A History of Sub-Saharan Africa

In a trawl through the entire sweep of sub-Saharan history, the authors, both teachers of African history and experienced travelers to the region, have written an accessible and comprehensive introduction for students and general readers. The opening chapter on geography and climate frames the discussion, demonstrating how the environment has shaped the societies and cultures of those living in the region. Thereafter they describe the rise of states and empires in the classical period, the slave trade within Africa and beyond to the Americas, and the European conquest. The concluding section focuses on Africa in the twentieth century as it gains independence and searches for a new identity beyond colonialism. While the authors mull over the debates which have shaped the study of African history over the last decade, at the center of this story are the tragedies, triumphs and resilience of the African people. The book is illustrated with photographs, maps and sidebars which feature the salient points on either side of a debate, and lists of further reading for those who want to delve deeper.


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A History of Sub-Saharan Africa

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Preface

The following History of Sub-Saharan Africa was born after decades of gestation. It is the work of two historians who, between them, have been teaching Africa’s history to American undergraduates for the better part of four decades. As any honest professor of history will ruefully admit, those lecture notes become yellowed with age when not continually revised to incorporate new information and interpretations. This is particularly the case for the dynamic historiography of Africa. In the 1960s the efforts of African historians were focused on such questions as “Where did the Bantu come from?” “Did Africans resist, or collaborate with, European imperialists?” “Did colonial rule bring ruthless exploitation or beneficial development?” During the subsequent half-century these and myriad other questions have been addressed by historians, their compatriots in the social sciences, and even many scholars from the physical sciences in a never-ending search for the African past. Today new questions engage the attention of Africa’s scholars, who explore such issues as identity, popular culture, and the environment, to name but a few. This volume aspires to synthesize the work of the vast army of scholars, young and old, who continue to revise and broaden our understanding of the continent’s past.

We wish to give special thanks to Marigold Acland, the Senior Editor for the Middle East and Africa at Cambridge University Press, to Mary Starkey for her splendid copyediting, and to Steve Brown of UCSB, a talented cartographer (and a good friend), who produced this volume’s superb maps.

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Conversion table

1 mile = 1.61 kilometer
1 foot = 0.3 metre
1 inch = 2.54 centimeter
1 pound = 0.45 kilogram
1 ounce = 28.35 gram

100 degrees Fahrenheit = 37.78 degrees Celsius