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# Locating Africans on the World Stage: A Problem in World History\*

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THE study of world history reflects an effort to locate and interpret a past that connects to our manifestly global and interactive present. While global interpretations of the past can be located far back in time—as far as to myths of origin—world history became naturalized within the profession of history only fifty years ago, especially with the appearance in 1963 of William McNeill's *Rise of the West*. McNeill, in his comprehensive volume, set and achieved his own two goals: He interpreted the “human community” comprehensively and did so through application of standard historical practices of research and writing. This innovative work nevertheless drew on a deep if episodic tradition of world-historical writing. His early leadership, accompanied by the involvement of several other scholars in world-historical analysis, gave the field a start.<sup>1</sup>

In the succeeding fifty years, the world-historical literature advanced substantially in its analysis, its rhetoric, and its institutions. In analysis, scholars have relied on three dimensions of practice: comprehensiveness, disciplinary specialization, and coherence. As a result, the contending tensions of breadth, depth, and interpretive coherence make of world-historical writing a genre that includes synthesis but goes beyond

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<sup>1</sup> William H. McNeill, *The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963); see the review by H. R. Trevor-Roper, “Barbarians Were Often at the Gates,” *New York Times Book Review*, October 6, 1963, 1, 30.

synthesis to rely on disciplinary research and theoretical formulations. In rhetoric—the framing and presentation of historical studies—world historians have developed a presentational style that may be described as portrayal of the “world stage.” This stage, on which selected actors and structures interact, undergoes shifts in time and space to convey an interpretation of the larger world beyond the stage. Such analysis and rhetoric in world-historical writing arose through the efforts of key individuals but came to be reinforced through the formation of institutions such as associations, journals, and programs of study. With the coalescence of a world-historical literature reflecting these elements, one can now begin to speak of the maturation of world history as a field of historical studies.

Maturation, however, is never without its problems. The origins of world history continue to strain against contemporary global logic in a dialectical tension of what world history has been with what it is becoming. World history grew out of civilizational history, imperial history, and comparative history. It bears the traces of these origins in its continuing emphases on empires, long-distance trade, macro-cultural comparison, and great-power conflicts. In contrast, contemporary concerns with globalization bring attention to planetary interactions in cultural and economic issues. Within these limits, such other postwar historiographical trends as area studies scholarship, social history, and environmental history each contributed to the coalescence of world-historical studies. Today, world-historical analyses address issues and connections spilling in many directions beyond their inherited emphases.<sup>2</sup>

The expanded and maturing field of world history faces fundamental questions in the style of its analysis and in the rhetoric of its presentation. The definition of world history remains elusive: The field's scope is so wide that groups of its practitioners approach it in quite different fashions. The varying frameworks—known, for instance, as global, entangled, deep—contrast especially in geographic, temporal, and social scale. Methodological differences lead to distinctions among comparative, connective, and interactive approaches, while disciplinary subfields are also appearing within world history.<sup>3</sup> In rhetoric, too,

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<sup>2</sup> Journals publishing world-historical studies include: *Comparative Studies in Society and History*; *Itinerario*; *Journal of World History*; *International History Review*; *New Global Studies*; *Journal of Global History*; *World History Connected*; and *Asian Review of World Histories*.

<sup>3</sup> For a comprehensive exploration of the various world-historical approaches, see Diego Olstein, *Thinking History Globally* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014). On comparative history, see Micol Seigel, “Beyond Compare: Comparative Method after the Transnational Turn,” *Radical History Review* 91 (2005): 62–90; on connected histories, see Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Connected Histories: Notes toward a Reconfiguration of Early Modern

alternative approaches to presentation are in play, though with less explicit debate. They bring contrasting approaches to the audiences intended, the range of topics, and the dynamics of any world-historical interpretation.

Debates in world history, more clearly than at the national level, address not only the empirical record but also the alternative balances among perspectives. The multiple perspectives on numerous topics—among past historical protagonists as well as among contemporary academic analysts—complicate world history to the point of indeterminacy. Thus, the search for a definitive world-historical standpoint has ended.<sup>4</sup> World historians' accommodation to the inevitability of multiple perspectives, once achieved, became highly productive.<sup>5</sup>

World history developed away from an approach that gave primacy to politics, revising its scope to incorporate political change into a wider range of historical processes. For instance, two decades of focus on "the great divergence" have brought major interpretive advances in global

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Eurasia," *Modern Asian Studies* 31 (1997): 735–762; on world-historical connections, see Patrick Manning, *Navigating World History: Historians Create a Global Past* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003). Transnational history, a framework focusing on modifying national-historical literatures rather than the creation of a new and global field of historical study, arose more recently and developed more rapidly than world history. It can be seen as one of many approaches to world-historical study, though some of its proponents treat it as a substitute for world history. Akira Iriye and Pierre-Yves Saunier, eds., *The Palgrave Dictionary of Transnational History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Pierre-Yves Saunier, *Transnational History* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Still, despite the long polemic of the 1990s against Eurocentrism, world historians may not yet be sufficiently attentive to the pervasiveness of assumptions about racial and civilizational identity and patterns of social hierarchy. See James Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World: Geographical Diffusionism and Eurocentric History* (New York: Guilford Press, 1993); Immanuel Wallerstein, *The End of the World as We Know It: Social Science for the Twenty-First Century* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 168–184.

<sup>5</sup> Hendrik Van Loon, an early popularizer of world history, argued that the view of the world from the tower of Old Saint Lawrence Church in Rotterdam gave him a global perspective, while Leften Stavrianos later argued that world history should be interpreted as "the view from the moon." Van Loon, *The Story of Mankind* (New York: Cardinal Giant, 1952), ix–xii; Leften S. Stavrianos, Loretta Krieder Andrews, George I. Blanksten, Roger F. Hackett, Ella C. Leppert, Paul L. Murphy, and Lacey Baldwin Smith, *A Global History of Man* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1964). World historians today, implicitly renouncing any privileged standpoint for interpreting the past, have taken a step into a challenging reformulation of the philosophy of history: Leaders in this regard include global environmental historian John R. McNeill and Felipe Fernández-Armesto, who expanded from history of exploration to produce a wide range of studies. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun: An Environmental History of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Norton, 2000); McNeill, *Mosquito Empires: Ecology and War in the Greater Caribbean, 1620–1914* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Fernández-Armesto, *Amerigo: The Man Who Gave His Name to America* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2006); Fernández-Armesto, *Civilizations: Culture, Ambition, and the Transformation of Nature* (New York: Free Press, 2001).

economic history and in related fields of study.<sup>6</sup> These interpretations, while innovative and exciting, have not brought a world-historical consensus. What arises is a new global historical task: setting the balance among multiple perspectives on the past by applying appropriate criteria and practices.<sup>7</sup> The literature in world history, in the course of this new and important discussion, has developed great strengths.

I elaborate on these historiographical achievements in the text to follow. At the same time, the article offers a commentary on the world-historical literature from a particular standpoint—that of Africans and people of the African diaspora. In it I observe that people of Africa and the African diaspora appear only scantily in world-historical interpretations and ask why this should be so. The main interpretations of modern world history give brief references to the experience of black people—discussing enslavement, emancipation, decolonization, and civil rights campaigns—but stop short of situating these references in the central narratives of constructing the modern economy, national identity, governance, or knowledge and culture.<sup>8</sup> Demographically, this essay contrasts existing world-historical narratives with the substantial proportion of black people in world population—today's population of African descent, some 1.3 billion persons, is roughly one sixth of all humanity and exceeds the population of Europe or the Americas.

The categories of “Africans,” “black people,” and “African diaspora” have been historically constructed—playing on phenotypical variation through enslavement, imperialism, and cultural categorization from without; constructed by nationalist and antiracist struggles in response. The porous boundaries of such groupings reveal the historical construction and definitional ambiguity of race and civilization as historical categories—categories that we use at our peril but use nevertheless. W. E. B. Du Bois addressed this issue in writing *The Negro* (1915). He sought at once to deny the biological significance of race and to survey the history of

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<sup>6</sup> Kenneth Pomeranz, *The Great Divergence: China, Europe, and the Making of the Modern World Economy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient: Asian Economy in the Global Age* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrienting the Nineteenth Century in the Continuing Asian Age*, ed. Robert A. Denemark (Boulder, Colo.: Paradigm Publishers, 2014); Prasannan Parthasarathi, *Why Europe Grew Rich and Asia Did Not: Global Economic Divergence 1600–1850* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> An early hint of this issue arose in the 1950s, when the initial UNESCO-supported effort to create a world history nearly collapsed in the multiplicity of perspectives. In the words of Gilbert Allardyce, “Thus world history Unesco-style reduced to a kind of entitlements program in which everyone received a share of the past.” Allardyce, “Toward World History: American Historians and the Coming of the World History Course,” *Journal of World History* 1 (1990): 36.

<sup>8</sup> Some specifics are documented below.

peoples of sub-Saharan Africa and the diaspora. As he put it, "In this little book, then, we are studying the history of the darker part of the human family, which is separated from the rest of mankind by no absolute physical line but which nevertheless forms, as a mass, a social group distinct in history, appearance, and, to some extent, in spiritual gift."<sup>9</sup>

In the century since Du Bois wrote these words, we have learned much about genetics and have learned to speak of race and ethnicity in terms of the social construction of identities. The human genome, shared across the planet, evolves biologically at a glacial rate, while social evolution provokes formation of local characteristics at a more rapid pace. But the distinctions, both biological and social, develop in tension with the convergence brought by the countervailing forces of long-term common ancestry as well as short-term migration, interbreeding, and communication. As a result, human subgroups remain provisional and historical rather than essential or timeless.

Human discourse, far more than the forces of nature, constructs the boundaries that exaggerate social and biological differences. Discursive construction of discrete borders and subgroups runs roughshod over the fluidity of individual migration and adoption of multiple identities. Through accumulated acts of the will, the discourse of race, ethnicity, and social hierarchy creates race as a social fact and civilization as a social relationship. One discursive strategy draws a line and assigns people arbitrarily to one group or another (as "black" or "Western"); another strategy imposes a distinctive "mixed" group at the same frontier, so that children are attributed different identities than their parents (as with "mulattos" and even "hybrids"). Such discourse draws on differences constructed in earlier times and imposes them on future generations.

"Africa" arose as a Latin term for the Mediterranean lands of Rome's enemy, Carthage; the term became "Ifriqiya" under Arab rule. With time and especially with Portuguese voyages along the coast, Europeans expanded their term "Africa" to the whole continent. As the place name expanded in its application, a racial component joined it: the term "African" came to be applied to people of sub-Saharan Africa, though far less so to the people of North Africa.<sup>10</sup> Through these sequential

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<sup>9</sup> Du Bois, *The Negro* (New York: Henry Holt, 1915). Thus, I use racial and ethnic terms, assuming them to be at once clear and problematic: see Patrick Manning, *The African Diaspora: A History through Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 11–16.

<sup>10</sup> As enslavement and the African diaspora grew, migrants to the Americas were known as Africans, blacks, and by labels given to "nations" from specific regions, such as "Nago" and "Congo." For migrants across the Indian Ocean, the terms "Habshi" and "Zanj" came to be used commonly.

discursive shifts, people of Negroid physical characteristics from sub-Saharan Africa and their descendants came to be labeled as “African” and “black.” Those within the line defined by “black” or “African” were especially liable to enslavement or, later, were vulnerable to discrimination reserved for descendants of slaves. These terms reflect the racial and civilizational characteristics often assumed to be carried by black people wherever they go.

Global-scale writing on Africa and Africans reflects a paradox in world historiography. Studies in world history, in their comprehensive approach, have insisted on recognition of Africans and the African diaspora.<sup>11</sup> Beyond formal inclusion of Africans, however, the literature refrains from detailed investigation of the continent, its people, and its emigrants. Portuguese voyages around the African continent are narrated with emphasis on trade with India, the lives of African captives in the Americas appear briefly on the global stage, and political and cultural transformations of the African continent remain in the background from the eighteenth century forward. While one might have been able to argue fifty years ago that information on the African past was unavailable, such an argument is no longer plausible.

This critical review builds toward the construction of alternative global historical narratives. The article’s next section articulates the strengths that have driven the world-historical literature to its recent achievements—but also reinforced the persistence of earlier limitations. Then the article documents a century of theoretical and empirical advances in history of black people, confirms the neglect of Africans in world-historical discourse with attention to the notions of initiative and response, and synthesizes these steps with examples of world-historical narratives that rely on the available record in black history. A concluding section suggests implications of this exercise for the study of world history.

#### CHARACTERISTICS OF WORLD-HISTORICAL ANALYSIS

World historiography expanded during the 1990s to become a lively literature of interacting studies. The preceding, concise set of key works, from senior-level globalist scholars, came then to be supplemented with works by mid-career and even junior scholars.<sup>12</sup> Underlying the expan-

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<sup>11</sup> Philip D. Curtin, “Depth, Span, and Relevance,” *American Historical Review* 89 (1984): 1–9.

<sup>12</sup> Citations in this section are drawn especially from the years after 1990, as the world-

sion of a world history specialization lay emergent practices setting its analytical priorities on comprehensiveness, disciplinary specialization, and coherence.<sup>13</sup> First, world historians, in setting their historical questions, tend to cast their net broadly. Teachers and researchers in world history, while they encounter the challenging question of what to leave out in offering interpretations, maintain a basic impulse toward *comprehensiveness*. World historians put substantial effort into emphasizing connections among issues, giving attention to wider spaces, different periods of time, related topics, and varying scales of aggregation. World history has already developed active subfields in the study of empire, global economy, social movements, environment, health, migration, and others.

A second priority of world historians, complementary to the first, is the inclusion of *disciplinary specialization* in their studies. That is, since the wide scope of global studies risks creation of a synthesis so broad as to skim over essential detail, world historians seek to explicate and verify their interpretations through delving deeply into selected disciplinary knowledge. World historians seek to draw on specialized regional and disciplinary scholarship and resources, at multiple scales, to minimize oversimplification. Alfred Crosby's path breaking *Columbian Exchange* relied on biological analysis to convey a new paradigm in trans-Atlantic relations. Lauren Benton constructed her analysis of legal regimes in the early modern world by focusing on legal exchanges at frontiers.<sup>14</sup>

A third analytical problem on which world historians have focused is that of *coherence*. The wide-ranging efforts at comprehensiveness and

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historical literature expanded. Key world-historical works of the 1990s that addressed the post-1500 era include Giovanni Arrighi, *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (London: Verso, 1994); Blaut, *The Colonizer's Model of the World*; K. N. Chaudhuri, *Asia before Europe: Economy and Civilisation of the Indian Ocean from the Rise of Islam to 1750* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Frederick Cooper, Florencia E. Mallon, Steve J. Stern, Allen F. Isaacman, and William Roseberry, *Confronting Historical Paradigms: Peasants, Labor, and the Capitalist World System in Africa and Latin America* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Philip D. Curtin, *The Rise and Fall of the Plantation Complex: Essays in Atlantic History* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Michael Geyer and Charles Bright, "World History in a Global Age," *American Historical Review* 100 (1995): 1034–1060.

<sup>13</sup> This statement of the framework of contemporary world-historical analysis, while assembled inductively, echoes earlier frameworks. The work of the Annales School, from the insights of Lucien Febvre through the work of Fernand Braudel, pursued an interactive *histoire totale*. Karl Marx's vision of "totality" in human society, as restated by György Lukács, also required a balance of contending types of analysis. The difference at present, however, is that world-historical analysis is carried on by a larger and more diverse group of historians.

<sup>14</sup> Alfred W. Crosby, *The Columbian Exchange: Biological and Cultural Consequences of 1492* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1972); Lauren Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures: Legal Regimes in World History, 1400–1900* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2002).



the occasional depth of disciplinary specialization leave open the question of whether a work of world history is scattered and eclectic or whether it identifies a new level of coherence at a global scale. World historians work to model their analyses, characterizing the elements and processes of the historical situation. Even then, they face choices on how to explain processes of social change, whether through cause-and-effect relations, interactive feedback, or correlations. The search for coherence in world history has led implicitly and occasionally explicitly toward the adoption of a systems framework for analyzing the functioning and interaction of human societies.<sup>15</sup>

For authors, presenting world history to readers brings challenges as serious as those of analysis. The rhetoric of world history, while rarely debated explicitly, has nonetheless made steps toward escaping the constraints of national outlooks. For more than a century, historians had polished styles of writing aimed at the national identity of their readers. For world historians, such rhetorical devices as using New York to symbolize all of the United States are of little relevance; they have had to decide whether to write to a national audience for world history or seek to create a global standpoint. What is emerging is the rhetorical device of the *world stage*. The *world stage* is the representation, on the pages of a book or article, of successive portions of the world. The scenes are selected by space, time, topic, and scale. The narrative must convey the drama of each scene yet also convey its significance for the *wider world*—the global domains beyond those on stage in the work.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Systems frameworks, in general, address thinking across boundaries and over time. One way to express the logic of world history and its multiple perspectives is to postulate the existence of a human system, including all human societies and human-natural interactions (as in climate, health, and resources). From this perspective, world history addresses interactions and systemic behavior across space, time, topic, and scale. For a review of recent advances in systems analysis, see John H. Miller and Scott E. Page, *Complex Adaptive Systems: An Introduction to Computational Models of Social Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007). More specifically, “world-systems analysis,” founded by Immanuel Wallerstein, has led to considerable analysis within history and historical sociology, but it is only one of many possible applications of systemic thinking to historical topics. Wallerstein, *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004). See also James Grier Miller, *Living Systems* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1978).

<sup>16</sup> The “world stage” conveys a provisional narrative, a large-scale story set firmly in context of a wider world. In contrast, a “master narrative” assumes that the story unfolding on the author’s stage is definitive in setting the terms for processes in the wider world. For works that are advancing the device of the world stage in practice, see Yuval Noah Harari, *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* (New York: Harper, 2015); Sebouh Aslanian, *From the Indian Ocean to the Mediterranean: The Global Trade Network of the Armenian Merchants from New Julfa* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011); Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller, (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014); see also Manning, *The African Diaspora*.

Given that there are so many perspectives in study of world history, how are scholars to combine them and give coherence to an understanding of the past? The very success of world-historical studies in recognizing the multiplicity of historical perspectives suggests an apparent indeterminate or arbitrary character for overall interpretation. Do we displace political history and replace it with social and environmental history? Do we seek a new balance among them? These are choices for a mature field of study. For instance, the impact of globalization during the 1990s heightened historians' interest in large-scale historical interpretation. Then, looking the other way, world historians became interested in the place of localized communities in the global scheme.<sup>17</sup> The latter trend did not expand much, and world historians continued to give relatively modest attention to social history, despite its growing importance in historical studies overall.<sup>18</sup> In sum, the issue of multiple perspectives has become a historiographical nexus: In addition to exploring each set of contested ideas, one must consider the general problem of multiple perspectives.<sup>19</sup>

Debates in world history have developed into lively discussions and, in some cases, whole new controversies. Migration history, long phrased as "immigration" history in national contexts, is now developing a highly evolved global narrative of migration. In this process, the concept of diaspora has now been recognized, through the world history literature, as a substantial concept for modern social scientific analysis.<sup>20</sup> Debates over global environmental history and global his-

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<sup>17</sup> The idea of multiple scales in history caught on much more slowly than that of planetary analysis. For early efforts, see A. G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History* (New York: Norton, 2002); Hopkins, ed., *Global History: Interactions between the Universal and the Local* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006); Patrick Manning, ed., *World History: Global and Local Interactions* (Princeton, N.J.: Markus Wiener, 2006).

<sup>18</sup> The work of E. P. Thompson set much of the agenda for social-historical research, especially his emphasis on working-class agency. Two leading world historians carried on campaigns to bring social history into world history. Peter Stearns, long-term editor of the *Journal of Social History*, edits and writes in a Routledge series on themes in world history, while Peter Gran has written two substantial monographs applying social-history analysis at global scales. E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963); Peter Stearns, *Childhood in World History* (New York: Routledge, 2006); Peter Gran, *Rise of the Rich: A New View of Modern World History* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2009).

<sup>19</sup> As indicated in note 16, one way to express the logic of world history and its multiple perspectives is to postulate the existence of a human system, including all human societies and human-natural interactions (as in climate, health, and resources). From this perspective, world history addresses interactions and systemic behavior across space, time, topic, and scale. Miller and Page, *Complex Adaptive Systems*.

<sup>20</sup> Only in the 1970s did the concept of "diaspora" begin to be applied beyond the Jewish and Greek migrant communities out of which it developed. On migration, see Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, eds., *Globalising Migration History: The Eurasian Experience*

tory of health have launched major new fields of discussion, each with implications for localities in global context.<sup>21</sup> In addition, world historians have developed significantly new and global perspectives on issues long under consideration in other segments of the historical literature. Among old issues reconsidered, the study of empire, while still dominated by studies of individual empires, has now expanded to comparisons and narratives at a global level. The comparative study of revolutions, long a concern of historians, has developed new insights in its world-historical version. On the other hand, studies of family in history, while they have advanced greatly in local and regional studies, have yet to develop a position of strength in world-historical analysis.<sup>22</sup> In sum, the growing literature in world history displays strength but also unevenness. The recurring encounter with multiple perspectives on the past has brought productive new insights. But it has also fueled the adoption of certain oversimplified or myopic perspectives.

Yet it is surprising that such a thriving field, even with its inevitable imbalances, should address disproportionately small attention to the history of Africa and the African diaspora. One can imagine at least four sorts of reasons for this pattern, though most of the arguments are easily dismissed. That is, one could imagine that Africans lacked the biological capacity to contribute on an equal level to historical experience. Or one could imagine that Africans were limited not by genetic but by social inferiority, if their institutions were structured to inhibit historical agency. Third, one could imagine the information on the black past

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(16th–21st Centuries) (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order: Asian Migration and the Globalization of Borders* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2008). On diaspora, see Donna Gabaccia, *Italy's Many Diasporas* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2000); Robin Cohen, *Global Diasporas: An Introduction* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997).

<sup>21</sup> On environment, see McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*; John F. Richards, *The Unending Frontier: An Environmental History of the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change and Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013); and John L. Brooke, *Climate Change and the Course of Global History: A Rough Journey* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014). In history of health, see James L. A. Webb, Jr., *Humanity's Burden: A Global History of Malaria* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); George Dehner, *Influenza: A Century of Science and Public Health Response* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012).

<sup>22</sup> On empire, see Jane Burbank and Frederick Cooper, *Empires in World History: Power and the Politics of Difference* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011); on social movements, see Jack Goldstone, *Revolution and Rebellion in the Early Modern World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993); on family history, see Wally Seccombe, *A Millennium of Family Change: Feudalism to Capitalism in Northwestern Europe* (London: Verso, 1992).

simply to be unavailable. Fourth, the pattern might result from the way that world historians set up their analysis.

The first three of these possibilities can be presumed to be invalid, based on the current state of knowledge. Recent developments in the natural sciences have now confirmed the remarkable uniformity of human individuals in genome, psychology, and intelligence, thus calling into question the inherent value of social hierarchy and group categorization.<sup>23</sup> Second, social sciences, while giving primary attention to large and complex organizations, have yet to confirm that some families or societies are more effective than others.<sup>24</sup> Third, as will be documented in detail in the next section, the record of historical documents and interpretations on Africa and the African diaspora is more than sufficiently rich to show the parallels with other racial or civilizational groups.

Thus we are left to suppose that the likely source of uneven historical treatment of people of African descent is world historians' logic and their practices of modeling the past. To frame this discussion, I begin with the reminder that world historians specialize in history with broad scope. This may be defined as horizontal or geographic scope and vertical scales, from commoners to elites. Tracing the connections and disconnections, in horizontal and vertical terms, is central to the work of world historians.

Such horizontal categories as race and civilization, when combined with vertical or elite-centered visions of innovation, yield a model dividing human society into many discrete segments. When combined with a vision of change treating innovation as infrequent and centered at elite levels, the resulting models suggest that only a few segments of society have the agency to bring about social change.<sup>25</sup>

Notions of civilization and social strata are as problematic as are those of race. I have prioritized race in defining the topic of this study, yet I seek to show how notions of civilization and social strata are entangled with those of race. Further, for a world conceived to be divided by race,

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<sup>23</sup> R. L. Cann, Mark Stoneking, and Allan C. Wilson, "Mitochondrial DNA and Human Evolution," *Nature* 325 (1987): 31–36.

<sup>24</sup> Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis, Steven B. Webb, and Barry R. Weingast, eds., *In the Shadow of Violence: Politics, Economics, and the Problems of Development* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>25</sup> As an example of the restraints brought by civilizational thinking, when I circulated an earlier version of this essay, entitled "Black Modernity," I sought to pose the question of the place of black people in world historical studies with reference to an overall, global modernity. What I learned from readers' reports was that modernity was treated as distinctive for each continental, civilizational, or racial group, so that a global assessment of modernity seemed inconceivable.

civilization, and social strata, these categories can be connected so as to suggest that some races and civilizations have ample elite strata, while others consist almost entirely of commoners. If one then adds notions of initiative and response such that innovation is scarce among commoners but facilitated among elites, one may accommodate to views in which a few elite groups are enabled to launch initiatives while most others are put in the position of responding.<sup>26</sup>

The present essay, based on presumptions of underlying human equality, explores the place of people of African descent in the current literature on the last half-millennium of world history.<sup>27</sup> World-historical attention to multiple perspectives has brought important interpretive advance, but has been incompletely pursued. Underlying the imbalance in writing on global topics, I argue, is a scholarly prioritization of elite and civilizational perspectives—stemming from a one-sided understanding of human innovation.<sup>28</sup> The result is a paradox in which global historiography, in seeking to develop broader and more interactive ways of portraying the past, also develops new arguments that marginalize the African past and the role of diaspora in modern history. The imperial history on which world history has drawn relies heavily on assumptions of elite initiative in launching historical change, even though social historians have shown amply the significance of social agency within subaltern communities and even the mechanisms by which such agency brings large-scale social change. Meanwhile, the continuing acceptance of racial and civilizational boundaries meant that the expanded literature on black history came to be known within black communities and by specialized scholars but not much beyond. Thus, the perspective of Africa and the African diaspora suggests that elite and civilizational bias may be limiting the breadth of world-historical analysis.

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<sup>26</sup> This vision assumes that innovation is rare in human society and that history pursues the search for rare but formative innovations. A contrary assumption is that innovation is common and that it arises in response to conditions encountered at any level or in any region. In this case, agency is spread throughout society, and history pursues the search for innovations and responses at all levels of society. These sets of assumptions, while greatly oversimplified, nonetheless indicate distinct approaches to the history of global social change.

<sup>27</sup> The topic of the representation of Africans in world history could reasonably be discussed in a longer time frame, going as far back as to the origin of our species, but the post-1500 framework is adopted here since most of the historical literature lies within this time frame.

<sup>28</sup> For modern times, the term “civilization” refers to macrosocial groupings, encompassing multiple societies, states, and language groups, but perhaps sharing a religious tradition. For ancient times, the term refers to discrete, hierarchically organized, urban-centered societies.

## COLONIALISM, DECOLONIZATION, AND HISTORICAL STUDY OF BLACK PEOPLE

The great postwar impulse of decolonization—bringing independence for Asian nations beginning in 1945, African nations beginning in 1955, and Caribbean nations beginning in 1962—unleashed a flood of historical and theoretical writing among formerly colonized peoples. In this era of expanded citizenship, historical studies of black communities proliferated in a dramatic, worldwide recovery of a neglected past. Research and publication in history of black peoples filled in gaps in the empirical record and challenged the social theory that had minimized the agency of black people. The new research contributed to retrieval of the historical past in the service of constructing new nations (in Africa), restructuring national histories to highlight the previously invisible black contribution (in the diaspora), and defining an encompassing history of the African diaspora. The research and publication came especially out of black communities, as expanding opportunities in education allowed the recording of community histories in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, North America, and the expanding black communities of European cities and Asian workplaces.<sup>29</sup> In Africa and Latin America, high schools and universities expanded; in the United States as elsewhere, black enrollment shot upward in schools at all levels. European and American university programs in area studies, which had already emerged for Asia and Latin America based on policy concerns, expanded to the study of Africa; a somewhat parallel wave of Black Studies programs arose in the late 1960s, although more in response to community demand than to the concerns of policymakers.

The new historical studies retrieved and amplified the heritage of works by black authors published from the sixteenth century forward. Writings composed in Africa and Europe were recovered, disseminated, and supplemented by an expanding sequence of authors from within black communities or in close contact with them during the era of emancipation.<sup>30</sup> By the mid-twentieth century these works had

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<sup>29</sup> While academic authors in the era of decolonization were mostly white, blacks were able to enter academic life in larger numbers in this era, and black writers continued to publish historical studies in nonacademic venues.

<sup>30</sup> Citations in this section refer especially to works published in the era of decolonization (1940s–1980s), but also works of the preceding colonial era. West African writers included ‘Abd al-Rahman ibn ‘Abd Allah Sa‘di, *Tarikh al-Sudan* (ca. 1655); Mahmud Kati, *Tarikh al-Fattash* (ca. 1664); and Ahmad Baba (d. 1627). On black writers in early modern Europe, see Dieudonné Gnammankou and Yao Modzinou, eds., *Les Africains et leurs descendants en Europe avant le XXe siècle* (Toulouse: MAT Editions, 2008).

expanded to include visions of the black world, interconnected analyses of social change, and sociological studies of plantation and urban life. Here, the writings of W. E. B. Du Bois, C. L. R. James, and Eric Williams stand out as particularly formative.<sup>31</sup> Postwar publications included the first successful survey texts on African American history and then on African and Caribbean history.<sup>32</sup> Studies of imperial and plantation dominance of black communities came to be supplemented by interactive studies of African trade and politics and then by chronicles of black nationalism throughout the diaspora. The search for African agency led researchers to document African kingdoms, social orders, commerce, and technology.<sup>33</sup>

The studies of plantations hit a peak with the controversy over Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman's *Time on the Cross* (1974), at once a leading study in economic history and an apparent justification of slavery. A census of the Atlantic slave trade launched a huge research effort that ultimately linked economic and demographic studies of the four Atlantic continents. As of the 1970s, historical monographs and interpretations were appearing on every section of the black world.<sup>34</sup>

<sup>31</sup> For global visions, see Edward W. Blyden, *Christianity, Islam and the Negro Race* (London: W. B. Whittingham, 1887); W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Negro* (New York: H. Holt, 1915); Du Bois, *The World and Africa: An Inquiry into the Part Which Africa Has Played in World History* (New York: Viking, 1947); and Cheikh-Anta Diop, *Nations nègres et culture* (Paris: Editions Africaines, 1955). For interconnected social change, see C. L. R. James, *Black Jacobins: Toussaint Louverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Dial Press, 1938); W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction: An Essay toward a History of the Part Which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860–1880* (New York: Russell and Russell, 1935); and Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944). For sociological studies, see W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study* (Philadelphia: Published for the University, 1899); Gilberto Freyre, *The Masters and the Slaves: A study in the Development of Brazilian Civilization*, trans. Samuel Putnam (New York: Knopf, 1956); Fernando Ortiz, *Cuban Counterpoint: Tobacco and Sugar*, trans. Harriet de Onís (New York: Knopf, 1947); E. Franklin Frazier, *The Negro Family in the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1939); St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1945). For a review of African-American historical writing, see Maghan Keita, *Race and the Writing of History: Riddling the Sphinx* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>32</sup> John Hope Franklin, *From Slavery to Freedom: A History of American Negroes* (New York, A. Knopf, 1947); Roland Oliver and John D. Fage, *A Short History of Africa* (Baltimore, Md.: Penguin, 1962); William Claypole and John Robottom, *Caribbean Story* (London: Longman, 1981); and Joseph Ki-Zerbo, *Histoire d'Afrique noire, d'hier à demain* (Paris: Hatier, 1972).

<sup>33</sup> K. O. Dike, *Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830–1885* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956); B. A. Ogot, *Building on the Indigenous: Selected Essays 1981–1998* (Kisumu: Angange Press, 1998); Jan Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966); A. G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London: Longman, 1973).

<sup>34</sup> Foundational works include Robert W. Fogel and Stanley L. Engerman, *Time on the Cross: The Economics of American Negro Slavery* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974); Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1969);

Frederick Bowser's 1974 study of Africans in early colonial Peru was one of the strongest contributions of that era to social history. A. I. Asiwaju's study of cross-border communities documented some of the many breaches of colonial African borders. Walter Rodney's appropriation of the notion of underdevelopment enabled him to present a trans-historical interpretation of Africa and its interrelations with Europe. Studies of pan-African ideas and action linked regions on both sides of the Atlantic from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries.<sup>35</sup>

The literature in black history expanded on four continents, in English, French, Portuguese, Spanish, and other languages.<sup>36</sup> Similarly, the studies of history and culture spanned all main religious groupings—Christianity (Catholic, Protestant, Monophysite, and Pentecostal), Islam (with a focus on Sufi orders), and religions of African heritage in Africa and the diaspora.<sup>37</sup> Small publishing houses and historical journals appeared in many regions. Not all survived, but the published

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Joseph E. Harris, *The African Presence in Asia: Consequences of the East African Slave Trade* (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1971); Edward A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves: Changing Pattern of International Trade in East Central Africa to the later nineteenth century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); James Walvin, *Black and White: The Negro and English Society, 1555–1945* (London: Penguin, 1973); Jean-Louis Miège, *Le Maroc* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1950); Bethwell A. Ogot, *History of the Southern Luo: Volume I, Migration and Settlement, 1500–1900*, (Nairobi: East African Publishing House, 1967). In addition, numerous unpublished theses written at African and New World universities, some of them quite valuable, await digitization and inclusion in the broader corpus of research.

<sup>35</sup> Key works of this era included Frederick Bowser, *The African Slave in Colonial Peru, 1524–1650* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1974); Colin Palmer, *Slaves of the White God: Blacks in Mexico, 1570–1650* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1976); Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London: Bogle-L'Ouverture Publications, 1972); A. I. Asiwaju, *Western Yorubaland under Colonial Rule: A Comparative Analysis of French and British Colonialism* (London: Longman, 1976); Elikia M'Bokolo, *Mirambo: Un grand chef contre les trafiquants d'esclaves* (Paris: ABC, 1976); B. W. Higman, *Slave Population and Economy in Jamaica, 1807–1834* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1976); J. Ayodele Langley, *Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, 1900–1945: A Study in Ideology and Social Classes* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975).

<sup>36</sup> Laënnec Hurbon, *Comprendre Haïti: Essai sur l'état, la nation, la culture* (Paris: Karthala, 1987); Nina S. de Friedemann and Jaime Arocha, *De sol a sol: Génesis, transformación y presencia de los negros en Colombia* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1986); Luiz Felipe de Alencastro, *O Trato dos Videntes: Formação do Brasil no Atlântico Sul. Séculos XVI e XVII* (São Paulo: Companhia das Letras, 2000). Other languages of publication included Arabic, Dutch, German, Swahili, Amharic, Italian, and Russian.

<sup>37</sup> João José Reis, *Death Is a Festival: Funeral Rites and Rebellion in Nineteenth-Century Brazil* [1991], trans. H. Sabrina Gledhill (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Jean Copans, *Les marabouts de l'arachide: La Confrérie mouride et les paysans du Sénégal* (Paris: Le Sycomore, 1980); James Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); James Lorand Matory, *Sex and the Empire That Is No More: Gender and the Politics of Metaphor in Oyo Yoruba Religion* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1994).



works remain part of the historical record. Larger projects began in the 1980s, including the *Cambridge History of Africa*, the UNESCO *General History of Africa*, and publications of the papers of Booker T. Washington and Marcus Garvey; later came a UNESCO history of the Caribbean.<sup>38</sup> Monographic studies on numerous social issues grew in number during the 1980s, followed by documentary collections—especially for the United States and Anglophone Africa, but ultimately for every region of the African diaspora.<sup>39</sup> Studies of art and culture poured forth in these years; recognition of the literary skills of black and African writers deepened with the award of five Nobel Prizes for literature in the seven years from 1986 to 1993, to Wole Soyinka, Naguib Mahfouz, Nadine Gordimer, Derek Walcott, and Toni Morrison.<sup>40</sup>

Theoretical debates during the era of decolonization brought retreat for racial and civilizational theory. Notions of “race” suffered first, followed more erratically by declines in scholarly belief in the analytical integrity of “empire” and “civilization,” although with new formulations commonly replacing the old. This transition can be seen through the rise and decline of several hierarchical theories. Some theories argued that differences in the land or climate of Africa (or the tropical lowlands of the Americas) made it inherently difficult for black societies to advance.<sup>41</sup> Modernization theory, a generalized and somewhat sanitized

<sup>38</sup> J. D. Fage and Roland Oliver, eds., *The Cambridge History of Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975–1986); *General History of Africa* (Paris: Unesco, 1978–1993); Lewis Harlan, ed., *The Booker T. Washington Papers* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press 1972–1984); Robert A. Hill, ed., *The Marcus Garvey and Universal Negro Improvement Association Papers* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983–1995); *General History of the Caribbean* (Paris: Unesco, 2003–2004).

<sup>39</sup> Jan S. Hogendorn and Marion Johnson, *Shell Money of the Slave Trade* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1986); John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Boubaçar Barry, *Senegambia and the Atlantic Slave Trade* [1988], trans. Ayi Kwei Armah (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Hilary McD. Beckles, *Natural Rebels: A Social History of Enslaved Black Women in Barbados* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1989). For documentary collections, see James Walvin, *The Black Presence: A Documentary History of the Negro in England, 1555–1860* (London: Orbach and Chambers, 1971); John Hope Franklin and August Meier, eds., *Black Leaders of the Twentieth Century* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982).

<sup>40</sup> John Holm, *Pidgins and Creoles*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1980); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1983); Richard J. Powell, *African and Afro-American Art: Call and Response* (Chicago: Field Museum of Natural History, 1984); Sterling Stuckey, *Slave Culture: Nationalist Theory and the Foundations of Black America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987).

<sup>41</sup> Regarding the productivity of African land, the continent’s population had grown by a factor of four yet by the end of the twentieth century was still able to feed itself. Marvin P. Miracle and Bruce Fetter, “Backward-Sloping Labor-Supply Functions and African Economic Behavior,” *Economic Development and Cultural Change* 18 (1970): 240–251.

defense of social hierarchy, argued that most societies were mired in traditional structures and needed to be led forward by elites socialized in the ways of the Europeans.<sup>42</sup> In familial terms, Daniel Patrick Moynihan famously argued in the 1960s that African American families were sociopathic and that single motherhood condemned a whole social group to inferiority.<sup>43</sup> At times such theses encountered glancing challenges, as when Africanist anthropologist Jacques Maquet tried to redefine “civilization” in terms of ways of life rather than in terms of high culture.<sup>44</sup> At other times, the hierarchical paradigms met with frontal attack, as in psychology where Leon Kamin showed statistical errors in studies claiming to document the heritability of intelligence. Physiology and medicine produced recurring demonstrations of a trans-racial human physiological equality that greatly counterbalanced the small though persistent physiological specificities of various social groups.<sup>45</sup>

A persistent aspect of the expanding literature on black history was attention to the agency of black individuals and communities, linked to a philosophical position on human initiative and response. Elite-oriented approaches in historical studies, simply modeled, treated initiative and innovation as rare and largely restricted to socially or culturally privileged arenas; most of humanity was left in the position of responding to elite initiatives or, worse yet, failing to respond.<sup>46</sup> In contrast, one may argue that every initiative is in response to existing conditions, and

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<sup>42</sup> On modernization, see Talcott Parsons and Neil Smelser, *Economy and Society* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1956); Manfred Halpern, *The Politics of Social Change in the Middle East and North Africa* (Santa Monica, Calif.: Rand, 1963). W. W. Rostow's *Stages of Economic Growth* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1960) was a policy-oriented version, adopted by the U.S. government in its Alliance for Progress. For one last try at formal civilizational analysis, see Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?* (Cambridge, Mass.: Olin Institute, 1993).

<sup>43</sup> Daniel Patrick Moynihan, *The Negro Family: The Case for National Action* (Washington, D.C.: Office of Planning and Research, United States Department of Labor, 1965). Later on, in the early days of the AIDS epidemic, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control briefly identified Haitian nationality as a disease factor, breaking all the rules of science by conflating race and nationality in the explanation of an individual-level pathology.

<sup>44</sup> Maquet attributed Africans with civilizations of the hoe, pastoralists, hunters. Jacques Maquet, *Civilizations of Black Africa*, trans. Joan Rayfield, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972).

<sup>45</sup> Leon J. Kamin, *The Science and Politics of I.Q.* (Potomac, Md.: Erlbaum, 1974). Kamin showed that Cyril Burt had reported impossibly close correlations of intelligence in twin studies. Kamin later went on to argue that the inheritability of intelligence must be close to zero. One consequence of the decline of racial theory was that positivist, universalist, individual-level theory gained new support. Thus rational choice theory arose in an era when racial and civilizational theory declined.

<sup>46</sup> Arnold J. Toynbee's extensive and influential historical synthesis, emphasizing civilizational rise and fall, articulated an approach to large-scale history that privileged elite initiative. Toynbee, *A Study of History*, 12 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1933–1961).

that innovation is common rather than rare at all levels of society. The question then becomes whether the innovative responses to existing (or changing) conditions are effective or not. Interest in this question was reflected in numerous studies of black inventors.<sup>47</sup>

In sum, by 1990, a great expansion of historical studies had accumulated for Africa and its diaspora. From this point, the interpretive landscape shifted: The 1990s brought expanded efforts to link the elements of black history, showing ties across regions and disciplines. Historical publication and political activism grew in parallel among the African-descended populations of South Africa, Latin America, the Indian Ocean region, and Europe. South American nations, especially Venezuela and Colombia, gave formal recognition to African ancestry as part of the national heritage, and thereby brought substantial change in education, law, and public recognition.<sup>48</sup> The African heritage in the Indian Ocean began to gain attention equivalent to that of Western Africa and the Atlantic.<sup>49</sup> The substantial black population of North Africa and the Sahara reentered the historical record, helping to clarify relations among that region, sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and the Middle East.<sup>50</sup> Beyond regional specificity, links among regions of the black world began to gain increasing attention—notably through Michael Gomez's tracing of the links of Africans to the American South and then again for the heritage of Islam in the Americas.<sup>51</sup> Through

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<sup>47</sup> Examples abound, but see Louis Haber, *Black Pioneers of Science and Education* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1970); and Silvio Bedini, *The Life of Benjamin Banneker* (New York: Scribner, 1971).

<sup>48</sup> Citations from this point to the end of this section identify the work, especially from 1990, in which historians of Africa and its diaspora located larger patterns in the past. Peter Wade, "El movimiento negro en Colombia," *América Negra* 5 (1993): 173–191.

<sup>49</sup> Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London: James Currey, 1987); Gwyn Campbell, ed., *Structure of Slavery in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia* (London: Frank Cass, 2004); and Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Eaton, eds., *Slavery and South Asian History* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006).

<sup>50</sup> On Europe, see Allison Blakely, *Blacks in the Dutch World: The Evolution of Racial Imagery in a Modern Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); Peter Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren* (Hamburg: Junius, 1993); Jayne Ifekwunigwe, *Scattered Belongings: Cultural Paradoxes of "Race," Nation and Gender* (London: Routledge, 1999). On the Middle East, see Ehud Toledano, *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, 1840–1890* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1982); William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). On North Africa, see Eve Troutt Powell, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain, and the Mastery of the Sudan* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); and Chouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012).

<sup>51</sup> Michael Gomez, *Exchanging Our Country Marks: The Transformation of African Identities in the Colonial and Antebellum South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Gomez, *Black Crescent: The Experience and Legacy of African Muslims in the Americas*

recognition of such links in Africa and overseas, the notion of an “African diaspora” expanded in the 1990s from an academic formulation to become a broad and powerful popular identity.<sup>52</sup> With time, the similarities and connections in history of African-descended people across this wide region provided the basis for a reinterpretation of the African diaspora in terms of three great regions in historical evolution: Africa, the Americas, and Eurasia. Black history, long interconnected implicitly through response to racialized discrimination, now explicitly affirmed a world-historical vision of the past.

As of the early twenty-first century, this expanding literature reflected the continuing accumulation of scholarly explorations in numerous directions—innovative in some cases, reviewing long-debated issues in others. The literature in black history included achievements in the established genres of biography and political narrative.<sup>53</sup> At the same time, it brought pioneering application of multidisciplinary methods, including advances in oral history, quantitative history, social anthropology, archaeology, linguistics, and folklore.<sup>54</sup> Altogether, a literature of immense size and wide range on the history of Africa and the African diaspora, with particular clarity at community and regional levels, is now at the disposal of historians. The problem addressed here is the recognition and consultation of that historiography by those writing at a broader level.

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(New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005). Richard J. Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997).

<sup>52</sup> For key articles on conceptualization of the African diaspora, see Carlton Wilson, “Conceptualizing the African Diaspora,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa, and the Middle East* 17, no. 2 (1997): 118–122; Palmer, “Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora”; Robin D. G. Kelley, “‘But a Local Phase of a World Problem’: Black History’s Global Vision, 1883–1950,” *Journal of American History* 86 (1999): 1045–1077; Brent Hayes Edwards, “The Uses of Diaspora,” *Social Text* 66 (2001): 45–73; Patrick Manning, “Africa and the African Diaspora: New Directions of Study,” *Journal of African History* 44 (2003), 487–506.

<sup>53</sup> Taylor Branch, *Parting the Waters: America in the King Years, 1954–63* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988); Fatima Meer, *Higher than Hope: The Authorized Biography of Nelson Mandela* (New York: Harper and Row, 1990).

<sup>54</sup> Maureen Warner Lewis, *Central Africa in the Caribbean: Transcending Time, Transforming Cultures* (Kingston: University of the West Indies Press, 2003); George Reid Andrews, *Afro-Latin America 1800–2000* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Kim D. Butler, *Freedoms Given, Freedoms Won: Afro-Brazilians in Post-Abolition São Paulo and Salvador* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Christopher Ehret, *An African Classical Age: Eastern and Southern Africa in World History, 1000 B.C. to A.D. 400* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1998).

## WORLD HISTORY AND BLACK HISTORY

Is there in fact neglect of Africans in world-historical writing? The complex history of Africans and people of the African diaspora provides a key instance for review of the achievements and challenges in world historiography on the past five centuries. This discussion of world historiography benefits from considering—at once—the African continent and its diaspora. Beyond African shores, a diasporic framework draws attention to migration (voluntary and involuntary) and highlights changes that migration brought to the region of departure, to the region of settlement, and to the migrants themselves. Within the continent, the interplay of local traditions and interconnections among adjoining regions—bringing recurrent change in language, religion, and political and economic systems—fit into a civilizational framework.<sup>55</sup> Sustaining a paired discussion of continent and diaspora yields information on a comprehensive range of the historical experiences of the past several centuries. For instance, this pairing makes it possible to show how the developments in expressive culture—a hallmark of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries—have resonated with particular strength both in Africa and its diaspora. In addition, it reveals the parallel interactions in recent social movements for national independence and social justice and in debates on the nature of human identity.

Major narratives of world history have given fragmented references to elements of African and African-diaspora history rather than a sense of interplay and transformation in black communities. Most prominent among historians recently surveying modern world history is C. A. Bayly. His synthetic volume discusses a world of growing uniformity (but also complexity) in state, economy, and ideology. It argues that changes after 1780 “were so rapid, and interacted with each other so profoundly,” that this period can be seen as “the birth of the modern world.” Bayly waits until late in this story to offer his only substantial discussion of the African diaspora: entitled “Slavery’s Indian Summer,” it rapidly recaps the history of slavery worldwide and wonders about the persistence of slavery at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>56</sup> More recently, Jürgen Osterhammel’s narrative of the nineteenth-century

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<sup>55</sup> Linkage to the overseas diaspora makes clear that the continental vision of “civilization” must include migration and diasporas, including those brought by enslavement within the continent.

<sup>56</sup> Citations in this section address world-historical studies, especially after 1990, and the degree of their focus on the past of Africa and the African diaspora. Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, 402–410. For other references to African and African-descended people, see 215–216 (on empire and nation) and 344–349 (on religion).

world portrays, skillfully, linkages and comparisons of events and processes around the world. Africa appears mainly through the three-way struggle among Boers, British, and Zulus in South Africa—and through compact discussions of slavery. References to blacks in the Americas are parallel in extent but give greater attention to racism.<sup>57</sup> In another large-scale historical interpretation, Immanuel Wallerstein investigated “the modern world-system” from 1500 to the 1890s. The four volumes of this work appeared over nearly forty years. The sparseness of Wallerstein’s references to Africans and blacks of the diaspora certainly did not arise from a lack of knowledge about Africa—his early specialization in African politics set up personal relations that persisted through his career. Yet Wallerstein drew especially on Fernand Braudel—taking more from the economic side of Braudel’s thinking than from his multiplicity of systemic factors.<sup>58</sup> Overall, authors of world-historical monographs and syntheses have yet to find ways to present Africans of the continent or the diaspora as participants in global affairs in a proportion approaching in any way their place among the numbers of humans.

Survey textbooks, even more clearly than monographic studies, present societies of Africa and the diaspora in each temporal era but do so in a fashion that leaves them separated from the great issues in modern historical transformation. The best-known text, by Jerry Bentley and Herbert Ziegler, includes a regional chapter on Africa for the era 1500–1800, focusing on Atlantic slave trade. Later chapters give references to the Haitian Revolution, the U.S. Civil War, imperial conquest, and decolonization.<sup>59</sup> This and other textbooks have improved dramati-

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<sup>57</sup> The twelve pages out of nine hundred addressing Africa do so principally through external influence on the continent; the diaspora, similarly, is seen principally through description of racism. Jürgen Osterhammel, *The Transformation of the World: A Global History of the Nineteenth Century*, trans. Patrick Camiller (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2014).

<sup>58</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 4 vols. (New York: Academic Press, 1974, 1980, 1989, 2011). Fernand Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Era of Philip II*, trans. Sian Reynolds (New York: Harper, 1976). Braudel’s paradigm extended to the study of Africa particularly through the work of his associate Joseph Ki-Zerbo, author of *Histoire d’Afrique noire*. For other works, the pattern remains the same, and the main tale of the modern world unfolds with scant reference to the large and in many ways prominent African portion of humanity. Thus Michel Beaud’s history of capitalism, in multiple editions, leaves out Africans and people of African descent except for cursory references to slave labor. Michel Beaud, *A History of Capitalism, 1500–2000*, trans. Tom Dickman and Anny Lefebvre (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2001). See also Robert B. Marks, *The Origins of the Modern World: A Global and Ecological Narrative from the Fifteenth to the Twenty-First Century*, 2nd ed. (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007); David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations: Why Some Are So Rich and Some So Poor* (New York: Norton, 1998).

<sup>59</sup> Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert Ziegler, *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past*, 5th ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2014); Richard W. Bulliet, Pamela Kyle

cally, in successive editions, in the quality of their illustrations and in their description of historical processes. Still, Africans and people of the African diaspora remain at the margins of the world stage, revealing little interaction with each other or with others on stage. The textbooks still tend to address Africa in monolithic terms, underplaying the diversity of African regions and the important interconnections among them, while also setting them aside from big questions in industry, politics, religion, or philosophy.

Why have Africa and Africans been left with minimal representation and minimal agency in these leading interpretations of world history? Space is tight when one is trying to tell the story of the whole world and its changes; the authors, apparently, could find no way to work in further specifics of black lives that appeared to connect to major world issues. One key point is that the textbooks continue to be organized on a civilizational or area-studies model. Organizing chapters by world regions raises the risk that summary statements for each region will downplay processes of change within the regions as well as processes linking multiple regions.

Specialists in the history of Africa and its diaspora made recurring efforts, without much success, to challenge the neglect of black people in large-scale historical interpretations. In interwar and postwar years, many skilled writers on the black world declined to celebrate modernization and instead focused critically on such negative aspects of global transformation as enslavement, racial discrimination, and cultural deprivation.<sup>60</sup> Philosophers V. Y. Mudimbe and Kwame Anthony Appiah advanced additional such arguments in the 1980s.<sup>61</sup> Paul Gilroy, in his

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Crossley, Daniel R. Headrick, Steven W. Hirsch, and Lyman L. Johnson, *The Earth and Its Peoples: A Global History*, 5th ed. (Boston: Cengage, 2010); Robert Tignor, Jeremy Adelman, Peter Brown, Benjamin Elman, Stephen Kotkin, Gyan Prakash, Brent Shaw, Stephen Aron, Xinru Liu, Suzanne Marchand, Holly Pittman, Michael Tsien et al., *Worlds Together, Worlds Apart: A History of the World*, 4th ed. (New York: Norton, 2013); Felipe Fernández-Armesto, *The World: A History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Pearson, 2009); Peter N. Stearns, Michael B. Adas, Stuart B. Schwartz, Marc Jason Gilbert et al., *World Civilizations: The Global Experience*, 7th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2014). For a text focusing on Africa in global context, see Erik Gilbert and Jonathan Reynolds, *Africa in World History: From Prehistory to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 2011).

<sup>60</sup> James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dial Press, 1963); Cheikh-Anta Diop, *Black Africa: The Economic and Cultural Basis for a Federated State*, trans. Harold Salemson (Westport, Conn.: L. Hill, 1978); Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. Joan Pinkham (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1972); C. L. R. James, *A History of Negro Revolt* (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1969); Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*; see also Chancellor Williams, *The Destruction of Black Civilization: Great Issues of a Race from 4500 B.C. to 2000 A.D.*, rev. ed. (Chicago: Third World Press, 1976).

<sup>61</sup> V. Y. Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa: Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992).

1993 *The Black Atlantic*, offered the approach to modernity that has perhaps been the most influential not only among black people but more broadly, though perhaps because it too takes an elite perspective. His point is that, in post-emancipation society, black artists and intellectuals drew on their cosmopolitan experience to produce innovative works in literature and music. The “Black Atlantic,” for him, was the cosmopolitan network of black artists whose vision of modernity inflected the dominant English-language culture.<sup>62</sup>

Historians Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley advanced, in a 1998 article, a detailed claim for the universality of the African American experience, identifying key issues in social, economic, and cultural history that demonstrated the global significance of transformations in African American communities. In a somewhat parallel essay with a standpoint in the African homeland, Maghan Keita reviewed analytical narratives on Africa’s place in the world and argued, point after point, that world-historical and even Africanist scholars had neglected the role of Africa in the past.<sup>63</sup> These two pleas for recognition of the universality of Africans and African Americans might have carried more weight if they had been linked to each other in the debate as they were in history. But even when Colin Palmer wrote to encompass the whole world of black people and attempted to set them in the context of global historical change, the echoes from elsewhere in the literature remained faint.<sup>64</sup>

#### SHARED AGENCY: AFRICA, THE DIASPORA, AND GLOBAL CHANGE

The history of Africa and its diaspora reveals the roles of black people in the construction of the modern world—through agency that has made itself felt along two axes. Along a vertical axis, blacks in subaltern positions have repeatedly influenced both the hierarchical relationships with elites and cross-community social patterns generally. In

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<sup>62</sup> Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993).

<sup>63</sup> Tiffany Ruby Patterson and Robin D. G. Kelley, “Unfinished Migrations: Reflections on the African Diaspora and the Making of the Modern World,” *African Studies Review* 43 (2000): 11–45; Maghan Keita, “Africa and the Construction of a Grand Narrative in World History,” in *Across Cultural Borders: Historiography in Global Perspective*, ed. Eckhardt Fuchs and Benedikt Stuchtey (Lanham, Md.: Rowman and Littlefield, 2002); see also Keita, “Africans and Asians: Historiography and the Long View of Global Interaction,” *Journal of World History* 16 (2005): 1–30.

<sup>64</sup> Colin Palmer, “Defining and Studying the Modern African Diaspora,” *Perspectives [American Historical Association]* 36, 6 (1998): 1, 22–25.



addition, along a horizontal axis, developments in one part of the black world affected others. Still further, the growing interconnections among regions of Africa and the diaspora led to construction of an enormous, mutually interconnected region of common diaspora consciousness—a consciousness that crossed several civilizational boundaries. Of the many and complex historical processes, here are a few to illustrate the character and connections of that history. I present them through a three-century narrative of seven waves of interactive change among Africans, Europeans, and their descendants around the Atlantic. (Parallel narratives can be framed for history within the boundaries of the African continent, for African links with Asians, and at other scales.)

The European-African maritime contact of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries brought standoffs as much as great transformations for each continent. Africa had neither the concentrated wealth of Asian centers nor the vulnerability that brought chaos to the Americas, yet Africans of all social stations found themselves caught up in the initial vortex of Atlantic connection. Artisans diverted a portion of their works from local elite consumers to an expanding Portuguese and European market for fineries from distant lands.<sup>65</sup> Emerging merchant elites included the *nhara* or *signares* of Senegambia and Upper Guinea, female merchants whose business model involved setting up marital and commercial alliances with immigrant Europeans.<sup>66</sup> African captives at home and abroad, while formally labeled as social inferiors, occasionally found openings enabling them to gain positions of security through marriage, artisanal and commercial skill, and skills in political negotiation and religious practice. The legal framework of the *Siete Partidas*, adopted in thirteenth-century Castile and later influential throughout Iberian territories, confirmed the legality of slave status yet provided various protections and opportunities for redress for the enslaved.<sup>67</sup> To characterize this early modern era of social mobility, Ira Berlin coined the term “Atlantic creole” to represent those among the early gener-

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<sup>65</sup> Citations in this section document the narrative of black agency in modern world history. On Sierra Leonian production of ivory sculpture for European consumers, see Mario Pereira, “West African Art in Renaissance Portugal,” unpublished paper.

<sup>66</sup> George Brooks, *Eurafricans in Western Africa: Commerce, Social Status, Gender, and Religious Observance from the Sixteenth to the Eighteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2003), 124–129, 206–221.

<sup>67</sup> The *Siete Partidas*, drawing on Roman and canon law, recognized slaves as persons who had suffered misfortune; its approach was reflected in slave law for Portugal, France, and the Dutch until plantation interests gained power in American colonies in the seventeenth century. Elsa Goveia, “The West Indian Slave Laws of the Eighteenth Century,” *Revista de Ciências Sociais* 4 (1960): 75–105.

ations of migrants who, in region after region, skillfully and imaginatively played leading roles in developing the colonial order, even while formally enslaved.<sup>68</sup>

From the mid-seventeenth century, a wave of contradictory socio-economic transformations surged throughout the Atlantic world, including West and Central Africa. Best known of these shifts are the commercial, military, and settlement expansions of the Dutch, English, and French. At the same time, Europeans and Africans responded to the deepening of the Little Ice Age and to the reverberations of the expanded global interconnections of the sixteenth century. Thus, the seventeenth century crisis had African as well as European dimensions.<sup>69</sup> In addition, as brutal systems of enslavement expanded, Africans now moved across the Atlantic in greater numbers than Europeans, while African societies underwent new sorts of transformations. An outstanding economic initiative took place among free people of West Africa: Witness the burst of artisanal production in villages of the Gold Coast during the seventeenth century, as documented by Ray Kea. This expansion in productive energy, in a region where the busy gold trade provided the basis of intensive commercial contacts, presents an economic initiative parallel to the contemporaneous “industrious revolution” identified by Jan de Vries for the Low Countries. In both cases, families of modest means took the initiative to invest in artisanal production to expand their consumption, notably of luxury goods.<sup>70</sup> In another pattern, the trade diasporas of Africa and elsewhere demonstrate ways in which commercial families and communities maintained their interconnections over great distances. New states arose in several African regions; their rulers apparently attempted to limit slave trade,

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<sup>68</sup> Ira Berlin, “From Creole to African: Atlantic Creoles and the Origins of African-American Society in Mainland North America,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 53, no. 2 (April, 1996): 251–288. See also Benton, *Law and Colonial Cultures*.

<sup>69</sup> C. R. Boxer, *The Dutch Seaborne Empire 1600–1800* (London: Hutchinson, 1965). Jan de Vries, “The Economic Crisis of the Seventeenth Century after Fifty Years,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 40 (2009): 151–194. Geoffrey Parker, *Global Crisis: War, Climate Change & Catastrophe in the Seventeenth Century* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2013).

<sup>70</sup> The latter consisted of seemingly spontaneous decisions by some seventeenth-century European farmers and artisans to extend their hours of work and expand their consumption. Ray A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade, and Politics in the Seventeenth-Century Gold Coast* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982); Jan de Vries, “The Industrial Revolution and the Industrious Revolution,” *Journal of Economic History* 94 (1994): 249–270. On the skills and output of artisans in Africa and the Americas, see Colleen E. Kriger, *Pride of Men: Ironworking in 19th Century West Central Africa* (Portsmouth, N.H.: Heinemann, 1999). For a different conceptualization of “industrious revolution,” see Bayly, *Birth of the Modern World*, 49–54.

but ended up being drawn more deeply into it.<sup>71</sup> In the diaspora, families struggled with occasional success to gain freedom; individual blacks rose to elite positions, and escapees formed maroon communities. The most remarkable such community was Palmares, which grew at several days' distance from the Brazilian sugar colony of Pernambuco, alternating for most of the seventeenth century between peaceful trading and holding off Dutch and Portuguese punitive expeditions.<sup>72</sup>

As individuals and in groups, blacks in the diaspora were arguably escaping the limits of elite control. Then events of the late seventeenth century put a cap on their ambitions. The restrictive French Code noir of 1685, commonly presented as a unilateral decision of Louis XIV and his minister Colbert, confirms in its text the preceding social conflicts that brought it into existence. From the imperial viewpoint, too many enslaved people were gaining freedom and recognition through marriage, self-purchase, and escape. With this code came an affirmation that African ancestry was to be a perpetual condemnation to social inferiority.<sup>73</sup> At virtually the same moment, the Moroccan sovereign Mawlay Isma'il took the unprecedented step of forcing all black males within Morocco into his army, incorporating their families as well. A large and upwardly mobile black population had grown up in Morocco, including long-time inhabitants and recently arrived captives from the Sudan. Mawlay Isma'il effectively enslaved these free Muslims and imposed a legal rationalization for his acts.<sup>74</sup> He sent an elaborate dossier to legal scholars at al-Azhar University in Cairo, seeking and in effect gaining their approbation for his unprecedented action. The pairing of this action with the enactment of the Code noir shows how the racialization of slavery expanded simultaneously in both Christian and Islamic worlds.<sup>75</sup> As a confirmation of this timing, an escalating set of Portuguese attacks destroyed Palmares in 1694.

<sup>71</sup> On trade diasporas, see Claude Meillassoux, *The Development of Indigenous Trade and Markets in West Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971); Philip D. Curtin, *Cross-Cultural Trade in World History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1984). On states: Barry, *Senegambia*; Vansina, *Kingdoms of the Savanna*.

<sup>72</sup> On Palmares, see Décio Freitas, *Palmares: A Guerra dos Escravos*, 5th ed. (Rio de Janeiro: Graal, 1990); and Raymond K. Kent, "Palmares: An African State in Brazil," *Journal of African History* 6 (1965): 161–176.

<sup>73</sup> Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code noir, ou, Le calvaire de Canaan* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987); Goveia, "West Indian Slave Laws"; Jacques Gillot and Jean-François Niort, *Le Code Noir* (Paris: Editions le Cavalier Bleu, 2015).

<sup>74</sup> Mawlay Isma'il's mother was born in the Niger Valley and subsequently enslaved. El Hamel, *Black Morocco*, 95.

<sup>75</sup> In addition, the Spanish state revised its law on slavery in 1680, sharply limiting the recognition of slave rights. Bernard Lewis, in a conflicting interpretation, chose to neglect this temporal shift and treat racial discrimination as a constant within Islamic society.

Such concerted repression of black initiative was by no means universally successful. In this same era, especially from 1690 to 1730, the prices of captives on the African coast rose by a factor of roughly four, perhaps because of a shortage of people to enslave but perhaps also because the prospective captives found ways to make their enslavement more costly.<sup>76</sup> Black women and men, in Africa and abroad, their lives disrupted by captivity and migration, nevertheless developed adaptive social practices including fictive kinship constructed out of informal associations and female-headed households capable of nurturing the next generation. All the same, women in slavery cared for children born from their wombs who were in an important sense not theirs; further, the very institutions of marriage slipped away for people who had little access to property. Still, in the realms of culture and ideas, specific conceptions of witchcraft and divination developed to handle major conflicts; at a more general level beliefs and practices of toleration in religion and social affairs arose and spread among peoples of the American colonies.<sup>77</sup> In artistic representation, a growing distance developed between African purveyors of elite visions of dominance and the more widespread, communal notions of community solidarity and renewal. Thus the militaristic King Agaja of eighteenth-century Dahomey, wrapped in garments from India, took the image of a Portuguese slave ship as his icon, while the Yoruba-speaking Nago, within reach of his armies, developed instead the tradition of *gelede* masks to portray senior women in terms both humorous and respectful. It is the latter that, in the twentieth century, became iconic representations of African creativity.<sup>78</sup> For the remainder of the eighteenth century the expanded Atlantic system of enslavement became a multipolar system in which the British and French warred for dominance in slave trade and colonial production, while the Dutch, Portuguese, and Spanish continued to play significant roles. Late in the century, however, the system ran into two sorts of limits: first, the increasingly militant rebellion of the enslaved (most effectively in what became Haiti); and second, a growing antislavery movement in imperial homelands, especially in Britain.

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Lewis, *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: An Historical Inquiry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

<sup>76</sup> Patrick Manning, *Slavery and African Life: Occidental, Oriental, and African Slave Trades* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 18–19, 94–98, 131–133.

<sup>77</sup> Stuart Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved: Religious Tolerance and Salvation in the Iberian Atlantic World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

<sup>78</sup> Patrick Manning, “Primitive Art and Modern Times,” *Radical History Review* no. 33 (1985), 165–181.

The campaign for emancipation and its ramifications, from roughly 1790 to 1930, raged across the world.<sup>79</sup> For the people of Africa and the diaspora, the nineteenth century was a time of continued enslavement, movements for emancipation, and consolidation of free communities. In one of the key global dynamics of emancipation, the restriction of oppression in some regions brought its expansion in others. Slavery ended in Haiti and declined in the British Empire but expanded in other regions (Cuba, Brazil, much of Africa, and some of Asia) so that the total number of persons held in bondage peaked in the 1860s and 1870s, even as the number of emancipated blacks rose at key moments throughout the century.<sup>80</sup> The end of slavery came often through warfare, and black men fought in war after war to create social change and gain personal advance. Equally significant were the sacrifices of black warriors in the civil wars of Venezuela and Colombia, the wars of Brazil, the Cuban rebellions of 1868 and 1895, the many wars of Africa, and the Great War of 1914–1918. Perhaps most distinguished of these warriors was Antonio Maceo, a general in each of Cuba's wars for independence.<sup>81</sup> Freedom from slavery was not enough—those who gained formal freedom sought full emancipation and citizenship.

Free but still subaltern communities in Africa and the Americas relied on the systems of informal self-government developed in days of slavery and colonialism. Black churches in the United States are but one example. Such traditions, commonly neglected in political theory, worked through village and religious institutions, social movements, and long experience in governance among the subaltern. The methods of their claims for land, civil rights, and a share of national political power provide a central part of modern political tradition.

The rise of militant white supremacy and explicit racial theory, starting in the 1870s, may be seen as a response to the accelerating wave of emancipation. White supremacy advanced a new form of ideological control to replace the expiring system of legal subjugation over a large, subordinate population.<sup>82</sup> This backlash and wave of social oppression, in response to the assertive social organization by emancipated people

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<sup>79</sup> Leo Spitzer, *Lives in Between: The Experience of Marginality in a Century of Emancipation* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1999).

<sup>80</sup> The growth of slave labor within Africa can have taken place only if there was economic growth among some sectors, in parallel to the slavery-linked economic growth of Europe, North America, and Asia.

<sup>81</sup> Andrews, *Afro-Latin America*, 54–62, 76–82; Ada Ferrer, *Insurgent Cuba: Race, Nation, and Revolution, 1868–1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

<sup>82</sup> A new wave of anti-Semitism fit the same calendar. Neil MacMaster, *Racism in Europe, 1870–2000* (New York: Palgrave, 2001).

of Africa and the diaspora, came as a clear echo of the crackdown of the late seventeenth century. Remarkably, however, this era of maximal white supremacy and cultural chauvinism coincided with the post-emancipation burst of cultural creativity in black communities on every continent. Urban popular culture expanded with new forms of music, dance, literature, and film in every region of the Americas, throughout Africa, and in Eurasia.<sup>83</sup> Jazz and blues are well known for the United States; rumba for Cuba, samba for Brazil, calypso for Trinidad, costeño for Colombia, high life for Ghana, and Swahili songs for East Africa. Black popular culture renewed itself repeatedly through new technology, new audiences, improvisation, and continued borrowing. It aimed at popular rather than elite audiences; it relied on new venues and new media. In fact, improvisation and attention to new audiences or new techniques characterized not only jazz but also most genres within black popular culture, diaspora-wide. In all these cases, urban music generated by black communities came to be adopted by wider communities. In rural areas, the most striking case of innovation in black popular culture came from an African anthem, “Nkosi Sikelel’i Afrika.” This song, created at the end of the nineteenth century in the Xhosa-speaking region of South Africa and translated as “God Bless Africa,” was sung a capella by communities as a statement of identity and destiny. With time, it was heard in many languages up and down the eastern African littoral. The musical and social power of this anthem sustained its popularity within the communities and brought expressions of amazement by observers from outside.<sup>84</sup>

To restate the global centrality of black history through more recent events: The great outbursts of social struggle in 1968 and 1989 are told in sharply contrasting fashions according to whether they include or exclude the lives of black people. The versions centering on Paris in 1968 and Berlin in 1989 reaffirm radical moments that were European-centered, racially white, elite-focused, and diffusionist in their dynamics. But the inclusion of black people shifts the perspective: The story of 1968 includes decolonization, civil rights, expanding education, and national liberation struggles; the story of 1989 extends to majority rule in southern Africa, the wave of African national conferences, the succeeding wave of African civil wars, the expansion in Latin

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<sup>83</sup> Manning, *The African Diaspora*, 209–272.

<sup>84</sup> The choirs relied on an inherited medium but a new social organization, demonstrating that the processes of modern transformation had been taking place in Africa as well as in the diaspora. By the mid-twentieth century, black cultural production had provided a platform for political mobilization: Struggles over land, literacy, and urban work congealed into a planetary challenge to racial discrimination and colonial rule.

American social reform, and the tightening web of communication among prominent black figures everywhere. Soon “Nkosi Sikelel’i Afrika” became a national anthem of a reconstituted South Africa.<sup>85</sup>

In sum, black people did not just experience world history: They also transformed it. Narrating the African diaspora as a whole reveals not only remarkable patterns in cultural and social transformation, but also in politics. With the peak of white supremacy at the end of the nineteenth century, black people in every region lost almost all elective, appointive, and hereditary positions of responsibility. Yet equally suddenly, in the 1960s, black people gained positions of elective and appointive leadership on four continents. The narrative—expulsion from leadership, sixty years of exile from formal politics, and return to official roles—was distinctive in each region, but the pattern was synchronous and interdependent everywhere. The causes of this world-historical transformation deserve deeper study.

#### SOCIAL HISTORY IN WORLD HISTORY

The object of the study of world history is to interpret the past at a large scale, with attention to global patterns. World history seeks to address society at the planetary scale but also its overlapping sub-systems, at such levels as continents, civilizations, diasporas, religious communities, economic institutions, racial identities, empires, and more. These histories collide, overlap, and interact, and each of them has a complex internal structure. World historians need to analyze human society comprehensively (thus adding complications) and yet coherently (thus seeking logical and consistent simplifications). Further, such analysis must apply disciplinary depth in the areas of its top priorities.

This article, in reviewing world history through an optic based on the combined history of Africa and the African diaspora, is intended to describe the character of world-historical studies and to clarify its analysis across vertical and horizontal scales. It proposes self-evaluation by world historians, asking, How well have world-historical studies fared in emphasizing comprehensiveness, disciplinary specialization, and

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<sup>85</sup> Nkosi Sikelel’i Afrika became incorporated into the national anthem of South Africa in 1997 alongside the Afrikaner anthem, “Die Stem van Suid Africa”—hence, a symbolic compromise to accompany long social struggle. See also August Meier, John Bracey Jr., and Elliott Rudwick, eds., *Black Protest in the Sixties* (New York: M. Wiener Pub., 1991); Patrick Manning, “1789–1792 and 1989–1992: Global Interactions of Social Movements,” *World History Connected* 3, no. 1 (October 2005), <http://worldhistoryconnected.org/3.1/manning.html>.

coherence? It touches on world history as seen from other fields of historical study: How well does world history fit and interact with historical studies at other scales, be they transnational, area-studies, or national?

In characterizing world history, I argue that the field is gaining coherence as an overall approach and also that it is developing clear subfields, some of which have more fully developed discourses than others. Global environmental history, for instance, has done remarkably well in contrasting long-term transitions and short-term fluctuations, the global and the local. While there are regional views of environmental history, one can speak of this as a historical discourse that has become naturalized within world history. For economic history, the “great divergence” debate launched a global discourse and a clear subfield of global economic history.<sup>86</sup> The process of developing world-historical subfields is slower elsewhere. Imperial history can be seen as an immigrant but not yet naturalized discourse in world history, in that the dominant tendency remains the analysis of individual empires and their struggles with immediate enemies.<sup>87</sup> Social history, while it visits with world history, must still be seen as a foreign discourse for world historians, a position it shares with cultural history. In sum, the unevenness of the advances in world-historical studies is readily apparent.

In its handling of global and interactive analysis, the emerging world-historical literature is deserving of critique from many perspectives; the comments here arise most clearly from consideration of Africa and its diaspora. First, there is a need to highlight social history to help understand the processes among commoners, the resulting bottom-up pressures, and the intersection of elite and subaltern initiatives. While ample research in social history is being conducted, more effort will have to go into learning how to place social-historical insights in world-historical

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<sup>86</sup> On environmental history, see J. McNeill, *Something New Under the Sun*; Richards, *Unending Frontier*; Parker, *Global Crisis*. On economic history, see Kevin H. O'Rourke and Jeffrey G. Williamson, *Globalization and History: The Evolution of a Nineteenth-Century Atlantic Economy* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1999); Pomeranz, *Great Divergence*; Gareth Austin and Kaoru Sugihara, eds., *Labour-Intensive Industrialisation in Global History* (London: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>87</sup> The works of Burbank and Cooper and Darwin reflect advances in the global history of empires, but John Elliott's comparison of Spanish and English empires, for all the strength of the work, primarily addresses individual empires. Burbank and Cooper, *Empires in World History*; John Darwin, *After Tamerlane: The Global History of Empire since 1405* (London: Allen Lane, 2007); J. H. Elliott, *Empires of the Atlantic World: Britain and Spain in America 1492–1830* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2006). On migration, see Jan Lucassen and Leo Lucassen, eds., *Globalising Migration History: The Eurasian Experience (16th–21st Centuries)* (Leiden: Brill, 2014); Dirk Hoerder, *Cultures in Contact: World Migration in the Second Millennium* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2002); Patrick Manning with Tiffany Trimmer, *Migration in World History*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012).



context.<sup>88</sup> That this may not be an easy task is underscored for the study of gender, where skilled analysts have sought ways to develop world-historical interpretations of gender, without yet developing a firm narrative on patterns of gender relations.<sup>89</sup> Second, world historians need to learn more about civilizations and culture areas, including the porosity of their boundaries and the character of their interiors, to get past tendencies to treat them as monolithic or to neglect them as uninteresting. Third, world historians need to give more attention to diasporas, which have grown steadily along with migration and which play social roles distinct from nations, empires, or civilizations.<sup>90</sup> Greater attention to social mobility and social interaction, both vertical and horizontal, will enable historians to locate the most interesting areas of communication and change in historical patterns.

Black history, in addition to addressing the past of up to one sixth of global population, provides important lessons for the study of world history more broadly. The historical experience of black people, because it is so distinctive, provides important lessons for the formulation of world-historical thinking. Black people, since they lost much of their elite from the seventeenth century on, long counted for little in elite history.<sup>91</sup> But black commoners continued to make history, forging innovations in economic structures, in social organization, in popular culture, and in subaltern governance. Drawing on this lesson, one may be able to rewrite aspects of world history for blacks and, by extension, for humanity in general. This would be a more complex history of social transformation, seen as an interactive process rather than as sequential moments of inspiration. Viewed from the African continent

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<sup>88</sup> Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker produced what is arguably the most sustained, large-scale application of history from below in *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000). For a further application, see Rediker, *The Amistad Rebellion: An Atlantic Odyssey of Slavery and Freedom* (New York: Viking, 2012); see also Schwartz, *All Can Be Saved*.

<sup>89</sup> Gerda Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988); Mrinalini Sinha, *Colonial Masculinity: The 'Manly Englishman' and the 'Effeminate Bengali'* (Manchester, U.K.: Manchester University Press, 1995); Antoinette Burdon, *Gender, Sexuality, and Colonial Modernities* (New York: Routledge, 1999); Stearns, *Gender in World History*; Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Gender in History: Global Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Hoboken, N.J.: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Pamela McVay, *Gender in World History* (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Pearson, 2011).

<sup>90</sup> On the critique of civilizational frameworks, see Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, trans. Russell Moore (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1989). On diasporas, see Cohen, *Global Diasporas*; Stéphane Dufoix, *Diasporas*, trans. William Rodarmor (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

<sup>91</sup> There were people of elite status in Africa as well as in the African diaspora, but they were commonly denied recognition by Europeans, often retrospectively.

and diaspora, this perspective gives attention to family and community (more than empire), to work (more than industry), to unfree labor (as much as to free labor), to political protest and citizenship (more than nationhood), to basic education (more than higher education), to popular culture (more than elite culture), and to the recurring problems in social and economic inequality.