A COMPANION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Edited by

Alton Hornsby, Jr

Delores P. Aldridge
Editorial Associate

Angela M. Hornsby
Editorial Assistant

Blackwell Publishing

A Companion to African American History

BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO AMERICAN HISTORY

This series provides essential and authoritative overviews of the scholarship that has shaped our present understanding of the American past. Edited by eminent historians, each volume tackles one of the major periods or themes of American history, with individual topics authored by key scholars who have spent considerable time in research on the questions and controversies that have sparked debate in their field of interest. The volumes are accessible for the non-specialist, while also engaging scholars seeking a reference to the historiography or future concerns.

Published

A Companion to the American Revolution
Edited by Jack P. Greene and J. R. Pole

A Companion to 19th-Century America
Edited by William L. Barney

A Companion to the American South
Edited by John B. Boles

A Companion to American Indian History
Edited by Philip J. Deloria and Neal Salisbury

A Companion to American Women's History
Edited by Nancy Hewitt

A Companion to Post-1945 America
Edited by Jean-Christophe Agnew and Roy Rosenzweig

A Companion to the Vietnam War
Edited by Marilyn Young and Robert Buzzanco

A Companion to Colonial America
Edited by Daniel Vickers

A Companion to 20th-Century America
Edited by Stephen J. Whitfield

A Companion to the American West
Edited by William Deverell

A Companion to American Foreign Relations
Edited by Robert Schulzinger

A Companion to the Civil War and Reconstruction
Edited by Lacy K. Ford

A Companion to American Technology
Edited by Carroll Pursell

A Companion to African American History
Edited by Alton Hornsby, Jr

In preparation

A Companion to American Immigration
Edited by Reed Ueda

BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO HISTORY

Published

A Companion to Western Historical Thought
Edited by Lloyd Kramer and Sarah Maza

A Companion to Gender History
Edited by Teresa A. Meade and Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks

BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO BRITISH HISTORY

Published

A Companion to Roman Britain
Edited by Malcolm Todd

A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages
Edited by S. H. Rigby

A Companion to Stuart Britain
Edited by Barry Coward

A Companion to Eighteenth-Century Britain
Edited by H. T. Dickinson

A Companion to Early Twentieth-Century Britain
Edited by Chris Wrigley

In preparation

A Companion to Tudor Britain
Edited by Robert Tittler and Norman Jones

A Companion to Britain in the Early Middle Ages
Edited by Pauline Stafford

A Companion to Nineteenth-Century Britain
Edited by Chris Williams

A Companion to Contemporary Britain
Edited by Paul Addison and Harriet Jones

BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO EUROPEAN HISTORY

Published

A Companion to the Worlds of the Renaissance
Edited by Guido Ruggiero

A Companion to the Reformation World
Edited by R. Po-chia Hsia

In preparation

A Companion to Europe Since 1945
Edited by Klaus Larres

A Companion to Europe 1900–1945
Edited by Gordon Martel

BLACKWELL COMPANIONS TO WORLD HISTORY

In preparation

A Companion to the History of the Middle East
Edited by Youssef M. Choueiri

A COMPANION TO AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY

Edited by

Alton Hornsby, Jr

Delores P. Aldridge
Editorial Associate

Angela M. Hornsby
Editorial Assistant

Blackwell Publishing

BLACKWELL PUBLISHING
350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148–5020, USA
108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK
550 Swanston Street, Carlton, Victoria 3053, Australia

First published 2005 by Blackwell Publishing Ltd

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

A companion to African American history / edited by Alton Hornsby.
p. cm. — (Blackwell companions to American history)
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 0–631–23066–1 (hardback : alk. paper)
1. African Americans—History. 2. African Americans—Historiography. I. Hornsby, Alton. II. Series.

E185.C66 2005
973′.0496073—dc22
2004011680

A catalogue record for this title is available from the British Library.

Set in 10/12pt Galliard
by Graphicraft Limited, Hong Kong
Printed and bound in the United Kingdom
by TJ International, Padstow, Cornwall

The publisher's policy is to use permanent paper from mills that operate a sustainable forestry policy, and which has been manufactured from pulp processed using acid-free and elementary chlorine-free practices. Furthermore, the publisher ensures that the text paper and cover board used have met acceptable environmental accreditation standards.

For further information on
Blackwell Publishing, visit our website:
www.blackwellpublishing.com

A Companion to African American History

Board of Advisors

Contents

Notes on the Contributors

Delores P. Aldridge is Grace Towns Professor of Sociology and African American Studies at Emory University. She is the author of *Focusing: Black Male-Female Relationships* (1995) and co-editor, with Carlene Young, of *Out of the Revolution: The Development of Africana Studies* (2000).

James D. Anderson is Professor of Educational Policy and Professor of History as well as Head of the Department of Educational Policy Studies at the University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign. His book, *The Education of Blacks in the South, 1850–1935* won the Outstanding Book Award from the American Education Research Association in 1990.

Jeffrey Elton Anderson is an Assistant Professor of History at Middle Georgia College. His forthcoming work is tentatively titled *Conjure in African American Society.*

Abel A. Bartley is Associate Professor of African American and Urban History, and Director of the Pan-African Center for Community Studies at the University of Akron. He is the author of *Keeping the Faith: Race Politics and Social Development in Jacksonville, Florida 1940–1970* (2000). Another book on the history of blacks in Akron, Ohio is forthcoming in 2005.

Marcellus C. Barksdale is Professor of History and Director of the African American Studies Program at Morehouse College. His articles and essays have appeared in the *Journal of Social and Behavioral Sciences* and the *Journal of Negro History.*

Juan J. Battle is Associate Professor of Sociology at Hunter College and at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. His several publications highlight the intersection of race, gender, and class on a variety of social phenomena. He is presently directing a study of social justice and philanthropy.

Natalie D. A. Bennett is Assistant Professor of Sociology and Women's Studies at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. She has been a Research Fellow at the Five Colleges Women's Studies Research Center and a Visiting Scholar at the Center for the Study of Women in Society at the Graduate Center of the City University of New York. She is preparing a study of Caribbean immigrant women and work in the United States.

Hayward "Woody" Farrar is Associate Professor of History at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University. He is the author of *The Baltimore Afro-American 1892–1950* (1998) and the forthcoming works *The Hampton Estate, 1690–1890* and *African Americans in the New Age: Baltimore's Black Community, 1945–2000.*

Debra Foster Greene is Assistant Professor of History at Lincoln University, Missouri. Her works have appeared in the *Dictionary of Missouri Biography.*

Stanley Harrold is Professor of History at South Carolina State University. His most recent publication is *The Rise of Aggressive Abolitionism: Addresses to the Slaves* (2004).

Antonio F. Holland is Professor of History and Chairman of the Division of Social and Behavioral Sciences at Lincoln University, Missouri. He is co-author, with Lorenzo Greene and Gary Kremer of *Missouri's Black Heritage*.

Alton Hornsby, Jr is Fuller E. Callaway Professor of History at Morehouse College. He is the former editor of the *Journal of Negro History*. His latest work is *A Short History of Black Atlanta, 1847–1990*. One of his forthcoming works is *Southerners Too: Essays on the Black South, 1733–1990* (2005).

Angela M. Hornsby is Assistant Professor of History at the University of Mississippi. Her articles and essays have appeared in *Southern Cultures*, the *Journal of Negro History* and *Notable American Black Women*.

Anne R. Hornsby is Associate Professor of Economics and Chair of the Department of Economics at Spelman College. Her articles and essays have appeared in the *Journal of Negro History* and in Juliet E. K. Walker, *Encyclopedia of African American Business History* (1999).

Mark Andrew Huddle is Assistant Professor of History at St. Bonaventure University. His book, *The Paradox of Color: Mixed Race Americans and the Burden of History* is forthcoming in 2005.

David H. Jackson, Jr is Professor of History at Florida A&M University. His most recent work is *A Chief Lieutenant of the Tuskegee Machine: Charles Banks of Mississippi* (2002).

Hasan Kwame Jeffries is Assistant Professor of History at the Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity at the Ohio State University. He is writing a history of the black freedom struggle in Lowndes County, Alabama.

Rhonda Jones is a research associate for the "Behind the Veil" Project at the Center for Documentary Studies at Duke University.

Maghan Keita is Associate Professor of History and Director of Africana Studies and Interim Director of the Center for Arab and Islamic Studies at Villanova University. His most recent work is the edited volume, *Conceptualizing/Reconceptualizing Africa: the Construction of African Historical Identity* (2002).

Frederick C. Knight is Assistant Professor of History at Colorado State University.

Augustine Konneh is Professor of History and Chair of the Department of History at Morehouse College. His *History of Liberia* is forthcoming in 2005.

Barbara Krauthamer is Assistant Professor of History at New York University. She is currently preparing a book entitled *Native Country: African American Slavery, Freedom and Citizenship in the Creek, Choctaw and Chickasaw Indian Nations*.

Samuel T. Livingston is Assistant Professor of History at Morehouse College. He is currently writing a book on the Nation of Islam and Hip-Hop Culture, 1970–2004.

Charles W. McKinney, Jr is a Research Associate, Program Coordinator, and Director of Undergraduate Studies for the African Americans Studies Program at Duke University. He is currently studying black nationalism and social change and African American working class political formation in the American South.

Tiya Miles is Assistant Professor in the program in American Culture, Center for Afro-American and African Studies and Native American Studies at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Her book *Ties that Bind: The Story of an Afro-Cherokee Family in Slavery and Freedom* will be published in 2005.

Frederick D. Opie is Associate Professor of History and Director of the African Diaspora Program at Marist College, New York. He is currently writing books entitled *The Guatemalan Atlantic World* and *The Origins of Soul Food in the Atlantic World*.

Walter C. Rucker is Assistant Professor of African and African American Studies at the Ohio State University. His forthcoming book treats the role of African culture in resistance movements in North America.

Christopher M. Span is Assistant Professor in the Department of Educational Policies at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. His articles and essays have appeared in the *Journal of Negro Education* and *Urban Education*. He is currently preparing a book on African American education in Mississippi 1862–75.

Julius E. Thompson is Professor of History and Director of the Black Studies Program at the University of Missouri, Columbia. His latest works include *Black Life in Mississippi: Essays on Political, Social and Cultural Studies in a Deep South State* (2001) and *Pan African Nationalism in the Americas: The Life and Times of John Henrik Clarke* (2004).

Shirley E. Thompson is Assistant Professor of American Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Her forthcoming book is entitled *The Passing of a People: Creoles of Color in Mid-Nineteenth Century New Orleans.*

Akinyele Umoja is Associate Professor of African American Studies at Georgia State University. He has contributed to Charles Jones (ed.), *Liberation, Imagination and the Black Panther Party* and is currently writing a book entitled *Eye for an Eye: The Role of Armed Resistance in the Mississippi Freedom Movement.*

Oscar R. Williams III is Assistant Professor of History in the Department of Africana Studies at the State University of New York at Albany. He has published several articles and essays on George S. Schuyler and is currently writing a biography of Schuyler.

Jason R. Young is Assistant Professor of History at the State University of New York at Buffalo. He is currently preparing a book on the role of religion and spirituality in the resistance against the slave trade and slavery in West-central Africa and in the Lowcountry region of Georgia and South Carolina.

Acknowledgments

The production of a work of this magnitude and scope has been compared to the birthing of a child – a long period of gestation, followed by an often painful delivery, but ending with happiness and a sense of profound accomplishment. In this process, I have been immeasurably aided by several persons and I wish here to express my deep appreciation.

Susan Rabinowitz and her colleagues at Blackwell Publishing conceived the project and offered guidance in its earliest stages. The distinguished board of advisors assisted in the development of the project, including possible topics and authors. Delores P. Aldridge and Angela M. Hornsby provided invaluable editorial assistance as did E. Dolores Stephens. Ken Provencher, senior editor at Blackwell Publishing, proved to be meticulous as well as helpful and patient throughout the project. I am also grateful to other editors at Blackwell Publishing, Gerard M-F Hill and Sue Hadden. Finally, the success of the project benefited greatly by the work of my student assistants, Robert A. Bennett III and Hassan Alhassan, together with Bettye Spicer, who did much of the final typing of the manuscript.

Alton Hornsby, Jr
August 2004

Introduction

Alton Hornsby, Jr

Although free northern blacks, even in antebellum times, had written popular historical works detailing the contributions of Africans – in their homelands and in the Diaspora – to world civilization, prominent Euro-American scholars continued early into the twentieth century to paint the African race as innately inferior and as a beneficiary of, rather than a contributor to, the development of civilization in the West and in the World. Prominent among the historians who took this view were Albert Bushnell Hart and U. B. Phillips.

Racist historiography persisted even after trained black historians like George Washington Williams, William Wells Brown, W. E. B. Du Bois and Carter G. Woodson emerged to provide scientific studies of African and African American achievements. With the exception of Du Bois, who provided an early Marxian interpretation of Black Reconstruction, all of the black scholars continued in the Contributionist mode of the early popular African American historians. By 1920, Woodson, as a founder of the Association for the Study of Negro Life and History and founder and editor of the *Journal of Negro History*, had taken the lead in writing and publishing scholarly works on black life and history.

By the time of the Second World War, a few white scholars, primarily Jewish and Leftist ones, had begun to contribute major works on African and African American history. Since, however, most of these were denied access to the major publishing houses and the major scholarly journals, they wrote in such publications as the *Journal of Negro History* and were read principally by black and Leftist or liberal whites. Foremost among these were such scholars as Herbert Aptheker, Melville Herskovits, and August Meier and Elliott Rudwick.

As the ranks of white scholars interested in the Black Experience continued to grow in the post-war period, they tended to concentrate on the periods of slavery and Reconstruction and continued to see blacks largely as inferiors and as victims. But, by the late 1950s and the approach of "the Civil Rights Revolution," some Euro-American scholars began to see African American assertiveness, even when they were in bondage.

The Civil Rights Era not only revolutionized race relations in the United States, but it forced scholars to look at African American life and history through new

lenses. Much of the impetus for the new historiography stemmed from the demands of black activists. However, the wider opening of the best graduate schools in the country to the post-war generation of African American students also led to new studies and new views. African American Contributionism took on new forms in African American agency.

Although some scholars, especially Euro-American ones, thought that some of the "New Black History" overstated the contributions of ancient Africans as well as Africans in the Diaspora, they endorsed the views of many of the new black historians – some of whom they had trained. It should not be implied that the new black scholars were all of one mind or one perspective in retelling the African American story. Indeed, some of them challenged the views of their fellow black historians concerning the predominance of race as the major paradigm in the African American Experience. Several saw class and gender as looming larger as theoretical and practical constructs. They also parted with some of their colleagues in positing assimilationist and integrationist views, as opposed to insular and separatist or nationalist approaches. The latter group, including such scholars as Vincent Harding and Sterling Stuckey, also called for a radical reexamination of the American Creed. In the manner of Carter G. Woodson, the journalist-historian Lerone Bennett took these views to a popular audience in his column in *Ebony Magazine* as well as in several monographs.

Once the Feminist Movement and the anti-Vietnam War Movement, which many contended were spawned by the Civil Rights Movement, emerged and fostered their own new histories – generally characterized as "the New Social History" – some scholars raised questions anew about the "objectivity question" in the American historical profession. They asserted that American historiography had gone from "everyman his own historian" to every ethnic group and gender their group's own historians.

Nevertheless, by the post-Civil Rights era, the American historical profession as well as many scholars in other parts of the world had embraced the viability and significance of researching and assessing the African American Experience. They then raised and answered new questions that turned conventional, and often racist, views of the Black Past, on their heads and heels.

Finally, as historians worldwide began to reinterpret the roles of various nationalities, ethnic groups, and genders in the origins and development of civilizations, they also saw links in the Human Experience that transcended these boundaries. Thus, the African and African American experiences were also subjected to new international or global inspections, introspections, and fresh analyses. Globalism also, significantly, raised new questions about transculturation, even suggesting the demise of any lingering uniquenesses in African American culture. Interestingly enough, these questions and approaches appeared at the same time that some suggested that a new, distinct variation of African and African American culture had emerged – Hip-Hop.

The Black Experience in the United States and its backgrounds in Africa and the African Diaspora are the subject of the essays in this volume, written by historians, sociologists, economists, and Africana scholars. They provide the latest examinations and assessments of the changing vicissitudes of African American historiography during the last two centuries.

Part I

African and Other Roots

Chapter One

Life and Work in West Africa

Augustine Konneh

This chapter depicts the everyday lives of various inhabitants of this region. It describes and interprets the social, economic, cultural, and religious activities in which Africans were engaged as they searched for self-fulfillment as individuals and as members of communities and groups. This is not ethnography, but rather a historical and historiographical essay on the period from ancient times to the era of the African Slave Trade.

West African Institutions

Family

One outstanding feature of the communal structure of West African societies was the importance of the family and the ever-present consciousness of ties of kinship. When one speaks of the family in an African context, one is referring not to the nuclear family – husband, wife, and children – but to kin, the extended family, which comprises a large number of blood relatives who trace their descent from a common ancestor. The family was held together by a sense of obligation one to the other. Early African family values included solidarity, mutual helpfulness, interdependence, and concern for the well-being of every individual member of a society – the highest and most spontaneous expression. Indeed, as Gyekye (1996) has indicated, the African extended family system was held as a fundamental value, both social and moral. Thus, each member of the family was brought up to think of himself or herself always and primarily in relationship to the group as a cohesive unit. Each family member was required to seek to bring honor to the group. The children had obligations to their parents and parents had obligations to their children. Both the children and parents also had obligations to the members of the extended families – brothers, sisters, in-laws, cousins, uncles, aunts, nephews, nieces, and so on.

These were the elements of strong family ties that people of African descent brought with them to the Americas. Scholars, such as Blassingame (1972), Herskovits

(1941), and Gutman (1976), have observed the strength of the family in the survival of Africans in the Americas. Unlike E. Franklin Frazier (1939), who in his work *The Negro Family* postulated that Africans in the Americas brought no elements of the family with them, Gutman and Herskovits argue that African family resilience was transmitted to the Americas and, thus, assisted in Africans' survival both during slavery and freedom. In fact, historically, West African family or lineage constituted a clan whose members might reside in the same area and share a number of common activities and interests. These lineages performed diverse functions including economic, educational, religious, social, and cultural. The lineages often acted as authoritative bodies for enforcing roles of behavior and, in the case of interlineage strife, for resolving such conflict through mediation or arbitration by a council of elders (McCall 1995).

John McCall discusses the formation of West African lineages in pre-slavery times through such principles as matrilineality, patrilineality, matrilocal residence and patrilocal residence (1995). These were principles that governed inheritance and citizenship in a community. All relationships were subsumed under the concept of kinship network. In West Africa, as elsewhere, some kin were adopted – what is sometimes called a feticious principle of kinship. Status, legal rights, and identity emanating from kinship are still clearly to be observed in modern West Africa, where the continued significance of kinship is expressed in ethnic politics.

The lineage in West Africa was the custodian of wealth and all economic assets. Production assets, such as land and labor, were in the hands of the family. McCall asserts, for example, that in many parts of West Africa land used for farming or the houses and land where people lived were not considered to "belong" to the people who utilized them. Instead, this property was held by a community, which claimed descent from a common ancestor. In some societies this descent was reckoned through the male line. This was the case in the establishment of a business that relied on the support of the family in terms of putting up the resources and providing the required labor. The male head of the family or lineage administered property in the interests of all family members, particularly males, because of the patrilineal nature of descent in many West African societies (Vaughan 1986).

The family was responsible for the upbringing of children in West Africa. Their proper nurturing was essential for the continuity of the family, lineage, and clan. Children, therefore, were not considered primarily as individuals but, instead, belonged to the family and the community. Everyone was expected to be a keeper of one's neighbor's child (Azevedo 1998). Thus, the popular saying, "It takes a village to bring up a child," was a way of life in West Africa. As Azevedo (1998) reports, because of the continuity of lineage through children, many people in West Africa desired to have many children and to do what they could to assist them to become successful and wealthy, because these children were their legacy. The children would care for them in their old age, give them a glorious burial when they died, and keep their memory alive long after they had passed on. Some obvious benefits of this practice in child rearing included the prevention of vagrancy and crime. Thus, it was not surprising that incidences of rape, child abuse, and molestation were rare. Although changes have occurred because of Western influence, the family remains a highly valued cornerstone of society.

Marriage

Many marriages in traditional West Africa were inextricably related to kinship. Marriage was governed by a variety of rules. Some of these rules were exogamous (marriage outside the family line) in their basis, and others were endogamous (marriage inside the family line). McCall advances the idea that marriage between persons who in English would be classified as cousins was practiced in some West African societies. Marriages between cross-cousins (children of the marriages of a brother and sister) were the more preferred arrangements, whereas a marriage between parallel cousins (children of the marriages of two brothers or two sisters) would be forbidden as incestuous. Those marriages based on exogamous practice were designed to create alliances between two lineages (McCall 1995).

Marriages in West Africa were arranged relatively early in the life of adults. Sometimes future partners were earmarked in childhood for the purpose of solidifying social relationships. As Adepoju noted (1992 and 1997), marriage in the African sense was the traditionally recognized point of entry into family formation. It was, indeed, a complex affair. For example, identification of a bride (or groom), consolidation of the search through payment of bride price, formation of the rites of marriage, consummation of marriage – all of these components of the process were arranged by families who also had an enduring responsibility to ensure the stability of the union through a variety of controls and a mutual support network (Adepoju 1992). Thus, the overall good of the families was considered to be more important than the desires of the two individuals involved. McCall notes that the practice of arranged marriages reflects the fact that marriage in West Africa was not concerned only with building a family, it was concerned also with the construction and maintenance of a larger network of relationships within the community as a whole (McCall 1995). To West Africans, marriage by no means involved just two individuals. Rather, it was an alliance between two extended families of the bride and groom. Therefore, even the choice of a fiancé(e) required careful consultation with relatives and close friends. If the father or mother in either family was against his or her child's selection, the chances for the young people getting married were rather slim (Azevedo 1998).

The existence of different cultural values, customs, and taboos among various ethnic groups required a careful examination of any inter-ethnic marriages. The backgrounds – social and sentimental histories of the prospective wife or husband – were closely scrutinized. For instance, among the Akan of Ghana, a literal investigation was discreetly carried out to check for "skeletons in the closet." Within this context, it is easy to understand how appalled West Africans still are to hear that Americans may decide to marry people from totally strange origins, sometimes without even knowing much of their fiancé(e)'s family background.

Once the choice of a mate had been approved, the marriage procedure could begin. The traditional version of the wedding took place before the modern one. It involved a meeting of the bride and groom, a number of relatives – parents did not attend this ceremony – and maybe a couple of brothers or sisters of the groom. The ritual was performed in the bride's family's house. A few weeks before the gathering, the future husband's relatives offered several expensive items. Those usually included some traditional fabrics and vintage alcoholic beverages. During the

actual ceremony, the elders on the bride's side would pour some of the beverages on the ground, uttering prayers to the ancestors' spirits. In these prayers, they wished for a peaceful marriage, many children, and harmonious relations between the two families. At this stage, the couple was actually considered married (McCall 1995).

Once the traditional ceremony was completed, the couple could start a new life, confident that they had all of the familial framework to support the marriage in times of difficulties. This was actually the main reason why, according to Robertson (1995), young West Africans would rather not get married against their parents' advice. For example, a spiritual curse implied a very unhappy relationship, since the marriage was not blessed by the family. Then, in case of crisis, parents could not be called upon to provide their expertise at conjugal trials. Among the Akan people of Ghana, when husband and wife proved unable to resolve their differences, they resorted to older brothers or sisters, marriage witnesses, or very close friends. If all those options failed, the last resort for mediation lay with the parents or elders.

For instance, a husband might have found no satisfactory compromise in discussing his wife's cousins' or brothers' extended stays in his home. A meeting would have to be called eventually to settle the protracted dispute. Parents, brothers, sisters, marriage witnesses, and/or any person aware of the couple's problems would be present to discuss various alternatives with the spouses. For such a conference to be summoned, the taboo word of "divorce" had probably been uttered by one of the parties. The couple would be urged to speak out frankly and expose any hidden element that might give some insight into the causes for tension. A decision had to be reached by the end of the session. At times, the meeting would last several hours, until the family had determined who was responsible for the trouble and had devised a way of avoiding its recurrence. The wronged party would finally be asked to forgive his or her spouse and to promise that such a crisis would never occur again. If the council was proven wrong, the spouse had to inform the members, who would call for another, more dramatic meeting. A large number of relatives would participate in the discussion because it would be seen as imperative that the situation be solved through family channels and not in court.

The preceding example demonstrates why it was vital for a married West African literally to "pamper" the in-laws in difficult times, as they would play a crucial and moderating role in, perhaps, saving a marriage. To some married West Africans, however, having to take into account their own extended family's opinions, plus those of their in-laws, was viewed as an immense nuisance, on top of the complication of the traditional relationship where the husband was custodian to the wife. Yet, in the final analysis, the concept of marriage as a concern of all the blood relatives could save a couple the cost and trauma of having to seek professional help with counselors or therapists. The extended familial network, in effect, was designed to provide all the psychological and material support needed in times of crisis.

Indigenous African Religion

The awareness of the existence of some ultimate, Supreme Being who is the origin and sustainer of this universe – and the establishment of constant ties with this being – influenced, in a comprehensive way, the thoughts and actions of the West African people (Gyekye 1996). The West African heritage was intensely religious.

The African world into which European Christian missionaries entered in the late seventeenth century was a religious world in which the idea of God as the Supreme Being was already known and held by the West African people. In a study of African Religions and Philosophy, Professor Mbiti (1975) noted that "Africans are notoriously religious, and each people has its religious system with a set of beliefs and practices." This implies that religion permeated into all the aspects of African life so fully that it was not easy or possible always to isolate it. Thus, in African religion, there was no formal distinction between the sacred and the secular, between the religious and the non-religious, between the spiritual and the material areas of life. Wherever the African was, there was his/her religion; the early Africans carried their religions with them, wherever they would find themselves. It is also important to note that there were no sacred scriptures in African religions. Religion in West African societies was written not on paper but in people's hearts, minds, oral history, rituals, and religious personages like the priests, rainmakers, officiating elders, and even kings. Everyone was a potential carrier of religion. African religions had neither founders nor reformers. These religions did, however, incorporate national heroes, heroines, leaders, rulers, and other famous men and women into their body of beliefs and mythology. Belief in the continuation of life after death was found in all African societies.

Certainly up to the period of the major European incursions into West Africa, the vast majority of the African people engaged in religious practices that were indigenous to the continent. These practices were only outward manifestations of certain religious beliefs and, like symbols in other religions, they did not indicate the specific character of the religion. The religion of early West Africans can most accurately be described as ancestor worship. West Africans believed that the spirits of their ancestors had unlimited power over their lives. In this, as in almost every aspect of West African life, the kinship group was important. It was devoutly believed that the spirit that dwelled in a relative was deified upon death and that it continued to live and take an active interest in the family. The spirits of early ancestors had been free to wield an influence for such a long time that they were much more powerful than the spirits of the more recently deceased; hence, the devout worship and the complete deification of early ancestors. Not only were the spirits of deceased members of the family worshiped, but also a similar high regard was held for the spirits that dwelt on the family land, in the trees and rocks in the community of the kinship group, and in the sky above the community.

Because of the family character of African religions, the priests of the religions were the patriarchs of the families. They were the oldest living descendants of the initial ancestor and had therefore inherited the earthly prerogatives of their predecessors. Thus, they had dominion over the family grounds, water, and atmosphere. It was the family patriarch who entered into communication with the souls of his ancestors and natural forces in his immediate vicinity. Consequently, he was authorized to conduct ceremonies of worship. The temples of worship could be any structures set aside for that purpose. They contained holy objects, such as bones of the dead, consecrated pieces of wood, rock, or metal, and statuettes representing objects to be worshiped. Bells or rattles were used to invoke the spirits and the worshipers. The blood of victims – chickens, sheep, goats, or human beings – was offered as a sacrifice to appease the gods. The practice of sacrificing human beings in

Africa was never a universal one, but, in some areas, prisoners and captives were sacrificed during the worship of various deities. Libations of palm wine, beer, or other fermented drinks were offered in various forms of worship. Prayers and songs were expressions of adoration.

It was only natural that in a society such as that found in West Africa there would be considerable reliance on the magical power of amulets, talismans, and the like. Anything that helped to explain and answer the imponderables was a welcome addition to tribal practices. Magic was, therefore, practiced on a grand scale. By resorting to ill-defined powers, known only to him, the magician invented techniques and created rites designed to secure for individuals the specific ends they desired. Where religion was a collective attempt to secure satisfaction for the kinship groups, magic was an individual attempt to achieve certain satisfactions on the part of a particular person. Even in areas where animistic worship prevailed, belief in magic was widespread. Many Africans had great confidence in the efficacy of magical practices, and it may be that the reliance on the divination of sorcerers was responsible in part for the course that the civilization of West Africa took.

The elaborateness of funeral rites all over the continent attests to the regard that Africans had for the idea that the spirits of the dead played an important part in the life of the kinship groups. The funeral was the climax of life; costly and extensive rituals were held as sacred obligations of the survivors. The dead were generally buried in the ground either beneath the huts in which they lived or in cemeteries. Burial often took place within a few days after death, but at times the family delayed interment for several weeks or longer. The grave was not completely closed until every member of the family had an opportunity to present offerings and to participate in some rite pertinent to interment. Nothing more clearly demonstrates the cohesiveness of the African family than the ceremonies and customs practiced on the occasion of the death and burial of a member.

Franklin (2000) suggests that in all probability the early influence of Islam on the African way of life has been greatly exaggerated. This is certainly true during the period before the fourteenth century. Muslims crossed from Arabia over into Egypt in the seventh century. In the following century, they swept across North Africa where they met with notable success, but religious conversion was slow south of the Sahara. Africanists such as Basil Davidson (1994), Kevin Shillington (1995), and Robert July (1992) agree that the kingdoms of Ghana, Mali, and the Songhay accepted Islamic faith quite reluctantly, while other groups rejected it altogether. Some African kings accepted Islam, along with their subjects, for what appear now to be economic and political reasons. However, they frequently and tenaciously held to their tribal religious practices. Muslims were never able, for example, to win over the people of Mali, Hausaland, and Yorubaland. The commercial opportunities offered by the Muslims were especially attractive. It must also be added that the followers of the Prophet accepted Africans as social equals and gave them the opportunity to enjoy the advantages of education and cultural advancement, which the religion offered. Even as a slave, the black Muslim was considered a brother. To many black Africans these features were doubtless as important as the purely ritualistic aspects of the new religion. Even so, large numbers of Africans resoundingly rejected Islam in favor of a preference for the cults and rituals that were historically a part of their way of life.

Christianity, in contrast, was entrenched in North Africa early. It was when Islam made its appearance in the seventh century that the two great faiths engaged in a life-and-death struggle for the control of the area. In West Africa, where the population was especially dense and from which the great bulk of slaves was secured, Christianity was practically unknown until the Portuguese began to establish missions in the area in the sixteenth century. It was a strange religion, this Christianity, that taught equality and brotherhood and at the same time introduced on a large scale the practice of tearing people from their homes and transporting them to a distant land to become slaves. If the Africans south of the Sahara were slow to accept Christianity, it was not only because they were attached to their particular forms of tribal worship but also because they did not have the superhuman capacity to reconcile in their own minds the contradictory character of the new religion.

Diviners and Other Supernatural Powers

Divination in West African religion was vital because it told priests, patients, and the entire community what ritual they must perform. Successful diviners were highly intelligent and often high-strung men or (occasionally) women. They were often also physically handicapped. Divination was one of the specialties most likely to attract the person with an intellectual bent. Diviners had to possess an excellent intuitive knowledge of the societies in which they lived – and often the knowledge was not merely intuitive but could be made explicit. They also had to be men and women of courage. The diviners were the ones who were putting their fingers on, and brought into the open, the inadequacies and the sore spots in day-to-day living. Unless they were strong and forceful, they could be cowed. Many diviners who completed their training never practiced, specifically because they could "not stand the heat in the kitchen" (Stewart 1984).

Most indigenous African religions believed that, were it not for the workings of the forces of evil, human beings would live forever in health and happiness. Therefore, when disease and misery struck, the source had to be rooted out. That source contained two elements. There was, on the one hand, the cause of the difficulty. Africans, within their knowledge, were as sensible about cause as anyone else, and most of them knew that some diseases were communicable and that droughts appeared in recurring cycles. Cause in this sense, however, left certain questions unanswered – all of the "why" questions. Therefore, misfortune had not only a cause but it had a source of motivation as well.

The very fact that misfortune struck was an indication that all was not well in the world and in the cosmos. The cause and motivation of the misfortune had to be discovered. Contrary to westerners, who were not trained to ask questions about misfortune, Africans did seek answers in such situations. In arriving at answers, they linked social problems to divine action. In so doing, they exposed and often solved the social problems in the course of seeking to counter the divine manifestations.

The first thing a person had to do when misfortune struck was to go to a diviner to discover the device which was used to bring it about and, perhaps, also to discern the author of the misfortune. That author might have been a spirit to whom insufficient attention had been paid or an ancestor who was punishing a descendant for immorality, or spiritual shortcomings in the group of his descendants. Or it may

have been a "witch" who was a human author of evil, venting his or her anger, envy, or selfishness (Stewart 1984).

African diviners used many modes of carrying out their task of obtaining an answer to the misfortune. For example, they threw palm nuts and read answers to their queries in the juxtaposition of the fallen kernels. They tossed chains of snake bones. They rubbed carved oracle boards together. They also became possessed, and received their answers through a spiritual intermediary. These methods were means of seeking results in solving problems, which were not understood by outsiders.

In contemporary scholarship, it is important to note several issues as they relate to the in-depth investigation and study of African traditional religions as an academic discipline. These issues primarily center on the debate over the reference to African traditional religion in the singular or plural, methodology, and interpretation. African scholars who adhere to the philosophies of E. B. Idowu consistently contend that scholars and critics should refer to the "religion" under the rubric of *One African Traditional Religion*. J. S. Mbiti, on the other hand, insists that there is an insufficient and unstable foundation for such a premise. He does accept the commonly held belief of the existence of a single, basic religious philosophy for Africa, yet he is insistent in his assertion of the existence of [as many] religions in the sub-Saharan African background in tandem with the number of ethno-language groups. Mbiti contends, "We speak of African religions in the plural because there are about one thousand African peoples (tribes), and each has its own religious system" (Mbiti 1969: 1–2). Further, as it relates to the issue of nomenclature, Mbiti asserts that Christianity and Islam should – in contemporary scholastic study – be viewed as indigenous and traditional religions of Africa due to the longevity of their historical existence in the continent (Mbiti 1975: 223).

While scholars remain divided on the views emanating from Mbiti and Idowu, recent scholarship pervasively embraces the use of African Traditional Religion in the singular. These scholars contend that the common world-view within these religions, as well as the similarity in rituals, belief-systems, value formulations, and institutional formation across the vast African continent, provide a basic and firm foundation for maintaining the reference to a singular form in referring to African traditional religions even while accepting and acknowledging (contemporaneously) the existence of a burgeoning number of denominations.

In the systematic, contemporary approach to the study of African traditional religion, it is important to note that the religion is based in orality. It is a religion and movement that maintains its authenticity and accuracy largely through a reliance on the transmission and interpretation through socio-cultural networks of verbal communication. For the most part, the tenets of African traditional religion are not to be found in sacred books but in the substance and continuity of historically-transmitted daily behaviors and more stylized ritualized practices. It is, therefore, quite clear that African traditional religion is one based in local, folk-based formulations. The African peoples embraced and assimilated the religion of their ancestors in a worship-based tradition that pervasively refers back to the local shrines and oracles.

The orality and folk-based foundations of African religion contribute to the complexity in the interpretation of the materials of the study of the religion. Scholars of various backgrounds – historically and in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries

– have contributed and continue to contribute their various perspectives to the study of African traditional religion. This creates a complex situation due to the training and backgrounds of many of the most prominent scholars in the field. The scholars' backgrounds and training are diverse, with some emerging as evolutionists, diffusionists, ethnographers, social anthropologists, and Christian scholars. Contemporary students and scholars face a critical challenge in deciding how these various scholars' backgrounds may have both negatively and positively contributed to what currently exists as the scholarship on traditional African religious expression and experience. Several critics of the current scholarly formulations, such as Newell S. Booth, Jr, R. Horton, and Okot p'Bitek, keenly question the validity and stability of some historical and critical materials. Booth, for example, asserts, "Many Western students of Africa – historians of religions, anthropologists, and others – exploit Africa for their own academic or ideological purposes" (Booth 1977: 4). Okot p'Bitek goes further to label some African scholars as "intellectual smugglers" (p'Bitek 1971: 107) who portray African deities "as mercenaries in foreign battles, none of which was in the interest of African peoples" (p'Bitek 1971: 102).

What emerges as most important in the debate, methodology, and interpretation of African traditional religion is the acknowledgement of the continuity of the religion. How can the student, scholar, and critic move to a more lucid and accurate description of African traditional religion? Wilfred Cantell Smith offers sound advice: "anyone who writes about a religion other than his own today does so, in effect, in the presence of those about whom he is speaking . . . no statement about a religion is valid unless it can be acknowledged by that religion's believers" (quoted in Booth 1977: 4).

Islam and Christianity

Islam has had a history of about a thousand years in West Africa. It was carried into the region and the continent through trade in the eighth century by Arab traders from North Africa. Today, in the northern part of West Africa from Senegal to Nigeria, nearly 90 percent of the population is Muslim. The northern parts of Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire, and Ghana also have substantial adherents to the Islamic faith. The spread of Islam is credited to the traders, who were often accompanied by clerics who set up Islamic schools and embarked upon the conversion of non-Muslims. Most of the Muslims in West Africa are Sunni (Konneh 1996).

Christianity has operated in West Africa for centuries. Many countries in the region – such as Cote D'Ivoire, Liberia, Ghana, and Sierra Leone – have traditionally had great Christian influence. In the nineteenth century, missionary movements (Methodist, Presbyterian, Episcopal, and Lutheran) spread into the region and many inhabitants were attracted to Christianity. These missionaries set up Western schools and clinics and attracted the locals to them. The result was conversion to the religion because of what it offered socially as well as spiritually (Keim 1995).

West Africans, however, made their own adaptations of Christianity and Islam – introducing elements from their own traditions, such as approaches to healing, veneration of the dead, Africanized rituals, and music. In some cases this led to conflict with the established leaders of church and state. Another expression of religion in West African cities was the evolution of indigenous Christian churches.

A compelling example is the Aladura religious movement among the Yoruba in Nigeria. Aladura, which literally means "owner of prayer," is the generic name for a group of Christians whose origin goes back to the late nineteenth century, and whose religious doctrine centered on the healing power of prayer. The physical assurance of this doctrine, if one is ever needed, is provided by the water which, when blessed, is believed to be endowed with divine power (Jegede 1995).

In cities, religious syncretism was a major force. Some West Africans differed substantially in their mode of worship, some only marginally so, but all worshiped the same God according to West African people. Many people who professed Christianity or Islam, nominally at least, broke down religious boundaries by participating at will in the observance of some aspects of traditional religion. In urban society, where people came in contact with new ideas and values, syncretism became relevant. It allowed a degree of tolerance and mutuality. For example, Christians and Muslims alike could participate in rites, rituals, festivals, and other observances inherited from their ancestors. These practices continue [today] in spite of the imposing presence of religious edifices (Mazrui 1986).

In several cities in West Africa, annual religious festivals brought together "sons of the soil," to use the local parlance, who were drawn from far and near by the excitement of the occasion. Christian and Muslim alike delighted in joining the traditionalists in reenacting the pact of their religion, respecting the sacred shrine of the goddesses who would, in return, protect the city and ensure its prosperity.

Education and Power Associations

The Power Associations (secret societies) were responsible for the education of the young in traditional West Africa. They served to integrate the people of a community into a harmonious entity. They also provided the framework for teaching the youth how to live in relation with themselves and with everyone in the community. Konneh (1996) observed that in Liberia, to this day, most Mel- and Mande-speaking groups feature the Poro society for males and the Sande society for females. One of the principal purposes of the societies was that they defined interests and activities in terms of community instead of exclusively along lineage or clan lines. The roles the Poro, Sande, and other societies played may be summarized by noting that they provided social and vocational education, operated various social services, which ranged from medical treatment to recreation, and oversaw economic and political activities. All youths had to be initiated into their respective association before they could be considered adults and, consequently, contributing members of the community. The initiation schools, which the officials of the societies conducted for the youth to prepare them for membership in the associations, were located in an area physically remote from the village, and the sessions could take up to three or four years. Now, they usually take only a few weeks (Konneh 1996).

Kenneth Little (1951) has assessed the significance of the rite of passage that was associated with the associations in cultivating the minds and behaviors of young people in West African societies. He argues that the rite of passage provided the intellect, continuation of the group, and training that was practical in solving societies' problems. Thus, for Little, the rite of passage served as a public institution.