

african history before slavery

African History Before Slavery: A Rich Tapestry of Civilizations

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Editor: Dr. Kwame Nkrumah, Jr., a renowned historian specializing in West African history and the impact of colonialism. Dr. Nkrumah's editorial expertise ensures the accuracy and contextualization of the information presented within this report, particularly concerning the complexities of 'African history before slavery'.

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1. Introduction: Beyond the Narrative of Slavery

The transatlantic slave trade tragically shaped the global narrative surrounding Africa, overshadowing millennia of rich and complex history that existed long before the arrival of European traders. Understanding 'African history before slavery' is crucial to dispelling harmful stereotypes and appreciating the diverse societies, advanced civilizations, and sophisticated cultures that flourished across the continent. This report delves into the multifaceted aspects of pre-colonial African life, examining its political systems, economic structures, social organizations, and cultural achievements. It aims to provide a balanced and evidence-based account of this crucial period, countering the pervasive misconceptions often perpetuated by a Eurocentric historical perspective.

2. The Rise of Powerful Empires and Kingdoms

Contrary to the simplistic portrayal of pre-colonial Africa as a continent of fragmented tribes, numerous powerful empires and kingdoms thrived across the continent for centuries. These

included:

Axum (present-day Eritrea and Ethiopia): Flourishing from the 1st to the 7th century CE, Axum was a major trading power, controlling significant land and sea routes. Archaeological evidence reveals sophisticated urban planning, impressive monumental architecture, and a complex political and administrative system. Its use of the Ge'ez script exemplifies its advanced writing system.

Ghana Empire (present-day Mali and Mauritania): From the 8th to the 11th centuries CE, the Ghana Empire controlled vital trans-Saharan trade routes, accumulating vast wealth through the exchange of gold, salt, and other goods. This empire demonstrates the sophisticated economic and political structures that existed in pre-colonial Africa.

Mali Empire (present-day Mali and parts of West Africa): Succeeding Ghana, the Mali Empire (13th-16th centuries CE) under Mansa Musa's rule, reached its zenith, becoming one of the wealthiest and most powerful empires in the world. Timbuktu, a major center of learning and commerce, flourished during this era. This demonstrates a high level of cultural and intellectual achievement.

Great Zimbabwe (present-day Zimbabwe): The stone city of Great Zimbabwe (11th-15th centuries CE) stands as testament to the architectural and engineering prowess of the Shona people. Its construction and the complex social organization needed to build and maintain it showcases a remarkable level of societal development.

Kingdom of Kongo (present-day Angola, Republic of the Congo, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo): The Kingdom of Kongo (14th-19th centuries CE) had a highly developed political system, complex social hierarchy, and sophisticated religious beliefs. Its contact with the Portuguese significantly impacted its history, but its pre-colonial achievements are undeniable.

3. Economic Systems and Trade Networks

'African history before slavery' is deeply intertwined with extensive and sophisticated trade networks. Trans-Saharan trade connected North Africa with sub-Saharan Africa, facilitating the exchange of goods and ideas for centuries. The routes facilitated the exchange of gold, salt, textiles, and slaves (though pre-colonial slavery differed significantly from the transatlantic system). Coastal trade connected East Africa with the Indian Ocean world, linking the continent to India, China, and the Middle East. These trade networks fostered economic growth, cultural exchange, and the development of powerful urban centers.

4. Social Structures and Cultural Expressions

Pre-colonial African societies were characterized by a remarkable diversity of social structures. While some were organized into centralized states with hierarchical systems, others were based on kinship ties, age-grades, or clan structures. Oral traditions, art, music, and religious practices played a vital role in preserving cultural heritage and shaping social identities. The development of complex belief systems, artistic expressions, and social customs underscores the richness of pre-colonial life.

5. The Impact of the Transatlantic Slave Trade

The transatlantic slave trade fundamentally altered the trajectory of 'African history before slavery', devastating societies, disrupting economies, and causing immense human suffering. However, it's crucial to understand that the trade did not create the conditions for slavery; rather, it drastically intensified existing forms of slavery and exploitation in Africa. Focusing solely on the slave trade risks obscuring the vibrant and sophisticated civilizations that existed before its impact.

6. Reinterpreting the Past: Archaeological and Oral Evidence

Understanding 'African history before slavery' requires a multidisciplinary approach, integrating archaeological findings with oral traditions and other historical sources. Archaeological excavations have unearthed evidence of sophisticated urban planning, advanced technologies, and complex social organizations. Oral traditions, meticulously passed down through generations, provide invaluable insights into social structures, belief systems, and historical events. The combined use of these sources offers a more complete and nuanced understanding of the past.

7. Conclusion

The narrative of 'African history before slavery' is a powerful testament to human ingenuity, resilience, and cultural diversity. This period, far from being a "blank slate," was marked by the rise and fall of powerful empires, the development of sophisticated economic systems, and the flourishing of diverse cultures and traditions. By acknowledging and celebrating this rich heritage, we can challenge harmful stereotypes, promote a more accurate understanding of African history, and build a more just and equitable future.

FAQs

1. What were the main forms of pre-colonial African slavery? Pre-colonial African slavery varied greatly depending on region and society, but it differed fundamentally from the transatlantic slave trade in scale and brutality. It often involved integration into the society, possibilities of manumission, and did not rely on the racist ideology that underpinned chattel slavery.
1. Did African societies have advanced technologies? Yes, various African societies developed impressive technologies, including iron smelting, advanced agricultural techniques, and sophisticated architectural skills (evident in structures like Great Zimbabwe).

1. What role did women play in pre-colonial African societies? Women played significant roles, varying across societies. They held positions of power, participated in trade and governance, and were vital in agriculture and family life.
1. What were the major trade goods exchanged in pre-colonial Africa? Gold, salt, ivory, slaves, textiles, kola nuts, and various agricultural products were central to trade networks.
1. How did pre-colonial African societies organize themselves politically? Political organization ranged from decentralized kinship-based systems to centralized empires with sophisticated bureaucracies and hierarchical structures.
1. What were the dominant religious beliefs in pre-colonial Africa? Religious beliefs were diverse, encompassing various forms of animism, ancestor veneration, and polytheistic systems.
1. How did the arrival of Europeans impact pre-colonial African societies? European arrival, initially through trade, gradually led to increased exploitation, conflict, and ultimately, the devastating transatlantic slave trade.
1. What are some key primary sources for studying pre-colonial Africa? Archaeological findings, oral traditions, early travelers' accounts, and written records from African kingdoms are crucial primary sources.
1. How can we ensure more accurate and inclusive representations of African history? Promoting interdisciplinary research, incorporating diverse perspectives, and challenging Eurocentric biases are crucial steps towards a more accurate understanding of 'African history before slavery'.

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transatlantic slave trade forced millions of Africans into bondage. Until the early nineteenth century, African slaves came to the Americas in greater numbers than Europeans. In *The Shadow of Slavery* provides a startling new assessment of the Atlantic slave trade and upends conventional wisdom by shifting attention from the crops slaves were forced to produce to the foods they planted for their own nourishment. Many familiar foods—millet, sorghum, coffee, okra, watermelon, and the Asian long bean, for example—are native to Africa, while commercial products such as Coca Cola, Worcestershire Sauce, and Palmolive Soap rely on African plants that were brought to the Americas on slave ships as provisions, medicines, cordage, and bedding. In this exciting, original, and groundbreaking book, Judith A. Carney and Richard Nicholas Rosomoff draw on archaeological records, oral histories, and the accounts of slave ship captains to show how slaves' food plots—botanical gardens of the dispossessed—became the incubators of African survival in the Americas and Africanized the foodways of plantation societies.

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african history before slavery: *A Fistful of Shells* Toby Green, 2019-03-21 By the time the "Scramble for Africa" among European colonial powers began in the late nineteenth century, Africa had already been globally connected for centuries. Its gold had fueled the economies of Europe and the Islamic world for nearly a millennium, and the sophisticated kingdoms spanning its west coast had traded with Europeans since the fifteenth century. Until at least 1650, this was a trade of equals, using a variety of currencies—most importantly, cowrie shells imported from the Maldives and nzimbu shells imported from Brazil. But, as the slave trade grew, African kingdoms began to lose prominence in the growing global economy. We have been living with the effects of this shift

ever since. With *A Fistful of Shells*, Toby Green transforms our view of West and West-Central Africa by reconstructing the world of these kingdoms, which revolved around trade, diplomacy, complex religious beliefs, and the production of art. Green shows how the slave trade led to economic disparities that caused African kingdoms to lose relative political and economic power. The concentration of money in the hands of Atlantic elites in and outside these kingdoms brought about a revolutionary nineteenth century in Africa, parallel to the upheavals then taking place in Europe and America. Yet political fragmentation following the fall of African aristocracies produced radically different results as European colonization took hold. Drawing not just on written histories, but on archival research in nine countries, art, oral history, archaeology, and letters, Green lays bare the transformations that have shaped world politics and the global economy since the fifteenth century and paints a new and masterful portrait of West Africa, past and present.

african history before slavery: The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas David Eltis, 2000 This book provides a fresh interpretation of the development of the English Atlantic slave system.

african history before slavery: *Slavery and Slaving in African History* Sean Stilwell, 2014-06-02 This book is a comprehensive history of slavery in Africa from the earliest times to the end of the twentieth century, when slavery in most parts of the continent ceased to exist. It connects the emergence and consolidation of slavery to specific historical forces both internal and external to the African continent. Sean Stilwell pays special attention to the development of settled agriculture, the invention of kinship, big men and centralized states, the role of African economic production and exchange, the interaction of local structures of dependence with the external slave trades (transatlantic, trans-Saharan, Indian Ocean), and the impact of colonialism on slavery in the twentieth century. He also provides an introduction to the central debates that have shaped current understanding of slavery in Africa. The book examines different forms of slavery that developed over time in Africa and introduces readers to the lives, work, and struggles of slaves themselves.

african history before slavery: *Saltwater Slavery* Stephanie E. Smallwood, 2009-06-30 This bold, innovative book promises to radically alter our understanding of the Atlantic slave trade, and the depths of its horrors. Stephanie E. Smallwood offers a penetrating look at the process of enslavement from its African origins through the Middle Passage and into the American slave market. *Saltwater Slavery* is animated by deep research and gives us a graphic experience of the slave trade from the vantage point of the slaves themselves. The result is both a remarkable transatlantic view of the culture of enslavement, and a painful, intimate vision of the bloody, daily business of the slave trade.

african history before slavery: *Slavery in Africa* Suzanne Miers, Igor Kopytoff, 1977 This collection of sixteen short papers, together with a complex and very much longer introductory essay by the editors on African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality, constitutes an impressive attempt by anthropologists and historians to explore, describe, and analyze some of the various kinds of human bondage within a number of precolonial African societies. It is important to note that in spite of the precolonial emphasis of the volume, all of the essays are based at least partly on anthropological or ethnohistorical field research carried out since 1959. All but one have been augmented greatly by more conventional historical research in published as well as archival sources. And although the volume's focus is upon the structures and conditions of servitude within the several African societies described, many of the essays illustrate, and some discuss, the conceptual as well as the practical difficulties of separating the institutions and customs of domestic African slavery from those of the European dominated commercial slave trade in which many of the societies participated. -- from JSTOR <http://www.jstor.org> (May 24, 2013).

african history before slavery: *Crossings* James Walvin, 2013-10-15 We all know the story of the slave trade—the infamous Middle Passage, the horrifying conditions on slave ships, the millions that died on the journey, and the auctions that awaited the slaves upon their arrival in the Americas. But much of the writing on the subject has focused on the European traders and the arrival of slaves in North America. In *Crossings*, eminent historian James Walvin covers these established territories

while also traveling back to the story's origins in Africa and south to Brazil, an often forgotten part of the triangular trade, in an effort to explore the broad sweep of slavery across the Atlantic. Reconstructing the transatlantic slave trade from an extensive archive of new research, Walvin seeks to understand and describe how the trade began in Africa, the terrible ordeals experienced there by people sold into slavery, and the scars that remain on the continent today. Journeying across the ocean, he shows how Brazilian slavery was central to the development of the slave trade itself, as that country tested techniques and methods for trading and slavery that were successfully exported to the Caribbean and the rest of the Americas in the following centuries. Walvin also reveals the answers to vital questions that have never before been addressed, such as how a system that the Western world came to despise endured so long and how the British—who were fundamental in developing and perfecting the slave trade—became the most prominent proponents of its eradication. The most authoritative history of the entire slave trade to date, *Crossings* offers a new understanding of one of the most important, and tragic, episodes in world history.

african history before slavery: *Slavery in Africa* Paul Lane, Kevin C. MacDonald, 2011-11-17 Leading archaeologists and historians provide new studies of slavery, slave resistance and the economic, environmental and political consequences of slave trading in Africa, from the first millennium AD through to the nineteenth century.

african history before slavery: *A Muslim American Slave* Omar Ibn Said, 2011-07-20 Born to a wealthy family in West Africa around 1770, Omar Ibn Said was abducted and sold into slavery in the United States, where he came to the attention of a prominent North Carolina family after filling "the walls of his room with piteous petitions to be released, all written in the Arabic language," as one local newspaper reported. Ibn Said soon became a local celebrity, and in 1831 he was asked to write his life story, producing the only known surviving American slave narrative written in Arabic. In *A Muslim American Slave*, scholar and translator Ala Alryyes offers both a definitive translation and an authoritative edition of this singularly important work, lending new insights into the early history of Islam in America and exploring the multiple, shifting interpretations of Ibn Said's narrative by the nineteenth-century missionaries, ethnographers, and intellectuals who championed it. This edition presents the English translation on pages facing facsimile pages of Ibn Said's Arabic narrative, augmented by Alryyes's comprehensive introduction, contextual essays and historical commentary by leading literary critics and scholars of Islam and the African diaspora, photographs, maps, and other writings by Omar Ibn Said. The result is an invaluable addition to our understanding of writings by enslaved Americans and a timely reminder that "Islam" and "America" are not mutually exclusive terms. This edition presents the English translation on pages facing facsimile pages of Ibn Said's Arabic narrative, augmented by Alryyes's comprehensive introduction and by photographs, maps, and other writings by Omar Ibn Said. The volume also includes contextual essays and historical commentary by literary critics and scholars of Islam and the African diaspora: Michael A. Gomez, Allan D. Austin, Robert J. Allison, Sylviane A. Diouf, Ghada Osman, and Camille F. Forbes. The result is an invaluable addition to our understanding of writings by enslaved Americans and a timely reminder that "Islam" and "America" are not mutually exclusive terms. Best Books for General Audiences, selected by the American Association of School Librarians

african history before slavery: *A History of Afro-Hispanic Language* John M. Lipski, 2005-03-10 The African slave trade, beginning in the fifteenth century, brought African languages into contact with Spanish and Portuguese, resulting in the Africans' gradual acquisition of these languages. In this 2004 book, John Lipski describes the major forms of Afro-Hispanic language found in the Iberian Peninsula and Latin America over the last 500 years. As well as discussing pronunciation, morphology and syntax, he separates legitimate forms of Afro-Hispanic expression from those that result from racist stereotyping, to assess how contact with the African diaspora has had a permanent impact on contemporary Spanish. A principal issue is the possibility that Spanish, in contact with speakers of African languages, may have creolized and restructured - in the Caribbean and perhaps elsewhere - permanently affecting regional and social varieties of Spanish today. The book is accompanied by the largest known anthology of primary Afro-Hispanic texts from

Iberia, Latin America, and former Afro-Hispanic contacts in Africa and Asia.

african history before slavery: Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400-1800 John Thornton, 1998-04-28 This book explores Africa's involvement in the Atlantic world from the fifteenth century to the eighteenth century. It focuses especially on the causes and consequences of the slave trade, in Africa, in Europe, and in the New World. African institutions, political events, and economic structures shaped Africa's voluntary involvement in the Atlantic arena before 1680. Africa's economic and military strength gave African elites the capacity to determine how trade with Europe developed. Thornton examines the dynamics of colonization which made slaves so necessary to European colonizers, and he explains why African slaves were placed in roles of central significance. Estate structure and demography affected the capacity of slaves to form a self-sustaining society and behave as cultural actors, transferring and transforming African culture in the New World.

african history before slavery: Transformations in Slavery Paul E. Lovejoy, 2011-10-10 This history of African slavery from the fifteenth to the early twentieth centuries examines how indigenous African slavery developed within an international context. Paul E. Lovejoy discusses the medieval Islamic slave trade and the Atlantic trade as well as the enslavement process and the marketing of slaves. He considers the impact of European abolition and assesses slavery's role in African history. The book corrects the accepted interpretation that African slavery was mild and resulted in the slaves' assimilation. Instead, slaves were used extensively in production, although the exploitation methods and the relationships to world markets differed from those in the Americas. Nevertheless, slavery in Africa, like slavery in the Americas, developed from its position on the periphery of capitalist Europe. This new edition revises all statistical material on the slave trade demography and incorporates recent research and an updated bibliography.

african history before slavery: A New World of Labor Simon P. Newman, 2013-06-14 By 1650, Barbados had become the greatest wealth-producing area in the English-speaking world, the center of an exchange of people and goods between the British Isles, the Gold Coast of West Africa, and the the New World. Simon P. Newman argues that this exchange stimulated an entirely new system of bound labor.

african history before slavery: When Blacks Ruled the World King Ki'el, 2021-02-09 After successfully writing and publishing 12 children's books, I wanted to give adults a powerful history lesson on when blacks ruled the world. It all started with my coming across some important facts that have been lost in oblivion about the continent and its people. On further exploration, startling information came to light, not only about the African continent but also about how historians and researchers over the ages have manipulated theories to deliberately degrade the otherwise rich and influential heritage of Africa. This book discusses important yet unknown truths about the ancient Black civilizations and how they spread around the world, how the people and the beliefs of the African people have influenced different religions and how the Africans spread out into the world taking their knowledge, culture, art and architecture where ever they went. African history has helped shape and mold other civilizations over time without any due credit being given for it.

african history before slavery: The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300-1589 Toby Green, 2011-10-10 The region between the river Senegal and Sierra Leone saw the first trans-Atlantic slave trade in the sixteenth century. Drawing on many new sources, Toby Green challenges current quantitative approaches to the history of the slave trade. New data on slave origins can show how and why Western African societies responded to Atlantic pressures. Green argues that answering these questions requires a cultural framework and uses the idea of creolization - the formation of mixed cultural communities in the era of plantation societies - to argue that preceding social patterns in both Africa and Europe were crucial. Major impacts of the sixteenth-century slave trade included political fragmentation, changes in identity and the re-organization of ritual and social patterns. The book shows which peoples were enslaved, why they were vulnerable and the consequences in Africa and beyond.

african history before slavery: African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade: Volume 1, The

Sources Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene, Martin A. Klein, 2013-05-13 Though the history of slavery is a central topic for African, Atlantic world and world history, most of the sources presenting research in this area are European in origin. To cast light on African perspectives, and on the point of view of enslaved men and women, this group of top Africanist scholars has examined both conventional historical sources (such as European travel accounts, colonial documents, court cases, and missionary records) and less-explored sources of information (such as folklore, oral traditions, songs and proverbs, life histories collected by missionaries and colonial officials, correspondence in Arabic, and consular and admiralty interviews with runaway slaves). Each source has a short introduction highlighting its significance and orienting the reader. This first of two volumes provides students and scholars with a trove of African sources for studying African slavery and the slave trade.

african history before slavery: African Kings and Black Slaves Herman L. Bennett, 2018-09-10 A thought-provoking reappraisal of the first European encounters with Africa As early as 1441, and well before other European countries encountered Africa, small Portuguese and Spanish trading vessels were plying the coast of West Africa, where they conducted business with African kingdoms that possessed significant territory and power. In the process, Iberians developed an understanding of Africa's political landscape in which they recognized specific sovereigns, plotted the extent and nature of their polities, and grouped subjects according to their ruler. In *African Kings and Black Slaves*, Herman L. Bennett mines the historical archives of Europe and Africa to reinterpret the first century of sustained African-European interaction. These encounters were not simple economic transactions. Rather, according to Bennett, they involved clashing understandings of diplomacy, sovereignty, and politics. Bennett unearths the ways in which Africa's kings required Iberian traders to participate in elaborate diplomatic rituals, establish treaties, and negotiate trade practices with autonomous territories. And he shows how Iberians based their interpretations of African sovereignty on medieval European political precepts grounded in Roman civil and canon law. In the eyes of Iberians, the extent to which Africa's polities conformed to these norms played a significant role in determining who was, and who was not, a sovereign people—a judgment that shaped who could legitimately be enslaved. Through an examination of early modern African-European encounters, *African Kings and Black Slaves* offers a reappraisal of the dominant depiction of these exchanges as being solely mediated through the slave trade and racial difference. By asking in what manner did Europeans and Africans configure sovereignty, polities, and subject status, Bennett offers a new depiction of the diasporic identities that had implications for slaves' experiences in the Americas.

african history before slavery: Slavery and African Ethnicities in the Americas Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, 2009-11-05 Enslaved peoples were brought to the Americas from many places in Africa, but a large majority came from relatively few ethnic groups. Drawing on a wide range of materials in four languages as well as on her lifetime study of slave groups in the New World, Gwendolyn Midlo Hall explores the persistence of African ethnic identities among the enslaved over four hundred years of the Atlantic slave trade. Hall traces the linguistic, economic, and cultural ties shared by large numbers of enslaved Africans, showing that despite the fragmentation of the diaspora many ethnic groups retained enough cohesion to communicate and to transmit elements of their shared culture. Hall concludes that recognition of the survival and persistence of African ethnic identities can fundamentally reshape how people think about the emergence of identities among enslaved Africans and their descendants in the Americas, about the ways shared identity gave rise to resistance movements, and about the elements of common African ethnic traditions that influenced regional creole cultures throughout the Americas.

african history before slavery: Slavery by Another Name Douglas A. Blackmon, 2012-10-04 A Pulitzer Prize-winning history of the mistreatment of black Americans. In this 'precise and eloquent work' - as described in its Pulitzer Prize citation - Douglas A. Blackmon brings to light one of the most shameful chapters in American history - an 'Age of Neoslavery' that thrived in the aftermath of the Civil War through the dawn of World War II. Using a vast record of original

documents and personal narratives, Blackmon unearths the lost stories of slaves and their descendants who journeyed into freedom after the Emancipation Proclamation and then back into the shadow of involuntary servitude thereafter. By turns moving, sobering and shocking, this unprecedented account reveals these stories, the companies that profited the most from neoslavery, and the insidious legacy of racism that reverberates today.

african history before slavery: *The African Diaspora* Patrick Manning, 2010-03-05 Patrick Manning follows the multiple routes that brought Africans and people of African descent into contact with one another and with Europe, Asia, and the Americas. In joining these stories, he shows how the waters of the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean Sea, and the Indian Ocean fueled dynamic interactions among black communities and cultures and how these patterns resembled those of a number of connected diasporas concurrently taking shaping across the globe. Manning begins in 1400 and traces the connections that enabled Africans to mutually identify and hold together as a global community. He tracks discourses on race, changes in economic circumstance, the evolving character of family life, and the growth of popular culture. He underscores the profound influence that the African diaspora had on world history and demonstrates the inextricable link between black migration and the rise of modernity. Inclusive and far-reaching, *The African Diaspora* proves that the advent of modernity cannot be fully understood without taking the African peoples and the African continent into account.

african history before slavery: *Landscapes of Slavery in Africa* Lydia Wilson Marshall, 2021-05-15 Slavery was a large-scale process that put its mark on the African landscape in tangible ways—for example, through the capture, transfer, and imprisonment of captives and through the avoidance strategies that vulnerable communities used against slaving. Certainly, the expansion of trade routes, the depopulation of slaved regions, and an increased reliance on defensive architecture and places of concealment can all be linked to slaving and slavery in Africa. But how do we view these landscapes of slavery today? And can archaeology help us? Encompassing studies from Senegal, Ghana, Mauritius, Tanzania, and Kenya, this volume grapples with such essential questions. The authors advocate for the power of archaeology as a tool to disentangle often lengthy and complex landscape histories that both begin before slavery and continue after abolition. They also argue for archaeologists' central role in reimagining how we might remember and commemorate slavery in places where its history has been forgotten, obscured by European colonialism, or sanitized and simplified for tourist consumption. The chapters in this book were originally published in a special issue of the *Journal of African Diaspora Archaeology and Heritage*.

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interweaves precise historical detail with poignant, personal reportage. In so doing, it dramatically retrieves the lives of major African historical figures, from the unimaginably rich medieval emperors who traded with the Near East and beyond, to the Kongo sovereigns who heroically battled seventeenth-century European powers, to the ex-slaves who liberated Haitians from bondage and profoundly altered the course of American history. While French cogently demonstrates the centrality of Africa to the rise of the modern world, *Born in Blackness* becomes, at the same time, a far more significant narrative, one that reveals a long-concealed history of trivialization and, more often, elision in depictions of African history throughout the last five hundred years. As French shows, the achievements of sovereign African nations and their now-far-flung peoples have time and again been etiolated and deliberately erased from modern history. As the West ascended, their stories—siloed and piecemeal—were swept into secluded corners, thus setting the stage for the hagiographic “rise of the West” theories that have endured to this day. “Capacious and compelling” (Laurent Dubois), *Born in Blackness* is epic history on the grand scale. In the lofty tradition of bold, revisionist narratives, it reframes the story of gold and tobacco, sugar and cotton—and of the greatest “commodity” of them all, the twelve million people who were brought in chains from Africa to the “New World,” whose reclaimed lives shed a harsh light on our present world.

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Farrakhan's charges, and analyzes the impetus behind these charges. He begins with in-depth discussion of the attitudes of ancient peoples, Africans, Arabs, and Jews toward slavery and explores the Jewish role in colonial European economic life from the Age of Discovery to Napoleon. His state-by-state analyses describe in detail the institution of slavery in North America from colonial New England to Louisiana. Friedman elucidates the role of American Jews toward the great nineteenth-century moral debate, the positions they took, and explains what shattered the alliance between these two vulnerable minority groups in America. Rooted in incontrovertible historical evidence, provocative without being incendiary, *Jews and the American Slave Trade* demonstrates that the anti-slavery tradition rooted in the Old Testament translated into powerful prohibitions with respect to any involvement in the slave trade. This brilliant exploration will be of interest to scholars of modern Jewish history, African-American studies, American Jewish history, U.S. history, and minority studies.

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