AFRICANA STUDIES

A SURVEY OF AFRICA
AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA
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A SURVEY OF AFRICA
AND THE AFRICAN DIASPORA

SECOND EDITION

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Contents

Acknowledgments ix
Introduction xi

Mario Azevedo

PART I INTELLECTUAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE BLACK EXPERIENCE

1 African Studies and the State of the Art 5

Mario Azevedo
Definition and Historical Evolution 6
The Disciplines and the “State of the Art” 8
The African Studies Association 20

2 African-American Studies and the State of the Art 31

Russell L. Adams
Foundation and Structure 32
Epistemology, Afrocentricity, and Ideology 39
Socio-Scientific Trends 42

PART II PEOPLES OF AFRICAN DESCENT AND THEIR PLACE IN HISTORY

3 Africa and the Genesis of Humankind 53

R. Hunt Davis, Jr.
Physical Environment and Human Development 54
The Evolution of Cultures and Civilizations 57
Egypt and Early African States 59

4 Legitimate Trade, Diplomacy, and the Slave Trade 69

M. Alpha Bab
The Fatal Encounter 69
African Internal “Slavery” 72
The Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade 74
Main Sources of Supply 77
The Middle Passage and Final Settlement 79
The Abolition of the Atlantic Slave Trade in Africa 81
Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on Africa 83

5 Diaspora Africans and Slavery 89

Raymond Gavins
The New World Slave System 89
Slavery in the United States 91
The Response to Slavery 95
Antislavery and Emancipation 99
## Contents

### Part II The Past and the Present

6 European Exploration and Conquest of Africa
   *Mario Azevedo*
   - The Scramble for Africa and African Response 108
   - Colonial Policies in Africa 114
   - Impact of Colonial Rule in Africa 116

7 Civil War to Civil Rights: The Quest for Freedom and Equality
   *Marsha Jean Darling*
   - Reconstruction: Education, Leadership, and the “Negro” Movement 122
   - Direct Social Action and Its Aftermath 138

8 The Caribbean: From Emancipation to Independence
   *Nikongo Ba’Nikongo*
   - Slavery and Emancipation 148
   - Independence and Social Structure 151
   - Political Economy and Economic Strains 154

9 Africa’s Road to Independence (1945–1960)
   *Julius E. Nyang’oro*
   - Background to Decolonization 160
   - Post-World War II Developments 161
   - Political Independence and Challenges 166

10 The Pan-African Movement
    *Michael Williams*
    - Origins and Early Emigration Efforts 169
    - Early Twentieth-Century Developments 172
    - Post-World War II Trends 176

### Part III The Present and the Future of the Black World

11 The Contemporary African World
    *Luis B. Serapiao*
    - Nation-Building and Economic Development 186
    - Africa in World Affairs 191
    - Southern Africa 195

12 Contemporary Diaspora and the Future
    *Alphine W. Jefferson*
    - African-Americans 202
    - Afro-Caribbeans 207
    - Afro-Latinos and Afro-Europeans 210

13 Continental Africans and Africans in America:
   The Progression of a Relationship
    *F. Ugboaja Ohaegbulam*
    - Naming the Race in Diaspora 220
    - Pre- and Post-Garvey Emigration Schemes 222
    - Africa and African-American Institutions and Scholars 230
    - Tensions in African and African-American Relations 236
Contents

PART IV CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE BLACK WORLD

14 Music in Africa and the Caribbean 243
   Roderic Knight and Kenneth Bilby
   Music in Africa 244
   Musical Instruments: An Overview 245
   Singing Styles and Content 246
   Stylistic Features of Ensemble Performance 248
   The Music of the Caribbean 249
   Caribbean Music and the Rest of the World 269

15 African-American Music 275
   Eddie S. Meadows
   African Retentions in Blues and Jazz 276
   Jazz Styles 276
   Jazz Since the Fifties 282
   Blues: Country, Classic, Early Urban, Urban 284
   Spirituals and Gospels 288

16 The Art of Africa and the Diaspora 297
   Sharon Pruitt
   Toward an Approach to Understanding African Art 298
   The Study of Traditional African Art 300
   Contemporary Art in Africa 302
   Africanisms and Pioneers in African-American Art 305
   Some Aspects of Caribbean Art 310

17 Literature in Africa and the Caribbean 315
   Tanure Ojaide
   Definition 316
   Traditional Oral and Written Literature in Africa 317
   Literary Trends in English-Speaking Caribbean 322

18 African-American Literature: A Survey 329
   Trudier Harris
   Oral Tradition and Slave Narrative 330
   African-American Poetry 332
   African-American Fiction and Drama 335

19 Contributions in Science, Business, Film, and Sports 341
   Mario Azevedo and Jeffrey Sammons
   Patenting by African-Americans 342
   African-Americans and Business Ownership 344
   African-Americans in the Film Industry 350
   African-Americans in the Sports Arena 351

PART V SOCIETY AND VALUES IN THE BLACK WORLD

20 The African Family 361
   Mario Azevedo
   Family Structure 361
   Patrilineal and Matrilineal Societies 363
Contents

Modes of Transmission of Tradition 368
The Impact of Modernization on the Family 369

21 The African-American Family 373
   Gwendolyn S. Prater
   The Black Family from Slavery to Freedom 374
   The Black Family from Freedom to Civil Rights 378
   The Survival of the African-American Family 380

22 Religion in Africa 387
   Mario Azevedo
   The Spread and Impact of Islam 387
   The Impact of Christianity 393
   Traditional Religion 397

23 Religion in the Diaspora 405
   Mario Azevedo and Gregory Davis
   The Church in the United States 406
   The Church in the Caribbean 416
   The Nation of Islam 419

24 African Women and Women of the Caribbean 425
   Hazel M. McFerson and A. Lynn Bolles
   Gender, Lineage and Kinship 426
   African Women in Contemporary Society 436
   Women of the Caribbean 445

25 Lifting As We Rise: Black Women in America 457
   Marsha Jean Darling
   Key Conceptual and Methodological Issues 458
   Assessing African Roots 460
   The Enslavement of African Females 464
   Free African-American Women 472
   Freedwomen 474

Part VI Appendixes

A. Selected Maps
   Physical Map of Africa 492
   Pre-Colonial Africa 493
   Colonial Africa 494
   Present-Day Africa 495
   The Caribbean 496

B. Landmarks in the History of Peoples of African Descent 497

C. Selected Periodicals and References in Africana Studies Available in the United States 505

Contributors 507

Index 513
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I would also like to acknowledge the role my own students played in the “Introduction to Afro-American and African Studies” course. I used them to classroom test the suitability of the textbook by providing them bound copies of the manuscript as reading materials. Dr. Gregory Davis adopted the same strategy during the Fall 1992 semester. The responses of both classes convinced me that this is a sound and significant undertaking—one that was perhaps long overdue.

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Mario Azevedo
Introduction

Mario Azevedo

This textbook was designed to respond to the present student generation’s needs and questions regarding the nature of the disciplines that constitute the African, African-American, and Afro-Caribbean Studies programs, once generically designated as Black Studies. The editor’s objective is, first, to make readily available the basic content of these broad fields and discuss their methodologies and themes in an introductory textbook that is comprehensive in its analysis of the experiences, contributions, and aspirations of the peoples of Africa and the scattered African diaspora. The editor’s goal has been to provide this material on a reading level that is appropriate to American college freshmen and sophomores. Second, unlike the few textbooks available on the subject at the moment, the present work takes into account, in a single volume, the practical needs of those programs, departments, institutes, or centers that either combine into one unit or split into the fields of African, African-American, or Pan-African Studies. In short, this introductory volume attempts to address and represent fairly and adequately the experience and contributions of blacks in Africa, the Americas, and other parts of the world, from the earliest times to the present, and provide a balanced view of the function of the disciplines and the perspectives of those scholars who have labored arduously to make them what they are today and who, by and large, determine their future course.

With these premises in mind, each chapter begins with an introductory statement and a list of the crucial concepts or terms pertinent to the topic, followed by a discussion of the content, as well as the theoretical framework or the controversial interpretations (if any) that have dominated the theme(s) covered, a succinct summary of the chapter, and some study questions to help the student grasp the thrust of the material and to generate class discussion. A short reference list, which may be consulted to get a fuller understanding of the topic and fulfill research interests, concludes each chapter.

The contributors are experienced and respected scholars in the fields of African, African-American, and Diaspora Studies, and provide, therefore, a perspective and content that are both relevant and accurate, consonant with the “state of the art” in their own disciplines. Others have been teachers of an introductory course for one or all three fields. The accrued advantage is that, as “toilers in the trenches and frontlines,” these contributors are not academics teaching in a platonic world but are classroom educators who, well aware of the needs and the levels of understanding of their students, have made the chapters readable and the content concise and realistic in relation to the common coverage time frame (usually one or two semesters or quarters), rejecting academic dogmatism, single
points of view, and tendencies of exclusiveness that have often marred similar academic undertakings.

For years, the editor and many of his colleagues in African-American, African, and Pan-African Studies have relied on one or two texts, for lack of better ones. Many of us, to be sure, have tolerated numerous shortcomings in most of the present introductory level textbooks. In general, these texts, without indexes, tend to be ideological, a pitfall the present textbook attempts to avoid or at least minimize. Since we are dealing with young minds, easily impressionable, we prefer a textbook that exposes the students not to a pontificating, dogmatic point of view, but to a variety of perspectives. Moreover, as the textbooks we have used so far focus primarily on the African-American experience and leave the African and the Caribbean diaspora Africans in the “tracks of the slave trade,” instructors find themselves constantly photocopying or adding supplementary reading materials in order to cover more comprehensively the aggregate experience of all peoples of African descent. Similar shortcomings apply to most textbooks on Africa which we have attempted to use in the past: they focus on Africa and fall short on the diaspora.

Although this work provides a discussion of the basic content, methodologies, and issues in Africana Studies, we realize that some chapters are more relevant than others to specific programs; that a few chapters are more complex in focus and style than most; and that, for some programs, adequate coverage may require two semesters or two quarters rather than one semester or one quarter. Whatever the circumstances, however, the role played by the instructor will be extremely crucial toward the successful use of the textbook. In fact, on certain occasions, only the instructor's specific guidance will allow students to discern what is important, as they attempt to fulfill the course requirements and satisfy any further interests they might develop during the course of the academic year.

Finally, we believe that, unless a superficial coverage of topics is tolerated (which goes against our training and academic standards), a multi-authored volume, in principle, has a better chance of doing justice to the totality of the black experience by combining the knowledge of many. Let it also be said that, to conform with new trends in the fields of African and African Diaspora Studies, the textbook explicitly avoids terms and expressions which elicit negative connotations, such as tribe (for ethnic group, society, or people), paganism, animism, and heathenism (for African traditional religion), brideprice (for bridewealth), huts (for homes or houses), negro (for African-American), pygmy (for BaMbuti, Twa), bushman (for Khoi, San), and natives, a term particularly preferred by the British colonial administrators (for Africans). The textbook is not only concerned with providing accurate information to students but also to sensitize (and not indoctrinate) them about the feelings of the people whose culture they are learning.

Insofar as the organization is concerned, the volume is divided into five parts, each with several chapters. Part I focuses on the disciplines that have given us our knowledge of the cultures and experiences of peoples of African descent. Part II traces the evolution and history of the black race and Part III deals with the status of black people and their relationships with each other and the rest of the world, at present, while outlining the challenges the black community is expected to face in the future. Part IV, on the one hand, looks at the specific contributions of black people in a wide array of areas. Part V, on the other, delves into some of the most significant aspects of the social life and values of the black communities scattered
part of the student’s repertoire of knowledge.

In conclusion, *Africana Studies: A Survey of Africa and The African Diaspora, 2nd Edition* literally introduces students of all racial and ethnic backgrounds to a multidisciplinary as well as an interdisciplinary study of the fields of African and African Diaspora Studies. It focuses on the interaction of cultures, particularly of black people, in the shaping of past and contemporary societies and on the methodologies and key interdisciplinary issues, themes, and problems, all of which provide legitimacy to the two academic fields. Ours is not, as it were, just a textbook on slavery, on colonialism, on racism and discrimination, or on the suffering and hardships of peoples of African origin and descent, or simply on their contributionist record. *Africana Studies* goes beyond that, as it probes into the two related fields and focuses on both the individual and aggregate experiences of black people, not in a vacuum or in isolation, but within the context of the cultural crisscrossing between peoples of African descent and the rest of human-kind, across time and space. *Africana Studies* is, therefore, a saga of both the pains and joys (and aspirations) of black people the world over and an exposé of the key to their future, not as a separate and monolithic group but as a dynamic, ever changing part of the world community, yet, with a uniqueness and a heritage worth preserving.