionally specific institutions, going back to earliest times—they are not easily remade by new technology or social fads. For patrilineal families, especially in West Africa and East Africa, the founding father was the key ancestor. For matrilineal families, especially in Central Africa and southeastern Africa, the founding mother was the key figure. Age-grade organizations, especially in East Africa and northeastern Africa, elected leaders of all the males or females who were close to one another in age. The full system of family life included traditions of birth, initiation, marriage, burial, and inheritance, plus rules for governance and adoption.

In the era of large-scale slave trade, African families came under several sorts of pressure, beginning with the grief over their losses. The export of a preponderance of males from West Africa and Central Africa meant that the continent was left with numerous captive females. These women became servants and concubines for their owners. As a result, African marriage systems were undermined and slavery became a growing part of family. Children of these relationships generally belonged to the owner, and the slave mother had no rights over them. In fact, she had no family, though she was held within a family.

In the Old World diaspora, most migrants were female, and many had children with their masters. In the Atlantic, most migrants were male—women were in short supply, and masters took some of them. Distance from home, the example of non-African family patterns, and uneven sex ratios each had their influence. Yet black women and men found each other and found ways to reaffirm or reinvent patterns of family life drawn from their African origins.

When there was a biological mix in the children—usually meaning a black mother and an Arab, Malagasy, European, or South Asian father—the children might become socially part of the black community (especially in the Americas, where that most often meant remaining in slavery). Or they might become part of the father's community—a common practice in the Old World, with striking results in such cases as the Moroccan king al-Mansur, the Duke Alessandro de Medici, and the Renaissance Spanish poet Juan Latino. Or they might become a distinct community, known as mulatto or people of color, as in the French Caribbean colonies. The complexities of biological and social mixes increased as the generations passed.

The religious affiliation of diaspora blacks, slave and free, influenced their family life. In most of the Old World diaspora, blacks were incorporated into the Islamic community. Similarly, in Europe, blacks were generally brought into Christian churches. In the Atlantic world, though only at the end of the eighteenth century, large numbers of blacks took up active participation in Christianity, both Protestant and Catholic. In almost every case, however, the principles and practices of African religious beliefs retained their significance.

In Africa, similar changes in religion and family structure came, but at a slower pace. Slavery did not really disappear until the 1930s, and the lack of full legal emancipation meant that families of slave descent may still suffer social discrimination. Rapid conversion to Christianity and Islam brought new social conventions and social practices to most Africans.

Another great change in black family life has come with formal education. First in the diaspora and then on the continent, black families have struggled and sacrificed to obtain education for their children, believing it a key to social advancement. The results, especially in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, were extraordinary. At the same time, sending children to school meant giving up time with them and the opportunity to mold their skills and values. Particularly in Africa, education often meant that the children would join a new language community. Formal education has brought great benefits, but it leaves new challenges to families wishing to preserve their traditions.

The pressures on diaspora families were different from those in Africa, so that some family practices in homeland and diaspora diverged. Yet other characteristics of family life appear throughout the black world.

Culture

As indicated by the subtitle, "a history through culture," the theme of culture receives a particular sort of attention in this book. Of the five main

themes, this one is privileged in that it does the most to help to depict the voices and outlooks of the black people who are our subject. In recent times, black voices have expressed themselves in a flood of creativity through the written word of poetry, novels, and essays, and through vocalized words in music, poetry, and oratory. For earlier times, we have lost most of the words spoken and written by black people, but we have many other records of their self-expression. People have represented the world and their responses to it not only through the spoken and written word but through visual representations, material culture, understandings of the spiritual world, social values, and knowledge of many other sorts. Taken together at the scale of whole societies, these cultural expressions add up to "macrocultural" contours of the civilizations of black people. The same cultural expressions, examined at a more intimate and personal scale, are the "microcultural" dimensions of expressive, material, societal, and reflective culture. This history through culture, rather than relying simply on the historian as narrator, will seek out the commentary of black people on their lives, as expressed in verbal and nonverbal media, at the levels of whole societies and individuals.

The "Macroculture" of Civilization

The idea of "African culture" or "black culture" is labeled with what can be called a "macrocultural" term. That is, "African culture" assumes there is an overall set of practices and identities shared by people of Africa and, perhaps, the African diaspora. In this sense, "culture" is parallel to "civilization," so that "African culture" can be compared and contrasted with Western culture, Islamic culture, Indian culture, Chinese culture, and so forth. Such terms are widely used, but they are problematic because they refer to vague generalities more than to specifics, and they overlap extensively. Thus Trinidad and South Africa can each be labeled African, Western, Islamic, Indian, and Chinese in their culture all at once, even though the two countries are quite distinct from each other. Macrocultural discussions, therefore, tend to be about cultural reputations rather than about actual cultural practices. We cannot escape such discussions, but they make progress only when they get more specific.

For instance, while this volume discusses the changing cultural reputations of black people, it gives more attention to reviewing their practical cultural contributions. In this regard, it draws attention to the fact that at the very moment black people were most denigrated in global cultural comparisons, people in Africa and the diaspora were developing important cultural innovations in music, dance, and visual art. These innovations enriched

black communities and then spread to other communities: for example, ragtime pianists in the United States, most famously Scott Joplin, dominated sheet-music sales and then music-roll sales for the newly invented player pianos. And while many whites dismissed the possibility of black creativity, a few attended to and learned from the voices or images from the creative repertoire of black communities: at the opening of the twentieth century, African sculpture inspired Spanish artist Pablo Picasso's contribution to the new genre of cubism in painting, German ethnologist Leo Frobenius published the first three volumes of his study of African culture history, and the British Museum gathered a huge collection of sculpture from the newly conquered kingdom of Benin. As the twentieth century progressed, black people continued to make significant contributions in philosophy, education, government, literature, and film. Black culture, overall, has changed in fascinating ways with time.

The "Microculture" of Cultural Production and Representation

The coming chapters note the difference between elite culture and popular culture, distinguishing those who performed for kings and generals from those who performed for village communities. Elite and popular culture, though they shared traits when they came from the same society, emphasized different values and styles. With time, changing technology and political values gave steadily greater scope to popular culture. Larger theaters, expanded print runs, phonographs, motion pictures, radio, audiotapes, television, videotapes, and the Internet have bridged the old gap between elite and popular spheres. Black popular culture, amplified through this succession of media, conveys artful sounds and images. It also conveys profound social meanings.

To explore the details of human creativity, we must break down the general term "culture" into its various microcultural aspects. We need to explore the details of how people have represented their outlooks and experiences. Here is a simple terminology to help classify the details. *Expressive culture* includes visual art, music, literature, and other interpretations of feelings—this is the category most easily understood as artistic. The *material culture* of the African diaspora consists of such physical manifestations of creative energy as dress, architecture, tools, and cuisine. *Reflective culture* encompasses philosophy, knowledge, and belief. *Societal culture* is the creation and modeling of family patterns, political culture, and rituals.

These terms will reappear when we discuss cultural representations of major issues and events in the history of Africa and the African diaspora. For

instance, the drums of West Africa and Central Africa, while they serve as instruments for music, a form of expressive culture, are themselves products of *material culture*. The wide distribution and shared characteristics of drums shows they originated in the distant past. They provide a central element in the region's cultural repertoire. The effectiveness of drums in evoking feeling and meaning has also resulted in their being used for many purposes, some of them contradictory. These drums spread material culture to the Americas and to the world as part of the African diaspora, bringing the expressive culture of their music with them.

Storytelling—for audiences of all ages—is a main form of African *expressive culture*. Among the best-known series of stories is the Akan-language tales of Anansi, the trickster spider who regularly outwitted those more powerful than he. Especially in Jamaica, enslaved settlers from the Gold Coast revised the Anansi stories to make them appropriate for servants seeking to outwit masters. With each new generation, these tales became more ingrained in the Jamaican national culture.

For *reflective culture* in the African diaspora, two contradictory but complementary philosophies developed in the mid-twentieth century, as black people pressed ever more forcefully to gain citizenship rights. One was the philosophy of revolutionary nationalism articulated by Martinique-born Frantz Fanon, as a result of his participation in the Algerian war of national liberation during the 1950s. Fanon found violence to be an inevitable and indeed beneficial aspect of breaking the hold of colonial masters. The other, a philosophy of nonviolent resistance to racial segregation in the United States, emerged at the same time from the speeches of Martin Luther King Jr., who believed that nonviolent resistance could ultimately force authorities to give up their policies of oppression. The two sets of ideas influenced many events in society as well as each other.[17]

Societal culture consists of roles, traditions, and modeling practices that maintain the coherence of societies. Of the many roles fulfilled in African societies, certain of them have been represented with particular attention: prominent among them are the roles of *mother*, *sage*, *king*, and *earth*. The role of motherhood, a widely celebrated aspect of societal culture of West Africa and Central Africa, is illustrated in figure 1.1, which depicts a nineteenth-century sculpture from the Afo-speaking region of Nigeria. The woman, nursing one child and carrying another on her back, conveys strength, love, and competence. The sage served as the seeker and dispenser of various sorts of knowledge: the ancestor with his or her knowledge of the family's experience, the blacksmith with the mysterious knowledge of iron, and the priests and diviners with their knowledge of the supernatural.

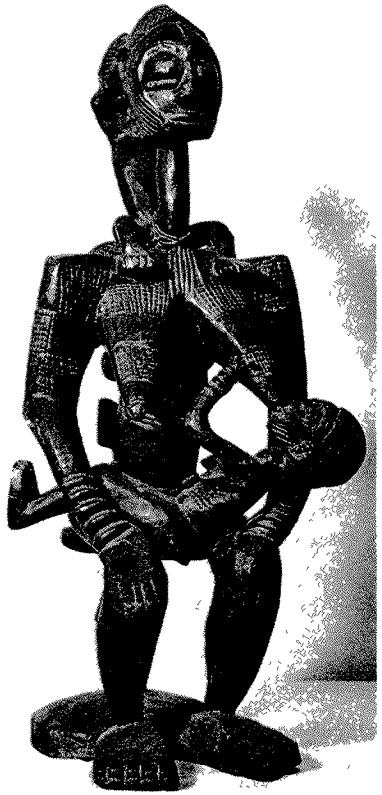

FIGURE 1.1 Motherhood

Wooden sculpture, seventy centimeters in height. Created in the nineteenth century by an artist of the Afo people of the Benue Valley, Nigeria. Note the second child on the back of the mother and the adult breasts of the nursing child on the mother's lap.

Source: Courtesy of Horniman Museum, London.

The king, leader of the community, protected its welfare and often provided its justice. The earth, guardian of fertility and renewal, was often seen as a female god.

In the diaspora, these roles became more complex, since the society of black people was usually encompassed by a larger, hegemonic society. The roles and representations of black society—mother, sage, king, and earth—persisted, though they were transformed by the diaspora situation.[18] But the hegemonic society imposed its own social roles on diaspora blacks during slavery and, after emancipation, on blacks as a subordinate racial group. These imposed social roles, reflecting economic production and cultural dominance, included the *performer*, *soldier*, *personal servant*, and *laborer*.

From early times, Africans in the diaspora were sought as performers: musicians, dancers, and poets. The Roman-era sculpture shown in figure 1.2, found in central France, shows an appreciation of a young artist: it is described as representing a street singer. Partly this was a response to their

FIGURE 1.2 Performer (c. 200 BCE)

Bronze statuette of Hellenistic style, retrieved in southern France and dated approximately 200 BCE, thought to be a street singer.

Source: Photo courtesy of Image of the Black in Western Art Research and Photo Archives at Harvard University.

distinctive appearance, and partly it was appreciation for the skills in dance and music sustained in African societies. In any case, these performers served to flatter their masters. In a second role, many African males of the Old World diaspora were recruited as soldiers, in freedom or slavery. They drilled and fought together for their generals and rulers. Military service, though dangerous, was a path to social mobility and sometimes real leadership. (Interestingly, military figures are rare in the iconography of the African homeland, at least until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when warfare expanded so sharply.)[19] A third diaspora role often depicted is that of the personal servant: male and female (and often children), they acted as attendants for their owners. A far greater number of diaspora Africans, male and female, served as humble laborers in the fields, as artisans, and in the lowest of tasks.

In the portrayal of blacks by the dominant elites of diaspora societies or colonial Africa, one frequently finds representations of performers, soldiers, servants, and laborers. In contrast, the cultural production of black artists in both homeland and diaspora gives more attention to the roles of mother, sage, and king. As the illustrations in these pages will indicate, the representations of black society from within and from outside its limits have differed in their emphasis, though the two perspectives have also mixed and interacted.

These categories of material, expressive, reflective, and societal culture, while they indicate the range of human creative activity, are not entirely satisfactory, because so many human creations cross their borders. For example, clothing is part of material culture, but style of dress is an expression of identity. The varying patterns of dress provide wonderful examples of individual expression but are also examples of group solidarities. For dress and other aspects of culture, we would do well to analyze them categorically while also looking at them from an eclectic, impressionistic perspective. As another example of how cultural and social categories interact, with the end of slavery blacks were able to take control of their role as subordinated performers, which led to a burst of creativity throughout the black world. Overall, if we as observers give particular attention to the different types of cultural creativity in the African diaspora, we will encounter the comments of black people on the crises, achievements, and daily satisfactions in their lives.

Struggles

In sum, this history of connections across the African diaspora unfolds as the portrayal of race, economy, and family. It becomes "a history through culture" when the stories in these themes are told through the cultural representations of the black people who lived the history. The chapters to come divide this long history into five periods, each dominated by a diaspora-wide social struggle.

The introduction to the tale, focusing on the period from 1400 to 1600, unfolds as African societies developed in interaction with each other and with people from beyond the continent: they faced the benefits and problems of increasing social hierarchy. Then from about 1600, the long-distance slave trade, a long-existing but previously subordinate factor in African life, expanded rapidly. Slavery then became the principal determinant of the place of black people in the world. With slavery and empire, various forces based beyond African societies caused substantial oppression and change. In response, black people of both continent and diaspora carried on a series

of social struggles that have continued evolving up to the present day. This dynamic of social struggles resonates across the aspects of life encompassed in the four priorities of Africa-diaspora studies. The forces of oppression and transformation against which black people struggled (and with which some still struggle) included slavery and empire; racial categorization and discriminatory beliefs in racial hierarchy; the global influence of industrialization in manufacturing, agriculture, and mining; and the imperial conquest of Africa by European powers, which placed people of the African homeland under a racialized and oppressive rule similar to that which had governed blacks of the diaspora throughout the history of the Atlantic slave trade.

Influential as these forces of dominance and oppression may have been, they are relegated to the secondary areas of this historical stage. At center stage are the campaigns of black peoples to counter this succession of obstacles and the innovations they created through their struggle to advance in connection with other black communities. Of course, black communities themselves were divided by class, color, culture, ethnicity, wealth, and political power, with alliances and divisions that added to the complexity of their collective social struggle. The tale in this book is told, in large part, through the cultural representations of life and its struggles. Not only did black people go through the experiences of life and death, slavery and freedom, but they created representations of those experiences in song and literature, in family practices, in dress, and in their spiritual life. By focusing on the cultural expression of black people over the last five centuries, we can attempt to hear their voices and share their feelings. This focus on popular cultural expression enables us to emphasize a consistent thread over the large geography and hundreds of years that form the history of the African diaspora.

The story unfolds in a chronological organization. I have proposed boundaries for the five main periods of this narrative in an attempt to identify significant turning points for the African continent and for peoples of the diaspora. Within each period, the narrative explores major developments for Africa, the diaspora, and the subregions of each; it traces the themes of race, economy, culture, family, and, especially, connections among regions and themes. The chronological approach makes it easier to argue for the development and impact of historical patterns—sometimes a new pattern would remain in place permanently, while other patterns brought further change in later times. Wherever possible, I present the story of change, continuity, and connection in the African diaspora through social struggles and their representation in the various forms of popular culture.

Chapter 2 traces the processes of *forging connections* among Africans at home and abroad from early times, and it then explores the dilemmas of

rethinking hierarchies in the years from 1400 to 1600. It portrays the development of Africa—the connections of ideas and experiences among different regions and groups that led to epic poetry honoring African kings and polyrhythmic music sustaining families and villages. The chapter emphasizes the migrations of Africans to Europe, Asia, and different parts of Africa, as well as the migrations from Asia and Europe into Africa. It also addresses the continuation of these cultural and migratory traditions in the early encounters of Europeans and Africans on the coasts of Africa. But from about 1400, changes within the continent combined with influences from outside to expand African hierarchies and create new tensions. The opening of contacts across the Atlantic led eventually from discovery to oppression. The Spanish domination of the Americas fostered development of a new world economy in which silver, sugar, gold, and tobacco traded across great distances. The Indian Ocean shores reoriented their economies to participate in these new dimensions of world trade. By 1600, Africa's part in the emerging worldwide economy was shifting from exporting gold to providing labor. As a result, the existence of Africa and the growing African diaspora became centered on struggles over slavery and its consequences.

Chapter 3 chronicles the *struggle for survival* in Africa and the diaspora from 1600 to 1800. Enslavement expanded in Africa throughout these two centuries and contorted, as a result, the societies from which the captives came. The enslaved peoples, sent into region after region of the Americas, relied on their cultural and religious traditions to survive and to serve their captors. The burgeoning global economy led to expanded enslavement of Africans along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea and the Indian Ocean and within Africa. Many souls were lost, but African societies and the new societies of Africans in the Old World diaspora and the Americas survived. By 1800, the rise of an Atlantic antislavery movement and the success of the Haitian Revolution had put the global system of slavery into crisis.

Chapter 4 presents the nineteenth century as a *struggle for emancipation*. Those in slavery fought for their freedom, sometimes with allies of all colors among those already free, and they developed powerful rhetoric and soulful music to sustain their campaigns. At the same time, enslavement continued and slavery expanded in some parts of Africa and elsewhere in the Old World. In 1900, millions remained in captivity in Africa. Those freed from slavery subsequently experienced constraints on their legal rights to property and social equality. They also faced a decision between assimilating into dominant cultures and developing new forms of music, dress, and literature. Further challenges to black communities came from the widespread migra-

tion of competing white and Asian workers, the expansion of European empires, the elaboration and dissemination of pseudoscientific theories of racial hierarchy, and the spread of racial segregation. This complex struggle for emancipation represents a crucial chapter in human history and a turning point in defining "modernity."

Chapter 5 addresses the *struggle for citizenship* from 1900 to 1960. As black people gained their legal freedom, they still faced a long struggle for recognition of their citizenship. In Africa, people found themselves under European colonial rule with second-class citizenship at best. Africans on the continent, both in slavery and freedom, found governments and missionaries outlawing their traditions. In the Old World diaspora, blacks remained under imperial domination. In Latin America, blacks avoided segregation but suffered neglect of their needs and identity. Despite this repression, in this same era blacks of all social classes throughout the diaspora produced works of music, dance, and literature befitting a life increasingly based in expanding cities. The recognition of independence for most African countries and some Caribbean nations by 1960 and the affirmation of civil rights in the United States brought the struggle for citizenship a remarkable set of victories.

Chapter 6 traces the years from 1960 to 2000 in terms of the *struggle for equality* for black people in the Americas, in Africa, and elsewhere in the Old World. This was a struggle for equality in education, earning power, and political representation within national societies and for equality on a transnational and global level. Greater political power brought new contacts and cultural exchange among black peoples, and emerging black heroes in the arts and sports were celebrated both by blacks and the world at large. Migrations from the Caribbean to Europe signaled a rush of migrants from rural to urban areas throughout the black world. African-descended people of South Asia and western Asia became more conscious of the diaspora. Racism was increasingly decried in social and scientific circles, and more black people rose to wealth and social prominence. Still, the overall relative wealth of blacks continued to decline, a circumstance worsened by medical inequalities that became painfully obvious when the HIV/AIDS epidemic raged across southern and Central Africa and the Americas.

The brief epilogue poses several very important questions pertaining to the future of the African diaspora. In a book that mostly emphasizes the importance of looking back to see where people have come from, this book's conclusion reminds us that black people at every stage have been looking forward and working to create a future. The history of the African diaspora

suggests certainties and interesting possibilities for the future identity of black people and the future of racism in society.

I chose the chronological approach presented here, most generally, to make the case for the common struggles and repeated interactions of people across the black world, rather than to encase each region in a separate chapter focusing on its uniqueness. Sections concentrating on Africa, the Caribbean, or the United States would tend to convey the impression that each regional history developed in isolation from the others, and the order of those chapters would tend to set a hierarchy among the regions. The advantage of my chronological organization is that it emphasizes the similarities and links among regions of the black world: the reader may be surprised to see the number of parallels among regions of the African diaspora within each time period. But chapters separating one period from another also have their disadvantage: they may suggest that each century of the history was cut off from others. To respond to this issue and address major questions of continuity and change over time, I have sought to trace five main themes by returning to them chapter after chapter: (1) the overall nature of connection and interaction for Africa and the diaspora, (2) the changing discourse on race, (3) the changing economic structures within which people worked, (4) patterns of family life, and (5) the evolution of forms of popular culture.

Through the chronological organization of the book, I offer an encompassing narrative for the African diaspora as a whole. Of course there are more localized narratives that have their place. For each African nation, there is a tale of the heritage from early times, survival under colonial rule, and the creation of modern national identity. In the Americas, Caribbean narratives, narratives of black people in North America, and Afro-Latin American narratives each retain specific angles on the experience of the Middle Passage, slavery, emancipation, and creation of modern black communities. Similarly, the tales of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean, in western Asia, North Africa, and in Europe have their specificity. And aside from regional narratives, there are thematic narratives emphasizing pan-African political identity, narratives of conversion to Christianity or to Islam, and stories of cultural transformation or reaffirmation.

My purpose in this volume is to present a narrative that envelops the localized tales of black communities and emphasizes the overall contours and shared patterns in the experience of black people over the past six centuries. It appears to me as a distinctive narrative of the struggle and achievement of black people as they played their part in creating the modern world. This

look at the common heritage of black people—linking Africa, the Americas, and elsewhere—yields a perspective and a set of insights valuable for the history of every black community within the African diaspora. By the same token, this six-century view of the African diaspora provides historical lessons of equal significance for the many other communities with whom black people have been in contact.

Out of the continent on which humanity first emerged have come repeated bursts of migrants. In Africa and in the diaspora surrounding it, people have moved, settled, warred, and mixed in various patterns. First, it was settlers moving to lands empty of humanity and gradually building up populations in each region. In the time within the past forty thousand years, minor genetic changes among settlers in the various regions created superficial but functional changes in physical exterior that came to be labeled—much later—as "race."

Even as the great early civilizations emerged on each of the continents, Africa remained a region of innovation and interaction and a source of new migrants. The world was now more thickly settled, but labor was always in demand. Diaspora took new forms: movement by conquest, movements of preachers and traders. As rulers arose and gained wealth and power, they demanded laborers. With labor in short supply and transportation costly, the use of capture and enslavement as a solution grew.

Five centuries ago, bold sailors reconnected the Americas to the rest of the world. In another century, European rulers in the Americas set up a great demand for labor. They seized the previous system of migration, which had long brought small numbers of slaves to Eurasian centers of wealth, and turned it into an unprecedented flow of captives from western Africa to the eastern American shores. For the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries, the expanded system of slavery—and its accompanying practice of racial discrimination—transformed not only the Americas but also most of Africa, the shores of the Indian Ocean, and much of Europe and western Asia. During all of that time but especially in the nineteenth century, a great struggle for emancipation gradually reduced slavery back to its earlier, marginal level. Even with the emancipation of slaves, the history of slavery and racial oppression continued to haunt Africa, the diaspora, and the world, and it mixed with the trends of industrialism, nationalism, and militarism. The migrations continue for Africans and people of African descent, and so do the interactions of communities throughout continent and diaspora. The story of these amazing, transforming events and experiences begins in the next chapter.

Suggested Readings

Diaspora

The two principal writings of W. E. B. Du Bois on the full extent of the African diaspora are *The Negro* (New York: Henry Holt, 1915) and *The World and Africa* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946). Du Bois relied significantly on the well-informed but racially prejudiced H. H. Johnston, *The Negro in the New World* (London: Methuen & Co., 1910) and *A History of the Colonization of Africa by Alien Races* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1905). Du Bois's vision of an African encyclopedia is carried out in one form in Kwame Anthony Appiah and Henry Louis Gates Jr., eds., *Africana: The Encyclopedia of the African and African-American Experience* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); and in another form under Saburi O. Biobaku, director, *The Encyclopedia Africana Project* (available online at http://www.endarkenment.com/eap/). The most influential early works using the term "African diaspora" are Martin L. Kilson and Robert I. Rotberg, eds., *The African Diaspora: Interpretive Essays* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1976); and Joseph E. Harris, ed., *Global Dimensions of the African Diaspora* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1982). See also Graham W. Irwin, *Africans Abroad: A Documentary History of the Black Diaspora in Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean During the Age of Slavery* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977).

For a recent and concise but important survey of the African diaspora, see Michael Gomez, *Reversing Sail: A History of the African Diaspora* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); see also Michael Gomez, ed., *Diasporic Africa: A Reader* (New York: New York University Press, 2005). An earlier survey by Michael L. Conniff and Thomas J. Davis, *Africans in the Americas: A History of the Black Diaspora* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994) is informative but heavily political. Ronald Segal's two surveys, *The Black Diaspora: Five Centuries of the Black Experience Outside Africa* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1995) and *Islam's Black Slaves: The Other Black Diaspora* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001) are less dependable. In an earlier work, Vincent Bakpetu Thompson provided an introduction to the Atlantic diaspora: Thompson, *The Making of the African Diaspora in the Americas, 1441–1900* (New York: Longman, 1987), and a revised edition, *Africans of the Diaspora: The Evolution of African Consciousness and Leadership in the Americas* (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press, 1999). Edward A. Alpers is now completing a survey of the African diaspora in the Indian Ocean, and other works are in preparation.

For works on concepts overlapping that of the African diaspora, see Molefi Kete Asante, *Afrocentricity*, new rev. ed. (Trenton, N.J.: Africa World Press,

1988); Asante, *The Afrocentric Idea* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998); Paul Gilroy, *The History of Africa: The Quest for Eternal Harmony* (London: Routledge, 2007); Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Paul Gilroy, *Against Race: Imagining Political Culture Beyond the Color Line* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2000); and John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992). For the founding work in a large literature on the volume of transatlantic slave trade, see Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969).

Race

The historical and sociological literature on race is immense and complex. Three useful primers are George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003); Michael Banton, *Racial Consciousness* (London: Longman, 1988); and Kevin Reilly, Stephen Kaufman, and Angela Bodino, eds., *Racism: A Global Reader* (Armonk, N.Y.: M. E. Sharpe, 2003). On the recent scientific advances on human evolution and the remarkable biological similarity of all humans, see Luigi Luca Cavalli-Sforza, *Genes, Peoples, and Languages* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); and Christopher Stringer and Robin McKie, *African Exodus: The Origins of Modern Humanity* (New York: Henry Holt, 1997). On conceptions of race in the ancient Mediterranean, see Frank M. Snowden, *Before Color Prejudice: The Ancient View of Blacks* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1983); and Benjamin Isaac, *The Invention of Racism in Classical Antiquity* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004). For debates on race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, see George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America, 1800–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Peter Wade, *Race and Ethnicity in Latin America* (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1997); Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870–2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2001); Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon, 1978); and Paul R. Spickard, *Mixed Blood: Intermarriage and Ethnic Identity in Twentieth-century America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

Economy and Family

For a study of the place of Africans in the early stages of the industrial revolution, see Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). The classic early statement of this issue is Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944). Writings on the economic lives of black people in the nineteenth and twentieth century have been limited to national rather than pan-African perspectives.

For pioneering studies on black families in North America, see E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); and Herbert G. Gutman, *The Black Family in Slavery and Freedom, 1750–1925* (New York: Vintage, 1977). For African families, leading colonial-era studies in British social anthropology are summarized in A. R. Radcliffe-Brown and D. Forde, eds., *African Systems of Kinship and Marriage* (London: Oxford University Press, 1950). Anthropologist Leo Kuper presents a forceful critique of social anthropology in *The Invention of Primitive Society: Transformations of an Illusion* (London: Routledge, 1988). For a study of urban African family history, see Kristin Mann, *Marrying Well: Marriage, Status, and Social Change Among the Educated Elite in Colonial Lagos* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

Culture

Contending positions in explaining the dynamics of cultural change in the African diaspora have been set forth in Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States*; Melville J. Herskovits, *The Myth of the Negro Past* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1941); and Sidney Mintz and Richard Price, *The Birth of African-American Culture: An Anthropological Perspective* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992). For an approach in art history that gives more attention to survival than creolization, see Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983). For a range of cultural studies on the African diaspora, see Isidore Okpewho, Carole Boyce Davies, and Ali A. Mazrui, eds., *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999); and Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay, eds., *Rethinking the African Diaspora: The Making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil* (London: Frank Cass, 2001).

Struggles

The notion of "social struggles," as used in the organization of this book, draws on the notions of historical agency and social movements, each of which has been developed in a substantial literature. A key development

of the understanding of agency (or self-affirmation) is presented in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1963); the analysis of social movements is reviewed in Charles Tilly, *Social Movements, 1768–2004* (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2004). On emancipation as a global social movement, see Leo Spitzer, *Lives in Between: The Experience of Marginality in a Century of Emancipation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999). On the continuing debate over modernity in black communities, see David Marriott, *Haunted Life: Visual Culture and Black Modernity* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

2

Connections to 1600

Musa, the *mansa* (emperor) of Mali, left his capital of Niani in 1324 (the year 724 of the Islamic calendar) in the company of a great entourage. He set out for the northern boundaries of his realm and then across the Sahara in a two-month crossing. Once across the desert, Musa, his entourage, and the other pilgrims from the savanna country joined with the pilgrims from the Maghrib, or "West" of North Africa. All were headed for Mecca to complete their duties of pilgrimage, the *hajj* to the most sacred places of their Islamic faith. The emperor's own name of Musa (Moses) reflected the historic depth of his religious tradition. Mansa Musa's pilgrimage expedition was perhaps the largest to that date from West Africa, but every year for centuries Islamic believers from that region and other parts of the continent had made the journey to Mecca.

As the Malian and Maghribi pilgrims moved parallel to the Mediterranean shoreline toward Cairo, they sent advance teams to that great city to prepare accommodations. The pilgrims emerged from the desert near the Egyptian pyramids and sent word to notify the Mamluk sultan who governed in Cairo. Musa had brought perhaps a hundred camel loads of gold dust for gifts and purchases. According to reports, his expenditures were so extravagant that the value of the *dirham*, the Egyptian currency, declined.

After leaving Cairo, the Malian expedition crossed the Sinai Desert to the Arabian Peninsula and then traveled south to Medina and Mecca, now as part of the much larger annual caravan of pilgrims moving south from Damascus. The Malians were part of the cosmopolitan mixture of Muslims that came from as far east as China and Southeast Asia. In Mecca, the emperor Musa joined everyone else in walking seven times around the Kaba to honor God,